CHAPTER FOUR

SHÜPFOMEI TRADITIONAL RELIGION:
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Introduction

The biggest challenge of the millennium being faced by Shüpfomei tribe is the protection of her indigenous religion which is on the verge of extinction. Will Shüpfomei indigenous religion ever be able to survive the acid test at this moment? If it survives then Shüpfomei “opfo ope chüna” - indigenous religion \(^1\) will sail through the 21\(^{st}\) century, if not then it will meet its natural death – with the death of the last old man. The greatest threat which Shüpfomei traditional religion is facing is due to the arrival of Christianity and modern education. Christianity and modern education are here to stay because the young generation is drawn into the world of the two. The spirit of revival is not kindled enough to be able to bring back that traditional religion. \(^2\) According to the belief of Shüpfomei “culture and religion” - “özhi ye chüna” is spoken as one. It is also mean ‘way of life and religious practices’ are one and the same. Thus, the survival of traditional religion will also be cultural revival and vice-versa.

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\(^1\) The Shüpfomei forefathers do not have exact term for religion as we understand today, “Opfo ope chüna” is the term for religion. But in reality it connotes rite and rituals when taken literally. Another concept where the forefathers refer to religion is “Opfo ope no amole” – it means what the forefathers believed. Thus, faith is also translated into religion.

\(^2\) Heni Chakho (65) Punanamei village Headman, Interviewed on the 14\(^{th}\) May, 1994. According to Shüpfomei understanding the village headman is respected in different ways and his words are often taken as a absolute truth. It is he who announces all the important genna in the village, he is the priest and the performer of the rites and rituals on behalf of the villages. He consults with others and does the divination of omen on important occasions like the new year etc.
The generation gap between the old and young is one of the main factors that lead to the decline of Shüpfoimei traditional religion. The old generation holds indigenous religion as the core and all the rest is peripheral and projections out of it. The centuries old values of the spirit of hard work, honesty, esteem for the elders and respect for parent, etc., is part and parcel of the religious tenants. Performance of sacrifice, rites and rituals together with moral laws are the outflow of that religious devotion. And today the young generation sees it with different attitude and notion. They look at the old religion as old fashioned and don’t find meaning in them. On the other hand, the older generation doesn’t understand the changes and situation that are needed to motivate the present generation. The old religion is unable to drill fear and faith experience through the varied performance of the rites and rituals in every occasion. While the modern education is more rational, and thus, faith experience has to be expressed in and through the modern context. Encountering the supernatural is the starting point of every religion. Thus, the concept of religion is where man mediate with the supernatural and from that experience he influences his being and society. Human urge to discover the ultimate often gives a man an expression through signs and symbols. And faith expression is that limited language where we express the ultimate and the supernatural in different names – God, while for Shüpfoimei is “Oramei”. 3

1. Western Shüpfoimei namely (Ememei group) pronounced “Oramei”, while the northern and southern Shüpfoimei (Paomata and Lepaona groups) pronounce “Ramai”. But it is one and the same in the meaning – “God”. The understanding of “Oramei” or “Ramai” is the benevolent God and it comprehends everything, no other words and term can be more substituted.
4. Shüpfomei traditional religion

4.1. Notion of religion

Shüpfomei do not have a proper word for religion like Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. It is because religion is their daily routine of life and their very existence. Then, what is that very routine and basis of life that which they (Shüpfomei) belief and called “Chüna chüño” – traditional religion? 4 To every Shüpfomei religion would mean living a spontaneous awareness of the presence of a creator – “Oramei”. 5

According to O Alem Ao, “Religion means, living in the spontaneous awareness of an encounter with, acknowledgement of, and obedience to the active reality of the presence of god, the “wholly other”. 6 Christian missionaries who came and encountered with the Nagas in general and Shüpfomei tribe looked upon the traditional religion as animistic, a blanket statement to the indigenous religion. No doubt certain elements of animism is manifested in their faith expression and in their daily activities. It is a not a belief that benevolent God exists in objects and in animate things. But instead malevolent spirits dwell in such objects and need to be offered sacrifices and propitiation lest they harm man. And when such labeling could be for the strong belief in the existence of a supernatural being, there is also the offer of sacrifice and appeasement to the lesser beings in the form of ancestral spirits, witch-crafts and host of spirits.

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1. Traditional religion – The closet term for Shüpfomei would be “Opfo ope chüna chüño”. But it would mean different concept when literately explained. The following meaning as ‘religious practices’ ‘code of religious tenants’ ‘rite and ritual’ ‘culture’, etc. Thus, Shüpfomei understanding of religion would mean the above mentioned as well as the genna, taboos, etc.
2. Ibid.
Traditional religion and practices are considered central to Shüpfomei because every action begins with the invocation and asking for blessing of fertility. The concept of fertility is a central element in the cosmology which unites the diverse Naga communities. Agriculture, sex, death, feasting and martial prowess are all united by the underlying concept of fertility, which is both gained by these activities, and is manifested in them.  

According to Thomas F. O'Dea, "Religion is the experience of God and the society is that confirms it. In established societies, religion is one of the important institutional structures making up the total social system...The central interest of religion appears to concern something comparatively vague and intangible, whose empirical reality is far from clear. It is concerned with a "beyond," with man's relation to and attitude that "beyond," and with what men consider to be the practical implications of the "beyond" for human life."  

The fear of "beyond" "unknown forces" especially the human experience of "death" are the impending fears which often hover in Shüpfomei psychic, which make the tribe conservative and superstitious in their religious outlook. But at the same time such conservative animist attitude makes him and her religious and god fearing. One can clearly reach such combined external and internal influence of fear and human anxieties in their religious performance of rites and rituals. Such rites and rituals are performed every month and become much more intense during the celebration of feasts and  

festivals. The Failures and negligence to propitiate the gods of lower grades (*ora kashû*) would consequently mean a chain of misfortunes, sicknesses, deaths or natural calamities like earthquake, floods, storms, fire, accidents and haunting by the evil spirits etc. The propitiation to the gods is a must and which contain the external manifestations of rites and rituals. On the other hand there is much joy and happiness and also a sense of fulfillment when such rites and rituals are performed in accordance with the prescribed rules and practices it with precision.

Traditional religion brings a deep sense of gratitude, loving worship and thanksgiving to God (*Oramei*) for the blessing and showering with rich harvest and plentiful gifts. There are joyful songs and dances to manifest what God had done. Thus, Shìpfomei religion in external appearances looks fearful and pessimistic because much of it depended on performance orientation rather then knowing the meaning of such action's result. Once the action is performed, then there is a sense of satisfaction that the evil spirits will not haunt the family or the individual. There is no officially established priesthood, but a priest is known for his divination and he sacrifices for the people. The village headman (*movuwo*) is as much the village priest or even the head of the family may perform the same. The priest is generally understood as one who does the rites and rituals namely the offering of sacrifices like pinching of cooked rice before eating (*kheto masi*) or dropping of little rice beer to the ground (*ozhe konû kocho*) to show respect to the forefather spirits. It is by offering chicken, coin, pieces of clothes, eggs, behind the

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1. The term priest would be “khehrewo” known as sacrificer and his role is mostly functionary of a particular event i.e. sacrificing a cock, touching the first animal for sacrifice, does the divination on particular occasion, etc. Generally he is self appointed and not by the ordination as we understand. Thus, there is no established priesthood in the proper sense.
village gate depended on the individual family, village or particular area etc. There are no written laws, rules and regulations laid down or prescribed. Much of it depends the person’s initiative and response to accept that status.

