



The emergence of the Tangkhul Women's Organization: A Case Study of Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), Ukhrul (1974-2000)

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Abstract

This article examines the historical trajectory and multifaceted contributions of the women's movement in Ukhrul district, Manipur, with a specific focus on the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL). Tracing its origins from early Christian women's society to its formal establishment as the East District Women Association (EDWA) in 1974, and subsequent renaming to TSL in 1981, the study highlights the pivotal role of women in addressing social injustices, advocating for human rights, and fostering community development. The article analyzes key events, such as the case of Rose Kumram and Luingamla Muinao incidents, which served as a spark for collective action against state violence and patriarchal structures. Furthermore, it explores TSL's diverse activities, including anti-liquor campaigns, educational initiatives, vocational training, and peace-building efforts during ethnic conflicts. Drawing upon historical records and community narratives, this research emphasizes the resilience and transformative power of Tangkhul women in shaping their society and challenging oppressive forces.

Keywords: Women's movement, Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), Ukhrul, Manipur, human rights, indigenous women, & community development

Introduction

In the North-Eastern state of Manipur, particularly within the Tangkhul Naga community of Ukhrul district, the emergence of a robust women's organization, the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of resistance and resilience. This article analyses into the historical development and significant contributions of the women's movement in this region, with a particular emphasis on the TSL, formerly known as the East District Women Association (EDWA). The Tangkhul community, like many indigenous groups in Northeast India, has experienced profound transformations influenced by colonial encounters, the advent of Christianity, and prolonged periods of armed conflict and state intervention. Within this complex milieu, Tangkhul women have not remained passive observers but have actively engaged in shaping their collective destiny. Their journey from localized, church-based groups to a powerful, district-wide apex body reflects a growing awareness of women's rights, dignity, and their indispensable role in societal upliftment. It will critically examine the causal events, such as the tragic incidents involving Rose Kumram in 1974 and Luingamla Muinao in 1986, which stirred women into collective action against military atrocities and human rights violations. Furthermore, the article will provide a comprehensive overview of TSL's multifarious activities, encompassing advocacy for social justice, promotion of education and economic empowerment, and their crucial involvement in peace-building and community welfare initiatives. By synthesizing historical accounts and community narratives, this article seeks to illuminate the profound impact of the TSL on the social, political, and cultural fabric of Ukhrul district, positioning it as a significant force in the broader discourse of women's movements in India.

Emergence of Tangkhul Women's Organizations: From Christian Society to Collective Action

The beginning of organized women's movements within the Tangkhul community is deeply intertwined with the broader

socio-historical developments of the region, particularly the advent of Christianity and increasing literacy rates among women. Early organizational efforts were predominantly church-based. The first recorded attempt at forming a women's society at Phungyo Baptist Church, Ukhrul by Mrs. Alice Pettigrew was short-lived. A subsequent Christian women's society in 1932 struggled due to lack of guidance and wartime restrictions. It was not until March 10, 1946, that the Tangkhul Christian Women Organization was formally established, with Miss L. Esther as its first Vice-Secretary. These village-level Christian women's societies played a crucial role in community upliftment, offering financial aid, feeding the hungry, and actively supporting missionary endeavours, including church building and funding crusades and seminars. They also provided scholarships, laying the groundwork for future social and educational initiatives.

Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL) / East District Women Association (EDWA): A Response to Atrocity

The most significant turning point in the Tangkhul women's movement was the birth of the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), initially known as the East District Women Association (EDWA). This organization emerged as a direct, powerful response to the brutal rape and subsequent suicide of Miss Rose Kumram in March 1974. On March 3 and 4, 1974, Miss Rose of Kumram (Ngapurum) village was subjected to gang rape by officers of the 95th BSF, specifically Major Pundir, Major Dharam Prakash, and Captain Negi, along with an accomplice, in Kumram village. This heinous act, accompanied by the abuse of other girls and torture of boys, led Miss Rose Kumram to tragically take her own life on March 4, 1974, out of shame and to protect women's dignity. This incident sent shockwaves through the Tangkhul community, igniting widespread outrage and a collective demand for justice. A public meeting was organized on April 9, 1974, at Tangkhul Long Ground, Ukhrul, the effigies of the rapist were burnt and prominent community leaders articulated the collective

