Chapter 1

Chapter 1

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1.0 Introduction

The current work is an attempt at a study of Khurkhul from a sociolinguistic point of view.

Khurkhul is the native tongue of the inhabitants of the Khurkhul village, which is located in Imphal West-1, one of the nine districts of Manipur, a north-eastern province of India. It is 15/16 km away from Imphal, the capital of Manipur.

Khurkhul is said to be a variety of Manipuri (also called Meiteilon[1]), the language that predominantly spoken in Manipur. Khurkhul thus belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Kuki-Chin language family.

According to 2011 population Census, the Khurkhul village has 6450 inhabitants, of which 3300 are males; 3150 females (which includes the present author). However, it has a higher literacy rate compared to the general literacy rate of Manipur. In 2011, the literacy rate of the Khurkhul village was 78.16% compared to 76.94% of Manipur.

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[1] Meiteilon has been recognised as Manipuri by the Indian Union and has been included in the list of scheduled languages (included in the 8th schedule by the 71st amendment of the constitution in 1992).

Khurkhul is thus an endangered language. However, the old generation, unlike the new generation increasingly shifting to Hindi and English, still uses Khurkhul in all domains of life.

The current research was carried out on Khurkhul as it is spoken by the old generation of the community who are almost detached from speakers of other languages.

1.1 The Khurkhuls as Lois and a Schedule Caste of Manipur

Manipur is located in the north-eastern region of India. Situated in a beautiful mountainous region, Manipur is surrounded by Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south, Upper Myanmar in the east and Assam in the west.

There are six ethnic groups in the valley of Manipur: the Meitei, the Loi, the Yaithibi, the Brahmin, the Bishnupriya, and the Pangan (Manipuri Muslim). Of these, three ethnic groups, namely, the Meitei, the Loi, and the Yaithibi claim to be and are often regarded by others as indigenous (see Saha, 1994, 56-57). The hill areas of Manipur are inhabited by the Nagas and the Kukis.

According to 2011 census, it has a population of 2,388,634 persons. Out of this, 56 percent consists of the Meiteis inhabiting the valley; 34.41 percent belongs to the Scheduled Tribes who mostly inhabit the hill areas (i.e. the Nagas and the Kukis)[2], while 2 percent consists of the Scheduled Castes[3] mostly inhabiting the foothills of Manipur and around 8 percent consists of other communities[4].

The total area of the state is 22,327 sq. km, divided into nine districts. Out of these, the Lois who are categorized as Scheduled Caste in the Indian Constitution are spread over four districts: Imphal West, Imphal East, Bishnupur and Chandel. As noted, the Khurkhuls, who belong to the Loi ethnic group, live in the Khurkhul village located in Imphal West.

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[2] According to the 1981 census, Manipur has a list of 29 scheduled tribes, which are broadly classified into the *Nagas and Kukis* (see Husain, 1994, 84).

[3] The Lois are the major Schedule Caste of Manipur. The Yaithibis constitute the other Schedule Caste of the state.

[4] Census of India, Series- 1, Union Primary Abstract for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. 1991, p.ll.

The Meiteis have been the dominant group of people in Manipur. British administrators and scholars are inclined to trace the origin of the Meiteis from an agglomeration of four old Naga-Kuki tribes (viz. Khuman, Luwang, Moirang and Meitei) who surrounded the Manipur valley. And it is the offshoots of these tribes that later became dominant in the valley, first the Khumans and then the Moirangs. But ultimately it was the Meiteis who subdued all the others. In course of time the name Meitei became applicable to all the tribes that settled in the valley (see Saha, ibid).

The word Loi is used as a prefix (and occasionally as a suffix) in Manipuri to express different meanings. It is used in such expressions as *Loi- thaba* (to exile in the Loi villages or expulsions from Manipur to a place outside), *Loi-kaba* (to return from exile), *Loi-okpa* (to receive somebody while returning from exile), *Loi haba* (to pay tribute to a conquering country), *Loipot-kaba* (to pay tribute to a conquering power), *Loi-chanba* (to conquer a country), *Loi-thokpa* (to kill).

According to Ningthoukhongjam and Lairenmayum (1967), the term Loi means those who were subdued or who pay tributes to a sovereign. Singh opines that, "Loi means subdued, dependent, outcaste, backward and to complete or to be completed. It is obviously connected with the degraded or subdued groups of outcaste and low caste people" (see Singh, 1998, 118).

In its present contextual meaning, it embraces only the groups of people who are included in the list of Scheduled Caste by the Constitution of India. In the Indian (Hindu) caste system, scheduled caste people are considered the "low caste" people, which include the Dalits as well. Thus, the Lois of Manipur have been pushed to the periphery in Manipur both spatially and socially.

Different scholars have different opinions about the origin of the people called the Lois today. Some scholars identified Lois as an independent tribe that once ruled the valley. During their conflict with the Meitei chiefs (Ningthouja chiefs), they were defeated and driven towards the foothills.

By this political conquest, they were designated as Lois and later emerged as a separate group, *Loi*. Thus, the Loi population consisted of those who were vanquished by the Meitei kings, and who paid tributes to the Meitei rulers, soldiers or people taken captive in the war and the people who were expelled from the Meitei society for violating the social customs

and traditions. Those committing crimes against the king or disobeying his orders were ordered to live in the Loi villages for the rest of their lives (see Singh, 38-39).

Hudson (1908, 8-9) opines: "the Loi is a title applied to the inhabitants of a number of villages which are at some distances from Imphal, and which are and have for long been in subjection to the Meiteis". Today, the Lois who inhabit the foothills of the state, are conferred by the Constitution of India the status of a Scheduled Caste community (this happened in 1956).

But the Lois had to suffer also for refusing to accept Hinduism. Till the beginning of the 18th century, the Meiteis of Manipur valley followed the ancient Meitei religion and the tribes who inhabit the surrounding hills were the practitioners of the animistic tribal religion. Besides the traditional religion, the Meiteis who dwell in the plain areas of Manipur adopted Hinduism from early eighteenth century while the Nagas and the Kukis, who are located in the hills, converted into Christianity in the nineteenth century A.D. In contrast to the Meiteis and the people in the hills, the Lois *at large* neither formally embraced Hinduism nor converted to Christianity, but continued to preserve the traditional culture and religion of their own.

As is observed in Lairenlakpam (2002, 10), "[w]ith the advent of Hinduism, the Meiteis began to imitate the caste system of the Hindus. The idea of touchability and untouchability came to the minds of the Hindu Meiteis. So, there was a time when the Meitei society [i.e. the royal Meitei power] degraded those Meiteis [to the status of Loi] who did not adopt Hinduism and would not mix, eat and sit with them........This attitude of treating the Lois as a low caste by the Meiteis is an important factor for them to be included in the scheduled caste even though their habits are quite different from the other scheduled castes of the country."[5]

Thus, the Lois could be divided into three groups namely, Lois by birth, Lois by punishment and Lois by purchase (ones captured during war). Lois can further be divided into two distinct groups: converted and non-converted. The former represents those who have

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[5] After the punishment, the degraded Meitei was usually readmitted within the fold of Meiteisocietal set-up. In the absence of readmission, no punishment could be more severe than to be permanently condemned to the status of Loi. Thus, as noted, we have expressions like *Loi- thaba* (to exile in the Loi villages or expulsions from Manipur to a place outside), *Loi-kaba* (to return from exile), *Loipot-kaba* (to pay tribute to a conquering power), *Loi-thokpa* (to kill) and so on.

formally converted to Hinduism with the permission of the kings whereas the latter includes those Lois who have not formally converted. But today the non-converted Lois are also seen as Hindus by virtue of their designation as Scheduled Caste. The converted Lois follow the life style, custom, manner and rituals practised by the Vaishnavite Meiteis and no longer called Lois but are called Meiteis. The social status of the converted Lois significantly changes to the extent that they are identified as Kshatriyas of the Hindu social hierarchy. The non-converted Lois, (though treated as Hindus), on the other hand, still observe their age-old usages, traditions, customs and cultures.

The negative attitude of the Meiteis towards the Lois can sometimes be rather extreme. One of the informants narrated his own experience here like this: "One Meitei teacher used to teach us. He would never touch our books, or our body. He used a long stick to touch us and our books. We were always looked down upon by him as inferior, as low caste Loi people."

Reacting to this another informant, a local scholar, opined: "We the Khurkhul people make and wear the finest and most expensive *muka* (silk); we make and drink the finest and the most expensive wine *waiyu khari* (a type of wine); we store food for more than a year. We are hardworking people. So, how can we be considered a lowly people?" He pointed out that the Lois are not backward or poor; they are suffering because of their resistance to Hinduism. Thus, the Schedule Castes of Manipur and the Schedule Castes of mainland India may significantly differ. As is observed in Naoroibam (2015, 11):

> The Lois were communities, which took major parts in the development of Manipur in ancient times. The Loi 'literally tributary' paid tributes to the king in kind instead of 'Lallup', a forced labor during monarchial period. Indeed, the Loi population of different Loi villages were exceedingly useful in producing several consumable and non-consumable items for both the king and for public

1.2 Stories about the origins of the Khurkhuls

There is no written record of the original Khurkhul inhabitants. However, there are many oral narratives passing down through generations, which give us some idea about their origins. We collected the following.

