

# **Oral Traditions**

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# **ANGAMI**

## **Oral tradition**

Like every other Naga tribes, oral tradition forms the backbone of knowledge among the Angamis. Traditions were passed down to generations in the form of folktales and folklores. The knowledge of how disputes could be settled by socially accepted clan norms and survival knowledge of how to obtain food, build shelters, travel, make handicrafts and cloths, hunt animals, make fire, cultivate crops, rear animals, protect oneself from hostile people were passed down to generations and were adapted by the later through the form of listening, observing, imitating and experiencing.

## **Inheritance**

Among the Angami, relationship is looked upon as a blood tie. However, it can also be set up by adoption though considered objectionable in some instances. It is rare that a childless father adopt young man from another clan to inherit his property. It is considered as real adoption only if the individual belongs to another clan. However, disputes arise often in this kind of adoption in matter of inheritance. An adoption is considered more appropriate if a kindred of a man sell his land and leave his village and seek adoption by the kindred of another clan in another village. Intermarriage among kindred of an adopted and of the kindred who adopted is not entertained. Real estate however stays within the kindred if not in a modified matter of verbal discourse. Only males can inherit real property. If a male leaves no son but several first cousins, property is divided equally. The usual practice is that a man divides his bulk of property during his lifetime. If his sons marry and set Lip house, each receives their share of property inherited from the father. On the father's death, the youngest son inherits all the property that is retained in the father's hand at that time. The custom of inheritance slightly varies from village to village. Women cannot inherit land in general. A man can leave a good amount of land for the daughter during her lifetime but male heirs inherit it after the death of the daughter. The personal property like cash and cattle, and a woman's own property is inherited by the daughter. If a woman has no daughter, her property goes to the father's heirs even if she has a son. Nevertheless necessary modifications could be settled in any special case through verbal directions and oath taking.

## **Superstitious beliefs and taboo**

Before the arrival of formal education, various superstitions exists most of

which lacks logical or reasonable explanations. For example, several Angami villages believe that a person's photograph taken to the plains would eventually kill the person being photographed. As there was no knowledge of technological devices, a camera is feared and as such, it was also impossible to take pictures of young girls because it was believed that the camera reveals the girls' pudenda. Besides, the number seven was regarded as an omen. No group of seven leaves the village for the belief that death would befall on one of them.

The fear of displeasing the divine being was a major concern to each individual. Each person believes that success would not be attained if one goes astray from the divine law of conduct. Elders also have a considerable status in the society. It is believed that by displeasing an elder, one never attains happiness in his/her life. In this context, the basic code of conduct are observed through oral sayings - usual moral ethics set by prohibition and forbidding certain manners which is considered taboo which is called as 'Kenyii' among the tribe.

Some of the common moral ethics includes;

1. It is 'kenyii' to displease the supreme power
2. It is 'kenyii' to beat one's own parents
3. It is 'kenyii' to displease an uncle or an aunt
4. It is 'kenyii' to take what is not yours
5. It is 'kenyii' to let a mother or an elder serve food or drinks till your seat
6. It is 'kenyii' to take bribe
7. It is 'kenyii' not to pay the complete wage of a worker
8. It is 'kenyii' to practice the use of false weight
9. It is 'kenyii' to wake Lip later than your host
10. It is 'kenyii' to eat with your legs crossed
11. It is 'kenyii' to eat meat without untying its robe
12. It is 'kenyii' to encroach other people's land
13. It is 'kenyii' to speak of things you cannot do
14. It is 'kenyii' not to forgive and call back a villager who has been chased away from the village for malpractices before seven years
15. It is 'kenyii' to burn food
16. It is 'kenyii' to misguide a traveller
17. It is 'kenyii' not to let the eldest taste the food first
18. It is 'kenyii' to kill if not in war
19. It is 'kenyii' to threaten a person from his home
20. It is 'kenyii' for a girl to whistle
21. It is 'kenyii' to stitch one's cloth while wearing it

- 22. It is 'kenyii' to kneel and work in the field
- 23. It is 'kenyii' to block an insects hole
- 24. It is 'kenyii' to stand in the middle of the village gate
- 25. It is 'kenyii' to let a beggar go empty handed if he reaches your house
- 26. It is 'kenyii' not to forgive an enemy if he comes with a chicken to your house
- 27. It is 'kenvil' to see the saliva of a dog without offering food to it

# AO

Ever since the formation of Mokokchung Village, many generations of *Putu Menden* (Village Councils) have administered one after the other, through memory transmission, its culture, polity, laws and traditions in a systematic and noble manner till today. Even now there exists a well established Village Customary Court and hierarchy of administrators.

In Mokokchung Village, since the time of the ancestors there are five (5) hierarchies of *Putu Menden* which function successively for thirty (30) years. The five councils are:

1. Medemsanger Putu
2. Mejensanger Putu
3. Mepongsanger Putu
4. Kosasanger Putu
5. Rionsanger Putu

## **The Formation of *Putu Menden* and its Functionaries :**

When the thirty years tenure of the *Putu Menden* ends, a new *Putu* takes over subsequently. The entitled new *Putu* assemble to discuss all matters concerning formation and then select a *Samenba/Aola* amongst them. After the new *Putu* is named, to formally induct the new generation, a *Sungdong* is selected and his field is cleared as a sign of induction. Counting from that day of field clearing till harvest, until the new *Punt* takes over, the powers and functions of the *Samenba* must observe 'Abstinence' (Anempong). The *Samenba*, along with the four *Samen*, are initiated in the new *Putu* by presenting a pig and ten (10) traditional baskets (Yimchi) of grains each. Besides that the *Samenba*, as a sign of purchasing the right to rule, has to present a spotless CoNA devoid of any scars or deformity.

Since the *Putu Menden* is based on purity and truth, the remaining *Samen* observe abstinence for 30 days and after the new *Putu Menden* is formally inducted, they observe another 9 days of abstinence.

Today, Mokokchung Village is governed by the *Rionsanger Putu* and there are 7 seats. These 7 seats comprise of the "*Rionsanger Putu Menden*". Depending on the *Unger* (Head), every seat consists of four *Samen*. Among the four *Samen* there is a *Taziingba* (Elder). In each seat, the functionaries of the Council, the traditional belief systems and judgements are the same. However, it is the *Samenba* among the *Putu* founders who wields the utmost

power and final word over all the seven seats. Therefore, there is no final judgement in the village other than that pronounced by the *Putu Menden*.

Each seat consists of :

- |             |   |        |
|-------------|---|--------|
| 1. Unger    | - | 1 each |
| 2. Samen    | - | 4 each |
| 3. Togong   | - | 4 each |
| 4. Cheim    | - | 2 each |
| 5. Chameja  | - | 2 each |
| 6. Sungdong | - | 1 each |

### **The powers and functions of each seat:**

1. *Unger* — *Unger* can be selected only from a descendent of Tongpok, and the *Unger* acts as the treasurer. The *Unger's* residence (*Kilang*) is where all decisions and policies for the citizens of the village are taken and laid down. Since *Putu Menden* is founded on purity and truth, the *Linger* should carry a good name in society and there should be no social stigma against him.
2. *SamenTatar* — The *Samen* is selected only by his clan and the stakeholders (*Dia miilok atuker*) of a seat. He should be of good social standing and of strong character. To maintain sanctity of the *Putu Menden*, the *Samen* cannot be chosen from those who are in intra-clan marriages, convicted thieves, illegitimate birth, unresolved parentage, only son in families, twins or handicaps.
3. Powers and functions of the *Samen*: They lay down rules for the village in the course of their thirty years rule (Legislative powers). They implement the rules and regulations and exercise power over these rules (Executive powers). They wield the power to punish offenders and the guilty (Judicial powers).
4. *Togong* — The *Togong* come second in the hierarchy of power. Whatever policies and decisions made by the *Samen* are executed by the *Togong* and they are also regarded as *Lenjeter* (tax regulators).
5. *Chiem* — The *Chiem* runs errands like searching for life stock and collecting fines and taxes as imposed.

## **Types of criminal and civil offences and some Important penalties imposed:**

1. Theft
2. Brawls
3. Adultery
4. Defamation
5. Setting wild fire to jungle
6. Incest/Intra-clan marriage
7. Property and Land dispute
8. Murder
9. Arson
10. Assault

Besides the above mentioned offences the following are also ways of passing final judgements as per customary laws:

1. Customary oath taking (*Aziingashitepba*)
2. Fine imposed against violation of deep-rooted customary norms (*Putisü Senchi*).
3. Social boycott (*Kishiba*).

### **1. Judicial process concerning customary oath taking:**

Customary oath taking takes place in cases such as land dispute, wealth dispute, loss/disappearance of goods/ items, birth of unresolved parentage, and so on.

In such cases where the court fails to reach a decision because both parties adduce evidence equally. The party that withdraws from the oath taking loses the cases. On the other hand, if both parties are willing to undertake the oath, they have to pledge according to customary laws. This oath taking cannot be undertaken by any individual or party without the permission of the *Putu*.

### **Process of Oath Taking:**

- a. The clan members and in-laws of both parties spend a day preparing their houses. On the same day they keep banana leaves and bamboo containers ready. Early the next morning, before birds and men gather at the pond, they fetch water in the bamboo containers.
- b. The council members go to the houses of both parties one by one and allow them to go about their household chores, after which they are taken outside and the shredding of banana leaves is performed and



they examine whether the shredded leaves point towards either the East or the West. If the leaves point to the West, it is counted as a fault.

- c. Both parties have to slice Bamboo portions into half by the dao with a single cut and the one whose bamboo is not cleanly cut with splinters of bamboo clinging to the sliced portions is considered another fault.
- d. If one stumbles or slips and falls down near the place where the oath was taken while working or moving around the oath taking site it is also counted as a fault.
- e. While taking oath, both parties invokes the sun, moon and ancestors and these are the words uttered by them, "This land/item belong to me, if I am guilty let blood flow from my nose and mouth and let me drop dead".
- f. After the oath taking process is completed, the party which has committed most faults is declared guilty.
- g. However, if both parties have committed the same number of faults, they are to maintain abstinence (*Anempong*) for 30 days Closely guarded by the *Putu*, with the following regulations:
  - Three bunches of branches with leaves are tied to the main pillar of each house. If the leaves undergo damage, it is taken as a fault.
  - If any family member acquires some sore or scar in the body, it is counted as a fault.
  - If, any domestic animal dies out of the already recorded member, within the household of one party, it is another fault.
  - In order to obtain proof for convicting the guilty party, after every 7 days the *Putu* checks which party is found faulty in the above three categories.
  - The customary oath taking process is the most painstaking and difficult judgement that the *Putu Menden* takes up in the village. However, since this process is based/ founded on truth, sacredness and purity, in actuality, the right or wrong is revealed and justice is dispensed accordingly.
  - On the specific days when the "oath taking" take place, all the villagers must observe *amungko* (Strict stay and observation within the village) and to feed the ritual observers, the two parties in dispute must pay equal share to the *Putu*.

## **2. Fine imposed against violation of deep rooted traditional norms (*Putisii Senchi*)**

In the first case, during the time of ancestors, there was pride in taking/acquiring human heads as trophies which completed the attire of a warrior. For this reason, an individual or three or four men would unite to go in search of trophies and cause enmity (*Nok menasa' Noktsiih*) with another village, this lawfully unacceptable way of taking heads was called *Niimja alepba'*. Such unlawful heads takers were punished severely by imposing fine of 9 pigs. If the 9 pigs could not be paid, land worth the 9 pigs would be seized from them. After this *Putisu senchi* is paid by the head takers, the whole village join the fined head takers to unite against the village with whom they had struck enmity.

In the second case, a penalty of 7 pigs is imposed on anyone who distorts/violates the origin history (*Lipok lisang*), customary belief systems (*Putipuin*), fundamental cultural issues (*Teret tekong*).

In cases where a *Putu* member commits this kind of offence, he, like any other offender of intra-clan marriage or theft, has to step down from *Putu Menden*.

### **3. Final Penalty- Social Boycott by way of Shutting House**

Within the jurisdiction of Mokokchung Village, any citizen who violates the rules of the *Putu* is punished appropriately. Whenever fines are imposed as punishment, the Council decides on a dateline. If the punished individual is unable or refuses to pay the fine within the stipulated time, it is announced that there will be social boycott of the individual by way of shutting his house. The highest order of the Council is the decree "Social Boycott from this Morning Onwards".

#### **Those under Social boycott must follow the following regulations:**

1. Must contribute physical labour along with the rest of the villagers in all tasks organised by the Council. Fines are imposed in case of failure to attend.
2. Pay all kinds of village taxes.
3. Cannot be a member of the Council
4. Will have no share in any beneficial distributions among the villagers.
5. No one can visit them in times of sickness or even in death.

When the boycotted individual comes to a realization of the difficulties of living in isolation from the way of life of the villagers, he may pay his actual fine with additional fine and his punishment may be lifted, after which he becomes one with the villagers in all activities and modes of socialization.

### ***Lanu Menden (Seat of the Younger Generation)***

Since the time of the ancestors, the *Lanu Menden* is a strong seat traditionally and even today. Except for the members of the *Putu Menden*, all other married men, boys who have entered the *Sungpu zunga*, including sons of widows together are called *Lanur* (Young Men). The common voice/front of these *younger* men is called *Pangjung* and the consolidation of this group is called *Lanu Menden*.

Unlike *Putu Menden*, there is no Treasurer (*Unger Kilang*) in *Lanu Menden*, but the *Pangjungba'* (Eldest) of both *Mongsen* and *Jungli* becomes the treasurer.

The composition of *Lanu Menden*:

1. Pangjungtsa - Jungli (8), Mongsen (8)
2. Tanglak - Jungli (8), Mongsen (8)
3. Mejia Ziinga/Tenya Zunga
4. Terziinga/Khuben zunga

#### **1. *Panzjuntsa - JunRli (8), Monjisen (8)***

The 16 members of *Pangjungtsa* from both *Mongsen* and *Jungli* are selected from among those who are not of intra-clan marriages, convicted thieves, or those who wear a social stigma classified as "*Meriing kongzuk aziiker alir*".

In the dynamics of the *Lanu Menden*, both *Tenya zunga* and *Khuben zunga* go through the mandatory peer hierarchy (*zunga tarensen*).

### **Functions of the *Lanu Menden Rizong***

The *Lanu Menden* executes the policies resolved by the *Putu Menden* and all physical labour related to traditional practices as well as collection of fines. Besides, other activities like hunting bears/tigers, fencing of fields, community fishing, clearing field and forest paths are also executed under the initiative of the *Lanu Menden Rizong*.

### **Morung Members (*Arju Nunger*)**

Within the village jurisdiction, the *Arju* members are an important branch under the *Lanu Menden* as per the system of peer stratification. Beginning with the eldest peer group (*Putir*), the youngest group is the *Siingpu zunga*. From the year of their induction into *Sungpu zunga*, they remain the youngest group among the *Morung* members for 3 years. After this, they are

replaced by another batch as the *Sungpu zunga*. In Mokokchung village, the eldest in each family enters the peer system first as *Sungpu zunga* followed successfully one after the other by the next brother or sister in order of age because in Mokokchung village 2 siblings from the same family cannot belong to the same peer group.

Morung members consist of those unmarried men from *Sungpu zunga* and upwards. The different levels of peer groups are:

- a. *Sungpu zunga*
- b. *Tenapang zunga*
- c. *Takang zunga*
- d. *Juzen zunga*
- e. *Kiyim zunga*

According to tradition, the activities of the Morung members are determined and divided accordingly by the *Lanu Menden*.

#### ***Putir Menden (Seat of the Elders)***

1. *PutirPatisa* - 4 (Senior most elders)
2. *Putipang/Ozin* - 8 (Second Senior elders)

The eldest from Tongpok's descendants becomes the *Putisongba* (head of the elders). Irrespective of whether an elder from another clan is the eldest in the village, it is only the eldest among the Tongpok descendants who can be the head and treasurer among the elders. He, along with the eldest three in the village, are called *Patir/Patisa*.

Next to these four *Patir*, the eight oldest men in the village are called *Ozin.'Patipang*. These 12 men are exempted from all kinds of community work but they are included in all kinds of annual taxes (*Tekong saru*). In case a man has reached the status of *Ozin* but has partaken in the meat share of *Putu*, he will be included in all kinds of village tax. Whenever the council engages in symbolic killing of pig (*Aksii*) and *Tekong Saru*, they assemble at the house of the head elder (*Putisongba*). On the day of *Ak'sa*, the 12 elders share the meat with the *Putu*.

The duties of the 4 eldest members are to participate in worship and cleansing/purifying ritual sometimes exclusively and sometimes in certain rituals along with the *Putu*.

During the time of the ancestors all the farmers in the village starting sowing in their fields only after the seed cleansing ritual (*Metsii walok*) and sowing ritual (*Tendenmung*) was performed. The seed worship is performed by the *Putir*, one of them carries a basket of grains and a rooster to the field and performs the seed worship. On his way home to the village, another *Putir* meets him halfway and takes over the load of the basket from the- other. Next, during the ritual sowing, only the grains brought back home from the seed cleansing ritual is used. Until the harvest ritual (*Tsademmung*) and rice harvesting worship is performed, the *Putir* who performs the sowing ritual must not engage in hunting or fishing as well as visiting sick people.

Whenever bad omens or scandalous incidents take place in the village, the *Putir* perform cleansing ritual but during sun worship ritual it is the *Unger* who perform the ritual.

In Mokokchung village, the festivals, community gatherings, and other celebrations are based on the cultural practices and the chronology of seasons is determined according to the following dates and months since the time of the ancestors.

#### Chronology of seasonal months

1. <i>Aobi Ita</i>	-	July
2. <i>Tsiingremmung Ita</i>	-	August
3. <i>Ayim Kumshi Ita</i>	-	September
4. <i>Kitsiik Meya ita</i>	-	October
5. <i>Sungko meshi Ita</i>	-	November
6. <i>Alu Lepden Ita</i>	-	December
7. <i>Apalem Ita</i>	-	January
8. <i>Matsu Walok Ita</i>	-	February
9. <i>Tenden Mung Ita</i>	-	March
10. <i>Monupi Ita</i>	-	April
11. <i>MoatsiiiLijaba Ita</i>	-	May
12. <i>Chameja Ita</i>	-	June

#### **Traditional Marriage**

It is not easy to present a uniform account of the marriage practices of the Ao as there are differences not only among the two Ao groups of Chongli and Mongsen but even among different villages. There are, however, certain basic features which are universally practiced by all Ao's. They are an exogamous society and marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. Heavy

punishment even excommunication from the village is imposed for endogamous marriage. When a marriage proposal is initiated, the parties concerned should first ensure that they belong to different clans.

## **PROPOSAL**

The traditional practice of Ao marriage is generally simple and inexpensive. On attaining marriageable age a young man expresses his wish that he wants to marry a certain girl with whom he may be acquainted for sometime. In some cases the parents and relatives from both sides arrange for the marriage of their son or daughter. Once the prospective bride-to-be is identified, negotiations between the two families particularly between the mothers of the boy and girl are held. If everything goes well, the boy's family selects a man to be an "Intermediary" or a matchmaker, who makes a formal proposal to the girl's parents. At first the girl's parents fake a refusal and may pretend to reject the proposal saying their daughter is too young and ignorant of household works. This is just a normal practice on the presumption that by this the prestige of their daughter is enhanced. Again the intermediary goes to the girl's parents and this time the proposal is readily accepted.

