

FESTIVALS: A SYNOPTIC VIEW AND THE TANGKHUL NAGA SEED SOWING FESTIVAL

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. Ringkahao Horam is the second son of Mrs. Lateola & Thikatai Horam of Tusom Christian village, Ukhrul District Manipur State. He had his early education in his native village and up to High School from Tiny Tots Unique School, Imphal. He has done P.U. Arts from D.M. College Imphal. He received B.A (H) in political science from Delhi University and M.A. Political Science from JNU New Delhi. In 1993, he finished M.Phil from Manipur University. In 2012 he was awarded Doctor of Philosophy (Ph:D) from the Manipur University. He has to his credit several articles and has participated many seminars and conferences. He has published book on **1.** “The Genesis of the Naga political Movement” **2.** “Customary Laws of the Nagas of Manipur”. **3.** “Undeclared War: The Naga Political Movement. **4.** The Tangkhul Folk Poetry in Song. **5.** Naga Festivals. **6.** Ideology: Influences and Trend of the Naga Political Movements. **7.** My Roots.

He joined government service in the college in 1990. Now he is Associate Professor and HOD. Department of Political Science, Modern College, Imphal.

He is undergoing research in Traditional Tribal Culture. He has been actively involved in many social, cultural and Environmental campaigns in different forums. He is also a Human Rights activist who has participated in trainer training course on “Fact finding and Documentation of Human Rights violation” held in Manila, Philippines in 1994. At present, he is the coordinator of Human Rights Education cell, Modern college Imphal. He is also a founder president of ‘Naga Cultural Development Society’ since 1992.

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ABSTRACT

Man is social by nature and his life is governed by theoretical and practical experiences within the society. In the society there are several ethnic and religious groups which have various cultures and customs. All these ethnic groups in the society have various kinds of Festivals related with their social, culture, or religious life. Therefore Festivals are an expression of their happiness showing their identity, cultural life and sometime of religious faith. There are various kinds of festivals such as Religious festivals, Arts and craft festival, Food and drink festivals, Seasonal and harvest festival. Among them one of the festivals celebrated by Tangkhul Naga Known as “Lui-Ngai-Ni” (Seed sowing festival) is unique in its own way as it is a celebration of the amalgamation of all kinds and purposes in this single Festival. It is celebrated to invoke the god of wealth for good harvest and also socializing events having beauty contest for choosing their life partner and also marketing opportunity to buy and sell their goods during this festival. It is celebrated for 12 days.

Hence Festivals have several facets which have different significance and purposes which become part of our life so cannot be ignored or separated from human being.

KEY WORDS

Festivals: The indicator of Social and Religious life of the People.

Introduction:

A festival is a specific occasion for a particular peoples, community, religion or state, relating to feasting, or celebration, usually with a social or religious significant. It is an events staged by a community with its special occasion having its believes system and goals. Festivals are associated with celebration entertainment, feasting, rites etc, which create a sense of belongingness of religious, social, or geographical groups. Moreover, it provides a sense of unity and integrity among the people.

In ancient Greece and Rome, festivals such as Saturnalia were closely associated with social organization and political processes as well as religion. However now a day things are changing, in modern times. Festival may be attended by stranger such as tourist, who are attracted to some of the more eccentric or historical ones. Hornbill festivals in Nagaland state and Sangai Festival in Manipur are some of the example in North East India.

Etymology

The word “festival” was originally used as an objective from the late fourteenth century, deriving from Latin via old French. Its first recorded used as a noun was in 1589 (as “festival”). Feast first came into usage as a noun circa 1200 and its first recorded use as verb was circa 1300. The term feast is also used in common secular parlance as a synonym for any large or elaborate meal or gathering. However, the word festivals are often refers to a religious festival rather than film or art festivals. But in spite of the word festival is coined and used in 13th century its practice and celebration (festival) are as old as human race because human being celebrate in one way or the other to mark any occasion right from the beginning of their existence.

Traditions

Most of the festivals are based in traditions and entwine with culture and religious significant such as Christmas, Diwali, Hanukkah, Eidal-Adha, Lui-ngai-ni etc. Apart from it, there are some festival, which are base in historical significant events, seasonal change, farming like harvest, etc., which provides the impetus for a festival.

There are many types of festivals in the world and most of the countries celebrate them with traditional cultural events because the occasion is related with their social and cultural life of the past and they have desire to continue the legacy of it after all it is their identity.

