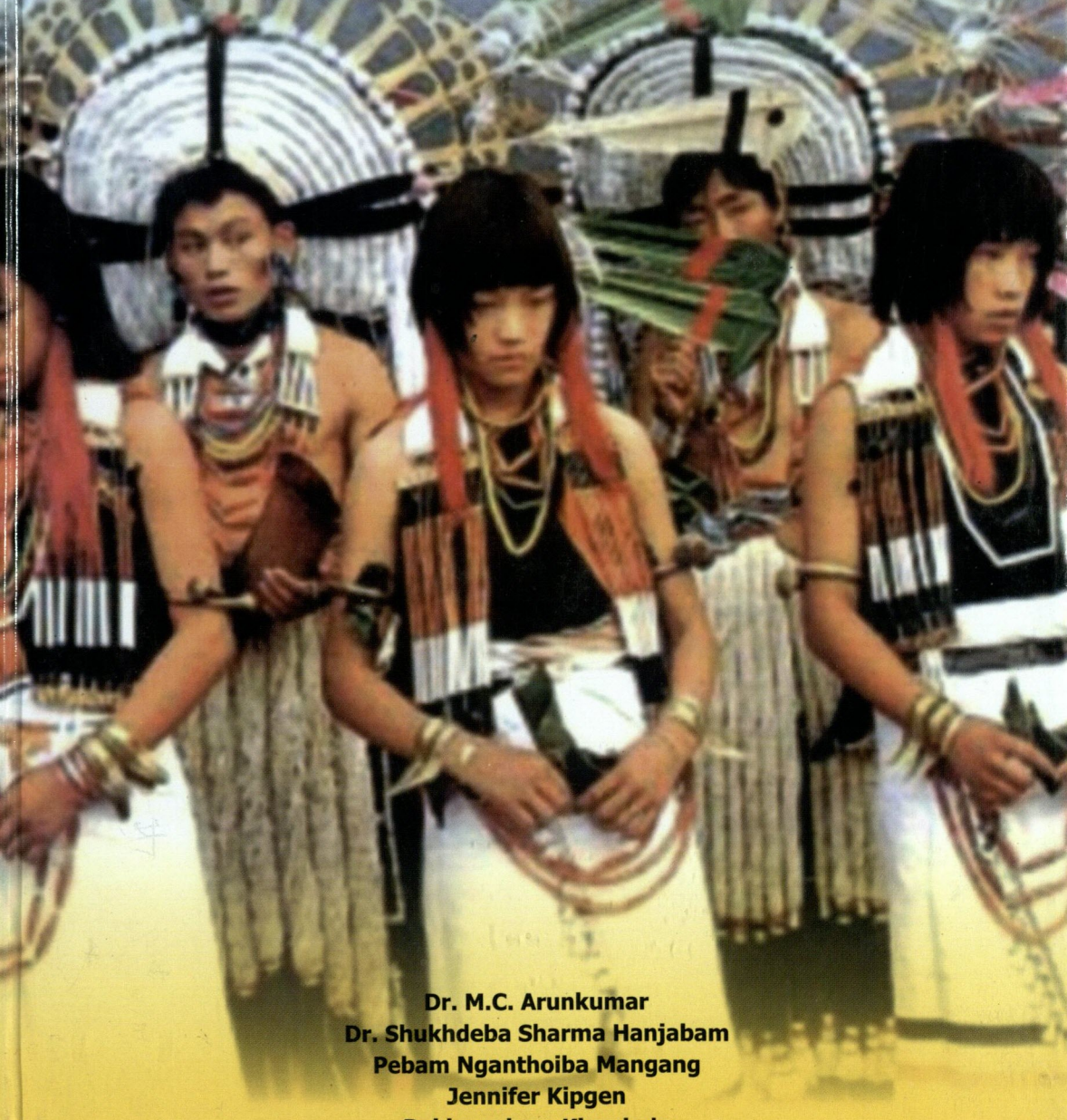




MAXFORD DYNAMIC SERIES OF TRIBAL STUDIES

The Tribes of NAGALAND



Dr. M.C. Arunkumar
Dr. Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam
Pebam Nganthoiba Mangang
Jennifer Kipgen
Pukhrambam Kiranbala

The Tribes of NAGALAND

The Tribes of Nagaland can be easily explored through this book, which detailed about all the major tribes along with other sub-tribes inhabit Nagaland. Each tribe has its own customs, languages, dress and can easily be marked by the brilliant designed attires, jewelry and bead strings that they wear. The present generation of Nagas has turned into fashion designing in a big way, reproducing fabrics that represent the ancestral motifs blended with modern appeal.

The traditional ceremonial attire of each tribe is an interesting sight to see, of which some of the selected photos are in the book. Nagaland is entirely tribal, populated state. The Naga's have different stories about their origin. The hill tribes in the state of Nagaland had no broad term applicable to the whole race. The word Naga was given to these hill tribes by the plains people. This proved to be a great unifying force to the tribes now classified as Naga.

Editors:



Dr. M.C. Arunkumar is not only known of his critical observation of the North East Societies but also of his creative works expressing his ideas of the people of this region. During his long career of anthropologist in Manipur University, he carried out many projects ranging from tribal studies to social problems relating with political culture and HIV/AIDS. His political plays are staged at state and national festivals by different theater groups. His doctoral work on Women's Crime in Manipur opens a new insight to the women's studies in the region. He is teaching Social Anthropology at present. To his credit, there are a number of academic papers as well as popular articles, number of books.



Dr. Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam is currently working as Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus, Manipur. His PhD is from ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, the School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.



Pebam Nganthoiba Mangang is a resident of Imphal West District, Manipur. He is a Research Scholar at the School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He works on Conflict and Health as an ICSSR doctoral fellow. His Master of Social Work is from Pune University with specialisation in Community Development.



Jennifer Kipgen, Manipur, is associated with the School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She is also associated with Karolinska Institute, Sweden as a Doctoral exchange fellow on public health. She has completed her Master of Social Work from Pune University with specialization in Community Development.



Pukhrambam Kiranbala, M A in Anthropology with specialization in Physical Anthropology from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, has also done B. Ed. Presently She is associated with the Department of Anthropology, Manipur University.