indignation. A unanimous resolution was adopted to recognize and safeguard women's rights, uphold their dignity, and ensure punishment for the perpetrators. This tragic event served as a powerful spark, compelling Tangkhul women to establish a united organization. On this day, April 9, 1974, the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL) (which means "women multitude in oneness"), initially named the East District Women Association (EDWA), was formally established.

The First General Election of the EDWA was held on May 8, 1974, at 10:30 AM, marked by the hymn *Khokharum Laa No. 67: "Ithumwui ngalei hi Christawui sahaoda"* (Our land for Christ). Representatives from 90 villages, totaling 703 members, attended. The conference theme was "*Khok kha yangkha kasa hi leiphalungra kala achalakra Tangkhul shanao*" (Unity, integrity is a must and women of the earlier Tangkhul), underscored its foundational principles. Following the election, its representatives, Miss C. Mahala and Anandi Ragui, met the Deputy Commissioner Shri Y. Radhyasham Singh, pressing for the rapist's punishment. He assured that "Whoever has done the crime, whether the police, personnel, army or any other civilians, I will be the first to give the befitting punishment". The first office bearers (May 1974 - April 1976) included Miss Masophi Luithui (President), Miss Asai Luikham (Vice-President), and Miss C. Mahala (General Secretary), with 11 executive members.

A legal committee, including the President, General Secretary, and three others (Miss Changyokla, Miss Vachungla, and Miss Asai), was formed to draft the TSL's constitution. The organization's objectives were clear: to uphold women's rights, protect cultural heritage, promote education, and assume greater societal responsibilities. Despite initial financial instability, EDWA demonstrated resourcefulness, collecting Rupees 4,369.25 by April 30, 1976, through contributions from 70 women and appeals to villages and churches. The Rose Kumram case remained central, leading to a significant meeting on August 3-4, 1974, in Imphal, where twenty-nine associations established the "All Manipur Women Action Committee (AMWAC)." Supported by Mr. K. Luithui, Mr. Z.V. Vakham, and Advocate General Mr. Tombi Singh, EDWA launched an indefinite hunger strike when punishment for the rapist was unheeded. This advocacy led to the Grihang case at a Court Martial and the Kumram case in a civil court. Thus, army atrocities inadvertently led to the establishment of Ukhrul District's largest apex women's organization. Despite financial constraints, EDWA activities progressed rapidly. Kongsui Luithui and Shangreiso A. Shimray drafted its constitution. The first death anniversary of Rose Kumram was observed on March 4, 1975. An Action Committee, including Victor Kaping (Chairman) and N.E. Luikham (Secretary), was formed on March 6, 1975, to ensure leadership continuity.

TSL's Expanding Mandate: Social Reform, Human Rights, and Community Development (1976-1990s)

The Second General Election of EDWA, held during the Second Annual Gathering on April 20, 1976, at Ukhrul Higher Secondary School (UHSS) hall, broadened its focus to social concerns. Discussions covered women's education, societal duties, and morality. New office bearers were elected for a three-year term, with Miss Drussilla Luikham, Ukhrul as President and Miss V.S. Ngalasing Talui as General Secretary, later replaced by Miss R. Theimila after Miss Ngalasing passed away. A key initiative was the campaign against liquor. In May, a meeting was held at

UHSS featuring messages on alcohol's evils from Masophi Nakhedei, R. Kanmila, Homila Shaiza, K. Ahor Shimray, and Shimrei Dungrei. EDWA executives, with police assistance, enforced prohibition, leading to district-level committees. EDWA also ventured into sports, forming the 'East District Women Football Association' in 1976, affiliated with MWFA. A tournament was held at 4th AR Ground. With Mr. Kongsui Luithui and Mr. Z. Luishophang's help, Tangkhul women's teams played in Imphal and Churachandpur. Seven players were selected for the national championship in Uttar Pradesh, with Miss K. Wungreiwon and Miss T.C. Benerista as state players and Miss Gelatin as a national player. Their success led to games in Ranchi and Calcutta. Mr. Sapei Luithui donated the Awon Luithui memorial shield in 1977, leading to a tournament played three times in Ukhrul. The third inter-district Women's Football Tournament in October 1978 in Imphal solidified Tangkhul women's pioneering role in Manipur football.

