



INDIGENOUS FORMS OF JUSTICE: PUNITIVE TRADITION AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCE AMONG THE ANGAMI-NAGAS

KHRIEENUO SOLO¹ AND YANBENI YANTHAN²

¹Research Scholar, Centre for Naga Tribal Language Studies, Nagaland University,

E-mail: christinasolo@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Centre for Naga Tribal Language Studies, Nagaland University.

E-mail: beni.yanthan@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

Abstract: The Angamis, one of the major Naga tribes, are known for their rich cultural heritage and a well-organized system of indigenous governance. Traditionally, they relied on unwritten customary laws that were orally transmitted across generations, functioning in the absence of formal state institutions. These customary laws played a crucial role in maintaining social order and ensuring communal harmony. With each Angami village functioning as an autonomous unit, the authority to interpret and enforce these laws rested with the village elders, who held significant influence within the community which are today, protected under Article 371A of the Indian Constitution.

Ensconed in oral tradition where clan and village have their own interpretation of customary laws, this paper examines the punitive measures and views them both as a lived social practice and as a reflection of traditional principles, values, and norms that remain flexible and responsive to socio-cultural change(s) in contemporary times. In parts, the paper draws upon Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Mary Douglas's notion of 'matter out of place' to illustrate how Angami indigenous customs, situated within the broader framework of "kenyü", operate not merely as mechanisms of social regulation, but as symbolic articulations of collective identity, cultural continuity and resilience.

Keywords: Customary Law, Society, Oral Tradition, Folklife, Angami

Received : 20 December 2025

Revised : 18 January 2026

Accepted : 29 January 2026

Published : 08 May 2026

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Khriesenuo Solo & Yanbeni Yanthan (2026). Indigenous Forms of Justice: Punitive Tradition and Social Consequence among the Angami-Nagas. *Journal of South Asian Research*, 4: 1, pp. 1-15.

1. Tradition in practice: Angami Customary Law

The Angamis are one of the major indigenous Naga tribes concentrated in the central and southern parts of Kohima district and some parts of Dimapur

(Zetsuvi 7). The first monograph on the Angamis was written by J. H. Hutton in 1921 and can be regarded as the earliest ethnographic account of the community. Produced within the framework of colonial anthropology, Hutton's work reflects both a detailed observation of Angami culture and society. His study delineates various aspects of the Angami world including but not limited to social norms, practices, beliefs and language use, while also discursively looking at the governing structures embedded in traditional customs, taboos, and "*gennas*" - ritual prohibitions that formed part of a moral and spiritual order. Hutton's account highlights the interrelated nature of these domains, revealing how social organisation, ritual practice, and belief systems were deeply intertwined in everyday Angami life, a dynamic that is reflected in the traditions of punitive justice, where the enforcement of social norms was often inseparable from ritual sanction and communal responsibility.

In the Naga context, Chüzho (2025) interprets customary law as "practices within a traditional or indigenous society," further asserting that Naga society does not operate under a single, unified legal framework. Rather, each tribe implements its own laws and customary practices. Drawing on Mohan and Dwivedi (2019), Chüzho argues that this plurality points to a polynomic Naga legal order, in which multiple legal systems operate across different Naga contexts and are not "functionally isolated" from one another. Customary law, in this way, thus constituted a crucial dimension through which social order was regulated and individual conduct governed.

Across Naga tribal societies, customary law continues to function as a marker of tradition, shaped by orality and systems of orally transmitted knowledge that inform social conduct and decision-making. Naga customary law is characterised by: a) the transmission of customary law through speech, storytelling, proverbs, ritual performances, deliberations in village councils, and the authority of elders; b) the learning of norms and sanctions through participation (as taught in *Morungs* – village dormitories for adolescent boys and girls), observation, and collective memory, rather than through codified legal documents; c) a legal and ethical system that is context-sensitive and adaptive, allowing customary rules to be interpreted, negotiated, and reworked in response to changing social circumstances. Owing to this oral mode of transmission, customary codes largely remain non-codified, with each village, clan, and tribe adhering to its own rules of conduct. As Chanock (1998) observes, custom is continually recreated, reimagined, and reinvented; customary law,

therefore, is not merely rooted in the past but actively constituted in the present. This dynamic process helps explain the sustained commitment of ordinary members of Naga society to customary law (11).

