



Festivals of *Nagaland*



FOREWORD

Nagaland is a land of myths and festivals. Life and culture is interwoven. Festival is a part of culture. Every tribe has its festivals.

This booklet 'Festivals of Nagaland' is an attempt to focus the importance of various festivals celebrated in Nagaland mainly for outside readers.

To present accuracy, potential sources and knowledgeable persons were consulted. Even then commissions and omissions are not ruled out. Therefore, advice and suggestions are welcomed for its improvement in the next edition.

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Festivals of Nagaland

Nagaland situated at the easternmost part of the country is replete with festivities all through the year as all the tribes have their own festivals which they hold so dear. They regard their festivals sacrosanct and participation in celebration is compulsory. They celebrate their distinct seasonal festivals with a pageantry of colour and a feast of music.

Most of these festivals revolve round agriculture, it being the main stay of Naga society. Over 85% population of Nagaland is directly dependent on agriculture and lives in a thousand and odd villages situated on high hill tops or slopes overlooking verdant valleys humming with murmuring streams. In this blissful setting Nagas enjoy the blessing of nature with a rare gusto striking the onlookers with awe and admiration. In most places, agriculture consists of monocrop.

Although some religious and spiritual sentiments are inter woven into secular rites and rituals, the pre-dominant theme of the festivals is offering of prayers to a Supreme Being having different names in different Naga dialects. At these festivals, the spirit of Gods are propitiated with sacrifices by the Village Shaman for a bountiful harvest either before the sowing or on the eve of harvest.

ANGAMI SEKRENYI



The Angamis celebrate SEKRENYI in the month of February. It normally falls on the 25th day of the Angami month of "KEZEI". The ten-day festival is also called PHOUSANYI by the Angamis

The festival follows a sequence of rituals and ceremonies. It begins with 'Kizie'. Kizie is the ritual by which the lady of the house scoops the top of the jar of festive rice brew, called 'Zumho', pours it into plantain leaf cups and places them on the three central pillars in consecration of the house. All the male members bathe and women fetch water, for domestic use, to suffice for the next three days. The village well is then cleaned by the two most abled bachelors at night, it is thence guarded by the youth from any defilement and women are prohibited from fetching water for the subsequent three days.

The first day of Sekrenyi ritual begins with 'Dzüseva' ceremony at dawn. All males proceed to the cleansed well, ritually chanting 'I am the first, oho, I am the first oho', carrying spear, dao and water jars for fetching water. On reaching the well, the ritual of ablutions begins by sprinkling of water over ones head, body, arms and legs. 'Dzüseva' means using the sleeping still water to cleanse all ill fortunes of the past year to begin anew a new year of life. The sanctification completed, fresh water is carried home, in chant as while going. For the next three days the males shall cook and eat separately from a new hearth usually at the outer entrance space of the house. The hearth is made with three wooden supports for cooking. Separate plates, spoons and pots are used. The next ceremony is the strangulation of cocks for every male partaking as a prediction to his year ahead. The extent of its struggle depicts the virility; the right leg flapping over the left leg is good posture of dominance. The innards upto the appendix of the cocks are extracted from anus to observe its fullness and balance in content of the appendices. The prosperity and balance of wealth are read from the appearances and sizes of the entrails. The cocks are then cooked separately each for each individual it was meant. The eating begins with the eldest

in a ceremony of the ritual of 'Chüsepe', which means casting of the liver. The liver is dished out and pieces of it clipped and cast onto ones feet; on the right foot then are eaten, and the meal and feasting begins in the house. The first three days, of the Sekrenyi, are observed with strict segregation of the males and females, the preparation and sharing of the food only with the same sex. On the third day at dusk, all males will ceremonially conclude in ritual of mouth wringing and ceasing consumption of all foodstuffs cooked separately. The ceremonial hearth is obliterated and all cooking appliances are set aside. This breaking of segregation is performed last by the eldest of the family, then the clan and the Khel. After this, the convergence of hearth and congregation of males and females commence and 'Thekra' from the fourth day of Sekrenyi.

The THEKRA HIE is the best part of the festival where the young people of the village sit together and sing traditional songs throughout the day. Jugs of rice-beer and plates of meat are placed before the participants. On the seventh day the young men go for hunting. The most important ceremony falls on the eighth day when the bridge-pulling or gate-pulling is performed or inter-village visits are exchanged. Until the close of the festival, no one goes to the fields and all field work cease during this season of feasting and song.

The young unmarried girls with closely shaven heads sit down with the bronzed youth and sing tunes of bygone ages, recreating a past where no care touched the human soul.



AO MOATSÜ MONG



The Aos observe Moatsü Mong after the sowing and the mother earth begin to show sign of fertility. It provides the Aos a period of recreation after the strenuous job which goes into clearing fields, burning jungles and sowing seeds, cleaning up the tsübu (Wells) and repairs and construction of houses by elders of the Putu Menden stretching over a week. The festival marked by vigorous songs and dances, merrymaking and fun, is now observed only for three days from 1 to 3 May.

The natural customary practice of the fore-fathers was competing in making the best rice- beer and rearing the best possible pigs and cows to be slaughtered during the festival. The womenfolk would weave the best of traditional garments and adorn themselves with all their fineries. They would join the menfolk in dancing, eating and drinking and composing warrior songs. Singing songs in praise of the lover and the village as a whole was done and the older menfolk would encourage the young people to be bold and heroic to defend and protect them from enemies as head-hunting was practised during the forefathers' time.

During this festival one of the symbolic celebrations is SANG-PANGTU where a big fire is lit and men and women sit around it. The women serve the best wine and meat and make merry. Forecast is made by the righteous men who live by the guidance of the Almighty to see whether good or evil days are awaiting the people.



TSÜNGREM MONG



The Aos have another festival called TSÜNGREM MONG. It is celebrated on the eve of harvest. However, nowadays the Aos celebrate this festival from 1 to 3 August.

Prior to the start of the festival the Village will declare the Süngküm (Village Gate) closed and free entry or exit is restricted and regulated for people who do not belong to that particular village.

Parties of young and old wearing their colourful costumes sing songs and perform dances to express their gratitude to the supreme Power for helping the crops to grow well. They provide the best offerings to the supreme Power for abundant blessings.

These festivals provide opportunities to the budding generation and village stalwart to demonstrate their intellectual skill and physical prowess.

A handful of young men hold the stage and tell amusing stories about their elders. Peals of laughter greet them and young and old jump in excitement.

These festivals are usually rounded off by a tug of war between men and women. Stories are galore that men lose, to please their womenfolk. But none has refuted the argument that attracted by charm of the opponents, absorbed by their sweet songs and regaled by their very presence men lose gracefully.

The only defence offered is that men have to pull uphill and the women downhill. Whatever the spirit behind this sport it is a treat to see and an honour to participate.

CHAKHESANG

SÜHKRÜHNYE/TSÜKHENYIE

The Chakhesang community celebrate seven festivals in a year as shown below:

Sühkrühnye	- 15 January
Ngunye	- 1 February
Tsakronye	- 1st Sunday of March
Tükhanye/Tsükhenyie-	6 May
Khuthonye	- 15 July
Turhinye	- 25 August
Thurinye/Khiluvatü	- 1 December

SÜHKRÜHNYE

SÜHKRÜHNYE is the most important festival and is celebrated on 15th January. During this festival the boys and girls are sanctified through religious ceremonies and rituals.

As a matter of fact, 'SÜHKRÜHNYE' covers eleven days starting from 'NYEDE' and within five days including 'NYEDE' necessary preparations are made for the rest of six days of festivity period.

The first day of the festivity period is known as 'CEDU'. On this very day animals are killed and every household sprinkles the blood of the killed animals on the main posts of the house. The first fetched out SÜHKRÜHNYE wine is offered to the deities in banana leaf tumblers and the cooked meat and rice-beer are offered to



the High-Priest and Priests of the village in expectation of blessings.

The second day is 'SÜHKRÜH' meant for men folk. 'SÜHKRÜH' signifies sanctification of young, innocent and unspoiled boys for this ritualistic ceremony. On this day every man is supposed to take a fresh-water bath and is forbidden to use water fetched by women. To perform this ritualistic ceremony (SÜHKRÜH) everything new is used including utensils and fireplace. The men folk go to the well early in the morning before any animal or bird touches or partakes of the water and takes a fresh-water-bath immediately after the first crow of cock which indicates the breaking of a new day, in order to sanctify themselves. Thereafter, the unpolluted water, considered to be holy, is brought home, fire is made out of the fire making method and unblemished cock is killed and cooked with the holy water and eat it to sanctify the boy/boys for the rest of their lives. Even when a new house is constructed 'SÜHKRÜH' is performed in order to get his house 'sanctified'. This whole process is called 'SÜHKRÜH' and 'NYE' is known as festival.