The man then goes fishing with a group of his friends. This fishing is an important event in the traditional Ao marriage practice. The major share of the day's catch is taken by the "intermediary" to the girl's parents. They return a portion of the fish to him to be taken to the boy's home. From the remaining they send fish presents to the carefully and meticulously selected relations of both the families and also to the girls of their daughter's age-group. This is regarded as a public declaration of their engagement and fish present taken as wedding invitation. The next morning the boy escorted by his '*Tambacha*' (bosom friend) presents a basket of paddy and a dao (machete) to the girl's father.

## **MARRIAGE**

In the cold season of December-January, the man builds a house and the expenses are borne by him except some very nominal aid by the girl's side. Marriages usually took place during the spring or autumn season. Once the wedding day is mutually fixed the marriage price or bride price known as "*Chenmen*" in Mongsen

and "*Senmen*" in Chongli is also fixed. This is only a formality the price is never high as it is not a purchase price as practiced among some Naga tribes. There is not much activity on the wedding day as it is in the evening. In the morning of the wedding day all invitees, namely those who received fish presents from the girl's parents bring gifts. The girl's parents in return entertain them. On this day all the girls of the bride's age-group bring loads of firewood and stack them at the new house of the couple for their use.

In the evening the ceremonies begin. Three old women of the bride's clan enter the new house and light a fire by traditional method using fire-thong or iron-stone. Having done that, they send for the bride. She comes from her parents' house in a procession which is in a particular order, first six old women of her clan, then the bride followed by the girls of her age-group carrying three baskets of husked rice, one basket of rice, a basket of firewood, two new cooking pots, one new winnowing fan and a parcel of salt for the new family. The bride wears her best traditional clothes and ornaments. The entourage enters the house and settle down to eat, drink and thoroughly enjoy themselves.

A little later the bridegroom comes with his father, the intermediary and some friends. Before entering the new house, the father sacrifices a cock with a prayer that the couple may be happy and prosperous and parents of children as sturdy as cane-shoots. He would also ascertain the future of the new family by observation and study of the intestine of the cock. They enter the house after the ceremony and the old women depart from the house. Then his friends come in and they feast and drink late into the night. Thus the wedding ceremony ends.

## **DIVORCE**

In cases of divorce, if the husband is at fault, he will have to pay Kilamet (fine in the form of a pig) and leave the house with just his dao, spear and plate. If the wife is at fault she will have to leave the house empty handed.

## **REMARRIAGE**

If a widower marries an unmarried woman, then the marriage rituals will be performed as usual. But in case of remarriage for both then no ritual will be performed.

## **OATH TAKING IN MATTER OF DISPUTES**

In matter of disputes, whether it be land or water, people practiced taking oaths in order to prove themselves as the rightful owner.

When there is a dispute between two people regarding the boundary (aruyang) of their land, people take oath (azungashi o) to prove themselves not guilty. In such a situation, if they could not compromise between themselves, then they would do the act of taking a small crumb of soil/earth and consume it as a sign to affirm that the piece of land belongs to him. It was practiced from the forefather's times as they believed that on doing so, the one who is guilty would suffer a swelling in stomach and die an unnatural death. Even to this day, people have in mindset about not overtaking other's land as the one's who make such kind of false proclaim over land boundaries would suffer an unnatural death.

Similarly, if there is a dispute between villages regarding the boundary of their land or water bodies, they would do the same act.

Thus, the ones who try to occupy someone's property/assets like land often refuses to do this act and hence, the issues arising due to one's greedy interest over someone's property or assets and claiming that the asset belongs to him have to undergo through this practice and through which people could know as to whom the land actually belongs.

## **Some social taboos of the Ao Race (AO KINI ASHIBANGA ARUBA)**

Right from the beginning of our forefathers the Ao race maintained a distinct order in the social organisation. strict genna and taboos were existing in the social life. There was certain practice in different aspects of their social life.

Some these aspects are described as follows:-



## **Food**

Among the men and women folk the food was divided. The women folk were taboo to eat certain fish like Mug fish(Alunt-zpungu) cat fish(Nunak) Prawn ( Akhung ) and fishes without scales, and animals like goat, elephant, bear, dog, monkey, porcupines and so on. Again on the men folks, the mongsen clan do not eat the intestine of pig. Among the animals tiger, leopard, wild dog, cat, bat, squirrel, snail, mole, snake and among birds the eagle, owl, crow, hawks, sparrow were not eaten by the Ao race. Again animals killed by unnatural means were also strictly tabooed with the belief that some bad omens or misfortune may befall on them.

## **Selection of fire wood**

Careful observations are made to the woods which are to be brought home. Any wood having the appearance of like a boil or swelling were not brought home, creepers buried deep in the hollow of the trees were also not used. It was believed that when such woods were used, the wife would bear abnormal children having similar appearance of the tree.

## **Taboos within the family regarding certain activities**

When a wife is pregnant the husband is always alert in whatever he does. For example he should not dig mud around the post or pillar of the house nor should he cover any hollows with mud because all these things may affect the baby which is to be born, again whenever the husband goes to the jungle he should not kill animals or trap birds, nor should he bring any sort of caterpillars living inside the big tree, all these activities were strictly taken into account because of certain belief. For the construction of houses, trees struck by lightning were not cut. In the olden days, the floors of the house were made of bamboos only, so bamboos with dark colour patches were not cut and used in any purpose with the belief that such things may bring abnormality to the children.

## **Discard of wealth and belongings of unnatural death**

When any person dies an unnatural death like in water, fire, childbirth, accidents or falling from the tree strict taboo was imposed. All the belongings, wealth were discarded. Not a single thing was to be touched or taken. Even in the granary, the baskets of rice were cut by dao and pigs were allowed to eat. Any person who wishes to give alms to the bereaved did so from outside the house. In that year the bereaved family till harvest will not shave their heads and nothing was accepted from others. All these rituals were observed with the belief that similar incident may not befall again.

## **Ritual observance for thirty days**

When a head is brought inside the village, it is kept in the village ritual platform (Yimrong) for thirty days and strict genna (among) was observed. During that period food was taken only in Amchi leaf. Any person violating the ritual feared for untimely death.

## **Weaving any kind of clothes**

When a shawl is weaved, it was believed that if a fly (lep manga) sits on the weaving shawl, then the shawl was not given to the owner, rather it was disposed again. When in weaving Ao traditional shawl (subangsa) the fly sits on the shawl then it is not worn but kept to cover his body when he dies. This fly (lep manga) is a type of fly which comes and sit on the dead body so it is called lep manga (corpse fly)

Such was the strict taboo and ritual performed by our forefathers. Today in our generation we hardly find any of these practices may be it is all because of the advent of Christianity, but we should not forget the legendary cultural heritage which our forefathers have ushered in for us.

## **INHERITANCE**

According to the Ao customary law, the inheritance of property is passed on to the male siblings. On the death of the head of the family, that is the father, the properties, both movable on immovable are inherited by the sons. If he has no sons all his properties are inherited by his relatives or any close kinsmen. But the land of his clan cannot be sold to any party by him. The son automatically gets a share in the clans land. He also shares it with his brothers who are married.

If he had more than one son then the immovable property are divided among the sons. The movable properties inherited from the father is usually shared among the brothers equally and the eldest son gets to select first. If the father makes his wishes known before he dies then his sons inherits according to the wishes of their father.

The daughters don't inherit any clan property after the death of their father since after marriage they belong to a different clan and are under their protection. An Ao woman retains and uses her title even after marriage. But

if the father wishes, he can give a share of its self acquired properties to his daughter.

There are different types of inheritance like:

- i. Clan inheritance: All the clans like the Jamir, Longkumer, Imchen, Aier etc, have their own clan inheritance like the area for cultivation, building houses etc, and no other clan can claim on the inheritance. This practice was observed since the forefather's time.
- ii. Family inheritance: The property that belongs to the family belonged to all the family members and no one can make it their own property on their own free will, until he or she inherit it after the death of their parents in accordance to the customary law.
- iii. Personal inheritance: In the Ao custom, whatever was acquired by the father or grandfather during their life time cannot be inherited by anyone else until the family line has completely finished. It is only when there is no inherit the property that the clan and the village can lay a claim to it.

An Ao woman inherits from her mother, sister and aunts. The daughter inherits the personal properties of her mother after her death, and likewise it on to her daughters as their inheritance. A woman has the right to dispose off her inheritance as she wishes and on her marriage her personal property does not become one with that of her husband's. If she doesn't have any daughter to whom she can leave her property, it is inherited by her sisters or her clan member. A widow does not inherit any immovable property upon her husband's death. She along with her sons inherits the movable property. As long as she lives she is allowed to live in their house, cultivate their field and make use of their other property if she doesn't remarry. If she remarries, then she loses all the right she had over her deceased husband property.

According to the Ao custom even debt is also inherited and it is the duty of the sons to pay it off after the death of their father. The inheritance is passed on according to the customary law and if any disagreement arises then it is settled by the village council.

# **CHAKHESANG**

## **Inheritance**

The male child inherits the wealth/possessions handed down by the parents. The Chakhesang follows the patriarchy system and so the land and properties are inherited by the man folk in the family. Woman does not have any share as she moves to another household when she gets married but its upto the father to give his daughter's share of inheritance.

In cases of large and big family, the land and properties are shared where the eldest inherit the larger part and the youngest inherit his father's house.

## **Superstitious Beliefs and Taboos**

Traditionally Nagas were described as animists; that is, they believed in the existence of spiritual beings inhabiting the natural world. They also believed in gods followed by various superstitious beliefs and taboos. There are different types of spirits - sky spirit and earth spirit. Then there are the house spirits, field spirits and jungle spirits. Depending on their inherent nature, spirits are good or bad.

During the harvest season, when parents are in the field the children or any other at home are not allowed to bake or roast anything in fire "*rüti künyi*" "*thuti künyi*" for it is believed to reap a poor harvest.

The horn on the houses are gained through feasting. If a person has given feast of merit to the whole village he can build horns on the house to show the status.

But it is believed that a person who builds a horn on his house without throwing any feast of merit to the village will not prosper and also lost all the things that he possess.

It is forbidden to sow seeds or to harvest before it is first sown or reaped by the chief or high priest of the village.

It is a taboo for a young girl to have long hairs before marriage. Once a girl is married, she can grow her hair.

## **Oath taking in matter of disputes**

When a dispute or misunderstandings of any matter arises between different parties, all the elders and the menfolk gather to settle the matter. The chief or high priest presides and decides over the matter. After much deliberation on the excuses and explanations of the different parties, a final decision is made. They are made to swear that unwanted consequences will befall upon them in future if they are at fault of any wrongdoings. The matter is then settled and closed.

# **CHANG**

## **Chang Naga Morung**

During forefathers time they used to gather at morung for any discussing. At those times whenever they have to go to war field they used to gather at morung and they *left* for war, after the war they gather at morung and they hang the enemy's head at morung and they used to dance whole night at morung for their victory. At present time the villagers used to gather at morung and they used morung as their community hall and they discuss everything at morung. Whenever they have bad situation they used to beat log drum which they kept at morung and the villagers gather at morung.

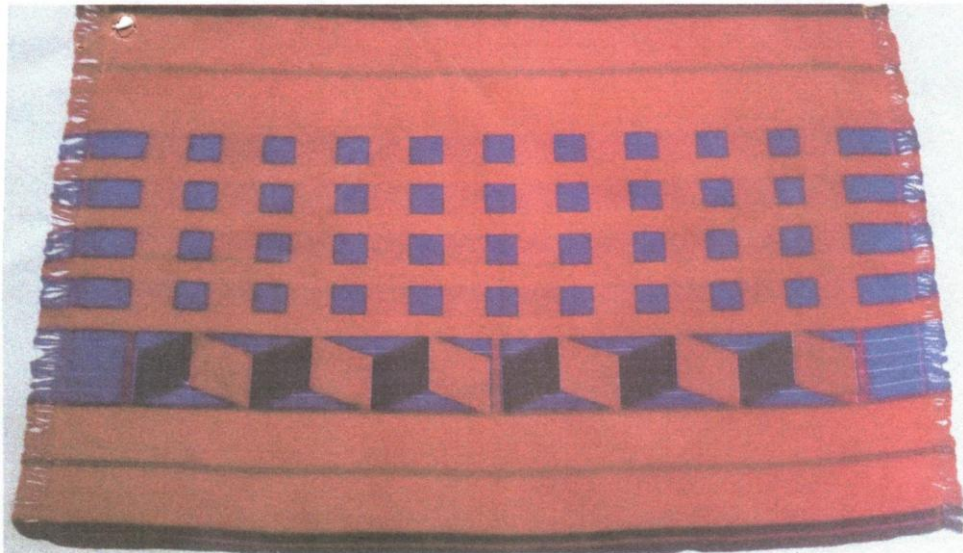
## **TRADITIONAL CHANG NAGA SHAWL**

### **Nongbü Nei (Common Shawl)**

Chang shawl, the Tobu nei has zig-zag patterns in alternate Red and Black on a Blue band. It is swon by men.

Length - 6: 8inch

Breadth - 5 inch



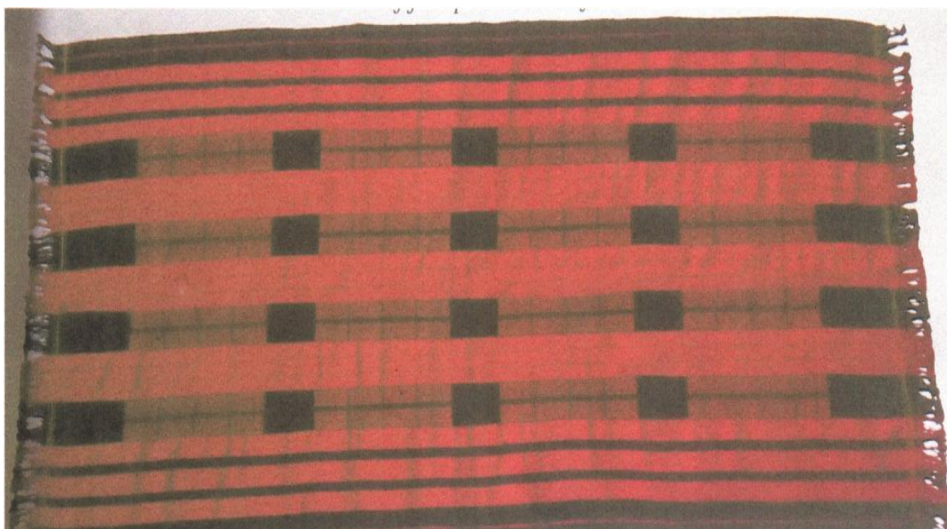
## **Selangnei**

During forefather's time this shawl was swon by a girl who is pure and capable of receiving holy marriage. In this modern era it is swon by an educated and respectable lady. It is also given as a token of love (Nyunei) to bride's mother by a groom during marriage.



## **Saonei (Ladies Common Shawl)**

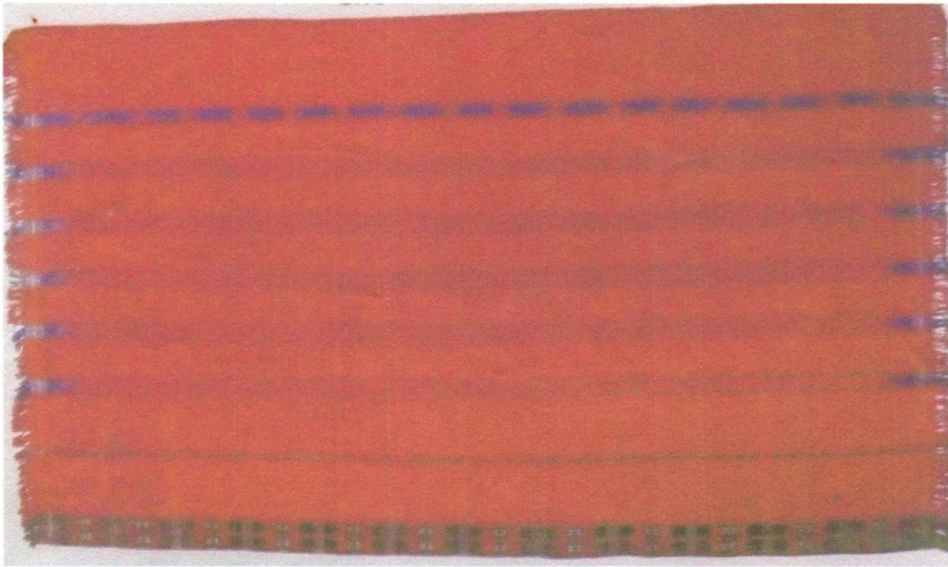
Saonei is a common shawl of Chang women. It is also given as a token of love (Nyunei) to a bride's mother by a groom during marriage.





### **Shuishuibu Loser (Ladies Common Mekhala)**

It was first made in the year 32-30 Be. According to Chang legend a little girl by the name Momola was married away to a fish as an offer in exchange of fishes by her parents. This little girl was later turned into a Mermaid, thus the design was made by looking at her forehead.





# **DIMASA KACHARI**

## **Bachelors' Dormitory (*Nodrang*)**

The Dimasa kachari youth dormitory is known as *Nodrang*. This institution was present in the earlier days, but at the present times, it exists only in its symbolic form. In the earlier days, only unmarried boys were eligible to stay in such dormitories. Generally, when a boy attains 12 years of age, he goes to stay in a *Nodrang*. This dormitory has a big hall with no compartments, but raised platforms made of bamboos are meant for sleeping. The hall is decorated with artistic designs. In this dormitory, the boys learn the art of singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, bamboo and cane craftmaking, hunting and fishing. The *nod rang* is not only an institution of the unmarried boys but also serves as a guard house during any times of attacks of wild animals or any dangers, for everyone. An efficient and good moral character young boy is selected as the leader called *nagahoja* during any event, activity or decision making. During the harvesting festival known as Bishu Dima, the *nagahoja* along with the female youth leader called *malahoja*, join together for the successful observation of the festival. The members of the *Nodrang* take active part in the arrangements of the festival and engage in every small activity. The *Nodrang* also provides social services during cultivation and helps villagers in tilling the land, clearing the jungles for jhum cultivation etc. The institution of *Nodrang* develops the spirit of discipline, team work, co-operation, social service and skill enhancements.

However, since there is less threat to wild animals in the villages at present times and also due to modernisation and spread of education, this institution is not given due priority at present. The male and female youths are seen to have given more importance in the common community club where they meet regularly for joint activities for village upliftment and youth development.

## **Inheritance**

Although the Dimasa kachari have double descent, they are a patriarchal society. There are three types of property in the Dimasa society, namely, paternal, maternal and common property. The paternal property is passed on by the fathers to the sons. It consists of weapons, tools, livestock, land, house, money etc. The maternal property is inherited by the daughters from their mothers, and consists of ornaments, clothes, weaving looms, etc. Common property consists of household implements, cooking utensils, etc. which are inherited equally by the sons and daughters.

## **Superstitious beliefs & Taboos**

Like any given society where social norms and restrictions makeup the social life, Dimasa society too observe such taboos. Such taboos are mostly seen in regard to marital alliance. As a tribal society, Dimasas maintain clan exogamy and failing to observe such restrictions led to excommunication from the society. The taboos are mostly assigned for matri-clan (*jadi*) members. For instance, member of same matriclan cannot enter into marital relationship. Besides some patrilans are considered closed cousins (like Hasnu and Haflongbar clan) and thus, it is taboo for both the members of these clans to conduct marriage alliance. Apart from it, there are taboos attached to certain inanimate or animate objects which are regarded as totem to many clans. For instances, some patrilans are prohibited in consuming pork meat, whereas some clans cannot wear black and gold ornaments.