Establishing a permanent EDWA office was challenging. Land donations from D.C. Radhyasham Singh and Chief Minister Shri Yangmaso Shaiza were thwarted by encroachment and disputes. The Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) eventually donated land, and the new office was inaugurated in August 1985, though initial documentation was lacking. EDWA maintained vigilance against human rights abuses. In 1977, women apprehended and beat a CRPF soldier attempting to molest a girl, leading to his termination and a fine. The Third Annual Meeting (October 5, 1977) resolved to combat social evils and advocated for a ladies' police force, a request that remained unfulfilled. The Third General Election saw Masophi Nakhedi nominated as President (October 16, 1977 - April 30, 1978). The Fourth Annual Gathering (1978) elected Miss A. Ayo Shimray (President), Miss C. Singnang (Vice-President), and Miss Serinoh Hongva (Secretary) for 1978-1980, extending to 1981. This leadership improved financial stability through pooled funds and monthly contributions. The Fifth Annual Gathering (October 8, 1978) focused on women's education, financial duties, and responsibilities. EDWA also organized a CISRS' Women Seminar on women's participation in church and society. Recognizing the need for communication, EDWA launched its first magazine, "*Khongsang*," in October 1979, with a dedicated board.

In May 1979, EDWA intervened when a PWD peon abused a six-year-old girl. Public outcry led to the peon's surrender, public humiliation, and termination. From July 27 to August 19, 1978, EDWA intensified its anti-liquor campaign, distributing pamphlets and appealing for student welfare. Despite financial hardships, members sold produce and worked as labourers. Mr. Changshi Luithui, Miss C. Singnang, and Miss A. Ayo Shimray each donated Rupees 500 for the sixth annual gathering.

The Formalization of Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL) and Continued Advocacy (1981-1990s)

The Fifth General Election, during the 7th Annual Gathering on February 26, 1981, at Ukhrul Higher Secondary School (UHSS), marked the formal renaming of EDWA to Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL). New office bearers included Mrs. Ningthingla Ruivahnao (President), Mrs. Atim Sareo (Vice-President), and Mrs. Surrender A. Shishak (General Secretary). This change asserted Tangkhul identity and consolidated the women's movement. TSL expanded community development, offering vocational wool knitting training. Lacking a permanent office, they rented a room for Rupees 90, serving as both office and training centre. A

Rupees 14,000 grant from the Social Welfare Advisory Board Manipur funded three-month Vocational Wool Knitting (VWK) programs.

The early 1980s brought renewed military atrocities. In 1981, the 20th Assam Rifles arrested and tortured innocent civilians, including Mr. Kongsui Luithui, who was advocating against torture. TSL, TNL, and other organizations protested these arrests and the Sikh Regiment's occupation of Pettigrew College and collective fines. TSL established a district-level Action Committee to mediate between the army and civilians. TSL ensured financial sustainability through yearly membership fees (initially Rupees 1, later Rupees 20) from women aged 13-60, also tracking membership. They appealed to the government for water during Ukhrul's scarcity.