On this day the entire men folk go for community bird-trapping. The



collected birds are hung on a decorated tip of a tall bamboo as a symbol of SÜHKRÜHNYE. Different kinds of birds so caught are believed to foretell the fortunes for the forthcoming days of the year of the concerned individual.

The third day is called 'THÜNO NUSO' which is meant for women only. The mother performs this ceremonial ritual to sanctify her young innocent daughter/daughters. THÜNO NUSO is

much simpler than that of SÜHKRÜH; they prepare an unblemished young hen and eat it to sanctify themselves for their entire lives.

The fourth day is known as 'MÜTHI CELHÜ' where social feasts such as MÜLELHÜ or feast of social age groups, ZHOTHU MUZA (Feast of merit), etc. begins. This day is set aside from religious restrictions.

The fifth day is known as 'CEDÜ

ZHONGU' which means accomplishment of the festivals.

The sixth and the last day is known as 'THÜNYE MÜKRA'. Now that the festival's religious pursuits are relaxed, to mark the last of SÜHKRÜHNYE they continue feasting, dancing and singing throughout the day and night till dawn.

With the coming of Christianity, SÜHKRÜHNYE's religious and traditional ceremonies and rituals are no longer in practice in most of the villages.

However, SÜHKRÜHNYE is still celebrated with great significance and enthusiasm mostly by the Chokris in Phek District. During this traditional festival the indigenous games, folk songs, folk dance and sports fully occupy the festive period of six days starting from 15th January in keeping with the Christian spirit.

SÜHKRÜHNYE being a festival of sanctification, it is also marked as Children's Day. Water baptism can take place on this occasion. SÜHKRÜHNYE is a time of joyful celebration and so people do anticipate and yearn for the next to come.

TSÜKHENYIE

The TSÜKHENYIE festival is also an important festival for the Chakhesang. Earlier it was usually celebrated at the end of the 3rd lunar month of March. But now it is being observed on 6th May.

A new year of activities begins with the arrival of Spring. All sports and games and other youth activities which began after the harvest will



cease with the closing of this festival.

The festival lasts for four days. On the first morning, the village Priest will offer sacrifice with the first COCK that crowed that morning. Also, early that morning, all male folks (any male person who can use a spear) come to a designated Well (where only male folks are allowed) and purify themselves by bathing. This purification is important. Any acts not conforming to the set rites and ceremonies will be frowned at and will bring bad luck to the person or the family. In this bathing ceremony, they use only new gourd dipper (for hauling water) specially set aside for this day, and also put on new dresses. After the bath is performed they invoke the Almighty for strength, long life, good harvest and other blessings.

During this festival only the best (unblemished) of the male domestic animals will be slaughtered for consumption. No female livestock will be slaughtered. New wine will be prepared and used. The meat and other food prepared will be shared with the best friends (khwukhe or hachhi). Games and sports, music competition is organised among the different age groups after which feast is also organised among those different age groups.

During this festival, the married women go to their parents' house and prepare the best food for their husbands. In some villages, the male youths will declare the most beautiful girl of the village for the year.

At the end of the festival, all the traditional games and music articles will be

stored away (kehale-mekhi) and not used till the necessary rites are performed for their use in the next after-harvest festival. Even the plates which were used for presenting food to the spirits of the dead will be thrown till the next opening of such performances after the harvest (kehale-methsu). All leisure activities will be forbidden after this festival.

As the festival ends with the invocation of new blessings, all leisure activities will be left behind and concentrate only in the activities of the fields and other related activities. With it the sowing of paddy and planting of new seeds starts.

TSÜKHENYIE is a festival which celebrates the culmination of all leisure activities and a festival for welcoming a new fruitful life and year.

CHANG KUNDANG LEM NAKNYU LEM

According to the oral traditional story of the Chang tribe, it is said that they have emerged from a place known as "Changsangmongko" and settled at a place called 'CHANGSANG'. This was the first named village for Changs. There, at the centre of the village, they constructed a platform called "MULLANG SHON". It is a platform of progress and prosperity, which became the public court for deliberating all the major issues and cases which were heard and judgement delivered accordingly. Social issues like village administration, cultivation, festivals, worship, marriage systems, boundaries of the land, war and peace-making were also taken up in this platform. Decision delivered and judgements passed from this Mullang Shon became the final order.

The Changs usually observe six major festivals in a year, out of which three festivals namely (1) Poang Lem (2) Jeinyu Lem and (3) Kundang Lem were monitored by Haongang Clan. The remaining three festivals (1) Mu-

ong Lem (2) Naknyu Lem and (3) Monyu Lem were monitored by Ung Clan. In this way the tradition was maintained for generations and is followed till date.

The counting of the days and the fixation of the festivals were made in the following manner:

At the time of counting the days for fixation of festival, a chicken offering is made for appeasing the God. Each Clan while performing such a ritual has to

observe much sanctity. All festivals were fixed six days ahead except the KUNDANG LEM and NAKNYU LEM. The Kundang Lem was treated as the youngest and was fixed five days ahead, whereas the Naknyu Lem was treated with much awe and so was fixed just two days ahead. It should start on the dark-moon-day as the main festival day.

KUNDANG LEM

Kundang Lem is observed in the eighth month (April) of the Chang Calendar. This festival is observed for five days only. During the first three days, materials for construction of field huts in Jhum cultivated areas are collected and the area is tested on the fourth day. On the fifth day the relatives collectively go to the fields for construction of the huts. Thereafter, in the evening, feasting takes place at home after they return from the fields. The sixth day is also kept for feasting. The seventh day is observed as "AOLAAK JAANGBU" - planting or raising a kind of tree which bears bunch of sour fruits.

A daughter born within this month is named KUNDANG.

NAKNYU LEM

It was believed that in ancient days, during the forefather's



time, the entire world was enveloped with total darkness and day and night could not be differentiated. The darkness was so thick that people could not even go out for collection of firewood and water. They remained inside their homes for six days and by then they ran short of everything. In order to keep the fire burning inside homes, they burnt every available thing and when nothing was left they were compelled to burn even the horns of buffaloes, mithuns and cows that were hung in front of the houses.

On the seventh day the light came as usual. The people of the earth became extremely happy and by way of giving thanks to God this Naknyu Lem was held. During Naknyu Lem, no worship is performed but certain rules are strictly observed.

This festival is held on the eleventh month of the Chang Calendar which falls during July. The counting of the days and the announcing of the day is made by the Ungshedbou of Ung Clan. It should be a sudden announcement leav-

ing two days gap only. It starts on the last day of the moon, i.e. flour grinding day. Domestic animals are slaughtered, young and old spin tops, while music and laughter pervades from the womenfolk as they play the Kongkhin (Flute) made out of bamboo splits. Village streets are swept and houses and their surroundings are cleaned while firewood and water are stocked.

The second day, which is the dark-moon-day, is called 'Youjem'. On this day no one goes out of the village, even for drawing water. There are exchanges of gifts and food items amongst friends and relatives. Meat, wine and freshly packed bread are abundantly used. Games like Top spinning, tug-of-war, high jump, long jump, climbing of oiled pole and jumping and grabbing big lumps of well-cooked meat hung in rows along a bamboo rope are played. The womenfolk play on the Kongkhin. They too compete with each other with this instrument. Men and women, young and old, all engage themselves in feasting and merrymaking the whole



day but do not indulge in dancing.

On this occasion the footpath and all the houses are decorated by placing leaves; a kind of herbal shrub called 'NGOUNAAM' (Eiziholfziablanda). It is a must to plant this shrub in front of every house to ward off evil Spirits. The people, especially the children, put the leaves in their ear lobes so that no evil spirit will harm them.

In the evening, at the time of sun set, everybody remains inside the house. No man walks or roams outside. During this hour, in the front and back door of every house a seed called 'Vui lang' (Tape seeds) is buried inside paddy husks and burnt. Every member of the family remains still to hear the bursting sound of the seed. The tape seed explodes and if the sound and the exploding fragments bounce back towards the house, it is a bad omen and if the sound is good and the fragments bounce off it means good fortune. At this hour, 'Shambuli Muhgha', a God from heaven descends and visits every house and anyone found outside is harmed. The third day is the day of cleaning the village surroundings and approach roads. After the celebration of this festival other activities like cleaning of paths leading to the fields and neighbouring villages start. A daughter born in this month is named as Monyu.



KACHARI

BUSHU/BUSHO JIBA

BAISAGN

The Kacharis celebrate a number of festivals in a year. Amongst them the most important ones are (a) Bushu or Buhsu Jiba which is widely celebrated by the Dimasa Kacharis and (b) Baisagn-the spring festival of the Mech (Boro) Kacharis.