## **Oath taking in the matter of Disputes:**

Most cases of disputes such as property disputes, adultery, divorce and other cases are settled in the village Headman Khunang (GB). When any particular case are being brought to the notice, both the complainant and the accused are asked to appear before the village administration with their respective witnesses if any. They are given opportunity to support or defend their cases. Then by a majority decision the case is settled. The village administration holds the right impose fine or to excommunicate. In a case where there are lacking adequate witnesses, they resort to an ordeal or oath (called as *Samaidangba*) according to their traditional way. Swearing is done against allegations or for committing offence and if such offences are prove false, misfortune or illness or ultimate destruction may befall on the person taking the oath.

# **KHIAMNIUNGAN**

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE OF KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA IN BRIEF**

The Khamniungan people are a homogenous group of people sharing common socio and cultural threads in everyday lives spread in a contagious area of India and Myanmar. There are about 40 recognized villages in India and above 150 Khamniungan villages beyond the border in Myanmar. The Khamniungans are culturally as well as linguistically linked to the Tibeto-Burman.

Until the late 1930s, the Khamniungans had no contact with the out world. The Britishers are the first white people who were the first outsider to have contact with the Khamniungans and the first written records about Khamniungans are found in the accounts of the Britishers. Khamniungans were known by the name 'Kelyo-Kenyu' during the British Raj. It is believed the name originated from the slate roof of the house, means 'slate house dweller'. However, other sources suggest that the name was a corrupted term given after the peak, 'Mt. Khulio-King/ Khulio-Kingnyu', the highest peak in the region by the Britishers.

Before the advent of Christianity in the region, the Khamniungans were a nature worshiper. All their rituals, customs, traditions and practices had direct trait with nature and its beliefs. Their social strata are therefore based upon their wealth and status. In a society a warrior or wealthy person maintain an honorable status comparing to ordinary citizens.

### **Village Organization:**

In a Khamniungan village, a family is the basic unit in a social set up of the village organization. Numbers of families of close relative further constitute a sub-clan. Comprising of two-three or even more sub-clans constitute a one large clan. A particular clan with many household makes a khel in a village and such different clans set up a village. Village is the biggest and the ultimate administrative set up in a Khamniungan society. There is no other institute higher than a village to serve allegiance or give tribute by the Khamniungans. The village is their own little world and besides their own village there is no other institute/village where Khamniungans had to pay honour even though there are friendly villages that existed. All kinds of activities in a Khamniungan society surrounds within the boundaries of their own village be it festivals or other religious activities except war or raids.

All the decision in respect of village is decided by the village elders or the chief with the aid and advises of the village elders, although this tradition has been replaced by the modern system of administration with Village Council at the top with village Chairman, comprises of Gaun Boras as his councilors.

### **Social Status:**

The father is the head of the family in a Khiamniungan society with whom resides all the important decision of the family. In the absence of the father due to death or other such similar tragedy, the eldest son of the family inherit the responsibility of decision making in a family. Similarly, in a family, it is the eldest son that inherits a lion's shares of property and wealth from their parents. The female member of a family is expected to work all the household chores and manage the granary. Weaving is an exclusive job of the female folks just like war belongs to the male.

The Khiamniungan society is a patriarchal form of society therefore, the birth of a male child is regarded more valued than a girl child. However, in the case of Khiamniungan society, patriarchal form of society exist only to ensure that the properties remain with parental blood line unlike the Hindu society where the birth of a male child is valued for dowry and other reasons. Although, the male child is more valued over a girl child but there is no such practice of female infanticide in a Khiamniungan society. In fact, the birth of a female child is also celebrated as much as the birth of a male child.

### **Institutions:**

Here are some of the institutions which were practice by Khiamniungans:-

#### **1. Morung:**

Morung or bachelor's dormitory is one of the main features that every khel have it constructed in a village. There are two-three or more morungs constructed in each khel that belong to various sub-clans in a village and the common morung of a particular clan.

Women are not allowed inside. A boy who have attended puberty stays in the morung and learn various skills of life like crafting and get educations on folk tales, folk dances and songs until he gets married and build his own house. The morung was a pride of the village, and its beams and posts were always

decorated with trophies of war and finest wood carvings the villagers were capable of.

## **2. Marriage:**

Marriage is usually a monogamous in a Khamniungan society. Fidelity to the spouse is considered as highly valued. In a Khamniungan society if a boy and a girl fall in love then the matter is brought to their parents for the settlement. But this step is taken not before the background of the boy or girl is properly checked especially, in matter of unclean spirit. Once everything is set the marriage date is fixed. The practice of marriage through by force was also in existence in a Khamniungan society, this, though however does not mean between strangers. This system was in existence in the society between two young couple who were known to each other.

Here, a boy will ask his friend to pick up the girl at night from girl's dormitory or her home and bring her forcefully to a groom's place where groom stays await with rice-brew mixed with the blood of the fowl. Once the bride is bought, her forefinger is immersed into the blood of fowl mixed with rice-brew. If the bride is willing then she will swear to live with the groom and look after her in-laws till death separates them. Similarly, the groom takes an oath after the bride. In case, the bride is not ready she will refuse to follow the ceremony or abide by the ceremony and will leave the groom's place. However, if she accepts the marriage, then early next morning before dawn she will pound grains in groom's place and leave for her home to bring her belongings and to be with the groom.

In a Khamniungan society marriage between same clan is strictly prohibited and is considered as incest. Such kind of marriage is not accepted in the society and if found will be forced to get separated or will be ostracized from the village. Not only the couple but even their children are not duly recognized or honored in the society.

## **3. Religion:**

The Khamniungans were a nature worshiper though they believed in the existence of Almighty God and spirits. They offer prayers through rituals and sacrifices of animals. Most of these sacrifices are done to seek prosperity of human kind, crops, domesticated animals, to be protected from invaders etc. People believed that God is present in everywhere and therefore, they offer prayers to Sun, Moon, Rocks, trees etc.

In most cases rituals were performed by a person from a clan called Meya/Meyo. This particular clan members are invited to perform rituals and offers prayers in the village in cases like when warriors comes back with trophies (severed enemy head) from war or raid. Offering of prayers are sometime done by the owner himself in cases of jhum filed but it is an exclusive job of the member from Meya clan to perform over enemy head brought in the village.

#### **4. Traditional Healing/Folk Medicines:**

The practice of traditional healing or medicine among the Khamniungans was basically conducted by a person with spirit of other human, animals and birds attach with him/her. Among them **KHAO OUN**, the spirit of Tiger and **PAO OUN**, the spirit of Snake are believed to have gifted with the ability to prophecies and extract foreign materials from ailing human body.

Traditional healing in Khamniungan society was mostly practiced by the women folk known as **EIN**. This title is hereditary by nature. The sicknesses are healed by massage, traditional medicine and through rituals and sacrifice.

#### **PRACTICE OF TATTOO MARKING IN KHAMNIUNGAN NAGA**

Since time immemorial the practice of tattooing the body has existed in a Khamniungan society. In Khamniungan language tattoo is known by the term, NGEPLAO. The term "NGEPLAO" is a combination of two different words. "NGEPMGE PJAO", is a thorn/needle specially made for the use of tattooing and "LAO" mean the act of pricking on the skin. A tattoo on the body can be observed as an alphabetical later, a numerical symbol or a sign of language in Khamniungan Naga. The purpose of tattooing the body was for identification, beautification and social recognition of a warrior from an ordinary person.

#### **Importance of Tattooing in Khamniungan Society:**

##### **1. Recognition:**

In a Khamniungan society tattooing one's body was a social recognition, identification and beautification. A male in a Khamniungan society was supposed to have his body tattooed in order to have honorable status in a society. Therefore, every male member rushed to participate in a headhunting raid or war. A male

who have not hunted head under goes a headhunting ceremony before he put tattoo marks on his body. No male would dare to mark tattoo on his body if he either took enemy's head or participated in headhunting ceremony. Any male who has violated this norm and has put tattoo on his body was considered a shame and disgrace on a clan. On the other hand, tattoo was a compulsory practice for a female folk. A female without tattoo on her body unlike male faces social segregation among the peer group and also faces difficulty to find suitable partner to get settle.

## **2. Belief:**

Besides, social recognition tattoo is deeply rooted in a Khamniungan society. Tattooing a body for female do not only centred around beautification or identification but it was viewed that if a girl died without tattoo on her body she faces hardship in the land of death. Therefore, in a Khamniungan society every girl child after the age of 12 years or puberty has to mark tattoo on her body parts.

It is believed that in the land of death a female spirit goes hungry and while entering the gate of land of death she had to offer her tattoo in exchange of food grains to pass the death land/village. Therefore, it was a common practice to draw three parallel lines on the chin of a female folk who died without tattoo on her body before buried.

## **Design of Tattoo:**

**1. Male:-** A male folk can mark tattoos on the chest arm and other part of the body. As a warrior the common designs were a V-shape upward divergent and a human figure on the chest and arm respectively. However, there was no restriction for a warrior to make tattoo on any parts of the body.

**2. Female:-** As for female, she can have tattoo on her forehead, Chin and on the leg from thigh down to the ankles. The common designs for women were, three parallel lines on a chin, two opposite zig-zag lines giving a diagonal shapes as it run from thigh to angle and a diagonal shape on the fore head. However, women with expert on the field of design can put their desired design on other parts of the body.

## **ORAL TRADITIONS ON INHERITANCE, SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF& TABOOS AND OATH TAKING IN MATTER OF DISPUTES BY KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA**

### **1. THE PRACTICE OF INHERITANCE IN KHIAMNIUNGAN SOCIETY**

Like most societies, the Khamniungan society is also a parental form of society, which means right to inheritance from parent remains with the son. In a Khamniungan society all the fortune of a parents are inherited by the male child. If in case, a person does not have a male child to pass his fortune/properties as heir then his properties/fortune are inherited by his biological brothers and in their absence the first cousins will inherit their properties.

In a Khamniungan society a female does not inherit properties from the parents but it does not mean that a girl child is ill treated and less loves in a family. The love and affection a girl receives from parents is no less than a male child received. Even after the marriage and left her home with her husband, the parents and brothers of a girl always remember their daughter/sister. The love for a girl can be seen from the belief where her children seek blessings from their maternal uncle, and also the bond of love her brother shows towards her children.

Though a girl child may not share her parents' properties with her brothers, mostly - the properties which are of immovable in nature, in the form of land and house. Other properties are shared with a girl child during the day she left her parental home with her husband, especially those valuable items that belongs to her mother. Therefore, if a marriage does not last long and in the event of separation of wife from husband with no valid reason, the relatives of a girl imposes heavy fine in honor of their daughter/sister upon husband.

### **2. THE PRACTICE OF SUPERSTITIOUS & TABOOS IN KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA**

The ancestors of Khamniungans had many superstitions and taboos related on various acts and occasions. Although with the advent of Christianity these superstitions and observance of



taboos are now no longer practice in the society, some of the superstitious and taboos that were prevalent in Khamniungan society are:-

**1. SHAMTHANG YAN ANO (Dedication of Hut surrounding in the field and observance of taboo):**

Shiamthang Yan Ano is related with the paddy harvesting. On the day of performing prayers and offering on Shiamthang Yan Ano the owner, along with his family goes to their field and clean the surrounding of the but and offer prayer seeking blessing over the crops. While performing ritual, the rice is cooked in an earthen pot which is then keep over the paddy straw along with an egg. After the completion of ritual the food offered is eaten only by the head of the family who had performed the ritual.

On the next day after the performance of Shamthang Yan Ano, the whole family stays at home observing genna. During the observance of Shamthang Yan Ano no visitors/guests are allowed at home. In order to forbid the guest from coming to their home, a stem with leaves are tug on the wall of a house indicating that the family is going to harvest the paddy. This is done so, that the blessings are prevented from being taken away by the visiting guest and also the visiting guest should take notice of the intention of the owner of the house.

During the observation of genna no family members will go to **the** jhum field either new or old, or go to jungle, river etc. for any kind of activities. in the event of any untoward eventuality on any member of the family, it is tabooed that it may result in poor harvesting. Instead on the day of genna, the family members do only household chores and stays at home. The mother and the daughters (if present) prepares rice brew to be consumed during harvesting. While man folk weave baskets and other related items to be used during harvesting and carrying rice from the field.

**Social Restriction:**

There were various social restrictions practiced by the ancestors of Khamniungan which are superstitious and considered as taboos, such as taboos related with foods, marriage etc.

In case of food, young people are prohibited from consuming brain, nose and other related animal body parts. It is tabooed that consuming these body parts of animals by the young people may cause them running nose and get disturbed by flies on the face and eyes which may result in accidents to the person.

Also, it is tabooed that no food should be eaten by a broken spoon. Anybody that eats food by a broken spoon may suffer from ache on the ribs, especially while working. Therefore, eating with a broken spoon is highly restricted at home.

In case of marriage, two biological brothers from one family are not suppose to marry two biological sisters from the same family. Marrying of two couple from two same families is considered as taboo. It is observed that in such case the couples do not live longer and expires at a very young age. Also, it is belief that the whole family lineage/clan get decline in number or wipe out.

## **OATH TAKING IN KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA**

In Khamniungan Naga dialect Oath is called "**ATHESHAN-TEE**" which means "swearing in the name of God, Earth and Heaven". Khamniungans from ages revered and honored what has been sworn in the name of God, Earth and Heaven. Any eventualities leading against or for after the oath is held firm and are not broken. Disputes between individuals or parties that cannot be settle in customary court are settled through by swearing an oath. The person/party that looses the oath is bound by the oath and pays heavy prices in term of land and other valuable properties to the winner of the oath. The justice served by the means of oath taking is considered as the highest verdict in a Khamniungan Naga society. Oath taking is the last resort to settle any dispute that arises between individuals/clans in a Khamniungan society.

### **Methods of settling disputes:**

Although oath is the heighest verdict that ones gets as justice it is arely practice in a Khamniungan society. However, there are other methods used to settle disputes or cases besides oath taking. Here are the three such methods applied to settle disputes in a Khamniungan society.

### **1. Go-Between (investigation) methods:**

This method is exercised by going among the members of the party in disputes to study the case before awarding verdict. In this method the parties/clans in disputes are placed in two separate morungs and the judges (mostly comprised of elders from the village) will carry the duty by asking from the members about the case. When the judges are satisfied about the pros and cons the verdict is announced.

### **2. Court Method:**

This is a popular method widely practiced most often in a society. Here the case is decided and verdict announced by adjudicating. Here, the parties/clans in dispute are summoned in a customary court (Morung). The judge after examining the questions and witnesses from both the parties/clans decides on the case and announces the verdict before both the parties/clans and the general public.

### **3. Oath Taking:**

This is the last and the final method applied to decide an undecided or complicated case. When the Go-Between and Customary court methods failed to decide a case or disputes, the oath taking method is used to decide a case. In this method Judges (village elders) and one or two persons each from disputing parties are required to decide a case. The practice of using morung to decide cases/disputes does not required in this method. Every dispute in this method is settled on the place of occurrence.

While performing this method every single person present on the spot has to appear in full traditional dresses. During the performance of oath taking any person who is not participating in the ceremony are not allowed to be present or entered the place of occurrence or disputed land. The people participating in oath taking ceremony dig some soil by his doa/machete from the place of occurrence or land and ask the other party to bite/eat the soil. Witness by Heaven and Earth, they pronounce that the guilty person/party will be the first victim of this oath.

### **Relationship between Dispute and Oracle Bones/Items:**

1. Land dispute: A dispute that arises due to land. Here, the dispute is settled

- by biting an earth or a soil from the spot.
2. Murder/Criminal Act: Here the person has to bite/eat a piece of earth, bite a tiger's tooth or skull or a fowl's neck is cut/chopped in one stroke.
  3. Thief: In case of a thief person has to bite a tiger's teeth/skull.
  4. Adultery: A person suspect of committing adultery has to bite a tiger's teeth/skull while taking an oath.

While performing the ceremonies of the above disputes and acts the parties performing these acts pronounces spell according to the nature of the crime. In the case of land dispute the performers will draw a piece of earth and give it to the other party/person to eat/bite and pronounces, **"GOUM NU LU JANTHATKU, AUN, AJE-ALEEN NU LUJANTHAT KU, TSU TSOU KU NU TONG LU THONKU, THAIPIK KIA NO LUE-AN KU"**, means *'let the heaven, earth, sun and moon or the universe be the judge and let there be an unnatural death upon the one who took a false oath'*.

The spell that pronounces while taking oath by biting a tiger tooth or skull read as, **"NGO TSUTSOU TSUTSOU, TSU KHAIO LUPAIKU"**, means *'let my head be broken if I took a false oath'*.

### **Oath taking ceremony while making peace with a warring village/party:**

In case of dispute between two villages, cases are settled on midway between the two villages. A day is fixed to settle a case and on that particular day parties from both villages bring with them domesticated hog, rice bear and other food staffs. By sharing and eating those food staffs they mark the new ties of friendship. Marking the ties of friendship, a friendship Pole (**PAIPHUN**) is erected on the side of a road which lad to both villages. During the ceremony a pig is slaughtered and its legs are hoisted on a friendship pole/tree. This signifies the number of heads they took as a trophy while they were on attacks and counter attacks. They exchange Dao, Cane and a piece of cloth while pronouncing oaths: **"NUNG NOKMEI HAO LUTHE-E KU; APA KHAIO NUNG SA NO TAPLO-E. APA MIA NUNG NEH KO TSANLO-E NAIU APA PHASUHOK NUNG OH SHIO-HE-E"**, it mean, *anyone who breaks an oath, his head, hand and legs will be chopped 'off by the dao, his dead body will be wrapped*

*by the cloth and his hands, legs and head will be tied and hoisted with the help of the cane.*

**Belief related to a false oath taker:**

There is a consequences related to a false oath taker which is strongly uphold by both the parties involved in oath taking and the society. In any given date within 10 days period if unnatural calamities like death, sickness, leprosy, lightning stroke upon person, animals, cultivated land, house, granary etc. are considered as curse of a false oath. If the 10 days period lapses, the three generation will be consider as an oath period. The first victim during this period is considered as a loser of the oath. Once the oath has been sworn in the name of God, Heaven and Earth there is nothing that can break the oath and the false oath taker cannot redeem from the curse.

