

A Study of the Traditional Institutions and Beliefs and Customs of Namphake Village of Tai Phake Village as a Living Museum

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Abstract

The Tai Phake people, a small yet culturally distinct Tai community, represent an important link between Southeast Asia and Northeast India. Migrating from Yunnan in China through Upper Myanmar, the community settled in Assam during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, driven by political upheavals and the search for fertile agricultural land. Today, their settlements are concentrated in a few villages in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, including Nam Phake, Tipam Phake, Borphake, and others, which serve as centers of cultural preservation. Despite their limited population, the Tai Phakes have retained their language, Theravada Buddhist practices, and clan-based social organization, while also adapting to Assamese influences. This paper explores their historical background, origin, language, village distribution, and socio-cultural identity, drawing on both historical sources and contemporary ethnographic studies. By examining their migration history and cultural continuity, the study highlights the resilience of the Tai Phakes in safeguarding their heritage amidst broader processes of assimilation and change in Northeast India.

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Introduction

The Tai Phake community of Assam represents a significant yet understudied strand of India's cultural mosaic. Descended from the broader Tai race, their migration from the Shan states of Myanmar into Northeast India during the eighteenth century marked the transplantation of a distinct socio-cultural system rooted in Theravada Buddhism, agrarian practices, and oral traditions (Barua, 2005; Gogoi, 2017). Today, Namphake village in Dibrugarh district constitutes the largest Tai Phake settlement in Assam and is often described as a "living museum", where cultural practices are not fossilized relics but actively embodied in daily life. The significance of Namphake lies in its unique preservation of Tai cultural identity amidst the assimilative pressures of mainstream Assamese and Indian society. The community sustains an intricate cultural repertoire, ranging from ritual practices, folklore, language, literature, architecture, and traditional weaving to socio-religious institutions anchored around the village Buddhist monastery (Phukan, 2013). This cultural continuity positions Namphake as a vital site for understanding both heritage resilience and the challenges of cultural survival in a globalizing context. Scholars of anthropology and cultural studies increasingly argue that indigenous communities function as repositories of intangible cultural heritage, which require both documentation and recognition as dynamic systems rather than static traditions (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006).

However, despite its cultural richness, Namphake has received limited scholarly engagement. The existing body of literature on Tai groups in Assam primarily focuses on ethnographic descriptions or linguistic documentation, often overlooking the lived cultural landscape of Namphake (Morey, 2005; Gogoi, 2017). Critical issues such as language endangerment, generational shifts in cultural participation, and the impacts of modernization on traditional practices remain underexplored. Without systematic study, there is a risk

that much of this intangible heritage may erode, particularly as younger generations are increasingly oriented towards mainstream educational and occupational aspirations.

The present study is guided by the rationale that Namphake must be conceptualized as a living museum - a space where cultural practices are continuously enacted, reinterpreted, and transmitted across generations. By framing Namphake within this conceptual lens, the study contributes to broader academic discourses on cultural heritage, ethnography, and indigenous identity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the relevance of Namphake for policy frameworks on cultural preservation and sustainable tourism development, highlighting its potential as a model for safeguarding minority cultures without commodifying them.

In doing so, the paper seeks to address three key objectives: (i) to document the socio-religious and cultural practices of Namphake, (ii) to analyze the dynamics of cultural continuity amidst modern pressures, and (iii) to situate Namphake within the larger discourse of intangible cultural heritage in South and Southeast Asia.

Data and Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, appropriate for understanding the lived cultural practices and heritage of the Tai Phake community in Namphake village. Ethnography allows the researcher to interpret the meanings embedded in rituals, traditions, and everyday practices, while situating them within historical and socio-cultural contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

Study Area

The research was conducted in Namphake village, located in Naharkatia subdivision of Dibrugarh district, Assam. Established in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Namphake today consists of approximately 150 households, making it the largest Tai Phake settlement in Assam (Barua, 2005). The village is distinguished by its Buddhist monastery (Vihara), community-centric socio-religious institutions, and distinctive traditional architecture, which together make it an important site for cultural preservation and ethnographic research.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized:

Primary Data

Field Visits and Observation: Participant observation was carried out to capture the cultural life of the community, including festivals, rituals, weaving practices, and Buddhist religious activities.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with village elders, monks, artisans, women weavers, and youth, to understand intergenerational perspectives on cultural continuity and change.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Group interactions were organized with community leaders and women's groups to examine collective memory and cultural transmission mechanisms.

Secondary Data

Relevant books, journal articles, census reports, and archival materials were reviewed to contextualize the historical migration of the Tai Phake, the role of Theravada Buddhism, and their socio-cultural evolution in Assam. Previous works by Barua (2005), Morey (2005), and Phukan (2013) provided important ethnographic and linguistic foundations.

Sampling and Respondent Profile

Given the small size of the community, the study adopted a purposive sampling method (Patton, 2015). A total of 35 respondents were selected, ensuring representation across different age groups,

genders, and occupational categories. This purposive selection enabled an in-depth exploration of the cultural landscape and how it is perceived across generations.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by the concept of “living museum”, which frames Namphake as a dynamic space of cultural performance rather than a static heritage site (Smith, 2006). Data collected through interviews and observations were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), categorizing recurring themes such as religious practices, language use, traditional weaving, community institutions, and challenges of modernization. Triangulation of multiple sources ensured reliability and validity.

