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Introduction

Man is a social being and lives in a dynamic society. Naturally certain aspect of social customs and traditions become outdated with the changing times and the society does change. There are many reasons as to why certain social customs and traditions become outdated. Firstly, it may be due to the interaction with another culture and such an influence creates a deep impression in the person. Secondly, it may be also the cultural transformation a tribe undergoes while adopting oneself to the environment. Thirdly, it may be due to an ideological outlook and technological advancement, where there is continually giving of birth and where the old is replaced by the new dynamism of man. Thus, the many old customs and traditions which were considered as the culture of the tribe do not hold any relevance in today’s fast changing society. The simple reason is due to the advancement of science and technology. The process where the old culture is replaced by the new culture is called “cultural death” because old customs and traditions simply disappear. The external influence of another culture is re-interpreted and adopted as one’s own. In a cultural encounter, there often take place a mutual confirmation, and in such situation occur partial change and enrichment. It is not necessary as a death of culture but helps in the growth of culture. This calls for cultural integration.¹

¹ Amalorpavadas, Recovery of Human Dignity and Culture in a Technological era. P. 7
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\(^1\) D.S. Amalorpavadass, Recovery of Human Dignity and Culture in a Technological era. P. 7
With the dawn of new development and changes, such process of birth and death of Shüpromei culture is inevitable. The society has to re-adjust itself in order to keep abreast with the process of modernization. It is a process of such re-adjustment where there could be a recoiling of culture where preserving of culture takes upper hand and on the hand allowing to be swept away by another culture. A mature culture should able to interact with another culture without fear and be prepared for a cultural progress, enrichment and transformation. Such is the stage that is to be seen as a social and cultural phenomenon. How ancient and mature is Shüpromei culture to such social and cultural phenomenon today? Shüpromei society is undergoing transformation and change and the elders witness their culture dying and being replaced by a new waves of culture. Will Shüpromei be able to attune themselves to such radical changes without losing their culture? If their cultural ethos are to survive then both the external and internal influence are to be kept under a close watch.

The two factors which have tested the spirit of Shüpromei and which have sown the seeds of transformation and modernization are Christianity and Western education. One might consider Christianity and Western education as one and the same, because with the dawn of Christianity Western education followed suite. These two (Christianity and western education) brought a radical and uncritical transformation which has become a blessing in disguise.²

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² S. Ashuli, (73) farmer during the interview regarding his feeling on the advent of Christianity and Education.
As a result Shüpfomei culture and tradition have undergone a mighty change, changed for the better and in that process the culture is lost. All what one sees and hears today is the by gone oral tradition. Thus what is told and practiced in the past is considered as belonging to the forefathers and there is nothing new in today's culture. The younger generation look at the old traditional customs as uncivilized and something which is of distant past and which does not fit into the modern culture. One can say that the present society follows only a shadow or a faint ray of that rich ancestral way of life.

According to Lohru Nepuni, he says, "Today, what actually is called as Shüpfomei culture is not Shüpfomei culture but adapted, modified and coloured with a westernized culture." This stage is the stage of diversion and departure. This departure is a painful breaking away and cutting away from the umbilical cord of the forefathers. One can call this as the second birth of Shüpfomei Naga tribe.

Shüpfomei family like any other families in the world was considered sacred and as the oldest form of expression of human relationship. But such old concept of sacredness, love, respect, uniqueness and of human expression of love is slowly going away. And such a state of Shüpfomei family would be the sad part of the society. And one has to ascertain the real cause of decline of Shüpfomei family institution today.

1. Lohru Nepuni (43) social worker, interviewed on 24.05. 1992.
Thus, it is only when Shüpfomei family move towards the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence can restore that fabric of Shüpfomei family. The speed of development and progress may be one of the many causes which is affecting the society. The family as the smallest unit was considered the core of the society is now put into test, the test of modern invention of technology and communication. Children who were under the control of the family and village authority became suddenly reacting against their parents, overlooked the village council, village rules and regulation etc. This is because there is no communication and dialogue with the parents nor with the village authorities.

Education of children in schools forces the parents to send them to boarding, hostels and far away places away from the contact with their parents and elders. Children with their new outlook of life and parents with their old outlook of life brought generation gap and communication breakdown. The speed of development and progress may be one of the many causes, which is affecting the society. The family that was the core of the society is put to test and confronted with roles redefined by modern invention of technology and communication. Children who are under the control of the family and village authority became suddenly reacting their parents, overlooked the village council, village rules and regulation etc. is because there is no communication and dialogue with the parents. Education of children forces the parents to send them to boarding, hostels and far from the contact with their parents and elders. Ignorant parents are unable to understand what is the need and want of their children, and often looked at their children from money concept and this further widens that gap.
Thus, in this perspective we shall bring out the different social ceremonies of Shüpfomei tribe. Like every institution Shüpfomei family is the smallest unit of the society and is in the process of transition. It may be under the pressure of economic, political, educational, cultural, religious transformation or by various social upheaval and weakening of the moral bond which was the binding force.

2. Shüpfomei birth ceremony

2.1. During pregnancy

When a woman is no longer a virgin and has entered wedlock and has conceived, in short conceived, she has a list or code of conduct namely the taboos - that is “do’s” and “don’ts” to be observed before and after the birth of a child. It served as the guiding principles which would make her to be a good mother, according to conventional rules and regulation of the society. She is advised especially by grandmothers and by her own mother, elders and her peers to observe such codes for the sake of her child and for her health itself. Some of such codes are as follows

2.1.1. The taboos

2.1.1.1. Fear of evil spirits

She should not go to the fields too early or come back too late, but follow the general public. There is a superstitious belief that, the child in the mother’s womb could be killed by evil spirits on hearing the cry of the child in the womb.
2.1.1.2. Don’t kill any being

She is advised not to kill any snake, and if she does so the child when it grows up
will imitate the bad habit of putting out the tongue like the serpent.

2.1.1.3. Don’t cover any holes

For the fear of becoming dumb or deaf she should not fill or cover up any holes
on the ground or cracks in the wall.

2.1.1.4. Don’t steal

She should not steal or take things in the absence of persons, lest the child in the
future becomes a thief or imitate in stealing other’s properties.

2.1.1.5. Don’t tie knots

She should not tie knot or cut any creeping ropes or plants. While cutting
firewood it is a bad omen, if the tree, which she cuts, falls on to another tree, it is
believed that she faces problem and difficulties during childbirth.
2.1.1.6. Don’t eat any wild animal meat

She must not eat meat of any wild animal especially of the wild cat (*ele*). If she does she would face complication at childbirth.

The first stage of parenthood is a stage of anxiety, mixed with longing and expectation. No doubt it is a mixture of joy and waiting. It is eagerness and longing to have the first arrival and often the first parenthood brings total change in the man. He becomes sober and responsible. His attitude changes with life and duties. Likewise the woman, becomes motherly and womanly. It is like purification for both for man and woman. It is also believed that the family listens to the different omens especially the dreams and the different signs around. If the family, especially the father or mother dreamt of a male animal, a cock, spear, gun, etc., they would predict or taken for granted that it would be a boy and vice versa a female animal, hen, basket, water jug, sieve, etc., it might be a girl child.  

It might be right or wrong but this is what the forefather’s had believed and explained. Even today, parents are told to be careful in taking note of the dreams. The family also starts rearing chickens as preparation for birth, so that at birth the mother may eat well, and become healthy and strong again to work.

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4. Such belief is till prevailing today in Shupfonei community, inspite of modern instruments for detection of the child’s sex.
2.2. During birth

At the time of delivery and at labour pain, usually the husband, grandmother or the girl’s mother or neighbours would be present as midwife. In order that she might have an easy birth they put a lot of clothes on her body to keep warm and feed her with warm food. Shüpfoemi usual delivery is near the kitchen hearth. In olden days the child’s birth took place on the ground where mat (oza) used to be spread with little cloth on it. The place where the mother give’s birth is a sacred place and nobody is allowed to go near by. As soon as the child is born, whether a boy or a girl, it is the duty of the parent to claim the child first, otherwise if gods claim faster than man, the child might not survive. Claiming the child means taking the ownership by the parents. There is a superstition that there would be a bargain between evil spirits and the child’s parents. In olden days the fear of death and infant mortality was very high. The Shüpfoemi feared that the evil spirits would be hovering over to take the soul of the child. Thus, the child’s mother has to be very careful soon after giving birth and she should observe it and follow the dictum of the elders. Following the norms and customs of the elders, a woman is judged and the measuring yard is laid down by the society, especially her father-in-law or mother-in-law testing her faithfulness and fidelity.