In Angami society, *Kedietho* (honesty), *Kenyü* (forbids people from doing certain act), *Kedzünga* (practising courtesy and avoiding causing shame to oneself, one's clan, family or village), *Kethezie* (being respectful and appreciative of others¹), and *Adielo* (forgiving without retribution) are some of the fundamental principles enshrined within the customary code of morality and human conduct. Notably, Article 371A of the Constitution of India 'provides special protection where the Naga customary law enjoys a special status, and no act of Parliament can be implemented concerning customary law and procedure in Nagaland without the approval of the state Legislative Assembly (Odyuo & Chavhan, 2024, p. b625). Any violation or breach of these customary laws results in serious consequences. Punishments for offenders in Angami society are often severe. Mechülho et al. (2024) describe this as *umia mehou*, meaning "too extreme to witness," underscoring the gravity and emotional intensity of the penalties.

One such customary practice is the seven-fold repayment system known as *Se Thenie*, which requires an offender to repay seven times the value of what was stolen (ibid). In cases of accidental death, the offender is subjected to *kita*, a form of punishment involving exile from the village for a period of seven years. This association with the number seven is not arbitrary but rooted in a significant historical event, which has since shaped and legitimized this enduring customary norm.

2. Method and Material

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, drawing on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected during field visits of two Northern Angami villages: Kohima and Rüsoma. The researchers employed both structured and unstructured interviews conducted in natural settings, along with observation methods. Secondary data were gathered from a range of sources, including books, journals, articles, websites, newspapers, souvenirs, films, school textbooks and dissertations, to present diverse perspectives related to the topic.

3. Review of Literature

In his book "*The Angami Nagas*" (1969), J H Hutton provides a detailed portrait of the Angami people, covering various aspects of their life and culture.

Most particularly, he highlights the significant influence of *kenyü*, a deeply rooted moral principle that governs behaviour and shapes the character of the people. He notes that something is often labelled as *kenyü* not necessarily because it invites divine punishment, but more likely to prevent misfortune or negative consequences. Additionally, he describes the religious practices of the ancestors, including the observation of *penyie* and the performance of various rituals and ceremonies that were central to their traditional belief system. His exposé of the belief system is integral in the shaping of laws and customs as they underlie and cut through the moral fabric of Angami society.

Meguo-o Mechülho et al., in their book *"Pfutsau Nanyü and Kelhou Dze"* (2024), explore significant aspects of the Tenyimia way of life, how their ancestors lived, and how various rituals were performed. This book becomes an important read for understanding culture change brought about by the arrival of Christianity and subsequent modern age order, as many of these traditional religious practices and deeply rooted rituals became redundant in the new belief system. This profound shift away from long-standing traditions raises concerns about the preservation of cultural identity, a critical element in shaping tribal epistemology.

In her book *"Zhozho"* (2002), Khrieü Sekhose reflects on ancestral ways of life, emphasizing how shared teachings, mutual support, and collective responsibility sustained a harmonious society. She uses gender as a lens of navigating Angami society, placing particular focus on the expectations placed upon women, underscoring the importance of living with dignity to avoid social reproach. Sekhose highlights the pivotal role of mothers in guiding and disciplining their daughters, noting how maternal instruction was central to shaping girls into individuals who upheld family honour and contributed positively to the wider community. Sekhose also mentions *"Khrienuo khro nuotha"*, meaning, 'teachings under *Khrienuo*' which refers to the traditional form of teaching that took place under the *khrienuo*- a bamboo shelf placed above the hearth in the kitchen. This space served as a symbolic classroom where mothers imparted moral values, cultural knowledge, and life lessons to their daughters, forming the foundation of their character and societal role.

