

The Phases Of Phom Naga Culture Then And Now

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Abstract

Society and culture are like two sides of the same coin which cannot be separated, in the same way in Phom Naga culture also there are two main institutions which is closely connected to their roots. The Phom Naga tribe is one of the major inhabitants of Nagaland popularly tagged as the "*Land of Clouds*" with Longleng as its district headquarter. The two institutions reflecting the culture of Phom Naga society are Morung and Family each having its own aspects in teaching the youngsters about the importance of society. The present study is taken among the Phom Naga people of Nagaland to understand better the traditional system of Phom Naga culture and the changes that have taken place over the time.

Key word: culture, change, past, present.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is one of the most important part in every Naga society, one will find the practice of culture in every aspects of life. Every Naga tribe has its own cultural history and the changes that have taken place over the time, cultural changes is seen as the ways of accepting the new system of practice and addition of modern aspects to the old one making it as a fusion of traditional and modernisation. (Aier 2004)

Like any other culture of Naga's from Nagaland, the Phom Naga too have its cultural history which has been passed down orally to their family members and the villagers. Phom Naga culture is unique in its own way because of its long history of head hunting practices which was practiced till early 1950's. Though Christianity reach the Phom land in November 1929, to keep behind the practiced of head hunting was a difficult one as head hunting became one of the most popular cultural practice during that time, this practice existed even before Longleng town was formed (the present District of Phom people). After much struggle from the elders the Phom people finally decided to stop the practice of head hunting and making the Phom area a land of peace and a land chirstianity.

The Past Phase

The first institution of all time was the Morung, during the ancient time Morung was the only system of education were the male youngsters were taught the art of surviving, they were taught the lesson of head hunting, hunting for wild boars and most importantly Morung works were the male folks would learn the art of bamboo weaving, making of spears and learning how to take important decision for the betterment of their village from the elders, the Phom people took effective roles to protect their people and to uplift their village. It is said that in every village there were different khels (vicinity), the number of khels wasdepented on the size of the village some big villages had 5,6khels while some villages had 3,4 khels. It was also believed that anyone who respect their village must obey the rules of their village as such the villagers were abide by those roles set. Morung was the only type of education for the villagersduring that time, through that they have learned how to be strong, and stand firm in any decision that was taken to protect their village.

Rooting deeply to the head hunting practice, there were three variations of this practice which was quite different from the other.

The first variation of head hunting was that, the village chief would give a proper information to the other village ahead of 3/5/6 months that he along with his warriors will formally attack their village, therefore this information is passed on to

the other village in order to make them aware and to prepare themselves and the villagers so that after the completion of the given month is over the villager is well prepared for the war, prior to the given information the village chief with his warriors attacks the village.

Second variation of head hunting was among the khel's (vicinity), a particular khel of the village can attack the other village but the remaining khel's can either join them or not depending on their interest and their relationship with the other village. Therefore in this type of head hunting practices all the village warriors did not participate.

Third kind of head hunting practice was named as 'Hidden' or 'Sacred'. This 'Hidden' or 'Sacred' head hunting was done when a member of the family was killed during the war, as such the particular family members start to attack those villagers without any knowledge of them, they would attack silently when those villagers comes to the forest for chopping fire wood, fetch water etc. this kind of attack from the particular family members were done silently without informing the village chief or the warriors of the village.

It was believed that giving proper information to every village before the beginning of war will not bring any bad fortune to the village or to the family members, but silently attacking the village and the villagers without prior information will bring bad fortune to the villagers in general and the family members in particular.

After the completion of head hunting war, the achieved warriors would take those head along with them in their respective village, the celebrations begins with the women folk waiting in the village gate dancing and serving the warriors with all the local beer, meet, cooked vegetables and many more. The celebration continuous for 12 days and during this time the warriors are not allowed to go back home but rather stays in there respective khelMorung, they believed that it was unclean for the warriors to go back home right after the battlefield as such they continue to stay back in the Morung.

Agriculture

Jhum cultivation has been the only agricultural practice since time immemorial, therefore this practice became the only source of survival for their livelihood. Since the Phom people were the devotees of animism before Christianity, before they start off with any kind of cultivation the first thing the people did was to sacrifice an animal either Hen, pig or a dog depending on the situation, only after the sacrificial ceremony was done the people start with their cultivation process. The sacrificial ceremony was done to the lord of that particular land to bless them with good harvest. Once the process is done and the harvest time begins every people of the village would go to their respective land without the knowledge from the people around them as they believed that it would take away their blessings.