5 According to the legend of Shüpfoemi, there is constant bargain between evil spirits and human being as soon as a child is born. The evil spirit waits for the birth of the child and that claim of the parents is assurance that the child belongs to the parents. Because of such omen pregnant woman are advised not go too early to the field and not to come too late from field. The spirits can hear the child cry in the mother’s womb. Such superstitious belief is considered as norm that woman are told to follow. Generally the family observes a day of genna at the child’s birth. On such occasion the whole family keep the day as sacred and at the same time thank god for the new arrival.
2.2.1. After birth

Before the delivery, the family would prepare bamboo scales for cutting the umbilical cord and in order to tie the naval cord. Soon after the delivery, it is the mother or midwife who cuts the umbilical cord with a bamboo scale (soluke) or with any sharp instruments. The use of bamboo scale may be because it is uncontaminated or rust proof. Midwife usually does the cutting of umbilical code, and generally man is not allowed to cut the naval cord. It is sacred taboo forced on man, due to his rough nature. The naval cord is then tied with a thread. The placenta (ehru) is buried beside the living room and never outside the house. In the same way, the midwife with the direction and full knowledge of the mother buries the placenta (ehru). She has to take special care while burying the placenta. The remaining umbilical cord should be on the top of the placenta during the burial. She also does not bury the placenta too close to those buried earlier. If the placenta is buried together by mistake or unknowingly, the result would bring bad consequence that is both the children would die on the same day (whose placenta are buried together.) The author remembers an incident that happened in the village where the whole village had talked about the placenta being buried together and the two brothers died on the same day. The younger brother died in the morning and the elder brother towards the evening before the burial of the younger one. The mother admitted that she had buried both the placentas together. Scientifically there is no proof that such happen because of such practice, but it is the belief of the forefathers and sacredness of burying the placenta could be the result of such event.
During the delivery, the mother must not allow the blood outflow to be crossed by any one. She is told by the elders to take outmost care, because there is a superstitious belief that if any one crosses as the blood outflows during birth of the child, the relation between the mother and the child would be sour in the future. There is another omen that is, since birth take place near the hearth, the blood outflow should not be allowed to flow near the hearth and definitely not into the fire. If such blood flows the child would suffer from suckling and milk from the mother’s breast would not easily flow.

The next superstitious belief among Shũpfomei tribe is the omen, i.e. after two or three days after birth, if a single piece of flesh comes out of the mother’s body and would be taken as a very bad omen. The mother is advised to take note of such an incident and instruct the child in the future as well as oneself. If such things take place neither the mother nor the child should come near the grave of each other, nor touch the cloths of each other lest death occur, nor come to wipe the face of the mother or the child when one dies. If such things happen death would occur in that house for the two.  

6 Narrated to the author by Punanamei village (Robvemei) Women Society, when questioned regarding the child’s birth and the different taboos observed by the elders in the village. One of them explained her own life story about her eldest son and she often reminds her son about such omen. Some of the name list of the Women Society –
Mrs. Boni (56) Farmer
Mrs. Kaisa (59) Farmer
Mrs. Lolia (52) Farmer
Mrs. Kapra-a (56) Farmer
Mrs. Besa (55) Farmer
2.2.2. Confinement-Nonobu

After the burial of placenta the mother and child take food together with the rest of the family members. With the burial of placenta and after the family meal, the mother and child retreat themselves into a period called “Nobu” which lasts for three days. “Nobu” comes from the term “Nonobu” which means a place set apart or isolated for the mother and child for confinement, selclusion or for recuperation. The mother and child have to stay isolated from the rest of the family. They have to prepare their own food, but all the necessary things like firewood for cooking, utensils (earthen pots), chicken for cooking, etc., will be supplied by the family members. It is observed with outmost diligence and usually no one violates the rules. If any violation take place, it is believed that the child might become a thief or a robber in the near future. Thus, mothers for the sake of their children follow the taboo strictly.

On the first day of “Nobu”, the family has to call two elders from the village and offer them a hearty meal and after the meal, the two elders bless the child saying-

*Antoate peno koso kono so chiño* – Let the child be freed from sickness,

*Mei pi motu malawo mohrüle* – Let him/her live above others,

*Okhro chińghí kapra ti kole* - Like the ever rising sun and moon,

*Kažiño so kajü koso sowo mohrü le* – Let him/her live a good and great life,

*Ora yi tho* – God be blessed.  

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7. Cf. N. Saléo, Imemé kohru (Mao Naga Life) Vol I. P. 23. There is no norm or set of prayer, but it is only a general pattern of invocation to God for the child.
With this prayer, the child and mother enter into confinement with certain things to be used during the confinement period. The place of confinement is near the corner of the house specially set apart, where the new hearth is constructed, new earthen pots for cooking, new wooden spoons and new wooden plates are supplied. The dry firewood is split into pieces and has to be recognized which is the head of the stem and while burning the firewood, the stem is to be burnt first. The reason is that if the firewood is burnt from stem first, some liquid oozes out, which is good for the food.

The whole family has to observe the following taboos during the “nobu” (confinement) period. Firstly, there should not be any sharpening of knife, no blacksmith work or weaving of shawls, because it is believed that it might obstruct the flow of milk for the child. Secondly, when the rice is cooked, the mother takes a small basket and placed on it a wild banana leaves (oviü vüchtu) and empty the cooked rice into the basket and with the same pot she has to cook the chicken. If the child is a boy – a cock is killed and if a girl a hen is used. The mother within the confinement area should do the bathing of the child.

When the author asked why such a strange observance and meaning behind such taboos regarding the confinement in Shüpfomei culture and customs. The elders were very prompt in their response and they spoke without any inhibition. They say, “It was a very positive and natural preventive system which helped the women to abstain from sexual intercourse soon after birth. It is also known as a natural family planning. In olden days, the forefathers devised such a sound method of family planning and of
respect for women’s status and her rights”. To the present generation it sounds absurd and funny.

2.2.3. Ceremony of naming a child

The manifestation day comes on the third day of confinement “Nobu”. All preparation of food for the following day is done on the previous night of the naming ceremony. The pass gone by days, this is the naming ceremony day which is a day of “genna” and the whole family abstain from work, making any journey outside the village or visitors from outside the village are not allowed to enter the house.

The third day of the child’s birth is called “sakapra” meaning “calling out, presentation day or bringing out”. According to the month of the child’s birth, the whole family often sit down to recall the names of their ancestors, forefathers and grandfathers and grandmothers in order to name the child after them. The spirit of recalling their forefather’s name is coming back among the young generation. The forefathers took pain to give their children a fitting name according to the reading of the lunar calendar month.

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1. Mr. K. Kapani (56) Government servant
Mr. Kh. Lohru (64) Farmer
Mr. Kh. Tasoni (63) Village Chairman
Mr. P. Adaso (53) Farmer
Tape recording during the Punanamei elders interview on 14th May, 1994.

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If the child is born during the month of Belu khro of the lunar calendar, corresponding to November month, the child’s name will be given with the significance of the month, taking into account of the situation and other social events. The names for instance like Belusë for boys and Belusa for girls. If the child is born during the festivals and feast days, the child will be called as Chanisië, Chanhirü for boys and Chanisa for girls. If the child is born during June month-Sale khro the child will be given as Saleo, Sani for boys and Sania, Saza for girls. If the family is so longing for a boy child and when such a birth takes place, they usually named the boy with Athili, Eloli, Elowo, Edili, Elohrü, etc. And when the couple give birth to children and if the previous child dies or if an unusual birth takes place they name the child with Kathiprië, Kashuprië, Makabo, Mathibo, Sibo, Vobo, etc. When the couple is having a successive birth of boy child they name the boys with Ashuli, Adahrü, Adaso, Adani, Pfokelo, Pfokrehrü, Pfokreni, and for the girls it is Adane, Eloni, etc. If their forefathers were wealthy and respected in the society the couple often name their children with Adava, Aahuva, Zhonio, Zhonia, Asani, etc., for the girls. If the mother dies soon after of birth of children will be named as Mangia, Matia, Matikho, etc. ⁹

⁹ The above mentioned names are the pronunciation and spelling of western Ememei group. While corresponding names and the pronunciation, spelling for eastern, northern and southern Chuluve, Paomata and Lepeona group would be Maikho, Vet, Chatsu, Theba, Yuno, Ngapu, Veinü, Dahrü, Panü, Kane, Dane. Asani, etc.
In the early 70's and 80's young educated couples had the fancy of naming their children like *Melody, Lucky, Aboy, Johnny, Welcome son, Solar son, Happy son, First gear, etc.* While for the girl's child, *Happy flower, Morning beauty, Valley rose, Shining moon, Everlasting love*, or give some film actress name, etc. But the trend is changing with the revival in the society which is done during the conference, meetings, seminars and workshops to create awareness of their identity. For the young couple, it is nice and fanciful, but a name should give an identity of the tribe and they should feel that they are part and parcel of that society. If such things are not taken care of the growing children will feel out of place within their own society.