The Khurkhuls are believed to be descendents of the people of the Yendrembam sagei[6] who came out of the cave called Leikhun which is behind the Ichum Lairembi Temple. According to this oral story, the Khurkhuls used to cry when their daughter would get married, but not when someone died. This is because the daughter would stay away from her parents after marriage, but the dead will return home after the fifth day of burial. Thus, earlier, the Khurkhuls would simply bury the dead body; they would not go for any ceremony. Once, a mother-in-law of the Yendrembam family told her daughter-in-law that her father-in-law, who had recently died, would soon come back from the grave. She instructed her to keep boiled water ready, and pour it on him when he was home. When in the evening the daughter-in- law came out of the kitchen to throw khutchum (waste water) outside, she felt someone was standing in the courtyard. But it was already dark and she failed to recognize her father-in-law, who was standing there with a coffin on his head. Terribly scared, she fainted then and there in front of him. But this was a great embarrassment to the father-in-law, so much so that he immediately left the house never to return again. After this incident, the Yendrembam sagei closed the cave (in a similar story, the King of Moirang was worried that if the Khurkhuls kept coming back after death, they would become more powerful than the Moirangs. So, he ordered to close the cave).

Thus, according to this oral narrative, Yendrembam family was the original inhabitants of Khurkhul; and their descendents are still there in Khurkhul today. However, they now belong to the Usham sagei[7] (see Louriyam, 2004).

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[6] The Khurkhul term 'sagei' denotes lineage. This term will appear in many subsequent pages of the current dissertation.

[7] Usham Rupachandra was the first Khurkhul to convert himself to Hinduism during the reign of the King Churchand in Manipur (1936). However, the coming of Hinduism to the Khurkhul village seems to be triggered by a personal conflict rather than an inner wish to embrace Hinduism. Usham Rupachandra and Ngangbam Sukorsing contested for the seat of *choutra* (care taker). Sukorsing defeated Rupachandra. Thereafter he converted to Hinduism and subsequently he was named Sebok (disciple) by the then king. The locality where he lived was also named after him. Thus, it is called Sebok *leikai*.

When the Yendrembam sagei converted to Hinduism they had to change their *sagei* because according to the Khurkhul mythology of creation the Khurkhuls were cave dwellers. So, they changed their sagei to become Ushams, a pure Hindu sagei.

Image 1: The descendents of the Yendrembam or Usham *sagei*

Image 2: The Ichum Lairembi Temple

The Khurkhuls are also believed to be the descendents of the last (youngest) friend of Khomdonnubi[8] taret (the Pleiades). The seven friends were expelled by their parents for having premarital sex. So, they decided to leave the place and move to some other place. But the youngest of them could not join the group in the journey as she was pregnant. Subsequently she gave birth a baby in the village called Khurkhul today. But she was humiliated for having a baby out of wedlock. Thus, she cursed the villagers, "Let there be no more than seven houses in this village". According to this story, the family of the Phuyam sagei is the first family who inhabited the Khurkhul village. It is believed that due to her curse Phuyam sagei

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[8] The seven starts in this constellation are personified as Gods in the myth of Khurkhul. The Khurkhuls are believed to be the descendants of the last/youngest star.

has a very small number of houses till today. One of the informants reported that he has never seen Phuyam sagei growing in number. It has ever remained only seven houses.

According to another story, Khurkhuls are descendents of fifteen Kabo slaves and fifteen other Moirang slaves. The Moirang Princess Thoibi was exiled from Moirang to Kabo as she refused to marry Nongbal (in the epic of Khamba Thoibi). Thoibi came to Kabo with fifteen Moirang slaves with her. When she was called back from Kabo by her father, the chief of Kabo presented her with fifteen slaves to be her dowry. On the way to Kabo from Moirang with the Pincesss Thoibi the slaves threw an egg. This egg fell on the ground and was broken at the present location of the Ichum Lairembi Temple. Since then they began to settle there (see Lairenlakpam, 2002, 16).

In a similar story, Thoibi was exiled to Kabo from Moirang when she disagreed to marry Nongban. During the exile, she had found something round shining like gold when, one day, she and Sangdrik Changningkhombi, the daughter of the Kabo king, went for fishing. Thoibi asked Sangdrik Changningkhombi to keep it with her, with the wish of taking it back when she would return to Moirang. One night, Sangdrik Changningkhombi had the shining thing in her dream. The shinig thing spoke like a human being and said that it no longer wants to be in Kabo. So, Sangdrik Changningkhombi along with thirty slaves with her came to Moirang to give the shining thing to Thoibi. But this time Thoibi had the shining thing in her dream one night. It said to her that it does not want to stay long in Moirang as Thangching (a Meitei deity) was already there. But Sangdrik Changningkhombi was determined not to return to Kabo. So, she, along with the thirty salves from Kabo and the "shining thing", made a journey out of Moirang. On the way they threw an egg to find a suitable place where they could settle down. The egg fell on the ground and was broken at the location where the present day Ichum Lairembi Temple in Khurkhul exits. Thereupon the "shinning thing" was buried there. Since then Sangdrik Changningkhombi has been worshiped as Ichum Lairembi.

The Khurkhuls still practice the ritual of throwing an egg in order to find the right place to bury a dead body. They bury the dead body at the location where the egg falls on the ground

is broken. The place for burying *lu* 'part of the head of the dead body' is also determined in this way.

Image 3: *Lu phumba* **(Burying the forehead)**

Besides this ritual of finding the right place of burial, the Khurkhuls use eggs in many other rituals like *Khayomlakpa*, *Mangtaba, Thawaikouba, Akan-athou khangba* and so on.

Khayomlakpa: In *khayomlakpa,* (trouble like severe stomach pain, constant vomiting) eggs are offered to *Pakhangba* (a Khurkhul deity).

Image 4: *Khayomlakpa*

Mangtaba: It is a ritual prayer in which the spirit and living people communicate through *maibi.* Eggs are offered to the deity.

Image 5: *Mangtaba*

***Thawaikouba*:** Eggs are used in this prayer, too, which is done to get rid of sudden sickness or in the case of accidents and so on.

***Akan-athou khangba*:** It is a prayer performed again with eggs along with rice and *langthrei* (a kind of plant which is used in almost every prayer and also used as medicine).

1.2.1 The term Khurkhul

The present name of the village "Khurkhul" was named differently earlier. There are many oral stories regarding the naming of Khurkhul. (Louriyam, 2004).

a) *Khoiri khun (kʰoiri + kʰun = umbilical cord + village): Once, there was a flood when the king Thangcha Khongchomba and the queen Leinung Yaibilok were ruling Sangaithel. When, the king was getting ready to go for making walls to block the flood the baby inside the queen's womb urged upon to take him too along with him. The father disagreed as he was inside the womb and was very young. Once the baby was born, he went to help his father without having the umbilical cord cut. The place where the umbilical cord got cut is called Khoiri khun, which became Khurkhul in course of time.*

b) *Khoiren khun (kʰoi +ren + kʰun = umbilical +cut+ village): When the youngest friend of Khomdonnubi taret (the Pleiades) delivered her baby as hari nungnang (cicada) the umbilical of the baby was cut with a blade of grass as a forest knife in*

a place which then earned the name Khoiren khun. Khoiren khun later became Khurkhul.

c) *Khutlukhun (kʰutlu+ kʰun = knee + village): The then Meitei king summoned the representatives of the communities which did not convert themselves to Hinduism. They were beaten till they agreed to accept the religion. However, the representative of one particular, bowing on his knee, kept saying, "I cannot do it". He was so stubborn that they could not change his mind. Since, then, the people of his community were known as Khutlukhun, which later became Khurkhul.*

1.2.2 The Khurkhul *sagei*s

There are thirteen original Khurkhul *sagei*s. A *sagei*, as noted, a family or a lineage. The thirteen original Khurkhul *sagei*s are *Phuyam, Yendrembam, Louriyam, Yumlembam, Khangembam, Heikham, Nganbam, Khaidem, Phuritshambam, Nungleppam, Usham, Irungbam, and Thengkucham.* The oral narratives tell the stories of naming these *sagei*s.

a) Phuritsabam *sagei* (pʰurit+sa+bam = cloth+make+place): There was no needle in meitrapak 'Manipur' before. When the Phuritshabam *sagei* came to meitrapak from Kabo, they brought needles with them. They knit clothes for the king with the needles. So, the *sagei* got the name *Phuritshabam.*

b) Nungleppam *sagei* (nuŋ+lep+pəm = stone+stand+place): This *sagei* made the dead trees stand on the stone for the King. The trees would grow green again. So the *sagei* got the name *Nungleppam.*

c) Louriyam *sagei* (ləwri+jam = wall of paddy field+many): Earlier, this *sagei* used to owe lots of paddy fields. So, the *sagei* got the name *Louriyam.*

Some new *sagei*s also have come to Khurkhul, e.g. *Manoharmayum, Wahengbam, Lourembam, Hijam, Heiyam, Ningthoujam, Tongbram, Abujam, Saikhom, Lamba.*

1.2.3 Genealogy of the Khurkhuls

The exact time when the Khurkhuls began to settle down in Khurkhul is not known. However, some elders of the Heikham *sagei* have maintained a rough draft of their family tree (see Louriyam, 2004).