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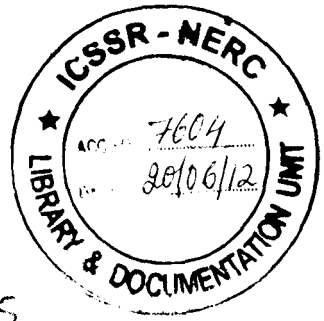
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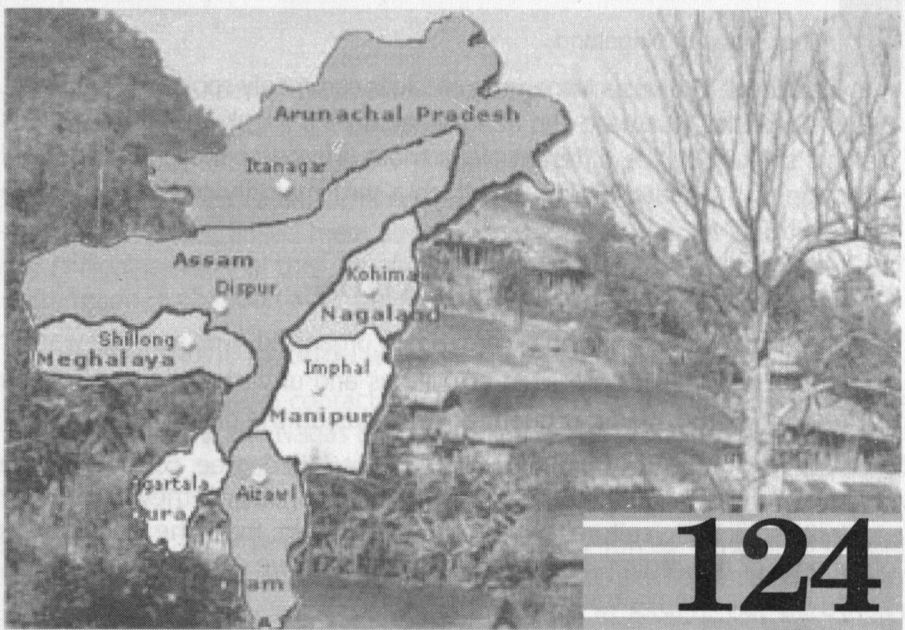
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INTRODUCTION

The term Naga refers to a conglomeration of many tribes inhabiting the North Eastern part of India who share similarities in their cultures and traditions. Some of the prominent Naga tribes are Anal, Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Lotha, Mao, Maram, Pochury, Phom, Poumai, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema (Sumi Naga), Tangkhul, Yimchunger, Zeliang, etc.

There are 15 officially recognized tribes in the present State of Nagaland (a North Eastern Indian State bordering Myanmar). The other Naga Tribes can be found in the neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and even across the border in Myanmar.

Some of these tribes are: Katcha, Laingmei, Mao, Anal, Maram, Nocte, Phom, Pochuri, Poumai, Rongmei, Tangkhul, Tangsa, Tutsa, Wancho and Zemei. The Naga tribes were headhunters. They practised the tradition of headhunting and preserving the heads of enemies as trophies.

The Naga tribes live in the Indian state of Nagaland, parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and the northwestern hill tracts of Myanmar such as the Sagaing Division. The Naga, though they have no common language, spoke many dialects that belong to the Tibeto-Burman languages group of the Sino-Tibetan languages family.

A language known as Nagamese creole is commonly spoken in the State. It is a mixture of Assamese and Bengali and does not truly reflect the various dialects spoken by the different Naga tribes. However the present official language of the State is 'English' which a vast majority of the people are fluent with.

ORGANIZATION

The Naga people traditionally are tribally organized, with a strong warrior tradition. Their villages are sited on hilltops and until the later part of the 19th century, they made frequent armed raids on the plains below.

Although the tribes exhibit variation to a certain degree, considering the diversity in their languages and some traditional practices, they have many similarities in their cultures which set them apart from the neighboring occupants of the region. Almost all these tribes have a similar dress code, eating habit, customs, traditional laws etc.

However, one trait that sets them apart from the other groups in the region is their Head Hunting Custom (Which was prevalent at one point of time). Though they no longer practice head hunting at present, there is enough evidence to prove that they once used to practice head hunting. The Naga people today number around 4 million in population.

EARLY HISTORY

There is no scholarly consensus regarding the early origins of the Nagas. The presence of Mongoloid groups in North-East India had been attested as early as *circa* 500 BC in ancient Indian literature, such as the *Vedas* and *Mahabharata*, and many of these Mongoloid groups are believed to be indigenous to the region.

Some believe that the Naga people, however, may have made a southwesterly migration to the sub-Himalayan region of north-eastern India and north-western Myanmar. These tribes speak Tibeto-Burman dialects and it is probable that their original homeland was in the region between the Huang Ho and Yangtze (Ch'ang) rivers in northwestern China and that they came in successive waves of migration spreading over centuries.

The Naga tribes had maintained little contact with the outside world till the later part of the 13th century, though their existence was noted much earlier in ancient Indian texts and also mentioned by Ptolemy in about 150 AD.

Oral traditions abound among the many tribes regarding how they came, dispersed, etc., but such accounts are steeped in myth and superstition and hence no concrete facts about their arrival to the region can emerge.

Curious coincidences of culture and language through the Pacific led some scholars to suggest that the Nagas were an off-shoot of groups which had originally descended from the central Asian plateau.

Their burial customs, ornamentation, agricultural practices and even games and crafts, linked them strongly to the tribal peoples of Borneo and the Philippines most of their rituals and practices were considered pagan and were made to abandon after the arrival of the Christian missionaries.

Contact with the outside world

Apart from cultural contacts with the neighboring Ahoms, the rulers of Assam from 1228, the Nagas had little or no contact with the outside world. Real exposure to the outside world came with the British annexation of Assam in 1828 following the Treaty of Yandabo.

In the 1830s, the British sent expeditionary forces, and in 1845, the colonial power succeeded in concluding a non-aggression pact with Naga chiefs who used to attack the bordering areas in Assam. But the Nagas violated the agreement time and again and their war and peace tactics continued. Since the 1830s, the attempts by the British to annex the region were met with sustained and effective guerrilla resistance from Naga groups, particularly the Angami Naga tribe.

