

# **Distinctive Markings Of Cultural Artistry And Identity: An In-Depth Study On Tattoo Practices In The Khamniungan Naga Head-Hunter Society**

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## **Abstract:**

*In The Khamniungan Naga Community, Head-Hunting And Tattooing Practices Hold Significant Cultural And Societal Implications. The Head-Hunting Tradition, Now Abolished, Was Once Driven By The Belief That The Human Head Harboured The 'Soul Matter', And Procuring An Enemy's Head Was Considered A Path To Prosperity. These Head-Hunters, Owing To Their Unique Societal Contributions, Enjoyed A Privileged Status, Identifiable By Distinct Tattoos, Attires, And Ornaments. The Tattoos Symbolised An Individual's Power, Status, And Valour, Essentially Serving As A Visual Language Narrating The Life Story Of The Bearer. The Symbolic Tattoos Varied, With Some Bearing Human Figures Or 'V'-Shaped Tattoos, While Others Wore Tiger Stripe Tattoos, Exclusively Reserved For Those Believed To Possess The 'Tiger Spirit.' However, With The Advent Of Christianity And Western Education, Head-Hunting And The Consequent Tattooing Practices Have Lost Their Relevance, Posing Significant Challenges For Cultural Research. The Ageing Population Of Original Tattoo Bearers Is Declining Rapidly, Leading To A Considerable Loss In Traditional Knowledge. This Study Primarily Relied On Oral Sources Due To The Nagas' Lack Of Written Records. Fieldwork Involved Employing Various Data Collection Techniques Such As Interviews, Questionnaires, And Personal Observations. Available Physical Remnants Related To The Study Were Also Documented. This Research Intends To Provide An Insightful Understanding Of The Tattoo Patterns, Their Meanings, And The Rituals Associated With Them, Thus Preserving A Crucial Aspect Of The Khamniungan Naga Culture.*

**Keywords:** *Tattooing, Khamniungan Naga, Headhunting, Culture.*

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## **I. Introduction**

The practice of tattooing, a form of body modification employing indelible ink to create enduring designs on the human skin, has been a part of human culture for centuries. Its origins span across various civilisations including the Egyptians, the Japanese, the Picts of Scotland, the indigenous tribes of the Polynesian Islands, the Maori of New Zealand, and diverse tribal groups in North and South America. However, pinpointing the precise genesis of tattooing remains challenging. It is plausible that the advent of tattooing was not confined to a singular culture or nation but, rather, it evolved independently in multiple locations throughout history. As noted by Charles Darwin (1871), no country exists that does not partake in tattooing or some variant of permanent body adornment.

The term 'tattoo' itself is derived from the Polynesian word 'Tatau,' which translates to 'to strike.' The prevalence of tattooing as a decorative form of body art is universal across cultures. However, for some cultures and tribal groups, tattoos bear a more profound significance. The designs can serve as markers of identity, rites of passage, symbols of beauty, badges of honour, spiritual emblems, or even as protective talismans against malevolent spirits.

A notable example of the antiquity of tattooing is the discovery of tattooed human skin on Otzi the Iceman, with the tattoos dating back to between 3370 and 3100 BC. This finding is the oldest evidence of tattooing on human

## **II. Objective of the study**

This paper's primary aim is to elucidate the symbolic meaning and societal importance of head-hunter tattoos. These markings were not merely decorative, but a visual testament to their status, valor, and spiritual connections. Head-hunters played crucial roles in their societies, not just as warriors, but also as spiritual intermediaries. The study delves into these complexities, interpreting the significance of their tattoos as a form of

communication and representation within the community, thus contributing to an enhanced understanding of these intricate sociocultural dynamics.

### **III. Research Methodology**

This research was undertaken within the Khamniungan Naga community, located in the Noklak district of Nagaland, India. According to the 2011 census, the district is composed of approximately 39 villages. For this study, a selection of the oldest villages, including Noklak Village, Nokyang, Pangsha, Wui, Sanglao, Kingniu, Nokhu, Pathso, and Lengnyu, were chosen for in-depth investigation.