K. S. Zetsuvi's *Traditional Culture of the Angami Nagas* (2014) offers a detailed account of Angami society, foregrounding its social organisation, customary laws, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions. Central to Zetsuvi's work is an understanding of customary law as a lived system that governs everyday life,

regulates social relations, and sustains collective identity. He also traces the impact of external influences and socio-political change, showing how Angami customary institutions and practices have been reshaped over time while continuing to retain their normative authority.

Temsula Ao's *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (2017), while focused on the Ao Naga tribe, provides critical insights into the role of orality in structuring social norms, governance, and cultural continuity. Notable similarities can be drawn between Ao and Angami societies, particularly in relation to migration narratives, cultural practices surrounding marriage, agriculture, governance, worship, and ritual sacrifice. These shared oral traditions function as normative frameworks through which customary laws are articulated, social conduct regulated, and distinct notions of community identity are produced and sustained.

4. Customary Sanctions and Traditional Ethics of the Angamis

Meguo-o Mechülho et al. identify six distinct forms of punishments in Angami society, some of which are considered to be exceptionally severe. They refer to these as *umia mekre mu kemerie mhatho*, meaning "extreme acts that causes terror or fear," underscoring their intensity. Unlike in some other Naga tribes, where punishments may vary depending on factors such as clan, village, or phratrical affiliation - Angami punitive measures, particularly those concerning dishonesty, are clearly codified and uniformly enforced.

1. *Se Thenie*

According to the Angami principle of *Se Thenie*²(sevenfold repayment), if an individual is caught red-handed committing theft and confesses to the crime, they are required to pay a sevenfold compensation based on the value of the stolen item. As Zetsuvi (2014: 64) notes, "The customary rules prescribed for theft is that the thief should be punished by recovering from him seven-fold of the value of property stolen; over and above, returning the stolen item."³ Once this restitution is made, the case is considered resolved within the community. Mechülho et al states that, for them, it's "*U ro u*" and "*Mo ro mo*", meaning "yes is yes" and "no is no" (185) meaning that the verdict of the community and its elders is considered final and implemented without hesitation. The truth stands supreme and there is no wavering in between yes or no. Beyond the material sanction, the social consequences of being labelled as *Kerügumia* (thief) carries

significant social stigma and deep shame upon the offender (Hutton 1921: 148), a cultural trait that is observed till today.

However, in instances where the accused denies the offence, the matter is escalated to the village elders, who summon both parties to conduct a thorough investigation. This process is crucial to debunk false accusations. In such situations, both the accuser and the accused are required to take oaths and uphold their respective claims, reinforcing the role of communal arbitration and moral responsibility in the pursuit of justice.

Case study from 2025

A very recent case from 2025 involves a man from Kohima Village, who was caught stealing a large sum of money amounting to crores of rupees. On 24th June 2025, the Tsütuonuomia Khel Council passed a resolution binding him under the Angami customary laws. According to the ancestral customary law, he is required to make a *Se Thenie*- a seven-fold repayment of the stolen amount. Until the full repayment is made, he is to be out casted from the community. Furthermore, no individual is allowed to bail him out; should anyone attempt to do so, they will be held responsible and made to bear the full burden of his crime. If the *Se Thenie* is not paid, he will face excommunication from the community for a period of seven years.

2. Rünyü Merhe

Another traditional form of punishment for theft among the Angamis is known as *Rünyü Merhe* (Mechülho et al., 186). *Rünyü* refers to a particular type of bamboo stick characterized by its sharp and rigid edges, capable of inflicting intense physical pain. This punishment is considered as one of the harshest within the Angami customary system and is typically reserved for repeat offenders, or those who continue to engage in stealing/ robbery despite prior warnings. In pre-modern Angami society, acts of theft commonly involved the stealing of food or personal belongings, as monetary transactions or money as currency was not used by the Angamis.