# **KONYAK**

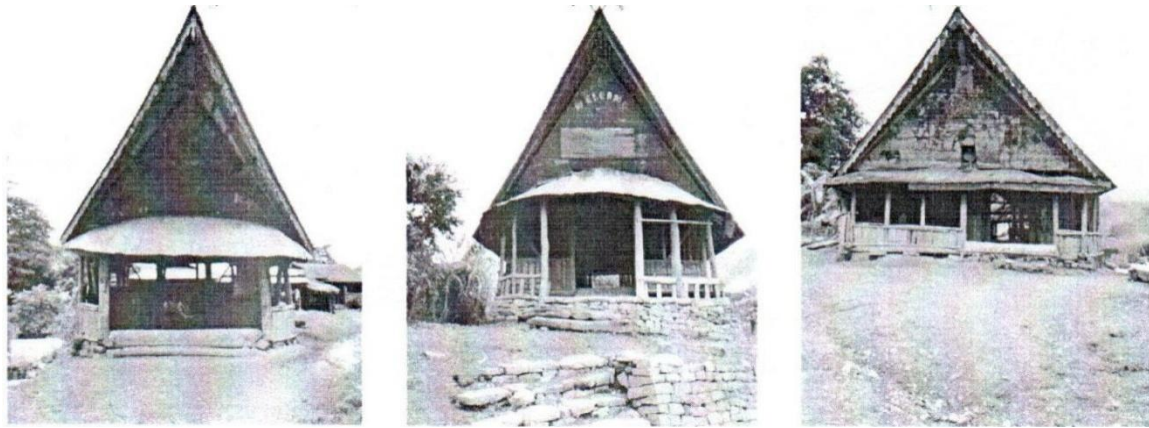
## **The Konyak-Morung**

Morung is a man's club house in Konyak villages. It is a dormitory for young unmarried men, serving as an agency for all round socialization and make him fit to become a worthy citizens of the village state.

Human skulls and other trophies of war are hung in the morung, and the pillars are carved with striking representations of the tiger, hornbill, monkey, elephant, cobra, lizard, human figures and so on. Each carving carries a meaning symbolizin2 the \ outli of the morung. For example. tiger symbolises the strength and intelligence, hornbill represents beauty, elephant stands for strength, monkey indicates smartness, cobra symbolizes ferociousness, human figure represents ownership and so forth.

The morung system of education was very strong among the traditional Konyak. The benefice members were recruited hatch by hatch according to their age. The newly recruited, in other words, the youngest in the morung used to served water, make fire, provide tea, betel leaves, lime, tobacco, bringing bamboo ropes and canes to weave basket for elders or to senior hatches etc. It was a kind of disciplinary training for the youngster.

All the young men used to sleep in morung till they get married. Morung was to serve as a place to teach all norms, histories, folk songs, folk tales, folk dance, legends, war techniques, manner and etiquette and also to discuss the affairs of a particular morung or village as a whole. Under morung system of education, elder members of the community play the role of teacher.



Girls also had dormitory, it is called in Konyak-Naga dialect. Could be constructed according to the clan or it could be the house of certain elderly women. Thus, Konyak women too acquired their education to become a perfect women citizen from their elders and peers.

The morung system of education was free and compulsory. Because all the boys after they attained certain age were recruited to become its bonafide member. Infact, the education they got there were enough to live their whole life.

## **OATH TAKING IN MATTER OF DISPUTES**

Oath is called in Konyak as Jeangjeppu or Jeangpu.

- i. Dispute in anything which could not be settled or solved in mutual understanding leads for oath taking.. For example, land dispute is the case where higher type of oath taking i.e. eatine of piece of earth from the dispute site is a practice.
- ii. Traditionally, no particular or single authority is appointed for administering the oath. As and when a case between individuals or parties is to be settled through an oath, there will a third party/parties to witness the oath- like village elders. If anything happens to any side of those oath takers, decision will be given by those third party who witness the oath taking.  
But in modern time whenever any dispute arises between individual or villages, government is informed

thereof and if decided to settle the dispute through oath taking process. i.e. (govt) representatives came be an authority to conduct the oath taking process.

- iii. For land dispute and theft cases, the procedure of oath-taking may be same. For instance, in land dispute, the ultimate form of oath is eating of earth from the dispute site. In the same way in theft case also if the accused and the accuser decide to take oath, both of them have to eat the price of earth from the very site from where the things was claimed to be missing or stolen. But wordings of the oath may be different.

But in the case of murder, the need of oath taking does not arise. Because as per the customs of the Konyaks, a criminal is out casted from the village without any question, and no more he a citizen of his village. But in case of accidental murder, the murderer will be voluntarily or otherwise expelled from the village for some years and can be re-admitted if he so wishes.

For adultery also, Konvak usually never take oath. The punishment for adultery is to impose heavy fines. Of course, the need of oath taking may arise if a person or couple is falsely alleged or if the real adulterer denies to accept the allegation. There is another chance of oath taking when a person divorces his rightful wife (wife never divorce husband) leading to the breaching of a strongly held matrimonial ties. As marriage is arranged by the parents and elders of the clans that also from the family without whom they have permanent matrimonial link. So breaching of such link by divorcing on silly matters is a crime. If a man does so for unknown reason and if he refuses to negotiate the matters in any form, then the matter will have to be settled through an oath. In such case, there is a system of oath taking which we called VIE TAHPU. Here, a long cane is used as an object of oath.



This long is put in a place with the husband and his clan members in one end and the divorced wife and her family members in another end of the cane. This cane should be chopped off into two pieces in single blow. If not, it is a bad sign for the man and his family who cuts the cane. Curse will fall upon him/his family instead of his opponent.

## **TABOOS ON CERTAIN DEATH**

It is believed that when the cause of death is un natural i.e. Death caused by accidents, suicide, murder etc. people do not mingle with the victims family or even share things. eat. Drinks etc. Believing that by associating with them the curse would befall their family.

It is highly forbidden for the villagers to visit the dead of a person who died of leprosy.

## **TABOOS DURING PREGNANCY AND CHILD BIRTH**

### **Food**

For a pregnant woman it is required of her to have food continuously so that she will not have any problems during children's birth. There are also some certain foods which are forbidden for pregnant woman to which she must abstain from it.

### **Role of husband**

Husband were forbidden to kill animals like snakes, tiger, pigs, chicken as it was believed that the child would look like them. He was also not allowed to cut cane or lead in the work force

### **Guests**

It was also believed that during, childbirth no guests will be entertained for more than ten days. No one was allowed to enter

the house as or was believed that the evil spirit or bad winds might enter the house and some misfortune might befall on the child like sickness or even death.

### **Death of a small baby**

When a small baby dies the villagers are not allowed to go to their field and work as they believed epidemics and flood might swipe away all their crops and lightning might destroy their field

## **TABOOS DURING FESTIVALS**

### **1. JAMTUN MO**

The Konyak Nagas of Longching village refers to word “mo” as festival. Jamtun mo is celebrated before the clearing of the new field to be cultivated. During this festival they offered roosters, dogs etc for sacrifices and prayed for the protection for the clearing of the forest.

### **2. LI SHU MO**

Before the sowing of seeds in the newly oblique fresh cleared field, they collect variety of seeds and saplings and kept it in the field "yamjong"(altar) and offer rooster sacrifice.

### **3. TAP MO**

After the completion of building field huts they offer rooster sacrifices so as the huts are protected from natural calamities followed by a great feast.

## **MONYU (AOLEANG)**

The Monyu festival is one of the major festival of the Konyaks. It is celebrated during the spring after the sowing of seeds. The festival last for six days.

The first day is known as "shongton", on this day the villagers would collect the firewood and necessary things needed for the festival.

The second day is called "shongme". This is the bamboo flag hoisting day.

The third day "A K hok", on this day animals like pigs, buffalo, mithun etc are slaughtered. This is the day the newly married couple's families and relatives share the feast with each other.

The fourth day is known as "Any an". The villagers would sent off all the invited guests.

The fifth day is called as the "Hahyam". The villagers offered sacrifices of animals in the field for good crops and bountiful harvest.

The sixth day is the day that the bamboo flag had to be pulled down. It is known as "Yongleituk". After that a great feast is held where everybody takes part in the feast.

## **MOHU MO**

It was the mini festival celebrated by the village/villagers.

## **JAPHAK MO**

Japhak mo is also one of the main festivals of the village, it is observed after ripening of crops. It is also known as pre-harvest

festival. During these festivals, animals are offered as sacrifice to appease their God for a bountiful harvest followed by a great feast.

## **LAO MO**

Lao mo is celebrated after the harvesting of crops .this is known as post harvest festival. The villagers gather together and celebrate with great joy. It was also believe that the villagers offer animal sacrifices to thank their God for the bountiful harvest of the year.

# **PHOM**

The institution of marriage is called "*Yiukyahpu*" among the Phom Nagas. Apart from procreation and building a family, it forged a closer bond between families. Marriage, once solemnized was unbreakable except in some extreme circumstances. Monogamy was strictly practiced, no other kind of marriage existed in Phom society. Adultery and infidelity was prohibited and discouraged. Exogamy was and is still strictly adhered to. Endogamy was a taboo and the defaulters were dealt with serious consequences even to the extent of extermination/ expelling them from the village permanently. Marriage ceremonies were usually held in the winter season after harvest. There were no restrictions with regard to age limit, but child marriage was virtually nonexistent.

## **PROPOSAL**

Proposal (*Yiükyahpü küpjan*) was done with the help of an "*Aang*" (matchmaker/mediator) arranged by the boy's parents. The matchmaker should be a trustworthy adult from amongst the boy's or girl's relatives. The matchmaker at the request of the boy's parents, convey the proposal of marriage to the girl's parents. If the parents of the girl accept the proposal it will lead to an engagement. Marriage usually takes place one to two years later. After engagement the boy and girl present "*Thinthu*" (gifts) to each other. The boy's gift can be any hunted items like birds, animals fishes or woven baskets etc. the girl usually gift items she has woven. Breaking of the engagement leads to severe consequences such as imposition of fine on the defaulter.

If the girl's parents are not inclined to give their daughter away in marriage to that boy, then instead of out rightly declining the proposal, which may seem rude, they make excuses saying their daughter is already engaged or too young to marry. There are also instances when the girl's parents refused proposals due to old family issues such as ill-treatment of their female relatives who were married to close relatives of the suitor. Such unsolved issues were discussed and resolved during this period.

If the girl's parents still refuse to give their consent after many proposals, the boy's parents/relatives would threaten to take away the girl forcibly and they will not be responsible for any consequences which may arise. Sometimes the girl's parents gave in to the threats and accepted the proposal, or they come to a mutual settlement. There were also instances wherein the boy's relatives forcibly kidnapped the girl while she was out fetching water/firewood or on her way to the field.

## **MARRIAGE**

A year or two after engagement, the marriage date is fixed by the parents of the couple. A feast is hosted by both the parents of the couple. Large number of animals are slaughtered depending on the wealth of the parents. The groom's family offer an animal

or large portion of meat to the bride's family. On the day of marriage the relatives of the couple gather early at the groom's house. After the formal talk, the groom's parents offer gifts/ bride price to the bride's parents. The items for bride price usually consists of muzzle-loading guns, necklaces adorned with wild boar teeth, mithuns (*bos fontalis*), pigs and even land. Traditional shawls are offered to the bride's parents. A feast follows the meeting. A large plate of rice and meat is served to the matchmaker as a sign of gratitude and "*Thinthu*" (gifts) too is offered. After the feast the matchmaker takes the bride to her parents house again.

The main ritual is held in the groom's house. The couple and their relatives are dressed in their traditional attires. The bride is led to the groom's house in a procession along with her female friends and relatives led by the matchmaker. During the marriage feast the bride and groom share food from the same plate made specially for the occasion. The plate is made of a special type of leaf known as "*lae*". Many cone shaped plates are also made from the same leaves for the guests. Along with rice, drinks are also offered to the couple in a bamboo cup with stripped designs. Before having the meal the groom's parents take a handful of rice from the plate of the couple and throw them to the ground while invoking blessings for a long and prosperous life for the couple. The bride is allowed to stay with her parents for a long time even after marriage. She was allowed to visit her husband for an overnight stay but during the day she was expected to work in her parents' field as she was still staying with them. With mutual understanding she could

stay in her parents' house even after childbirth. Eventually she has to go to her husband's house and live there. Some couples do start living together right after marriage.

The rituals associated with the marriage was the same for bride's from other village also, but the cost of bride price was relatively higher. Some clans discouraged inviting relatives of brides from other village as it was considered taboo.

**Oral traditions on (a) inheritance (b) superstitious belief & taboos (c) oath taking in matters of disputes.**

**(a) Inheritance**

The Phom followed patrilineal system whereby men were given preference over women for inheritance of both movable and immovable property of the Family. The eldest brother inherits the properties of his father however in usual case the property is distributed amongst the sons. The daughters receive only household items like basket, clothes, machete, seeds etc on her marriage.

There are community lands or "Bang kah" which are maintained by the morung. "phangkah" land belonging to certain clans and "pühukah" the land which are shared and cultivated by brothers of the same family but not owned by particular siblings. Such lands cannot be claimed by any individual but could be sold to an individual in certain exceptional circumstances through the permission of the morung, clan and kins respectively.

**(b) Superstitious beliefs and Taboos**

**(i) Thibü :**

We have a number of people who were believed to possess the spirits of tigers and they can be also termed as "tiger- spirited-man" and as such depends on the numbers of tigers and their spirits that he or she possesses. Some may have five to six tigers and some may have ten to twelve tigers. It is said that out of many tigers, there would be only one alpha tiger and the rest would be subordinates. Supposing someone shoots at this alpha tiger and succumbed to injuries, then, the tiger-man would also die at the same moment. If this alpha tiger suffered for long term injuries, then the tiger-man would also suffer the same. But if any of the subordinates tiger suffers from injury, the tiger-man would also suffer but not as much as in the case of the alpha tiger.

Such gift was normally a hereditary and one of tiger-man's children could be possessed with tigers' spirits though effect with some others could not be ruled out. It is said that the spirits of the tiger demand some rituals to be observed, taboos to be kept in order to take possession of her (tiger) spirits by the one who would be a tiger-man. But if he or she wanted to discard this gift, one would nullify all requirements and do things conterwise. While carrying out this act of nullification, he or she might suffer lots of spiritual tortures with physical uneasiness but later would be freed from this grip gradually.

Once the spirits of the tigers took possession of the tiger-man, he had to keep certain taboos, he would not enter the house of death especially of those who had unnatural death like the family where mother had died during the child delivery was strictly prohibited. Taking any food from all such family was strictly prohibited. There would be separate cup and plate for him even at home. On journey, he would spread leaves over plate to put rice for eating but he would always carry cup for himself. To take beef or pork or any meat that has been killed by tiger or any others wild animals was forbidden. The tiger-man would always pretend to identify himself with some kind of peculiar signs keeping of long witch-knot, necklace and some objects in his possession.

Usually, the tiger-man had a wider and greater involvement in community life. He was highly respected in the society and people were afraid to utter anything ill of him because his service might be sought after and consulted for any eventuality in the family as well as in the community. He was regarded as the visible figure to reach the invisible world to bring message for problems at hand and also for the future of the family. He could even foretell the impending danger about to happen in the community. The medium whereby he got messages was mainly by means of necromancy. They use seances, trance, meditation and telepathy to reach the spirit during the state of falling into a trance. Another medium was the messages being brought by the spirits of the tigers which would update the events around.

The necromancy was mainly practised specially when some family members of the patient came to inquire as to what caused the patient to fall sick and how and what is to be done for his healing. Tiger-man would fall into trance and he would communicate with the ghost of the deceased to know the reason behind sickness and remedial steps to recover. He would bring the messages from the deceased through trance-speaking what to do and what not to do for healing. If the message was negative, then the patient would die. The family would comply and perform whatever the ghost of the



deceased demanded. Sometimes, he would also perform rice divination to ascertain the causes of the sickness and its healing.

The tiger-man also acted like a medicine-man. Whatever the prescription he received through Necromancy, tigers' spirits and other divination he had to convey it to the patient's family. He would also prepare medicine from herb, roots, seeds, bark of trees, bones of animals, feather and fur for the patient. He would predict when a man would die or what kinds of misfortune would occur in a family. But here is a very interesting saying, "thibu hOk laophulei lashuh-1 bangei laophu dihen nenyinyih" which means, he could predict when a man would die but not his own because his fate would not allow him to know as to when he would die.

### **(ii) Ginger divination:**

It was very commonly practised amongst the Phoms. On the invitation of an enquirer, the diviner would come and perform this divination for the purpose he was called for. The diviner, by holding a knife and a piece of ginger in his hand would cut up piece by piece and throw on the surfaces of the designated place. He would then read the shapes, sizes and position of the ginger pieces and predict what would happen in future and suggest what to do about it.

### **(iii) Egg Divination:**

An egg remains just an ordinary egg until it is gossiped or mocked to perform some supernatural powers. The moment an egg is gossiped by the performer to carry out the desired plan, it becomes a very powerful mana possessed egg. For instance, in the event of fire mishap devouring houses one after another by raging flames, the performer would take an egg with its top opened and gossip saying, "Oh lemphü aokpü oünyak oüshüha, nüngi awjü lemtükshih or leptükshih" meaning, 'oh, all powerful all black and white chicken, let this raging flames wander. The result would be immediate as desired and this is how the fires were doused easily.

In order to trap tiger, egg mana was used. The charmer would break-open the top side of the eggs and gossip utterances to it and leave around the trap for tiger to eat so that it would be easily beguiled. The similar allurements were also used to beguile monkeys by placing the gossiped egg under the tree where monkeys would sleep. They would not run away in the morning even if they saw hunters around them. This same egg mana was also used during the raids of the other villages and in times of trials of cases with an ulterior motive to cause confusions, lose hearts and courage to confront with rivals.

**(iv) Broom-grass divination:**

Either before head-hunting or fishing and hunting expeditions, one would attempt to know either good or bad would befall, he would consult with a skilled diviner on broom-grass stalk which is called “ala shaakpü”. A diviner would split the broom-grass stalk into two to three pieces. One piece after another he would tear the stalks from one end to the other. He would read the shortness and lengthiness of its edges on both, left and right, inner and outer sides. The diviner would tell the prediction to the enquirer. If the predictor gave a green signal, then the expedition would be undertaken, but in the case of red signal, one would countermand the proposal. Attempt against it was believed to face trouble or danger.

**(v) Chicken entrails divination:**

The diviner would kill a chicken provided by the caller. He would pull out the entrails of the chicken killed for the purpose and after careful observation, he would tell what has gone wrong and what remedial measure would be done about it.

**(vi) Rituals for recall of spirit : (ompü):**

The seizure of soul in Phom is called, ompü. This seizure could take place in a brook, saddle, valley, mountain, lake, jungle, field and even at home when a person feels afraid or get sudden shock of something at home or elsewhere. Sometimes, soul could be seized without knowing what had happened. Seizure of soul at home was considered to be more serious and dangerous which would be difficult to recover. It was also believed that the seizure of soul by the male devil could be pacified and conceded easily by our animals sacrifice, but a soul seized by female devil would not be easily appeased and in most cases the patient would not survive. Except boils and sore, burns and injuries, all kinds of sicknesses were believed to be caused by the action of the evil spirits.

Healing of sick was mostly a spiritual concern rather than physical one. The family members had to call a shaman or diviner to know as to where and how the soul of the patient was seized. After divination, he would say what animals should be sacrificed, It could be chicken, dog, pig or goat depending on the demand of evil spirits but not cow or mithun. The diviner with his assistant would take these animals to the very place where soul is suspected to have seized. As the blood of the sacrificed animal is sprinkled on leaves, the diviner would pronounce saying, “oh, we offer you this sacrifice in exchange of the patient. Please release the soul of (patient's name)”. After this sacrificial rite is performed, the diviner and his helper would boil this meat and eat all by

themselves that day itself and would not take home even a single piece, they would carry six stones in case of man and five stones in case of women and a jug of water with them. On their way back home, they would not speak to anyone they meet on the way nor would they answer to the questions asked by anyone believing that talking with others would stop the soul from following them. On reaching the village gate, the diviner would call to the seized soul by pronouncing thus:

“Pinüng maakdhangì, biühen shepshüngì, Shümtang shümei anpha-ü.”