A field survey was carried out, with a careful selection of respondents who were either former head-hunters themselves or individuals possessing extensive knowledge of the local culture and traditions. This study utilized a qualitative research approach, with interviews serving as the primary data collection method.

In addition to these primary sources, the research also incorporated secondary data, collected from a diverse range of resources such as books, both published and unpublished materials, academic journals and popular magazines, seminar papers, presentations, as well as articles and write-ups published in newspapers concerning the subject matter. This combination of primary and secondary data provided a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study.

### **IV. Ethnographic account**

Nestled in the extreme northeastern region of India, Nagaland is a state characterized by its magnificent mountain ranges, vibrant rivers, and a biodiverse array of flora and fauna. It shares borders with Myanmar to the east, Assam to the west, a combination of Arunachal Pradesh and a small portion of Assam to the north, and Manipur to the south. On December 1, 1963, Nagaland was officially recognized as the 16th state of the Indian Union by the then President Dr S. Radhakrishnan. The state is administratively divided into sixteen districts, including Kohima, Dimapur, Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Zunheboto, Mon, Phek, Peren, Kiphire, Noklak, Longleng, Shamator, Niuland, Tseminyu, and Chumoukedima. The state capital, Kohima, is perched at an elevation of 1444.12 meters above sea level, while Dimapur is recognized as the state's commercial capital and most populous city. The official language across the state is English.

Noklak district, predominantly inhabited by the Khamniungan tribe with a Chang tribe presence in the administrative circle of Chingmei, was formally established on December 21, 2017. The district is organized into five administrative circles: Noklak, Thonoknyu, Nokhu, Panso, and Chingmei. Covering an area of 1152 square kilometres, it had a recorded population of 59,300 according to the 2011 census. The region is linguistically diverse with over six languages, all belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Despite their linguistic commonality, each language group exhibits unique dialects and slight variations in customs. The official language of the Khamniungans is the Noklak Village language. Like other Naga tribes, the Khamniungans display Mongoloid features. The population is predominantly Christian (98.5%), with minor presences of Hinduism (0.7%), Islam (0.5%), Buddhism (0.2%), and Sikhism.

The colonial era established a political boundary between India and Myanmar, dividing the region inhabited by the Khamniungans. There are currently 39 Khamniungan villages on the Indian side, with over 130 in Myanmar, leading to the metaphorical saying that the "head" of the Khamniungans is in India, while the "body" is in Myanmar. The Nagaland government, with support from the Indian central government, established an International Trade Centre at Dan, on the border with Myanmar, to foster trade relations and cultural exchange.

### **V. Origin of the Khamniungans**

The origins of the Khamniungan Naga remain an enigma due to the unavailability of written records preceding the British Raj and the absence of archaeological evidence thus far. Therefore, the reconstruction of their history primarily relies on their rich oral tradition, which encompasses folk tales, legends, myths, and narratives. A central belief within the Khamniungan Naga community revolves around an ancient gathering near a water source, situated in proximity to the present-day Lengnyu-Tsuwao village. It was from this historical congregation that they began identifying themselves as Khamniungan, a term translating to "Source of great water" (with '*Khiam*' signifying 'water' and '*Nuingan*' denoting 'Source').

According to their oral tradition, individuals at this gathering began to drink water from cups made out of leaves. The varied manners of drinking—some upright, others upside down or sideways—led to the emergence of different dialects among the people. This narrative provides a cultural explanation for the linguistic diversity within the Khamniungan Naga, who currently speak more than six distinct dialects. Consequently, the dialect of the Noklak village has been adopted as the official language for the sake of linguistic unity. This anecdote exemplifies the integral role of oral tradition in understanding and preserving the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Khamniungan Naga community.

## **VI. Headhunting practices**

Ham (2003, p. 106) delineates headhunting as the practice of severing and preserving the heads of adversaries, a tradition rooted in certain cultures' belief in the existence of a quasi-material essence vital to all life forms. In humans, this essence, often referred to as 'soul matter', is believed to be concentrated in the head. The act of decapitating an enemy is understood to capture this soul matter, thereby augmenting the community's collective soul matter reservoir. This captured essence is considered to contribute to the fertility and prosperity of human populations, livestock, and crops.