Thomas F. O’Dea puts three fundamental characteristics of human existence, firstly, contingency (uncertainty) events of crucial significance to his safety and welfare are beyond his prevision. Secondly, powerlessness, man’s limited capacity to control the conflicts between his wants and his environment. Thirdly, scarcity, the society is orderly allocation of functions, facilities, and rewards. It involves both a division of labour and a division of product. It requires imperative co-ordination—that is, some degree of super ordination and subordination in relations of men.10

According to S. Ashuli, he says, “Shüpfomei religion (Chüna) is taken as a rule of life and norm of existence which keep the Shüpfomei tribe truthful, hospitality, generous, uprightness, righteousness, sincere and loving in general.” 11 In the same way N. Saleo, also explains, that the old understanding of Shüpfomei religion (chüna) as very respectful, loving and truthful. He further explains that it reflects the very presence of God (Oramei) in nature and judges man’s action according to his deeds. 12

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11 Sano Ashuli (73) interviewed on the 29th June, 1996, he says Shüpfomei religion (china) is much more than performing of rites and rituals, but living out the daily life.
12 N. Saleo (70) interviewed on the 14th May, 1994
Finally religion is not only their experience of the supreme God which they encounter in their history. But religion is the living out in their daily lives and is being felt so by many other tribes. Shūpfomei experiences of their God is seen clearly as we mentioned in above i.e. everyday life’s situations. The present changes taking place in the society, culture, economy and way of life is where the older generation have not come to term. Inspite of the great changes taking place in the social behaviour, there is something still holding on and that is the basic moral values such as sincerity, honesty, hospitality, generosity, etc., which is seen even today. The religious experience of the forefathers is seen as moral values today.

4.1.1. Religious values

Looking from the present trend of religious aspect, Shūpfomei in general do not have the civic dimension. On the other hand the individuality becomes very much powerful. The reason may be this that individual aspect in the performance of the rites and rituals, because such rites and rituals can be performed by the individual family man, or the village headman for the whole village. There is no common priesthood to look into the common good and for the community. Thus, the greater good of the community that may be served is much less than that of other tribes. Yet Shūpfomei traditional religion demands a very high profile reflecting on social aspect as to holistic dimension for the development of the person.
The holistic concept is looked upon from every natural sense, which is very much human and in the true sense of religion. Shüpfomei religion consist of the external performance and internal grace that is put into practice through the various religious tenents such as eco-spirituality, truthfulness, love of neighbour, caring, loving concern for the other, hospitality to the strangers, etc., Shüpfomei does not have any holy books and scriptures.

The oral tradition is the linking verbal code of conduct and creed as a tool that are generally passed on from generation to generation. It does not tell that Shüpfomei indigenous religion is superior or inferior, instead God is equal and can be experienced in nature. 13 It does not have a localized place of worship, but solely depends on the individual family, the village and so holistic dimension is seen in Shüpfomei religion. There is a tremendous change undergone with Shüpfomei concept of religion. The old religion is also called pagan religion. It is looked upon as the guide to traditional values, the spirit of hard work, hospitality to everyone, honesty and respect of parents and elders, and religious devotion that lead to the fear of God. Further more this religion is prevailing as under current and fermenting the whole social outlook, economically, spiritual, and morality of the people.

13. The experience of God in Nature is expressed in different seasons, in the advent of birds and animals. The forefathers of Shüpfomei never go beyond the maxmum of nature. Their feast and festivals, the different village gennas, the performance of rites and rituals etc. are all their experience of God in nature.
Süpfomei accepts the supreme God in nature, that is in man’s words and deeds, his good and bad actions, the punishment and the rewards in relationship with his community. Community aspect is very powerful in Shüpfomei religion. He/she is very much aware that the kind of life he/she lives in this world will determine his/her future life and life after death.

Human being has no power to alter one’s future course of action because it is God who reveals his reward and final judgement depending on man’s action. Holistic concept is viewed in the formal world religion and which is founded on love, tolerance, creed and code of conduct, concerning for humanity and ecology, etc.

4.1.2. Shüpfomei religious code with Mosaic law

Shüpfomei religion is not inferior to the organized world religion in any sense and has much to give and much to take especially from Christianity. Today most of the Shüpfomei are now professing and practicing Christian religion and these two are very similar to each other in many ways. Shüpfomei moral code, which often sanctioned society is equal in all respect with the Mosaic law in the Bible. ¹⁴

1. Respect and fear of God - Oramei yi tho ye priule
2. Don’t swear in the name of God for falsehood - Oramei zhu kowo madawo icho lemoē
3. Don’t harm others - Omei yi so mashii lemoē

¹⁴. Cf. Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version) Exodus: 20/1-17
4. Don’t kill other fellow being  
- *Omei yi sotha lemoe*

5. Don’t commit adultery  
- *Neto pfoto chokhro so lemoe*

6. Don’t steal other’s things  
- *Omei zhū ve lemoe*

7. Don’t tell a lie  
- *Ochū ola mada lemoe*

8. Don’t covet other’s things  
- *Omei oni ozū monū lemoe*

9. Honour thy father, mother and elders  
- *Opfū opfo ye kotsūmei ilo le*

10. Venerate the earth which gave you life  
- *Ojū itsū mokhro le* 

According to K. Saleo says, “These moral codes look universal and as though translated from the Bible. Instead it is believed that the forefathers had a strong moral principle that governed them. And it is such moral code that sanctioned and bound every individual for the society”. 

4.2. Shūpfomei understanding of Supreme God – “Oramei”

4.2.1. Etymology of the term “Oramei”

According to the world-view of Shūpfomei, they believe in the existence of a supreme God and also other hierarchy of gods. But to this supreme God whose divinity has a transcendental origin and immanence which Shūpfomei never questioned. To this supreme God all the adjectives and attributes such as good, loving, caring, benevolent,

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ever compassion, etc. are given. Shüpfonei called this supreme God as “Oramei”. They 
don’t offer worship by sacrifice and they do not propitiate to the supreme God. It is not 
the supreme God but to the lower spirits, ancestral spirits that they offer sacrifice.

The term “Oramei” with prefix “O” is pronounced by the Ememei of the western 
and Chiluvei of the eastern Shüpfonei group. While without the prefix “O” that is 
“Ramé” is pronounced by the other two Shüpfonei groups, Lepaona and Paomata. The 
term “Oramei” contains deep meaning of sacredness, mystery, wonder and unexplained 
human language. “Ora” is taken a God and gods, and “mei” is taken as people. Therefore 
“Oramei” is God’s revelation to man. It is God’s initiative that is revealed and it is also 
man’s awareness of God.

The maxim of Shüpfonei as he begins the day or any important event, or decision 
he is going to undertake, “Oramei iyi mono kapio” “Oramei iyi mono kapio pei” “Oramei 
iyi chuku ile kapio” – the translation would mean, “God who gives us birth, God who 
cares and supports us”. The following words are very much used when there is a 
judgement to be passed, “Orachii madi ipfo, ojii mashi ipfii” – deep blue sky over our 
father and deep earth our mother. Today Christian transcendental God is addressed in the 
term “Oramei”.

Shüpfonei indigenous religion expresses God as “transcendental God”. And this 
transcendental God is explained and addressed as two principles namely, (a) God of the 
sky, father or the male principle, (b) God of the earth, mother or the female principle.
And it is believed that the earthquake is their conjugal embrace, whence all fertility and all growth on earth, has its origin. 17

4.2.2. Feminine notion of God

The feminine gender is the Shüpfomei God and the creed is addressed in feminine gender. But it is not all through that such feminine creed goes, though there are occasions where neuter gender is also manifested. We shall highlight some of the feminine aspect where Shüpfomei does address God as feminine, “Oramei iyi mono kapio” – God who gave us birth. “Oramei iyi chüku ile kapio” – God who cares and support us. “Oramei ipfo ipfi” – God our father, mother. In the case of neuter gender, God is neither father nor mother, male or female. “Oramei ipfo ipe – God our father and grandfather. The supreme God (Oramei) is transcendent and immanent and it is expressed in term as God who covers the world and nature.