The British followed up with many military expeditions till 1851 amidst continuing guerrilla warfare by the tribals and they succeeded in setting up military posts in some areas. The conflict culminated in 1878 when the Angamis mounted raids on British camps. The response was brutal with the burning of several rebel villages by the British forces. The resistance met with failure and eventually the region became administered by the British.

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

An important landmark in the history of the Naga people with considerable social, cultural and political ramifications is the arrival of missionaries and the spread of Christianity among the Naga tribes. The acceptance of Christianity marks a departure from their many tribal customs and traditions, and along with the spread of English education, heralds the arrival of modernity in the Naga hills.

The first missionary to arrive the Naga hills is believed to be Rev. Miles Bronson in 1841 although he stayed only for a short period. In the 1870s, Dr. & Mrs. E.W. Clark worked among the Ao people and with the help of Mr. Godhula, an Assamese Christian, established the first Church in Molungkimong in 1872.

Rev. William Pettigrew, a Scottish missionary arrived in Ukhrul in 1895 and got the permission to open a mission school from Raihao, the chief of

Hunphun. Pettigrew's efforts included translating the Bible and Christian hymnals into the Hunphun dialect which resulted in the dialect becoming the lingua franca among the Tangkhuls.



Fig. 124.1: A Naga Tribe

Likewise the missionaries served as an agent in forging a greater "Naga" identity which is a radical departure from the age old set up of warring village republics. The dreaded custom of head hunting slowly declined and disappeared as more and more Nagas embraced Christianity in the early 20th century. Today, more than 95% of Naga people claim to be Christians. Christianity has changed the Naga society entirely and it bears little semblance to the tribal society that it was a century ago.

The Christian missionaries interfered in the social and cultural practices to a far greater extent than the government. The new educational system and religion disrupted the indigenous pattern of life as both the British administration and the Christian missionaries brought about dramatic changes among the Naga tribes thereby effecting the tribes to discard their age old social patterns, cultural practices and traditional political setup without providing functional substitutes.

Resistance and Struggle for Identity

From the arrival of the British till date, the Naga hills have been an area of constant strife and turmoil. The Tribes are a fiercely independent people and they have resisted any incursions into their territories using brute force. The dawn of a spirit of nationalism and a common identity, however, are relatively new concepts among the Naga people.

This is because, according to the people, every village is a republic, free from all outside domination and their desire had been to preserve the status quo. With the coming of modern education, the politicization of Naga ethnicity began. The first instance was the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 by a group of educated Nagas.

The club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 with the demand that "Nagas should not be included within the Reformed Scheme of India". After India's independence from British rule, the 'Nagas' were the first ethnic group from north east India to rise up against accession to India. The legendary Naga leader Zapu Phizo spearheaded the initial movement with the Naga National Council (NNC).

In the dying days of the British, hectic parleys were led by him for a sovereign Naga nation. Consequently, in June 1947, a 9-point agreement was signed which promised bringing the Naga tribes under a single administrative unit and the Naga' right to self determination after 10 years. However, disputes arose over the interpretation of the agreement, and many in the NNC opposed it.

Under Phizo, the Nagas declared their independence from the British on 14 August 1947, a day before India. In May 1951, the NNC claimed that 99 per cent of the tribals supported a referendum to secede from India which

was summarily rejected by New Delhi. By 1952, the NNC led a guerrilla movement which resulted in a violent crackdown by India's armed forces. Phizo escaped from region through East Pakistan and went on an exile to London where he inspired the movement till his death in 1990.

STATEHOOD, FACTIONS AND CEASEFIRES

In 1960, the Naga People's Convention (formed in 1957 supposedly as a people's forum but dubbed by Naga groups as India's creation) signed a 16-point agreement with the Indian government through which statehood was granted to Nagaland in 1963. The agreement was condemned as the greatest betrayal in Naga history, as through it the Indian government declared that the Naga political issue had been amicably settled.

The formation of Nagaland effectively divided the Nagas into four administrative states within India. A ceasefire was signed between the NNC and the Indian government and they had six rounds of talks till 1972 with no real progress.

The first ceasefire and talks broke down in 1972 when an assassination attempt was made on the Chief Minister of the state. In November 1975, a delegation of the NNC signed the infamous Shillong Accord through which the revolutionaries agreed to unconditional acceptance of the Indian Constitution and surrender of arms.

The accord was condemned by many Nagas and it marked the beginning of factionalism among the revolutionaries. An immediate repercussion was the formation of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in the late 1970s by Thuingaleng Muivah, Isaac Swu and S.Khaplang. The NSCN later splintered into two with the breaking away of Khaplang. The 1990s were marked by fratricidal violence between the revolutionary groups.

The mid-1990s were a time of turmoil in the Naga hills especially around Manipur as ethnic violence erupted between the Nagas and Kukis, inflicting hundreds of casualties on both sides. On January 23, 1993, the NSCN (IM) was admitted to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), which was seen then as a step towards gaining more international attention to the Naga issue. In 1997, the NSCN (IM) signed a ceasefire with the Indian government and negotiations continue till date.

Recent trends in talks indicate that the NSCN(IM) have mellowed on their demand for sovereignty and instead strengthened the demand for autonomy and unification of all Naga areas in Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh with Nagaland which triggered strong protests in Manipur. According to the UNPO, the biggest impediment in the peace process, as the NSCN sees it, is the refusal of the government of India to officially extend the ceasefire to all Naga-inhabited areas outside of Nagaland.

The Indian government has shown little enthusiasm in solving the Naga issue considering the fact that little progress has been made in the last 12 years of talks. On the other hand, the ambiguity about the territorial scope of the ceasefire agreement is resulting in continuing clashes between the Indian army and the NSCN cadre.

Society

The people are simple, straight-forward, hard-working and honest people with a high standard of integrity. They possess a strong sense of self respect and rarely submitted to anyone who roughshod over them. A hallmark of their character was their hospitality and cheerfulness. The Naga tribals have an egalitarian society, and the village is a closely knit unit consisting of households of different clans.