"By mantis and spiders, earthworms and snails, Send from one place to another."

"Biühen shepshüng mü, ajek vamüi ma; Biunyü biütem mü, methah melaü mü; Yaongshü püchong mü, bhenlak vungpha mü; Külbhih yaongphang mü shumtang shümei, Jaitang jaiyei anpha-ü,"

"with earthworms and snails; with sparrow and munias; With pythons and cobra; with termites and pebbles; Send from one place to another, and let the soul reach home".

The moment they enter the house, they would ask the family members to close the shutters from backdoor, windows from front door immediately to prevent the soul from going away. Coming near to the patient, the water they brought would be given to drink and the stones would be kept under the patient's pillow signifying that the soul has come back home. If the soul was suspected to be detained in far flung areas and if the exact places were not detected, then the diviner or even the family members would take a trumpet known as shükvaung or Amit made out of buffalo's horn and blow loud and long so that the detained soul would hear it and come back home.

## **TABOOS**

### **(i) Killing of tiger/python:**

If a man kills python he has to go down to the river and bite small crabs, then he has to go straight to the morung and jump over the fire wash his hands and feet before he goes home. It is done so because of the belief that he will get disease of snake in contemporary understanding the disease may be understood as paralysis or leprosy. They also refrain from eating mushroom since it grows on fallen dead trunks or branches, which is similar to the stillness of the snake.

If a man kills a tiger he makes sure that the jaws remain open. Thus, he thrusts a stick between the jaws with the belief that it will not tell his spirits whoever killed him. It is because men feared that the tiger spirit would avenge him.

**(ii) Unnatural death:**

In the olden days, the family facing such an unnatural death was considered as the most wretched family. The accidental deaths caused due to falling from the tree, drowning, killed by any kind of wild animal, death during child delivery, death caused by fire, shooting etc were all considered as unnatural death.

Apart from the grief due to loss of precious life, they had to abandon their house with all the precious things therein, their granary barns, their animals, they were not to harvest the paddy and any other vegetables in that current year. The worst part was that they even abandon the clothes or dresses worn by them before bath and they had to replace it with new ones after the bath of purification. The purification had to be done the following day or two days after the accident by taking bath in the river by the whole family members. The family had to start a new social and economic life, all the necessities would be taken from relatives including seeds for the next year's cultivation.

**(iii) Child birth:**

When a child is born in a family they would pluck banyan leaves and placed it in front of the house to let the community know that the child is born. Six piece of banyan leaves for boy and five piece for a girl. No guest should visit the house until the naming of the baby, i.e six days for boys and five days for girls. No crab will be cooked because they believed that like the crab the baby will bite the mother's breast nibble while feeding him or her.

**(iv) Domesticated animals:**

When piglets, puppies are born they refrain from eating crabs with the belief that the young ones will bite mother's breast while feeding. They will also put out leaves in front of the house to let others know that the domesticated animals has their young ones. The leaves of trees like fig and jackfruit etc are used i.e which has abundant juice/ water in it to resemble the oozing of milk from the breast.

**(v) Marraige:**

Marraige amongst the same clan and kin was strictly prohibited. They believed that such marraige leads to abnormal, disabled and under averaged children because of same bloodline.

**(vi) Unusual occurance:**

During unusual occurance like solar and lunar eclipse the whole village would remain indoors except the youths who would gather in the morung and beat the log drum untill the phenomenon is over. They believe eclipse is the time of crossing between the sun and the moon therefore women and children are not suppose to witness it. The menfolk shout and yell to the sun to release the moon.

**(vii) Other form of taboos:**

The youths are not supposed to eat meals provided during the funeral. Only the old man and woman would visit in case of a death of mother during delivery fearing that they might meet the same fate or their longevity could be shortened.

The women are not suppose to hold or walk over the tools belonging to men like spears, machete, guns, fishing hooks and nets etc. They consider that such action would lead to unsuccessful campaigns during fishing, hunting and war etc.

**(c) Oath taking in matters of disputes:**

Our fore-fathers often used to say this among themselves as well as to their children, "Don't twist the history and remove the boundary stones or marks and leave a curse to posteriors." To take an oath for Land was considered a terrible thing. Apart from shame, defeat and loss of property, they believe that curse would continue for generations starting first from the one who swear, then family members and so on. The outcome of the oath was final and binding and it was considered as the judgement of the supernatural. But in some exceptional case, if there was no outcome of oath within the stipulated period, then with the help of third party, the property would be divided equally, if not, the dispute would continue for ages.

Some of the oaths taken by the Phoms are :

**(i) Kandok hahpü**

One of the often used methods of oath taking was "eating of Soil" if we go for literal translation of the term. In terms of dispute between the two families, the head of the family would swear, if it was between the two clans, then the eldest of the clan or anyone they unanimously chose would swear, if it was between the two villages, then the swearer would be the descendant of the one who occupied the land first. In this method, the swearer of one of the rival parties would dig out a handful of soil, holding in his hand, would invoke the name of God and then Sun, the moon, the stars to let them know what he said was true and authentic and to give right judgement. He would then narrate the name of the forefathers who firstly occupied the land to prove the authenticity of their claims in the same way as the former. This was how the oath ended. In all oath takings, unless otherwise stated, they would keep a deadline within which the misfortune would happen to the guilty.

**(ii) Veivan kü dephü:**

In this Oath, two rival swearers would hold on to each end of a cane and after making all authentic declaration of their respective claims, the person chosen by community to administer the oath would cut off the cane which was a simple oath taking practice.

**(iii) Yüng yingteipü:**

In the case of river or water dispute, one rival swearer would fetch the water in a bamboo jug from the same disputed river or water and would give it to the rival swearer to take. This give and take of water jug was the act of oath between the two rivals.

**(iv) Yaong bhagpü:**

It is also one of the methods of oath taking between the two rivals. The swearer of both the rival parties after declaring their respective rights would break the stone into two pieces. This stone would be about a foot long so that it could be broken into two equal pieces.

**(v) Oubüm shaakpü:**

In this oath taking method, a chicken would be brought in a stipulated place. The swearers of both the rival parties would hold each side of the chicken's legs and after pronouncing their respective rights, rival swearers would tear the chicken into two pieces by pulling it into two diametrically opposite directions.

**(vi) Shahnyü bha ku ketteipü :**

During the British rule, one new system of oath was introduced. They would bring one tiger's tooth and the swearers of both the rival parties after pronouncing their respective rights would bite to this tiger's tooth one after another.

**(vii) Ou katteipü :**

In this method, both the rival parties would bring the two biggest cock (one each) in the village. These two cocks would be fastened separately by a rope of three to four feet long and tie-up against a peg each. The cock would challenge each other and the one whose cock flaps and crows first was considered winner in the dispute. The result was immediately known in this case and no further allegation was made since the verdict was candidly spectacular.

**(viii) Yung kü shiipü :**

This oath taking system was practised among the Nagas of the Manipur also. In this method, both the rival divers (swearers) would dive into the water to remain in water as long as they could. The one who could remain in water longer than the rival diver, he and his party was declared winner in this method, the verdict was immediate, decisive and final. There would be no further allegation and disputes. The verdict was always believed to be supernatural beyond human speculations,

**(ix) Aüt kakpü :**

When the two villages had conflict or dispute and the tension escalated to the outbreak of war, then delegates from both the villages would come together to decisively resolve to fight each other. In such decision, they would bring a bamboo arrow and it would be split into two halves equally. This act of arrow split is called "Aüt kakpü", they would take one piece each of split arrow back to their respective villages to signify that war was imminent and at hand. From the next day, they would make a strategy to attack their enemies. When the villagers wanted an amicable solution peacefully, then they would come together in a particular place. They would break the bamboo arrow "aut" and a stone into two equal halves. These acts were the signs of agreement that they would not fight anymore thus making peace between them.

# **POCHURY**

## **INHERITANCE**

The system of inheritance had been in existence since our ancestral days. Our society, been strongly patriarchal, all the property and assets of the family are based on patriarchal lineage and thus a male folk inherits everything. A male child inherits all the family properties like houses, plots, paddy fields and all other assets of the family when he gets married. In families where there are more sons, the family property is shared among them in such a way where the first gets the biggest share and the youngest son gets the smallest share and it is the youngest son who will inherit his father house and looks after his parents till their death. In case of no male child in the family, the paternal relative of the man will inherit the entire properties. In matter of disputes of properties among the families or brothers it is always resolved through proper discussion and consensus decisions are made.

Woman cannot inherit ancestral property, but gifting of land/paddy field to the daughters by the rich man was practiced. This gifting system was called 'ASOUZHUH', in Pochury Society where a daughter is given a property/paddy field which she can freely use it until her death and on her death, the property shall be taken back by one of her brother (if no son(s) then the paternal male relative(s) of her father) who in return must pay for the property by killing a live animals like mithun/buffalo/cow on her funeral. A woman is also given special gifts from her family on her marriage like spades, daos, ornaments, woven basketries, shawls, mekhalas etc, and then sent off to her new home.

## **Superstitious beliefs & taboos**

Before Christianity came into our society, our ancestors' beliefs in many superstitions and lived in fear for most of the life. They fear to go deep in valleys and thick forest and even to go in water areas like ponds and wells because they believed ghosts and spirits existed in such places. Before the yearly jhum cultivation starts, a particular kind of metal called 'amiirilh' (iron) is thrown on the way leading to the fields so that no harm or dangers from the spirits



comes their way. It is belief that the meal like rice, curry and wine should be offered first to the ghost/spirit in order to keep everyone in sound health and mind. Before field activities starts proper ritual should be performed so that the harvest will be bountiful, failing to fulfill all the rituals leads to bad omen in health and even death. The vegetations of the fields and tattles dies in cases no proper rituals are done. It is also widely believed that the soul of the death existed and in their memorial on every special occasion and festivals, special meal and wine are kept at cemetery or in the corner of the house where it is believed they come to eat and drink them. There is a particular rock called miitiloo (boil rock) in Phor village which is believed that if a person touches that rock he/she will suffer from lots of boils. That rock is still there to this day.

Many social taboos were prevalent and had many impact and consequences on the individual and society. A strong taboo was practiced where a same clan cannot be married. Same clan marriage has many harmful consequences on the couple committing it and on village life too. It is believed that the vegetations and paddies will be infested with pest/insects/rots and the year will bring no good for the village. The same clan married couple are exiled from the village as punishment for their deeds.

During the period of community fishing, the father goes to the river with the rest of the men folk for fishing and other who stays at home must not kill any young chicks/puppy/piglet for meal as it is believed to bring bad luck to the community fishing. And if such incidents are committed then the father will be cast out from joining the community fishing again. Men are also not allowed to do netting and weaving. If a man practices such works, it will bring bad luck to him in hunting and other business.

If a person fall sick in a family and is believed to have lost his/her spirit, it is through witchcraft that the lost spirit will come back to the person. And in this process a person who does witchcraft will go out in search of the lost spirit and the whole family does a scared ritual in the house waiting for the lost spirit. The whole family must cook and eat only ginger and dry fish and must go to sleep without entertaining any visitors or relative. If so they happen to open the door for visitors it is believed that the lost soul will never come back home again.

On the day of seed sowing it is the parents who goes to the field early in the morning for sowing and the children who stays

back home must fast without food and drinks, waiting for the parents to reach back home and cook for them. In any case if the children cooks or eat before the parents return home, it is believed that the paddy will bear less fruit and will reap harvest.

### **Oath taking in matter of disputes**

During our ancestral days there were no written laws in books to carry out trails and orders, but it was done through swearing and oath as the last means/procedure, when controversies regarding land disputes between two people or family occur, or one person claims to own part of that land and the boundary to where it reaches. In matter of decision and oath taking, only the men folk and elders of the village representing from each clan and khels participate. It is done in the village gate or entrance of the village. In such a case, the person is asked to swear in such a way, he takes the mud from the disputed land and put it in his mouth and pronounces that the land belongs to him. Now the land belongs to him after swearing is done.

If a person commits a theft, he /she must be put to trail for the theft he/she has committed. And if at all the person denies the act, he/she asked to swear. The accused is made to swear on the following words, "If I have truly stolen your thing, I will die before sunset. I won't have a good harvest and the crops that I have planted will perish. I also swear that my parents, siblings and my entire clan will die if I have committed such a crime."

If a woman gets involved in an extra marital affairs and her husband/in-laws come to know of it, she will be driven out of home. However if she denies of the affairs, then she is made to swear by biting the skull of the tiger or a bear that she hasn't committed an act of adultery. But if the case is such that she had an affair but refuses to accept her act then she will lead an unhappy life and her life span will be shortened.

However, when a person who even after having committed to the facts and takes oath/swearing, and denies it, the person faces consequences in future where there is no healthy living, sicknesses like blindness, fracturing bones and other severe accident and unnatural death will befall on him/her.

# **RENGMA**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage constitutes the basic structure of the social system of all human race. Systems and procedures that govern marriage, as it is understood, however differs from culture to culture and society to society. The Sacredness of marriage is one important principle on which all societies converge into or commonly share.

Monogamy was the basic feature of marriage among the Rengma Naga. Polyandry was not practiced, however rare instances of polygyny were reported. Exogamy is also another important feature of marriage. Exogamy here implies marriage outside one's clan which could be termed as clan exogamy. It means that marriage within the same clan is taboo/ forbidden. A loose form of levirate (a custom by which on the death of a married man, his widow marries one of his brothers) and sororate (a custom by which upon the death of a woman, her husband marries her sister) was prevalent among the Rengmas.

## **PROPOSAL**

Marriage is by mutual consent between the two families. Marriage is considered sacrosanct to which a great deal of values and importance is attached. Mate selection is done by parents. It is customary for the boy's family to do the proposing. The young man after having acquired a house of his own and other properties is said to be eligible for marriage. It may be noted that in searching for a suitable bride, the young man may pick a girl of his choice, however it was rarely practiced and his parents played a major role in deciding his future wife. Once the prospective bride is identified, the marriage proposal is initiated through an intermediary or matchmaker, who is ideally an aunt or uncle or an elderly woman. The intermediary or matchmaker played an important role in traditional marriage. He or she must be a person of integrity, morally upright, well versed with culture ad traditions, reliable and trustworthy.

Marriage proposal can be sent to the same person three or four times. Her family reserves the right to accept or reject the

proposal. If the proposal is accepted the intermediary would convey the news to the boy's family. On the night of engagement, either the intermediary or an elderly woman would hold the night at the young man's place where a trap would be set at a corner of the house. If the trap caught a mouse it signifies a good omen. It is also believed that she would have a, good or bad, concerning the future of the couple. A spearhead along with a bamboo mug of rice beer covered with banana leaf would be sent to the bride's family through the intermediary. If the intermediary stumbles on her way it indicates bad omen for the couple. The spear signifies that the girl now belongs to the young man. Again another spearhead is sent to the bride's family following which the fixation of the wedding day is done, Marriage did not involve any noteworthy ceremonies or rituals. There was however a sort of post-wedding ritual. Love marriage is not uncommon though forbidden and marriage evolved out of such relationship is said to bring many adversities in life including poverty, childless, constant danger of animal attacks etc.

## **MARRIAGE**

There was no particular season for marriage. However sowing or spring season was considered the best time for marriage as it was believed to bring prosperity. Marriages were not held during mourning period. The traditional marriageable age for a boy was between 18 and 21, while that of a girl was 16 and 18 years. Marriage did not involve any noteworthy ceremonies or rituals. It is a simple event not associated with lengthy formality. It neither involved solemnization nor community feasting. It consists of a simple ritual, with the groom and bride taking vow to be faithful to each other, offering of prayer and a send off ceremony at the bride's residence. The couple would be presented with gifts like fowls, bamboo baskets, weaving materials, kitchen items etc. by the guests. Friends of the bride would come and assist her in carrying the bride's belongings to her new home. Before the departure of the couple and the marriage party to their new home, the parents of the bride would invoke blessings for a happy and prosperous life upon the couple.

The procession from the bride's house is led by the intermediary. While leaving her home the bride never looks back as a sign of leaving for good. The moment she steps into her new home she would stop using her surname and adopt her husband's name.

She is not allowed to visit her parents home for the first three days, likewise her parents also cannot visit her for similar days.

Though the marriage is a simple affair, there was however a sort of post-marriage ritual.

1. The first three days is also called cleansing period where the newly married couple would not go anywhere. They had to remain at home as a mark of honor to their marriage.
2. Exactly after three days there would be a get together at the house of the bride's parents. There would be feasting and drinking. Visitors attending this post marriage celebration would bring along gifts like fowls, baskets, vegetables, kitchen materials and present it to the couple.
3. Again another one day event known as the pig's ritual is held at the residence of the newly wedded couple. It is officially performed by a young boy and an elderly person in order to invoke blessings upon the couple.
4. A feast called an elder's feast is an important post marriage event which lasts for a day. All the elderly people were invited to the feast. They in turn bless the couple.

Love marriage is not uncommon though forbidden and marriage evolved out of such relationship is said to bring many adversities in life including poverty, childless, constant danger of animal attacks etc.

## **CHILDHOOD BETROTHAL**

Childhood betrothal or engagement was prevalent among the Rengmas in the past. It is done usually between families who share close and cordial relationship with each other. Engagement is done in infancy on the basis of mutual agreement by both sets of parents. Here too, the parents of the baby boy propose to the baby girl's parents. If the proposal is accepted, an earring or necklace would be put on the baby girl by the parents of the boy. The earring or necklace signifies that she is engaged to the boy. This 'vow of betrothal' is sacred which cannot be violated and had to follow through.

## **BRIDE PRICE**

Another noteworthy feature of the Rengmas is bride price. There are two categories of bride price, one for the rich and one for the poor. The rich paid three cows as bride price to the girl's family whereas the poor paid either a cow's leg or half a cow for the bride. Bride price can be paid on installment basis. It was believed that bride price brought prosperity. There is a specific day that is fixed for the settlement of the bride price.

## **INHERITANCE**

The principle rule of inheritance of the Rengma tribe is that all property goes to the male descendants with exception that a widow is entitled to maintenance from her husband's property till re-marriage or death. Some important system of inheritance is:-

All self-acquired properties of the father will be equally distributed/shared among his sons, i.e. land, fields, houses, male ornaments, cattle and guns. The youngest son inherits the parental house. The daughter has no inheritance right except through will or gift by her father.

In case of a sonless family the order of succession of inheritance is as follow-

1. Own brothers.
2. Paternal uncles.
3. Paternal nephews.
4. Close relative of the possessor and
5. Clan members

A sonless father can transfer his land to his daughters or son-in-laws by means of sale.

A woman can own or purchase land and other property. Her sons will inherit this property after her death. If she dies unmarried then her brothers will inherit the land.

A person may give a plot of cultivated land to his daughter at the time of her marriage. She may utilize the land for cultivation during her life time. In such cases, the woman cannot sell the land. The heirs of her father will inherit the land after her death.

A daughter can inherit her mother's dresses and ornaments and those properties given to her by will or gift.

If a poor person incapable of earning a livelihood is maintained by a rich man, they establish a father-son relationship. If the former prosper and died then the foster father inherits the property.

The clan members collectively inherit the ancestral property of the clan.