Fig 1: The Family tree of Heikham *sagei*
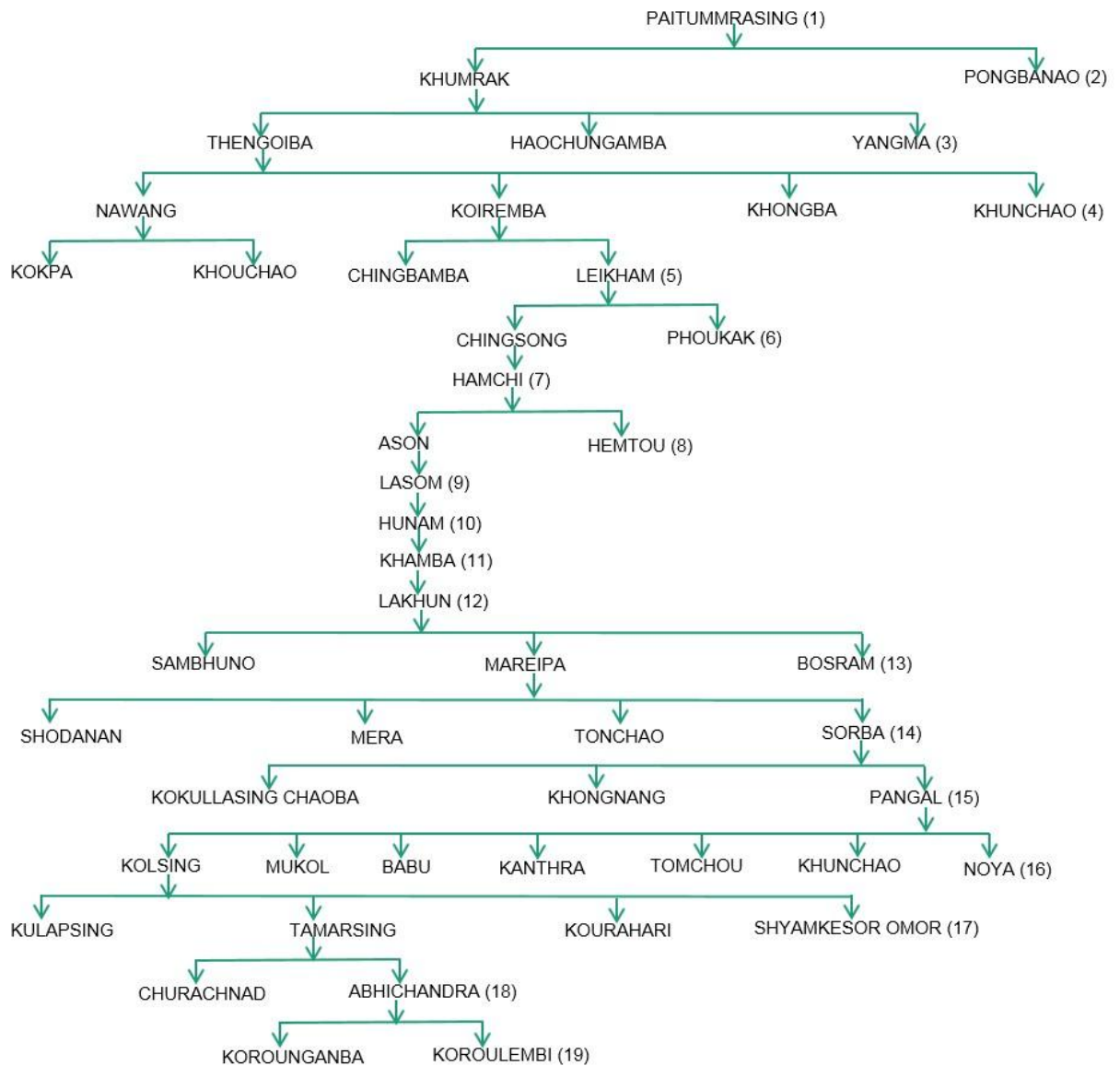
Heikham *sagei* is one of the original families who inhabited in Khurkhul. According to Tamrasigh (see Louriyam 2004), some generations are miss out while writing, so the approximate generation of Khurkhul is around more than twenty generations.

1.3. Khurkhul Festivals, Ceremonies, and Rituals

The Khurkhuls perform many festivals in a year as described in this section.

1.3.1 Festivals and Rituals

Sachibu Cheiraoba: It is the New Year festival of the Khurkhuls. They celebrate it on nongma panba (the first lunar day of the lunar month) of Sachibu, which falls mostly in the month of **April** *of the English calendar. They offer well cooked pork, chicken, and other curries to Kumpuba lai (the Deity of the Year), and also to Saroi ngaroi laiyam (the minor deities) asking blessings for the coming days and praying them to protect them any possible harm and damage. The Khurkhuls count their age after having the lunch of Cheiraoba, i.e. the New Year. According to the Khurkhul culture, a baby is considered one year old on the day of her or his birth. Thus, a baby who is born one day before Cheiraoba (i.e. the New Year) will be two years old on the day of Cheiraoba.*

*Kurak Lamtaiba: It is performed in the month of Inga i.e. mostl*y **June***. An auspicious day is decided on, and all the rituals are performed in loisang (a hut where the big drum of the Ichum Lairembi is kept). In the prayer, they seek blessings for good health, prosperity, and pray for security from unwanted death of villagers, and protection of paddy fields from insects. It is led by Khullakpa, Luplakpa, and Khumuchamba (they are care takers of the Ichum Lairembi Temple). Until this ritual is performed, they cannot eat wasoi (the baby bamboo).*

Thawan Laitanba: It is performed in the month of Thawan i.e. mostly in **August***. It is performed on the day of tatnaba (an ominous day of a month) in order to chase evil deities. Men go to an open field each with one stick in their hands and beat on yangkok (a bamboo basket used for winnowing rice chaffs) and say "poha-poha" in a chorus. On the other hand, women, who are at home, beat on either pukham (plate) or khuteng (a kind of tub) with a stick and say "poha-poha" in choris.*

Langban Chara tamba: It is a prayer offered to Apokpa Khubam (the spirits of the ancestors) in the month of Langban i.e. mostly in **September**. *This prayer is done in order to honour the ancestors by offering a meal with curries of pork and chicken. The Khurkhuls believe that Khamnung lai (God of Death) allows the spirits to visit in this month their meeram, the relatives in the world.*

Ningol Chakouba: This festival is performed in the month of Hiyangkei i.e. mostly in **November**. *Each piba (male of a lineage) takes their turn to be the host, and invites all the ningols (consanguineal women) for a grand feast. Unlike the Meiteis who celebrate it within two families, the Khurkhuls celebrate it sagei wise, i.e. all the ningols (consanguineal women) of a sagei are invited for the feast by a piba (male of a lineage) of their sagei.*

In Poinu, performed mostly in **December**, *Keirai/Kotlai Khuramba (praying to the deity of paddy store house), lourai Khuramba (praying to the deity of the paddy field) are done. These rituals are performed when someone steals the paddy rice from the paddy field or the store house. It is a prayer to offer an apology to Phouwoibi (Goddess of Wealth). In this month, Chanoutangba is also done. In this, the newly harvested crops are consumed after they are offered to God.*

Yumoinu Khuramba (the Goddess of the Hearth in the Kitchen): It is done in the month of Wakching i.e. mostly in **January**. *It is a prayer offered to phungka lai (the Goddess of the Hearth). In this, a black hen is offered.*

Ichum Lairembi Chanou katpa: It is performed in the Khurkhul month of Phairen, roughly **February.** *A pig is sareichanba, i.e. sacrificed in front of the temple, and two males who has just become thouchanba (adult) cook the pork to be offered to the deities.*

Sharoi Khangba: It is performed in the month of Lamta, i.e. roughly **March**. *The villagers offer prayers for the defence of the four corners of the village.*

1.3.2 Ceremonies and Rituals

Rituals performed in marriage, birth, and death are discussed in this section.

1.3.2.1 Marriage

The term luhongba (/luhoŋbə/ = lu +hoŋ +bə = head + change+ NMLZ) 'marriage' denotes two meanings in Khurkhul

    a) The social rule that allows a man and woman to stay as couple, and

    b) The actual function of marriage.

Earlier, marriages were mostly arranged. The elders of the sagies would arrange the marriage. A proposal would be sent from the family of the *piba* family to the family of the *ningol* through a third party, which they call *yathangthaba* (sending a marriage proposal). It is followed by a formal visit to the family of the *ningol*. On the day of marriage, all the four kinds of wine that are made in the village i.e. *Khari, Leiyu, Atingba*, and *Pukyu* would be served to the guests along with pork curry *and hingsu/singsu* (a kind of salad). The family of the bride will give a string of *ngamus* fish (i.e. snakeheads/channa orientalis) to each and every guest. The string will be made of 3, or 5, or 7 *ngamus* (the Khurkhuls consider an odd number 'life', an even number 'death'). The *ngamus* are supplied by the family of the groom. At the meantime, the groom comes inside the *piba ka* (male's room) and the bride sits in the *ningol ka* (conseguineal women's room) of the house. They (bride and groom) offer prayer to *Lainingthou* and *Laimaren* (the deities of the household affairs), and *Apokpa* (the ancestors) at the auspicious time fixed by the *maiba*, the local male priest. Then, the bride and groom receive blessings from bride's parents.

Image 6: *Satin upu* (a marriage gift)

Image 7: *Chengbon* **(a marriage gift)**

1.3.2.2 Birth

The Khurkhuls perform many rituals related to birth, too, as described in brief below.

Kokpa chamba (purifying): It is a ritual performed in order to purify the mother and her baby still in the womb. This is performed when the mother attains seven or nine months of pregnancy. This ritual is performed in order to protect them from anamahachuba, which one may experience after seeing odd things like a couple having sex etc.

Khoiphumba (burying the umbilical cord): On the day of delivery, the umbilical cord is cut and wrapped in a leaf of a tree called Khangla, and is then buried at either the right (if the baby is a boy) or the left side (if the baby is a girl) of Thongaren (the front door of the house).