Types of festivals

a) Religious festivals

Religious festivals are celebrated in honor of God or gods. Some of the religious festival, which celebrates every year, does not have fixed date but it is determine by either by lunar or agricultural cycles or the calendar in use at that time such are Passover, Easter festivals and Eid al Ahda etc. There are some religious festivals which date is is fixed like Christmas.

b) Arts and craft festival

This type of festivals are mainly based on creativities of different trade which are fixed from time to time to show, promote and exhibit sometime for commercial purpose. Such type includes literary festivals, music festival handloom and handicraft festivals etc.

c) Food and drink festivals

Usually in the festivals people dress up with the best costume with traditional or modern attire. Special foods are prepared and consumed in community or in family. However, there are certain festivals where particular foods or drinks are served to celebrate to mark the festival. Such as the national peanut festival, pumpkin festival, orange festival, wine festival bread festival (khamui phanit) in Tangkhul, pineapple festival, Oktoberfest in Germany for beer etc.

d) Seasonal and harvest festivals

Seasonal and harvest festivals are observed all over the world depending upon their relevant situation. In the Alps, in autumn the return of the cattle from the mountain pastures to the stables in the valley is celebrated as “Almabtrieb”. Dree festival is celebrated by Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh for bumper crop harvest. For the Tangkhul Naga “Wonzai” festival is celebrated to invoke “Ameowo” (Supreme God) to grant them a good harvest of their hard labor. Yarra festival is another seasonal festival of the Tangkhuls. This festival is marked with heavy feasting with different foods and drink to strengthen and fatten themselves getting ready for the hard work of rice plantation.

NAGA FESTIVALS

Naga festivals are unique in many ways. They regard their festivals as sacrosanct and their participation is mandatory for everyone. They celebrate them with colorful traditional custom, feasting, and seasonal variety of relevant song, dance, and music are sung and displayed in the festivals.

Most of the Nagas festivals revolve around agriculture. This is because even today more than 70% of the population depends upon agriculture.

Another remarkable characteristic of the Naga festival is that it is closely interwoven with social culture and religious elements. Therefore there are some festival which has many facet and activities and surprisingly it serve all the purpose. One of the best example of such festival is LUIRA PHANIT (Lui-Ngai-Ni). It is also known as seed sowing festival. Let us examine the different dimension and facet of “Luiraphanit”.

LUIRA PHANIT (Lui-Ngai-Ni)

As the winter is slowly fading and the season bird started chirping merrily heralding New Year and new season, the trees and its leaf become dry and brown and started fallen off getting ready for the new fresh shoots. The sky is crystal clear started blowing with fresh air. The unstoppable desire of heart spontaneously come out in their lips singing melody folk song like “Luiraphanit hoksa sangaiuwa” (longing for celebration of Luiraphanit festival, longing for eating pork.)

All the village, young and old would like to celebrate “Luiraphanit” (Lui-Ngai-Ni) and more so by young boys and girls, because this is the season and festival where the girls would display their beauty in a dance known as “Laa Khamanui” (Virgin dance/beauty contest). On such festival, the neighbor village bachelor would come and watch the dance.

“Luiraphanit” is one of the major and longest day celebrated festival among Tangkhul Nagas. In fact it is celebrated for 12 days with different activities with specific significant and important, they are.

- 1) Luiraphanit is also known as “Seed Sowing festival” because in this festival their deity” Phunghui Kameo (god of wealth) is pray and propitiate for prosperous harvest of the current year.

- 2) This is also a festival of showing generosity to other irrespective of their villagers or outsiders. On this day friends relative and even strangers are invited and drink are abundantly and generously served. This is an occasion of feasting and marry making.
- 3) This is also an occasion of games and sports testing their strength and technique sports like tug of war, wrestling etc are taken up.
- 4) On this festival unmarried girls proudly attired them self with gorgeous traditional dress in uniform showing their beauty in a dance called “Laa Khanganui” beauty show/beauty contest all the villagers and outsider even from far away bachelor use to come and watched the show some even looking for choosing their life partner for marriage. Therefore, it is also a season and festival for choosing their partner.
- 5) In the later of the festival neighbor, villagers are informed so that they can participate in the trade fair. Different product from handloom, handicraft to food items are sold here.

“Luira Phanit Day wise activities”

The first two days is known as KHASHIT or MEILAPHAT, which means cleaning or beautification of the village and arrangement of light (resin of pine tree). On these days, youth will prepare clean and arrange necessary things for the festival, where as parents are to clean garden and set fire and smoke upward indicating that Luira Phanit has started.