## **SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS AND TABOOS IN RENGMA NAGA CONTEXT WITH REGARD TO THE FOLLOWING**

### **Incestuous relationship**

Incestuous relationship in the form of parent-child, sibling-sibling and cousin-cousin unions is traditionally and culturally forbidden. Any person accused of involvement in such things would incur some social sanctions including barring from hunting especially of bears and tigers, serving community in any activity, from going to war, from performing any rites and rituals except for themselves. It is believed that those engaged in such relationship would carry generation curse i.e. there may be the curse of no prosperity, posterity or having barren issues, also to their descendants. When one comes across tiger there is a warning that those who involve in incestuous relationship will be killed by it.

### **Premarital sexual relationship**

There is a strong social taboos pertaining to this case. It is believed that the prime glories and blessings roar out from their life crowns and left them empty. Real life power, blessings, prosperity, honour and dignity desert their life. No marital rituals are allowed at the time of their marriage as per tradition and culture. Premarital sexual relationship is common in our culture in the past. When a boy impregnates his girl friend he has to pay a fine of seven fields to her lover's parents or relatives as per traditions.

### **Murder**

This has stringent social sanctions. The murderer along with his/her whole family members will be expelled from

village. They are allowed to return only after new water or spring comes out from soil or earth. They face certain social stigma from society as people look down upon them. After the advent of British term of expel is fixed as 7years.

## **Suicide**

Strong taboo is attached to suicide. In fact it is forbidden even to utter this word. It affects community, family and individual life as it is unnatural and deadly against nature and community. According to Rengma custom the dead body of suicidal death should be buried outside village forest. The next day after the burial of the dead body the whole villagers will go for fasting of KESAKENA KEMNI to condemn the suicide spirit to die away with the dead body.

## **Dead bodies/corpses**

Some taboos are observed with regard to touching handling and disposal of dead bodies. It is forbidden for young people, pregnant women and children to touch corpses of the victims of animal attacks, accidents and suicides because it is believed that it affects them mentally, physically and psychologically. When a pregnant woman dies its corpses will not be looked at or seen by young women. Its dead body is carried through broken wall (opening on the wall). All her belongings would be buried alongside the grave or be disposed off in a far off place where people can't go. There is no taboo of burying dead body/corpse. Rather it is forbidden not to bury. Corpses of unnatural death were buried outside the village. It was believed that the ghost/spirit of such death visit and haunt the graveyard at night time.

## **Animals**

It is prohibited for small children, women and pregnant women to eat or touch certain animals like pangolins, snakes, tigers, lions, slow loris etc. It is said to affect generations or siblings, health or body according to traditional beliefs.



## **Bodily function**

Open farting/flatulence is considered disrespectful, indiscipline and ill-mannered. It is believed to earn curses, misfortune or even disease of boils.

## **OATH TAKING IN MATTER OF DISPUTES**

Oath taking is the last resort to resolve any dispute cases. It is the highest form of resolving a case. If the swearer is ready to take an oath then an oath taking ceremony is administered upon him. The oldest person in the court recites the verse and the swearer follows after him. After an oath is administered the swearer may take away his claims and the defendant has to surrender his right.

### **Oath Taking Verse**

"I am not telling lie in my words. If I lied let the tiger devour me, let my enemy kill me and let my whole generation vanish from the face of the earth like the falling leaves."

Two kinds of Oath taking

#### **1. Tiger's Tooth:-**

Swearer took oath on tiger's tooth by placing a few hairs of his own and a little soil from the village land on it. He stands in the open air when swearing for he must be between earth and sky and swears according to the formula dictated by the village burier or some poor and landless man. The formula varies somewhat, but always the swearer declares that if he swears falsely he will meet a violent end before next harvest, either by being killed by a tiger, drowning or falling from a cliff or by a wound from his own spear or dao or in some such way. Occasionally a leaf from the head-tree was substituted for the tiger's tooth. The swearer had to pluck it himself, and this was a very terrible oath indeed.

#### **2. Oath on Anyakho/Nahu wood:-**

This oath is taken on a piece of wood from a tree called anyakho of nahu. The tree has bright red flowers and all the leaves fall in the autumn. This oath is considered very

serious and stronger than that on a tiger's tooth and if taken falsely, will entail the extinction of the swearer's clan.

## **WEAVING AND SHAWLS**

As any other Naga tribes weaving is a popular art of the Rengmas. For weaving usually loin loom is used, however fly shuttle loom is gaining currency over the years. Traditional shawls, mekkelas of unique designs, shoulder bags, jackets, mufflers with traditional touch are woven. The traditional Rengma clothing consists of various types of clothes which are indicative of the status and position of the wearers. A man who has not been able to offer a great feast of merit or has never killed an enemy may wear an ordinary type of cloth called Rhikho. Rikho is a white cloth with four narrow black bands. Moyetsu is an ordinary type of cloth worn by the young men. Anuthsii/Zonyuphi is a cloth for a man of high social standing and the one who had already offered a great feast. Rengmas make yellow dye from the flowers of a tree and also practice painting on clothes.

## **ARTISTRY**

Artistry like basketry, woodcarving, ironsmith, pottery etc are practiced by the tribe. Tseminyu village is popular for pottery making.

## **DIET**

Rengmas have a very simple yet unique cuisine. Taro/ colocasia is a very popular food amongst the Rengmas. A simple food meal would include rice, taro soup and chilli sauce. A very delicious item that forms an important part of Rengma cuisine is crab chilli sauce prepared by pounding with lots of chillies, salt, tomato and garlic.

## **OTHER CUSTOMS**

The Rengma tribals bury their dead and place the spear, shield and other belongings of the deceased in the grave. The funeral ceremonies end with lamentations and feasting.

# **SANGTAM**

## **ORAL TRADITION ON INHERITANCE, OATH TAKING, SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS AND TABOOS AMONGST THE SANGTAM TRIBE OF KIPHIRE.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sangtam (Naga) tribe is found in two different districts of Nagaland, the Upper Sangtam or Longkhim-Chare area in Tuensang district and the Lower Sangtam or the Kiphire area in Kiphire district. The Lower Sangtam constitutes the major bulk of the Sangtam population.

### **INHERITANCE**

The Sangtam practices patriarchal inheritance. When father dies, the house and most of the immovable valuable assets are inherited by the youngest son. Other movable and some immovable properties are distributed amongst the sons where the eldest has the liberty to choose and take first followed by his brothers. In case, the parents have only a single plot of land then there is no issue, the eldest son automatically inherits it. However, if the mother wishes to stay back even after her husband expires, the property remains a common property amongst brothers but the youngest son holds the right to the house and most of the properties. In certain case, if a man has no son and he passes away, then the deceased paternal kin becomes the rightful owner of the wealth. The Sangtam women have no role when it comes to inheritance of property and wealth.

### **OATH TAKING IN TIMES OF DISPUTE**

Oath taking depends or varies with the type of issues. In land dispute case, both the dispute parties along with the elders gather at a place on a date and time which is preplanned. The skull bones of a tiger or the tooth of wild boar/tiger is brought to that place. An elevated small mount or area fenced with cane wire is used as the place of oath taking. Each dispute parties will be represented by a member from their respective clan. The representative takes turn in biting the skull or tooth by declaring that the land is genuinely belongs to his clan. The whole act is being witnessed by the people and it is belief that within a short span of

time, either of the oath takers or any of the members for the dispute parties will die and the deceased party is considered the fraudster/guilty. After the oath taking ceremonies, both the party rushes back to their respective villages, without turning and looking behind as it is considered a taboo to look back and shortens one's life. While on the way home, the dispute party sings songs of head hunting with a hope that they will be winner and that the head of the fraudster will be collected as trophy.

In any case, if there is oath taking amongst friends or family, then their relationship terminates forever. In fornication case, the oath taking is slightly different however, the process is similar and the accused is penalized.

### **SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF AND TABOO**

The Sangtam community has numbers of superstitious belief and taboo. It is belief that in order to keep oneself fit and healthy, the youngsters must refrain themselves from eating the head portion of any animal's meat. It is a taboo to eat animals like snake, owl, eagle, vulture, etc and even hurting disabled/mentally ill is forbidden.

If a person dies accidentally by falling off a cliff, by drowning in water or unnatural death like during child birth, it is considered a taboo. The movable properties of the victim/deceased are either thrown away or are burned to ashes. It is said that in keeping possession of these expired person may result in recurring the same problem again.

# **SUMI**

## **SUMI TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE**

The Sumi traditional marriage differs in many aspects from other Naga tribes. One unique features is the payment of dowry to secure a wife. In the olden days agriculture was the main and the only means of livelihood, but for those villagers who do not wish to work or unable to work alone in the field form into groups called 'alogi'. This group consisted of both male and female, married and both unmarried. In many instances a man and woman would fall in love which leads to marriage.

When a boy starts to like a particular girl and if they are from the same group, he would start collecting items or cut firewood for her to carry back home in the evening. After few days or weeks he would propose her saying 'I promise that till death part us, I want to make you my life partner'. If the girl likes the boy too she would say, "It's not for me to decide but my parents, and if they approve the marriage proposal what can I say". Once the boy understands that the girl likes him the he will again make plans to tell the girl's parents. But before approaching her parents for the second time he starts sending them whatever he could collect from hunting or fishing. He would sent the things in the evening and wait hiding outside to hear what the girl's parents would say.

Finally the boy would approach the girl's parents saying, "I've come to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage and I promise that till death part us I will never leave her, and even if you don't accept me am not going anywhere". If the girl's parents like the boy they will tell the boy to bring his parents. The boy then first tells his mother about the girl he likes and willing to marry. On hearing that, the boy's mother would first perform a ritual and see if the girl would be suitable or not. And so for this ritual the mother will call the girl in an empty house and asks her to bring her drinking cup along with her. Then the boy's mother spills some local wine on the girl's knee. If the wine flows down smoothly on the shin and ends between the big toe and the second toe, it's a sign that the girl is still pure and virtuous so she accepts. She goes back home and tells her husband about it and finally they would agree to go and meet the girl's parents.

In Sumi culture one may see that formalities in marriage varies from clan to clan and also the Sumis residing in warmer (Ghabomi) and colder areas (Ajomi). However despite of slight variations the general formalities remains the same.

Among the Sumi tribe there is no fixed age for a boy or a girl to marry. A boy may be fit to marry if he is able to carry big loads and when he is capable of cutting down big bamboos and trees. In the same way a girl is said to have attained marriageable age after puberty when female organs are well developed and when she is capable of preparing all the dishes for a meal.

After a Sumi boy expresses his desire to marry a particular girl, the boy's father with the consent of his relatives goes to the girl's parent's house saying that his son wishes to marry their daughter (proposal). But before doing this someone from boy's side (Anisuu) is sent to the bride's parent's house. The Anisuu says "my son wishes to marry your daughter, can you kindly start relation with us"? (the Anisuu is normally an old person. In some clan Anisuu is an old man but in many cases Anisuu is an old woman usually the oldest aunt from the groom father's side)

After going to the brides place for 4-5 times and formal approval, the day is fixed for both the families to meet. On the fixed day all the relatives from both the families meet at the girl's parent's house and approve the marriage. The time between this formal approval and the actual marriage may vary from few days to weeks to even a year. During this time, it is customary for both the families to kill a pig and give a feast to each other during the Tulini festival. Before the feast it is alright if the couple decides not to marry, but after the feast it is forbidden or heavy burden is placed on the family who decline's the marriage.

On the day of proposal, a particular day is fixed to settle for the dowry too (engagement). This day is called "Atsa-ita/ AmehKukugha". In the olden days the Sumis never allow any person to marry their daughter without the payment of dowry. Dowry included fields, cows, mithuns, pigs, dao, spears and money. Payment of more dowry means it would bring much honour and pride to son-in-law. The amount of dowry paid revealed the wealth and social status of Sumi families.

Three days before the settlement of dowry a dog and a piece of salt is given to the bride's parents. This purpose is to establish a good relation and also to the new couple they will have a blessed married life. Also the girl's parents inform the boy's parents of how much dowry should be brought by them. On the day of the settlement of dowry, the bride's parent's lays on the bamboo mat whatever items they have prepared for the girl. The price/amount of the dowry will depend on the items displayed. If the entire attire of woman is presented then the amount of dowry to be paid by the grooms parents increases. In other case the price reduces. On this day the date for marriage is also fixed. In Sumi tradition marriage should take place at the beginning of a new moon or at full moon and not after that. Days after full moon is compared to the last stages of life.

## **DOWRY**

In Sumi traditional marriages, dowry is the most important aspect and the most unique, differing from other tribes. The formalities are laid down in brief below.

### **1. Kighila**

It is the amount taken by the girl's parents in exchange for their daughter. It can be fields, cows, mithuns, and money. A shawl for the father and wrap around (amini) for the mother is compulsory. The amount however depends on the social status of the parents.

### **2. Aphakuchu**

This is paid to the relatives of the bride's parents. The purpose of paying this is to let the relative take care of the couple in case their parents passes away.

### **3. Apuhshi**

This consists of the head of a pig and some amount of money gifted to the eldest brother of the bride's father. This person acts like that of Godfather.

### **4. Aghungala**

This is paid to all the immediate relatives of the bride. It will consists of some amount of money and some portion of pig killed during the marriage.

**5. Akhaukuptha**

This is paid to the bride's immediate aunt or the person who accompanies the bride in marriage.

**6. Ashiakhoshighe**

This is pieces of meat cut and distributed to the villagers. The villagers in exchange gift the bride with paddy or any other item for her to carry to her new house.

On the day fixed for marriage, the groom along with his family members comes to take the bride with him. However with the advent of Christianity, this day is celebrated with much prompt and show and grand fest is arranged for many people. Today, with the change of time, the traditional marriage of the Sumi's have also changed to a great extend.

After marriage the newly married couple first settles in a house without any windows or backdoor. And before the first taste of food, a prayer is said, "bless us with a long life and let our offspring multiply like the stars and sands, bless us with wealth and let our life be prosperous". And then after this prayer the desire to live in a normal house is desired, so the couple gives a feast and they are ready to live in a normal house.

In the olden days a man could possess more than one wife at a time but only after the approval of the first wife. In many cases it was due to the reason of being unable to produce an offspring. Also possession of any properties and multiple wives was considered an honour and accorded higher social status.

Among the Sumis divorce is not very common. However, under some circumstances a couple may decide to separate. One of such reason is, the wife being not able to bear a child where the husband is compelled to marry other woman in order to produce an offspring so that the family tree continues. In other circumstances it may be due to adultery committed by either husband or wife. In rare case the husband divorces his wife, if his wife is unable to cook well or take good care of him. After divorce the customs and actions differs depending on the cases. If a woman commits adultery and is divorced by her husband, the husband is entitled to take all the property and also the dowry paid at the time of marriage by the husband, must be refunded by the wife's parents. In other case if the husband



commits adultery and the woman no longer wishes to stay with her husband then the property is shared equally but the dowry paid by the husband cannot be refunded. In any divorce, the children are always taken by the husband. After separation both the couples can get married again but it is done after the settlement of divorce.

## MORUNG CONSTRUCTION

A Morung is a learning institution of the traditional Sumi Nagas. To build a morung, first a site is selected. A priest known as KICHELAPULI conducts rituals at the site. Meat is burned on the site to appease the spirit and bless the site. Only then, the construction of the *morung* is done by the village community together.

The number of *morung* a village has depends on the number of population. Hence, a large village may have 4-5 *morung* whereas a small one may have only one. The *morung* was used by the elderly to discuss important decision relating to the village matters. *Morung* was used by village elders to discuss administration, war and peace, and other diplomatic decisions of the village.

It also served as a watch house against enemies. One interesting thing about the *morung* is the presence of 'log-drum' which is used as an alarm for war, fire and other natural or man-made disaster in the village. A log-drum is made of a giant log which is made empty/hollow inside for greater sound. When the log-drum is beaten, all the villagers working in the farm comes back to the village anticipating that an untoward incident might have taken place in the village. The log-drum is also beaten when someone in the village dies.

Among the Sumis, the *morung* is known as *APUKI* for boys' dormitory and *ALIKI* for girls' dormitory. Men are not allowed to enter the girl's dormitory or *aliki* and vice versa. Young boys and girls stays in the *apuki* and *aliki* respectively till get married.

Young boys right after attaining puberty enter the *apuki* till he gets married. In *apuki*, young lads are taught the way of life, songs, and dances. Folk tales, heroic deeds of their forefathers, etc. were also recited to the boys. They are also taught how to become a

good warrior and a good leader to defend the village in times of war and conflicts.

In *aliki*, young girls are taught how to weave traditional cloths, baskets, and other domestic chores. The warden of the *aliki*, who is usually an old lady, recites stories and folk tales to the girls. She also teaches the girls songs and dances.

## **CULTIVATION AND OTHER RITUALS**

Before the start of cultivation, Sumis observe rituals at the field. A priest known as *AWOOU* conducts rituals to bless the ensuing year of harvest. To start the rituals, *awoou* makes fire on which meat and eggs are burnt. The *awoou* then recite prayers to the spirits for good harvest and protection from all bad events for the agricultural year.

## **GEENA**

Sumis like many other tribes observe *geena*. *Genna* is observed in many occasions like during death of a person, marriage, cultivation, unnatural events, etc.

When a person dies in a family, the family members are not allowed to go to the field for cultivation work. If a male member dies, the family members do not go to field for six (6) days. However, if a female member dies, the family member do not go to fields for five (5) days. Thus, they observe *genna* for days accordingly.

During marriage, *genna* is observed strictly. On the first day, the cost to be borne by the groom is discussed. The date for the marriage is also decided on the first day. After marriage, while walking out, the married girl steps out on her house on right foot. Also, while entering her husband's home, the married girl steps in the new house on her right foot. While leaving her home after marriage, the girl is accompanied by her mother, aunt, uncle, etc. to her new home. But her father is not allowed to accompany her. If a girl is married to a person of another village, the people accompanying her will sleep for the day and leave in the morning after having food.

## **ORAL TRADITIONS (A) INHERITANCE (B) SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF AND TABOOS (C) OATH TAKING IN MATTER OF DISPUTES**

### **a). INHERITANCE**

Traditionally, Sumi society is a patriarchy system where man dominates in matter of owning farmland, house and power in all public affairs. Though women can influence decisions within a household, they are not allowed to own any property or hold any public position.

Henry only a son is eligible to inherit the property of their father. The property of a father is distributed equally among the sons. However, the house of the parents is given to the youngest son.

There is also a common property of land own by the community as a whole. It is the land of their forefathers. Here, no one is allowed to sell the land except on the consent of the whole community. The dispute arising out of this land is settled among the household or community. Very rarely the dispute is referred to the village head for settlement.

### **b). SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEF AND TABOO**

Before the arrival of Christianity, the Sumis had many superstitious beliefs. They did not have concepts about heaven or hell. They only believed that a person who dies go to the 'abode of the dead'. The Sumi talked about *ALHOU* (*God*). However, *alhou* was not worshipped. In fact, the Sumis worshipped many spirits/bad ghosts. Some of the spirits as per Sumi beliefs are:-

#### **AKIGHAU (GHOST OF HOUSE)**

*Akighau* is the ghost of the house. But it was believed that not every household had *akighau*. In fact, it was hereditary in nature. Only the decedents of the person having *akighau* had the same. The house ghosts were offered with meat and rice whenever the family ate their food.

## **AIUGHAU (SPIRIT OF THE FARM)**

*Alughau* was the spirit of the farm. The farmers used to hold rituals and offer prayer to *alughau* for not affecting their produce during the agricultural year. Meat and eggs were burnt in the field to appease the *alughau*.