Seeking blessing from the Sun God: The child is covered with a piece of white cloth, and the mother took him/her out of the house for the first time. She seeks blessings for the baby's health, wealth, and long life from the Sun God. After this, the child can be taken out of the house any time.

1.3.2.3 Death

The Khurkhuls do not deny the fact that people are born to die. Thus, goes the Khurkhul proverb:

pokpə	*sibə*	*punnə*	*laki*
born	die	together	come

'Death and birth come together.'

However, they believe that everyone should die only after completing the duties for which they are sent to the earth by God. Thus, the Khurkhuls meet three types of death, and the rituals are performed accordingly.

a) Natural death: Those people who die from old age, after having love and care from their children.

b) Untimely death: Those people who died before he or she could complete the duties. For instance, meeting death before marriage, or one's son was settled.

c) The death of a child who is below three years, i.e. children who died before becoming aware of their duties and responsibilities.

The dead body is bathed and wrapped in a clean piece of cloth and is then kept in a hut made from bamboos. This hut is called *asi sang* (hut for the spirit). Then, the family of the deceased organizes a feast for the ancestors. When they come for the feast, they are requested to take the new spirit back with them. This ritual is performed in order to introduce the spirit (i.e. the dead person) to the ancestors so that the new spirit does not have problem in finding his or her new home. Then, *Khamnungpaotakpa* (God of Death) is informed about it.

1.4. Khurkhul: A severely endangered speech

When a language is lost, it is not only the language but also the identity of the speakers; knowledge of environment; and valuable cultural practice of their community such as oral history, folk medicine, folktales, traditional songs and other form of arts that are tied to the language.

The influence of English; Hindi; and other dominant language especially standard variety in daily interaction has a tremendous effect on the use of Khurkhul.

1.4.1 Endangerment

Speakers of languages, who are millions in number, might find it strenuous to accept the fact that there are many languages which are left with a single speaker or is extinct. But there are many such languages today. For instance, Tevfic Esenc was the last speaker of the Ubylk language by the time linguist recorded him. Thus, linguists like Krauss (1992) claim that by 2100, 90% of the world languages will be endangered. Athough linguists differ on this (e.g. linguists like Nettle & Romaine (2000) and Crystal (2000) believe that only 50% of the world languages will be endangered by that time), they agree that many a world language is soon going to be extinct.

A language is considered endangered if it is with fewer than 10000 speakers (Kruass, 1992). However, this may not be true in each and every context. For example, Suruaha is a small community formed by only about 150 members. They are endogenous group of people of Brazil.

These people live in a remote area of Amazonia in Brazil. Regardless of the small number, they were strongly practicing their tradition and language by the time linguists found them. On the other hand, Navajo, a community which used to have more than 100000 speakers a generation ago, is sharp declining. Thus, in simple terms, a language is endangered if it is likely to become "extinct" in the near future.

However, based on UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework, six degrees of endangerment may be distinguished, as is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: UNESCO's Language vitality and endangerment framework

| Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational language transmission
Safe	Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
Vulnerable	Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
Definitely endangered	Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home
Severely endangered	Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
Critically endangered	The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
Extinct	There are no speakers left

1.4.1.1 Language and ecology: Khurkhul

The interrelationship between language diversity and biodiversity is proclaimed by many scholars. For example, Sutherland (2003) states that the places like Indonesia and Papua New Guinea have both various biological species and languages. When biodiversity declines, the lexical terms which are used to denote them also decline. For instance, in the case of Khurkhul, the oldest generation have more knowledge of edible plants (both wild and non-wild) than the youngest generation.

This is shown in Table 2 below. Names of edible plants were collected (see Appendix for a full list) from some two hundred people of mixed gender (between ages 20 and 90) besides some of the primary informants. They gave us the names of the edible plants they know.

Table 2: Informants' knowledge of plants

Age Group	Number of plants, they know
20-30	14%
31-40	22%
41-50	41%
51-60	52%
61-70	88%
71-80	90%
81-90	100%

Fig 2: Informants' knowledge of plants
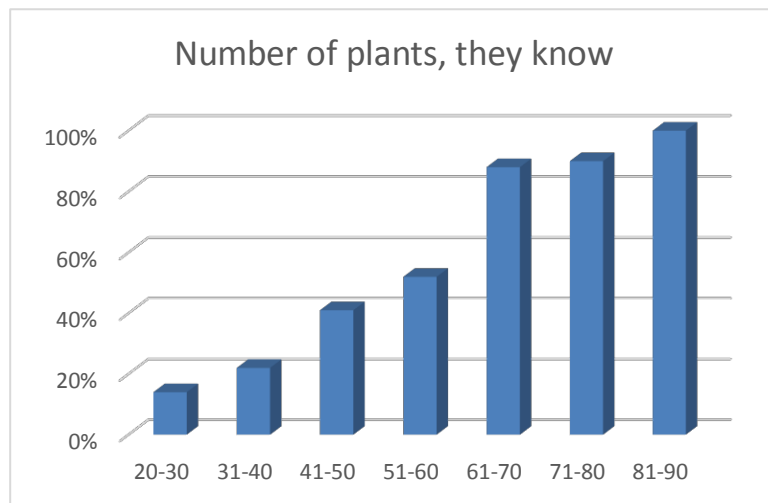
In Table 1, a huge difference can been seen between the oldest generation and the youngest generation in terms of their knowledge of the plants that grow in the Khurkhul village. The people who are between ages 20 and 30 know 14% of the edible vegetables, whereas the people who are between ages 81 and 90 know 100% of them. On the other hand, the people who are between ages 31 and 40 know 22%, whereas the people between ages 41 and 50 know 41%. The people between ages 51 and 60 know 52%; the people between ages 61 and 70 know 88%. Then, people between ages 71 and 80 know 90%. The survey is based only on age and gender; their social, or economic background were not considered. During the survey, it was also observed that many people who are between ages 20 and 30 do not even know the few important plants which the older generation often use as folk medicines to cure their illness.

(a) (b)
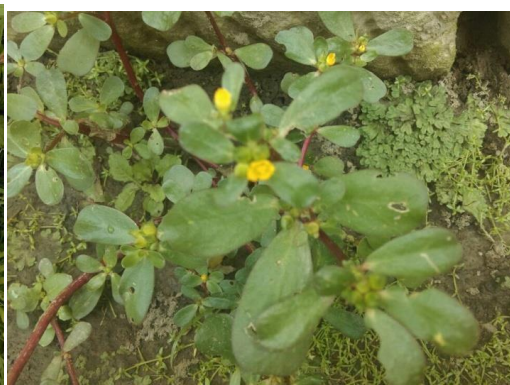
(c) (d)

a) *Chom:* It is used to cure *thabak naba* (chest pain), *ising mari* (kindney problem), and *sadou thungba* (respiratory problem).

b) *Sampakpi amuba*: It is used to cure *phingou chatpa* (white patch), *i chatpa* (in excessive blood in menstruation), *tang naba* (join paint); and as an antiseptic for cuts, scratch and the like.

c) *Nurakhongchomlei*: It is used to cure *iton phaiba* (dysentery), *arumhouba* (fever), etc.

d) *Leibakkundo:* It is used to cure *phingou chatpa* (white patch), *kokta nungsit haikatpa* (rise of air pressure in the brain) and for *lawai ingba* (to keep the head cool), etc.

1.4.1.2 Language and culture: Khurkhul

As is observed by Nettle and Romaine:

> The knowledge of surviving in extreme cold in north Arctic where people have to deal with extreme cold; on the other hand, the knowledge of surviving in desert where people have to deal with extreme heat are found in their respective languages. And it can be passed on to their future generation only through languages (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, 16).

The Khurkhuls keep a permanent place *phungka* in the kitchen. This is a place not only for the Goddess Yumoinu, but the place is maintained also for telling folk tales to grandchildren by the grandparents. While the mother is engaged in cooking, grandparents tell folk tales, which are rich in knowledge and wisdom. This is a traditional way of transferring knowledge and culture from the old to the new generation.

However, after the advent of the TV, video games etc the *phungka* is now remain only a place for performing rituals for Yumoinu. Perhaps it no longer plays the role of transferring knowledge and wisdom to the new generation.

A study was conducted in order to find out the use of *phungka wari* in the present-day Khurkhul families. This was done with 99 children who are between the ages of 4 and 9. They were divided into three groups; each group consisted of 33 children. Thus, the children between the ages of 4 and 5 were 33 in number; the children between the ages of 6 and 7 were also 33 in number; the same applies to the children between ages of 8 and 9. They were both male and female; other factors (e.g. economy) were not considered here. The children were asked the following questions.

    (1) How do you spend your evening after the school?
- a. Watching cartoons on the TV
- b. Playing video games
- c. Playing in the ground
- d. Going for tuition
- e. Listening to *phungka wari*

It was in the evening when the grandparents and the children would spend their quality time with phungka wari before.