Like other Naga tribes, the Khamniungan were a warring tribe and practised headhunting. Frequent warfare was prevalent amongst neighbouring villages and other tribes, leading to a culture of constant vigilance and hostility. As a defensive strategy, villages were typically established atop hills or elevated terrains, and fortifications were erected to gain a strategic advantage during enemy raids. The onus of safeguarding the village against enemy invasions rested predominantly on the male population. This warring culture shaped the societal norms and behaviours of the Khamniungan, defining their identity and way of life.

In the realm of community vigilance systems, it is typical to find a group of three to four males assigned to a strategically located watchtower near the village periphery. Their fundamental obligation is to maintain acute surveillance for potential threats or undesirable activities. Upon the detection of imminent hostilities or suspicious behaviours, they are tasked with sounding a distinctive auditory alert, which can be likened to a howl. This serves as a catalyst, prompting the village's younger male population to play a log drum<sup>1</sup> (**Fig. 1**), a traditional instrument that effectively disseminates the warning across the entire community.



Given the village's unique topographical position, the women are typically charged with the task of collecting water from downhill sources. This undertaking is rarely executed without the accompaniment of a protective male contingent, as these water sources are identified as potential zones of conflict where women are particularly vulnerable. The societal prestige associated with the heads of women and children, perceived as high-value trophies, is notable. Successful acquisition of such trophies is interpreted as a testament to the warrior's ability to elude the robust male security apparatus. Additionally, the female hair is often showcased on the scabbard as an emblem of valour and martial prowess (**Fig. 2**).



Beyond these tangible markers of victory, the practice of headhunting is deeply entrenched in the spiritual belief of the 'soul matter' residing within the head. The act of headhunting is thus perceived as a method for the appropriation of this 'soul matter', an element the Nagas deem essential for procuring wealth and prosperity. Furthermore, the enhancement of the village's fertility is believed to necessitate the acquisition of the 'soul matter' contained within a human head. Rituals centred around this belief are performed to ensure bountiful harvests and overall community fertility. The Nagas are convinced that the survival and continuity of their village are contingent upon drawing in the life force inherent in nature, a feat they believe is achievable through the act of headhunting.

Within the confines of certain indigenous customs, it is forbidden for a male individual to engrave his chest with tattooed symbols until he has actively partaken in a raid and successfully secured a human trophy. These campaigns are orchestrated with significant forethought by battle-hardened warriors, often integrating young men on the cusp of adulthood into the ensemble, with the aspiration of nurturing their metamorphosis into formidable combatants.

A trophy hunter is necessitated to maintain chastity, abstaining from any sexual activities, in adherence to societal prohibitions. The instrument designated for these hunting forays is a distinct blade, termed a '*Salaiom*' (**Fig. 3**). This implement is deemed sacred, and it is strictly forbidden for females to interact with it. Such interaction is believed to precipitate a chain of adverse events or augur ill-omened circumstances for the impending expedition.

The attack on a village is customarily scheduled to align with the dawn, capitalizing on the inhabitants' likely state of oblivion, and the advent of daylight subsequently aids in the raiders' navigation back to their village.

Before embarking on such a venture, the tribal shaman, typically a member of the *Meya*<sup>2</sup> clan, conducts a ritualistic sacrifice of a fowl. The entrails of the sacrificed creature serve a dual purpose: they are divined for omens, potentially offering prescience of future occurrences, and are employed in a sanctification ceremony to bestow upon the warrior's auspiciousness for the imminent head-hunting expedition.

During the course of a raid, a warrior's arsenal comprises both spears and a machete known as a *dao*. Spears are utilized to inflict wounds from a considerable distance, while the machete is employed to decapitate. As Haimendorf articulately describes, "Despite the weight of their spears and heavy shields, the warriors demonstrate remarkable agility. Even at a substantial distance, appearing merely as diminutive figures, there is an undeniable expressiveness in their movements. Could it be the manifestation of their unwavering resolve to engage in a battle of life and death?" (Haimendorf reprint 2004: 151).