In this type of punishment, the thief's hands are tied to the *rünyü*, and a ritual elder, referred to as *Livau*, performs a ceremonial chant. The elder recites the phrase:

“Chünu chümvü, chüsuo chüvao; lotei lora li moshie”,
(To not do what is told to do; to do what is told not to do –

black yarn, red yarn⁴, substitute not).

After the utterance, the *Livau* pulls the bamboo stick, causing the sharp edges of the *rünyü* to cut through the thief's fingers. The middle finger is specifically targeted, as cutting it off is taboo in Angami society⁵.

3. *Themia Tshiekecü*

'Themia Tshiekecü' is regarded as *kemerie*, a term denoting something profoundly serious or extraordinary. This ritual is invoked particularly in cases of unresolved theft when efforts by the villagers to identify the perpetrator have failed. In such circumstances, *Themia Tshiekecü* is performed as a measure of last resort, intended to rectify the moral and social disruption caused by the theft. It is neither a common nor routine practice; rather, it is undertaken only on specific occasions, such as during *Sekrenyi* or on a new moon night. According to oral accounts, the ritual involves fashioning a banana stem into the shape of a human figure. This effigy is then wrapped in a woman's *mekhala* (traditional wrap-around skirt), and a bottle gourd is placed on top to represent the head. An outstanding warrior known as *Terhü Sakramia*⁶ (sometimes this is performed by *Livau*⁷) spears the figure, symbolically enacting the killing of the perpetrator of the crime. As he throws the spear, he chants phrases such as *Kerügu- u bu khrü kejö ze jücie*, meaning "let the thief vanish like the disappearing moon." Other villagers then follow suit, casting their own spears at the effigy. It is widely believed that shortly after the ritual is performed, the thief dies. The fear of meeting such a fate acts as a powerful deterrent, reinforcing moral behaviour within the community. In this way, *Themia Tshiekecü* functions not just as a ritual act but also as a prescriptive moral tool.

4. *Kewhikhrieciü*

Kewhikhri may be understood as a form of public execution that foregrounds collective participation, thereby reinforcing communal notions of justice, moral accountability, and shared responsibility within Angami society.

This form of punishment was reserved for individuals in Angami society found guilty of grave transgressions, including poisoning, murder, rape, theft, or the deliberate desecration of ritual practices. This traditional mode of execution is known as *kewhikhri*. In this procedure, a mat-like structure is woven from hard bamboo, upon which the offender is laid on the ground. The bamboo mat is then placed over the body, after which a figure of authority,

often referred to as the *Livau*, chants prescribed incantations and steps onto the mat, signalling the commencement of the punishment. Members of the community subsequently step onto the mat in succession, continuing until the offender is trampled to death.

The public and participatory nature of *kewhikhri* underscores the idea that grave transgressions were not offenses against an individual alone, but violations of the moral fabric of the community itself. As such, responsibility for both judgment and punishment was collectively assumed, reinforcing shared ethical norms and social accountability. Rather than functioning as an arbitrary act, *kewhikhri* was embedded within a culturally specific legal and cosmological order that linked wrongdoing, ritual authority, and communal justice.

5. *Themou Kechü*

Pre-modern Naga society practiced a form of headhunting rooted in the belief that the human soul resided in the head. This act was closely tied to ritual practices that framed head-taking as the ultimate transformative act (Jacobs 121), a symbolic moment through which life was turned into death. The accompanying rituals served to convert the biological fact of death into a culturally significant event, transforming it from a natural occurrence into a social object (ibid). Hence, annihilation of another was something that was seen a celebratory act. However, the killing of a fellow villager whether it was accidental or intentional was considered a serious crime (Zetsuvi 67). The consequences of such actions are evident in a case recorded by Mechülho et al., (a contrasting case as cited by Hutton) in which a man from Kohima village, while on a hunting expedition, accidentally shot and killed his elder brother's son, who was part of the same group. From a distance, he had mistaken his nephew for a deer grazing in the field. Despite the accidental nature of the incident, the man was subjected to *Themou*, which is a traditional punishment involving seven years of exile from the village⁸. Similarly, oral sources from Khonoma village state that the killer of G. H. Damant, the British Political Officer in 1879 was exiled for a period of 7 years from Khonoma.