Table 3: How the children spend the time in the evening

Age Group	Watching cartoons	Going for tuition	Playing video game	Playing in the ground	Listen to *phungka wari*
3 to 4	30%	30%	0%	24%	6%
5 to 6	30%	39%	6%	18%	6%
7 to 8	36%	24%	15%	30%	0%

Fig 3: How the children spend the time in the evening
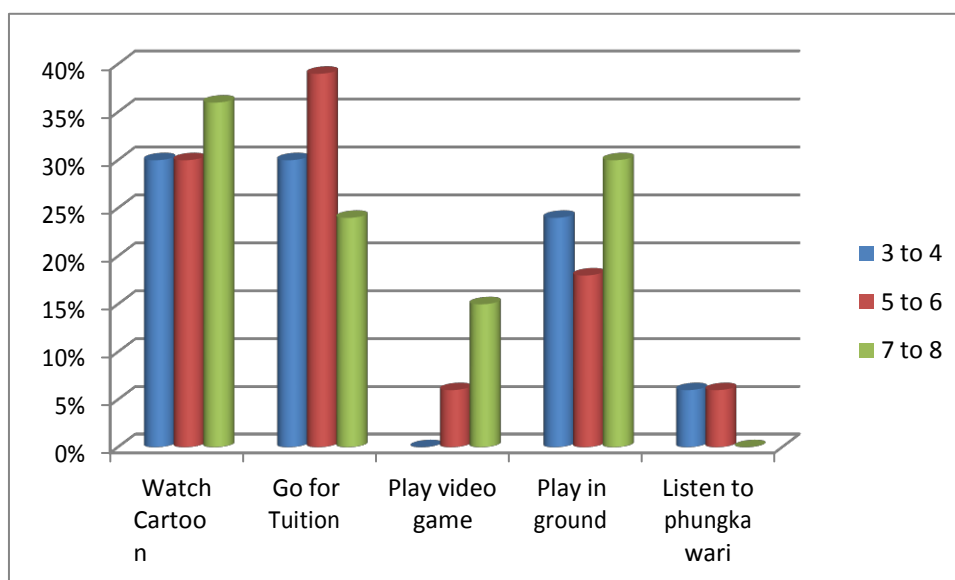
It can been seen form Table 3 above that of the children between ages 3 and 4, 30% of them spend watching cartoon; 30% of them go to tuition; 0% of them play video games; 24% of them play in the ground; and only 6% of them listen to *phungka wari* (folk tale). Of the children who are between ages of 5 and 6, 30% of them watch cartoons; 39% of them go to tuition; 6% of them play video games; 18% of them play in the ground; and again 6% of them listen to *phungka wari*. Of the children between ages 7 and 8, 36% of them watch cartoons; 24% of them go to tuition; 15% of them play video games; 30% of them play in the ground; and 0% of them listen to *phungka wari*.

Thus, it was found that the practice of *phungka wari* is sharply declining in the present-day Khurkhul society.

1.4.2 Attitude to Khurkhul

The attitude towards a language, especially of the native speakers, informs whether the language is maintained or ignored. If it is negative, then the language is not maintained.

During the field work, the current author heard a father (the grandson of one of the informants) instructing his wife not to allow their sons to speak in Khurkhul. When asked the reason, he replied that he does not want his son to go through the same humiliation and embarrassment which he had gone through for not knowing Hindi or English. Obviously, in such a situation the child is unlikely to learn Khurkhul, and it is unlikely to be transmitted. Thus, if the child somewhat forgets the language or refuses to speak it pretending he/she has forgotten it, or it is shameful speaking the language, the future of the language is not positive (Calvet, 1998).

In order to understand the attitude of the native speakers towards Khurkhul a survey was conducted. The participants were between ages of 16 and 90. They were divided into four groups on the basis of their economy, social position, and age. Gender wise it was again a mixed group. Thus, the four categories were: students, office goers, daily wage earners, and people from the older generation who has almost no contact with speakers of any other language. Each of these four groups were again subgrouped into three categories as described below.

a) **Students:** who are between tenth standard to the university level. Thus, they were subgrouped into the following three categories.

(A) High school to secondary level students: between ages 16 and 18

(B) College students: between ages 19 and 21

(C) University students: between ages 22 and 30

b) **Office goers:** they were subgrouped on the basis of age.

(A) Between the age of 30 and 40

(B) Between the age of 41 and 50

(C) Between the age of 51 and 60

c)   **Daily wage earners:** they were subgrouped on the basis of age.

   (A) Between the age of 30 and 40

   (B) Between the age of 41 and 50

   (C) Between the age of 51 and 60

d)   **People of the older generation:** who has almost no contact with speakers of any other language?

   (A) Between the age of 60 and 70.

   (B) Between the age of 71 and 80

   (C) Between the age of 81 and 90

Each subgroup above consisted of 10 participants so that each group consisted of 30 people. Thus, the total number of participants was 120 with sex ratio of 1:1.

They are asked the following questions:

a)   How do you feel when you speak Khurkhul?

   (A) Proud

   (B) Embarrassment

   (C) Mixed feelings

   (D) Nothing

   b) Where do you switch code?

   (A) at home

   (B) in (educational) institutions (school, college, university, office etc.)

   (C) in the market (Khwairamband Bazar)

   (D) In presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul

   c) The medium of instruction?

   (A) Hindi

   (B) English

   (C) Standard variety[9]

---

[9] i.e. Meiteilon

(D) Khurkhul variety

d)   What language should be the medium of instruction in the education institutions?

(A) Hindi

(B) English

(C) Standard variety

(D) Khurkhul variety

Table 4: How do you feel when you speak Khurkhul?

Categories	Age	Proud	Embarrassment	Mixed feeling	Neutral
Students	16-18	1%	85%	10%	5%
	19-21	3%	70%	20%	7%
	22-30	3%	75%	60%	15%
Office goer	30-40	10%	60%	40%	15%
	41-50	10%	45%	20%	15%
	51-60	25%	25%	39%	20%
Daily wage earner	30-40	10%	35%	20%	30%
	41-50	30%	20%	20%	45%
	51-60	40%	10%	30%	50%
Old generation	61-70	70%	10%	2%	30%
	71-80	85%	0%	10%	5%
	81-90	90%	0%	0%	10%

Fig 4: How do you feel when you speak Khurkhul?
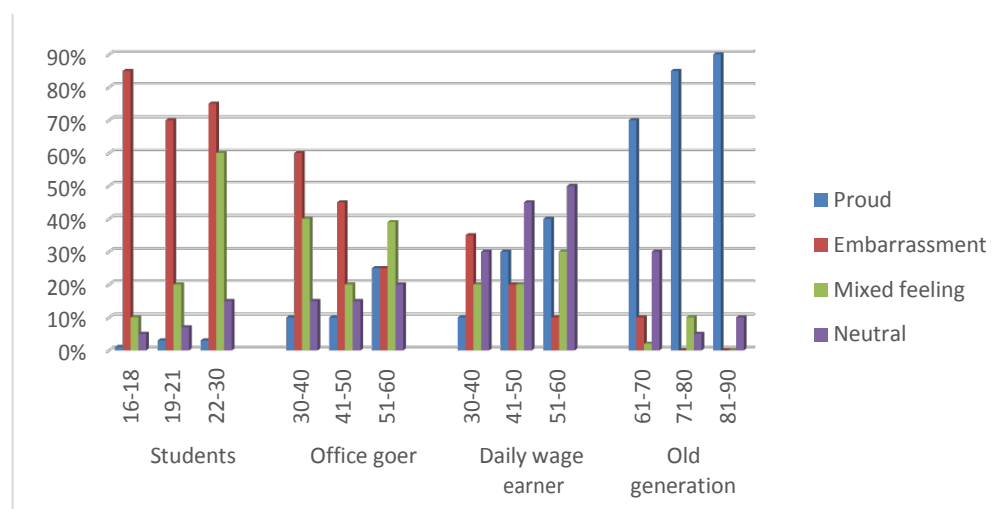
It can be seen the following from Table 4 above.

- **Students**
  - who are between the ages of 16 and18: 1% of them feel proud, 85% of them feel embarrassment, 10% of them have mix feelings, and 5% of feel neutral.

  - who are between the ages of 19 and 21: 3% of them feel proud, 70% of them feel embarrassment, 20% of them have mix feelings, and 7% of them feel neutral.

  - who are between the ages of 22 and 30: 3% of them feel proud, 75% of them feel embarrassment, 60% of them have mix feeling, and 15% of them feel neutral.

- **Office goers**
  - who are between the age of 30 and 40: 10% of them feel proud, 60% of them feel embarrassment, 40% of them have mix feelings, and 15% of them feel neutral.

  - who are between the age of 41 and 50: 10% of them feel proud, 45% of them feel embarrassment, 20% of them have mix feelings, 15% of feel neutral.

  - who are between the age of 51 and 60: 25% of them feel proud, 25% of them feel embarrassment, 39% of them have mix feelings, and 20% of them feel neutral.

- **Daily wage earners**
  - who are between the age of 30 and 40: 10% of them feel proud, 25% of them feel embarrassment, 20% of them have mix feelings, and 30% of them feel neutral.

  - who are between the age of 41 and 50: 30% of them feel proud, 20% of them feel embarrassment, 20% of them have mix feelings, and 45% of them feel neutral.