The Village

They traditionally live in villages. The village is a well-defined entity with distinct land demarcation from neighboring villages. Each has a dialect of its own and as such there is a strong sense of social solidarity within it. The people in it are held together by social, economic, political and ritual ties.

The villages have their own identity but not in isolation as there are interdependent relationships with neighboring villages. The impact of modernization is slowly but steadily eroding the centrality of villages as a social unit as large commercial towns are rapidly coming up in every region of the Naga hills. This is bringing about drastic changes in the values, lifestyles and social setup of the people.

The Family

The family was the basic unit of the Naga society. Marriages were usually monogamous and fidelity to the spouse was considered a high virtue. Marriage within the same clan is not permitted and it amounts to incest. Incestuous couples used to be ostracized from the villages.

The family was the most important institution of social education and social control. There used to be a deep respect for parents and elders. Material inheritance, such as land and cattle, is passed on to the male offspring with the eldest son receiving the largest share (indicating that the society was pseudo-egalitarian).

Status of Women

In the classless, caste-less Naga society, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. However, being a patriarchal society with strong warrior tradition, it is considered an honour to be born as a man.

The traditional culture and customs expect a Naga woman to be obedient and humble; also expect her to perform the roles of wife, mother, child bearer, food producer and household manager.

She also supplements the household income by weaving colorful shawls, an activity which is done exclusively by women. Women are highly respected and given a great deal of freedom, however, they are traditionally not included in the decision-making process of the clan or the village.

The Morung System

The *Morung*, or the bachelor dormitory system, used to be an essential part of Naga life. Apart from the family, it was the most important educational set up of the people. The Morungs are grant buildings, constructed at the village entrance or a spot from where the village can be guarded most effectively.

On attaining the age of puberty, young boys and girls were admitted to their respective dormitories. The Naga culture, customs and traditions which were transmitted from generation to generation through folk music and dance, folk tales and oral tradition, wood carving and weaving, were conveyed to the young in the Morungs.

Announcements of meetings, death of a villager, warnings of impending dangers, etc., were made from the Morungs with the beating of log drums. With the onset of modernity, the Morung system is no longer in practice among the Tribes.

HEADHUNTING

One of the most striking social characteristics of the Nagas was the practice of headhunting. Ursula Graham Bower described the Naga hills as the "paradise of headhunters." Most villages had a skull house and each man in the village was expected to contribute to the collection. The taking of a head is symbolic of courage and men who could not were dubbed as women or cows. There is nothing more glorious for a Naga than victory in battle by bringing home the severed head of an enemy.

There is however, no indication of cannibalism among the Naga Tribes. This practice is now entirely eradicated with the introduction of Christianity brought in by the British Missionaries in the early 1800s and the subsequent spread of modern education in the region.

Transformation and Challenges

The Naga society is undergoing tremendous transformation. The spread of Christianity, the growth of education and developmental programs undertaken by the government have all unleashed forces which are churning up the tribal society and rapidly changing its complexion and character.

The modern set up of detached nuclear families is fast catching up with the people as they have greater intercourse with the modern world. This is leading to the erosion of the role of the clan and the village as agents of social control.

CULTURE

Art and Craft

The Naga tribes are expert craftsmen. Their dwellings are made of wood and straw and these are ornately carved and arranged. Each tribe has a unique way of constructing their huts. A common thing about all the tribes is that they decorate the entrances of their dwellings with heads of buffaloes.

The Naga people love colour and this is evident in their colorfully designed shawls and headgear. Here again, the designs on the costumes are unique to each tribe. They use beads with variety, profusion and complexity in their jewellery along with a gamut of materials like glass, shell, stone, teeth or tusk, claws/horns, metal, bone, wood, seeds, hair, fibre, etc.

According to Dr. Verrier Elwin, the arts and crafts of this group of tribes reflect their self-sufficient lifestyle - "they have made their own cloth, their own hats and rain-coats; they have prepared their own medicines, their own cooking-vessels, their own substitutes for crockery."

The various craft-work done by the people include basketry, weaving, wood carving, pottery, metalwork, jewellery and bead-work. Weaving of colorful woolen and cotton shawls is a central activity for women of all Naga tribes. One of the common features of Naga shawls is that three pieces are woven separately and stitched together.

Weaving is an intricate and time consuming work and each shawl takes at least a few days to complete. Designs for shawls and wraparounds (commonly called *meghala*) are different for men and women. Among many tribes the design of the shawl denotes the social status of the wearer.

Some of the more known shawls include *Tsungkote* and *Rongsu* of the Ao tribe; *Sutam*, *Ethasu*, *Longpensu* of the Lothas; *Haora*, *Changkhom* and *Raivat* of the Tangkhuls; *Supong* of the Sangtams, *Rongkhim* and *Tsungrem Khim* of the Yimchangers; the Angami *Lohe* shawls with thick embroidered animal motifs etc.

The Indian Chamber of Commerce has filed an application seeking registration of traditional Naga shawls made in Nagaland with the Geographical Registry of India for Geographical Indication.

FOLK SONG AND DANCE

Folk songs and dances are essential ingredients of the traditional Naga culture. The oral tradition is kept alive through the media of folk tales and

songs. Naga folks songs are both romantic and historical, with songs narrating entire stories of famous ancestors and incidents. There are also seasonal songs which describe various activities done in a particular agricultural season.

The early Western missionaries opposed the use of folk songs by Naga Christians as they are perceived to be associated with spirit worship, war and immorality. As a result, translated versions of Western hymns were introduced, leading to the slow disappearance of indigenous music from the Naga hills.

Folk dances of the tribals are mostly performed in groups in synchronized fashion by both men and women, depending on the type of dance. Dances are usually performed in festivals and religious occasions.

War dances are performed mostly by men and are athletic and martial in style. All dances are accompanied by songs and war cries by the dancers themselves. The various indigenous musical instruments used by the people are bamboo mouth organs, cup violins, bamboo flutes, trumpets, drums made of cattle skin, and log drums.

TEXTILES OF NAGA

Nagas are versatile artisans and they leave an impression of ethnicity on most of their objects of everyday usage. The sheer impulse of the Nagas to decorate even their deadly weapons is evident from their daos and spears. Their bamboo drinking pots are embossed beautifully with various cultural motifs. The wood carving on massive doorways and the village gates as well as on log drums is still on display.