A more recent incident took place in 2021 in Rüsoma (a Northern Angami village), where a man was accidentally shot by a fellow member of his hunting party, who had mistaken him for a wild animal. In keeping with Angami customary law, the shooter, along with his entire household (defined here as all

those sharing the same fire hearth) was exiled from the village for seven years. This case demonstrates the deep entanglement of justice and kinship in Angami society, where punitive measures are not limited to the individual offender but extend to the familial collective, reflecting a conception of responsibility rooted in shared social and domestic ties .

6. *Themia puo kelhikewa*

This form of punitive sanction aligns with what William Bascom states as one of the functions of folklore in society – that of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour in a society (Bascom 346), directly through custom and ritual or through discursive means such as verbal expressions like proverbs as seen in certain African communities like the Setswana who use them as part of their judicial system (Gadilatolwe 2).

The *Themia puo kelhikewa* is essentially a mechanism of social regulation, rooted in the deliberate excommunication of individuals who defy “*Mechü die*” or the “word” or collective decision of the majority, articulated through the authority of village elders. As the embodiment of communal consensus and moral order, the *Mechü die* is considered final and non-negotiable. Any deliberate challenge to this decision activates a customary sanction known as *Themia Puo Kelhikewa*, a culturally embedded form of ostracism that serves both as deterrent and corrective. Outcasting, in this context, functions as a total withdrawal of social recognition and reciprocity. The severing of ties is not merely social but symbolic: the refusal to engage in *ketsütho* (communal camaraderie where members cut each others hairs) or *pele* (cooperative labour) effectively strips the individual of personhood within the moral order of the village. The growing of long, untrimmed hair becomes a visible and embodied sign of this exclusion, what anthropologist Mary Douglas might describe as a form of “matter out of place,” (Douglas 35) signalling the breakdown of normative order. In her book, “Purity and Danger” (1966), she notes: “if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained (41).

The social death of the outcast is reinforced through collective non-engagement, extending even to moments of vulnerability such as illness, where the denial of care underscores the completeness of exclusion. However, this does not mean that there is no redemption. Should the individual express

remorse and demonstrate behavioural transformation, the elders acting as moral arbiters of the community monitor and evaluate the offender's potential to transform. If his remorse is deemed sincere, the individual may be ritually and socially restored to full membership, highlighting the rehabilitative dimension of Angami customary justice.

5. Liminal Space(s) in *Kenyü*

Among the Angamis, *kenyü* refers to a culturally sanctioned set of ritual prohibitions, broadly understood as that which is "forbidden" within a specific temporal or social context. It is also commonly referred to as *genna* across many Naga tribes. Kuolie writes that, "up until our parents' generation, the Tenymia way of life was deeply guided by the values of *kenyü* and *menga*" (8). The act of *kenyü* functions as a mechanism of ritual regulation that temporarily suspends ordinary activities in response to particular events or transitions. As Jacobs (84) observes, "in the *genna* period, everything that is normally active becomes inactive: there is a prohibition on sex, work, certain foods and travel." In this sense, *kenyü* operates much like classic anthropological notions of taboo, in that it serves both to structure communal behaviour and safeguard cosmological balance. When a word, gesture, or act is declared *kenyü*, its violation is believed to provoke consequences that have social, spiritual and physical implications. As a symbolic action, *kenyü* marks the signalling that something extraordinary is taking place within the moral and ritual life of the village. As such, it functions not only as a form of social control but also as a culturally encoded response to uncertainty, transformation, or potential disorder.