With deep remorse A. Sanu, cautions young parents regarding their role in the proper growth of children, and he wanders why young generation parents fail to name their children according to their forefathers? He accepts the different changes taking place in young parents and children, but he feels the pain to hear that children are called with other language and name. He encourages young couple i.e. present generation to give the name of their children accordingly and in accordance with the forefathers tradition and culture.  

10 A. Sanu, (83) farmer, interviewed on the 18th June, 1995 on his feeling regarding the changing of name in children by present parents. His concept on the traditional name is meaningful and the forefather idea of name is precious and it is said that they take great pain while giving the names. The growing up children in the future will feel the identity and a sense of love for their grand parents.
2.2.3.1. Naming of a male child

The naming ceremony is very solemn and has a deep meaning and significance for Shüpfomei society. If the child is a boy, then the naming ceremony has to be done by a grown up boy. The grown up boy may be from a neighbour or if he has an elder brother. In the same way, for a girl child by some grown up girls between the age of five or six years. With the sunrise the boy who is supposed to name the child is attired in traditional costumes of a man and must carry a spear (ehu) and a shield (erü). He goes out of the house, together with the father or mother carrying the baby and a lighted pine stick (kholo mate pfo) and the boy has to hold the hand of the baby and say the following words:

"Kaisü, she kavalei prale she" – “Kaisü” let us come to the light.

From that moment onwards the child is called “Kaisü” given by their parents. It is the name given by the parents, which they think is fitting and meaningful. The forefathers seem to have had the sixth senses while giving the name and what is that sixth sense, we really don’t know, but it very sure the child’s action and deed in the future will be manifested by its name given to them.
2.2.3.2. Naming of a female child

Similar to the above, the grown up girl will also follow the rituals. The girl who is supposed to name the baby girl is also dressed with the following traditional costumes. “Shobvü” – a fishing basket tied around her waist, “she kosii” – a special staff used by woman during the time of marriage, “kodzi” – a water proof umbrella made of leaves on her back. Together with the parents carrying the lighted pinewood torch and she would hold the hand of the baby girl will and go outside the house and say the following words:

“Boni, she kava lei prale she” – “Boni” let us come to the light.

From that moment onward the child is called “Boni”. Special meal is served for those whose name the child and the chicken thigh is served for those naming the child. Sometimes the name given by the parents may not suit the child and if the child cries too much and without stopping, the parent would change the name of the child. It so happen at time in some rare cases, and parents have to change the name. 11

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11. Ibid., He also mentioned from his own life about his younger brother (late) Kholi, whose original name was Losu, but due to crying too much his parents had changed his name to Kholi, and after giving the name he stop crying. It looks superstitious and funny even for him. According to him “name of a person” have many things to tell and he often insist on giving a meaningful name.
2.2.4. Closing of confinement-Nobu

After the naming ceremony is done, the child is no longer brought back to Nonobu – confinement but he/she is placed in the family bed. And at noon the child is given a nice hot water bath, but the mother is not allowed to touch paddy because she is still in her period of purification.

By evening the father and mother will prepare for the closing ritual of “nonobu” period. Before the sun sets all the utensils like the earthen pots, spoons, plates and mat collected together will be carried beyond the village gate and throw them away near a tree trunk or near the corner of the edge. While going to throw away the things, the father would lead the route carrying with him a spear on his shoulder and the mother carrying the things behind the man. On return, the woman will lead and the man follow behind the woman and they have to reach home before sunset.

On reaching the house, a live charcoal is kept outside the door and the husband will put if off by stamping it and enter the house. The mother will fast till the morning but drink is served and with plenty of meat for her. With that “Nonobu” comes to an end. The fourth day is called “makracho” – a day set apart to observe and pray to god to overcome poverty in future for the child. On this day no living being is killed for meal, but eating is done in the main hearth. The symbolic gesture for every Shupfomei child as he or she
passes through the different taboos. The whole family observes a genna on this day – abstaining from work and travel.\textsuperscript{12}

2.3. Sanctification and purification of the child - \textit{Ale kocho}

A boy in his lifetime has to perform the sacred ritual 6 times and in the case of a girl she has to perform 5 times. Such rituals are meticulous, precise and time consuming. On the fifth day after birth starts "Ale kocho" – meaning sanctification and purification is observed. On this day special food is prepared to feed the gods (ora khe khole). With "Ale kocho" the first sacred sanctification ritual for the child begins.

On this day two cocks for a male child and two hens for a female child are killed and cooked. As the meat is being cooked on the oven and before anyone eats the food, the heart of the chicken and some cooked rice is taken out separately placed them on the wild banana leaf (ovi\text{"u} v\text{"u}chu) and offered to god as a sign of gratitude and blessing. The mother takes what is offered to god and pinched out both the chicken heart and cooked rice and smeared on the children it on the forehead first, chest and the joints. It symbolized asking god’s protection and blessing at the same time asking the ancestors for their continued support.

\textsuperscript{12} Even today many families do observed genna.
2.3.1. Second sanctification - *Ale le pa*

After two days, the family has to do the sacred ritual a second time known as "*Ale le pa*". On this day the family has to make a new fire, new hearth and two chicken according to the sex of the child, and with river fish fingerlings (*okho loni*) to be cooked with thatch grass as firewood. When the second ritual is done the child is taken out for the first time to the paddy field or outside the village gate. The parents have to take the following articles - firstly, the feather of the chicken killed during "*Ale kocho*" is tied together to a sickle and two bundle of special scented plant known as "*kholo*". According to the saying of the forefather "*kholo*" plant is a thorn for the spirits and they really feared this particular plant. Secondly, a gourd of rice beer (*oha ha kali*), and thirdly, the spade for ploughing and they placed them on the forefather’s erected merit stone. On this erected merit stone, they will plant the feathers, special scented plant (*kholo*) and pouring rice beer on the stone they will ask the blessing and support of their forefather when they return home they will pluck two small branches and placed them on the house door post.

2.3.2. Observance of taboos

The child should not be taken to the jhum fields ¹³ (*osù loli*) first and if the child is taken first to jhum field it is believed that he/she will feel thirsty all through out his/her life. And if the child is taken first to the field where they have to cross the river, the

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¹³ Jhum fields (slash and burn) – The jhum fields are dry and it is believed that children when taken for the first time will become thirsty and will become drunkard in the future.
parents while on returning homeward as they wadding the river water have to splash little water with their legs again. The meaning is that they have recalled the spirit of the child (symbolizing that the spirit of the child is called back as they return home). During the period of purification and sanctification, the whole family has to restrain from eating crab (ovo) and shell fish (okhosinabvii). Crab symbolizes cruelty and shell fish as a sign of uncontrollable shyness. The family usually doesn’t participate at the funeral service or mourning of death. It is believed that misfortune is brought to the family. After the inauguration of the fieldwork the rest of the sacred rituals will be celebrated alternatively till its course is complete.

2.4. Sacred meal - Macha kozii

Every male child who passes through from infant stage to manhood has to celebrate the sacred ritual meal known as "Macha kozii". It is a must and even today many parents perform this ritual with Christian additions colouring watering down much of the meaning and significance. The precision and meticulous performance of the rites and rituals is something notable and from here the sacredness of the celebration is seen. The child performs with his father, brother or with others. The meaning of such a celebration is the presentation of the child by the family as a befitting man to the society. It is an occasion to show the pride, prestige and honour for the family. This sacred ritual meal is done during the month of July, in other words "Sale Khro" – the lunar calendar of Shüpfomei.
This lunar calendar is a special month where the feast of "Saleni" is also celebrated. "Saleni" is a festival soon after paddy transplantation for five consecutive days. It is not a mere celebration of feast but a solemn day filled with sacred rituals. This feast is never celebrated during the leap year, "Sale kahei" meaning double July. The reason why double July is because lunar month has only 29 days and therefore, every three years another month is added and it is called double July = Sale kahei.