The Bushu is basically a post-harvest festival and usually falls in the month of January every year after all the hard earned grains of paddy are harvested, thrashed and stored in the granaries. Although the exact date and place of the festival is not generally fixed, people see to it that it is celebrated when there is moonlight in the nights because it is believed to be auspicious. In recent years, the people have decided to celebrate the festival in the last week of January. The other festival Baisagn, is celebrated in the second week of April coinciding with the New Year's Day of the Hindu Calendar. The mode of celebration of these two festivals being basically similar, the soul of these festivals is feasting and merrymaking with socio-cultural activities.

Bushu is celebrated either village-wise or sometimes a number of villages in contiguous areas together organise the festival. This promotes better unity and understanding amongst the people of all ages and social status. The food items of the festival include rice, mutton, chicken, pork, buffalo meat and rice-beer. The killing of these animals is known as 'Meesthaiba' which involves ritualistic performance before the animals are actually killed. Thereafter, the Village Priest prays on behalf of the people and places an offering of cooked rice and meat in the name of 'Sibairai', the Creator. This offering is known as 'Meedo-Karba'. This is followed by feast-



ing and merry making through songs and dances in which people of all ages and sex participate. Traditional sports called 'Rimin-nehlaiba' (consisting of two opponents trying to push each other holding a wooden bar by hands below the armpit) and 'Longthai-sugubar (lifting of heavy stones) etc. are played. Also competitions on cultural dances, folk songs, folk tales etc. are held during the festival. The dancing group also performs in honour of the village chief or any invited guest which is known as 'Bai-sengba'. The honoured guest offers some 'gifts' to the group as a gesture of acknowledgement of the honour.

Bushu is of three types:

1. Hangsho - which lasts for 7 days and 7 nights.
2. Surem - lasts for 3 days and 3 nights.
3. JidepJiba - lasts for 1 day and 1 night.

Among these the last one is generally observed in every village.

The origin of this festival dates back to the days of yore. From time immemorial each Dimasa village had a youth dormitory called 'Nohdrung'. All the male adults, particularly the youth lived in the dormitory and guarded the village from theft, enemy raids etc. Besides, this served as the learning centre of handicraft, music, dance and other forms of art. It was from this rural institution that gave rise to the idea of holding an annual feast after the paddy grains are harvested and stored. In the later years all the villages began to give religious importance to the feast and thus it became an important festival of the people. Till today this festival is celebrated with pomp and grandeur by the Dimasa Kacharis.



KHIAMNIUNGAN

MIU

TSOKUM

MIU

This festival is held in the first week of May every year. One of the main significances of this festival is to build cordial relations and to forge close-knit relations between the maternal uncle and his sister's off springs i.e., nephews and nieces. It is during this festival that the maternal uncle offers a very special prayer by invoking the supernatural Deity to grant good health, prosperous life and power over enemy to his nephews and nieces.

On this occasion, nieces and nephews visit their Maternal Uncle with gifts such as Clothes, Daos and other things besides food items like fermented brews, sticky rice and cooked or uncooked meat. This is also a very special occasion of FORGIVE and FORGET between Maternal Uncle and his nieces or nephews. But if the difference or dispute is beyond pardonable on the part of Maternal Uncle, he will not allow his nieces and nephews to visit his house for getting blessing. In the event of such happenings it is believed that the future life of his nieces and nephews will lay in shambles. But refusing to give blessing is a very rare case.



The significance of this festival is also to mark the seedling in the new field in which all the families of the village go to their fields and perform rituals and prayer by offering animal blood and flesh with other food stuff to their Deity. The people also pray to bless them with strong, handsome and beautiful children. They too pray for increase of animals and grains in the field and ask for prevention of crops from damage and visitation of plague over human and animals.

This festival is also known as dividing line between merrymaking season and the start of working season. From this festival onwards people stop performing folk songs and dances till the next joyous festival called 'TSOKUM' comes. The elders of the tribe and also the villages

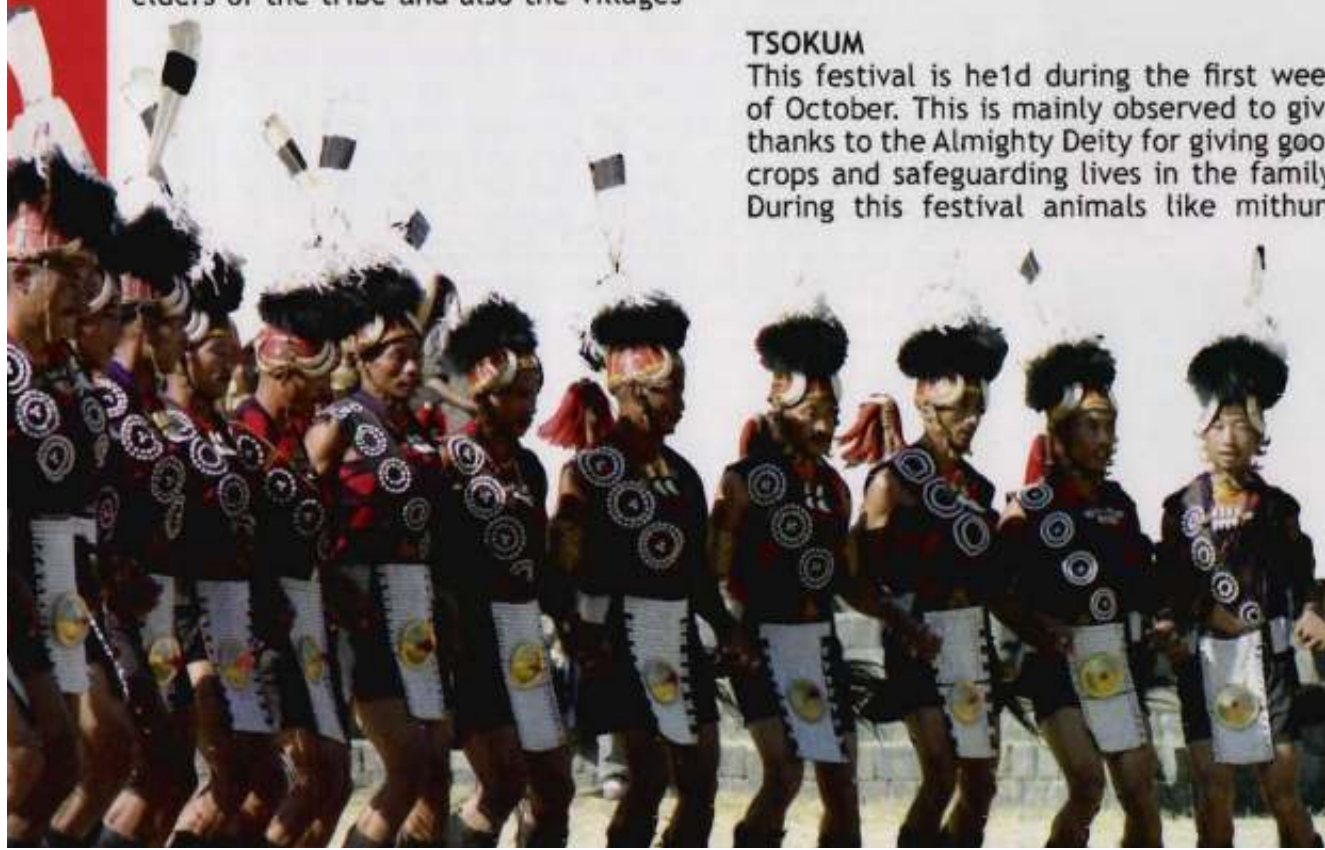
stop to enter into any treaty or hold any diplomatic welfare ties with any tribe and villages.

TSOKUM

This festival is held during the first week of October. This is mainly observed to give thanks to the Almighty Deity for giving good crops and safeguarding lives in the family. During this festival animals like mithun,

buffaloes, cows, pigs etc. are killed and sacrificed to appease their God. A portion of neck and limbs of the animals killed is then collected in the 'Morung' in the form of compulsory donation. The next day all the male folks of the village go to make or repair the roads and bridges between the villages and also the roads leading to their fields. On their return home from work, they partake of the food and brews that have been kept arranged by the villagers out of the meat, donated by those who killed animals during the festival.

One of the main significances of this festival is to grant permission of right to harvest and test the new crops. It is also during this time that each warrior of the village is in a liberty to display his hunted trophies by marking on the sharpened wood so that the people will come to know how many men he has killed during his life time.





KONYAK AOLEANG MONYU



The entire Konyak Community of Nagaland, observe Aoleang Monyu in the first week of Aoleang Lee (April) every year since time immemorial. Aoleang is observed after completion of sowing of seeds in the new fields and also to mark the end of the old year and to welcome the New Year beginning with spring when a riot of flowers in every hue start to bloom. It is a time to ask Almighty God for bountiful harvest of crops in that very year. The Aoleang Monyu is spread over six days. Each day has separate names and different significance: (1) Hoi Lai Yah Nyih (2) Yin Mok Pho Nyih (3) Yin Mok Shek Nyih (4) Lingnyu Nyih (5) Lingha Nyih and (6) Lingshan Nyih.