Transcendence is taken in the sense that we cannot see with out eyes, yet immanence is that God is present. Shüpfomei understand and see God’s revelation and revealing in and through nature. All good, beauty, harmony, wonder in the world is God’s revelation. The understanding of the supreme God is not as an abstract concept but descriptive in character. The reason is that Shüpfomei understanding of God is ever present, ever revealing and ever active in the world and God speaks in and through

nature. The limitation of human language and human experience often puts this God as the cause and effect in human terms.

4.2.3. Shüpfomei understanding of God in nature

Shüpfomei understand God in their lives through the handiwork of nature. We cannot just merely call this as animist, superstitious or worship of spirits or ancestral worship, etc. Their outlook has changed much with the Christian theology, in reality Shüpfomei understanding of God is that God is in their midst, and God’s manifestation is through their immediate contact – nature. Nature speaks to them as the mouth of God. The storm, often destroy houses, crops, fruit bearing flowers it is because of man’s failure to God, either to appease him or breaking his natural laws. So also the thunder, lighting, earth-quake or floods, etc. at the same time a good harvest also shows God blessing. 18

The same God they believe is also the creator and announcer of the changing of seasons. It often heralds to the people the changing and announcement of seasons. Christian theology and scientific studies will prove that such changes occur due to the revolution, evolution, rotation of the earth. Yet such scientific occurrence does not satisfy the simple people and their frame of mind.

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18 The traditional belief which are handed down even today and often taken as for granted.
Till today, there is a saying that the changing of seasons is attributed to God (Oramel) i.e. the arrival heralded by cooing of the “kotu” – cuckoo. Such comments are made during agricultural works, the sowing of seeds and changing of weather. The budding of new leaves sends the message of new life, warm weather, etc. Another rare occurrence is the first sight of “kodzuā pa” - a water grass plant, whose flower resemble the water hyacinth bloom and which sprout up on the ground after the long dry spell of winter and which, people often translate it to show that summer is at hand. 19

The superstitious belief that a particular bird like “lishi to”, when it suddenly chirps it is believed to be ominous bringing bad news or bad omen and might be even fatal. The crow flying or hovering around and owl hopping at night brings death in the family or village. The croaking of frog bring imminent rain or movement of ants, flies or bees taken as the impending occurrence of flood, landslides etc. Sociologists and anthropologists do described such beliefs as animist because in them unknown mysterious power communicate to men.

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19. Such understanding of nature and natural changes especially the seasonal changes which are experiential is taken as God’s handiwork.
4.3. Shüpforme world of spirits

4.3.1. Notion of spirits — *ora kashü*

Shüpforme believes in the existence of spirits — *ora kashü*. These spirits are impersonal supernatural beings who reveal their power through material and non-material signs. And Shüpforme believes that they manifest their divinity through natural phenomena and objects bringing good and bad according to their power. Thus, hierarchy of deities within them and the world of spirits are manifestation to human beings. It is not clear about the origin and their abode. It is hard to distinguish between the benevolent and malevolent spirits.

"Oramei" is a benevolent God to whom Shüpforme need not offer sacrifice in any way but prayers are addressed. There are also benevolent spirits whom they call guardian spirits, because they become friends with certain persons and help them in different ways — such as during the hunting expedition, from accident, during journeys. There is a belief that some spirits enter into friendship with some persons and discern and predict the future of people. These spirits can also heal sickness, give good harvest and prosperity. But Shüpforme feared the most these malevolent spirits and generally connotes as evil, to be feared and harmful. Shüpforme constantly needs to be propitiated. Such malevolent spirits as "*ora kashü" are known as evil spirits. "*Ora kashü" is also refers to terminal sickness, even passing common flu, cold, cough etc. It is also refers to people who

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20. The general understanding of spirits is always taken in the negative sense and it connotes fear, need to be appeased. The word, "anima" = spirits, is what Shüpforme believed and from this point we can say they are animist that is believing in the world of spirits.
possess evil spirits or practice black magic. The occurrence of natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, earthquake, heavy wind, storms, shooting stars are the handiwork of spirits. And such events need to be propitiated through offering of eggs and chickens, coins, paddy, etc., lest they disturb human beings.

4.3.2. Ways of placating spirits

It is said and there is a strong belief is the existence of countless malignant spirits and their assertion for supremacy in human lives is accepted. The only way to get rid of evil spirits is that Shūpsomei has to offer sacrifice and propitiate so that it is exorcised, through prayer, a very informal compilation of words for that occasion, supplication and petition. It is mostly pleading and requesting to the possessed spirits to free him/her for the sickness. The efficacious means used during propitiation are substituted by:

4.3.2.1. Eggs

The father of the family, or the village headman goes to the village gate early morning taking the eggs in his right hand and a knife holding to his left hand clinging to his chest. And without talking to anyone on the road goes beyond the village gate (koro)
while placing the eggs at the edge of the gate, he utters some words and return to the house of the sick person and tells everything is done and will be alright.

4.3.2.2. Chicken

Shüpfomei call this offering as “raphra kaphra” which means that the chicken is offered to substitute the sickness of the sick person. The family head takes a chick or a pair of chicks and goes beyond the village gate with a prayer and then release outside the gate as a scapegoat to take away the sickness. The chicks are supposed to take away the misfortunes of the family.

4.3.2.3. Cut piece of cloth

The village headman or a family head often cuts a piece of cloth from the sick person and with a scented plant (khola) placed behind the village gate. This is done during the village epidemic like chicken-pox (kotsü ra), small-pox (Pfüpro kapra), cholera (morü kale), plague, etc.

4.3.2.4. Sacrifice of animal

A rich person offers sacrifice of animals to the spirits especially the spirit of death. It is often bulls, buffaloes or cattle. Such propitiation is performed as mentioned above by individual family. The priest “khehrüwo” will touch the animal first with his
hand and with a prayer and he will ask to kill the bull for sacrifice. This offering is done to receive blessing, to prolong life, to cure the sick person, to ward off a particular evil spirit that possess the person. It is also an offering to release the person from bondage of the spirit, to obtain children for those who have no issue, to obtain blessing and protection from natural calamities and poverty, to seek even for animals, etc. 

4.3.3. Types of spirits

According to Shüpforme's understanding of spirits is seen as evil spirits. There are different types of spirits take different forms – "spirits" takes the form of dogs, pigs, birds, wild animals, gusty wing, buffaloes or strange sounds. But most of the spirits are called and are known in a area and by their activities. They do not have permanent place for their abode. They often move from place to place, and Shüpforme people believe that the spirits stay in thick jungles, waterfall, mountains, caves, streams, steep precipices, near bamboo grooves and rocky places. The different spirits which Shüpforme name them according to the place and area are:

4.3.3.1. Long head spirit - *Ora piso*

It is believed that "long head spirit - *ora piso*" has a long head, and its leg does not touch the ground. When human being sees it moves very fast away and disappears.

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22 The sacrifice of animal does not mean a burnt offering, but it is killing of the animal and given as a gift to the people as a sign of God blessing and prayer. The belief is that with the offering and killing of animal the person who is sick will recover from the illness. In olden days such offering of animal and disturbing the meat was common says K. Kholi (65) farmer.
According to the belief, *ora piso* does not harm people and it is seen during misty days moving with the mist. The spirit with a long head, often frighten people and roams in the night and people often see *ora piso* in the misty night.

