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Lamsimngyi Festival: A Cultural Celebration Of The Zeliang Naga Tribe

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Abstract: Lamsimngyi Festival is a premier pre-harvest event held on the 30th and 31st of October celebrated annually by the Zeliang Naga tribe. This vibrant festival, first recognized as a restricted holiday in 1966 by the State Government, reflects the deep cultural, religious, and agricultural heritage of the Zeliang people. The celebration goes over six days where rituals and ceremonies were conducted that reinforce family bonds, showcase traditional customs and honour agricultural cycles. Lamsimngyi is also known as a festival of familial reconnection, where relationships between parents, married children, siblings and extended relatives are renewed. Traditional dishes are shared among family members and friends, expressing love and care. Central to the festival is the invocation of blessings for an abundant harvest, with prayers directed to the Almighty. Lamsimngyi is further marked by the cleaning of village pathways, symbolizing the temporary cessation of headhunting, which historically provided a sense of security during the harvest season. The festival also serves as a stage for traditional sports competitions, where champions are celebrated as village heroes capable of safeguarding the community. Each day of the festival has its own distinct significance, from the consecration of male children to communal feasts and competitive games. Through these customs, Lamsimngyi fosters unity, strengthens cultural identity, and promotes agricultural prosperity within the Zeliang Naga society.

Keywords: Lamsimngyi Festival, Zeliang Naga, pre-harvest celebration, cultural rituals, agricultural blessings, headhunting, traditional sports

1. Introduction

The **Lamsimngyi Festival** is one of the most significant and widely celebrated festivals of the Zeliang Naga tribe. Traditionally, it is a pre-harvest festival held during the last part of October, but in modern times, it is celebrated on the 30th and 31st of the October month. The festival, known for its vibrant cultural displays, was officially recognized as a Zeliang restricted holiday on October 31, 1966, by Shri. S.C. Dev, the then Deputy Commissioner of Kohima. Dev declared this holiday while serving as the chief guest at Benreu Village in Peren, Nagaland (Zeliang, 2018). The objective of the paper is to give an insight the significance of the Langsimngyi festival of the Zeliang Nagas. Data source include direct interview with Zeliang Naga elders and secondary data gathered from various sources, including local dailies, unpublished works, magazines and journals.

2. Cultural Significance of Lamsimngyi

Lamsimngyi is a unique blend of cultural, religious, and agricultural elements, celebrated with exuberance and grandeur. The festival is a time when both the young and old don their traditional attire, participating in various rituals and events. It serves as a platform to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Zeliang Nagas.

The festival, also known as **Kwakpwangyi**, is especially important for rekindling relationships among family members. It serves to strengthen bonds between parents and their married children, between brothers and sisters, and between extended families, including nieces and maternal uncles (Zeliang, 2018). Lamsimngyi is not only celebrated for merry making and enjoyment. It is celebrated by both young and old showcasing the rich culture and tradition of the Zeliang people. They come together in their traditional dresses and fineries during the festival. Lamsimngyi is a festival centered around religion, culture and agriculture. It is a festival associated with rituals. Lamsimngyi, also known as 'Kwakpwangyi' is also a festival of rekindling of relationship between parents and married children, between families of brothers and sisters, between family of married niece and the chosen maternal uncle's family, and also with other near relatives. During the festival they show love and care for each other by sharing their specially prepared traditional dishes to relatives and friends.

Agriculture is at the heart of Lamsimngyi Festival. The festival serves as an opportunity for the community to offer prayers to the Almighty, seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest. Rituals, prayers, and acts of cleaning—such as tidying the village pathways, gates, and fields—are significant components of the celebration (Longchar, 2022). The traditional village cleaning, which includes the clearing of footpaths and field paths, also marks a temporary cessation of headhunting, a practice once integral to the Zeliang society (Thungoe, 2020). Neighboring villagers would often wait for this festival, knowing they would be safe during the harvest season.

Lamsimngyi is also a time for traditional sporting events. Participants, especially the younger generation, engage in various competitive sports, such as wrestling, long jump, and high jump. These competitions serve as a way to honor and recognize bravery and strength within the community (Zeliang, 2018). Winners are revered as capable warriors who can defend the village from external threats, reinforcing their status within the community.

The festival is celebrated for six days, with each day dedicated to specific rituals and customs.

3. Breakdown of the Festival's Six Days

Day 1: Nset-Zau: The first day, Nset-Zau, is a preparation day for the consecration ritual of the male child, which takes place the following day. Families prepare for the significant event in which young boys are inducted into the male dormitory, known as Rehangki.