The dress materials for everyday use produced on the primitive looms by the female folks are a visual delight. The process of weaving is a very slow and tedious and therefore, the end products are usually a trifle expensive. In some tribal communities each member has the right to put on decorative attire and jewellery signifying his or her belonging to a certain ethnic group, there are others where only those who distinguished themselves by virtue of their deeds or those who desire to indicate their high social status are privileged to wear special attire and put on personal ornaments.

Among the Nagas 2 categories of clansman until the recent past had the right to adorn themselves in a particular way- the head takers and the givers of ceremonial feasts. In many cases not only, they but their wives and even members of their families were entitled to distinct items of dress. The insignia and achievements fall into two categories:

1. Those concerned with head hunting
2. those concerned with feast of merit that were a demonstration of an individual's level of prosperity and some gift of it to the community.

The type of body cloth worn by men and women differs from one Naga group to another. The design and colour, which varies not only between the tribes but also sometimes between clans of the same tribe and between different villages, records the wearer's position in society.

There are around 16 tribes in Nagaland and each may have its own distinctive design and colour combination. Each may have a different design for some special occasion. The tribes are: Ao, Konyak, Sema, Chakesang, Angami, Lotha, Sangtam, Phom, Chang, Kheimungan, Yimchunger, Zeilang, Rengma, Tikhir, Mokware, Chirr. The different designs and symbols are discussed later.

Technique of Spinning

Spinning, like dyeing and weaving is performed by women and every Naga woman is supposed to weave the cloths of her family. Until recently, it was essential that every marriageable girl should know how to spin and weave, and tiny girls can often be seen with little toy looms experimenting with weaving.

The usual process of spinning is rather primitive and a few simple tools are used in the whole process. The cotton is cleaned off its seeds by being rolled on a lat stone with a short stick used like a rolling pin. The cotton having been cleaned off its seeds is carded by being flicked with a small sized bow. The clean cotton is gently rolled by hand with the help of a round stick over a flat stone or plank into sausages like silvers. The Naga spindle is a very primitive affair.

The spindle is made of along spike of hard wood frequently of the sago palm with a point at the bottom, greatest thickness being just above this point. Above this again is a round flat stone spindle-whorl, cut, trimmed, and bored in the middle, through which the wooden stem is passed from the other end. This stone weights the spindle and for a long time, the point being potsherd covered with a cloth to keep it from wandering.

The thread is gradually wound round the wooden stem as it is spun. From the spindle, the thread is wound on to a sort of double T- shaped stick. From this it is unwound and steeped in hot rice-water hardening as it dries, and when it is dry, it is wound on to a light bamboo frame. From this frame, it is wound into a ball.

Dyeing

In case the yarn is to be dyed, the dyeing process takes place after the yarn is transferred into skeins. The indigenous colours are, in recent years, fading away and are replaced by chemical dyes. Further the easy availability of coloured thread in the bazaar does not encourage the necessity of producing the old indigenous colours.

The Nagas use dark, blue, red and rarely yellow dye. The whole process is carried out by women who are also taboo among some tribes to handle any dye during pregnancy lest the foetus be effected by the colour. Blue dye is obtained from the leaves of the *Strobilanthes flaccidifolius*. This is a universal Naga dye and the plant is grown on the outskirts of the villages or in patches cleared in heavy jungle.

There is a slight difference in the method of preparation and use of the blue dye among the different tribes. One of the commonest Naga methods of preparation of blue dye is to boil the leaves in water in a big pot. Then the cloth or thread to be dyed is dipped in it and boiled for nearly an hour. It is then taken out and dried in the sun. If the colour does not take properly, the same process is repeated twice or even three times.

The indigenous red dye is less used than the dark blue. The red colour being of blood, a young woman using this colour in dye operation is superstitiously believed to die a violent death or loose her head in a raid. Therefore, only old women dye yarn in the red colour. Some other tribes like the Lothas consider this a risky occupation likely to bring on dysentery, and therefore, only suitable for old woman who are of less value to the community.

Only a few tribes make yellow dye. Angamis prepare it from the wood of a plant locally called 'athuo'. The wood portion of the plant is light yellow in natural colour. The bark of the plant is first removed with a dao; the wood is then sliced into chips, which are boiled in water with the thread. The thread is then taken out and dried in the sun. Rengmas make yellow dye from the flowers of a tree. Use of the dye of any colour is restricted before harvest, there being a strong feeling that the process is in some way detrimental to crops.

Technique of Weaving

Unlike other parts of India, where much of the spinning and weaving is in the hands of man, spinning and weaving in Nagaland is the exclusive monopoly of women. Weaving can begin as soon as the first fruit of the new rice have been eaten. The Naga loom, though of the type known as Indonesian tension loom, but is interesting to see working.

The loom is simple back strap one with a continuous horizontal warp consisting of six sticks serving the function of warp beam, lease rod, heald stick, beating sword and extra warp beam. For setting the loom, first the warp beam is securely fastened to the wall of the house or any other suitable form supporting in a horizontal position. On this are slipped two loops of bark string.

The loops length of which is adjusted from an already woven piece of cloth, are set at a distance apart equal to a little more than the breadth of

the piece of the cloth to be woven. The lower bar or cloth beam is notched at either end so that the weaving belt can be attached to it. This belt is worn by the operator in the small of her back. By it, as she sits on a low bench in front of the loom with her feet pressing on a firm support, she can keep the necessary tension on the warp.

The women keeps the necessary strain by sitting with the belt (Aphi) in the small of her back, attached to a bar from which the warp (kotong) runs to the beam, itself firmly attached either to the well of the house or to stakes fixed in the ground. The heddle, lease rod, and bar above the lease rod, round which the warp is twisted once.

The shuttle is shot enough through by hand, and the woof beaten up with wax or with a very fine white powder, found on the underside of the leaves of a species of wild plantation. The patterns in cloth are obtained by the necessary combination of different coloured threads in the warp and weft.

Weaving specimens from the various districts of Nagaland comprise a wide range and number which themselves as pieces of the precious treasures showing in respect of designing and processing, an accomplishment of great measure. The distinctive costumes and apparels comprise wrappers and shawls, waistcloths and bodice, girdles, scarfs, skirts, aprons and lungis resplendent with skilful colour combination in their own fashion and style.