### 4.3.3.2. Fire spirit - *Ora mi*

It is considered as a bad omen to see fire spirit – *ora mi*. The spirit of light, it is often sighted towards evening and in the night. When such bright flashing light is seen and dies down suddenly, villages are told to be careful. Sometime it is told that fire spirit – *ora mi* do chase people.

### 4.3.3.3. Eater of human soul - *Khromo tsüto ra*

The spirit that often takes away the human soul of the people and the person dies suddenly without any sickness. It is the spirit that eats human shadow (*khromo*). The black magician is said to be the possessor of the spirit which eat human soul. When a person is sick the eater of human soul would force the black magician to go to that particular sick person house. The village people do know such person and they will never allow such persons to come near the house.
4.3.3.4. Epidemic spirit - *Rata khe*

The spread of epidemic in the village is called –*rata ravu*, the spirit of epidemic like of cholera, dysentery, chicken pox, small pox and when lot of people die. The spirit of epidemic spread the plague to punish the village or tribe. “*Rata khe*” is believed to come from the south and when it comes it take heavy toll of lives says village people.

4.3.3.5. Deadly spirit - *Chakha ra*

According to Shüpfomei forefathers’ belief the killer spirit dwelt in Maram area (*Mahramei chü*). And when a person is dying, this particular spirit often carry the person to that side. And if relatives and friends are able to call the dying person back then the sick person regains consciousness and often family members make thick smoke with the straw of millet outside the house to avert entering of this spirit. It is told that *Chakha ra* is a twin spirit, father and son. They often kill beautiful girls or women to take their hair to made their roof. Thus, when sooth sayer, black magician predicts the coming of “*chakha ra*” special announcement is done to the villages regarding human life. People often take precaution both lives and cattle.
4.3.3.6. Four spirits - *Chara padei*

It refers to the four spirits (i) *kathi mahe kopfo* – which is able to bring relief to the dead person by blowing into his nostril. (ii) *ojü pfoki pfü kopho* – which brings down the mountain. (iii) *ora ri sü mozu* – which cures sickness. (iv) *ongo ho chülu chiarüo* – spirit with upward nostril and which dwells on Mt. Esü (*Esü pfoki*). 23 Shüpfomei believe that these four spirits are considered as good spirits.

4.3.3.7. House spirit – *Ochü ra*

It is the house spirit whichs take different shapes, form and listen to the conversation of the family. It is the duty of the family members to propitiate by offering rice beer and rice to the house god. The result of such propitiation would be a benevolent helper and displeasure would be the opposite result as malevolent. It is a belief that when the house spirit abandons the house tragedy occurs in the family.

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23. Ref. The photo of Mt. Esü. The highest peak on Japfü mountain range. It lies in the western side of Shüpfomei area. It is told when this peak is covered with clouds it bring rain. When there is too much rain and when this peak is not seen, then the people use to say the spirit (chara padei) must have gone for tour.
4.4. Shüpfomei understanding of salvation – chüsa kohrü

Shüpfomei religion believes in salvation and the idea of salvation is that there is life after death. Because of such a belief that they put food and drink, cloth, weapons, etc. in the coffin and on the top of the grave. There is a strong belief that after death they go to meet their ancestors and that is the reason why a few drops of rice beer is poured on the ground to honour and to show respect to the ancestors. The first fruit is offered and sacrifices are done during every feast and festival in order to establish a communion with the living and the dead. Shüpfomei religion is very vague regarding where heaven and hell is about. The understanding is that “heaven” is the place where all the good people go after death and meet their ancestors. And “hell” is the place where bad people stay after death and where they don’t meet their ancestors.

The general belief is that after death the human soul (raku) goes to meet “Pukhekhujü” – the gate keeper of the death, and every soul has to combat with him. Thus, the reason why during the burial two spears and knives are put into the coffin is so that the dead man’s soul may combat with the Pukhekhujü. If the soul is successful it

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24. The Christian concept of salvation does not have equalivant term, word for Shüpfomei. It would be put as “chüsa kohrü” everlasting life. It would also mean heaven after death etc.
25. Heaven is a place where all the good people dwell. It is believed that the place where they meet their ancestors.
26. Hell is the place where the human soul does not meet their ancestors.
27. According to Shüpfomei understanding “Pukhekhujü” is known as the God of death. It is to this God of death the dead person has to challenge and because of that spears and knife are put into the coffin or grave for the dead person. If the dead person manages to spear him he will enjoy after death and if he fails he has to serve him the rest of the life.
enjoys forever and if not it becomes the slave of *Pukhekhujë*. Human soul undergoes changes through seven lives or re-incarnation and finally it becomes a butterfly. There is often a general belief that certain person’s spirit still haunts the family members and at times disturb them and even talks to them. Some human spirits roam around the house of the family and do not leave the family. During such times the family often makes sacrifice and even offers what they want because life in the other world is like normal life on earth, they need this and that in the next life.

Shüpfomei concept of human body and soul is different from prevailing concepts. If the soul leaves the body, the body dies. The soul at time strays away leaving the body, which causes the person to get sick. It is the duty of the family members to call back the soul. Human soul and ghost cannot be differentiated, “Soul” is “raku” and “Ghost” is known as “koma”. It can only be explained, when a wicked person dies unnatural death in a village his / her ghost lingers on the place where he / she meets with the accident. The Ghost frightens people “*ama no kopri*” or sometime people say his / her spirit is chasing.

Shüpfomei idea of “sin” 28 is the failure to relate with God and society. Sin is considered as an impurity in the performance of rituals, breaking of taboos, failure to offered sacrifice, etc. Sin has a community dimension because sin, which is committed by the community, will have effect on the society.

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28 The equivalent word and expression for the term *sin* in Shüpfomei language is “kama”. “Kama komo koso” “Sin” would be failure to perform rituals, failure to observe gennas, taboos, it would be more on social aspect failing to live upto the demands of the society.
The society considers such individual offence as social sin, like premarital sex
relation, incest, murder, theft, etc. The sinner is answerable to the community and it is the
community which imposes punishment, fine and even quite. The individual has to make
reparation for the sin accordance to the customs of the village. If the society offends God
is ultimately offended and punishment from God is called upon. The ultimate good and
well being of the society is taken as the goal and the breaking of the taboos, which
violates the norms and natural principle of the society are taken as a sinful acts. Thus, sin
is generally considered as the breaking of taboos and the non performance of rites and
rituals during feast and festivals.

4.4.1. Understanding of priesthood

Shüpforme tribe does not have instituted priesthood, but every village has a form
of priest who offers sacrifice. The village recognize him as a performer of sacrifice. And
he is known by the name “Khehrewo”. Often the priest is the king or head of a family. It
is often hereditary and family person who acts as the priest. He is responsible to the
whole village and often offers sacrifice for the community. The villagers go to him to
offer sacrifice on their behalf. They contribute to the expenses of the ceremony either
chicken, coin, etc. There are many soothe sayers, interpreters of dream, prophets of
omens, diviners of the good and bad for the village, etc. The priest has the combination of healing, sacrifices and the mentioned functions above.

4.4.2. Worship and sacrifice

Shupfomei worship and sacrifice go together and much more during sickness, natural calamities, feast and festival, agricultural plantation and harvest, protection of disease, pestilence, celebration of child's birth, marriage and death. But worship and sacrifice do not take place in temple, church, mosque, etc., but either in his house, beyond the village gate, under a tree or stone. Often sacrifices are not by killing or shedding of blood but it is done by offering of the live chicken and by setting it free in the jungle to propitiate the sickness. Offering of cooked rice and meat, rice beer, sprinkling of water drawn early morning on the new-year day. Sacrifice of cattle, domestic animals like dogs, chicken is done when rich people die, to support in their journey to meet the God of death. Worship and uttering words of prayer is done during the sacrifice. The formula of the creed which elders used are as follows:

"Oratho! Ochù madei opfoe, ojù mashù opfùe" – Deep blue sky father, nature as mother, God be praised.

