

“Tha-Thavan” the Festival of Women

Dr. Modang Reena

Asstt. Professor (Geography)
Wangcha Rajkumar Govt. College Deomali
Email: rynamon [at]rediffmail.com

Abstract: Festivals are one of the most important cultural elements of tribe that distinguishes their distinctive culture from another tribe. Festivals unite people and they come together for the sole purpose of celebration and happiness. Other than that, festivals also help in embrace our culture and happiness. Each traditional festivals involves rituals, rites, customs etc., that reflect every aspect of their culture. “Tha Thavan” is a festival of women celebrated by the wancho Community of Longding district. in Arunachal Pradesh. This festival is celebrated by different names in different villages. Some village of the middle and lower Wancho celebrate it as “Shaa Chavan” while some village in the wakka circle of the district celebrate it as “Cha Thagan”. This paper deals with the festival “Tha Thavan” which is celebrated by the particular village of the district called ‘Kamhua Noknu’ in the Pongchau circle of Longding district. The unique feature of this festival is that in this festival no men are allowed. it is the festival where only women or girl can take part. it is a special festival held to honor the women of the society. Generally, this festival is dedicated to celebrating girls who have reached puberty and praying for the fertility of plants and animals”. The most unique thing about these festivals is that whenever Tha Thavan “festival takes place, there is no sacrifice of animals instead rice rituals are done for the animals.

Keywords: Shaa Chavan, festivals, Man, Puberty fertility, Celebration, Sacrifice, Animals

1. Introduction

The Longding district is the 17th administrative district of Arunachal Pradesh in North East. Latitudinal extension of the district is 95°32N and longitudinal extension of 26°86 E. It shares its boundaries with Tirap district in the north, Nagaland in south and west and Myanmar in the East. Longding town is the headquarter of Longding district. Administrative unit consisting of Longding District was created by bifurcating erstwhile Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh on 26th September 2011 by Arunachal Assembly. The district was formally inaugurated on 19th March 2012. The total geographical extension is 1063 sq. km. The total population in Longding district is 56, 953 out of which 28710 are male and 28243 are female according to 2011 census.

The tribe inhabiting the districts is known as Wancho. The Wancho's were martial tribes who at one time actively engaged in head-hunting. However, the practice is now extinct since many years. Wancho's are famous for wood carving and beads work. The social life is governed by the traditional chieftainship system assisted by the councils of elders. Most of the people live in the villages. The life-style is community based. Most of them earn their livelihood through farming and other activities such as govt. employment, govt. contract works, contract works in forest products, trade in local products and agricultural labor etc. The agriculture is primarily of the shifting type (jhum) though slowly people have started adopting terrace farming too.

The social practices of the wanchos

The Wancho society is divided into two important social divisions, Wangham, the chief and Wangpan, the commoner. The division dates back to the days of the first creation of a Wancho village and there is no tradition or folklore to say the exact time of this division. As is customary and usual in a society with a chief, a Wancho chief is entitled to marry several girls from the commoner

class. The marriage of the Wangham with Wangpan girl has given birth to two intermediate social classes, Wangsa and Wangsu. A chief is sacred and so is his blood. So, his son born out of a Wangpan wife can never be Wangham because there is Wangpan blood in him, nor can he be a Wangpan because Wangham blood is also in him. Thus, all the children of Wangham from his Wangpan wife or wives are assigned to an intermediate class of Wangsa, just a rank lower than the Wangham. Below Wangsa there is another class, the Wangsui. e. son of Wangsa father and Wangpan mother. Four social classes have thus been established. On the highest rank of the social hierarchy is the Wangham with all his glory enjoying special facilities and honour in every sphere of life. Next to him is the Wangsa, Wangsu goes a step further down and does not give rise to any other class. On the last and the lowest in the social strata is the Wangpan with no royal blood in him. All these four social classes have various social responsibilities and obligations, rights and duties and interpersonal relationship.

Social distinction between the classes is very scrupulously observed in every sphere of life. As for example, in the village festivals the Wangpans are not allowed to sit and take meal in the same row with the Wanghams. They are also not allowed to marry a Wangcha girl from Wangham's family although there is no restriction on the part of the Wangham to marry a Wangpan girl.