Following the Namthilok ambush on the 21st Sikh Regiment, which killed 22 personnel, armed forces retaliated with severe torture against villagers. Girls were abused, boys subjected to electric shocks and sodomy, and many paralyzed. Mr. Daniel and Mr. C. Paul were arrested and disappeared. TSL's President and Secretary conducted a spot inquiry and filed a writ petition at the Guwahati High Court. Financial support came from TSL members abroad. Mr. Luingam Luithui and Mr. Sebastian Muisang engaged prominent Delhi women for a fact-finding mission. This team, including Promila Dondavage, Nandita Haskar, Subhadra Joshi, Urmila Phadnis, and Kirti Singh, visited Ukhrul in February 1982. TSL members covered their expenses. The Fact-Finding Team, TSL, TNL, and other organizations secured a landmark victory at the Guwahati High Court, resulting in Rupees 200,000 compensation for victims' families. The team also donated Rupees 5,000 to TSL, with Nandita Haskar, Ella Dutt Luithui, and Goswami providing crucial expertise.

The Sixth General Election (March 1983) at Shangyang Hall featured resource persons like Miss Kahaola Hungyo and Mr. K. Envy. Miss Philangam Shangjam demonstrated haute cuisine, and Dr. Ayao Leisan and Mr. R.V. Leishman screened 'Asiad '82' film. New office bearers included Miss Grace Chiphang (President) and S. Atim (General Secretary). To continue "*Khongsang*" magazine, TSL office bearers fundraised by cleaning public spaces. TSL also collaborated with the Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP), providing tailoring training and sewing machines to women. The anti-liquor campaign resumed in March 1984. In the same year, TSL intervened in a girl's abuse case in Lamlang village, settling it amicably with the *Hanga Wungnao* (village Councillor), demonstrating women's leadership in crime prevention.

TSL's Enduring Legacy: Human Rights, Peacebuilding, and Social Transformation (Late 1980s - 1990s)

The Seventh General Election, during the International Year of Women observation (February 28 - March 3, 1985), elected Miss C. Grace (President), Mrs. Jayanti (Vice-President), and Wonthing A. Shimray (General Secretary). Miss C. Grace later resigned, and Mrs. Jayanti Keishing became President, with Rita Keishing as Vice-President, at the 10th Annual Gathering (March 21-23, 1986). TSL utilized seminars for outreach. Seminar on May 26-27, 1984, focused on "Society and women's responsibilities on development." Volunteers for Village Development (VVD) sponsored other seminars. TSL provided loans from a revolving fund. A foresightful awareness camp on drug addiction was organized from July 10-24, 1985. The first matric scholarship of Rupees 500 was awarded to a top-performing girl.

Another seminar on "Social problems" was held with the Women's Department. On October 18, 1985, TSL and "Macha Leima" organized an expedition to '*Khangkhui Mangsor*' and '*Shirui Kashong*,' followed by a discussion on women's role in Manipur. TSL provided humanitarian aid when Huishu village was burned, dispatching relief materials with Ashok Tipnis despite difficult conditions. A second major incident, the killing of Miss Luingamla Muinao of Ngainga village on January 25, 1986, by Captain Madir Singh and Lt. Sanjeev Dubey after an attempted rape, provoked the community. News reached the ongoing Tangkhul Katamnao Saklong (TKS) conference, leading to a condolence service and a large public meeting at TNL ground. This incident, following Rose Kumram, was a major army crime against Tangkhul women. TSL organized a meeting on March 11, 1986, followed by a silent procession in Imphal. Various organizations participated, agreeing to recognize March 11 as 'Unity Day for both the hills and the valley.' TSL pursued justice, with a court-martial hearing fixed for June 20-24, 1988. On September 13, 1986, TSL intervened when a Manipur Rifles cobbler abused a girl. After consulting TNL and other organizations, TSL submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister on September 16, 1987, leading to the cobbler's termination. In 1986, VVD sponsored Jayanti Keishing and Wonthing A. Shimray for a community health and development program, including journalism training. TSL organized anti-corruption seminars (December 13-16, 1986) and provided loans to women's societies for sustainable livelihoods.