"Omei khowe, otoko khowe, otu morù ko khowe" – Asking people, food, cattle,
4.5. Traditional observances

4.5.1. Types of traditional taboos - chūno

Traditional taboos can be understood as “chūno” which would mean “don’t do – so chūno, not allowed – pfiu chūnoe, in short means prohibition enforced by the society. Shūpfoemei Naga tribe observes three different traditional gennas, namely yearly, monthly and family; these gennas are called “manl” – which means abstaining from work. It prohibits work, food, touch, talk, movements. It affects the family when family genna is observed during the birth of a son, birth of calves. It affects the whole village on village genna days when afflicted with epidemic or death; they are observed during the different days in the month. It affects the whole tribe or the Naga tribes for example, when the villages hear or see the breaking of the wild pear tree or any branches breaks.

Basically observing genna is to regain the lost energies and rebuild the strength to start anew. It is not merely abstaining from work as farmers. It is to instill a positive attitude towards their health and well being. There are seventeen obligations for the celebration of gennas in a year. According to the season of the year the gennas are observed and in month wise. The genna days are the days of prayer to God and often abstaining from manual labour. ²⁹ It is the village headman who announces to the village on the previous night and early in the morning.

4.5.2. Difference between genna and taboos

There are similarities and differences between "genna" (ref. 4.5.1.) and "taboo". "Taboo" when taken from religious aspect it would simple mean, "prohibited, forbidden" it would mean also "don’t touch, don’t do, even don’t speak", etc. It contains the sacred acts like offering to God, or spirits and elders.³⁰ It is a religious sanction and when it is broken the effect would mean an opposite consequence. The social disapproval laid down by society, such taboos like incest, premarital sex and immoral behaviours.

The understanding of taboo becomes much more meaningful when it affects the whole community. It is the community that passes the sanction for the observance of taboos and such observations of taboo purifies the culture. It demarcates the different roles to be played by man and woman in life.

4.5.2.1. Social taboos

There are more than 200 “do’s and don’t” for Shüpfomei tribe, yet we shall give only some of the most common use and even today parents often tell to their children when such breaking of the taboos. We can differentiate taboos into three categories pertaining to men, some taboos to women only, while some are in general applicable to both.

³⁰ Some of taboos which young people observes and give special consideration to elders are simple and at the same time looks silly yet the society approves such taboos. For example giving the brain part, best part of the animal when it is killed is given to old people. The parents frighten their children when their child eats the special dish saying grey hair will come fast if they eat that particular dish etc.
4.5.2.2. Taboos on men

(a) Omei kahi chü ochümei yi sazü chünoe – During death in the village no sexual intercourse with one’s wife.

(b) Ochumei yi sazü chünoe – You must not have sexual intercourse with your sister.

(c) Pfotomei no netomei sade khrulei lo chünoe – Men are not allowed to go beneath the weaving loom of women.

(d) Pfotomei no netomei dona dokre di chünoe – Men are not allowed to touched women weaving implements.

(e) Nolumei no osütto shu chünoe – Young people are not allowed to plant sapplings.

(f) Nolumei no kovobu shu chünoe – Young people are not allowed to plant bamboo sapplings.

(g) Nolumei no mei icha ano chünoe – Young people are not allowed to listen to oath takings of others.

4.5.2.3. Taboos on women

(a) Netomei no ochü khe chünoe – Woman / girl cannot climb on the roof of the house. It is forbidden for female to thatch the roof.
(b) Netomei no makei ye moho chũnoe – Women / girls are not supposed to yell
    nor to do traditional yell.

(c) Netomei no nghi kata chũ ona ko chani pfüta chũnoe – Women / girls during
    marriage are not suppose to carry with them seven pieces of clothings.

(d) Netomei no otho vu kowo chũ shüpei chũnoe – During winnoing paddy
    women / girls are no supposed to talk.

(e) Netomei no pfotomei chũka pfo chũnoe – Woman cannot inherit man’s
    property.

(f) Netomei no pfotomei phi komotu chũnoe – Woman cannot walk across man’s
    leg.

4.5.2.4. General taboos

(a) Osi chüphe va kapra maki chũnoe – Dog which climb up on the roof should
    not be reared.

(b) Movumei hi mei zhü ve chũnoe – The kings are not suppose to steal other’s
    things.

(c) Kathimei khulei osa mani chani tho chũnoe – At the time of burial, seven
    pieces of cloths or things are not put in the grave.

(d) Movumei hi ojüpa to chũnoe – The village headman is not allowed to eat
    mushroom.
(e) Kathimei ba mokhu pfovu chünoe – Cannot bury a dead man with his/her hand upside down.

(f) Thopre kono lei odo shu chünoe – Before thopre genna is announced planting of paddy is not allowed.

(g) Thopre thi ochü / ikrü chünoe – After thopre genna making house / blacksmith work is not allowed.  

4.5.3. Types of traditional gennas

There are three different traditional gennas where every Shüpfomei observe and consider it as taboo. Traditional gennas are generally observed by the whole village or by individual family. We shall see how gennas are observed in the village.

(a) “Ora thini” is the general holiday, which is observed by the whole village or tribe.

(b) “Mopfu lei thini” is the yearly holiday, which is also observed by the different village.

(c) “Ohelei thini” is the causal holiday observed by the individual family or by the village.

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4.5.3.1. General village holiday - *Ora thini*

At the beginning of each month, there are five general holidays. All the villages generally observe such holidays. These general holidays have many purposes for the farmers. It is considered that such holidays bring God’s blessing and physical rest to the worn out bodies. Every month there will be five holidays during different days.

(a) *Phehrù mani* – a day of prayer to God. A day set apart for the sanctification and purification of self both physical and spiritual well being. On such day all men folk have to go to the village pond for early morning bath as a token of washing away all evils, sickness, disease, misfortune and past deed and promise to lead a new virtuous life. On this day men folk not only wash their physical bodies but also their weapons like guns, spear, shield, bows and arrows, etc.

(b) *Ora mani* – a day of thanksgiving for the manifold gifts. A day of thanksgiving, adoration and prayer to God for sustaining life and blessing. It is also a day where we ask God to shower his blessing with long life.

(c) *Pfureshū mani* – a day of prayer to God not to cause greediness. It is a day of prayer to help preserve a long lasting value of food grains and wealth.

(d) *Tokho mani* – a day of prayer for food. It is also a day for asking God to lavish plentiful food and drink for the people.
(e) *Omei kazhū* – a day of prayer imploring God not to cause destruction by fire. It is a day set apart asking God to avert unfortunate fire accidents in the village. 32

4.5.3.2. Yearly specific gennas - *Mopfulei thini*

There are thirteen yearly holidays for Shüpfomei tribe and this type of yearly holidays is observed and can be observed after the happening of the events. It is a prayerful offering, thanksgiving and gratitude to God for the protection and blessings to be showered on the people. These holidays are taken with much care and sacredness and people take as religious observation.

(a) *Osü pu kakha mani* – holiday for the last day of sowing millet. It is a day of rest after sowing of millet and such observation is to be announced the completion of time and season for sowing of millet. And after such day no one is allowed to sow the millet in the field and breaking would be a taboo and bad consequence to the millet plant.

