

Role of Te-I Khukhu Festival as a Traditional Social Structure and Social Integration in Viswema Village, Nagaland, India

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Abstract

The Te-I Khukhu festival constitutes a central traditional institution in Viswema village, situated in the Southern Angami Naga region under the Kohima district of Nagaland. Beyond its cultural dimension, the Te-I Khukhu festival functions as an institutionalized social practice rooted in customary law and inherited traditions. It plays a significant role in maintaining traditional institutional structure and fostering social integration by reinforcing shared norms, collective values, and communal solidarity. The study examines how the Te-I Khukhu festival acts as a bridge between inherited traditions and changing social relationships within the village, while also regulating social interactions and contributing to social order and local development. Data were collected from two main sources, namely primary and secondary, to provide a comprehensive basis for analyzing the Te-I Khukhu festival as a traditional social structure and a mechanism of social integration within its socio-cultural context.

Keywords: Te-I Khukhu Festival, Inherited Traditions, Traditional Institutional Structure, Social Integration, Customary Law, Modernity

Introduction

Festival is a form of public entertainment and collective participation, contributes to both the strengthening and preserving of identity, and traditional practices of the communal while also illuminating its shared interests. It operates as the perfect medium to establish and learn one's culture and tradition through oral transmission, interactive patterns, outfit designs, and performative expressions. In this way, festivals not only preserve but also spread culture and tradition from one generation to another generation. And remain a foremost aspect of community life, serving to express sentiments, social atmosphere, and performances that help rejuvenate the traditionally accepted ethics, norms, and beliefs of the people. During the course of the festival, people take time to reconnect and strengthen their communal ties. Families come together as one, while the elderly person and the youth share mutual spaces for interaction and exchange. Relatives from near and far return to their ancestral home environment, renewing kinship linkages, and familial bonds. Neighbours and friends gather to share happiness, stories, and reminiscences. These connections in the festival helps reinforce social links and nurture the spirit of closeness. It is a cycle when social interlinkages are at their peak, forming a favourable environment for individuals to strengthen existing relationships, reaffirm social relations, and establish fresh contacts. In this sense, festival acts as an important traditional institution that nurtures social inclusion within the community. Furthermore, it marks a stage when members of the

community assemble to strengthen their cultural beliefs and morals while also expressing their collective ambitions (Lanunungsang & Ovung, 2012). In keeping with the spirit of the festival, rites are performed that perform as a powerful unifying force, influencing, and bonding the people of the community. Rituals are connected with a set of actions that regularly comprise the use of gestures, words, and objects performed at specific times and places prearranged by religion or tradition, predominantly for symbolic value. These actions are not arbitrary; they abide by norms within a community. They include the manipulation of objects and actions that hold meaning within the framework of the divine order. The objects used in rituals, such as offerings, sacred symbols or ceremonial spaces, derive their significance from shared beliefs and knowledge rather than from their phenomenal nature. Rituals appear as an organized performances of behaviours intended to impact the non-physical powers and are intended to influence preternatural entities or forces in accordance with the performer's goals and interests. At the same time, they regulate conduct, define roles and structure participation within the group. By bringing people together in coordinated action, rituals contribute to the formation of a sense of belonging and continuity. Rituals further establish a connection between the human worldview and the supernatural realm, facilitating individuals to interconnect with and understand the supernatural. The site of performance, the objects used, the language spoken, and the participant's performance all carry deep representative significance within the traditional and spiritual fabric of the community. Each component of the ritual is enclosed with meaning, strengthening shared memory, and belief structures.

Festivals are structured forms of traditional presentations through which rituals and symbols function as mechanisms for the expression, protecting, and reproduction of tradition within a specific socio-cultural context. The observances of the festivals continue to help in preserving culture because festivals are not merely occasions for merrymaking but also bring the community together as one as a whole, evoke coordinated social involvement, play a major role in transferring cultural principles, and interconnect societal aspirations. In this way, festivals connect people as a unified whole, emphasizing collective consciousness and strengthening the ethical bonds that sustain community life (Nagi, 2018). Within this research paradigm, Te-l Khukhu festival can be understood as a traditional social structure deeply rooted with the people's normative order. It organizes participation, reinforces customary duties, and maintain a common identity through structural ritual performance. In this sense, the Te-l Khukhu festival is considered as a main expression for sustaining indigenous identity and common values. At the same time, it offers a vital analytical lens for exploring how indigenous practices are enacted, transferred, and negotiated in response to shifting social situations, thereby revealing the ways in which they balances the cultural continuity with the pressures of modernity and social transformation.

