

A RE DELVE ON MONGMONG FESTIVAL OF SANGTAM NAGA TRIBE

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Introduction -

Nagaland is known as the land of festivals and Folklore that has been passed down for generations. The diversity of its people and tribes, each having their own culture and heritage, creates a yearlong atmosphere of celebrations in the state. The state of Nagaland is inhabited by 17 Major recognised tribes and offers rich traditional and cultural heritage. Each of this Naga tribe has its own indigenous and unique way of celebrating festivals that are mostly based on their simple way of life, seeking divine intervention for bountiful harvest, thanksgiving for the blessings of nature and merrymaking. The culture and traditions are depicted in the practise of their many rituals and ceremonies. Their ancient music and folkdance attributes a unique ethnicity.

The Sangtam tribe is one of the major tribe of Nagaland which celebrates twelve festivals out of which Mongmong Festival is the most important one that is observed every year from 1-6th of September. It is believed that Sangtam tribe is originated from parts of Kiphire district and spread over to Tuensang district in Nagaland. Being a widely acclaimed tribe of the state signs the Mongmong festival as one of the popular festival of Nagaland. The festival with its element of amusement attributes to the flourishing tourism of Nagaland. The festival is observed through the practise of worshipping God for all his gifts in the trajectory of life. The entire district is employed in the course of the holidays to prepare for this festival which incorporates ritualistic ceremonies and feasting.

Festivals of Nagaland can be well classified through the table given below:

Sl.No	Name of tribe	Name of Festival	Date of Festival
1	Chakhesang	Sukrunye	January 15
2	Kuki	Mimkut	January 17
3	Dimasa Kachari	Bushu	End of January
4	Zeliang	Hega	February 10-15
5	Angami	Sekrenyi	February 25-27
6	Phom	Monyu	April 1
7	Konyak	Aoleang/Aoleang Monyu	April 1-2
8	Ao	Moatsu/Moatsu Mong	May 1-3
9	Khiamniungan	Miu	May 5
10	Sumi	Tuluni	July 8
11	Chang	Naknyulum	July 31
12	Yimkhiung/Yimchungru	Metemneo	August 4-8
13	Sangtam	Mongmong	September 1-6
14	Pochury	Yemshe	October 5
15	Lotha	Tokhu Emong	November 7
16	Rengma	Ngada	November 27-28
17	Tikhir	Tsonglaknyi	October 9-12

Table 1: showing the major recognised tribe’s festival of Nagaland

The precise definition of the word ‘MONGMONG’ can be interpreted as ‘everlasting unity’/’Together Forever’. It is celebrated in the first week of September every year with bomb and gaiety. The six day event has its own significance which is celebrated throughout the jurisdiction of Sangtam areas.

Sequence of six days event and significance:

Day 1: The first day of Mongmong festival is observed on 1st of September which is called ‘SINKKITSA’ means preparation for festival. On that specific day all transactions regarding domestic animals get stopped and people will start preparation of festival by collecting food items, firewood, water, vegetables, millets and different types of locally made rice beers.

Day 2: On the second day, they will kill the domestic animals. They keep some meat aside and distribute rest of the meat to a team called Akhingru and Atiru (guests and officials). Special feast is arranged by treasure of the group and rich people share killed animals’ meat with friends and relatives.

Day 3: Third day is called ‘Musuyangtap’ which means feeding the oven (stone). This day is considered to be the most important day of Mongmong festival. They worship three stones of oven in the form of their God. Eldest women of the family performs the ritual by putting ball of gum rice over each stone and pour some wine on three stones. People strongly believe that

no one should taste food before the worship of stone is completed. They also don't feed animals during the ritual because it can be a sign of an evil.

On the third day, people don't go out of village or on the field as they believe it can damage their crops. Priests of the village perform a ritual of first fetching water from well very carefully. They do the ritual by covering their head by green leaves to save themselves from cholera. They sing songs of bravery with their friends and families. They dance, eat, drink rice beer and participate in tug of war. People play in gay costumes and young man gather with their girlfriends. They also perform merrymaking activities.

Day 4: The fourth day of the festival is called 'Kikhalangpi' which means clearing the weeds and roads. Elder people clean up their village and wells. They clean fields, path of the field and other roads. After cleaning of the village they serve wine and meat to priests' house. Senior lady of the house put together chilly, ginger and cotton to protect crops from evil eye.

Day 5: This day is called 'Shilang wuba Nyumong' which meand a day of visiting grainstore. On this day people meet families, friends and also neighbouring villages. They exchange meats and drinks as gifts and often tokens are exchanged.

Day 6: The last day is called Akatisingkithsa. It is believed that their God has fully blessed them so they can start new harvest. People place nettle leaves on their rooftops to keep out of evil spirits. People also wish that God will protect their crops and give happiness to their families. They thank their God of houses and three cooking stones for making their life worthy and faithful.

Each day of the festival is important to the entire festival of the community. The Sangtam people offer their due respects and prayers to the Gods, once the seeds scattered in their fertile lands begin to cultivate and grow. The prayers are for a thriving and good cultivation. Recital of the prayer is done once in the evening and once in the morning. The morning prayer is considered more powerful and brings health and prosperity. Whereas the prayer constituted in the evening is mainly done for the banishment of evil spirits that remain around their lands and bring in bad vibes. The primary reason to celebrate Mongmong festival is to worship their God and three cooking stones in the fireplace.

Importance of the study:

The festivals that are existing till the present day, no doubt brings the people together with feeling of oneness and brotherhood. It is quite obvious that, during the ancient times lives were full of fear and superstitious. Head hunting were the normal practices but even in

such a given circumstances and situation, traditions could still be able to carry forward which is visible in the present form.

In the modern times however, there is a decreasing trends in terms of giving importance to the traditional festivals especially by the upcoming younger generations. There are several factors which contribute to the slow growth of making the festival popular. The variety of sacrifices required on several occasion involving the use of pigs, dogs, bulls, chickens and eggs etc. must have been so taxing especially for the poorer sections of the society. The advent of Christianity has led to the rethinking of the significance of Mongmong among the Sangtam community and Nagas as a whole. Today we are faced with three challenges of festivals among the Nagas, the epoch of animist festivals, the festival with Christian values and the festivals with post-modern fashion. Sad to say but, some Christians does not encourage the churches to play their role at some stages in festivals. Besides some churches and the religious leaders comes forward to present Christ in culture or Christ in the festival. The influence of westernisation and modernisation, the advancement of science and technology, migration of large people from rural to urban towns and cities etc has led to a sharp decline and discouragement to the practice of festival. The jurisprudence of central and state, very often contradicts the real essence of festival.