Interestingly, elements of *kenyü* are embedded in various forms of customary punishment, revealing the ritual logic and moral cosmology that underpin the nature and culture of justice in Angami society. During the punitive process of *Rünyü Merhe*, for instance, a number of ritual taboos must be observed: it is considered *kenyü* to touch the thief's hands, assist them in standing, or to cut the middle finger, acts believed to bring misfortune or ritual pollution (Mechülho et al., 186). These prohibitions are not merely symbolic but reflect a deep-seated belief that moral transgressions carry spiritual consequences, and that justice must be ritually contained and purified. These ritual acts align with what Victor Turner describes as liminal states, periods of transition where individuals are symbolically separated from the social structure and placed in a state of ambiguity, "betwixt and between" normative roles. The individual undergoing punishment or ritual is no longer part of ordinary life but not yet reintegrated;

the surrounding taboos serve to mark and manage this transitional phase (Turner 359). Liminal entities are represented as those who possess nothing, no status, property, insignia, or anything indicating rank or position in the kinship system (ibid). Turner states that this is done as if to indicate that “they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (ibid). The various *kenyü* exhibits this type of trait where the culprit is literally and figuratively removed from the social order through a ritual process.

A similar ritual sensitivity can be seen in the *Themia tshie* ceremony, where it is *kenyü* to remove one’s spear before *Zhangou* (Wednesday), and taboo to spear one’s own shadow, hence the act is performed in the evening, facing west. This prohibition reflects the Angami (and wider Naga) belief in the existence of multiple souls or spirit-selves, often connected with one’s shadow, and highlights the cosmological risks of spiritual self-harm during liminal ritual actions. Furthermore, after the completion of such rituals, it is *kenyü* to resume regular work immediately, requiring a liminal pause before re-entry into ordinary life (Mechülho et al., 187–188). Similarly, in cases of exile brought about by murder, ritual reintegration is not automatic. After the seven-year exile, it is not only customary but *kenyü* for the individual to return without being formally summoned. Their re-integration must be initiated by the clan through ritual invitation, marking the end of their liminal separation and the restoration of social equilibrium.

Through these practices, *kenyü* serves not only as a system of prohibition but as a means of navigating the dangerous thresholds of moral and spiritual transition, precisely the kind of liminal terrain Turner identifies as central to ritual life.

Conclusion

As illustrated above, oral tradition, as a foundational component of customary law in pre-modern Angami society, significantly contributed to the cultivation of the ideals of honesty and integrity within the community. Much like other indigenous cultures such as the Igbo and Maori, who also rest their customary traditions in orality, the Angami too depended on their oral tradition to reinforce communal values. One telling example of this moral framework can be seen in everyday practices: when people went to their fields, they rarely locked their doors. Instead, they would simply place a cane-sized stick across the entrance,

a symbolic way to state that the household was temporarily unoccupied. One striking illustration of moral ethics embedded in Angami customary law is *kenhou tshii*, a practice that continues to be observed in the present day. When an individual encounters a beehive in the forest and intends to harvest it at a later time, the site is marked by tying a knot using leaves and branches. This *kenhou* functions as an informal yet widely recognised marker of claim, operating in the absence of written ownership or codified property rights. Its authority rests on shared moral understanding and oral norms rather than enforceable sanctions.

This paper has sought to examine the ethical and moral cartographies of Angami society, with particular attention to the customary punitive measures historically imposed upon individuals who transgressed established normative codes. These sanctions, while often severe, functioned not solely as retributive justice but as culturally embedded deterrents designed to uphold communal expectations and reinforce the centrality of truth, integrity, and social harmony. This enduring moral ethos continues to inform the foundations of Angami society, even as it negotiates the pressures of modernity and socio-cultural transformation.

In the contemporary moment, there is an urgent imperative to reclaim and recontextualize these ethical frameworks by engaging with the moral philosophies embedded in oral tradition. Such an approach not only affirms the intrinsic value of indigenous knowledge systems but also contributes to the reconstitution of tribal identity through both traditional and emergent forms of justice. The revitalization of storytelling and intergenerational transmission of knowledge is central to this. Traditional institutions such as the *Morung* and *Thehouba*, youth dormitories that historically served as sociological pillars for the transmission of cultural knowledge, skill, and communal responsibility, offer significant potential for re-engaging younger generations with ancestral values. These spaces, once critical to informal education and collective memory, may once again serve as sites for cultivating ethical subjectivities grounded in indigenous epistemologies.