Upon successful decapitation, the head is secured within a traditional sling bag, referred to as a *Phacham* (**Fig. 4**). Raids typically span a relatively brief duration. Upon the triumphant conclusion of an expedition, the warriors commence their homeward journey. As they approach the village gate, they vocalize a unique chant, "*Ohkk Ohkk*", signalling their victorious return. The entire village populace, inclusive of women and children, congregates at the village entrance to accord a hero's welcome. The triumphant warriors are then presented with rice beer, traditionally brought forth by the village women.





Post-entry into the village, the warriors proceed directly to the location housing the log drum. The severed heads are placed within the log drum, and the drum is struck as a symbolic derision of the deceased, and a declaration to neighbouring villages of their successful campaign, instilling a sense of trepidation among them. The young men who participated in the expedition then extract the heads from the drum. A sharp bamboo instrument is used to pierce the heads, after which they, along with the warriors, march towards the Shaman's residence. The heads are then placed in a sanctified location (**Fig. 5**).



The Shaman, casting his gaze towards the defeated enemy's village, proclaims loudly, "You, having been vanquished, shall inherit the darkness, while we, the victorious, shall embrace the light."

Each warrior is obligated to slaughter several pigs equivalent to the count of heads he has successfully claimed<sup>3</sup>. The best leg portion and rice beer are subsequently transported to the Shaman's abode, and a feast commences, spanning the duration of the following two days. Throughout this period, the village Shaman beseeches blessings upon them and prays for their future endeavours<sup>4</sup>.

On the third day, a ritual cleansing takes place. The Shaman escorts the warriors to a local stream. Upon arrival, he crushes a chicken egg and instructs the warriors to extend their palms. He then proceeds to wash their hands, symbolically purging them of any malevolent spirits. This act is steeped in the belief that a failure to perform this cleansing could result in their hands festering and, ultimately, could lead to their demise.

Each warrior is presented with a distinctive shawl, referred to as a '*Neain*' (**Fig. 6**), adorned with cowrie shells and woven by his family members. Henceforth, he is acknowledged as a bona fide warrior and guardian of the village.



### **Tattoo Artist**

The role of a tattoo artist within the village context is typically assumed by mature or elderly women who possess a wealth of experience in this art form<sup>5</sup>. Often, they are sought from within their community, but if no such individuals are available, the search extends to neighbouring, friendly villages. Unlike many other professional roles that are often determined by lineage or clan affiliation, the role of a tattoo artist does not adhere to such societal structures. Instead, it is characterized by personal interest, the acquisition of the necessary skill set, and years of accumulated practical experience.

The path to becoming a tattoo artist is not a conventional career pursuit in the typical sense. Any woman within the village may express a desire to follow this path, but it comes with certain prerequisites. Primarily, they must be willing to dedicate years to learning the craft, apprenticing under a seasoned professional to gain the requisite expertise and hone their skills.

Being a tattoo artist is not considered a full-time occupation for these women. In many cases, they have other responsibilities and roles within their families and communities. Despite this, an experienced tattoo artist is held in high esteem. Their skills are not only revered within their village but also sought after by neighbouring communities. The presence of an adept tattoo artist can enhance the reputation of a village and create bonds of mutual respect among various communities.

A unique aspect of this role is that the artists do not charge for their services in the traditional sense. The absence of monetary exchange is due to the communal and mutual respect embedded in these societies. Instead of a conventional payment, the family receiving the artist's services typically exhibits their gratitude by organizing



a feast in her honour. This feast often includes a basket of rice, select pieces of meat, and rice beer, depending on the host family's resources and customs. This practice emphasizes the communal spirit and the value placed on the exchange of services and respect, rather than financial transactions.