The village headman officially announces from an elevated stand on the 18th of July known as “Zhepe” telling the people to start preparing rice beer for the feast. On the 24th July the Saleni feast is inaugurated. The following day namely 25th July is “Nijü” - main feast day and as the feast progresses the village headman again announces on the 26th July for the preparation of the sacred ritual meal known as “Macha kozi”. For individual persons who have commemorated the merit feast called “Zhoso mozi” are also called to prepare themselves. The actual day for “Macha kozi” is on the 28th early morning onwards.

2.4.1. Ritual preparation of “Macha kozi”

2.4.1.1. Number of wooden plates

The celebration of this sacred ritual meal required the following things as part of the ritual. According to the needs, the family had to carve few wooden plates, which are
done earlier from the field and brought home and kept separately for the use during the ceremony.

2.4.1.2. Number of wooden spoons

The number of wooden spoons depends on the need and requirement of the host. The wooden spoons are prepared usually from “amosü bu” a special tree, which has plenty of sour seeds. There is no hard and fast rule to select a particular tree for use in the ceremonial rite.

2.4.1.3. Wooden oven

Traditional wooden oven is three cut pieces of wood driven into the ground to form apexes of a triangular shape on which the cooking pot is placed and beneath the firewood is inserted for burning. “Chübi sü or Süchu sü” - the stem of this tree is cut to be used for wooden oven during the celebration.
2.4.1.4. Number of earthen pots

These earthen pots are brought from Oinam village (*Pinimei chū*) called “*Pinimei li*” or from Viswema village 14 called “*Shūna li*” for cooking. The number of pots also depends on the number of person who will be eating the meal. In the same way there is no hard and fast rule regarding the number of cooking pots. It depends on the family and their economy.

2.4.1.5. Special reed basket

A special basket woven with a jungle bamboo (reed) for holding an unblemished cock for the sacred ritual meal, in Shūpfomei dialect it is called “*Ikhro pisū*”. The unblemished cock is caught on 26th July and put into the special cage, to be killed on the 28th morning for the sacred ritual meal. Two more cocks are also used during the sacred ritual meal. The ritual begins with the drawing of water known as “*Khudzū*” from the pond early morning. All men-folk with gourd basins “*oha*” go to the pond at early dawn any animal or bird might contaminate the water by drinking or muddling it. Two buds of a scented plant call “*kholo*” is squeezed into the water and on their return they wash the head, chest, hands and legs of the child. The remaining part of the scented plant is placed on the child’s neck, right hand and leg.

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14 Viswema village (Shūnami), this particular village belong to southern Angami tribe and lies on the National Highway No. 39. In the past this village had the fine art of making earthen pot prior to the coming of modern aluminum ware. In olden days two villages namely Viswema (Shūnami) and Oinam (*Pinimei*) were known for making fine pottery ware. For any function and rituals earthen pots are purchased from these villages.
It is said that the wooden oven used for cooking should not be placed upside down and the firewood for cooking should be selected carefully and split the stem part first and even during burning the stem part is burnt first. The earthen pot for cooking should be brought either from Oinam village (Pinimei chü) or Viswema village (Shünamei chü) of Nagaland known as “Pinimei li” and “Shünamei li” respectively. And the wooden plate is square in shape.

The first fire is lit by pressing a cushion of dry grass over a piece of wood. Then twisting a bamboo strand vigorously between both hands makes the friction hot enough to fire up the grass and wood and it called “mila kosü”. It is a very old method of making fire. The unblemished cock is killed first and the heart portion is taken out separately and cooked in the evening with some rice. A plantain leaf cup is made and rice beer is poured into it. Placing the whole preparation together, a solemn prayer is offered invoking god to partake of the food and drink so prepared -

“God our creator and protector come and partake of this food, even if there is any short coming and may not be our best and equal share in our preparation, but come and share the food and drink of ours with heart content. Protect us from all evils”.

With this prayer the offered portion of cooked rice and rice beer, and the heart portion are placed near the corner of the house.
2.4.2. Actual ritual meal – Macha koto

Before the sacrificial meal is eaten, the heart portion of the chicken is pinched out and the rubbed child on the forehead and chest of the child. And with a solemn prayer of blessing from the parents or one who assist in the ritual says – “May God grant you health by eating of this food and drink, keep you free from diseases so that you may do in accordance with wisdom of the brain and sincerity of heart.” After the ceremonies the child with his friends will have a common meal.

2.4.2.1. Prayer of blessing

Towards evening before sunset the whole family gather around the hearth. The father of the family catches as the unblemished cock and with it goes outside of the house. While raising the cock and calling the spirit in a loud voice and with prayer, the following words are chanted. First he goes to the right and side of the house and calling the spirits –

“Chüpra pei izhopo ye inapo, kashüpo ye evepo kalei mei sü tavu vu” – the spirits of the east and west, north and south come and abide. Then entering into the house with the same cock he blesses first the child and then he goes out with the same cock and goes to the left side of the house and utters the same, asking the family members who are inside the house, “Have the spirits come?” The whole family members in response will answer, “Yes, already come” and entering the house blesses all the members saying –
“if you go to west, peace and prosperity follow you and if you go east may shining sun protect you like weapon from your enemies and dwell in plenty”. 15

2.4.2.2. Calling of ancestors spirit

The calling of the ancestors’ spirit is practiced by the older generation. The deep respect and concern for the forefathers who are dead and such calling of the ancestors’ spirit is an invocation to assist them and support them in their needs. Their continual support and guidance is the main reason why such practice is done.

2.4.3. Rite of piercing the ear

One of the common rituals undergone by every Shüpforme child without any distinction of sex is the ear piercing ceremony and the ritual that follows. The philosophy behind this ritual is for beauty, decoration and for status quo. Ear piercing is done within a month of the child’s birth. The whole family will observe a family genna – abstaining from work. The ritual is done by an old man who had the experienced in needle-work. The ear piercing is done near the ear lobe and the thread is hung down or a small stick pushed into it. Eventually a small hole is created which occurs from that piercing, where in the future it is used for decoration and adoring war trophies for man. As a token for the service to the old man a cup of rice beer is given.

15 Cf. N. Saleo, Interviewed and recorded on the 11th May 1992. According to the pagan (who are still no yet following any religion) – opfo pe zhi kosomei, do observed Saleni feast and at the end of the festival, they offer such prayers to God. According to their belief of the forefathers this particular prayer is powerful to the family members. The often wait and prepare themselves to receive the blessing.
2.5. Shüpfomei marriage ceremonies

2.5.1. The concept of marriage

Shüpfomei ancestors seem to live under the policy of peaceful co-existence with himself, with his neighbour and with nature. Such peaceful, caring and loving concept is seen from his daily activities. But also the strain of manual labour can be read in his or her face, which bears the marks of struggle for sustenance. Life and nature are both an integral part of Shüpfomei, because in life and nature human relationship grows and finally finds its fulfillment by entering into marriage. Shüpfomei follow the law of nature and her moral code is based on this very principle. The perfect balancing and blend is seen in the human immortality of friendship – married life.

Marriage is considered as one of the most important, sacred and binding cord in Shüpfomei life cycle. According to Shüpfomei life cycle begins with birth, marriage and ends in death. All his activities of earning, spending and procreation revolve on these three axes. When he is small he learns from his parents, brothers and sisters, his peer groups that life is a cycle of the trio. As he grows into adulthood he has to go through the morung or bachelor dormitory (khracho ye lochu kozü). Every boy and every girl had to stay in the morung till his or her marriage. It is said that boys and girls from here learn the basic and normal human relationship of manners, folksongs, folktales, respect for elders and community. The community spirit is instilled either in social work like building village house, leveling the ground or village road, or any other social
celebrations and finally keeping vigil during wars, epidemic, etc. It was the socialization process (modern formal education) and considered the best for every Shüpfoemi youth and parents take pride of sending their children to such morung. The house owner is very much respected and of social standing in the community. It is because he is the one who imparts the customary knowledge to the bachelor or spinster dormitory. He is regarded and considered as their teacher, instructor and model during the growing stages. In such an informal schooling young boys and girls learn about many things and their spiritual, mental and moral characters is formed. This is the place and time where the future life partners are looked for and selected. It is unthinkable for any normal man and woman to be unmarried. There is a tendency of ragging the unmarried people. Thus, bachelor or spinster dormitory was set up to make the youth strong and resilient.