## **AZUGHAU (SPIRIT OF WATER/RIVER)**

*Azughau* is the spirit of the rivers who is responsible for drowning the people. It was feared by the people and was referred to as bad spirit.

The Sumis believed that a man's spirit can be a tiger, monkey or a python. It is said to be hereditary and not every person possessed spirits of animal. However, even a person not possessing spirit animal can have this spirits if he eats half eaten food or drinks rice beer taken by the person possessing spirit. Hence, it is believed to be contagious. If a person possessing spirit dies, his spirit itself doesn't die. However, if the spirit dies, the people fail sick and die soon.

The Sumis practised many taboo or forbidding practises. Some of the practices are:-

-In the matter of food, the young or youths are not allowed to eat crow, eagle, owl, snake, tiger, hawk, etc. These meat items are believed to be elderly food and hence only the elderly ate this meat items. Girls are not allowed to eat monkey meat to prevent the girl from giving birth to monkey look-alike child. Also, the girls are not to eat goat, Squirrel, farm rat, etc.

- People are forbidden to excrete in the river because it pollutes the water system.

- Couples are forbidden to sleep together a day before the man is to go to war.

- A woman is not allowed to handle or even jump-over a Dao, spear and gun.

### **c). OATH TAKING IN MATTERS OF DISPUTE**

Oath taking is conducted mainly in matters of land dispute. When there is a dispute between parties, the ancestral boundary stone is referred to. However, if the stone boundary is not definitive, oath taking place. Oath taking is done in the presence of the village community and sometimes also in the presence of *CHOCHO* who is the chief spokesperson of *AKUKAU* (*village head*).

To start with, the person in dispute digs soil of the land and bites it swearing that it is his land. Following this, the land becomes his owned property. But it is believed that if the person lies while swearing, it will bring him sickness or even death. Hence, people are cautious on taking the oath in matter of land.

# **YIMCHUNGRU**

## **TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE PRACTICE**

Normally in the Yimchungru traditional marriage practice, a man would choose a bride from his own village. However, marrying a girl from another village is also widely practiced till date. Marrying from one's own clan, close relatives and cousins is considered a taboo and whoever breaks such a law will result in expulsion from the village, clan or the family. The Yimchungru customary rules are very clear and stringent on these aspects.

There are two ways in which a man and woman are brought together to know each other intimately. The first one is meeting through friends in churches, meetings, social gatherings, etc. That means, a man and woman would come to know each other in their own ways. If they fall in love with each other, the process of engagement and marriage begins. The second one is through parents who make the arrangements for their children to get married. Both the procedures were adopted and practiced since time immemorial till date. They first trace the genealogy, blood line and ancestors before any talk of marriage. They then learn if any bad blood line exists or if any unclean history exists in either lineage. Knowledge of existence of bad history will automatically result in cancellation of the marriage proposal talks. If genealogy history is clean and clear on both sides, there are certain guidelines adopted by the man before the final decision is made for engagement and marriage.

When a man likes a woman or has chosen his bride-to-be, he secretly tries to find out her whole personality; whether she is good in field work, if she knows how to weave clothes, about her emotions and the way in which she deals with people. When he is satisfied with her qualities, he approaches her with his proposal for marriage. If the girl agrees, he informs his parents of the same for future course of action. If the parents of the man also agree, then an emissary is chosen from a close confident, who is usually a very clever person. He is sent with a good quality dao called "Limtemnok" (Dao which paves the way for the process of marriage proposal talks). The Dao is handed over to the father of the girl by the emissary before the talk of the proposal for

marriage starts. When the emissary brings positive news to the boy's family, necessary arrangements are made for the parents of the boy along with the boy to go to the house of the girl's parents for

familiarization between the boy and the girl. Both the families feast in a meal prepared by the girl's family. Normally when the marriage talk proceeds, a pig is killed and taken as a gift from the boy's side. As an engagement sign, a bangle or a necklace is put on the girl by the boy's mother; which means that the girl is betrothed to their son. In return, the girl's parents also kill a pig or cow and then a big portion is given to the boy's family. This is a positive sign that both sides have agreed to the proposal. This means that the engagement has taken place and both the girl and the boy are betrothed to each other.

During the engagement process, the dowry to be given to the girl's parents is settled. If for any reason it is not settled during this period, after some time, the emissary is again sent to the girl's family for the dowry to be paid by the boy's family. The following items were considered as dowry gifts from the boy's family.

1. Fields
2. Head gears
3. Domestic animals
4. Pears, daos
5. Other costly dresses or ornaments.

There are three types of dowry to be given from the boy's side according to the Yimchunger Custom.

1. "Tun Kheak": The boy's side gives whatever demands are settled to be given.
2. "Beru Tun": Girl's mother's share. The mother of the girl asks for a gift. This ranges from ornaments, fields to animals or cash.
3. "Ku-niru Tun": Maternal uncle's share. One of the girl's mother's brothers takes this share.

The gift is normally a shawl, dao, field or any other thing that is settled as dowry.

The number of dowry gifts for general category varies according to the demands of the girl's family. Once this is settled, it is followed by the marriage party.

The most accepted time for marriages in the Yimchungru Community is during the months of January to May and from October to December. Mid-summer period is not considered suitable due to heavy monsoon rain. Friends from sides, relatives and village folks are invited to enjoy the marriage feast.

Immediately after the marriage ceremony is over, the girl and the boy, now man and wife, begin to live in the man's house for a few days, weeks or months. However as custom laid down, the woman should return to her parent's house for the last time and remain there for a while, as per requirement with the approval of her husband. During this period, the girl does all household

chores, field work and weaves clothes for her parents, her husband and for herself. Finally when the time for her to leave homes, the girl will be sent off by her family and her relatives with the following items:

1. Good amount of grains, paddy, etc.
2. Ornaments
3. Weaving materials
4. Various seedlings
5. Shawls
6. Mekhela
7. Animals
8. Various baskets
9. Dao, field spades
10. Steel walking stick
11. Cash

On a specific date, the girl's relatives drop her off at the boy's house. There, the relatives of the girl are fed with rice, meat and rice beer and sent off. From then on, the man and woman start a family of their own. Henceforth, they are counted as new members of the village.

## **FOOD HABITS**

The Yimchungrü people are fond of kholar (beans) and it form the tribe's main diet. It is grown in abundant. There are varieties of



kholar, the best quality known as "Jiphuyak", is available only in Shamator belt. People consume varieties of food items such as rice, millet, maize, bajra, job tear, taro, yam, cucumber, pumpkin, chilly etc. Both domestic animals and wild birds and animals (including marine products) are also consumed. Various fruits such as wild apple, grapes, mango, guava, banana, papaya and other home grown and wild fruits are consumed as supplementary diet.

## **MORUNG DORMITORY**

The Khiang—Yam is the first building constructed in the village. It performs multiple roles. In the past days, all the young unmarried boys are mandatory to sleep inside the Morung house till they married. Girls also had separate dormitory to sleep. All the girls on reaching puberty stage are compulsory to enroll themselves in their respective dormitory and remained attached to it till they are married off.

The institution of Morung is considered as a sacred place, a meeting hall, a place for keeping log drum, store house of war trophies, an educational institution and so forth. Generally, a wooden platform is erected to be served as a watch tower for viewing enemies. During the intense situation such as advancement of enemies, burning of house, occurrence of death etc. in the village. A log drum installed inside the Morung is beaten several times to alert the villagers and warning them off with danger in the village.

The participation of elder members in sharing folktales, folksongs, folkdances, war tactic, art and craft and other professional skills taught to the younger members were evident, which has been handed down from generation to generation. The elder members administrate the institution of Morung/dormitory. Girls were not allowed to enter inside the Morung as it considered as scared place. Thus, the Khiang Yarn (Morung) was the most important organized institution in the village during early days, and its legacy will never fade away even with the passage of time.

## **FEAST OF MERIT**

Feast of merit is host only by rich men after he expressed his intension. During such occasion, the neighboring village is also invited by the host. Normally, this merry making occasion lasts for about nine days. The seasoned rice beer (Yin — Khu) is arranged in

many wooden barrels known as "Tan". The bulls to be slaughtered for the occasion are dragged around the village in procession chanting frenzy songs until they are finally brought back at the host's residence.

On the arrival of guest at host's residence, they would not rest but would sing and dance praising and honoring the host and host's village. The damsels of the village would come in queue with rice beer, meat and rice to feed into the mouths of dancing guest.

A man who hosts a feast of merit is respected and accorded high status in the society. On this occasion, the host may generously offer grains, meat, drink and commodities to poor people.

### **TATTOOING (YAK-DO-KHI)**

Both men and women gets tattoo on certain parts of their body, such as the chin, forehead, arms and legs. Tattoo for the girls signifies their puberty and marriageable age. A girl who does not mark the tattoo cannot enter into marriage.

The men who did not either kill an enemy or strike the enemy corpse are not competent to cause tattoo on their body. They should have either killed the enemy themselves or at least chop the dead body of enemies killed by others. The tattoo for the warrior and wealthy men differs from each other. The design of the tattoo may also be different from village to village and clan to clan. The old belief is that, in the land of the dead, the deceased soul shall be identified by his clan/ village members through the tattoo he/she bores.

### **SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS AND TABOOS**

Before the dawn of Christianity in Yimchunger land. People were nature worshippers which gradually turn to animistic worshippers. Thus, the aspects of the people's life were surrounded with various superstitious beliefs and taboos.

Dreams played an important part in people's life. Good dreams made them happy whereas the bad ones warned them of danger and misfortune likely to happen. Another superstitious the people believed is the forecasting of good luck or bad luck by using small pieces of sliced tree branches. Usually older people perform this art.

Some people are believed to practice sorcery and witchcraft against the enemies or on payment to do so from other people (customer). The people however debunk and hated this sort of evil practice, hence, anyone found indulge this evil practice were excommunicated or even exterminated the whole family or race. Another belief of the people is the existence of human possessing tiger soul and snake soul. People fear and avoided those possessing a soul. If a tiger or a snake is killed, it is believed that the person possessing it also dies. On the other hand, the tiger or snake is believed to guard and protect family members or the entire village from enemies, dangers, wild animals etc. The following are some of the superstitious beliefs of the Yimchungru Naga:

- i. It is inauspicious for the people to undertake a journey or any other expedition the next day after a big festival or event.
- ii. Raw meat even offered by an enemy should not be returned back to the sender. It should be thrown away; give it away or destroyed, otherwise it may cause bad luck or illness.
- iii. It is inauspicious to see snake in copulation.
- iv. When the snake visits homes and hearth it brings bad luck and ill health.
- v. Crowing of cocks before midnight is regarded unpleasant.
- vi. The people believed that whosoever touches, burn, gather or use wood, plants which is hit/ strike by lightning may fall ill.
- vii. Whenever a tiger/big cats or a leopard is killed the flesh is made to be eaten outside the gates of the village for three days. Thereafter those who had eaten flesh of such animal are not allowed entry into the village for three days. Breaking the rules brings ill health and bad luck to the village.
- viii. It is inauspicious to see a live porcupine or an anteater during daytime.
- ix. Meat offered in honour of dead is supposed to be consumed totally. It is inauspicious to kept any left over.

- x. After a visit to a funeral service/place on return one has to wash hands and feet before entering house. It is inauspicious if one does not follow the rule
- xi. Wild animals entering into a village or a house is regarded to bring ill luck or calamity to the village.
- xii. Snake bite, dog bites and lightening strike a human are considered inauspicious.
- xiii. The dead body of those who died of drowning is not allowed to be brought inside the village, and have to bury straight away in the cemetery. It is inauspicious if it is not followed.
- xiv. It is believed that keeping of luck-stones brings good luck.
- xv. It is believed that, whenever a soul bird sounds, death is imminent to some people in near future.
- xvi. Insect bites and stings on human genitals are considered inauspicious.
- xvii. Lying on snake or snake crawling over human while asleep is considered inauspicious.
- xviii. Rainbows seen near welling houses are considered inauspicious.
- xix. Ghost or spirit of a person supposed to have seen is considered inauspicious.
- xx. As snake, cat or crow crossing path while on hunting, fishing trip is considered ill luck.
- xxi. It is considered inauspicious to see the genital of cock.
- xxii. It is considered inauspicious to wear un-pattern shawl. Warriors and men folk should not wear such shawl.
- xxiii. Men folk are not supposed to touch weaving materials before under taking any hunting or fishing expedition in order to avoid bad luck.

- xxiv. Men folk are advised to avoid sexual intercourse with women the night before one undertakes hunting, fishing or head — hunting trip. It is supposed to bring ill luck if this is followed.
- xxv. Seeing a naked person in dreams means that the person who was dreamt may fall ill.
- xxvi. Seeing a man's or women's genital in dreams means that someone has spoken great ill of the dreamer's reputation. Seeing human face also meant the same thing.
- xxvii. Wearing warrior's shawl in dream means that great successor victory is in the offing.

In the past days, taboos are strictly observed by the tribe. Whoever does not observed were meted out with bad luck or brings harm to their life. Some of the taboos are:

- i. Some food stuff is forbidden for some clan members and vice versa, for instance, consuming of dog meat, blood of animals and intestines of an animal are forbidden and regarded as taboo especially for Khiungru.
- ii. An elder's share of meat should not be consumed or arrogated by the younger members of the family lest they should face imminent misfortunes in terms of pre-mature falling of tooth, decay and graying of hairs.
- iii. If a person is killed by another person, the aggrieved and the defaulted families observe restraint from sharing any commodities towards each other until a compromise agreement is arrived at.
- iv. The members of the belligerent villages also restraint from sharing any commodities or enter into inter-village marriages until a peace treaty is concluded.

### **OATH TAKING (THIYU CHIH— CHIM)**

Traditionally oath taking was performed only in case of serious disputes and not in case of ordinary one. It is executed when two parties could no longer sort out the issue amicably through any talk

or negotiation. As such, oath taking is conducted as the last resort to settle dispute for once and all; and to dispense justice to the righteous. It is very dangerous and one is advised not to take an oath, if he is uncertain about his right.

## **DIFFERENT METHOD OF OATH TAKING**

- i. A disputing party stands inside the circle so drawn with a spear in erect position and consumes the dispute soil yelling and calling the names of their ancestors, village founders, their own name and the cause of the oath taking. The belly of the defaulting party swells instantly.
- ii. The party solemnly swears by holding a tiger tooth or a soil in the name of the heavenly spirit and the earthly spirit that whatever he states is true and correct and further declares that in the event of false statement he would bear any evil.
- iii. The disputing party may also bite a tiger's tooth in the solemn declaration of their ancestors, their own name and the cause of the oath taking, and invite the spirit of the earth and heaven to bear the testimony of the same.
- iv. A cane stick is encircled upon the ground where an animal's heart sliced into two equal parts would be laid upon the banana leaf. In between the sliced heart, salt, ginger and chilly powder is then inserted. Both contenders shall be made to nibble at the meat by solemnly swearing and calling the heavenly and earthly spirit to bear testimony of the same.
- v. In the event of the stipulation of days, such as thirty or fifteen days, as the case may be, the happening and non-happening of certain omens are observed, monitored and confirmed by the village chief and the witnesses or by any one so entrusted with the task by the competent authority.
- vi. During the period of observation, the party upon whom the misfortune befalls is considered the defaulters; such misfortune may befall upon the person of the defaulter concern or upon the family member, livestock or any other belongings of the defaulter.

## **INHERITANCE**

As per the law of inheritance of Yimchungru community, only male heirs are entitled to inherit land and immovable property. Thus, women are not entitled to inherit landed and other immovable properties. However, father can use discretion whether to be given to daughter any such properties. Normally, a daughter inherits jewelry, dress and other articles like seedlings, pots, plates, cups, weaving articles, baskets of various types and domestic animals. If there are many sons, father decides the share of property to be divided among his sons born to him. Normally, the eldest and the youngest inherit the major share of the property or any other assets. In case, a man dies without a male heir, his properties are automatically taken by his brother. In case, a man died with some debts, his children and blood cousin will clear off on the day he died to the creditors.

The landed and immovable property cannot be sold or transferred to any other villagers or non — local. The motive behind this restriction is to prevent the alienation of indigenous land. Each village, khel, clan or group of family is permitted to jointly own land and immovable properties, which no individual can sell it off or decide to do anything without the consent and decision of every member.

## **THE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL LIFE OF YIMCHUNGRU TRIBE COVERING FAMILY LIFE, VARIOUS PROFESSIONS TABOOS ETC.**

The Yimchunger tribe is one of the major tribe in Tuensang district. It is also one of the recognized tribe in Nagaland. Like the rest of the Naga tribes, the Yimchungru have Mongoloid features. The tribe occupies the eastern region of the district. In the east the tribe has boundary with Burma. In the north it has boundary with the Khiamniungans and the Changs. In the west it has boundary with the Changs, the western Sangtams and the Sema tribes. In the South it has boundary with the eastern Sangtams and the Pochury tribes. The Yimchungru tribes has five different speaking dialects namely:

- 1. The Langas**
- 2. The Tikhirs**
- 3. The Mukhokrus**
- 4. The Chirrs**
- 5. The Mums.**

The Langa dialect is used as major [common] language.

## **1. SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

There is no caste system practiced in the Yimchungru tribe. Society composes of the family, clan, khel and village. Family is the smallest unit, which has affinity with many families of the same blood [clan]. The society composes of the many clans, which then form khels. A village may consist of many khels or a few khels. Each village is established under the leadership of a strong man who is then considered the Godfather of the village. He is respected and given due tribute in aspect. He is also regarded as the village headman who governs and runs the administration of the village. Many lieutenants who execute orders assist him. Almost all villages run the administration in the tradition of the modern democracy system. The customary courts settle almost all types of cases. Penalty varies according to the nature of the case. Every family is required to contribute at least male member for the village defense purpose. Women are regarded as helpmate of men. They cannot inherit properties nor have any say in the administration of the village. Women are expected to behave as true feminine and cannot overrule men. They are expected to possess the art of cultivation, cooking, home management, care of children and look after the welfare of men folk.

The Yimchungru tribe does not practice slavery in any form. The people are sturdy and hard working.

## **2. MANNERS AND CUSTOMS**

The Yimchungru tribe has got its own manners and customs. For instance, when a male child born he is given a name normally on the sixth day and the fifth day for a girl. It is mandatory that this be followed. Before the naming of the child, both parents of the child remain indoors. They cease all outdoor activities; the mother is fed with all delicacies like meat, eggs, milk, vegetables, fish etc. to recoup health. The earlobes of the babies are pierced later on. It is customary and mandatory that this is followed.