It nearly takes 10 hours for an expert weaver to complete the plain strip or in other words, 30 hours are required to weave a complete cloth. One of the common features of Naga shawl is that three pieces are woven separately and stitched together. In fact, the central stripe is more decorated than the two others, which generally have more or less the same pattern. In case of shawls for children and skirts for women, the stripes are reduced to two only.

Painting on Cloth

Paintings on a few clothes are practiced only by the Lothas, Aos and Rengmas. The Ao art of painting resembles that of the Rengmas although the conventional pattern is different. Aos paint the white band of their famous warrior shawl, which can be worn only by one who had taken heads in war or who has performed feasts of merit.

The figure of elephant, tiger, mithun, cock, dao spear and human heads are painted with black on the white median band. The colour is prepared from the sap of a tree, which is mixed with very strong rice beer and the ash of its own leaves. Sometimes, the ash of bamboo leaves is used in place of Tangko leaves resulting into a grey fluid, which is applied with a pointed end of the bamboo stick. Painting is done by old men only. He works free hand on the lines of the thread. The same medium is used by the Rengmas.

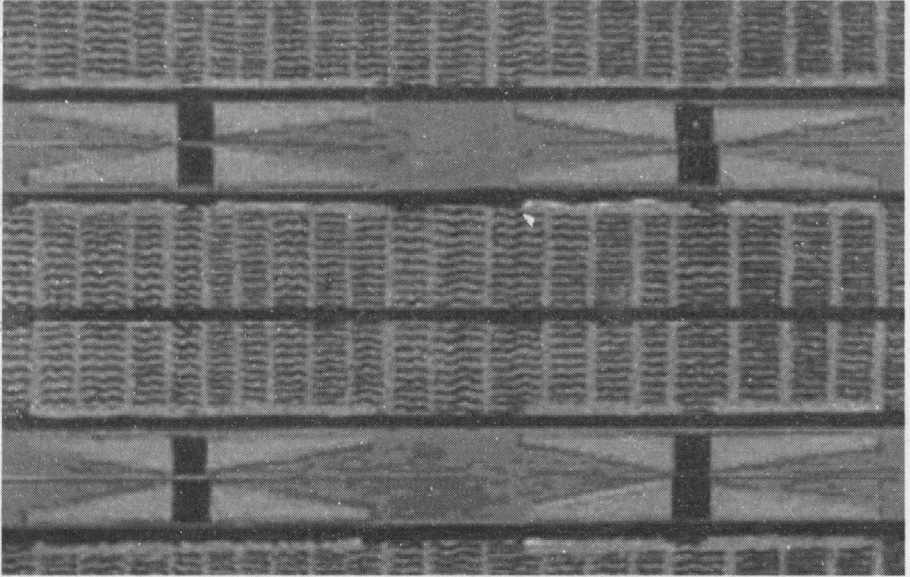
DESIGN AND SYMBOLS IN TEXTILES OF NAGA

Fig. 124.2: The decorative warrior shawl

The Nagas set great value on their costume worn on ceremonies or festive occasions, though some pieces were for everyday use that of his wife and daughter. The insignia were highly desirable because of the achievements necessary to gain the right to wear them. The design and colour, which varies not only between tribes but also sometimes between different villages, records the wearers position in society.

The designs vary from a formal arrangement of lines to elaborate patterns of diamonds and lozenge shape. Simple straight lines, stripes, squares and bands, varying in width, colour and arrangement are the most traditional design and motifs. Naga women are great experts in the choice and combination of colours. Each tribe has its own patterns with simple, clean lines, stripes, squares and bands being the most traditional design motifs.

Described below are the designs of some of the tribes of Naga.

Aos

The decorative warrior shawl *Tsungkotepsu* is one of the most characteristic cloths of the Aos. This is an exclusive male shawl and could be worn only by one who has taken heads in war or offered mithun sacrifice (a feast of merit performed in Naga society by rich men).

On a general dark base, the cloth has a median white band and on either side of it are horizontal bands of contrasting black, red and white. The median

band is painted with a pattern in black which includes figures of mithun symbolizing wealth of the owner, elephant and tiger to symbolize valour of the man, human head representing success in head-hunting and a few other things like spear, dao and cock.

Another shawl worn on festive occasions by men of wealth of the sons and daughters of wealthy men is Aomelep su, in which dog's hair dyed red is woven at regular intervals so as to make the shawl appear shaggy in spots. This shawl is woven in strips of red, yellow and black alternating.

Rongsu shawl is one of the most decorative Ao cloth and the most difficult to earn the right to wearing it, for it can be worn only by a man whose grandfather and father have both done the mithun sacrifice feast and who has done it himself.

The other shawls consist of Tiongkong su, Tabensa su, Lungkhum subang, Keyi su, and Bangmerem su.

The Ao women's skirt consists of a cloth nearly one and a quarter metre long and about two thirds of the metre deep wrapped round the waist with the top outer corner tucked in just in front on of the left hip. It is impossible to describe all the varieties of skirts for they vary from village to village, phratry to phratry and even clan to clan in the same village.

The Ao skirts include: Azu jangnup su mostly of red and black stripes with little yellow in the black stripes. Ngami su or fish tail skirt. Yongzujangau or cucumber seed skirt is woven in red on a black background.

Angami Nagas

The Angami are one of the biggest Naga tribes. They are a handsome and hardworking people living chiefly on the products of the fertile terraced fields generations ago on the hilly slopes and in the valleys around their villages, and by hunting. The Angami women are expert weavers.

When there is no work in the fields, one can see them sitting at their simple looms for long hours, slightly bending forward, interlocking the horizontal threads of the weft with the stretched vertical threads of the warp have to be divided into two layers.

There are several varieties of cloths worn by the Angamis, the predominant pattern with white with red and black bands called Loramhoushu and black with red and yellow bands called lohe. The Angamis have only one cloth distinctive of social status namely phichu-pfe worn by the priest. Another kind of cheap shawl used by men and women for rough wear is a black shawl called ratapfe.