Marriage is a sacred rite (chüna) and a life long commitment between the man and woman. Therefore both the parties look into their dreams (omu ome) to search for the good omen. If the omen is good for the parties then serious negotiation begins. In olden days marriages were mostly arranged, but the new trend is slowly on love marriage where parents have to agree to the proposal of their children. There is no such accident of child marriage, no polygamy or polyandry in Shüpfoemi society. Intermarriage within the same clan or close relatives namely blood relationship is strictly prohibited and breaking of such rules and regulations are considered as a taboo and an incest.
2.5.2. Marriage as the bond of unity

The primary aim in entering into marriage is to beget a child. It is the pride and honour for the couple to have their own children. And when such issues are not there in their married life, the society looks on the couple as a curse. Marriage has a community dimension apart from family ties. There are no restrictions for anyone marrying from another tribe or group. There is a structural break today from the traditional outlook and conservative marriage concept, which was practiced by Shųpfomei society. Though the basic principle of marriage as sacred and bond of unity remain the same, permanence in marriage becomes a bedrock. Because of such an outlook there is no much breakage and divorces even today. Yet in such strong principle of marriage as unbreakable, permanence, etc., there are still divorces in the community and much more present day inspite of love marriage between the partners.

2.5.2.1. Causes of divorce in Shųpfomei society

We shall give some immediate reasons why marriages break up in the present day marriages among Shųpfomei society.
2.5.2.1.1. Modern verses traditional style of marriage

Modern weddings are expensive, time consuming and much more it is in a westernized fashion. The couple face both financial and material stress and strains, which often leads to quarrels resulting in the divorce after the marriage. While the traditional style of marriage are simple, without much expense.

2.5.2.1.2. Wrong concept of marriage

Families from the lower strata of the society feels that who have no property to offer or gifts to give as a share to the new family. Thus, the couple feels uneasy and this creates inferiority complexes. It creates in the newly married couple the wrong concept of marriage bringing tension and anxiety in them.

2.5.2.1.3. Western style of marriage

In a western style of marriage market both the families have to invest their resources much in the external show i.e. invitation cards, suits and gowns decorations, cakes, vehicles, etc., and their expenditure amount pile up in the external preparation as well as on the day of the celebration. They have to borrow much and to return back what they have borrowed for the wedding celebration there is always a psychological strain in them.
2.5.2.1.4. Defects of man and woman

Excessive drinking and gambling is one of the defects of man. With meager income in the village often bring the family to ruin. While on the part of woman like laziness, infidelity, stubbornness, bring disunity in the family. There are many other causes where there is break down of marriages and divorces in Shüpfomei society.

2.5.3. Classification of marriage

2.5.3.1. Informal marriage

Shüpfomei marriage is broadly divided into informal and formal marriages. The former is done without much consultation and consent of parents, elders. In such a system the boy brings the girl home. The later is done with the full knowledge of parents. The old marriage practice had both these two aspects and we cannot fully say it is formal or informal. The only radical change between the old traditional method and present system is the external show and expenses. No doubt there was expenses and the process was laborious. Even today it is time consuming. Social analyst give their views as to why so many elope Shüpfomei society. It is considered purely for economic reasons saying the untold economic constraints affecting directly or indirectly. Another reason for such an informal marriage is to escape parental objection, pre-marital or uncommitted sexual union between a boy and a girl also causes the informal marriage to be common. Older
generation lament and find hard to reconcile to the present rate of eloping and express shock at the breaking down of moral valves.

25.3.2. Formal marriage

The generally accepted form of marriage is the formal marriage. The normal norm of marriage in Shüpfomei community is called arranged marriage and endorsed by consent. In such a formal marriage both the parties are well informed about the family background and such marriages are based on mutual love for each other and with the consultation of parents. The mutual love begins from their early meeting in the morung - spinster dormitory (Lochü kožü bu lei ) or during their social work and peer group manual work. During such occasions they express their remote love affairs through their companions. Engagement was done secretly by both parents through an intermediary. The middle person used to be a man or a woman, a relative, neighbour or friend. He/she becomes the linking between the two parties. In the olden days parents looked forward to a suitor for their growing children and often propose their daughters to young handsome man or even indirectly hint about it. In many such arranged marriage system, when engagement is done, the girl is told by her parents to stop shaving her hair. She will slowly come to know the person or the man through her friends. Shaving was an indication that she is still a virgin.
25.4. Engagement ceremony - *Onghi ano kocho*

The middleman or woman plays a vital role in the negotiation between two families. It is he/she who negotiates with the girl’s parents and if the response is yes, they consult to dreams (*amu ome*). If the dream is good, the parties negotiate the time, date and even discuss the matters of wealth, properties and look into the family background. Matters regarding paddy field, forest plot, paddy barn (*ocha ongho*) to be given are also discussed. If both the families come from well-to-do families, a herd of cattle consisting of four, five, six or eight in number including a special bull (*thope reki*) is given to the new couple. In the same way the bride's family give a family gift to the new couple a herd of cattle called (*onghi tu*) not numbering seven. When families give rich dowry\(^\text{16}\) to their children during marriage, there is a general feeling that the new couple will prosper. During the negotiation period both the parents have to look into different aspects of either families, genealogy, characters, clan, family tree and as a result it is often kept as sacred and secret.

The eldest son of the family gets the best share of the family property like paddy field, forest plot for firewood (*chükhu pfole*) and even cattle. While in the case of the youngest son, he inherits the parents’ house. Generally daughters are not given family inheritance but if they are not married or married but divorced then during their life time they have a share of property for their maintenance even if the parents die. If she had

\(^{16}\) “Dowry” is the western concept and when they use the word and concept it would be misleading. The reason is Shuípomei understanding of the term “Dowry” is different from the western concept. For them “Dowry” would mean and is equal to “onghi tu” “Oh no kru pfu na” “Otho oji kali” etc. Literally it is the bare necessity gift from girl's family for the newly married couple to start family.
children from the previous marriage and divorced the children usually go back to the father. There are exceptions which and made with mutual agreement between husband and wife. The children could stay either with the father or mother.

When such a settlement is made no other party is allowed to violate it. In case if something happens, the violating party will have to pay the compensation to the other. Such properties and dowry negotiated with the help of the middleman or woman is explained to the concerned parents.

2.5.4.1. Selection of a partner

Prior to negotiations both the families usually do a lot of homework to get the best bride and best bridegroom for their children. In such an examination and analysis parents do make mistakes and when they make false comments it often leads to prejudice and sour relationships. The general search for the bride and bridegroom with a good personality causes a lot of stress on Shüpfomei society.

The stress is often made on a woman’s character – whether she is gentle? Is she respectful? Is she generous and kind? Has she lived under her brothers? Is she sacrificing and loving to her neighbour? Has she lived with respect and loving to her younger brothers? Is she hard working? Is she gentle respecting her word and deeds? Is she well mannered? Is she lazy and does she talk too much? Is she proud? Is she sociable? These are some of the questions often asked by the negotiating families.
2.5.4.2. Search for a man of character

It is not only where a woman's character is in question but also a man's. Society often puts certain demands on the man, and a man has to live up to the demands of the society. When such demands of the society is not lived up to, the result would be that the woman would refuse to marry and that would be the greatest humiliation for the man. Often when he is faced with such humiliation he would refuse to any other future proposals and often lived without marrying in life.

Is he gentle and truthful? Is he hard working? Is he respectful in the society? Is he a debtor? Does he own much property and paddy field? Has he a forest plot and jhum land? Is he sociable and does he command respect? Is he proud and greedy? Such are some of the questions often raised during the negotiations.

2.5.5. Wedding

Generally, marriages take place during two seasons namely, winter and summer. During summer season (chohro lei onghi nothu), only rich people get married during this season. The reason is that the poor cannot afford to marry due to lack of food grain. When such marriages take place, the bride often work in the jhum fields. Most marriages take place during winter (chaka le onghi nothu) because of the availability of food grain. Marriages are held in the month of January (Chāthuni khro) and but never on the seventh
day of the month of November month - *Okho khro*, which is considered as sacred month for the dead. When marriages take place during these times such unions do not last.

If the bride is from a different village, usually from the groom’s side they will send two young girls to the bride’s village with rice beer on the previous night itself. These two girls either sleep in their relative’s house or even stay in the bride’s house. If there is death or any other village taboos being observed at this time, the two girls will carry rice beer from the bride’s house to the groom’s house. According to the tradition such taking of rice beer along show concern and sharing of the mutual solidarity to the village people. Thus, it is a symbolic gesture to show their solidarity, mutual bond of relationship of two families.17

On the day of marriage, the bride gets up early from the morung (spinster’s dormitory), and gets herself ready. The reason is that till the last day she is to remain in the morung with her own friends and she often bids farewell to them. By now the whole village and friends know about the news and they will accompany her till the groom’s house. If the girl is married to another village, a group of young men and women from her village will accompany her to a distance. Correspondingly from the groom’s side also they will send some young men and women to bring the bride to the village.