Viswema village has been selected for the present study as the Te-l Khukhu festival continues to be actively celebrated. The village is situated in the Jakhama circle of the Kohima district of the Indian state of Nagaland. It is considered as the second largest village in the state of Nagaland, with a population of 7,417 (as per the Census of 2011), of which 3,576 are males, and 3,841 are females, with a total of 1,369 households. The

demographic size and household composition of Viswema village provide a meaningful social context for analyzing the patterns of social bindings, dynamic natures, and social integration in relation to the celebration of the Te-I Khukhu festival. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore how the Te-I Khukhu festival functions as a social institution that form collective interaction and identity, representing the festival bringing people together as one through shared norms, cultural performances, and participatory activities, while also highlighting the traditional social structures, including family ties, leadership roles, and customary duties. Besides, the festival not only preserves indigenous ethics and transmits traditional knowledge but also contributes to social cohesion by integration of individuals into the community, that guide the social life in Viswema village, Nagaland.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded on the theoretical contributions of Emile Durkheim's theory of social solidarity and A. R. Radcliffe Brown's structural functionalism to understand the role of Te-I Khukhu festival in sustaining social integration and structural continuity in Viswema village. These perspectives provide a conceptual basis as how cultural practices function as integral components of the social system. From Durkheim's standpoint, society is established through a shared social system of beliefs, values, and moral regulations, theorized as the collective conscience. Rituals and collective ceremonies contributes to form social solidarity by fostering mutual emotional and symbolic experiences among participants (Durkheim, 1893). In this context, through participation in the celebration of the Te-I Khukhu festival and ritual observances, people of Viswema village reaffirm their common identity and strengthen their relationships to the social group. Such collective get-together develop what Durkheim explains as ethical unity, thereby ensuring continuity and cohesion of the existing social order. In this context, the Te-I Khukhu festival is not solely a cultural event but an important social institution that upholds social cohesion and reinforce common identity.

In contrast, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism emphasizes on the concept of social institutions and patterned relationships in the social structure of society. Society is understood as an organised social network of mutually dependent roles, which includes kinship bonds, leadership structures, and customary practices. Rituals and traditional ceremonies regulate social behaviour, define obligations, and reinforce institutional continuity. By reaffirming established roles and patterns of interaction, such practices contribute to the stability and equilibrium of the overall social arrangement (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Applied to the Te-I Khukhu festival, this approach explain how these practices strengthen the family ties, validate leadership authority, reinforce customary obligations, and maintain traditional norms among the people in Viswema village. Together, these perspectives articulates the dual role of the Te-I Khukhu festival as both a mechanism of social integration and a structural institution that preserves and transmits traditional social order.

Methods of Data Collection

The study is based on a qualitative research design, which is employed to analyse the cultural and social significance of the Te-l Khukhu festival in Viswema village. A case study approach is adopted to allow an in-depth understanding of how the Te-l Khukhu festival reflects customary law and communal values, while also highlighting its evolving role in contemporary social contexts. This approach enables a comprehensive analysis of Te-l Khukhu festival's structural and integrative functions within Viswema village.

Both primary and secondary data have been used for study purpose. Primary data were collected through participant observation during the celebration of the Te-l Khukhu festival, where attention was given to ritual performances, leadership roles and patterns of community participation. First-hand observation during this events offered valuable insights into the symbolic and social dimensions of the Te-l Khukhu festival and how it continues to reinforce customary law and communal harmony. In addition, the interview method was employed through an interview schedule involving village elders, indigenous leaders, youths, and women. These interviews were unstructured, allowing flexibility to explore both personal experiences and shared memories, while capturing generational perspectives on the meaning, continuity, and transformation of the Te-l Khukhu festival. The secondary data were drawn from published books, journal articles, local souvenirs, newspapers, the internet and other existing literature that document the Naga festivals, indigenous governance and oral traditions. These sources provided a broader contextual framework for understanding the Te-l Khukhu festival within the larger spectrum of Naga cultural practices and social structures.

Discussion

Te-l Khukhu festival continues to function as a vital cultural institution in Viswema village, associated with in a deep connection to ancestral heritage while concurrently adapting to a changing social setting. The term "Te-l Khukhu" is derived from two separate words: *Te-l*, meaning "toad," and *Khukhu*, meaning "serving or sharing of food" in the local dialect of Viswema village. In simple meaning, it signifies a meal symbolically connected to the toad's share. It is also a special occasion dedicated to honouring and celebrating the girl child in Viswema village. The festival is traditionally celebrated annually during the second week of July or specifically on the 13th of the month. The celebration is observed through sequence of rituals, dances, and songs, during which elders prepare food for the celebration, lead prayers, and offer blessings invoking prosperity and well-being for their people. Traditional food, folk games, and feasts help strengthen social bonds among families and relatives. The Te-l Khukhu festival functions as a structural pillar in preserving indigenous identity and communal values. This provides an important lens for examining how traditional practices are enacted, transmitted, and adapted, revealing the ways in which they balances the preservation of cultural heritage with the demands of modern influences and social transformation.