Equally crucial is the formal recognition and integration of traditional knowledge systems within contemporary education. The introduction of *Nagaland Heritage Studies* textbooks and complementary *Nagaland Heritage Studies* based films for school children by the Nagaland state government represents a commendable step toward bridging the divide between indigenous moral worldviews and modern educational paradigms. Additionally, NGOs like the

Lidi Kro-u conduct story telling sessions and village walks in order to impart traditional knowledge to the younger generations. By embedding traditional ethical codes into formal curricula, such initiatives not only preserve cultural heritage but also equip younger generations with frameworks of integrity and justice that are locally rooted and contextually relevant.

Notes

1. Definitions obtained from: Value Lessons from the Tenyimia Society, YouTube, SCERT Nagaland, 22nd September 2022 <https://youtu.be/MnWJRNZtydA?si=z1lpFZpz-9rLtkv1>
2. According to oral tradition, the practice of sevenfold repayment originated from a man named Üsou. During his time, a theft occurred and as an elder, Üsou was consulted for his advice on how to deal with the thief. He responded that the thief should be taught a lesson and should repay seven times the value of what was stolen. Following his counsel, the thief was made to pay accordingly. From that incident onward, the Angamis adopted the system of sevenfold repayment as a customary form of justice. (Personal Interview with Eno Meguo-o Mechülho, dated 7th August, 2025).
3. This customary practice resonates with a biblical saying that goes, “*But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house*” (Proverbs 6:31), thereby suggesting an interesting alignment between indigenous and scriptural moral codes.
4. The use of black and red yarn in traditional chants is rooted in an old tale about *Themia* (man) and *Terhuomia* (spirit). Once upon a time, there was a harmful spirit who frequently visited a man’s house to check whether he was home or not. The spirit feared the man but sought to harm his family in his absence. Aware of this, the man instructed his family to always say he was at home even when he was actually away in the field. One day, when the man was at home, the spirit came again and asked his family if he was around. They replied that he wasn’t, though he was. The man was hiding behind the door with his machete. As the spirit stretched out his arm to open the door, the man struck his arm. Furious and in pain, the spirit uttered ‘*pi ri pi dadua..... lotei lora lileyha!*’ which means, ‘.....replace black yarn with red yarn’. But the man responded with a verbal counter refusing to be swayed by the evil spirit. He declared that he will not substitute the yarns. From this tale, this phrase became a part of traditional chants. (Personal Interview with Eno Meguo-o Mechülho, dated 7th August, 2025).
5. The name of the middle finger, *zouü*, holds cultural significance. The term *zouü* is used to express high regard for someone. For example, when a person is referred to as the *zouü*, it means they stand out among their peers and are considered a true gem. Because of this positive association, the middle finger which is also the tallest of all fingers and bears the name *zouü*, it has become taboo to chop it off. (Personal Interview with Eno Meguo-o Mechülho, dated 7th August, 2025).

6. A person who has earned *Ramei*; a prestigious award bestowed for valour in headhunting. *Ramei* is earned only after a person successfully performs *rügezha*, commonly referred to as *rügezhakenyü*. Therefore, *Terhü Sakramia* is considered a prestigious title to attain.
7. The role of *Livau* is typically assigned to a middle-aged bachelor or an orphan. Sometimes, this role is carried out by a person who is mentally unstable or considered mentally incomplete. In situations where the community must carry out unpleasant tasks, such as curse rituals or punishments, the *Livau* is called upon to perform them. This is largely because, due to his mental condition, he is seen as exempt from strict ritual restrictions or taboos. Moreover, as someone without a family, there is no fear of curses affecting his household. Even if he happens to violate certain ritual norms or restricted days, he is not held strictly accountable, as his actions are understood in light of his mental instability.
8. J. H Hutton in his monograph documents three cases of homicide among the Angamis, one of which involves the accidental killing of a fellow villager during a hunting expedition. In such instances, the prescribed punishment is seven years of banishment, referred to as Themou (Hutton, 149).