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17. Kaisil Lohri, tape recording during the interview on the 14th May, 1994
2.5.5.1. Things to be taken by bride on the wedding day

The two small girls who come from the bridegroom’s village the previous night, go near the entrance of the house and call the bride saying, “She, Ani tale shēl” – “Come Aunty, let us go”. With this invitation the whole group proceeds towards the groom’s house. She would carry on her back “Mahra ro”, a special basket made by Maram Naga tribe or “Khibo ro” made by the Angami Naga tribe. Inside this basket she puts first, paddy and on the top of the paddy, she puts two gourd of rice beer (ozhe oha kahei).

Then a special shawl called “Okhrisa” which is made from the yarn of creepers. It is compulsory to take this shawl. If she does not have this particular shawl “Okhrisa”, she has to borrow from others and carry it along with her and later she can return. This is the first shawl ever made by Shüpfomei tribe. She also carries her “Takei”, a specially woven basket made of cane, where she puts all her cloths. She has to be very careful while putting her cloths inside the “Takei” and she must not put seven pieces because seven is a bad omen for Shüpfomei tribe. 18 As she goes out of the house, she has to take the royal staff (she kosū) 19 if she is coming from a rich family. This staff symbolizes the status of the family and her family background. At the moment of departure from her parent’s house she has to cry and all women usually do. There is an old saying that if she does not cry at that moment, in future, the vegetables she cultivates would not grow well.

18 According to Shüpfomei tribe number “seven” stands for bad omen, and “seven” signifies without pair. Often two, four, six, etc. considered as “complete, full, number”.
19 A. Sanoa, says “She kosū” was brought first by the Tangkhuls who sold them to Shüpfomei tribe in their villages and those days the price was one anna/half anna according to the sizes and material.
2.5.5.2. Exchange of consent

Before reaching the groom’s house, the groom would be waiting with an escort party near the village gate with his spear to receive the bride. Together with the party they proceed towards the house. On reaching the house, the groom’s parents would put two pieces of iron rode across the door and the bride with her legs would have to separate the two iron rode and enter the house. Before sitting down, the bride and bridegroom are given “ovü vüchu” – a special wild banana leaves are given and they made cup (ole bvü le) and rice beer is poured into the cup up to the brim. Without drinking they should pour down a little rice beer on the ground (kongei kocho) as a sign of paying respect to their ancestors, and after that they would pour rice beer again into the cup, this time also without drinking the bride and bridegroom would exchange their cups (ole). At this very moment when they exchange the cups, it is said that god binds their hair together. The exchange cup is placed onto the cavicle of either side of the door by the married couple. The celebration starts with the placing of the cups on the door post. The two small girls who went to bride’s village would remain in the groom’s house and will leave only on the following day.

The second day is called “Pithe koshu” – which literally means planting a new kitchen or new oven, starting a new separate family life from the parent’s house. According to the custom, soon the married couple starts a new kitchen either in the parent’s house or newly built house. On this day, the bridegroom will make a new
wooden spoons (*o*šũ *khemachi*) make new hearth and new oven. Until the new spoons are brought home, the bride and bridegroom is not allowed to see each other. The spoons are brought in the evening and the bride will serve the first meal and while cooking the meal she has to remember that the stem part of the firewood has to be burnt first.

The third day is called "Ongho koso" – wherein they inaugurate the work in the field. The new couple will go to the field or just cross the village gate, signifying the inauguration of manual work as a new family. The fourth day is called "Azhũdu koso" – meaning giving gift or presentation of gift to the bridegroom’s family. On this day the bride will bring from her parents at least 4 to 5 barrels of rice beer, cooked meat and slice piece of meat (*sonũ*)\(^{20}\) and bring to the bridegroom’s house. In the evening, elders, kings, and clans and relatives are called to share their joy. The elders are all served in plantain leaf cup (*ole*) and rice beer is poured and little rice beer is poured to the ground to show respect to the ancestors. With the second pouring of rice beer, the whole community gives a yell (*makei khro kocho*) to the house owner, signifying the honour and gratitude. They will drink and pour rice beer again and with the second yell the community blesses the couple. It is a sign of recognition and acceptance that the society sanctions the marriage.

\(^{20}\) "Sonũ" is a sliced meat in two or three pieces which is given by those who celebrate the “feast of merit”. According to the custom each household in the village is distributed. And every household is entitled to receive such gift. "Sonũ" is also given by the elder brothers to their married sisters in other villages. This particular gift is given so show that married sisters are remembered by their brothers.
2.5.5.3. Solemn blessing

According to the belief of Shüpfomei tribe, the blessing of old people is very powerful and considered the blessing of elderly people as next to God. Thus, every step of life is considered an event where God has a plan. And so the family often called an elderly man and woman to get their blessing to start new family. Here is the usual pattern of blessing for the newly married couple –

“Oratho, ochü madei oppoe, ojü mashü opfie” - Deep blue sky father, earth / nature mother be praised

"Omei khowe, otoko khowe, otu morüko khowe" Asking person, food and livestock

"Ota na ngho, ota chovo delo omokru te icha le” – As you till your land may it produce in plenty,

"Osü de ngho osü chovo delo” – As you cut firewood may it give in abundance,

"Omei kho, Oto kho, morü kho” – May it bring life, food and animal.

"Omei hrü ngho shührü tto ye ovo na mono le” – Bring forth children like spiders and crabs,

“Otkho chünghi kapra ti kole, otu morü makieh imite icha le” - Like rising of the sun and moon, let your cattle increase and multiply.

“Phibe jüpi, obo mozü leino adapra chühe phro pio to khowe” – Let it increase, prosper in number and fill your house,

"Ana nghi peno kazhiwo so, kajü koso, sowo mohüle”. – Let my children live good, great and high life.  

The fifth day is called “Ozhi koppia” meaning carrying mineral salt water from the village spring for cooking purpose. The significance of carrying such salt water is to get acquaintance with the womenfolk of the village and mingle herself with the community. It is also to show that she is sharer of the village property. With this, the marriage ceremony comes to a close before the final gift presentation from the bride’s parents.

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Before she brings the gift presentation she has to bring two baskets full of paddy (thofu kofü) to start her new kitchen life.

2.5.6. Marriage gift festival - Odu duju

2.5.6.1. Gift presentation by girl’s parent

During the month of December (Chūthuni khro) the girl’s parent give a gift to the boy’s parents and it is known as “Odu duju”. It is the real gift presentation and this is done only after the harvest and during the harvest festival. This feast is known as “Chūthuni” = feast of dawn, or generally called harvest feast. The festival commences on the 25th day of the month called “Nisha” – inauguration of the festival.

On this day, prepared rice beer is inaugurated and relished with friends and relatives. On the 26th day is called “Niju” – main day of the celebration, where eating and drinking, singing, dancing, playing of traditional games is done. Then, on the 27th is known as “Oshu kope” which means, sending off the relatives and visitors.

2.5.6.2. Celebration of marriage gift - odu duju

On this day “Odu duju”- gift presentation is done by the parents to their married daughters. The gift contains 30 to 40 barrels of rice beer and cooked meat. Youths from the girl’s village are called to carry to the groom’s house. The married lady lead the
procession, where she will carry her basket (*otobvíi*) and inside the basket she will carry all the gifts given by her parents. On reaching her husband’s house, she invites all the relatives of her husband’s clans, elders and serve them with the rice beer which she brought from her parent’s house. The village headman and elders are served first in a banana leaf cup (*ole*) and to show respect and reverence to their ancestors and for the death relatives, they will drop some rice beer to the ground and fill it again. Then the great yell is accorded to the house and to the family members. This yell is done by a single person with his strength howls, “*ho...ha...ah*” and the community in responds to his yell accompany “*wo...wo...wo*” three times and the leader once again howls and ends the great yell. Drinking continues and with the serving of one or two more rounds the community once again accord the same yell and the community disperse to their homes.