(b) *Khrihu kashū mani* – holiday to avert storm and cyclonic rain. It is a day of prayer to God not to blow strong wind and cyclonic rain lest it destroys crops and houses. It is asking God for protection from strong wind as olden days houses were make of thatch roofs. On this day women folk are not allowed to wash their hair as a token to respect.

(c) *Ojü kathi mani* – holiday for fertility of soil. A day of prayer to be observed to give thanks for sending off the old season and ushering a new season. When it is literally translated it means a genna for the death of the earth or soil.

(d) *Probu ra mani* – a day to spare from epidemic disease to new leaves. It is a day of prayer not to send disease to the sprouting of new leaves and plants. It is imploring God to protect the new sprouting leaves, flowers and shoots of plants from epidemic disease.

(e) *Osü ra koso* – holiday for the growth of millet. It is observed to seek God’s protection of millet crop from the possible attack of pests and insects. On this day making fire in the jungle is prohibited and even roasting of any edible things and going to millet field is strictly prohibited and considered as taboo.

(f) *Chühu pirü mani* – a day of prayer not to send hail storm. It is beseeching God to avert hail storms from the destruction of flowers at the time of bloom. Normal work such as carrying of fodder, cow dung, and repair of agricultural implements are allowed.

(g) *Ochü kazhü mani* – a day of prayer to God not to send darkness again. There is a morbid fear that there was a total darkness that took place, long ago, which had affected the whole agriculture. And to avoid such an unusual accident the day is observed. It could have been caused by solar eclipse.

(h) *Deükho mani* – a day of prayer to God for water. It is a day when the whole village ask God for timely and adequate rain for cultivation.

(i) *Thopre mani* – a day of prayer to God for good weather for the inauguration of paddy transplantation. Making fire and roasting of edible things are
prohibited. On this occasion rice beer and food are served to the cowherd for their service with gratitude.

(j) *Doshu pirü mani* – a day of prayer to God to protect the paddy from hail storm and heavy rain.

(k) *Okheshū mani* – a day of prayer to God to avert the destruction of the growing paddy plant from insects. It is an important day imploring God to protect the cultivated crops from the attack of pest. On this day strangers and other non-villagers are not allowed to enter the village and the villagers are not allowed to leave the village.

(l) *Ochü kazhü kokho mani* – a day of prayer to God asking him to give good weather for the harvest.

(m) *Molu kosū mani* – a day of prayer asking God not to cause earthquake. It is seeking God’s *protection from any unfortunate incident of earthquake.*

The above mentioned yearly holidays are observed by all villages as an invocation to God and imploring for protection. The gennas are strictly followed and observed with much care and though people have become Christian and accepted Jesus Christ, yet traditional gennas are respected, observed and abstaining from any work.

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4.5.3.3. Casual holiday - Ohelei thini

The individual village or individual families according to the events and situation do observe the causal holidays. It is often due to the unforeseen events, which come within the time. Individual village observes genna namely causal holiday, when the villagers move out for war, coronation of the village headman or when there is outbreak of any natural calamities. One of such observation is done when there is a break down of wild pear tree (Chüte bu) at Shajouba. The breaking of wild peer tree or its branches (commemorative departure tree) are considered to all the Naga tribes as the place of departure. As all the Naga tribes considered as the place of departure and look upon with much reverence. Individual gennas are like the birth of the child in the family, a new calf in the cattle, hatching of chicks or death of relatives, etc.

4.6. Shüpfomei Lunar months

4.6.1. Different Lunar months

Shüpfomei Naga tribe has twelve traditional lunar months in a year. And every three years, 30 days are added to the year and it is known as double July – Sale kahei, to reconcile with the solar calendar. The following are the lunar months:

(a) January           Chüthuni
(b) February          Chüsolopra
(c) March  \textit{Orolopra}
(d) April  \textit{Khraniū}
(e) May  \textit{Khrana}
(f) June  \textit{Pfozū}
(g) July  \textit{Sale}
(h) August  \textit{Rolei}
(i) September  \textit{Onu}
(j) October  \textit{Mazhalupfu}
(k) November  \textit{Belu}
(l) December  \textit{Okro}

4.6.2. Significance of the months

4.6.2.1. Month of January - \textit{Chūthuni khro}

It is a period of matrimony, inauguration of tilling of soil, bringing manure to the paddy field, transplantation of fruit trees. It is also the time for cutting of fire-wood, playing of bugles, musical instruments, amusement with games and sports. Chūthuni month is the new-year for Shūpfomei. It is full of merriment, happiness is seen in all the surroundings and it is also a day of relaxation for the people from work.\textsuperscript{34} During this month the following days are observed as a day of genna by the village and the whole Shūpfomei tribe.

\textsuperscript{1} - \textit{Phehrū mani},\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{1} K. Lohrū. (Retd. A.I.) Interviewed on the 14\textsuperscript{th} May, 1994
\textsuperscript{3} Ref. Pp. 217-218
5<sup>th</sup> - *Ora mani*, 36

6<sup>n</sup> - *Pfureshu mani*, 37

8<sup>th</sup> - *Omi kazzu mani*, 38

18<sup>th</sup> - Zhepe (announcement for the preparation of rice beer for Chūthuni feast),

25<sup>th</sup> - *Nisha* (advent of the feast),

26<sup>th</sup> - Nijū (main feast day),

27<sup>th</sup> - *Oshu kope* (chasing and catching of bird competition, giving farewell to visitors and guests),

28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> - *Oni zho* (observing the feast).

### 4.6.2.2. Month of February - Chūsolopra khro

It is the month of sowing millet seed (*osūtho*) and often called the sowing of seed month. Many vegetable seeds are sown in this month like potato, Naga onion (*kopfopro*), garlic, cabbage, maize, pumpkin, cucumber, etc. and the ploughing of terrace field (*dothi kashi*) is also done.

The month of February will have the following days of genna.

1<sup>st</sup> - *Ora mani*, 39

6<sup>th</sup> - *Pfureshu mani*, 40

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Ibidem.,
Ibidem.,
Ibidem.,
Ref. Pp. 217 - 218
Ibid.,
5th – *Omi kazhi mani*, it is the king who will officially inaugurate the sowing of seed for the whole people on the eleventh day of the this month and the people will also follow after him.

9th – *Tokho mani* (a day of prayer for sustaining food stuff),

10th – *Oni anii* (post celebration of Chüthuni feast),

11th – *Movu mati tho* (the king will inaugurate the sowing seed),

13th – *Ongho sole* (inauguration of tilling),

14th – *Ongho pa* (second inauguration of the sowing of seed),

15th – *Zhongo mani* (a day of rest from sowing of seeds).

### 4.6.2.3. Month of March - *Orolopra khro*

The month has the significance of tilling of paddy field, construction of house, pulling of memorial stones by Zhosomei, etc. The king will once again inaugurate the sowing of paddy seed (*othethe*) in the nursery. Paddy seeds are reared in a separate prepared place on a dry land and after three month, the paddy seedling are that transplanted in a wet field.

The following days are observed as genna,

1st – *Ora mani*,

6th – *Pjureshi mani*. 

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5th – Thobu mani (a day of prayer for wealth),

6th – Lopra zho kari (first day of clearing the paddy field),

10th – Lopra zho totsii (second day of clearing the paddy field),

11th – Lora zho kono (last day of clearing the paddy field),

12th – Movu mati tho (the king inaugurates the sowing of paddy seed in a nursery plot),

13th – Ba mani (rest from putting seed),

14th – Ongho so (inaugurate the work again),

15th – Ongho pa (second day of inauguration),

16th – Zhongu mani (observing the day of rest),

18th – Khrehu kashii mani (a day of prayer from pest).