The Eighth General Election (April 14, 1987), after the 11th Annual Gathering, elected Mrs. Hangmila Shaiza (President), Miss Charmila Lungleng (Vice-President), and Miss L. Themreiwon (General Secretary). The theme was "*Shanaona yurwui pangshapna*" (women's strength for a nation). In 1987, the killing of Miss Ningmila of Nungshang village prompted a rally on May 2, 1987. Speakers like Miss L.K. Anot, Miss Sara, and Miss Ahaio Hungyo spoke against heroin and liquor. Rupees 900 collected were given to Miss S. Ningmila's family. In September 1987, TSL offered Rupees 500 scholarships to outstanding girl students. The 12th annual gathering (March 31 - April 1, 1988) at Ngainga village included a workshop on 'Drugs and alcoholic abuse.' The 13th annual gathering (March 11, 1989) focused on "Women and economy."

The Ninth General Election, during the 14th Annual Gathering (March 6-10, 1990), elected Mrs. Jayanti Keishing (President), Miss Veronica Zingkhai (Vice-President), and Miss Thothingla Vashum (General Secretary). The 15th Annual Gathering (March 7-10, 1991) involved 73 villages, and the 16th Annual Gathering (March 12-16, 1992) focused on "*Rasayan*" (weaving culture). These annual gatherings motivated women towards empowerment. The Tenth General Election (March 1993-1996), at the 17th Annual Gathering, elected P. Veronica Zingkhai (President), Pakahao (Vice-President), and Wungshimla (General Secretary). The 18th Annual Gathering (March 22-26, 1994) explored "*Shimkhurin*" (aims of a family), discussing family roles, law, democracy, education, and politics.

TSL's Role in Crisis and Advocacy: Confronting State Violence and Ethnic Conflict (Mid-1990s Onwards)

The Eleventh General Elections (1995-1998) saw P. Veronica Zingkhai re-elected President and Mrs. Silla J. Konghay as Vice-President. The theme, "*Shanaowui Mashun*" (women's right), was central. Subsequent annual gatherings (20th at Shirui, 21st at Ramphoi, 22nd at Tashar)

addressed ecological balance. The 12th general election elected Mrs. Silla J. Konghay (President) and R.N. Khangamla (Vice-President, 1998-2000). Mrs. Silla Konghay continued as President until April 14, 2007, and Miss A.S. Dinah served as General Secretary for six years, becoming the 13th President on April 15, 2007.

TSL continued its multifarious work, advocating for greater representation within TNL. They participated in social organization meets, seminars, and workshops. The TSL secretary attended a training on women's issues (June 7-9, 1991). A Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) donation of Rupees 7,000 funded a health workshop (November 23-25, 1988) in Ukhrul. Culturally, TSL promoted traditional dresses. Talui Shanaolong's "Nisha Bandh" (March 17, 1991) was supported by TSL and TMNL. TSL's programs were disseminated, and March 4th was celebrated annually as TSL Day.

The new TSL office building was inaugurated on July 15, 1996, by M.H. Khan, Deputy Commissioner. TSL secured a written document with a map during Mr. Ngalangai's TNL presidency. The mid-1990s saw continued violence. On August 24, 1991, six youths were killed in Shirui village; TSL offered aid to bereaved families. In 1994, TSL and other organizations boycotted Independence Day in protest against a government order to surrender arms. A bomb explosion and indiscriminate firing by the 20th Assam Rifles injured 13 women attempting to rescue civilians. This highlighted the risks faced by TSL. TSL initiated a meeting on January 7, 1994, leading to the establishment of the Manipur Naga Women Union (MNWU), with P. Veronica as convener. The first MNWU seminar-cum-assembly was hosted by TSL in Ukhrul (October 3-6, 1994), with 12 Naga tribes participating. On May 9, 1994, two 20th Assam Rifles officers and three civilians were killed by motor bombs in Ukhrul.