In situations where the artist hails from a neighbouring village, additional customs are observed to ensure her well-being and maintain cordial relations between the two villages. The host family or village prepares a packed lunch for her and any accompanying individuals from her village. Further illustrating the respect accorded to the artist and the importance of her safe return, young warriors from the host village are assigned the duty of escorting her back home. The role of the tattoo artist in these villages transcends mere body art. It serves as a symbolic representation of the village's cultural heritage, communal spirit, and inter-village relationships. The artists themselves, through their skills and dedication, contribute significantly to preserving traditional practices and strengthening social bonds.

### **Tattooing procedure**

Distinct from certain Naga tribes, the Khamniungans do not incorporate any ceremonial rituals or animal sacrifices within the process of tattooing. In the days leading up to the tattooing procedure, young men from the village venture into the neighbouring jungle to procure thorns from the *Ngeplaotsao* plant<sup>6</sup>, which are then fashioned into needles.

The Khamniungans employ a unique technique in their tattooing practice, opting for a hammering method as opposed to the traditional pricking technique. Accordingly, the tattoo artist gathers branches of the soft plant known as *Cho-een pai*<sup>7</sup>. These branches are then meticulously smoothed with a *dao*, or machete, to create both the mallet used in the hammering process and the base that holds the thorn needle.

The ink used in the tattooing process is prepared by the tattoo artist herself. This is accomplished by igniting small fragments of pinewood, with an earthen bowl positioned above to collect the resultant soot. This soot is then combined with a modest amount of water and boiled until thoroughly blended, resulting in a slimy-textured ink.

Following the collection and preparation of all necessary materials, 3 to 4 *Ngeplaotsao* needles are inserted into the *Cho-een pai* and secured with ropes or strings made from bamboo, cane, or other plant fibres available at the time (**Fig. 7**). While there is no specific timing designated for the tattooing procedure, the early morning hours are typically preferred.



The tattooing process is carried out in a machang<sup>8</sup>, located outside the warrior's dwelling. The warrior is instructed to lie down, and the tattoo artist begins the process by using a pigment stick crafted from bamboo to create the desired patterns<sup>9</sup>. The artist then commences with the hammering process, striking the top of the stick that holds the needle, carefully outlining the tattoo patterns and rubbing in the ink until a visibly dark, permanent mark is achieved. The procedure can span several hours, and given its painful nature, the warrior's friends and family typically offer physical support by holding his limbs, providing comfort, and bolstering his morale throughout the process.

The time taken to complete the tattoo is dependent on the complexity of the design, occasionally extending over several days. This period also serves as an instructional phase for the young apprentices, who are

educated about the techniques involved and may even be permitted to temporarily assume the artist's role during her breaks.

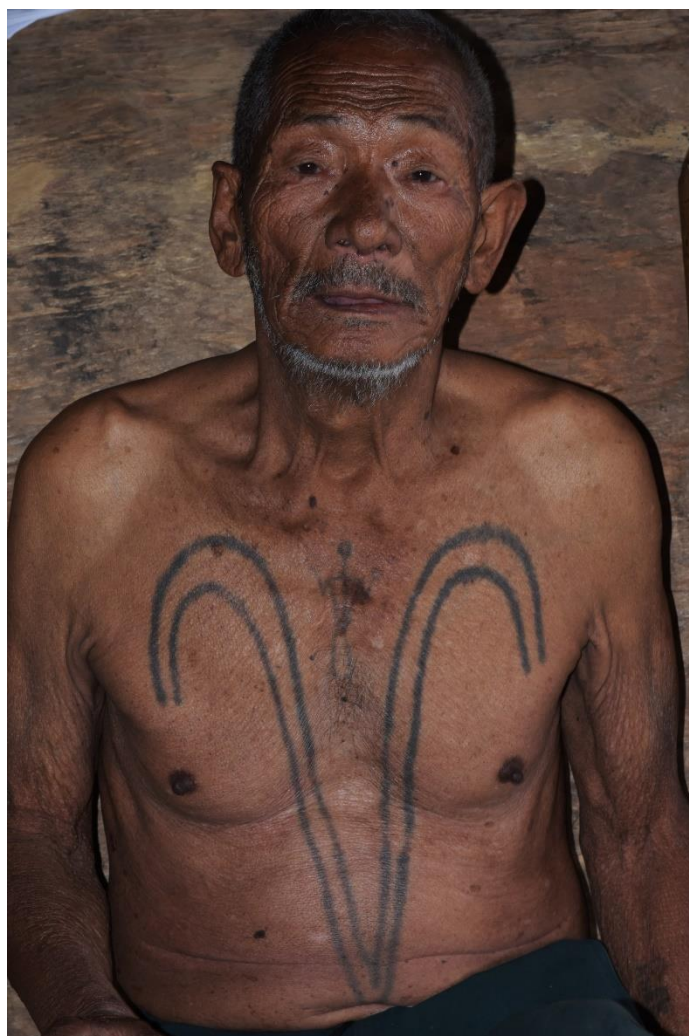
In earlier times, the absence of contemporary medical facilities and antiseptic treatments meant that the healing process was largely reliant on the individual's health and their commitment to adhering to a strict diet, typically excluding meat and dry fish until the wounds healed. However, the primary reliance was on the natural healing process, with only rare instances of infection or death due to infection.