Preparations for the Te-I Khukhu festival reflect a clear division of work in a traditional social structures. Before the celebration, men engage in hunting, fishing, and collecting carpenter worms, particularly from oak trees, whereas the women prepare millet and gather edible snails from the paddy fields. These activities reveal the cooperative nature of practices and reveals interdependence among the members. On the day of the festival, every household prepares special meals that are shared not only within families but also with children, relatives, and neighbours. This collective sharing of food holds a critical role in strengthening social bonds, fostering reciprocity, and reinforcing social solidarity. They gathered in peer groups and participate in various activities that further encourage friendship and mutual support. The Te-I Khukhu festival is a primary cultural institution structured around ritual performances, special meals prepared in their honour, folk performances, and social gatherings. The authoritative presence of the village elders and the dominant role of mothers in overseeing ritual performances and ensuring that participants fulfil their ceremonial responsibilities reflect a system of customary law derived from tradition. In this system, leadership derives from inherited norms rather than formal political structures, strengthening continuity in indigenous social organisations.

The Te-I Khukhu festival is an important institutional expression of customary law and traditional local leadership structures. Because during the celebration, disputes are resolved, strained social relationships are renewed, and communal harmony is restored. Although formal administrative institutions now coexist alongside traditional power, the Te-I Khukhu festival continues to function as a domain in which customary law retains social relevance. It is also observed that a gradual transformation in leadership and participation patterns in the Te-I Khukhu festival. Increasing involvement of youth and women in organisational and leadership roles indicates a shift towards more inclusive forms of control. Rituals and oral traditions remain integral to fostering social cohesion within the village. Songs and dances performed in the celebration are not only recreational but performative expressions of shared memory and collective identity. These cultural forms facilitate the intergenerational transmission of values, norms, and indigenous knowledge. Throughout the observance of this festival, social differences related to age, gender, and status are temporarily minimised as the members participate collectively in celebration and remembrance. The renewal of kinship bonds, inter-clan cooperation, and shared feasting reinforce the festival's role as a mechanism of social integration and cultural continuity. At the same time, the Te-I Khukhu festival demonstrates a notable capacity for cultural adaptation. Influenced by modernization, education, residential relocation, and the arrival of Christianity, these factors have led to the reduction of certain ritual elements, although some households continue to observe them. Despite these changes, the fundamental spirit of collective celebration, gratitude, and social unity remains intact. In the celebration, the participation of younger peers reflects a consciousness of the Te-I Khukhu festival as a platform for cultural revival. Women's active involvement in organizing and managing the festival's activities signifies evolving gender dynamics, marking a gradual shift towards better social inclusivity. Moreover, the incorporation of media, tourism, and digital platforms reveals how this festival is being decontextualized within contemporary modes of cultural expressions. Beyond its ceremonial dimensions, the Te-I Khukhu festival also functions as a medium for addressing social concerns and

strengthening common responsibility. The village council's involvement in organizing the celebration shows its commitment to cultural preservation and collective accountability. These efforts emphasize a broader role in shaping social ethics and fostering development among the people of Viswema village.

Conclusion

The Te-l Khukhu festival of Viswema village stands as a profound expression of cultural continuity, customary law, and social harmony. Through its rituals, oral traditions, and communal activities, it reinforces customary norms and strengthens the structural foundations of village life. The study indicates that the Te-l Khukhu festival functions not simply as a cultural celebration but as an essential social institution that upholds unity, cooperation, and collective identity. By renewing kinship ties, encouraging intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and fostering communal responsibility, the Te-l Khukhu festival promotes social integration in the village. The coexistence of tradition and modern influences reveals the resilience of indigenous institutions in Viswema village. Ultimately, the Te-l Khukhu festival remains a living social institution through which cultural heritage, social cohesion, and collective identity are sustained across generations. This festival showed that traditional social structures in Viswema village are capable of adapting to social change while preserving cultural continuity. In this way, the Te-l Khukhu festival maintains a balance between tradition and modern influences, strengthening collective identity while responding to new social realities.

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