Food Habit

Drinking Rice beer "*Nukyiu*" was the most popular and traditional food habit for the Nagas and the Phom people. It was consumed as an appetizer after the meals. Rice beer was used and consumed by almost all the male folks at any time, there was no special occasion for that. Sticky rice "*Nukjau*" was also commonly used by the Phom people, red meat was believed to be included in every meal.

Family

Like any social system of Nagaland, the Phom society also followed the patriarchal family system, where the father is the head of the family and all the major decision is taken by him. Family is considered to be one of the most important institutions of all time. It is in the family that the youngsters were taught how to address their elders with respect as Father "*oppa*", Mother "*onyu*", Brother "*ojie*", Sister "*onya*", Uncle "*Oku*", Aunt "*onyie*" and many more it is also from the family itself where the young folks learned how family clan came into being.

Marriage system

Marriage system was quite different during that time, most marriages were arranged marriage and the family looked into the qualities of a woman who had the abilities to work in the field, who was bold brave enough to face any situation at any time, during the time of engagement the boy family give gift to the girl family

as a sign of respect and love towards them. After the completion of the engagement a gap of one year was taken so that the boy family can invite his fiancé during the time of cultivation and observed the good qualities of her. Most Marriages were held before the "*Monyu*" festival as it was believed that during the festival the bride's family would invite the groom's family for dinner and feast.

The Present Phase

Change is possible when there is equal participation and acceptance of cultural change by the people of the society (Aier 2004)

The Phom Naga culture have seen and observed tremendous changes with Christianity reaching its land. However change to the extent of leaving behind the head hunting practice was a difficult one. It was only when the elders of all the villages realized that this practice would only bring hatred and discomfort among themselves and to the other Naga people. Therefore after much struggle from all village elders 1952 is marked as one of the most memorable day as it was on this day that all the Phom people came under one umbrella and together decided to stop the practice of head hunting and thereafter a new kind of relationship began. From that day on words the Phom land is seen as one of the most peaceful area. Today one would see acknowledging each other and maintaining good hospitality in every Phom village.

Like any other Naga tribe of Nagaland, Phom people also started to live in a peaceful society. True to the saying it has a long history of traditions and customs, however the elders took the traditions and customs which would bring love, peace and understanding within themselves, and left behind those evil practices for the betterment of their people in particular and the Naga society in general. This is remembered as one of the remarkable contribution made by the elders of the Phom community, which is still carried out and practice even today.

“*Kangching*” was the first village who accepted Christianity, followed by rest of the villages, each villages had accepted Christianity at different time, therefore it was difficult to collect the exact information. However “*Pongching*” one of the important village of Phom area also accepted Christianity in 1947 only.

Family

The family system is still carried out and practice like that of the past tradition as the practice of teaching the young folks to respect the elders was and is considered to be one of the most beautiful institutions taken from the old culture.

Education system

The system of formal education reach lately in the Phom area however the practice of informalsystem of education gradually started to change and was replaced by the formal system of education were the young folks irrespective of male and female began to avail the proper system of education like that of their other Naga brothers and sisters.

Marriage

Marriage system to some certain extend was changed were most of the marriage were love marriage and a gap of 3 months was taken after the engagement was completed. At this present time also the practice of giving gifts to the girls family at the time of engagement is still carried on which reflects the true tradition of love respect and concern towards the girl family.

Festival

Of all the festival *Monyu* festival is marked as one of the biggest and most popular festival of the Phom people which is celebrated in the month of April- 6 every year, this festival is celebrated to invoke Gods blessing to bless them with

bountiful harvest through out the year, it also marks the end of winter season and the beginning of summer season.

The year 1962 is remembered and cherished for its remarkable contribution by the pioneers of the Phom elders when they decided to mark June 6th as a special day for the Phom people for their achievement in maintaining peace among themselves. Therefore June 6th is celebrated as "*Phom Day*" by all the Phom people residing in different parts of Nagaland every year.

Today Phom area is consider to be a true land of Christianity, before the people begin with any kind of work the first thing they do is to worship and pray together to the above father to bless them and be their guardian in all walks of their life. The rich culture and traditions which has been passed on by the elders is practice by every individual in the Phom land. The scenario of todays generation have a different outlook in comparison to the past years, the changes in the Phom society have brought massive transformation which can be seen from their present cultural practice, and their believe in the true existence of Christianity, education system has also brought a kind of equal treatment toward both the gender which reflects their pure culture.

Conclusion

Every culture and tradition have something to teach the society about the existence of their people. It is important to look back and observed the tremendous changes that have taken place over time. The Phomculture have also experienced the cultural changes which was made for the betterment of their own people. Today Phom land is enjoying a serene environment with their beautiful culture and traditions.

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