The first day is called "HOI LAI YAH NYIH" which means the preparation day of the Aoleang Monyu. On this day every arrangement is made for the Aoleang, like collection of firewood, banana leaves, vegetables etc. The rice-beer is also stored on this day. New clothes are woven and all necessary ornaments are prepared. On this day, the head of the family goes to the jhum field and sacrifices a chicken and sprinkles its hot blood on the "WUMJONG" altar with an invocation to the supreme Power for helping to grow crops well. By taking out the intestine, he predicts the future of his family. A leg of chicken with food is given to the neighbour of the new jhum field of that year. The food is carefully put into leaves and brought home and given to the family members after the prayers and ceremony. On that day also, a stage called "Aoleang WAKAM" is constructed in every "PANS" Morung for the dancing parties.

The second day is called "YIN MOK PHO NYIH". The domestic animals like buffaloes, mithuns, cows and pigs etc. have to be searched and roped in and tethered to a post to be killed during the Aoleang. In addition, young boys who have not yet joined in head-hunting were taken to the jungles for proxy head-hunting. On their return from the jungles, the next day young boys and girls have to be tattooed.

The third day is called "YIN MOK SHEK NYIH" which means the day for killing of animals. On this day, the green signal for the start of the festival is given by hoisting of a well-decorated bamboo flag "KOIP HON'G". Right after the hoisting, the young men start playing the log drum and go to respective houses to kill the animals. All the men gathered at the Morung will have the best chosen food and rice-beer before they go to their houses. The youngsters in the age group between 15 to 20 years

together kill some domestic animals and take the meat to their parents after they enjoy the day.

The fourth day is called "LINGNYU NYIH" which means the greatest day amongst the six days of Aoleang Monyu. On this day, men and women wear beautiful ornaments, and spend the whole day in community feasts, amusements, dances and merrymaking. Every house prepares the best feast and shares it with friends, relatives and neighbours. In the afternoon, all the men go to the main entrance gate of the village and have a feast there and also teach the young men the art of head-hunting. On their return from the place called "PE-JONG" which means 'entrance gate of the village', the men group themselves according to different Morungs and start dancing. Led by their leaders, they visit each other's Morung and express each other's good and bad qualities through songs.

The normal themes of the songs are victory over the enemy, asking Almighty God for bountiful crops etc. The dance party holds the enemy's head in their hands and displays it in front of the other Morungs their victory over their



enemies. In the evening, all the groups gather at a place called "SHAOCHONG" where the heads, legs and hands of enemies are kept. All the groups dance together and fire the guns. The old and young men who can shoot go to their own houses with loaded guns and fire in front of their houses to signify the "LINGNYU NYIH".

The fifth day is called "LINGHA NYIH". This day is observed by honouring each other; the old men are honoured by the young; young boys and their parents call on their married sisters and daughters respectively and offer them the best feasts; married daughters also visit their parents and offer grand feasts to their parents. On this day, families of the dead visit the

burial sites of their dead relatives and pay their last homage to the departed souls. A special feast is arranged on this day to renew the friendship made by parents and to make the friendship last for posterity amongst the descendants. They also visit permanently-declared household friends and exchange well-prepared food items. Permanently-declared household friendship continues for years together and the best portions of meat are exchanged between these households.

The sixth day is called "LINGSHAN NYIH" which means final day of the Aoleang Monyu. The day is spent in cleaning the village and houses which were made dirty during the Aoleang Days.



KUKI MIMKUUT



Mimkuut is the harvest festival of the Kukis. Kukis of Nagaland celebrate this festival on the 17th Kuki month of Tolbol (January) every year. The celebration lasts one week. Besides Mimkuut, Kukis celebrate Chapphou Kuut and Chavang Kuut as well as other smaller festivals.

It is believed that Mimkuut and other festivals came into being from the fact that, in order to appease Thilha (Demon). The people offered sacrifices and at the same time they also believed in the existence of a Supreme God whom they called "Chung Pathen" (Heavenly God). To get the blessings of such gods, the village Medicine man (Thempu) would sacrifice fowls to propitiate the spirit of the Demon-god by performing a series of rituals and prayer.

Tradition handed down orally from generation to generation says that the Kukis originated from subterranean underworld. They came out from this underworld in search of better land. They brought with them a number of cereals such as millet, tapioca, beans, yam etc. After they came over ground they found paddy and job's tears together, which were brought across a river called Twinanhem by a pair of wild rats on a bamboo sheath (Stipule) tucked in their mouths. Gradually they found Mithun from a place called Sisep, Pig from Bonbol and Fowl from Molkon which they domesticated. They would lavishly use these animals during such festivals. Thus the cultivation of Job's tears started. They found that it was more productive and yielded a better harvest.

The celebration of the completion of the year's harvest is done with the instruction and guidance of the village Medicine man (Thempu). On that day, for the entire village, the Medicine man would chant incantations to the God for the rich harvest and invoke the spirit for more abundant harvests in the coming years. The Mimkuut is essentially a wrap-up of the year-long toils of the land. The celebration is marked by feasting and drinking of Madhu (rice-beer). The youths engage themselves in various types of merrymaking, and fetching of water and firewood. Traditional sports like wrestling and other games and different kinds of amusements continue throughout the day and night. The older people sit by the fire-side singing traditional songs and the more enthusiastic ones dance and crack jokes from time to time.

A simple translation of one of the songs sung during the celebration of Mimkuut is as follows:

"Job's tear is harvested and gathered.

Time to wrap up the year's toil and relax;

Countless birds encircle the Job's tears field.

Suddenly one kite swoops down and away it carries off one;

Before a stone could be pelted at it".

SEQUENCE OF SEVEN DAYS MIMKUUT CELEBRATIONS:

The First Day of Mimkuut is exclusive for the Village Priest-Shaman. He would perform a series of rituals asking the god Thilha (demon) about the good or bad time for the celebration. Accordingly, he would announce the date and manner of celebration. The announcement is done early in the morning at cock-crow with the accompaniment of the sound of Gong and Drum. Everyone then starts the preparations mentally and physically.

On the Second Day early in the morning, the Village Shaman would perform rites and rituals at the Village Water Point and at other ominous places like biggest tree and biggest rock near the Village, believed to be the abode of god Thilha (demon), by sacrificing an unblemished white fowl.

The Third Day is devoted to cleaning of the village, footpath to Water Point, Khetis and neighbouring Villages. The womenfolk prepare food, Ju and other drinks. They would serve them to the men folk who are working.

On the Fourth Day, able-bodied men from each household and the youth from Phan (Dormitory) would go to the jungle to rope a Mithun. The Mithun is brought to the Village and tied to a post having three branches. No ordinary tree or post is used. On this day the womenfolk and youngsters bring millet, yam, pumpkin, job's tears and other kheti produces. They prepare country-baked cake and cook yam, pumpkin, tapioca etc. These are served to the men folk on arrival with the Mithun. The boys and girls fetch firewood, water and leaves required for the feast.

On the Fifth Day, the Mithun is ceremoniously killed after observing rites by the Shaman. The men folk cut and prepare the Mithun. The womenfolk continuously serve Madhu and other drinks. The boys and girls, wearing the best of clothes and other garments, sing and dance throughout the day. The whole day is devoted to merrymaking, jest, singing and dancing. New songs are taught and learned. The whole evening is spent in feasting and revelry. The main Kuut Feast is enjoyed together by one and all.

The Sixth Day is devoted to sports. Different age groups are formed and competition goes on throughout the day. The elder group, the younger group and the women group would vie for the coveted prize which is normally a lump of Mithun meat set aside. The Sports competed are mostly shot-put, race, pole climbing, wrestling, mithun jump, pole throw (pole used for pounding rice) etc. Other traditional games are also played. The women section also competes in various types of sports, whereas the aged and children would enjoy watching. The night is a get together night. A big camp-fire is lit and folk songs and folk dances, punctuated by jokes continue throughout the night.

The Seventh Day - the last day, is the coming together of mainly family members and neighbours. Married daughters with husband and children would visit their parents, brothers and sisters and exchange gifts. They will be reciprocated and sent back after being entertained.

The Shaman would announce the closing of the celebration after performing rites and rituals in the same manner by again releasing a spotless white fowl to please Thilha god (demon). And with a good omen for the village (prosperity and health), he would announce the closure of the celebration officially.

The village will then begin the year's activity.