2.5.6.3. *Gift and presentation from the boy’s parents*

The boy’s parents also present gifts to the girl’s parents as well as the newly married couple. During the “*odu dujii*”, the boy’s parent will present a shawl to the girl’s parents and also give a spade. If the boy’s family is rich or eldest, the son gets a lion share of the parent’s property like a garden plot, paddy fields, forest land, etc (*lophi lopa*). Being the eldest in the family, a particular paddy field is given by the boy’s parent, and it cannot be sold or exchange to other families. But he can give to his younger brothers or sisters only, because it is parent’s property.
2.5.6.4. Carrying of dowry – *Ocha kopfii*

The girl’s parent will present to their daughters a basket barn of paddy, (a barn of paddy contains 60-70 tins or about 10 quintals) according to the size of the barn (*obe*). The paddy is carried during the month April and May (*Khranü, Khrana*) by the village youth. The parents also give a herd of cattle as “*onghi tu*” according to the wealth of the family.

2.6. Death and burial ceremony of Shüpfomei

2.6.1. Concept of death

Death is the final meeting of the ancestors and every human being has to pay the debt of death is the concept of Shüpfomei people. Death is not everything and if we live well after death it is believed that a second life goes on. Shüpfomei take death as the natural course of life, following the ancestors. Thus, when a person is serious and sure of death, he often announces his will and prepares himself. In some cases the dying person often call all his children and relation and blesses them. According to the belief, such moment often brings relatives and friends closer.
2.6.1.1. Moment of death – *oshi lowo mala phachü*

When the person is unconscious and struggling for breath, those who are close by often howl, shouting and calling the name of the person encouraging him to revive. As the person is dying, his or her ornaments like necklace (*oto*) bangles (*chūsa*) and earrings (*kobvo*) are taken out. As soon as the person is declared dead, there are shouts of cry, howling and calling the person's name to wake up. In the mean time the eye is closed by the relative, then cooked rice, curry, rice beer and yeast are collected and taken outside of the house. “Kehreo” is the priest or “Tavei korūwa” 22— one who keeps fast will take some water in a ground (*oha*) and mug (*losa*) and keep separately for the ceremony. Once the goods are taken outside of the house, the priest will enter the house and sprinkle water over the body. With the sprinkling of water by the priest, they can take the body to wash and washing is a must immediately after death. It is the eldest son for his father, eldest daughter for her mother or any intimate friend respectively can wash the body.

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22. “Kehreo” can be taken as the priest, but not in the conventional concept as ordained priest. He / she is recognized by the village as the one who offer sacrifice for the people in moment of sickness, plague, divining the omen of the year. “Kehreo” is the most important during the time of death ceremonies and much more during the burial time. It is he who administered all the rituals at the dead man’s house. While “Tavei korūwa” is not the priest in a strict sense, but often his office is synonymous with “Kehreo” at the moment of death. When such person as “Kehreo” is not found “Tavei Korūo” take the place of “Kehreo”.

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Once the washing is done, the corpse is laid on the bed with his or her daily articles like plates, cups, tobacco, bag, etc. above his or her head. Different types of shawls will be hung near the corpse, such display of shawls show the wealth and riches of the person. Whenever death occurs in the village, his/her clan will observe a genna, and usually the whole village also observes a genna for the dead person.

2.6.1.2. Announcing of death - *thipe kape*

If the person dies in the night, the villagers and relatives keep vigil, and at early dawn some young men are sent to the different villages to inform the relatives about the death of the person. If the person has a close relative in far villages it is common practice to announce it through yelling from village to village passing the message. On hearing the message, it is the duty of that particular village to convey to the next village and finally to the concerned relatives. This was the only means of communication through which in the olden days the message was passed on. It is known as "*thipe kape*" means announcing the sad news to the far relative about death. The mode of sending the sad news is done by two or three men who go to any elevated place of the village calling the name of the dead man’s relative and tells that your brother or sister has expired.

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21. "Thipe kape" is the old style of sending message to other villages. In olden days there was no means of sending message, road and means of modern communication was not there. The only means of sending such urgent message was selecting three to four young boys to go to hill top of a mountain range where that particular village could hear the yelling of the messengers. Until the message is heard and conveyed they will continue to call on that particular village. Those who hear these young boys yelling in a melancholic tune, the villagers will take the message and give to the concern family or person. Only when the message is conveyed, then they will return to their village. It is a taboo not talk to any people or even if so only in low pitch. Accordingly these boys don’t talk to any person on their way or on their returned.
The whole village and even close by villages will come to know through the blank fire of musketeers which done for rich people. This blank fire of musketeer is done to announce near by villages about death in the village. Firing of musketeers is done only for a man and never to a woman. When there is such blank firing of musketeers, on hearing by other villages, they often comment, 'oh! Some rich person must have died'.

To send out death message (thipe kape) for a few month old child to their relatives in other villages, it is often done by two or three young boys going beyond the village gate (koro) and turning their face to the relative's village. They would there whisper to the relative and announce it by telling so and so (the child’s name is mentioned) has died and with that message, they will return to the house.

2.6.2. Type of death and restriction for burial

All deaths are not equally treated and there are certain restrictions in the village. Burial of certain dead persons is not allowed to take place in the village, because of their notorious life they lived. Here are some of the categories where the villages don’t sanction restrictions for burial in the village.

(a) Dead due to sickness (lishüwo kathi)

(b) Dead without any sickness (lishümo kathi)
Natural deaths like from sickness, death without any sickness, death from accidents, the above mentioned are buried in the village, generally, near the house or in the garden. There is no restriction and people give their sympathy to the bereaved families. People in great number often come to the house of the dead person to show their solidarity with the family. Here are some restrictions (that is not official burial with the village observing a genna, or with solemn burial ceremony by bursting of musketeers) which the village council puts during such mysterious death, the restrictions are sanctioned so that those who are alive may not follow such system. It is mostly taken as a curse or a punishment from God. Generally, people take it as a disciplinary action.

(a) Death by fire (*Omi leino dei katha*)
(b) Death by drowning in river, pond (*Odzü leino kome katha*)
(c) Death by river current (*Odzüino motu kolo*)
(d) Killed by wild animal (*Okhena no tsüto kolo*)
(e) Death in war (*Oso oru me leino zü kolo*)
(f) Death by suicide (*Chade katha*)
(g) Death in child birth (*Ona mono kathi*)

Such deaths mentioned above are not buried in the village. In the past it is said that such persons are buried outside the village gate. Persons who are drowned or carried by river current, their bodies are usually rolled up in a mat (*ožha*) and without any ceremony pushed into the grave. While people who are killed by wild animal, killed in

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24. "Natural deaths" – are those who died suddenly without sickness, old age, without prolong illness, etc. There is also an understanding of natural death as person who are killed by evil spirits etc.
war (head-hunting expedition), commit suicide, are considered as bad omen and are
buried outside the village. The whole village observes genna when death occurs in the
village, even if one is in the field, when on hearing the announcement, often abstains
from work and return home to observe the death ceremonies.

2.6.3. Digging of the grave - *oku kohu*

The eldest son or intimate friend will dig the grave first. Before digging the grave
a chicken is strangled as the digging starts. In the mean time the goods which are taken
soon after death is brought back again inside the house. “*Khehreo*” – the priest or “*Tavei
korũwo*” – the person who keeps fast for the dead will take a little paddy and spread it in
the sun shine (*oribu phule*). Then after placing the paddy in the sun shine, he also puts a
gourd of rice beer in a small basket and place it on the door post. Then all the traditional
customs, garments and cloths are exposed near and around the corpse. The priest will go
to the cattle and touch with his hand or with a stick the particular bull to be sacrificed.
The bull is killed and cut into pieces and given as a souvenir to all persons who come to
pay respect, homage to the dead. That souvenir is known as “*opra*” a gift by the dead. It
is a symbolic token of friendship, love and companionship during their lifetime. This
particular souvenir (*opra*) is given and done without distinguishing man or woman.
2.6.3.1. The grave

The grave is usually 5’ in length 2’ in breadth, and 4’ deep. Flat stone (*kachä*) tiles of size 2’ x 3’ breadth and length at the thickness of 3’ and 6 pieces are placed over the corpse in the grave for rich people. For the poor people, it is substituted with a newly cut tree stem numbering about 8 pieces instead of flat stone tiles. These flat stones and tree stem are, to place over the corpse. The reason is to protect the corpse from direct contact with mud. In olden days there was no coffin and the only coffin was two planks joined together and tied by bamboo strings.

H. Chakho, Punanamei village headman says, “*Traditional burial system was very simple, he further says that, in the olden days there was no coffin lid like the present days. It did not have lid or any supportive structure for the corpse*”.  