During this period, the individual is required to live in another village, under the symbolic guardianship of a new parental figure.

References

- Aier, Anungla. *Studies on Naga Oral Tradition: Memories and Telling of Origin Myth and Migration*. Vol I, Heritage Publication House, 2018.
- Ao, Temsula. *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. Heritage Publishing House, 2017.
- Chücha, Neichüriazho. *Tenyimia Kelhou Dze*. Ura Academy Publication (UAP), 1989.
- Chüzho, N. "Customary Law and Customary Practices: Changkija's Criticism of the 'Customary' in Relation to Gendered Experiences", *Open Library of Humanities* 11(2). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.17984>.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger*. Routledge, 1966.
- Hutton, J.H. *The Angami Nagas*. Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Iralu, Kaka D. "The lost Angami Culture of honesty and concern for one another's welfare" *Eastern Mirror Nagaland*, 3rd November, 2015. <https://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/mourning-the-lost-angami-culture-of-honesty-and-concern-for-one-anothers-welfare>
- Jacobs, Julian. *The Nagas: Hill peoples of Northeast India*. Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 2012.
- Kelio, Kezhangunuo. *Customary Laws of the Angami Naga Tribe: A Contemporary Feminist Perspective*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Assam Don Bosco University, 2015.

- Kuolie, D. *Keriekimia Mhasimhale Kenyü mu Menga; U Tsiepfumia Diekuo*. UAP, 2018.
- Mechülho, et al. *Pfutsau Nanyü & Kelhou Dze*. UAP, 2024.
- Mohan, S. & Dwivedi, D. *Gandhi and Philosophy: On Theological Anti-Politics*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
- Odyuo, Benchilo., & Chavhan, Amol Deo. Navigating Legal Pluralism: Understanding Naga Customary Law and the Indian Legal System in Nagaland. *Jornal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, Vol 11 (4). <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2404169.pdf>
- SCERT Nagaland Heritage Film, *Value Lessons from the Tenyimia Society*, YouTube, SCERT, 22nd September, 2022. <https://youtu.be/MnWJRNZtydA?si=z1lpFZpz-9rLtkv1>
- SCERT, Nagaland. *Nagaland Heritage Studies Alternative English Class V11*, Artwork, 2019.
- Sekhose, Khrieü. *Zhozho*. Genuine Printing Press, 2002.
- Sekhose, Rüzühkhrie. *Tenyimia Dzeyie*. Ura Academy, 2000.
- Tsütuonuomia Khel Council. (2025). *Eno Kekietuo Solo Kerügu Nyie La Tsütuonuomia Mha Pepikolie (Tsütuonuomia Khel Council's decisions on Kekietuo Solo's theft case)* Retrieved from TCK/Resolution/2025-26.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure*. Cornell University Press, 1969.
- Zetsuvi, K.S. *Traditional Culture of the Angami Nagas*. Heritage Publishing House, 2014.

Personal Interviews

Name	Gender	Age	Village	Interview Date
Neituoselie Liezietsu	Male	77 years*	Kohima village	12 th , 15 th , 19 th & 24 th July, 2025
Neikhriekhoü Solo	Female	74 years*	Kohima village	8 th - 9 th May 12 th - 15 th June, 2025
Dziesetuonuo Liezietsu	Female	71 years*	Kohima village	21 st , 23 rd & 24 th May, 2025
Medoselhou Keretsü	Male	76 years*	Kohima village	21 st April, 2025
Meguo-o Mechülho	Male	82 years*	Kohima village	7 th August, 2025
Pelevotsolie Terhase	Male	65 years*	Rüsoma village	9 th August, 2025
Yalie Terhase	Female	56 years*	Rüsoma village	9 th August, 2025

*age as on the date of interview