The 20th Assam Rifles retaliated by torturing innocents. TSL and TKS, with 12 other organizations, appealed for AFSPA repeal and removal of the 20th Assam Rifles post. A massive procession (over 20,000 people) and a joint memorandum were submitted to Lt. Gen. V.K. Nayar. A case was registered at the Guwahati High Court with 18 social organizations' signatures. On August 17, 1994, the 20th Assam Rifles killed three more civilians. Their bodies were brought to TNL ground, and TSL presented traditional shawls. On August 27, 1994, crossfire between the 12th Dongra and non-state actors killed six-year-old Tychicus. TSL, with TNL and TKS presidents, conducted a spot inquiry, supporting bereaved families. In March 1996, after an attack on Huishu army camp, TSL met with military officials, securing assurances against civilian torture, allowing their annual program to proceed. An all-India fact-finding team, led by Ms. Shiraj and sponsored by NPMHR Delhi, visited Ukhrul on April 20, 1996. TSL President P. Veronica Zingkhai narrated the region's hardships since the 1950s. TSL demanded AFSPA repeal and removal of the 20th Assam Rifles post. The team's report, 'Where peacekeepers declared war,' highlighted TSL's role in exposing suffering. On July 17, 1997, a shootout led to the 20th AR arresting and torturing civilians, resulting in Mr. Ramaso's death. TSL and other organizations demanded his body, presenting a traditional Tangkhul shawl (*Haora*) in accordance with custom.

During the Kuki-Naga conflict (1994), TSL provided humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts. They consoled Mrs. Pamleiphy, whose mother-in-law was killed, providing financial aid and rice. When Leisan Ato village was burned (April 7, 1995), TSL collected and delivered relief. After an attack on Laikoiching (April 20, 1998), TSL visited victims, offering financial aid and solace. TSL worked tirelessly to restore peace. They also rescued an elderly Liangmei housewife arrested and abandoned by the army, escorting her to the Zeliangrong Union President.

Collaborative Efforts and Continued Evolution

The Tangkhul Public Action Committee, established in 1985, initially included TNL, TKS, and TSL representatives. It arranged schooling for Luingamla Muinao's sister. Revived as the 'Joint Committee of Tangkhul Social Organization (JCTSO)' due to continued army atrocities, it included NPMHR, TKS, and TSL, underscoring women's integral role. TSL advocated for public services. When Mrs. Khathingla died at Ukhrul district hospital (September 30, 1997) due to lack of doctors, TSL launched a strike (November 21 - December 8, 1997), which ended peacefully after a compromise, demonstrating TSL's effectiveness. TSL's influence reached national platforms. Five representatives attended the Sixth National Women Conference in Ranchi (December 24, 1997 - January 6, 1998), highlighting grievances under AFSPA. A TSL representative attended the National Conference of Indigenous and Tribal People in Delhi (February 21, 1998). The 22nd annual gathering at Tashar Village, Ukhrul focused on AIDS awareness. On February 13, 1999, TSL conducted a workshop on Community Leaders Training on AIDS, with Dr. Felix speaking on NGOs' role in HIV/AIDS prevention. This raised awareness among women.

Conclusion

The journey of the women's movement in Ukhrul, particularly through the Tangkhul Shanao Long (TSL), is a compelling narrative of resilience, advocacy, and social transformation. From its nascent stages as Christian women's societies to its powerful emergence as the EDWA/TSL, the organization has consistently served as a vital platform for Tangkhul women to assert their rights, challenge injustices, and contribute significantly to community development. Transformative events like the Rose Kumram and Luingamla Muinao cases emphasize the profound impact of state violence on indigenous communities and the subsequent mobilization of women as frontline defenders of human rights. TSL's diverse activities—ranging from anti-liquor campaigns and educational initiatives to vocational training, peacebuilding during ethnic conflicts, and advocacy against oppressive laws like AFSPA—demonstrate its multifaceted approach to empowering women and fostering a just society. The TSL's enduring legacy lies not only in its ability to respond to crises but also in its proactive efforts to shape a better future for the Tangkhul community, embodying the collective strength and unwavering spirit of its women. Its evolution reflects a dynamic interplay between local traditions, external influences, and the persistent struggle for dignity and self-determination in a complex socio-political landscape.

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