### **Head-Hunters tattoo**

In the context of village life, the act of receiving a warrior tattoo is not a right freely granted to every man. Rather, it is a privilege that must be earned through proven acts of valour and bravery. As Lars Krutak (2016) noted, "Naga tattooing is a visual language, and with an understanding of the complex symbolism of this form of body art, it is possible to decipher the life history and accomplishments of the individual bearing these markings."

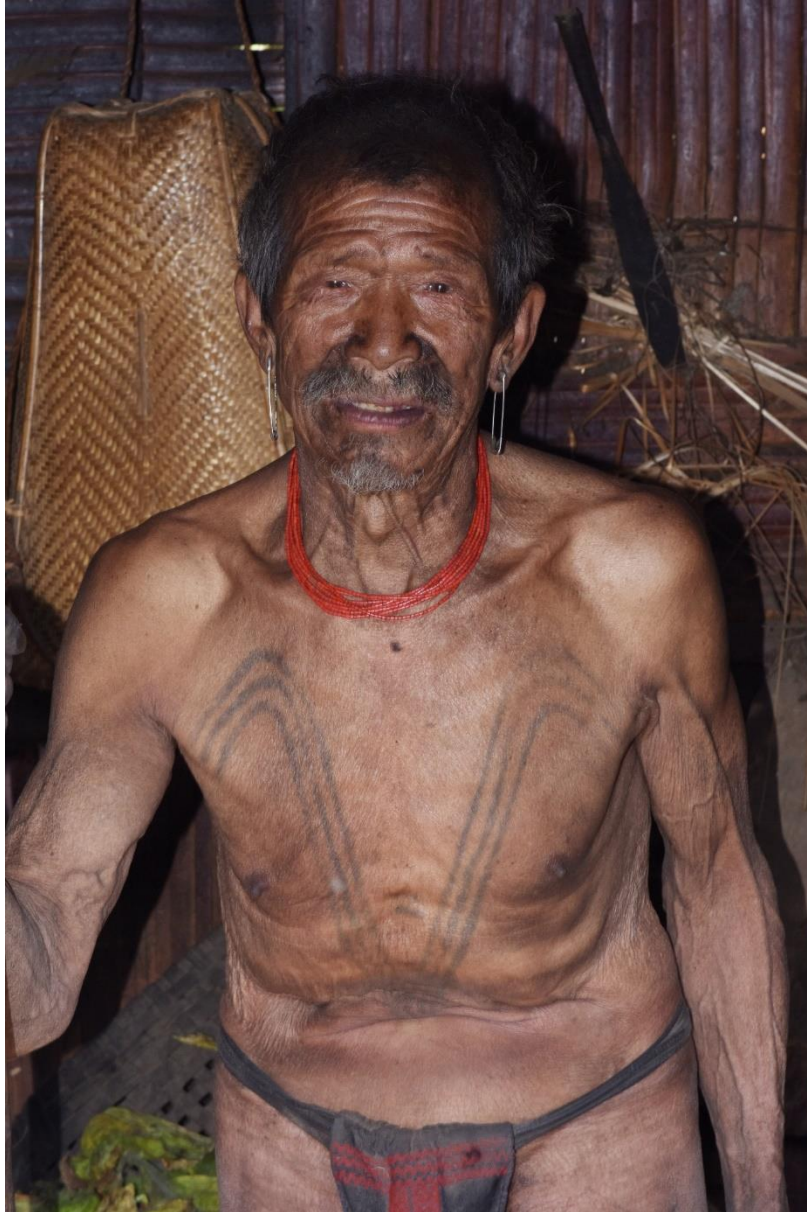
From a young age, each male in the village harbours aspirations to join the ranks of the revered warriors. They seek not only to gain recognition within their community but also to instil fear and respect among their enemies. The tattoo, prominently displayed on a warrior's chest, serves as a tangible testament to his achievements. It symbolically encapsulates a multitude of revered virtues, including honour, valour, masculinity, bravery, strength, courage, and virility. These traits are not only greatly admired within the community but are also seen as essential qualities that define a true warrior<sup>10</sup>.