4.6.2.4. Month of April - Khronii khro

The month of April is known and the external atmosphere of warm and the coming of spring season is clearly noticed with the new leave, flowers and the weather is warm. It is the best month where merit feast is celebrated, and the continuation of the sowing of seeds like soya bean and the advent of cuckoo (koti) (a kind of migrated bird commonly known as kotu due to its cuckoo sounds) can be heard.
The following days are observed as genna,

3\textsuperscript{rd} - \textit{Ora mani}, \textsuperscript{44}

6\textsuperscript{th} - \textit{Pfureshū mani}, \textsuperscript{45}

8\textsuperscript{th} - \textit{Omi kazhū mani}, \textsuperscript{46} and

14\textsuperscript{th} - \textit{Ojū kathi mani} (a day of prayer to God to sustain the earth from darkness).

\textbf{4.6.2.5. Month of May - \textit{Khraṇī khro}}

It is the month of harrowing of jhum field, sowing of summer vegetables, transplantation of chilly plants, bamboo, cactus, banana plants and the advent of migrated bird - \textit{makhrīpido}, which has a special chirping sound. Paddy transplantation begins according to the monsoon climate and rain. If the monsoon is early people don’t usually wait for the feast of \textit{Chūjānī} (a feast celebrated in order to prepare physically for the heavy cultivation work).

The following days will be observed as genna,

3\textsuperscript{rd} - \textit{Ora mani}, \textsuperscript{47}

6\textsuperscript{th} - \textit{Pfureshū mani}, \textsuperscript{48}

9\textsuperscript{th} - \textit{Omi kazhū mani} \textsuperscript{49} respectively.

\textsuperscript{44} (Ref) Pp. 217-218
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibidem.

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4.6.2.6. Month of June - Pfozü khro

The month of June is a busy month for the people because of field work and if monsoon is timely, all the transplantation of paddy is done in this month. Apart from cultivation, blacksmith work is also carried out, sowing of soya bean, Naga dal (hrotho) transplantation of maize plant and Chinese cabbage is done.

The following days will be observed as a day of genna,

3rd – Ora mani, 50

6th – Pfureshü mani, 51

9th – Dzü kho mani (asking God to send proper rain for cultivation),

14th – Doshu pirä mani (a day observing for nice rain to paddy seedling transplantation),

18th – Zhepe le (announcing the coming feast of Chüjüni before cultivation),

21st – Thopre oso kozhu le (bulls are killed and meat shared for the feast),

22nd – Othe pei (gathering paddy seedling from the nursery for transplantation),

23rd – Thopre le (waiting for the day of transplantation),

24th – Thopre pa (second day of waiting),

25th – Movu ale (the king sanctification and purification before the plantation),

26th – Ekrü le (work of blacksmith for the agriculture),

27th – Chüjüni mani le (feast day of Chüjüni),

Ibidem.,
Ibidem.
28th - Pfuresshua mani (observing a genna from greediness),
29th - Moso thole (the general public will observe a day of prayer before the cultivation.

4.6.2.7. Month of July - Sale khro

This month is considered as the sacred month for Shupfomei Naga tribe. This month celebrates the Saleni feast, which is full of rites and rituals. Generally people do the cultivation up to the middle of July. Plantation of trees and sowing of Naga dal (hrotho), harvesting of millet, garlic and blowing of bugles (choha kei) is done.

The following days will be observed as genna,
3rd - Ora mani. 52
5th - Pfuresshua mani, 53
8th - Dzukho mani respectively.
18th July is Zhepe (announcement of the preparation of rice beer),
20th - The second day for announcement of the rice beer for Saleni feast.
23rd Omora ashu pfole (inviting the spirit and asking God for wealth).
24th - The real feast day of Saleni begins,
25th Otupro pfiu kari (first day of carrying cattle grass),
26th Otupro pfiu totsü (second day of carrying cattle grass),
27th Otupro pfiu kono (the last day of carrying cattle grass),
28th Macha kozü (sacred meal given to children),

52 Ref. Pp. 217-218
53 Ibsd.
29th Niju (the main feast day of Saleni), the rest days are called “Oni zo” means observing the feast day and celebration continues till the 3rd of August.

4.6.2.8. Month of August - Rolei khiro

The month of August is a relaxed month when the men folk make handicrafts items like making basket, mat, often going to their field to look into the water drainage, canals, etc. while the women folk do weaving of shawls, catching of fish, weeding of paddy fields and collecting vegetables, etc.

The month of August will have the following days of genna:-

1st - Ora mani,

3rd - Oshu kope (farewell to the visitors and guests),

4th - Ale lepa (a day of sanctification and purification),

5th - Ale lejü (main day of sanctification and purification),

12th - Oni anü (post celebration of Saleni),

13th - Ongho koso kari (inauguration of work after celebration).

14th - Ongho koso pa (second day of inauguration),

16th - Omo pra kohro mani (a day of prayer to God for sprouting of paddy seedling which was just plantated).

54. (Ref) Pp. 217-218
18th – Pitureshü mani, 55
22nd – Okhe sü mani (a day of prayer from pest).

4.6.2.9 Month of September - Onu khro

It is during this month that renovation of traditional migration road and memorial stones is done. The village chiefs are coronated, new village foundation stones are laid, sowing of seeds like chilly, mustard, garlic is done.

The following days will be observed as genna:

1st – Lijü vale (renovate the old traditional road),
2nd – Tokho mani (asking God to spare food stuff),
3rd – Ora mani, 56
20th – 22nd Tapha (cleaning and clearing of the village, roads etc.),
23rd – Motcho kotho mani,
24th – Lohozù,
25th – Mosotho
26th – Ba mani,
27th – Nahri mani,
28th – Onu ni, (the celebration of the feast of joyful harest)
29th Tuphe čîuno (on this day cattle are put into the respective shed).

55. (Ref) Pp. 217-218
56. Ibid.
4.6.2.10. Month of October - *Mazhalupfu khro*

Weaving of clothes, tilling of soil for the coming year for sowing paddy seed, millet, maize, potato, etc. The following days are observed as genna:-

3rd – *Ora mani*, \(^{57}\)

6th – *Pfureshū mani*, \(^{58}\)

8th – *Khibodu mani*,

9th – *Oche tokho mani*,

22nd – *Ochū kazhū mani* (asking God for good weather for harvest of jhum fields).

4.6.2.11. Month of November - *Belu khro*

It is the harvest month when the paddy is cut, thrashed, winnowed and carried home. The following days are observed as genna,

3rd – *Ora mani*, \(^{59}\)

6th – *Pfureshū mani*, \(^{60}\)

8th – *Tokho mani*,

25th – *Belu mani* (feast day of Belu month),

26th – *Belu lejū* (main feast day of Belu feast),

27th – *Tobu koto*,

\(^{57}\) Ibid.,

\(^{58}\) Ibid.,

\(^{59}\) Ibid.,

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
29th – Bepi apra.

4.6.2.12. Month of December - Okro khro

The month is known for bidding farewell to the dead persons and inauguration by the person who gives the feast of merit (zhoso mozūmei), setting the cattle free in the field, playing of bugles and amusing games. The following days will be observed as a genna:

3rd – Ora mani,

6th – Pfureshi mani,

8th – Omi kazhii mani (a day of prayer to avert fire accident),

12th – Molu kosii mani (a day of prayer to God to avert earthquake),

25th – Omi koro kro (on this day Shüpfomei remember all who have died in fire accident),

26th – shuzü kro (on this day they remember all those who died by bullet, drowning, falling from tree),

27th – Okro krojii (a day set apart to remember all those who have died a natural death),

28th – Ongho so (one of the elderly person has to inaugurate the work by going beyond the village gate after the observation of the three sacred days for the death.)