LOTHA

TOKHU EMONG



The Tokhu Emong is the harvest festival of the Lothas. With the harvest done and the granaries full, the people now take a respite from the toils and sweat and settle down to enjoy the fruits of one's hard labour.

Tokhu Emong is celebrated in the 1st week of November every year and it stretches over to 9 days. Earlier, no particular date was fixed. However, in order to carve unity and uniformity among the ranges, Wokha elders decided to celebrate it on a fixed date. Following this, Tokhu Emong is celebrated on November 7, every year.

During this festival, the entire Village takes part in the celebration. Every household have food and drinks prepared for the feast. Friends, families, neighbours are invited to each other's house and this continues for 9 days. The main features of the feast are community songs, dances, feast, fun and frolic. Everyone attires themselves in their beautiful traditional dresses and costumes according to their social status. There is an air of gaiety and light heartedness everywhere. Gifts of food and drinks are exchanged during the Festival. Among friends, the number of cooked meat given denotes the depth of friendship and ties. For example, if one man offers 12 pieces of meat to his friend, it shows that he treasures his friendship, if it is reciprocated, and he is also offered 12 pieces of meat, it means that the friendship is valued from both sides.

In this case, should any disaster or misfortune strike either one of them, both of them will stand by each other no matter what. Thus a friendship of loyalty and fidelity was pledged. In case of mere acquaintances or platonic ones, only 6 pieces of meat are exchanged.

It is the Priest who gives the signal for the start of the festival. He accompanied by Aides (Yinga) along with baskets goes round the village collecting unhusked rice from every home. When offering is made, the Priest takes a handful of it, showers prayers and it is only after this that he puts the contribution in his basket. The belief was that the more generous the contribution, the more yield one would get during harvest but if anyone refuses to contribute, he would lead a pauper's life. So, none would dare to refuse contribution for fear of that. A portion of the collection is used to buy a pig and the rest is used for making rice-beer. The pig is killed and cut and is distributed to the contributors. This ritual is considered as a contributing factor to general prosperity.

Before the commencement of the festival, if any stranger happens to be in the village, he gets two options; to leave the village (past beyond the village gate) before sunset or to stay there in the village until the festival is over. He however, enjoys the warm hospitality of the villagers. This festival also provides the occasion to offer prayers for the departed souls. The family who lost any member during the year performs his/her last rites. The people remain in the village till the last rites are performed.

Young boys and girls engaged during the year are happily married after Tokhu. It is also the time for renovating the Village gate, cleaning wells and repairing houses.

Tokhu Emong is also a festival of thanksgiving, sharing and reconciliation but the most beautiful aspect of this festival is that past rancours are forgiven, new ties are formed and bonds of closer intimacy are formed.

Wild cries of joy-echo over the green hills and narrow valleys. One feels as if the stones have been given tongue to say 'Oh farmers, tender your fields with love and care'.



PHOM

MONYU

MOHA

BONGVUM

PAANGMO

The Phoms have four major festivals each having unique significance. They are MONYU, MOHA, BONGVUM and PAANGMO.

MONYU

Monyu, the most popular and biggest festival falls in the month of April every year soon after the sowing season. The festival is celebrated for six days beginning from 1st to 6th April every year. It also marks the end of winter and the beginning of summer or monsoon. A day or two prior to the festival the green signal of the dawn of festival is made by beating log drums with a distinct tune synchronised purposely for the event, traditionally named "LAN NYANGSHEM".

The Priests or the village elders perform a ritual and predict what the forthcoming festival would be- a blessing or a curse. In case the prediction shows a sign of danger, the villagers are warned to be careful during the festivity. Monyu is the time to bid farewell to the on going year and



herald the dawn of the New Year. It is also the time of prayers and dedication for the sprouting crops that are already sowed. The main feature of the Monyu is the occasion when the male members of the family show love and renewal of affectionate feelings towards their married daughters or sisters by presenting them the purest of the rice-beer and specially prepared food. Such conduct reflects the general status of the Phom women that "they are respected and honoured". Planning and decision relating to community welfare to be implemented throughout the year are also decided during the festival.

The six day long festival follows a circle of ritual and activities which may be categorised day-wise as the following:

The first day is the day for overall preparation. Besides preparing of domestic chores, every household goes to collect wrapping leaves and bamboos, which is called "SHONG-TEN-LAIPHEN".

The second day is for compulsory brewing of all kinds of rice-beer.

The third day is meant for the varying age-group from oldest down to the youngest. They gather together and feast amidst dancing and merrymaking. Thus the day is named "Aiha Okshok".

The fourth day is coined as "Chingi Okshok" which practically means general festivity and also the day of arrival of guests from neighbouring

villages.

On the fifth day, parties of young and old men and women wear their respective colourful costumes, keep themselves busy, eating, drinking, dancing, inviting friends, kith and kin ... making each moment of the day memorable and joyous, which is called "Paangmohah".

The sixth day and the last day is another remarkable day. The elderly people feast by exchanging jug of purest rice-beer and meat. The younger ones both boys and girls stroll out to the outskirts of the village and feast together. The most common game played during the last day of the festival is "Swing" made out of wild rope locally called "SHAKOK VU". It is to be noted that the whole process is carried in a ritualistic manner.

MOHA

Moha is the one day festival in the month of May to pray for the better growing of seeds/plants. The new crop plants of various kind are taken to village by the elders or the Priests of the village and put in a ritual place or an altar called "Moidu" invoking blessing by Priests called "Ngongpathu" for the better growth of the seeds.

BONGVUM

The Bongvum festival generally falls in the month of October every year after the major harvest and is observed only for a day. This festival may be best interpreted as the festi-

val of Thanksgiving to the unseen Almighty God for whatever has yielded during the preceding months. On this occasion, no other animal but chicken is killed and its hot blood sprinkled against the outer surface of the bamboo pail for storing grains.

The other ritual associated with the Bongvum festival is the preparation of sticky rice. The meat is cooked with prawns and crabs mixed with dried bamboo shoots and ginger. This prepared food is put into the leaves carefully and tied to the main posts of the house. Both these rituals are performed as a token of giving thanks to the unseen Almighty for the blessing harvest. Also predicting the future of the family by taking out the chicken's intestine performed by the father who is the head of the family forms another part of ritual during the festival.

PAANGMO

The festival called Paangmo is another important event of the Phoms. It is celebrated in the month of November which stretches over three days. At this festival, the whole surrounding of the village is cleaned. Wells and homes are repaired and decorated. Every household and varying age-group brew special rice-beer called "YU" and kill animals. Parents present gifts commonly meat and prepared food to their daughters already married (DOIDAIBU YUKHA) who also reciprocate in the like manner with ardent "Love and Respect".



POCHURY YEMSHE

October is the month of festivity which every Pochury anxiously awaits, every year to celebrate their greatest festival Yemshe. Yemshe is the festival of welcoming the new harvest and blessing. All the Pochuries, young and old, rich and poor, celebrate this festival with great pomp and gaiety anticipating a good harvest which they deserve after a year's hard labour under scorching sun and merciless rain. No one is allowed to harvest until the whole period of festival is over.

Originally, the festival commenced from the last part of September with different categories of observances till the final day which falls in the first week of October every year. Yemshe is observed only on the 5th October keeping in tune with the final days of the traditional observance of the festival.

When the time approaches, the Village Spokesman announces the arrival of Yemshe. The very next day the festivities begin with the observance of the first part of rituals.

Preparations are made. The Youth of the Village clean the whole village, footpaths, wells and fields and construct

Basket making-cum-Resting Places. After that the head of the family performs all rituals. Necessary materials used in rituals are fastened to the main post of the front house. Engaged couples will renew their relationship with exchange of food or wine and eat together. Many young couples come to know each other and get engaged during this period. As such, this festival is important and enjoyable particularly to young people and farmers in general. This is known as the Big Yemshe.

The small Yemshe, like big Yemshe, is also celebrated with rituals. For sanctification of the House, a ritual feast has to be hosted by a rich family. All the villagers observe the period with great solemnity till the end of the period.

The family who host the Sanctification Feast has to fulfill the following conditions before the feast day:

1. The family who host the Sanctification Feast will have to provide wine to all families of the village.
2. The family will have to host a dance party of his (head of the family) age-group, men and women in the village and in Khel wise as well. Feast will be given to the dancers, and meat will be distributed to all his age-group friends.
3. Cutting of Bamboo Mugs will be held twice. All the host's clansmen/nephews will make new bamboo mugs. They will take wine from these mugs which will be kept with the host. Also the old mugs will be collected from every house and kept in the host's family for drinking wine.

4. Only paddy rice will be arranged (not millet, maize etc.) and distribute it to all the houses by the host and later the cooked rice will be again collected and redistributed to all the families in the village.