  - who are between the age of 51 and 60: 40% of them feel proud, 10% of them feel embarrassment, 30% of them have mix feelings, and 50% of them feel neutral.
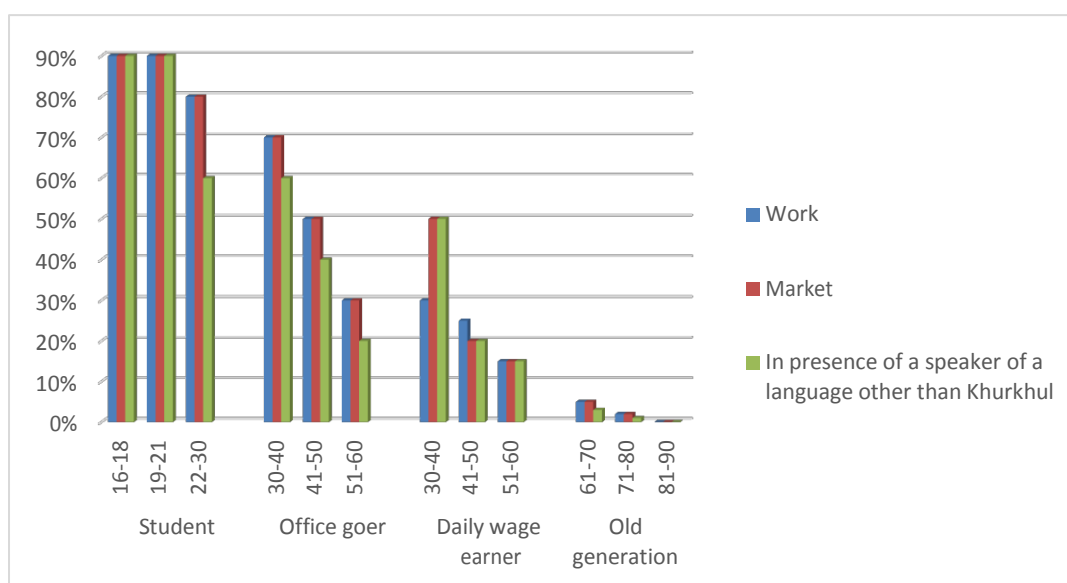
- **The old generation**
  - who are between the age of 61 and 70: 70% of them feel proud, 10% of them feel embarrassment, 2% of them have mix feelings, and 30% of them feel neutral.

  - who are between the age of 71 and 80: 85% of them feel proud, 0% of feel embarrassment, 10% of them have mix feelings, 5% of them neutral.

  - who are between the age of 81 and 90: 90% of them feel proud, 0% of them feel embarrassment, 0% of them have mix feelings, and 10% of them feel neutral.

Thus, when 90% of the oldest generation feel proud when they speak Khurkhul, only 1% of the youngest generation feel proud.

Table 5: Where do you switch your code?

Categories	Age	Work	Market	In presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul
Student	16-18	90%	90%	90%
	19-21	90%	90%	90%
	22-30	80%	80%	60%
Office goer	30-40	70%	70%	60%
	41-50	50%	50%	40%
	51-60	30%	30%	20%
Daily wage earner	30-40	30%	50%	50%
	41-50	25%	20%	20%
	51-60	15%	15%	15%
Old generation	61-70	5%	5%	3%
	71-80	2%	2%	1%
	81-90	0%	0%	0%

Fig 5: Domains where switch code is made

It can be seen from Table 5 above that the oldest generation who is between the ages of 81 and 90 old did not switch code in any context, whereas the youngest generation who is between the ages of 16 and18 switch code in all the contexts. Thus,

▪ **Students**
  o who are between the ages of 16 and18: 90% of them switch code in work place, 90% of them switch code in the market place, and 90% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  o who are between the ages of 19 and 21: 90% of them switch code in work place, 90% of them switch code in the market, and 90% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  o who are between the ages of 22 and 30: 80% of them switch code in work place, 80% of them switch code in the market, and 60% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

- **Office goers**
  - who are between the ages of 30 and 40: 70% of them switch code in the work place, 70% of them switch code in the market, and 60% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  - who are between the ages of 41 and 50: 50% of them switch code in the work place, 50% of them switch code in the market, and 40% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  - who are between the ages 51 and 60: 30% of them switch code in the work place, 30% of them switch code in the market place, and 20% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

- **Daily wage earners**
  - who are between the ages of 30 and 40: 30% of them switch code in work place, 50% of them switch code in the market place, and 50% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  - who are between the ages of 41 and 50: 25% of them switch code in work place, 20% of them switch code in the market, and 20% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

  - who are between the ages of 51 and 60: 15% of them switch code in the work place, 15% of them switch code in the market place, and 15% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

- **Old generation**
  - who are between the ages of 61 and 70: 5% of them switch code in the work place, 5% of them switch code in the market place, and 3% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

o who are between the ages of 71 and 80: 0% of them switch code in the work place, 2% of them switch code in the market, and 1% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

o who are between the ages of 81 and 90: 0% of them switch code in the work place, 0% of them switch code in the market, 0% of them switch code in presence of a speaker of a language other than Khurkhul.

During the survey, it was also noticed that most of the younger generation used the standard variety even at home. Thus, the negative attitude towards the language is seen mostly in younger generation who are supposed to be the future pillar of the language. As is rightly said, "The pulse of a language clearly lies in the youngest generation" (Nettle and Romaine, 2000, 8).

Table 6: The medium of instruction

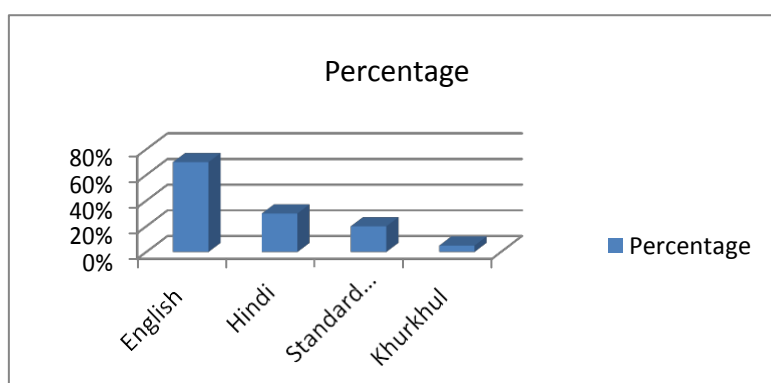| Standard	English	Hindi	Standard Variety	Khurkhul Variety
Primary	50%	20%	20%	10%
High school	70%	20%	10%	0%
Secondary	100%	0%	0%	0%
College	100%	0%	0%	0%
University	100%	0%	0%	0%

Fig 6: The medium of instruction
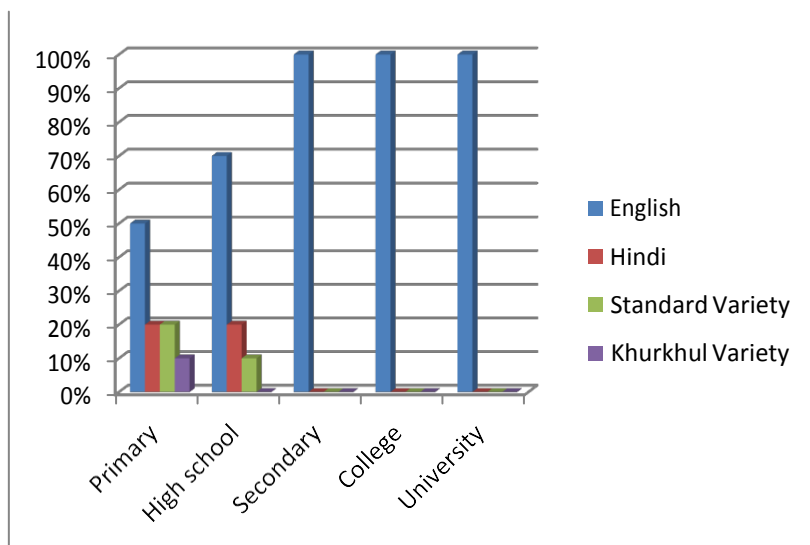
Both the male and the female child are given equal opportunity in the field of education in the Khurkhul society. Table 6 above gives us information about nine schools, colleges, and universities in total attended by our informants. As can be seen from Table 6, the medium of instruction for the primary level students is as this: 50% English; 20% Hindi; 20%; 20% Standard variety, and 10% Khurkhul. For the high school level students, it is as this: 70% English, 20% Hindi; 10%; Standard variety, and 0% Khurkhul. For the secondary level students, it is as this: 100% English; 0% Hindi; 0% Standard variety, and 0% Khurkhul. In the case of the college and university level it is as this: 100% English; 0% Hindi; 0% Standard variety, and 0% Khurkhul.

One can see from above data that the use of English as a medium of instruction is more at the higher levels. Thus, by the time the child attends the secondary level, she or he receives instructions only in English (except when it is the Language Departments, e.g. Manipuri Department, Hindi Department etc.). On the other hand, Khurkhul, as can be seen from Table 6, is used as a medium of instruction only till the primary level and that too in a very low percentage (only 10%). One of the informants made this comment: "Now-a-day, if you can speak English, you are considered to be educated. Perhaps it is no longer the era of the brain that thinks, it is rather the era of the mouth that moves with English".

Table 7: Suggested medium of instruction

Language	Percentage
English	70%
Hindi	30%
Standard Variety	20%
Khurkhul	5%

Fig 7: Suggested medium of instruction

It can be seen from Table 7 above that 70% of the above-mentioned informants prefer to be taught in English, whereas 30% of them prefer Hindi; 20% of them prefer the Standard variety; only 5% of them prefer to be taught in Khurkhul. One of the informants, a teacher, commented that the reason for majority of people preferring English is that "in the current society, if one does not know how to read, write, and speak English, he is just like a person who is both blind and dumb."

Despite the fact that Hindi has been banned in Manipur since 2000 by a group of separatists called the 'Revolutionary People Front', 42.80% of them prefer the language. The possible reasons here are the following:

- After the secondary level, many Khurkhul children nowadays aspire to go or go to Delhi for higher study where Hindi is the lingua franca. This demands them to know Hindi.

- The Leimakhong Army Camp is one of the largest army camps in Manipur, which is located only 2 kms away from the Khurkhul village. There are many situations where the army people and the Khurkhul villagers need to communicate in Hindi.

