

A Study on Culture of Tai phake Community of Assam

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Abstract: Tai Phake is a tribal community of Assam. Tai phake is the branch of the great Tai race that entered Assam approximately in the year of 1776. They had migrated from “Mong Mau” of south China under Yunnan province. They now live in the district of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia and approximately their population is 2000. The Villages that they are living at – Namphake, Tipamphake, Borphake, Monmau, Nonglai, Longphake, Ningam, Moug-lang, faneng -gaon etc. Apart from these, some of Tai phake people living in Chang-lang and Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. Tai phake Community is culturally very rich. Apart from other tribal community, they have own language, traditions, mores, norms, values, dressing & food-habits etc. These tangible and intangible cultures reflect the cultural life of Tai phake Community. **Keywords:** Community, language, traditions, mores, values, tangible, intangible, culture.

1. TAI PHAKE COMMUNITY: AN INTRODUCTION

Tai phake is a tai speaking indigenous ethnic group of Assam, living in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia district in particular. Not only Assam, Tai phake people are also found in Arunachal Pradesh at Lohit Changlang district. It is believed that Tai phake people were migrated China, (particularly from Muong Mao) in the year of 1775. Before migrating to Assam, they ruled at Hukong valley in Myanmar for a few years. Tai phake people basically use tai language within their community, but they speak Assamese language as well. The word, “phake” has been derived from the Tai words “ pha” meaning wall, and “ ke” meaning Ancient or Old.

Before their migration into Assam, they had lived on the bank of the Irrawaddy. Coming to Assam, they at first settled under their chief chow Ta Meng Khuen Meng of the Royal line of Mung Kong at a place called Moongkongtat, a little above Ningroo on the river Burhidihing .

They were called upon by the Ahom official Chandra Gohain , who brought them to his capital from their original habitat in the early 19th century. When the British invaded Assam, they were force to flee to Muong Mao. Therefore, a group of tai phake people went to Muong Mao again.

But a few of them were settled down on the bank of river Burhidihing. At present, Tai phake people are found in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh ; although their numbers are less than the majority of other tribes. Now they have been settled down in many villages both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Some of the Villages where there have been living are namely Namphake, Borphake, Manmau, Namchai, Tipamphake, Manlong , Nanglai, Lalung, Phaneng, Ninggum etc. At present, their population are approximately 2000.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study on the culture of Tai phake Community.
- 2) To study on the Historical background of Tai phake Community.
- 3) To examine their beliefs, norms and mores.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, for the collection of data, I have used both primary and secondary sources. As a primary source of data collection, I have used participant observation and made interviews among Tai Phake people. And as a secondary tool of data collection, I have used many articles, books, and novels.

Study Area:- This study had been conducted on the Tai phake Community living at Namphake village of Dibrugarh district (Assam).

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Tai phake is a tribal Community which is residing in some particular districts of Assam. They have been always taking care of their cultural beliefs, practices and languages. Researchers should make study and explore means to restore their uniqueness among various ethnic groups. Moreover, if we start studying on them, then it will spread their social identity among the new generations. However, Govt. should commercialize their food culture, traditions through which the tourists could be attracted. It is very important to do research on them in-depth so that we can know about them in a more distinct way.

5. MAIN BODY

Tai phake is one of the most cultural ethnic groups in north east India. The society of Tai Phake is basically tribal, which is simple in nature and democratic in particular. Culturally, they are very rich. Among tangible culture, we can speak about their dressing styles, shelters and food habits. Local bamboos and woods are used for the construction of their homes. Along with bamboos and woods, they use many other materials such as Timber, Livistona Jenkinsiana etc to construct their shelters. Every house has a drawing room which is called as "kan -nok" and a prayer hall which is called as "khok-pai-frah". Every house, there is a kitchen room called "Haun-aom" in their local language.

In the ground of dressing, they basically wear their own tribal dress for everyday use as well as for particular occasions also. The elderly man of Tai phake Community usually use green and black coloured "woven lungi" lined with a red, yellow & white yarn, and a white turban. Moreover, a white scarf with a plain border and white long sleeved shirt are worn when they go to any distinct places. Among the boys, trousers and shirt are very popular that they use these when they have to go outside of their village. In their own village and home they use to wear their traditional tribal dress. Coming back to the dressing styles wear by women.

It is seen that the Tai phake women usually wear their traditional dresses which are colourful and consist of an ankle-length skirt and a front side open blouse. In some occasions, they wear a white turban. Young girls of this community use traditional dress as well as bazaar made frocks. They also use to wear a skirt called as "chin" in their local language and a blouse. The people of Tai phake belong to Buddhism, so that the Buddhist monks usually wear special clothes, which must be of yellow colour. Apart from this dressing culture, they are rich in their food culture. Basically, rice is their main food. They drink tea and the delicious flavour of tea is very popular among Tai phake Community. Their meals consist of cooked rice wrapped in banana or "kau leaves" that "khau-how" and boiled vegetables. They also use to eat meat, fish etc.

Coming back to the point on intangible culture, we may tell about their religious beliefs, Customs, language, traditions and many festivals organized by them. Tai phake people are basically belong to Buddhism. They believe on the path directed by Gautama Buddha and they follow Theravada sect of Buddhism. They also believe on Animism. Tai phake people organize many festivals such as "Poi-sangken", Buddha purnima, Poiokwa, Naun-wa" etc. In every year, Poi-sangken is celebrated for three days on 13 or 14 April. In this festival, people enjoy throwing water to each other believing that it could wash the sins of one another. In this festival, they also wash the Buddha's image and statues. The most interesting thing is that this festival is closely similar to "Songkaam" which is celebrated in Thailand that marks the beginning of new year in the Tai Calendar.

Celebrating Buddha purnima or the Birthday of Gautama Buddha is one of the major festival among Tai Phake people. In this festival, Tai phake people gather together in the Buddhist Monastery to offer their prayer to Lord Buddha. This festival is usually organized in the month of May.

Naun-wa is not a festival in general, but an important religious practice in particular. This festival is celebrated for three month period in which no marriage or construction work are done. In each month, during the day of Purnima, people

gather together in the monastery and they offer prayer. After three months celebration of Naun-wa , or sometime during the end of Naun-wa,

poiok- wa festival would celebrated where people offer their prayer into God to forgive them for their faults which could happen during Naun-wa. Apart from these, there are so many festivals such as “Poi-Mai-ko-chumfai, poilu-fra, Poilu-kyong, Poi-kithing” etc.

Tai phake people speak Tai phake language which is similar to those of shan. Tai -phake language has 10 vowel phonemes, 12 consonant phonemes, 2 Semivowels and a few diphthongs and 3 consonant clusters.

From above this discussion, it reflects that the Tai-phake people follow a rich cultural path. They follow certain rules regarding their death ceremony. For normal death, cremation is the rule. For abnormal death, burial is prescribed. It is believed that the purification of soul ceremony is a organized for seven days. Apart from this death ceremony organized for common people, there is a special provision for the disposal of the dead body of a Monk. The monk's dead body is not disposed on the same day, rather it is kept for a year or in a watertight coffin. After about one year, the Tai phakes are gathered together and arranged a big festival to ceremonial cremation of the dead body of the Monk.

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