A noteworthy element in this array of warrior tattoos is the *Kongshang*, a bold V-shaped design on the chest that extends downwards to the navel (**Fig. 8&9**). This distinct pattern is a shared characteristic among all Naga tribes that engage in the practice of tattooing. A warrior earns the right to bear this tattoo upon demonstrating his bravery and skill in battle, specifically upon bringing back a head to the village for the first time. The pattern, often referred to as the V-shaped tattoo - a nomenclature attributed to colonial explorers - carries an undefined symbolism. The precise meaning of the pattern remains elusive, but the long-standing tradition of its application across generations is undisputed.





Some warriors choose to augment their chest tattoo by incorporating an additional design across the collarbone, which bears a resemblance to a necklace (**Fig. 10**). This pattern, known as *Sangkom*, is often seen as an aesthetic enhancement to the overall chest tattoo. However, certain interpretations suggest that it may also signify the bearer's possession of a "tiger spirit" (lycanthropy), given its striking similarity to tiger stripes. In some village communities, the depiction of a human figure, known as *Aethso*, is tattooed at the centre of the warrior's chest. This is believed to signify the warrior's feat of capturing an enemy alive<sup>11</sup>. Conversely, in other communities, this design may serve no symbolic purpose, existing solely for its aesthetic appeal (**Fig.11**).





and reaching down to the wrist. This complex design, referred to as *Phemtholao*, is characterised by a diamond-shaped pattern formed by four interconnected lines, within which an outline of a human figure is tattooed. The tips of the diamond meet, forming a continuous pattern that winds down the length of the arm. Only the bravest of the brave dare to undertake this intricate tattoo design, given the considerable pain associated with the process, and the inevitable temporary incapacitation of the warrior's arms until the tattoo wounds have completely healed (**Fig. 12**). This showcases the courage and resilience of the warriors, further emphasising the importance of tattoos as a rite of passage and a symbol of personal accomplishment in their society



## **VII. Conclusion**

In the Khamniungan culture, both men and women were active participants in the art of tattooing. The tattooed forms of identity were worn by women on various parts of their bodies, including their foreheads, chins, shoulders, arms, and legs. The designs, mainly geometric, were etched into the skin when girls reached adolescence, signifying a rite of passage and acting as an indelible marker of identity.

In the era of head-hunting, women's heads were highly prized, and tattoos played an instrumental role in identification when villagers retrieved bodies. The tattoos were far more than mere decorations or symbols of adulthood; they were a protective charm, ensuring the woman's identity would remain intact even in death. The prevalence of tattoos among women underscores the role of women in society and the significance of tattoos as a means of safeguarding their identities and honour.

Men from certain villages bore additional tattoo patterns, reflecting their deeply ingrained beliefs about the afterlife. The understanding was that these tattoos would function as a form of currency in the afterlife, enabling them to acquire food and drink during their journey to their final resting place (**Fig.13**). This belief signifies the profound interconnection between the physical and metaphysical realms in the Khamniungan culture, where tattoos play a critical role in bridging the gap between the corporeal and spiritual worlds.