Men invariably wear a kilt, which is a plain black cloth. This kilt is generally embroidered with cowries in three or four lines, the real significance of which

is rapidly changing. In olden days, three lines of cowries signified that the wearer was a warrior, and four lines of cowries signified that the wearer was a veteran of renown.

The cloths principally in vogue among the women are a plain blue cloth and a white cloth with black marginal bands of varying width, but they are more frequently seen wearing the men's cloth. The ordinary dress of Angami women consists of a petticoat called neikhro, a sleeve less bodice called vatchi, a white skirt called pfmehou.

Ze-liangs-rong

The Ze-liangs-rong, a mixed group of Zemis, Liangmais and Rongmei wear a few varieties of clothes, the design of which do not basically differ from those of the Angamis. The general pattern is a white cloth having about six black bands at both edges.

The sizes of the black bands are not same. While the cloths and skirts of the Zemei are white with a very narrow black and red border, women of the two other groups wear a variety of cloths, the designs of which do not until recently basically differ from those of the Angamis. From the homegrown cotton, they make shawls and skirts in white or beige, the original colours if their two varieties of raw cotton, with black bands of different widths on the border, separated by red and pink borders.

These are for everyday use. For ceremonial attire Rongmei women have introduced intricate designs of many variations of line and colours, particularly for their skirts, belts and men's sashes used for dancing in which they excel among other Naga tribes. The most popular dancing skirt is black with a wide, elaborately embroidered red border and three white median bands with a thin red line in the center.

Sangtam

The designs and symbols in the textiles of Sangtam Naga are mutandis similar to those of the Aos and Yimchungers. Sangtam Rongsu shawl is a warrior shawl, no ordinary people can wear. The cloth on a black base has four grey bands at the top and another four bands of the same colour at the bottom. Another decorative Sangtam shawl called Supong is supposed to be used by rich men.

The Sangtam tsingrang su, design of which is said to have been revealed to a woman of Pongen clan in a dream, is another shawl of the man of Sangtam aristocracy alone.

Sema

Although weaving was comparatively less practiced in Sema villages than among the neighboring tribes, in recent years the Sema women have been

producing shawls and skirts that have admired for their delicate colourful patterns even outside Nagaland.

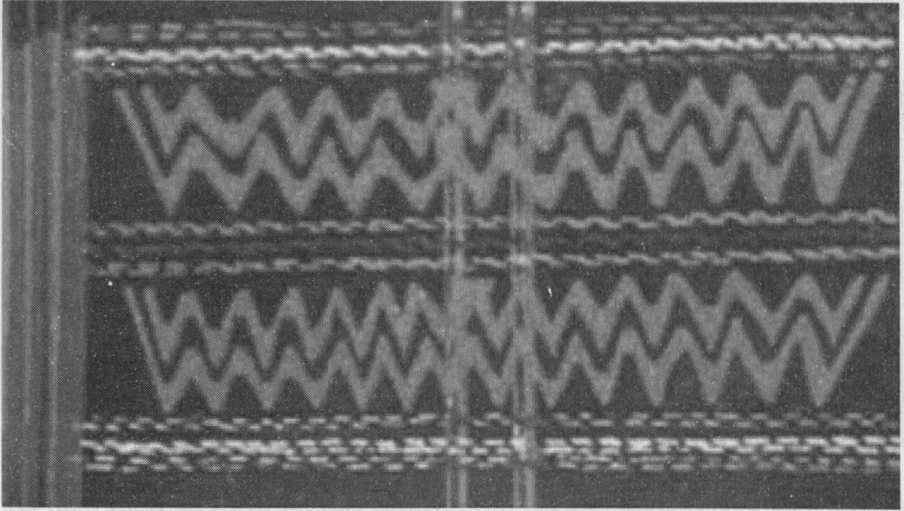


Fig. 124.3: Different designs used in Sema textiles

One of the commonest Sema cloths, akhum, is black with three or four red bands. Akhum may be decorated with several designs and any be worn by rich men. Sema warriors of note wear a cloth called avi-kiyi-phi, which is a modification of meiphi and is very similar to the Lotha rakhusu. A rich Sema, who offered that feast of merit by killing mithun, may also wear this cloth. It is a white cloth with nine white bands of about at regular intervals.

In the white band are embroidered shapes and a pattern of 'X' lozenges in red woolen. In some of the Sema villages a handsome cloth of broad black and white strips called nisuphi is worn. An ordinary cloth commonly worn by Sema women and girls without any restrictions is called lototsu.

Yimchunger

The Yimchunger Nagas have a great variety of shawls. One of the most attractive shawls is called the rongkhim, which can be worn only by a warrior of great renown. The red colour in the shawl symbolizes the blood of the enemy. If this cloth is worn by any other man, who is not a warrior, he is believed to die of leprosy.

Kechinger Ronfkhim is also a warrior shawl, but in order of merit, it denotes second rate honour. The man who takes the right hand of the slain enemy is entitled to wear this shawl and none other. It is a black cloth with narrow grey bands at two edges. The tsungrem khim is an exclusive female shawl. There is a story as to how the design of this shawl came to the weavers.

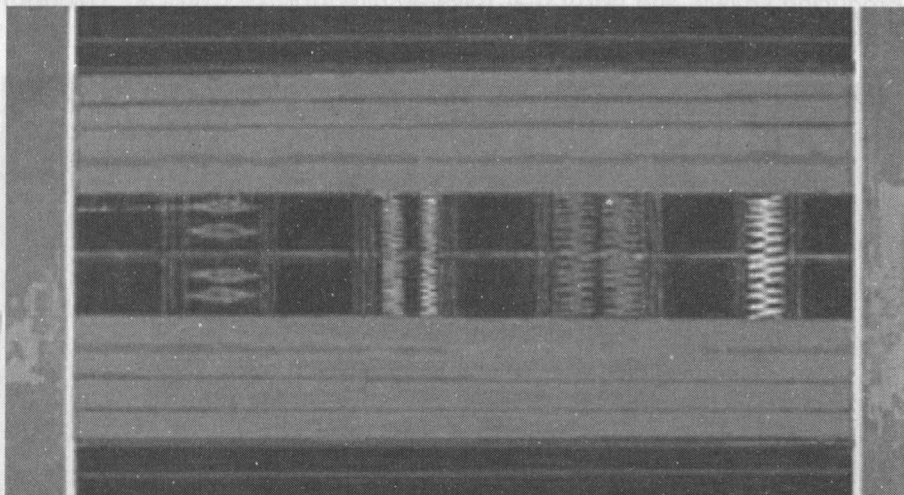


Fig. 124.4: Middle portion of Yimchunger Shawl

Sangkonglim khim or long drum shawl can be worn by both man and woman without any restriction. It is a black shawl with a narrow white band in each of the three stripes. Amerthre khim is another attractive Yimchunger shawl, which can be worn only by a man who had killed a tiger. Rehuke khim or cowrie shawl is the most important cloth meant for the rich man of the Yimchunger tribe.