Day 2: Nset-Tau: The second day is 'Nset-Tau', which means consecration of the male child to the 'Rehangki' (Morung/Dormitory), which takes place once in a lifetime. After the 'Nset-Tau' the boy becomes a member of 'Rehangki', and he was entitled to take part in every activity as male members of the community.

Day 3: Nlau-Het: The third day is 'Nlau-Het'. On this day the parents collect meat and fish which is ritually considered clean for the ritual of 'Nlau'. Early in the morning the mother prepares 'Nlau-zau' (new wine for Nlau) exclusively meant for 'Nlau'.

Day 4: Nlau: The fourth day is 'Nlau'. This day is observed mainly to sanctify the youngest child in the family. This was performed to invoke blessings from God. Early in the morning the mother who has a young child fetches water from the village pond which was called 'Nlau-dui'. 'Nlau-Dui' was meant for cooking food and to performed sprinkle water ritual on the child. This sprinkled ritual was called 'Ki'. When 'Ki' was to be performed the mother make a cone shaped cup with foxtail leaves and sacred water was poured into the cup which was sprinkled upon every joint of the child by using two undistorted foxtail leaves.

While performing this ritual the mother enchant and bless her child for good and prosperous future with long life. Delicious food which was prepared in honour of this ritual was served to the parents and grandparents, particularly those who do not observe this ritual. This was observed all day long without entertaining any guest at home. On this day the man folk throw 'Tambau' (a kind of reed) from their 'Rehangki' (Morung/Dormitory) towards the northern side and this activity is called 'Tambauhia'. 'Tambauhia' signified that the land would produce adequate quantity of crops/paddy, like the constant flow of the reeds. Animal which was selected for the occasion of 'Kwakpwa' / 'Hetamram', was butchered and dressed on this day.

Day 5: Kwakpwa The fifth day of the festival was 'Kwakpwa'. On this day the male folks present gifts, the best of delicacies like meat, fish, foodstuffs or any other items one can think of, to their married daughters, sisters, cousins, aunties or granddaughters. This was a social obligation or practices which does not imply any ritual. This was a day to rekindled the love and cares for the married women who were away from the paternal home. Women of affluent family background receives maximum presents and in large quantity which was a pride from her husband family.

In some villages, on this day the 'Hemeupuime' (Brides to be), gather together and spend time and enjoy the day for the last time before finally turning into a woman. The women folk, according to their age groups gather and enjoy each other's company while the man folk look after the household chores and take care of the children.

Day 6: The sixth day is 'Lamsimngyi'. On the day of 'Lamsim' the village youths, young and old gather at a particular place called 'Lamsimkie' (pathways to the field) before the dawn. There were competitions in clearing both the sides of the 'Lamsimkie' by all able boys. On return from the path clearance the community feast was held in the morning and get ready for the grand sports events of the day. In run up to the games and sports competition, young boys and men of different clans form groups and take turns to feed each with fresh meat and practice in the games and sports for this day. Women and girls stay indoors, observing the hour for good luck to the male members from their family so that they bring laurels to the family/clan. All households maintain abstinence in order that no injury or harm befalls on anyone while they compete in the day of 'Lamsim'. If death had taken place during the year or domestic animal had given birth the previous night, boys or men of that household do not take part in the competitions, and even avoid mingling with others till the competitions are over.

The competitions start with 'Nrwa' (ululation) by the man folk of the village. After 'Nrwa', young boys and men plough the long jump pitch, then start the 'hezwa' (long jump). When the winner is declared, the youths compete in 'Nsau' (leaping). Different competitions follows like 'Heram' (high jump), 'chugi'shot put, etc.

Finally, after all the competitions were held, everyone settles down to watch the 'Hepwa' (wrestling) competition, which is played according to the age groups. The champions in different disciplines are looked upon with respect by all the people, as they are considered as persons capable of guarding the village as good able brave warriors.

After the day competitions of various games and sports champions were declared and the menfolk yeodeled 'Nrwa' and 'Hui' and culminate the Lamsimngyi Festival for good harvest and dispersed.

4. Conclusion

Lamsimngyi Festival is more than a celebration as it is a reflection of the Zeliang Naga tribe's cultural identity, agricultural practices and social cohesion. By intertwining traditions, religious rituals, and social obligations, the festival serves as a key event for strengthening family relationships, ensuring agricultural prosperity, and preserving the tribe's cultural heritage. It is also to honour the traditional and customary practices of the community and to preserve and practice the rich tradition passed down from forefathers.

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