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{[Ref.] Pp. 217-218}\]
4.7. Expression of signs and symbols

4.7.1. Understanding signs and symbols

The inner quest of man is to express his deep experience of truth, goodness and beauty in a tangible manner. As a social being he tries to articulate such experience through gestures of signs and symbols. Shüpfomei have a very rich collections of signs and symbol language. While such signs and symbols vary from culture to culture, race to race and there is no international culture where is taken as a standard. Signs and symbols are also expressed through songs, dances, music, drama, etc. It is through such signs and symbols language that the community understands the joys, pains, fears and fright, etc.

4.7.2. What are signs and symbols?

"Sign is something that points to...indicate towards something of a reality..." 63

"Symbol is a sign that points toward a deeper meaning of a reality and does not exhaust meaning of the reality." 64

4.7.2.1. Shüpfomei signs and symbols

Shüpfomei Naga tribe does not have written manuscripts where she can impart the signs and symbols, but the rich signs and symbols are communicated through oral tradition and till today it stands as a powerful meaning to the present generation.

64. Ibid.
According to N. Saleo, he laments over for not using the rich signs and symbolism in today's Church service, etc. While K. Lohru, Retd. A.I. he says that, there are many reasons as to why such sense of loss is felt; it is due to the lack of usage, not in touch with the reality, present mode of education which alienate the cultural background. We shall see some of the rich signs and symbolism of Shupfomei Naga tribe.

4.7.2.2. Reading the signs and symbols

4.7.2.2.1. Giving spade handle to a person - *Kofo ko dazo kapi*

This symbolizes asking forgiveness from the owner for the wrong, the harm done to the other. The defeated person during the village war in olden days or individual fight, comes with such article to seek reconciliation with the victor. It stands for acceptance of the defeat and surrender. It also seeks forgiveness and when such occasion comes the victor has to accept and forgive the person and reconcile with the other.

4.7.2.2.2. Giving of spear - *Ingho kapi*

The giving of spear connotes for the whole village or tribe who are at war. This symbolizes that there be no more war but peace and reconciliation. The spear stands for

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N. Saleo. Interview on 11th April, 1989.

K. Lohru, A.I. Interview on 11th April, 1989. Both of them agreed that inspite of the present education system many of the children can able to read the signs and symbols of the ancestors. It is due to their contact with their parents, elders and village. Christianity and education are the two great forces which has helped the younger generation a better understanding of such signs and symbols. During the interview with both of them, they also agree that with the hostel or boarding system force their children to leave home and they fear that slowly the children will not able to learn the many signs and symbols of the forefathers.
defense, instrument used during war. It is the defeated village that gives the spear to the victor, and seeks peace and brotherhood.

4.7.2.2.3. Giving one’s personal shawl - *Osa saba kapi*

It is often the practice even today when a personal friend dies, his intimate friend covers the dead body with personal shawl. This symbolizes as intimate friendship, love and remembrance. It has a very deep meaning and significance for lovers and friends who have long friendship.

4.7.2.2.4. Giving a piece of meat - *Oso kapi*

It is often for the parent to give to their married daughters a strip of meat, which symbolizes their blessing, remembrance and wishing the other a long prosperous life. The occasion where parent gives a piece of sliced meat is during the festivals called “Sonū”. In place of the father it is the elder brother who gives to all their married sisters, aunts and nieces as a sign of blessing and long life.

4.7.2.2.5. Giving of rice beer - *Ozhe mali kapi*

It has two meanings firstly, to live like father and son and secondly, to forgive the wrong deeds and the mistakes. Giving rice beer in the first case is a sign of harmony and
to live like father and son as one family. It also shows mutual relationship between the neighbours and even close friends.

In the second context it is more or less the same with the giving of spade handle to a person. It is to restore the lost friendship due to wrong deeds a mistake. The family who steals something or by mistake taken something by mistake often comes for reconciliation by bringing a gourd of rice beer explaining the causes and asking forgiveness. In such cases the offense and wrong deeds are forgiven and relationship is built up. Till today this practice is done and held in high esteem. It is one of the best form of confessions for Shüpfomei Naga tribe.

4.7.2.2.6. Putting grass across the road - Opro khrisî kocho

The symbolic meaning is that the person has gone ahead, gone in this or that way. This practice is done especially during the hunting expedition to unknown areas. Hunting is done with the people following different routes with an agreement to meet at a particular place. When such signs like putting of grass is put across the road, the party can understand that the other group, he/she has gone homeward or ahead. Even today among friends such action is done.
4.7.2.7. Target made of sheaves of grass - *Prodzi kodzi kocho*

This symbolizes that the particular area or goods are reserved by the owner which is meant for future purpose. It means ‘don’t cut or take it away’ it is preserved for some good purpose such as trees for building material, some implements, and some stone to be used for memorial erection, etc. The owner often marks such things with signs near the bamboo grooves, banana plant, fish-pond, etc. This grass target is done with shift of grass rolled in a bundle then pierced into it with three or four long sticks and it is then planted near the goods. The owner reserves the person who sees this sign will neither cut nor steal because he understands that it. Such signs call for restraint on other person whose intention is to cut or take the things, such practices calls for sincerity and respect for the other.

4.7.2.8. Planting of trees and stones - *Osi ye otsu koshu*

The whole meaning is to mark boundary. It shows that the boundary of the particular person where the mark ends. The planting of tree, cactus, stone and even digging drains is to show to the future generation that the things whether that boundary belong to the person who makes the boundary. According to Shüpomei terminology it is known as “*oritsu, phikhu koshu, ketho kopfo*” etc.
4.7.2.9. Closed door with stick across - Chiikhu chiîta ta kowo

In the village people generally don’t use lock and key to close their door. But a long wooden plank is placed across the door to show that nobody is at home. Such signs were respected and binding in olden days. It showed their sincerity, honesty and truthfulness, but we cannot imagine today’s situation.

4.7.2.10. Giving charcoal - Pizü kapi

In the olden days the warring faction between villages used to give charcoal which indicates that they will burn their village and houses. It shows signs of trouble awaiting them from the enemy.

Conclusion

Religion is considered as the oldest form of institution which man experience the infinite. Sociologist and anthropologists give their approach to religion in their context. Shüpfomei concept of religion, religious practices, code of life and the social conventional rule and regulations and their social life are not a dichotomy, instead it is an integral part of their life where life and religion meet. Though their philosophical and theological treaties may not be written down, but reading the signs of nature was their invisible God, where the forefathers could communicate and nature as the real communicator to the forefathers. Thus, Shüpfomei forefathers could read nature because
it was communicating to them without being confined to a particular place, time and season. Eco-spirituality was seen as their basic tenant of the forefathers.

Believing in the existence of spirits is very strong and it is expressed in the offering of animals, material objects etc. which propitiated the evil spirits (ora kashū) to avert the sickness, misfortunes, illness, natural calamities etc. Thus, by propitiating the spirits their well being or sickness are assured and vice-versa. The spirits are known by their place, actions and every Shüpforme area has certain place where the forefathers used to say, that and that place is spirit haunted place etc.

Signs and symbols are evocative and powerful external sign, which communicate to the people. The arrival of certain birds, flowers, insects, etc. shows the seasonal changes and reading these signs, Shüpforme forefathers will tell the different seasons. The celebration of different gennas also brings the observance and prohibition of the attitude of the people. The forefathers have different symbols, which convey signs of friendship, anger, war, revenge, love, etc. With the wake of Christianity and Education the cultural heritage is slowly on the verge of decay. The real question is whether in the wake of Christianity and Education Shüpforme tribe is going away from the values of the forefathers?