The study above shows that it is only the oldest generation who has pride in speaking Khurkhul; the younger generation who were supposed to enrich it has developed a negative attitude towards it. According to UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework, Khurkhul is in a vulnerable situation where children learn it but use only in restricted domains, for instance, home.

1.5 Typology of Khurkhul

Although the current dissertation is a sociolinguistic study, we tried to arrive at a rough typology of Khurkhul. In this section, we present some of our findings about its structure, which we hope to refine in the future.

1.5.1 Khurkhul sounds

1.5.1.1 Vowels of Khurkhul

We have established six pure vowels and six diphthongs for Khurkhul through minimal pairs the pure vowels, which are i, e, a, ə, o, and u, are presented in Table 8 below (see Table 9 for the minimal pairs used).

Table 8: Vowels of Khurkhul

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
HIGH	i		u
MID	e	ə	o
LOW		a	

Table 9: Minimal pairs establishing the pure vowels of Khurkhul

Minimal pairs	Contexts	Phonemes
[pi] : [pe] 'tear'; 'a kind of umbrella'	[p_]	/i/, /e/
[li] : [la] 'cane' ; 'banana leaf'	[l_]	/i/, /a/
[kəmbə]: [kambə] 'cut'; 'greedy	[k_mbə]	/ə/, /a/
[məroi] : [maroi] 'vegetable': 'will not rotten'	[m_roi]	/ ə/ /a/
[lobə] : [lubə] 'ripe' : 'deep'	[l_bə]	/o/, /u/
[koppə] : [kuppə] 'curve' 'cover'	[p_bə]	/o/, /u/

Table 10 below shows the occurrence of the pure vowels in different positions in a word.

Table 10: Positions of the pure vowels

Pure vowels	Initial position	Middle syllable	Final position
i	inuŋ 'inside the house'	cin 'mouth'	Pi 'tear'
e	en 'chicken'	leŋ 'shoulder'	Pe 'a kind of umbrella'
ə	əhan 'day before yesterday'	səŋ 'hut'	sənabə 'to play'
a	a:də 'there'	labə 'male'	məca 'small'
u	uci 'mouse'	utʰum 'a kind of edible plant'	məpu 'owner'
o	ok 'pork'	lok 'cough'	tʰəro 'lily'

In Table 11, the diphthongs of Khurkhul is presented, which are ai, əi, oi, əw, ui, and aw and also their positions in a word (see Table 11 for the minimal pairs used).

Table 11: Diphthongs of Khurkhul

Diphthongs	Initial position	Middle position	Final position
ai		haipʰet 'slightly'	Lai 'God'
əi	əi 'I '	həiba 'to say'	pʰəi 'a seat made out of straw for the rice/curry pot'
oi	Oi 'left'	koibə 'long way'	koi 'not frank'
əw	əwa- əwa 'indicating that the speaker wants to take a break during playing'	pʰəwra 'made of bamboo to dry things like paddy rice, chillies, silk cocoons etc,'	pʰəw 'paddy rice'
ui	Uide 'not dozing'	huibə 'wither'	kʰui 'is narrow'
aw	aw 'a way of saying yes'	nawron 'the gap between two children'	naw 'small'

Table 12: Minimal pairs establishing the diphthongs of Khurkhul

Minimal pairs	Contexts	Phonemes
[kai] : [kəi] 'made of bamboo to carry a dead body'; 'the place to store firewood'	[k_]	/ai/, /əi/
[lai] : [lei] 'God' 'flower'	[l_]	/ai/, /ei/
[moi] : [məw] 'they' : 'affinal woman'	[m_]	/oi/, /əw/
[loi] : [ləw] 'a group of people' 'paddy field'	[l_]	/oi/, /əw/
[lui] : [law] 'difficult' 'shout (IMP)'	[l_]	/ui/, /aw/
[cui] : [caw] 'stain' 'eat (IMP)'	[c_]	/ui/, /aw/

1.5.1.2 Consonants of Khurkhul

We have established consonants for Khurkhul through minimal pairs, which are presented in Table 13 below (see Table 14 for the minimal pairs used).

Table 13: Consonants of Khurkhul

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
+ / - Voice	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V
Stops: Un Aspirate	p	b	t	d	c		k	ɡ		
Stops: Aspirate	pʰ		tʰ				kʰ			
Fricatives					s					H
Nasals	m		n					ŋ		
Lateral		l								
Trills		r								
Semi vowel		w								J

Table 14: Minimal pairs establishing the consonants of Khurkhul

Minimal pairs	Contexts	Phonemes
[pa] : [ta] 'eye lash'; 'arrow'	[_a]	/p/, /t/
[pui] : [tui] 'borrow'; 'fall'	[_ui]	/p//t/
[ka] : [kʰa] 'room'; 'south'	[k_]	/k/, /kʰ/
[cəka]: [cəga] 'wheel'; 'place'	[cə_a]	/k/, /g/
[kəw] : [kʰəw] 'ox'; 'throat'	[_əw]	/k/, /kʰ/
[pʰəw] : [tʰəw] 'paddy rice'; 'duty'	[_əw]	/pʰ/, /tʰ/
[pʰan] : [tʰan] 'a kind of stool'; 'bunch of clothes to sell'	[_an]	/pʰ/, /tʰ/
[nəsi]: [məsi] 'today' 'this'	[_əsi]	/m/, /n/
[nai] : [ŋai] 'pun'; 'the kinship relation between the parents of the bride and thegroom'; the social relation between the Khurkhuls and another tribe who exchange necessary support to each other'	[_ai]	/n/, / ŋ/
[ləw] : [rəw] 'paddy field'; 'a kind of fish'	[_əw]	/l/, /r/
[ləsiŋ] : [məsiŋ] 'cotton' 'the fiber in fruits/vegetable'	[_əsiŋ]	/l/, /ŋ/
[wai] : [jai] 'the cover of uncooked rice'; ' a kind of plant used for fishing, i.e. it suffocates the fish for a while'	[_ai]	/w/, /j/
[wabə] : [pabə] 'tire' 'thin'	[_abə]	/w/, /p/
[joŋ] : [loŋ] 'monkey' 'a kind of fishnet used by women'	[_oŋ]	/j/, /l/
[ca] : [sa] 'tea'; 'animal'	[_a]	/c/ /s/
[cəŋbə] : [səŋbə] 'to enter'; 'free'	[_əŋbə]	/c/, /s/
[həi] : [təi] 'fruit'; ' a kind of frying pan'	[_əi]	/h/, /t/
[hu] : [ju] 'poison'; 'wine'	[_u]	/h/, /j/
[cadə] : [camə] 'out of cent'; 'hundred'	[ca_ə]	/d/, /m/

1.5.1.3 Tones of Khurkhul

Khurkhul has two tones: falling and level. The falling tone is marked as (ˋ) while the level tone is unmarked. The tones are exemplified in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Tones of Khurkhul

Level tone	Falling tone
kaŋ (mosquito)	kàŋ (a traditional game)
i (blood)	ì (thatch)
tʰaŋbə (to carry)	tʰàŋbə (pass on)
tʰoŋ (door)	tʰòŋ (bridge)
səmbə (to join)	sə̀mbə (taking short cut)
kʰəŋbə (to get frighten)	kʰə̀ŋbə (to know)
tabə (to fall)	tàbə (to roll)

1.5.2 Khurkhul Word order

In terms of word order Khurkhul follows the SOV order as is evident from examples like the following.

a)   ***tombə cak cai***

      Tomba rice eat

      'Tomba eats rice.'

1.5.3 Khurkhul Morphology

Nouns: Nouns in Khurkhul form a distinct category. The nominalizer *-bə* is suffixed to the verb root to form a verbal noun (see Table 16 below).

Table 16: Nouns in Khurkhul

Nouns from verbs	Nouns
Verbal nouns**:** *ca-bə* 'to eat/ eating'	*numit* '(the Sun)'; *isiŋ* 'water'; *mit* 'eye'; *kəi* 'tiger'

Nouns in Khurkhul do not inflect for plurality as can be seen from the examples below.

(a)   *sən-bi lak-(l)e*
       cow-FEM come-PERF
       '*The cow has come.*'

(b)   *sən-bi ani lak- (l)e*
       cow-FEM two come-PERF
       '*The two cows have come.*'

Pronouns: The pronouns of Khurkhul are presented in Table 17 below. No Khurkhul pronoun marks gender. They only show the distinction between person and number.

Table 17: Pronouns of Khurkhul

Person	Singular	Dual	Plural
1ˢᵗ Person	əi , ijak, jak	ibani/imani/əikʰoni/kʰoni 'we two'	əi kʰoi/kʰoi/ijakʰoi 'we'
2ⁿᵈ Person	nəŋ 'you'	nəbani/noini/nəmaini 'you two'	noi 'you' pl.
3ʳᵈ Person	ma 'he/she'	moi ni/ məbani 'they two'	moi 'they'

Adjectives: Some adjectives of Khurkhul are given in Table 18 below.

Table 18: Adjectives in Khurkhul

Quality	Examples
Attribute	pʰəcə hui (beautiful dog)
Size	cau hui (big dog)
Colour	mubə hui (black dog)
Gender	hui əmom (female dog)

It is noticed from the table above that while some adjectives in Khurkhul precede the noun, some other follow the noun.

Postpositions: Khurkhul has postpositions, which are given below.