The eight day (8th day) is known as KHASO (Village open). Until this day from day one to day seven it is taboo to inter and go out from the village. This is strictly observed.

The first day of this festival is also known as “SATHITHANG” which means a day of animal slaughter. On this day meat for the festival is arranged.

The 2nd day is known as “AWUNGSHI RUKTHANG” or WUNGREI RUKTHANG. On this day, the chief of the village prays and offers wine or beer to deity “AMEOWO” in his house in the family altar, imploring him to bless and grant them a prosperous year free from natural calamities and diseases.

The 3rd day is known as “YARUI RUKTHANG”. On this day every household should perform ritualistic invocation in their respective homes at the designated altar of every house known as “THEIRUIKHONG”. They invoke and propitiate “Phunghui Kameo” (god of wealth) for prosperous farming.

The 4th to 6th day, these three days are the most joyous and climax of the celebration. All the villagers particularly boys and girls adorn themselves with the best traditional dress including ornaments and headgear. A variety of activities including games and sports like, wrestling, tug of war etc are organized. However, the most important events which started performing from this day onward is “Laa Khanganui” beauty show or beauty competition. This dance is also known as “Virgin dance” because only virgin girl or innocent grown up girl have to participate in this dance. Girls who do not participate in such dance are suspected of their chastity or question their morality. It is believed that when pregnant, immoral girls participate in such dance bad omen, or signs are shown during the dance. Every year the boys are eagerly awaiting these events because this is an opportunity to admire the beauty of women, and propose and choose for their life partner. The young girls know this therefore they try their best to mesmerize and woo the boys. The girls oil themselves from tip to toe with animal oil (No lotion in those days) and dress up

uniformly with traditional attire, covering their half body within necklace, bangles, khormashim, Huishon etc exposing the rest half of their body shine like reflection from the fresh stream water. Looking grand and stunningly beautiful, they swing and sung together in unison with the gentle clicking bell sound hanging from their head in the tip of the Huishon. The girls never get tire because they knew that their beauty is watched and admire by young and old and most importantly by the eligible bachelors.

On 7th day the most important ritual of the festival, take place on this day. While the villagers continue their celebration unabated the chief of the village along with his wife, with dignified dress went to the field and after performing ritual by smearing the blood of chicken to the seed or on the paddy and offering chicken head to “Phunghui kameo” (God of wealth). They will performs “Maamaji, theimaji, khamashao” or Luikathui, here they will show paddy or seed in a selected small area in his field. Only after this, the rest villagers are permitted to carry on sowing all kinds of seeds.

On the 8th day while the festival continue all the householder along with their wife descend to their respective field and do the ritual invocation and offering like the chief who have done in the previous day.

The 9th day is known as “KHASHO” which means village is open for all. It is indicated by smoke up by burning garden of the village compound. Neighbor villagers travelers’ seller buyers and visitors are allowed with their wares etc. for trade.

On the 10th day to 12th day the main activities is trading. In the earlier day it was barter system, which has been, replace by trade through money. Different kinds of goods from eatables to handloom and craft all kinds of items are sold and exchanged. Since it is

wind-up Stage of the festival feasting, drinking inviting friends, and neighbor continue and the finale show of “Laa Khanganui” beauty show are performed.

The above 12 day long Lui-Ngai-Ni festival explicitly shows that, it has so many dimension and purpose of the festival, which is unique in itself. In short, it is a ritual invoking to god of wealth for prosperous and good year, in the beginning of the year. It is also a festival of games and sports, beauty show for choosing partner entertainment through singing and dancing around great opportunity for trade. Hence, some of the Naga festival like “Lui-Ngai-Ni” is unique and rare among the festival of the world.

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GLOSSARY

Lui-Ngai-Ni	: Naga Seed Sowing Festival
Diwali	: Hindu Festival of light
Khamui Phanit	: Bread Festival
Ameowo	: Supreme God
Yarra Phanit	: Youth Festival
Laa Khanganui	: Virgin Dance/Beauty contest
Phunghui Kameo	: god of wealth
Awungshi Rukthang	:Village Chief deity prayer day
Yarui Rukthang	: Public deity prayer day

Theiruikhong	: designated alter of every house for invoking god
Khormashim	: Women dress wrap around the buttock made of beads etc
Huishon	: Women ornaments hanging down from head with small bells and rings of brass interwoven meticulously.
Mamaji	: Paddy seed
Theimaji	: Seeds (excluding Paddy seed).