2.6.3.2. Materials to be put in the grave for man

Before the burial took place the family members would sort out the goods to be put in the grave of the man. The following things are put in the coffin and grave for man during burial ceremony –

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25. Tape record interview on 14th May, 1994 with H. Chakho (65) on Shupfomei burial system. He also mentioned about his parents who were buried without coffin like the present day. In those days there was no common cemetery where the corpse is carried. The corpse is buried in front of the house and coffin lid was not much necessary. Apart from coffin making early days the forefathers just roll the corpse in a mat and put into the grave. It was very simple and ordinary.
(a) All his clothing like shirts, pants counted correctly and not numbering seven, numbering seven would mean bad omen for the dead and the living.

(b) *Erū* – war shield, usually made off matted bamboo or from the animal skin.

(c) *Engho* – spear, it may be one or two according to the family capacity.

(d) *Mikhepro lokhabvü* – tobacco bag

(e) *Olo* – sling, bow and arrow

(f) *Khalaro* – a small bamboo basket in which a small new gourd is placed. This gourd will have opening on the top and the gourd seed must not fall on the ground anywhere in the house. It is believed that the dead person used this gourd and the seed for the future life.

Sometimes relatives put a gourd of rice beer inside the grave. It is believed that the death person has to journey to meet the god of death and during the journey he might need the rice beer.

2.6.3.3. Materials to be put in the grave for woman

In the same manner, the family members recall the things to be put in the grave or in the coffin for the woman. The following things are put in the coffin or grave during burial –

(a) *Kodzü* – the water shield, traditional umbrella used during the rainy season, mostly used at cultivation time.

(b) *Lomi* – spinning instrument for weaving, usually made of bamboo.
(c) *Kosi* – her walking stick, it is the commonly used stick as she goes to field or return from field etc.

(d) *Shobvü* – specially made bamboo basket to put in fish, during fishing and ploughing; it is hung around the waist

(e) *Oto chüsa* - her necklace and bangles

(f) *Khalaro* – a small basket (cf: 2.7.6. No. f)

2.6.3.4. Things to be put in the grave for infant

The following things are put in the coffin or grave for infant –

(a) *Onedzü* – a bowl of mother’s milk. It is squeezed out from the mother’s breast into the bowl and then put into the coffin.

(b) *Osa mani* – all play things and clothing.

2.6.4. Burial

2.6.4.1. General form of burial for man

The last moment of burial is the crucial moment and the final touch is given to the corpse. The corpse is taken out from the house and put outside of the house. A close friend or relative will relate the life history of the person by means of dirges and in melancholic tone (*okhro kroli*). After that, two gun shots are fired by putting onto the dead man’s finger on the trigger. This is done to give warning and signal to the god of
death that a warrior is coming. It is also a warning to the spirits that it should not disturb 
on his way to eternal kingdom. Other formalities are done at this moment –

(a) *Opi kasi* – shaving the hair. It is not the shaving of the whole head, instead it 
shaving off little portion. It is a confirmation that the person is dead, and the 
family keeps the hair as a souvenir of the dead person.

(b) The cloths which is going to be put inside the grave is sprinkled with water by the 
priest.

(c) The cloths which are going to be put inside the grave are cut with a knife,

(d) The knife which is used for cutting the cloths is also put in the grave,

(e) The person who digs the grave first will take a bundle of dry thatch, light it and 
goes round the grave and throws the buds into the grave. The putting of the 
burning thatch in the grave signifies the purification of the grave. It also gives 
light and warmth to the dead man’s soul because it is believed that the grave is 
cold and dark for the soul to dwell.

(f) The priest “*Khehreo*” or “*Tavei korīwo*” – one who keeps a fast for the dead 
person will turn the dead man’s face straight and the coffin is lowered with rope.

(g) The same person (priest or one who keeps the fast) will place the first “*kachū*” - 
the flat stones or cut wooden stems over the corpse.

(h) “*Khehreo*” will put the mud first over the grave and he will be the alast to leave 
the grave.
2.6.4.2. Things put on the man’s grave

We have mentioned the things put inside the grave or coffin, we shall see what things are put on the top of the grave after the burial. Burials take place before sun-set, in the case of infant it has to be before noon inside the house or just near the portico. On the top of man’s grave, the following things are put – his war shield, cups, crane leggings, spade handle, etc.

2.6.4.3. Things put on the woman’s grave

And for woman’s grave – her weaving apparatus, rain coat, fishing basket etc. A small chicken is strangled on the grave and its head hung on a small stick and its feet just touching the ground is put. Some husk is taken and placed near the feet of the chicken and burnt.

After that the priest “Khehreo” and “Tavei koruwo” – one who keeps the fast for the death will cut some bitter plant known as “Kokia” smash it and wash their hands with it. The washing of hand with this bitter plant is to signify the bad omen of the memories of the dead. The abomination and nausea feeling of the evil days and lingering of memory of the dead person. If the dead person is a wealthy man usually the priest and the one who keep the fasts is given a small plot of garden or paddy field. But if he is poor one basket full of paddy (otho solei kali) or one gourd of rice beer (oha ha kali).
2.6.5. Final rite

2.6.5.1. Commemoration for the dead

After five days of the death, the family observe a genna, wherein a small meal is served both for the living as well as in honour of the dead person. A little food is placed in the corner of the living room for the dead man’s spirit. Early remembrance is also done in the lunar month called “Okro khro” corresponding to the Gregorian month i.e. last week or November or first week of December depending of the sighting of the moon. Three full days are set apart to commemorate the departed souls by the relatives, friends and dear ones. It is considered as the most important day for Shüpfomei tribe to observe genna in the village.

(a) On the 25th day of November or December month, it is known as “Omi koro kro” – a special day set apart to commemorate all those who died in fire.

(b) On the 26th day of November or December month, it is known as “Shuzü kro” – a day to commemorate all those who are killed by wild animal or drown or by bullet wounds, etc.

(c) On the 27th day of November or December month, it is known as “Okro krojü” – a day to commemorate all those who died a natural death.

These three days are very special and the whole village observe it. Within these three days, if death occurs it is considered as bad omen. The village’s oldest man or woman
will inaugurate the new working day by crossing the village gate after the three days of observation.

2.6.5.2. Taboos in death ceremonies

(a) It is forbidden to joke and laugh at those who mourn during their departed dear ones and their relatives. The old saying goes that if he does, the same misfortune comes to that person also.

(b) When the husband dies, the wife must not cry by calling “my husband” (achowo) or when the wife dies the husband calling “my wife” (achūmei) instead he or she has to call by the real name of the person.

(c) It is customary when husband or wife dies, the man or the woman sits a moment and sing the dredges “Okro kolî” of their love and affection.

(d) If the person dies at night, towards the dawn the family members come and wipe the dead person’s face. And if he/she dies at dawn, before the arrival of the mourners the family members come and wipe the dead person’s face. It signifies the sanctification and reconciliation.

(e) It is bad omen to put inside the grave the wedding dresses of either the husband or the wife.

(f) It is forbidden between the mother and child who are in “ahrîpri” – meaning after birth from the mother’s womb a piece of flesh falls. If such incidence occurs the mother and child has to be careful not to touch each other’s
clothing and no physical contact when such death occurs. It is believed that
death might occur to both.

(g) The dead person’s face should be facing the east and the corpse should be laid
straight during the burial.

(h) The flat stone or wooden stem (kachü) should be first placed on the head and
then the rest.

(i) If a person is a warrior or village hero, before putting the corpse into the grave
a great yell (makei) is accorded to him to signify his bravery and heroism.

Conclusion

The present social – cultural life of Shüpfomei Naga tribe has many things to
contribute towards the Nagas in general. The sacredness of life, covenant and fidelity of
marriage and the final acceptance of death are something which becomes part of the
social structure. Every society has same aspect of life and death, procreating and sharing
in the ecology of nature. Shüpfomei understanding of life is something very sacred and
this sacredness comes in every stage of life. This sacredness is manifested during the
sacred picnic “macha kozü”. It also manifests the generosity of the parents for the society
without counting the cost. The presentation of their children to the society brings down
God’s grace and enrichment. It also instills in the children patriotism and self sacrifice for
the clan, village, tribe, etc.
Entering into a marriage life brings human character to perfection. There is an old saying, which says that if you are not married you are not cooperating in God’s creation. When a man doesn’t marry he will lose his blood line. When a woman reached the marriageable age her parents are worried as to how to choose a partner, or who will be a suitor for her? The life cycle of a man and a woman is for procreation and building up of families. There is an old famous song which, the young generation often sing today, that is “One day we will become another’s father and mother and it is sad”.

The last stage is the final acceptance of life - the life lived to the full. The greatest blessing of a man or a woman’s life is to see the third generation. Living to see the third generation counted as a blessing.