As Hutton (reprint 2020) succinctly encapsulates, the practice of headhunting among Naga groups was rooted in the belief that the head was the repository of life's essence. This essence once brought back to the village, diffused into the community, nourishing the people, their crops, and their livestock. The Khamniungans adhered to this belief system, engaging in headhunting not as a demonstration of their might, but as a ritualistic act of safeguarding their families, clans, and village from enemies and invoking fertility and prosperity for their community.

The chest tattoo of a warrior stands as an enduring testament to the courage and bravery he exhibited to earn it. This body art narrates the tale of the warrior's life, transforming his skin into a canvas that bears the marks of his journey from boyhood to a formidable warrior. The sight of these tattoos instilled fear among their enemies, underlining the power and status they represented.

However, the advent of Christianity in the 19th century and the introduction of Western education catalysed a profound cultural transformation among the Khamniungan and the Naga people in general. Traditional practices such as headhunting and tattooing were renounced, morungs were replaced with schools, and the young generation swapped their daos (machetes) for books. Tattoos, once symbols of honour and social status, have faded into the shadows of history, becoming poignant reminders of past glories.

In the current era, white-collar jobs are often associated with high social status, a dramatic shift from traditional norms. As the number of tattoo-bearing warriors dwindles, this research endeavours to document and reconstruct a fading history before it is entirely lost to the hands of time. Through this exploration, the research aims to preserve a piece of cultural history, emphasizing the importance of tattoos as a potent component of the Naga identity and heritage, embodying their courage, resilience, and collective past.

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#### **End notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Various melodies correspond to distinct events or circumstances. The music's tone and rhythm vary depending on the occasion, each having a unique resonance that aligns with the mood or significance of the event.

<sup>2</sup> The Meya clan holds a significant role in their community as they are in charge of conducting all the village's rituals. The position of a shaman, someone who connects the physical and spiritual worlds, is inherited within this

clan. This ancestral practice has been handed down through generations, preserving the spiritual customs and beliefs of the village.

<sup>3</sup> The societal status of a warrior in the community is often tied to the ownership of a pig. If a warrior doesn't possess a pig, he will go to the lengths of mortgaging his own land in exchange for a harvest. He uses this harvest to acquire a pig, thus maintaining his stature and respect within the community.

<sup>4</sup> When night falls, every warrior in the community retreats to their own homes for rest. Regardless of the battles fought or duties fulfilled throughout the day, it is customary for these warriors to return to their individual residences to sleep.

<sup>5</sup> The role of a tattoo artist is uniquely restricted in this culture. It is deemed taboo for a man to take on this profession. This prohibition is deeply rooted in societal norms and cultural beliefs, emphasizing the stringent gender roles and the sacred nature of tattoo artistry in their community.

<sup>6</sup> The scientific name of this plant is still unknown.

<sup>7</sup> The scientific name of this plant is still unknown.

<sup>8</sup> A quaint structure made of bamboo is erected right outside the dwelling, functioning similarly to contemporary balconies. This modest addition to the house provides an outdoor space for the inhabitants to relax and observe their surroundings.

<sup>9</sup> The responsibility of tattooing women predominantly falls on the young apprentices. This is primarily because the tattoos inked on head-hunters are revered as sacred symbols and badges of honour. The cultural significance and reverence associated with these tattoos necessitate a certain level of experience and status, often beyond what an apprentice holds.

<sup>10</sup> As a warrior brings home more heads over time, his social status within the community escalates. However, this increase in status does not correspondingly affect his tattoos. In other words, the warrior's elevated standing does not translate to any changes or additions to his existing tattoos, which hold their own unique value and significance.

<sup>11</sup> There are instances when a warrior apprehends an enemy alive and fastens him to a pole in the village's center. A missive is then dispatched to the captive's home village, demanding a ransom, typically in the form of a Mithun (Bison), a pig, or some material goods. This tense situation can sometimes lead to a positive resolution. The captive's villagers may express relief that their warrior has been spared, leading to a mutually agreed truce between the two parties.