5. All the clansmen will take one Mithun and a Chicken to a river on the way to the Jhum field and feast. They will construct a Resting Shed there for the host of the Sanctification Feast. It is believed that in the second life, those who have not hosted the Sanctification Feast can not sigh with a deep breath as 'ewhi', but can only say 'Korowhi' and those who have not performed the Resting Shed Feast they can only say 'owhi'.

6. For reserving of frogs, one axe each for three rivers is given to the villagers, as frogs in these three rivers are reserved. This will be followed by giving out a big feast to all the village elders. After that it will be announced in the village that frogs are reserved by the host of Sanctification or Yemshe Festival and no other should go to these rivers to catch it.

7. After wine and food is arranged, the master of the festival will ask his villagers to fetch him pine-wood and he will give a big feast to his villagers. Men will

take 6 pieces of meat while women will take only 5 pieces.

8. All the clansmen will carry well-prepared food and wine and go to the reserved rivers and make bridges/ladders for frog catchers to enable them to go to any part of the river. At the same time, they shall eat and drink and enjoy themselves. This is a part of many games they play.

9. A chicken will be kept in a cage on a selected tree on the way to the field. After that a selected group will go to that spot with dried frogs where chicken was kept and have a feast there. Every household has to perform this. Even the poorest family has to perform this ritual by roasting brinjal as the substitute of frogs and chicken.

10. It is traditionally believed that the most fertile lands were under the control of devils. Sacrificial acts also therefore have to be performed according to the fertility of the land. For the most fertile land a Mithun has to be sacrificed, then a pig and for the less fertile land a chicken has to be sacrificed in the field. Two big gourds of wine will be carried, one for halfway and the other for sacrificial consumption. While coming back from their field a particular group will not mingle with another

group. So, a Mithun group, Pig group and Chicken group shall come back separately. Likewise, wine also will be taken separately.

After all the arrangements like collection of green vegetables, meat etc. and performances of rituals are completed, the master will select six supervisors; two for washing ginger, four to supervise the butchers for preparation of the feast for the whole village. All young and old will come and help the host in preparation of the feast. In this feast, Mithun, Pigs and Chicken will be slaughtered. If there is no Mithun three pigs will substitute a Mithun. Womenfolk will pound rice and cook, while the men folk will be busy for cutting of the meat, and other difficult jobs. By sundown, all villagers, from youngest to the oldest, will come together to attend the great feast.

Few quantities of all sorts of foodstuff and rice grains shall be shared and offered to the dead souls as farewell gifts and greetings of the Yemshe Feast.

The last day of the feast will be impressively observed as the Feast Cleansing Day. All will remain at home and no one will do anything, neither goes on journey nor anywhere. From the very next day all types of harvest and collection of house construction materials etc. will begin as the happiest moment for the farmers has come with the blessings of God.

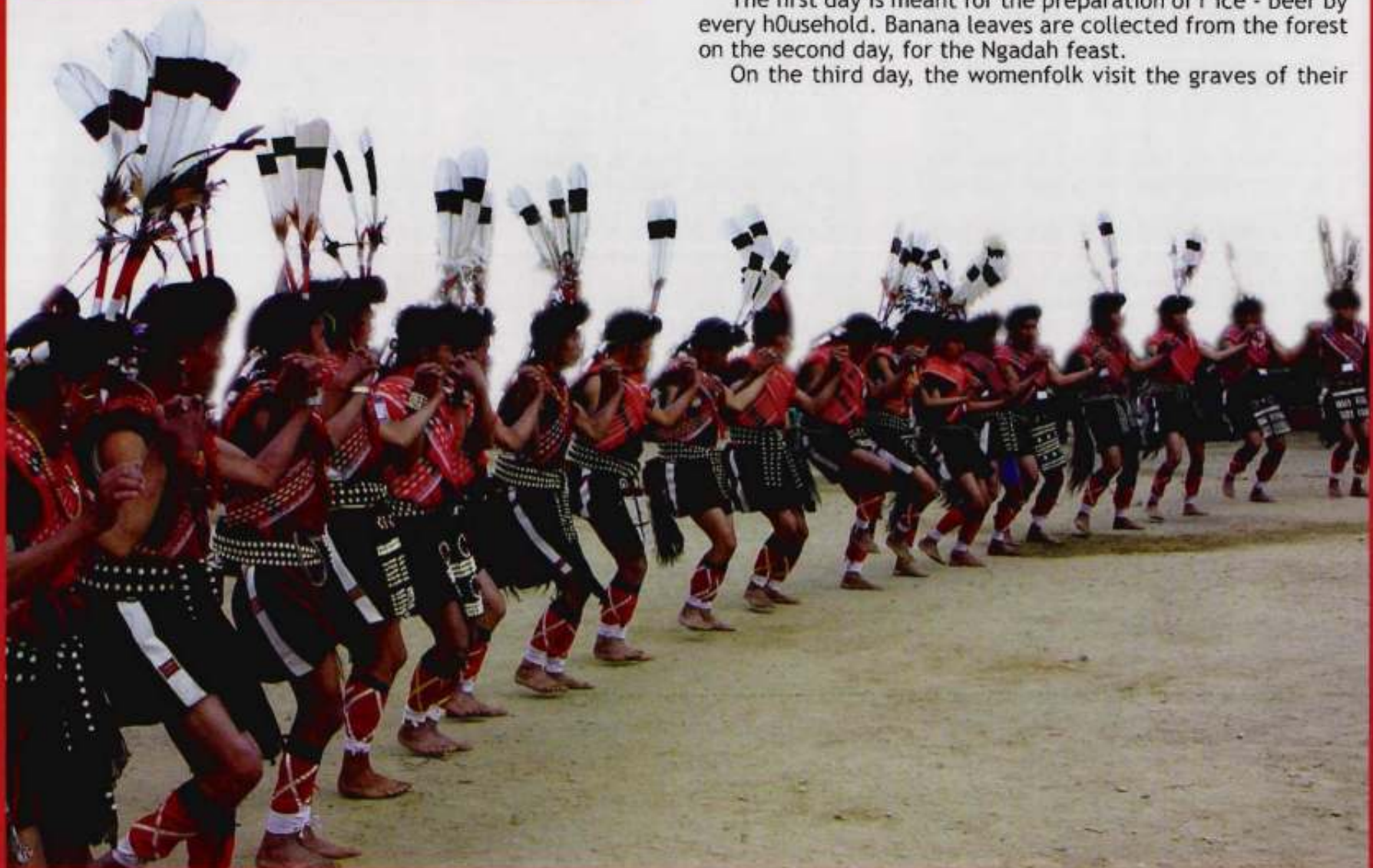


RENGMA NGADAH

The Rengmas celebrate eight days of Ngadah festival towards the end of November, just after harvest. It is the festival of thanksgiving, merrymaking and rejoicing. This festival also marks the end of the agricultural year. The Village High Priest (PHENSENGU) announces the date of commencement of the festival at the top of his voice, so that the villagers can prepare themselves for the festival.

The first day is meant for the preparation of rice - beer by every household. Banana leaves are collected from the forest on the second day, for the Ngadah feast.

On the third day, the womenfolk visit the graves of their



relatives and place rice-beer wrapped in banana leaves, on the graves. This is a symbolic presentation of offerings to the dead spirit. It was believed that the souls of the dead visit their near and dear ones once in a year during Ngadah festival. Therefore, the festival is observed in remembrance of the departed souls, besides cleaning and repairing the graves. This is the day the rice-beer prepared for the festival is tasted by the eldest member of the house, which is followed by the others drinking from it.

On the fourth day, all male members gather together at their respective khel morungs known as "RENSI", early in the morning, with their own rice-beer and meat and have the meal there. It is taboo for womenfolk to take part in the

morning feast. At mid-day, all male members in their ceremonial and warrior fineries go round the village, followed by women with rice-beer in their mugs and bitter gourd containers, to offer them drinks.

The fifth day again witnesses all the male members going in procession, visiting all the houses, singing songs relating to 'NGADAH' festival. Each household has to give something as a token of their appreciation, when the procession visits them.

On the sixth day, all the members of the village visit the house of one another irrespective of khel or clan, eat and drink with one and all in every house without any restriction or hesitation.

On the seventh day, everybody goes to

the forest for collection of firewood, banana leaves and vegetables for the feast. A grand feast is arranged on the eighth day, where the whole village population feast on whatever was collected on the fifth day procession. After this feast, it is believed that the souls of those who died that very year, leaves the village and go to the land of the dead. On this day three rites are performed. One is the peace agreement with fire in order to avoid fire accident in the village. The second agreement is made with rats, so that they do not destroy crops or household goods. The third rite is performed to expel evil spirits from all households and the village. This ends the eight long day celebration of the 'NGADAH' festival of the Rengmas.