One of the most common cloth used by both men and women without any restriction is a black shawl called Aneadk Khim. The next type of shawl commonly worn by male and female alike is Mokhok Khim. This shawl is worn by an ordinary person who is neither a warrior nor a rich man. The shawl is completely white having no design on it. Amurk Khim is another kind of shawl, which can be worn by both man and woman.

Women wear mostly two kinds of skirts:

- (a) Kechingperu khim is the first skirt given to a child when she requires one. It is a white cloth with narrow black and red bands at regular intervals alternating with the white.
- (b) Alongza khim or Langa Imjung is a rich woman's skirt.

Phom Nagas

Phom Nagas also classify their clothes on the basis of their social status of the wearer. The ordinary cloth for rough wear may be a white in which they call Vihe-ashak or a dark blue called Nempong-ashak. A man who has taken human heads in war or has offered feast of merit as a recognition of his wealth in his village may wear a cowrie shawl called by the Phom fanet.

In Naga society, cowrie is a symbol of marital status. Another handsome cloth, which the Phoms called the henyu, is a red shawl with narrow white horizontal bands at regular intervals. Rich men may wear this cloth. But in the recent years, this cloth has been selected as the National cloth for the Phom and now any person wears it without any restrictions.

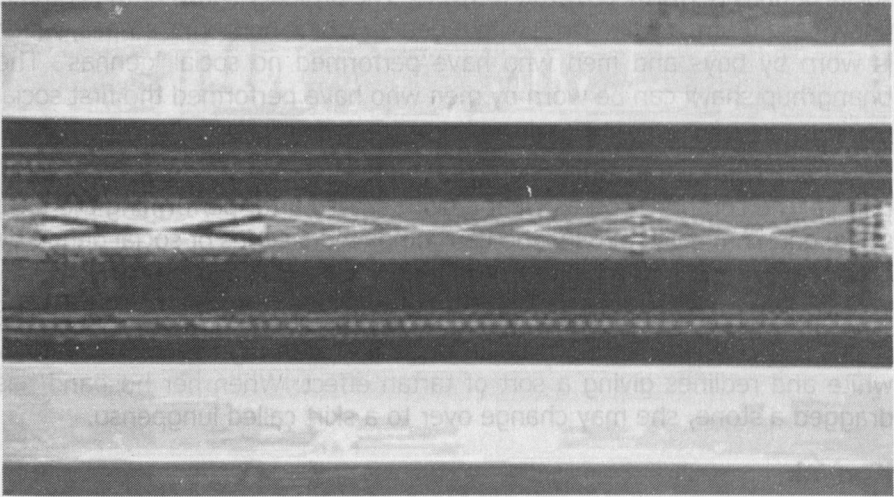


Fig. 124.5: Dengas of the median bands of Phom Warrior Shawl

The general pattern of the Phom shawl is red with a broad median white band elaborately embroidered with red lozenges. Phom women wear a skirt called Phom shungnang. This is a black cloth with two prominent and parallel stripes in each of which there are five narrow red lines. Wives and daughters of rich Phom may wear a white skirt called shaka.

Rengma

Rengma Naga cloths are also of various patterns. The difference of the various types of cloths is all the more important, particularly being indicative of the status and position of the weavers. A man who has not been able to offer any feast of merit nor ever taken an enemy head is entitled to wear an ordinary type of cloth called rhikho. It is white with four narrow black bands.

This is worn by young and old alike, the only difference that the numbers of black bands are reduced. Another kind of cloth for which no ceremonies are required is a dark blue one with a very broad median band embroidered with a thin zigzag pattern in red at the edges. This is essentially a young man's cloth. It is called the Moyet tsu.

Alungtsu is a cloth for well-to-do men. It is worn by men who have not yet offered a great feast of merit marked by setting up of monoliths. Teri

Phiketsu is another Rengma shawl for which the performance of head hunting ceremony is essential.

Lotha

Lotha shawls are also of several patterns and indicate the number of social gennas performed by the weavers. The ordinary shawl of the Lotha is known as Sutam, a white cloth with broad dark blue horizontal stripes, which is worn by boys and men who have performed no social 'gennas'. The phangrhum shawl can be worn by men who have performed the first social genna.

There is no cloth assigned to be worn after performing the second social genna. The southern Lothas wear a cloth ethasu after performing the third social genna. Finally, a man who has completed a series of social genna by dragging a stone wears handsome cloth, which is called eshamsu.

The skirt of an unmarried girl is a plain bark blue one. On marriage, she wears a pretty skirt called loroesu, dark blue with big squares of narrow white and redlines giving a sort of tartan effect. When her husband has dragged a stone, she may change over to a skirt called lungpensu.

Konyak

The Konyaks have a few varieties of clothes. The Konyaks have a few varieties of clothes. A remarkable shawl worn by the village elders in important meetings and conferences is called nye-myon. Another white shawl worn by women is called Nikola. In the medium portion, there are two narrow black lines at a distance of nearly 4 cms between which a lozenge pattern in red is woven. Colorful and handsome shawl called shatni may be worn by rich konyak women.

When a rich man's daughter marries, it is their custom that she would be presented a shatni shawl by her parents, which she will simply preserve. This particular shawl would be used to wrap her body on death. An aristocrat shawl generally used by the konyak chiefs (Ang) and elders of the village is called meyni. It is a combination of broad black and red bands alternately. Another shawl worn by village elders is called Hompani, which is nothing but a meyni cloth devoid of cowries and woolen fringes. Rich Konyaks wear a handsome cloth called nyauni, which is a combination of red bands and red lines.