The Wangham is the head of the village as well as of the society. The head of the village has got to be Wangham and since the post of Wangham is hereditary, a Wangham has to produce a Wangham son. For this he has to marry the daughter of a Wangham born of a Wangcha wife. Such a daughter is known as “Wangcha.” If a Wangham does not have son from any of the Wangcha wife, the office of the chief, on his death goes to his nearest kin, his brother's son given the first preference. But if it so happens that his brother also does not have sons born out of their Wangcha wives he asks the Chief of his parent village to send to his

village one of his younger son to succeed him. This arrangement is also followed when the Chief of the parent or the paramount village has no son, or other eligible heir. He then asks the Chief of the village which branched off from it to send his eldest son, who then shifts to the parent village and inherits the office of the paramount chief on his death. But in no case, a Wangsa becomes a chief. Since the office of the chief is sacred, the holder has to be sacred and one can only be sacred if one is born of a Wangcha mother.

Wangsa is a status only for one generation given to the Chief's children by a Wangpan wife, known as *Wangnu*. So long such a child survives he remains a Wangsa, his children are downgraded to a still lower status of Wangsu. This helps in the reducing the number of Wangsa in the village. If the Wangsa were made into a permanent class it could create problems for the society by becoming a potential rival to the heirs of the chief. If Wangsa were allowed to increase their number, one day they would become very powerful in the village and could pose a threat to the chief's authority. Numerical strength has always been considered as main source of power in the Wancho villages, and villages with considerable population have always dominated smaller ones and subjected them to their authority by sheer threat of annihilation. A Wangsu is the descendent of Wangsa. This class is permanent and more stable.

A Wangsu is the descendent of the Wangsa; this class is permanent and more stable by virtue of having the chief's blood in them. They are considered a little superior to the Wangpan but are not entitled to much social prestige.

A Wangpan remains a Wangpan for all time. There is no change in their social status. His marriage relation with a higher-class female does not enable him to rise in social scale. He can marry a daughter of a Wangham, other than a Wangcha that means the daughter of Wangpan wife. A Wangpan cannot marry a Wangcha but can marry Wangham's daughter who is born out of Wangpan mother. There is no restriction on the part of a Wangham to marry a Wangpan girl. The Wanghams, Wangsas and Wangsus practically controls the affairs of the village. As they have royal blood in their veins they are entitled to take important part in social function and important portfolios such as looking after the chief bachelor dormitory called "*Paa*."

"Tha-Thavan" the festival of women

Many festivals of India consist of rituals to be performed by men only. But there is one festival in the country where only women are allowed and men are prohibited from participating. This is the "*Tha Thavan*" festival celebrated by the '*Wanchos*' of '*Kamhwa Noknu*' village of Longding district in Arunachal Pradesh.

The word 'Tah' means paddy, 'Tha' means spirit and 'van' means coming. This festival is celebrated in the month of April every year to celebrate puberty and fertility of plants and animals.

The most unique feature of this festival is that whenever '*Tha Thavan*' festival takes place, there is no sacrifices of animals especially Mithuns (*Bos Frontalis*).

The day of festival begins with women-young and old-dressing themselves up in the traditional dress and ornament. The women then walk to their farms. All the women get together in their farm huts and prepare food for themselves and heartily enjoys the food together whatever is being cooked. There no men are allowed to enter the farm hut or touch the food.

After eating heartily, the elderly women of the village chant and perform rituals for all the women who hit puberty within the year. These women are given a white skirt to wrap around their waist, signifying they are mature and eligible to marry. The rest of the day of festival involves singing folk songs. Songs of love, song of tearing or of expressing sadness about their lost youth.

Women of the village, after performing various rituals in the field, would bring back a sapling from their fields and tie it in their home in the hope of fertility and prosperity. A folk story goes that women went to village to ask where the rice wished to go. The rice crop replied that it wants to stay whenever animals are specially Mithun.

All the village women then get together at a common point and have fun activities for instances, games on the village swing. On this day, the roads are filled with women celebrating singing and having fun-a rare sight. The festival concludes as the women walk around the village and reach the Chief's house.

Earlier this festival was celebrated by the girls who have hit the puberty, but today these festivals involve women of all ages getting together to celebrate fertility. This festival is also celebrated for the fertility of plants and animals.

On this day one can see the mithuns tied up in every household. All the Mithun owner bring back their mithuns from the jungle and tie up outside their house and feed them with salt and rice. there is no sacrifice of Mithun instead rice rituals are performed for the animals.

2. Conclusion

The Wancho tribe celebrate various other festivals also which are generally related to agriculture following the tradition and culture which give us a clear idea that the festivals are an integral part of the Wanchos life. Though variations can be seen in the naming of these festivals in different Wancho inhabiting village, yet there is similarity in practice and custom. These similarities weave the integrity and solidarity amongst the Wanchos. These festivals have played a major role in keeping intact the beautiful unique identity of the Wancho tribe.

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