SANGTAM AMONGMONG

The Sangtams have about 12 festivals spreading over the Calendar Year including some special functions. Except certain gennas, all the festivals are concerned with food production, blessings and prosperity. AMONGMONG is one of the most important festivals of the Sangtams. The predominant theme of the festival is the worship of the God of the house and the three cooking stones in the fire place. The festival is observed in the first week of September every year.

After toiling for several months during the year and when the crops are ripe for harvest, the green signal to start the celebration of Amongmong festival is given by the Village Priest called "BEBURU" with due prayers and rites. At the

dead of the night the Priest will announce/proclaim the "ZANGNYUO MONGMONG NUNG EH-LEHE". The next morning another Priest will repeat the proclamation. Then the villagers will begin preparations for the festival by accumulating food stuff, firewood and special wine like Rohi and Madhu. The announcement made in the morning is taken as the correct information. The proxy announcement made at dead of the night denotes the separation of the spirit of the dead from the living during Amongmong festival. Also nobody would like to inherit the sins of the dead and any kind of sinful deeds. Thus throughout Amongmong festival, a line is drawn between the dead and the living.

Amongmong festival, which means togetherness forever, is very cautiously observed every year and stretches over six days. The object is to have a good harvest, food grains for which the villagers have toiled for throughout the whole year. The figure 'SIX' also bears a great significance among the forefathers as the figure 'Seven' was among the Hebrews. For example, when a man brings an enemy's head from war, he keeps himself undefiled and observes genna for six days. A male baby is christened on the sixth day. If a man dies, the deceased's family would mourn for six days.

Each day of the festival has got its own significance. Thus the first day, that is September 1, is called 'SINGKITHSA'. This day is marked by the closing of all transactions relating to purchase of domestic animals like Pigs, Cows, Mithuns, and roping them, besides preparing and collecting of foodstuff. The villagers also engage themselves in collection of firewood and vegetables and millets from the old fields.

While collection of firewood and water continues on the second day, the roped domestic animals are also killed. After setting



aside some portions for the feast, the meat is distributed amongst the team members of the groups called ATIRŪ and AKHINGRŪ. These male and female groups are organised according to the age group primarily for working together in the fields of every member of the team in turn. During Amongmong festival, special meals are arranged in the house of the treasurer of the respective groups/teams. On the other hand, the meat of animals killed by rich individuals is generally shared among relatives, neighbours and friends. The day is called 'SINGKITHSA'.

The third day is 'MŪSŪYANGTAP' - day of worshipping the 3 oven stones by one and all. In the early morning of the third day of celebration, the oldest woman of the household performs the ritual by placing sticky rice shaped into balls on the top of the 3 stones and pouring little wine upon these stones believing that the God (LIJABA) is represented by these stones. Until the ritual is completed, nobody in the house is allowed to taste food, and even animals are not fed. This performance normally takes a short time only. But great care is taken during the ritual lest it is eaten up by some domestic animals which is believed to be the sign of some misfortune or wrath of the devil.

On these three days, villagers will neither go to the fields nor outside the village as according to the belief, these actions would bring calamities and also damage the crops. Again at dawn, the Priest would go to the village well and first draw water very carefully. This will be followed by other people waiting there. But each one of them must



cover his or her head with green leaves lest he/she is attacked by cholera. The day is celebrated with children playing among themselves with gay dresses and the young people in their festive best gather in the dormitory and exchange songs of bravery. In course of time, they are usually joined by their girl friends. The whole day is devoted to drinking of rice-beer, dancing, tug of war and other merrymaking activities.

The fourth day is called KIKHA-LANGPI. The male population of the village gives a face-lift to the village. Here again, the Priest will first start clearing the weeds which is followed by all other villagers. Path leading to the fields, inter-village roads, village wells and springs are cleaned. On returning home, every grown-up male member will contribute meat and wine and feast together in the house of the Village Priest. There they re-affirm mutual friendships. In short, it is a day of special gathering and feasting. The wife of the house puts chillies, ginger and cot-

ton in green leaves called 'TSIDONG' and put them in the field or outside the village, as according to the belief these actions would ward off calamities and prevent damage of crops.

The fifth day is called "SHIL-ANG WUBA NYUMONG". On this day, the villagers pay visits to relatives, friends and neighbouring villages. Also sharing of meals, drinks and exchange of gifts in the form of meat take place.

The last day of the festival is called "AKATISINGKITHSA". From this day harvesting starts. On successful completion of the six-day celebration of Amongmong the Sangtam tribe believe that their God is well pleased and hope for blessing from him to have rich harvest and good health in the family.

SUMI AHUNA TULUNI

Ahuna is a traditional post-harvest festival of the Sumis. It signifies the celebration of the season's harvest in thanksgiving, while invoking the spirits for good fortune in the New Year. On this occasion, the entire community prepares, and feasts on the first meal of rice - drawn from the season's harvest - cooked in bamboo segments. The receptacles for cooking or serving on this occasion, are freshly made, carved or cut, from indigenously available resources - prolific and abundant in the countryside.

TULUNI

Tuluni is a festival of great significance. This festival is marked with feasts as the occasion occurs in the bountiful season of the year. Drinking rice-beer indispensably forms a part of the feast. Rice-beer is served in a goblet made with the leaf of plantain. This wine is called TULUNI. Therefore, consumption of the wine is called "TULUNI". Tuluni is also called "ANNI" the word of which denotes the season of plentiful crops. This mid-year (July) festival is the greatest and most fervent moment



for the Sumi Community of Nagaland.

During this festival, the betrothed exchange basketful of gifts with meals. The Fiance is invited to a grand dinner at the Fiancee's residence. Even siblings of the families of both the bride and groom exchange dinner and packed food and meat.

It is a time of joy even for the baby-sitters. On this day they are fed generously with food and meat. Cultivators usually work in groups and especially for Anni (Festival) they keep budget with which either pigs or cows are procured and the butchered animals are shared amongst the members. The reserved meat is used for group feast. In the midst of the feast group leaders get extra offer of meat by way of feeding them by others. Each working group consists of 20 to 30 in number which includes several women too. The new recruits are also made to add to the group at this grand feast.

The betrothed are settled at this period. The fervour of feast is synchronised with a chain of folk songs and ballads.

Sumis have two different clan heads, Swu (Sumi) and Tuku (Tukumi). By virtue of two separate clans the gennas and rituals differ between Sumi and Tukumi. Among all other festivals and gennas Sumis in general accept the festival of Tuluni as the most grand and important one.



YIMCHUNGRÜ

METUMNIU

TSUNGKAMNIU

METUMNIU

The Yimchungrüs celebrate Metumniu Festival from 4th to 8th of August every year after the harvest of millet. This festival is connected with the prayers for the souls of the departed ones. It is a sentimental ceremony for those dear ones who left for their heavenly abode during the year. An elder known as "KHEAMPURU", after due prayers, inaugurates the festival. The festival is spread over five days and has separate names for the day's viz., SHITO, ZHIHTO, ZUMTO, KHEHRESUK and SHERESUK.

On the first day, the village is cleaned by community efforts, the damaged roads and homes by heavy rains are repaired. On the second day, the path leading to the field is put in right shape; land slides which are very common during heavy rains are cleaned. Unwieldy growths are also cut. On the third day, inter-village roads are taken up. On the fourth day,





water points and springs are cleaned giving a new look to the village and its surrounding. The villagers enjoy their millet. Friends are invited, gifts are exchanged. They dance in their finest and go round the village to charm young and old.

As the festival has a strong agricultural base, the agricultural implements are sharpened and worshipped the three important things such as Spade, Dao and Hoe.

During Metumniu festival, the young boys and girls get engaged and those already betrothed exchange presents for new born babies. Special prayers are held and offerings are made. If the child happens to be male, the parents offer six pieces of meat to the Priest and if the child happens to be female, parents offer five pieces of meat. This signifies that the male has six souls and female five.

TSUNGKAMNIU

The Tsungkamniu, another important festival of the Yimchungüs falls in the month of January, from 14th to 16th every year. This festival is observed to signify the year long life and harvest achieved during the year long hard works in the field.

During this festival the young men and women of the village gather together and go round dancing to every house of the village in merriment. In turn every household provides meat, wine and rice cooked and kept ready for them. This procession would go round the entire village and complete within stipulated time. The first day of the morning is spent for cleaning the village and thereafter eating, drinking and dancing starts.



ZELIANG

MILEINGI / LANSIMNGI
CHEGA GADI

MILEINGI

The Mileingi/Hega festival of the Zeme people, inhabiting Peren District of Nagaland, NC Hills of Assam and Senapati District of Manipur, is one of the most important festivals. This festival is celebrated every year during the month of February; where people attired in their traditional costume; celebrate the age old customs and traditions of our fore fathers with great enthusiasm.