Table 19: Postpositions in Khurkhul

Post-positions	Case
Noun-gi	Genitive case
Noun -də	Dative case
Noun -də	Locative case
Noun -nə	Instrumental
Noun-gə/kə	Associative
Noun-təgi/ dəgi	Ablative
Noun-nə	Nominative

Two of the postpositions are exemplified below.

    (a)   ***tombə-gi hui***

            Tomba-GEN dog

            'Tomba's dog'

    (b)   ***tombə caobə-da   hui   pi-re***

            Tomba Chaoba-DAT dog   give-PERF

            'Tomba has given a dog to Chaoba.'

Adverbs: The following table describes the morphological formation of adverbs in Khurkhul. Note that reduplication is part of the formation.

Table 20: Adverbs in Khurkhul

Examples	Roots	Adverbial morphemes
ca-nə ca-nə (doing something simultaneously)	ca-	-nə
cao-tək cao-tək (very big)	cao-	-tək
na-ri na-ri (slightly painful)	na	-ri

Verbs: The following table shows how verbs in Khurkhul inflect for different categories.

Table 21: Verbs

Verb root-morphemes
ca-i eat-*non-future*
ca-gəni eat-*future*
ca-re eat-*perfect*
ca-ri eat-*progressive*
ca-ro eat-*imperative*
ca-nu eat-*prohibitive*
ca-de eat-*negation*
ca-ge eat-*volition*

The following table shows how in Khurkhul, like in some other languages of the world, the morphemes (e.g. –*re*, -*de* in Table 21 above) that go with verbs also go with adjectives to mean an action. In this case, the state as meant by the adjective is seen as changing.

Table 22: Verbal morphemes with Adjectives

Adjectives	Verbal morphemes	Examples
-*cao* 'big'	cao-re big-PERF	tombi cao-re tombi-big-PERF *'Tombi has grown up.'*
-*waŋ* 'tall'	waŋ-de tall-NEG	tombi waŋ-de tombi-tall-NEG *'Tombi is not growing.'*

Wh-words: Questions are one of the most important types of sentential constructions in language. There are very few wh-question words in human languages in general. Such words are used to extract or seek certain information by the user. The wh-words in Khurkhul are given with examples in Table 23 below.

Table 23: Wh-words of Khurkhul

Wh-words	Examples
kəna (who)	tombə-nə kəna pa:mi Tomba-NOM Who like *'Who does Tomba like?'*
kəri (what)	nəŋ kəri cai you what eat *'What do you eat?'*
kaidə (where)	tombə kaida cak cai Tomba where food eat *'Where does Tomba eat food?'*
keigi (why)	nəŋ keigi lairik pai you why book read *'Why do you read books?'*
kəwŋandə (when)	tombə kəwŋan(də) laki Tomba when come *'When does Tomba come?'*
kəjam (how many)	nəŋ pʰi: kəjam sai you clothes how many make *'How many dresses do you make?'*
kəmai(nə) (how)	nəŋ pʰi: kəmai (nə) sai you clothes how make *'How do you make clothes?'*
kəidəwnə (why)	nəŋ pʰi: kəidəwnə sai you clothes why make *'Why do you make clothes?'*
kəramba (which)	nəŋ pʰi: kəramba sai you clothes which make *'Which clothes do you make?'*

Yes/no type questions: The other type of question formation in the language is yes/no type questions. This type of questions are formed in Khurkhul by using –ra (and also -la/-ro/lo). This is exemplified in (a) below.

(a)   ***nəŋ niŋthou-ra***

    you king-Y/N-INT

    Are you a king?

1.6 Literature Review

So far, no comprehensive linguistic study of Khurkhul is available. However, in the following works some reference is made to Khurkhul: Account of the Valley of Manipur (1859) by Mc Culloch; Andro gee Folkore Culture Neinaba (2001) by Chirom Rajketan; Lois of Manipur (2002) by Bino Devi; Khurkhul gee Folklore Neinaba (2004) by Louriyam Shantani.

In Andro gee Folkore Culture Neinaba (2001) the Khurkhuls are mentioned as Chakpa Khurkhuls, where the term Chapka means the original inhabitants of a place.

In Lois of Manipur (2002), the Khurkhul villagers are claimed to be the descendents of Kabo slaves who accompanied Thoibi in her exile (in the epic called the *Khamba-Thoibi*).

In Khurkhulgee Folkore Neinaba (2004), the author talks about a possible link between the Khurkhuls and the Shan people of the Kabo valley. This seems to be supported by the fact that in Colonel Mc Culloch's Account of the Valley of Manipur (1859) Khurkhul is mentioned as the Khooreekhul Shan language.

Given that Khurkhul is a variety of Meitelon, we must mention here the work titled *Social Grammar of Meitelon* as authored by Nameirakpam Pramodini, perhaps the first-ever study of Meitelon from an ethno-sociolinguistic perspective. This is a PhD dissertation, which was submitted to Manipur University in 1989. Thus, the work studies the kinship terms, taboos, and politeness in Meitelon. However, the data used in the work for analysis does not cover Khurkhul. Second, the data is not analyzed in within any theoretical framework. For example, in studying the kinship terms in Meitelon, the work does not set out the terms and rules for use in reference and address. As for colour terms in Meitelon, they are briefly mentioned in the work (see pp 236-237 of her work). The current work, which is, as mentioned, exclusively on Khurkhul, however, deals with these topics within a theoretical framework. For instance, the study of color terms in Khurkhul in the current work is based on Berlin and Kay's theory. Although Khurkhul is considered to be a variety of Meitelon, the Khurkhuls practice their unique social norms and culture that bear a reflection on their speech. For instance, the above-mentioned work by Nameirakpam Pramodini discusses honorifics in Meitelon (see Chapter 3 of her work), but Khurkhul does not have honorific terms; they use particular kinship terms to show politeness, as is shown in our present work.

To the best of my knowledge, the current work is thus the first ever attempt at a sociolinguistic study of Khurkhul.

1.7 Objective of the study

The current work is an attempt at a study of Khurkhul, an endangered language of Manipur, from a sociolinguistics point of view. Thus, its specific objectives are:

- To study the Kinship system of Khurkhul

- To study the Politeness strategies of Khurkhul

- To study the Colour terms of Khurkhul

- To study Gender in Khurkhul

- To study the Taboos of Khurkhul

- To study the Proverbs of Khurkhul

- To understand the Khurkhul society through the above investigations.

It is hoped that the current study will at least preserve some available information about Khurkhul which is almost on the verge being extinct.

1.8 Research Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative approach is applied in this research. It consists of sources of data, research design, and process how the data is analysed. Most of the data collected during the field work is in written, recorded, and some of the interviewers are video graph too.

1.8.1 Qualitative approach

Data collection: The primarily source of data was 12 informants, all native speakers of

Khurkhul, who we have mentioned below with gratitude. The informants were of mixed gender and were between 75 and 96 of age. The justification of the study on people between this age group is that they are hardly in contact with speakers of other languages. Thus, the Khurkhul they speak can be said to the 'original' version of Khurkhul. And also they have still strictly followed the traditional Khurkhul norms and culture. To my great sorrow I lost some of the old informants towards the end of the field work.

I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all of them for their so kind cooperation in my work.

1. (Late) Louriyam Sukorsing (Male): He was a well-known maiba 'local male priest', and also a dedicated researcher of the tradition and culture of Khurkhul. He spent most of his life researching the old tradition of Khurkhul. He was 87 years old when he expired. I was with him in December 2013.

2. Heikham Tamarsing (Male): He is 77 years old. He is a retired high school teacher. He is a well-known maiba 'local male priest' and also maichou 'high profile priest' at Kangla, the palace of the Meitei King. I interviewed him in many occssions in December 2013, May 2014, and April 2016.

3. Usham Apabi (Male): He is 80 years old. He is the son of Usham Rupachandra, the first Khurkhul who converted to Hinduism. I interviewed him in December 2013.

4. Ngangbam Ongbi Suchamukhi (Female): She is 76 years old. I interviewed her in May 2014.

5. Ngangbam Pheikonchao (Male): He is 75 years old. He is a former vocalist of hoi laoba (a traditional music) and also a former conch player. I interviewed him in April 2014.

6. (Late) Khangembam Chandrasing (Male): He passed away when he turned 84. I interviewed him in December 2013.

7. Khangembam ongbi Lochati (Female): She is 83 years old. She is a well-known folk singer in Khurkhul. I interviewed her in May 2016.

8. Ngangbam ongbi Kombirei (Female): She is 88 years old. I interviewed her in

December 2013, May 2014, and April 2016.

9. Usham Leichon (Female): She is 87 years old. I interviewed her in October 2015.

10. Ngangbam Leisang (Female): She is 80 years old. I interviewed her in October 2015.

11. Irungbam Kolei (Female): She is 88 years old. I interviewed her in October 2015.

12. Louriyam ongbi Leisana: She is 96 years old. I interviewed her in October 2015.

Research design: Interview, group discussion and observation were the key methods I adopted for collecting the data.

1.8.2 Quantitative approach

As for this approach, a questionnaire was created (see above). The informants were selected on the basis of age, gender, and occupation.

1.9 Chapter Organization

The current dissertation has seven chapters and a conclusion. It has also an Appendix. The following is its structure.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Kinship Terms in Khurkhul

Chapter 3 Politeness in Khurkhul

Chapter 4 Gender in Khurkhul

Chapter 5 Colour Terms in Khurkhul

Chapter 6 Taboos in Khurkhul

Chapter 7 Proverbs in Khurkhul

Conclusion

Appendix

We hope the current work will be furthered by young researchers from within and outside the Khurkhul community in the future.