Earlier, when deaths occurred the people left the dead bodies on a raised platforms which would be subjected to heat, rains, wind, birds and insects etc. Now a days people bury the dead in the common cemetery earmarked for such in villages or towns. Earlier, people would bury the dead in their homes, garden or compound, whenever death occurs in a family, relatives and friends gather to mourn for the dead, farewell speeches are given out from the loved ones and the coffin is carried away in a procession\_ Farewell feast in honor of the dead is thrown. The quality of the feast depends upon the status and wealth. Generally,



the family members don't go out for any work outside their homes for at least a week after the burial. It is customary and mandatory that an animal is killed and its meat distributed to all relatives, neighbours kept. All utensil, plates, cups and spoons used for cooking funeral meat is cleaned and kept. The ritual ceases with last process,

### **3. SOCIAL LIFE**

#### **(A) LAW OR INHERITANCE:**

As per the laws of inheritance of Yimchungru community, only male heirs are entitled to inherit landed and immovable property. Women are not permitted nor entitled to inherit. However the discretion lies with the father whether to given to daughters any landed or immovable property. In case the majority of the offering is male the father may decide to bestow some of the property. Normally, the daughters inherit jewelry, dresses and other articles like various seedlings, pots, plates, cups, weaving articles, various types of baskets and domestic animals. Those items are further handed down to their daughters and so on. If there are many his sons , he decides the quantity of property to be divided among his sons born to him. Normally, the eldest and the youngest inherit the major share of the property. In case a man dies without a male heir, his property is automatically taken over by his brothers and sons, which may be further divided among the closest blood cousins. In case a man dies with some debts, his children and blood cousins will clear off on the day he dies to the debtor.

The landed and immovable property can be sold or purchased but customary laws do not permit it to be transferred to any other village. No property is permitted to be sold to non-locals. Each village has laws restricting selling of landed and immovable proper to members of other villages except on very rare cases. Each, village, khel, clan or group of families are permitted to jointly own landed and immovable property which becomes the joint property, no individual can sell it off or decides to do anything with it without the consent and decision of every members.

Before money [currency] was introduced, the people carried out business transactions on barter system the selling item and the proposed item to be purchased should posses equivalent price. Before the market salt came into use the people used to manufacture local out of salt water, which was collected from, the salt water springs in the forest. On evaporation the salt water due to high heat salt was collected as a result.

## (B) DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Long back, the Yimchungru people only used loin clothes to cover themselves. From dresses made out of cotton, tree barked and leaves it gradually led to wearing of dresses made out of animal's skins. It was only after the civilization brought the use of present day fabrics made up of superior quality that the people started using it till today. However the Yimchungru people even in the earlier days knew the art of dyeing the fabrics locally. The dye could be obtained from some particular plants. Since olden times the Yimchungru have varieties of shawls for both men and women and also varieties of makhela for women. Only those men who could chop a man's head could wear the warrior's shawls known as "RONGKHIM" in Yimchungru dialects. The person would then be officially declared a warrior and only then he could be entitled to wear this particular shawl. But now a days because of abandonment of head hunting ways of system for such method for entitlement has also been abolished. Anyone can wear these prestigious shawls. Men folk wore earrings made up of ivory and also arm bracelets and wrist bracelets made up of ivory and super fine quality cane. Only the warrior and rich could afford ivory. Now days every one can afford it. Head gear consist of fine hairs of animals and men, two nos of wild boar teeth, feathers and hornbill and the head gear is woven out of finest cane or bamboo. Nails of Tiger and bear would be attached to the string of rope to the bottom of the headgear. On the shawls beads of cowrie's shell would also be woven. Again this particular shawls could be worn only the warrior and rich man. Even now days only the rich and the affluent and the educated one wear this particular shawl. Poor and low status people cannot use it. Men folk used anklets made up of bear's skins and also wore leather belts on which is attached Dao boxes made up of fine quality wood. During ceremonial dances a small basket is attached to the near of the box. The small basket would further be attached by a good bunch of long silky hairs mostly obtained from woven. Men folk were fond of tattooing on the chest and arms. Tattooing was confined only to these two regions. Men folk also wore necklaces made up of fine beads of precious stones, shells, ivory of various colors. They also wore tiger teeth and necklaces made up of brass, copper and silver. There are also other good varieties of necklaces worn by men. Women also wear lots of varieties of necklaces of ruby, egad, sapphire and varieties of shells. The rich and the affluent wore a prestigious necklace called "KHINULAK". Women wore fine bracelets made up of brass, copper, lead and zinc. Earrings made up of quarts, ruby, emerald, sapphire, copper, brass and silver were used. Tattooing was confined to fore head, chin and legs. There are lots of varieties of shawl, mekhela worn by women. Varieties of baskets, bags and weaving tools are used. Women used walking sticks made up of brass or iron. Men used spear made up of the fine iron or other alloys. Animal skins, hairs would be attached to the spear for better grip. Long before men folk

started using half pants/long pants they used a lion cloth called "LANGTAM" which is woven by threads. During special ceremonial dances men used to attach a spherical disc made up of brass, steel to the front portion of langtam. It produced a jingling sound, which gave tune to their singing while dancing.

[c] Dwelling Houses: Before establishment of towns almost all villages were established on hilltops. This was primarily done and necessitated for defence purpose. Moreover, diseases and sicknesses were believed to be less on high altitude. Roads connecting villages were narrow and people use to construct house in clusters. Sanitation and hygiene condition was poor. Man and animals lived under the same roof. Houses were constructed with structure of wooden posts and bamboo. The roof would be of palm leaves or thatch. Ventilation system was poor. A house usually would consist of three to four rooms. However, drainage system was good. Floor was always kept clean and dry. Olden days people used pots made up of clay and plates, cups and spoons made up of wood or bamboo. Now a day's people have started using pots, plates and cups made up of aluminium, steel, brass, copper and other alloys. Earlier beds were made or curved out of a single log. Rich and affluent section of people used these types. Ordinary, beds made out of bamboo and woods were used also. Now a day's people have started using beds made out of superior materials like steel, brass, good quality wood etc. Generally, in the front or back of the house a machang or platform is constructed for leisure and rest. A separate barn houses were also constructed to store grains. Earlier people used to go to jungles to pass motion since no latrine system was made available.

#### (D) FOOD HABITS

The Yimchungru people are fond of kholar [kidney beans], which grows abundantly. There are varieties of kholar out of which is best quality known as "JIPHUYAK" is available only in the Shamatore belt. People also cultivate rice, millet, kachu, corn, rhizome, cucumber, bumpkins, bottle gourds, and the naga dal in plenty. The people don't lack in any of the crops. Besides fruits like papaya, oranges, banana, guava, big lemon, are grown in abundance. The people also rear various domestic animals like pigs, cow, dogs, goats, sheep, buffaloes and poultry. The Mithun is considered rich man's animals and his wealth is measured by the numbers of mithun he posses. The people eat types of flesh except snakes, house rats and lizards. They also eat all types of birds, fish and some particular insects. Varieties of plants along with its shoots, leaves are eaten. Rice beer is one of the main drinks of the Yimchungru people. But, Christianity considers of late drinking of rice beer unreligious. Locally produced tobacco was commonly used for smoking and preparation of other intoxicant drinks. Drinking of fresh milk of cows or goats was confined to rich and affluent section only. It was not commonly used. It was considered a luxury items.

#### 4. COMMUNITY LIFE

Yimchungru people are communal in character. They have well-established customary laws and social set up. The people don't live an isolated life. They work, play and do all activities together as one community. The community lives is filled with many activities such as games and sports hunting and fishing and also have fair and festivals etc. The people play lots of outdoor and indoor games. Out door games include tops-spin, cock fights, hide and seek, spear throw, shot puts, running race, tug of war, wood-chopping. pole climbing, wresting, football, target shooting. Women play games with the seeds of sword bean, swing competition, hide and seek, cooking competition, musical chair competition, story telling etc. Locally made mouth organs are used to produce music, both men folk and women have varieties of traditional songs and melodious tunes which can be sung for games competition and also sung during dances and ceremonial occasion

The people are also very fond of hunting and fishing. Before modern guns came in to use, the people used bows arrows, poison darts. spear, slingshots and varieties of traps for hunting and trapping wild animals and birds. For fishing traditional method was adopted, in this method diversion of watercourse was done to catch fishes. Another method was to put juices of crushed plants into the river or stream, which acts as poison for the fishes leading to death. Spear improvised harpoons were used to catch fish. Another method was the use of big stones, which could be smashed against another stones in the river or streams with great force, which would result in the death of fishes. Another method was to keep baskets made up of bamboos or canes across the river where the fishes would be trapped in the baskets. There are some well-experienced people who can catch fish just with bare hands also. The people also have fairs and festivals. Fairs are hold in the villages where the people can sell their produces and also both domestic and wild animals. Before currency came into use the people practiced barber system. In this method the people would exchange with goods possessing equivalent price. The Yimchungru people have lots of festivals out of which the "MEDUMNIO" festival is regarded as the longest and the biggest festival lots of animals are killed for meat, rice beer consumed and young boys and girls get engaged. The roads are cleaned and some animistic deities are given due honour during this period. The important ditsy was attributed to "RIJABAH" The festival is marked by lots of merry making, eating and drinking. People share with whatever they with those who visit them during this festival. The festival lasts for 7 days, which begin from the 2nd of august to the 8th of august every year. There are also other festivals such as khedi house construction festival, harvest festival, eating and drinking festival etc.

## **5. ENGAGEMENT, MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND MORALS**

The Yimchungru people enjoy great freedom in regards to choosing a wife or husband. Society does not permit great sexual freedom before marriage. Those found out are subject to penalties, which are imposed by the authorities. Boys and girls are freely allowed to mingle but sexual freedom is restricted. Pregnancy outside the marriage is considered taboo. The women and children of such conjugation are looked down by the society. However, it can be legalized by formal marriage ceremony. But one has to go through the whole process of marriage rules and regulation. Grown up boys and girls are not allowed to sleep in the same room of the parents formally, no secret marriage could be just ignored by the society and family members. The process of engagement and marriage procedure varies from one region to another. However, the accepted and the common practiced is enumerated as below:

When a boy decided or chooses a girl for a wife, he informs his parents and relatives about it. A family meeting is then holds and decides to send an emissary to the girl's parents for proposal. This begins the engagement process. The emissary may be a close relative of the boy either from the father or mother's side. The emissary takes along a gift, usually a dao, spear, shawl, or some other costly article to the parents of the girl. The emissary and the parents of the girl and relatives discuss over the proposal. Whether the decision from the girl's side is positive or negatives the emissary return and inform the boy's family about it. If the proposal has not been accepted, the matter is conveyed to the boy to choose another girl. If the proposal has been accepted the parents of the boy now personally go to the house of the girl to meet the parents and also see the girl. In this stage the boy's parents take along an animal as a gift in honour of the acceptance. Date for the engagement ceremony is fixed and there after returns back home for further arrangement.

It is pertinent to mention that before the boy's emissary is sent to the girl's the family and the close relatives of the boy thoroughly discuss about the lineage, position, status, and background of the girl's family. In case of doubt or has reservation about it, disapproval is made known to the boy who is asked to choose another girl. When the proposal is brought by the emissary of the boy the girl's side also sit for consultation and discussion keeping in mind the factors to be looked into the boy's side. If the conditions are favorable or otherwise, the matter is conveyed through the emissary.

The Yimchungru community does not allow or permit marriage within the same clan or cousins. It is highly regarded immoral and a taboo. Violators are ex-communicated and their children's are always looked down by the society. For the engagement ceremony, the boy's side and the girl's side jointly

arrange a party. There the boy and girl are formally engaged to be married soon. They are made to eat from the same plate but they are not allowed to sleep together on one bed. A certain period is set aside for arrangement of the real marriage ceremony. Formerly, no church marriage was conducted. It was something like a court marriage. The boy's side had to pay some amount of money or in kind to the girl's parents. However the price set by the parents of the girl's could be negotiable. The real marriage ceremony is marked by celebration of eating, drinking and merry making. In the evening, parents and relatives of both sides sit jointly to encourage and warn the newly wedded couple, of marriage life and other social life. The boy is advised and warned by his relatives and foray' members the consequences of mal-treatment, adultery, or indifferent attitude towards his wife and her relatives like wise the girl's side also does the same. The next few days is devoted to sharing of meat and gifts between the girl and the boy's relatives and family. The newly wedded couples are invited by the relatives of both side for formal attribution and dine in honour of their marriage. This is a welcome gesture shown by both side to show that they have been accepted as a member of a new family here after.

After the marriage ceremony, the girl does not immediately leave her father's house to live with her husband. She is supposed to stay back for some weeks or months to help her parents for the last time. During this period, she weaves shawl, bag and other clothe items for her new home. When the time is come for her to leave for her new home, she is escorted right up to her husband's house by her close relatives, brothers, sisters and friends. Her parents and relatives make sure that she is sent with all necessary gifts and articles entitled to her. Her mother advised and confides all the secrets of home keeping, husband and child caring. On reaching her new home, after some few days her relatives who had escorted her are given a warm farewell. She then settles down to look after her new home and future. This finishes the marriage procedure.

Normally, every mother asks her share of gift or price of the girl from the boy's side for having brought up the daughter. This is called the "BERU TUN \" [mother's share] in Yimchungru dialects. The mother's share may range from pigs, cows, and mithuns or may also ask in cash. It is customary to Yimchungru people that this share is given at any costs unless the mother refuses or may decide not to take. If the mother's share is not given or is taken, the husband if ill-treats his wife is liable to be panelised by the wife's family members. The husband's ill treatment cannot be condoned off simply like that.

The society does not impose any restrictions to bigamy. The rich and affluent can marry two; three wives provided husband could afford to maintain the wives and children's. Now a day society and religion do not advocated for bigamy. As in every society and community, adultery and in fidelity

occasionally crops up. However customary rules deal strictly with such cases. Divorce to take place but it is allowed only on grounds of adultery and infidelity of either spouse. Normally it is the commission of such by women, which accounts for higher divorce rates. Adultery and infidelity of wife is not easily condoned off or forgiven, rather the punishment is harsh. The divorce is given to the wife. The following rules and terms are followed for a divorce to take place:

(a) If the wife is-the culprit, the husband normally straight away decided to send her back to her parent's house giving the reason to her family. The wife's side has to recover [pay back] the price paid to her family by the husband before marriage. She is not entitle to claim children or any property from the husband.

(b) If the husband is the culprit, he has to pay heavy penalty to the family of the women with whom he has committed adultery; this is in case he decides not to marry her. But, if he decides to marry her he is not required to pay. Now if he decides to divorce his wife because he wants to marry a new wife he has to pay heavy penalty to the family of his wife. He may have to part with his property and may also part with some of his children. Normally, when divorce cases come up family members and relatives of both sides sit again jointly and finalized the case. Only two possibilities come up, either the case compromised [patched up between the husband and wife.] or the case ends in final divorce.

## **DORMITORY (COMMUNITY HOUSES) LOG DRUM**

The Yimchungru people did not have dormitory system, rather there used to be community:, houses situated in the center of the villages where every capable and fit for male members gathered every night and slept in rotation. This was necessitated as a precautionary measure; to be ready for any eventuality, like sudden attack from enemy, natural calamity or for any other emergency law and order problem, which may arise in the village. Women never slept in the community houses. This community houses served as dormitories for men folk. Here, the male members shared ideas, suggestions. It kept them united and they developed a sense of oneness. Log drums curved out of a single big log used to be kept inside the community house. The sentries were made in rotation that would sound / beat the drums timely. There are different beats or a number of beats on the log drums, which signify different meaning. The beats indicate and informed people of time. It also passed messages from village to another village. It warned people of dangers from approaching enemies etc. People also performed certain rituals before curving out such log drums and also before installation in the community houses.

The Yimchungru people also practiced blacksmith. But, it was confined to certain race, clan or family. The secret of the trade was not shared to other people. Every one cannot be a blacksmith. The blacksmith manufactured dao, spear, spades and digging tools. However the people did not possess the technical knowledge of good making.

Most of the Yimchungru men folk are experts in making handicraft items. The community houses are one fine example of central place where men folk make varieties of handicraft items while on duty or leisure.

The Yimchungru people by and large practice jhuming system of cultivation. Field terracing was not practiced till recently. Due to rugged condition of terrains; terrace field cannot be carried out extensively. There are two great rivers, which flow through the center of the Yimchungru land. The Zungki and the Yai River. But both the rivers have not served any purpose due to its steep flow making it impossible to navigate for agricultural purposes. However, of late two hydel projects have come up which could be of great benefit in days to come. The Likimro hydel project in pongro area and the Huhrongke project in Shamatore area. The Saramati, the highest mountain in the state in Pongro area of the Yimchungru land moreover the Pongro area boast of minerals like, coal, lime stones, nickel, chromium, steel, iron ore in Pokphur and Mimi belts. The ONGC has carried out extraction works in these areas. A variety of flora and fauna exists in the land. Cultivation and the use of narcotic drug plants are unknown among the people. The famous Mithun and Tragopan is found in plenty in the Saramati belt. Ginseng the wonder plant is also found in the Saramati belt and on the high hills in some regions of the Yimchungru inhabited areas.



# **ZELIANG**

## **TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE OF ZELIANG**

Marriage is a holy institution, a voluntary union of man and woman. It is performed with great pomp and celebrations. Any adult who have attained physical and mental maturity and is ready to take up social responsibility gets into marital contract. For getting married there is a specific season i.e December to January for trying nuptial through ritualistic procedures. According to Zeme tradition there is a belief not to tie knot during the summer season especially the eight month i.e August as certain marital problem arises if the wedlock is done during this period.

## **PROPOSAL**

The proposal is done by the aunt of the boy after which two elderly person of the village are entrusted to finalize. The elderly person are sent as to solve or decide if any post marital problem may arises.

## **TYPES OF MARRIAGES**

There are various types of marriages practiced by the Zeme community. They are:

### **1) Hengi Meu/Meudi/Holy Marriage:**

This is the highest institution of marriage matrimony which is highly respected and most popular. However, there are certain criteria for a girl to be eligible for this wedlock. They are:

- a) A girl must be a virgin
- b) Her parents should be alive
- c) There should not be any death in her household
- d) She should not be involved in any unlawful activity
- e) She must have a weaving knowledge
- f)

Then the girl is accompanied by her companion to drop her to the boy's place. According to the holy matrimonial (Hengi Meu/Meudi) of Zeme community she must be a virgin and must have a good reputation. After dropping the girl, her companion is given a big piece of meat as a token of thank you.

## **Regular Marriage**

During the early part of the year, most of the adult male go looking for a suitable partner for themselves. Here, if a guy finds a girl that he

likes then he would tell his aunt and she will act as a liaison agent for him and she would propose the girl on his behalf. Once the girl's parents approves the proposal, about two or three elders will talk to the girl's parents and finalize everything regarding the bride's price and future plans between them.

### **Simple Marriage**

in this case, the boy and girl would already be having prior relationship of which both parents also agree to that. In this type of relationship both the parents would get them married off eventually. The wedding celebration would be only among close relatives and friends.

### **Eloping**

Though it is a taboo in the days of our ancestors, but with the passage of time and situation this marriage is practice not by choice but by condition. As a formality if there is no stern objection by both the parents then some elders are sent to the girl's place to finalize their togetherness.

### **Re-marriage**

Widows and widowers can be remarried as when they wishes if they find a good understanding partner but only after the mourning period is over which is one year but it can be more than a year too after the demise of their former partner.

### **PRICE**

Zeme Naga has a traditional practice where the groom have to pay the bride monetary which is a fixed price called Hemi/Pepummi. The price is fixed by under strict ritual called BungtakRenet which cannot be changed. Exceptions are given to the boy belonging to the poor family where it allows the groom to pay in kind such as Handicrafts or land.

The fixed rate to be paid by the groom family are:

Holy marriage (Meudi) : Rs. 130/-                      Widow remarriage :  
Rs.80/- Arranged marriage or love marriage : Rs. 100/-

The amount is shared among maternal relatives i.e Uncles and Brothers. The share is divided and given as ₹ 16 for maternal uncle, ₹ 12 for brothers and ₹ 20 to selected individual if the girl is married to outsider.