Just days before the festival starts,

it is a tradition for the young girls to weave or make some ornaments and discreetly give it to the young boy whom they have taken a liking to, for them to wear it with their traditional costumes for the festival. It is a pride for the boy who receives most such gifts.

Announcement of the start of the festival: The chief priest of the village an-





nounces the start of the festival in the morning of the first day and:

- calls for all families to prepare food for the celebration;
- calls all womenfolk to stop weaving
- reminds all for abstinence

When this decree is being announced, all menfolk shall no longer lie in bed but get up and prepare themselves for the celebration.

FIRST DAY

Hengi Zau: Rice beer is prepared on the 1st day, which is later mixed with the Nrizau and served during the festival.

Mangkang/Ntim: The womenfolk also prepare special dishes on this day

Leidi: In the evening the menfolk goes to the well for fetching water for their exclusive use. At the well they cry out "Auwi" and say that they are drawing the water for Leidi. With this water they prepare their own food, as it is taboo for men and women to share food till the festival is over (i.e upto Zausa).

Milei: The traditional way of making fire is performed at the morung by the person selected by the clan. After the fire is lit, every household of the clan takes it to their re-

spective hearths and start their own fireplace and prepare food. After meal, the boys takes a stump of the burning fire back to the morung, and at the entrance shout out, "Auwi, the festival- of bravery, of abundance food & drinks, of good population, of great warriors, may this be a blessing for me, and I shall reap the best harvest - thus saying throws the fire into the hearth.

The special food is shared among family members. The boys and girls who are to be married that year has to have meal in their respective in-laws' house (leidi) and some curry is packed and given to them, which they take it to their morungs and releiki (girls' dormitory) to share it with their friends. Marriages takes place on a single day for that particular year, which, held on the 5th day after Zausa.

SECOND DAY

Rwadi: After the morning meal, the village gate is also pulled on this day, only after blessing is invoked by an elder, saying- "Auwi, let this gate be smoothly pulled, let the year have a good harvest and many more children born, let this gate be a blessing for the people - thus with Nrwa, lifts and pulls it to the place and erects it. Then all the young men / boys, clad in their best attires, compete in indigenous games & sports like, wrestling, long jump, high jump, shot put, leaping, etc. After which the rest of the day is spent in giving finishing touches to the costumes for the dances of the following day.

THIRD DAY

Bamsak/Mipui nngngwa: Women go to

their parents' house with their daughters and small sons (who have not come of age to sleep in the morung) to enjoy special food her mother had prepared for her and her children. All members of the bride's releiki gather and go to the house of the bridegroom and sing songs asking the mother of the groom to give them salt, which was held very dear in the olden days. The same is consumed during the 5 days observed as **Hemeu Ram** in honour of the brides. In the evening the men, boys and girls along with the brides perform dances called **Nta**.

FOURTH DAY

Cingpwa/Mipei nngwa: The youths go to the jungles to collect firewood for the morungs. The hosts of the morungs provide one **Hepop** of special rice beer which the young members of the morung drink it after they fetch the firewood. One or two big logs are brought to the village and placed in the ground where dances are performed, and at the end of the day's dances, the young boys and girls grapple for the log, and the winner will take it away either to the morung or dormitory. However, it is always the girls who win this competition and the boys help them carry it to the girls' dormitory.

They also play a game called **Nhiangplün**, where men/boys and girls stand in groups and sing songs. Agile young men/boys hold hands together and jump towards the girls and try to run back before the girls can lay their hands on them. If the men/boys misbehave, the women-folk identify them and help the girls to punish those persons. A game known as **hebalia**, where the girls holding hands together in groups of two, put across their hands upto the wrists under a curtain, and usually the eligible bachelors try to guess whose hands it was, and is likely to mention the name of the one he is interested in, or the name of the girl his clansmen hold in high esteem. Young men perform war dance called **Reta**, with shield (**hegumgeu**) and spear.



FIFTH DAY

Zausa: The final day is spent eating, drinking and dancing. In the evening the menfolk perform **Zausa** - throwing their cup (prepared from the sheath of bamboo) up in between the horns of mithuns skulls hung above the entrance of the morung. It is believed that if a thrower succeeds in the first

attempt, he is likely to reap a good harvest that year; and for the bachelors it is believed that a successful thrower will marry a girl of his choice the next year. The festival ends on the fifth day for all others except for the house owners of the princely clans, who continue observing for the sixth day called **Hegwangnim**.

COSTUMES

Men

1. Zwakdi & Rakdi (head gear)
2. Nzai nli (earring)
3. Langcim & Lopie
4. Tangkui peu, Teila, Bungtie (necklace)
5. Hepwata, Mpumta
6. Zakreu
7. Heceuni, Kangha
8. Tang & Dapi

Women

1. Hekün geu
2. Heceu nli
3. Teiba
4. Teila
5. Taseu, Tadi, Takwa & Tapet
6. Heceu tangza
7. Giakli, Lisangtwak nkang

LANGSIMNGI

The most popular festival of the Zeliangs - 'Langsimgi' is celebrated during the last part of October or early part of November very year with great pomp and gaiety. In 1965, the then Deputy Commissioner of Kohima, S.C. Dev graced the festival celebrations at Benreu village as chief guest. Thereafter, the government of Nagaland declared the 31st October as a Restricted Holiday on account of this festival.

Langsimnyi or 'Kwaknwa', is a festival for rekindling of the relationship between parents and their married daughters, between brothers and sisters that are each married and with families of their own, between the married niece and her maternal uncle who was chosen to be the 'special' uncle when the girl was betrothed. On this day the families of parents/brothers/maternal uncles prepare their best food and send it to the family of their daughter/sister/niece, which is called 'kwakpwa'. The woman's family reciprocates by sending their best food and rice beer to the house of her parents brothers/uncle called 'het-amram'.

In some villages the second day is observed by gathering in packs of different age groups, both young and old, for get-together or picnic known as 'halla'. Most notable is the gathering of 'hemeupuime' or brides-to-be, for the last time before they each become a woman. On this day womenfolk can enjoy the company of their own friends as the menfolk are left behind to attend to the household chores for the day.

In the event that death had occurred in a household that year, or any domestic animal had given birth the previous night, all members of such households are debarred not only from taking part in the competition but also from mingling with others during such festivities and competitions.

In most of the villages, it is considered that the day belongs to the men and young boys. In order to prepare

for the games and sports during this festival, men and young boys gather in groups of Khels or Clans and take turns to feed the members, giving out the best they could afford, so that fresh meat or good food is available for some time and also to give equal opportunity to all to eat and to practice etc. The entire household solemnly observes abstinence or 'mareu' in order that no harm befalls the men or boys when they compete in various games and sports.



CHEGA GADI

Chega Gadi is another important and popular Festival of the Zeliang people. The genesis of this festival marks the people's belief that on this day the Almighty shows blessings and brings good harvest and health. However, the date for the celebration often differs between communities and villages which usually is fixed according to their convenience. The Liangmai Community celebrates this festival usually in the last part of the Chegahiu i.e., October.

Earlier, the forefathers observed this festival for duration of 4-5 days. However, the duration is reduced to even 3 to 4 days in times of any casualty. The people wait anxiously even at midnight to see the first new moon, which is believed to be a boon and bring blessings of God. After the appearance of the moon, the Priest of the village (Singkupi) makes an announcement and the people begin necessary preparation such as dresses, attirements, food and drinks. After all the preparations are over, the Priest makes another announcement as a prelude to the Festival. The next morning, the youth of the Village, men folk and womenfolk go to the jungle to cut firewood and bring them to their respective Morungs. At noon the men folk go to make new cups and plates out of bamboo to be used only in the festival. In the evening, the men folk again will go to draw water to be used in the Morung. From this

day onwards a separate fire place will be made for men folk usually at a room called AKHANGKI and cooking is separated from the womenfolk of the family. At sunset all the men folk along with 2 (two) High Priests will go outside the main gate of the village for making new fire to be used for the Festival and the males are then blessed after which they shout signifying that they have been sanctified. The men folk collect the fire and come back to their respective Morungs and as per the tradition the womenfolk are prohibited to touch this fire and even the cups and plates of the festival, till the third day of the Festival. From this day onwards all the men folk irrespective of age leave their homes and sleep in the Morung.

On the third day, 2 (two) males who had observed fasting will go to the jungle to collect wood which will be carved like a man and tattooed. This wooden statue is then installed at the two gates of the Village and then spearing of the wooden statue takes place. After that, all the men folk gather at the main ground of the village which is also called the jumping pit and various competitions are held viz., long jump, wrestling, cock fights etc. Later, the High Priest would declare the completion of all the arrangement and lift all prohibitions imposed earlier. The folks of the village irrespective of men and women are now free from all bindings and they start feasting and merrymaking till the end of the Festival.

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