Historical Background of the Tai-Phake People

The Tai-Phake people, a branch of the broader Tai community, migrated to Assam in Northeastern India and established their kingdom towards the end of the eighteenth century. The term *Phake* is derived from the Tai words *Pa* (wall) and *Ke/Ge* (ancient or old), reflecting their association with the mountainous terrain of their settlement (Saikia, 2011). Historically, the Tai peoples aimed to expand their kingdoms to secure political recognition and enhance the livelihoods of their subjects (Dutta, 1985). According to tradition, three princes—Chow Seukapha, Chow Seukhanpha, and Chow Seuchatpha—set out from Yunnan with groups of followers, guided by their almanacs, and journeyed in different directions under military escort to ensure safety. The youngest prince, Chow Seuchatpha, established his reign in Yunnan, while Chow Seukhanpha, accompanied by the Tai-Phake people, moved northeast and founded a kingdom in Moug-Kwang (present-day Mogawng, Myanmar) in 1215 AD (Gait, 1963; Gogoi, 1996).

The Tai-Phakes were instructed to settle in the Hukawng Valley, where three rivers—Khe-Nan-Turung, Khe-Nan-Taram, and Khe-Nan-Chalip—merged near a stone wall, forming a gorge long known as *Pha-Ke*, meaning “the wall of an old hill” or “people living by the side of the mountain” (Baruah, 1992). Geographically, the Hukawng Valley was bounded by the Lang-Ta Hills in the east, the Puungyi-Punga Hills in the west, the Patkai Hills in the north (beyond which lay Assam), and the Jampu Hills in the south. The Tai-Phakes remained in this valley for more than four centuries. Eventually, the region came under Burmese rule, whose oppressive administration compelled the Tai-Phakes to seek alternative settlements (Acharyya, 1978).

During this period, the Tai-Phakes came into contact with the Singpho people around 1247 AD. Both groups, united in their resistance to Burmese oppression, entered into a pact of mutual assistance, ritually sealed by the slaughter of a buffalo and a communal feast (Dutta, 1985). In 1775 AD, the Tai-Phakes, accompanied by the Singphos, migrated toward Assam, following the same route once taken by King Seukapha (Dutta, 1985; Saikia, 2011). They first halted at a place on the Assam–Burma border, which they named Pang-Sao (*Pang* meaning “place” and *Sao* meaning “rest”). However, Burmese pursuit forced them to abandon this settlement and continue their journey (Baruah, 1992).

Eventually, the Tai-Phakes reached a moss-covered pond in present-day Arunachal Pradesh, which they named Nong-Taw, making it their settlement center. By the late eighteenth century, they had established a stable society there and developed close relations with the Khamptis (Gogoi, 1996). Their growing presence soon attracted the attention of the Sadiya Khowa king, who, alarmed by their alliance with the Singphos, dispatched an army to destroy the settlement. This confrontation culminated in a coup against the Sadiya Khowa king in 1797 AD, marking a decisive moment in the history of the Tai-Phakes’ migration and settlement in the region (Acharyya, 1978; Dutta, 1985).

Brief Origin of the Tai Phakes

The Tai Phakes, often referred to historically as *Phakials*, are a small Tai-speaking community settled primarily in the upper Assam region. The community is bilingual, speaking both the Phake language and Assamese. They possess a distinct script and have preserved several manuscripts, many of which are religious scriptures (Dutta, 1990; Gogoi, 2006). The Phakes also have a fine tradition of maintaining

genealogical records. One such genealogical record, known as *Ho Likboi*, documents the lineages of particular families. These records are usually prepared by an elderly man, called *Pathek*, who is well-versed in community history. For instance, one *Ho Likboi* found in the possession of Ai Mya Kheng Gohain of Nampkake village, dated around 1790, was read by Thou Mung Cheng Chon during the *Borsabasa* festival at Nongtao (Barua, 2005).

According to these records, the first person to descend from Mung Phake (a Phake principality at Mogoung in present-day Myanmar) was Thou Kyo Khon. The Phakes originally resided at the confluence of the Turung, Taram, and Silip rivers, within the jurisdiction of the Hukong Valley in Upper Burma (Nehru, 1987; Morey, 2005). The principality of Mung Phake was said to have been established by Chou Taa Cheo, consisting of 101 clans (*Fan Kun Pk Chu Neng*). The territorial extent of Mung Phake was marked by the Patkai Hills on the north, Nai Langta adjoining Borkhamti on the east, Jambubam near Mogoung on the south, and the Hukong Hame Hills and Pungi Punga on the west (Phukan, 2012).

Crossing into Assam in the latter half of the 18th century, the Tai Phake community migrated through various locations before settling permanently in nine villages across Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts (Namchoom, 2003; Gogoi, 2006). While the community self-identifies as Tai Phake, colonial records labeled them as *Phakial*. This term, however, has acquired derogatory connotations, as “phaki” in Assamese means “lie.” Some Assamese historians during the 1960s and 1970s misinterpreted the ethnonym to mean “liars,” suggesting that the community may have deceived others to acquire land in Northeast India (Saikia, 2004). Since the 1980s, however, there has been a conscious effort by the community to reinstate their authentic identity, preferring “Tai Phake” in official documents and rejecting the derogatory “Phakial” label (Dutta, 1990; Gogoi, 2006).

With the decline in the use of the Phake language and the gradual loss of vocabulary, community members have turned to innovative means to preserve their cultural heritage. Modern songs have been composed incorporating folklore and forgotten Tai words, with the hope that younger generations will be inspired to learn them and reconnect with their linguistic heritage (Morey, 2005; Baruah, 2014). Interestingly, within the same family, surnames vary—while older generations often used “Gohain,” a title associated with Ahom nobility, younger members increasingly prefer distinct Tai surnames, reflecting a shift in identity politics within the community (Phukan, 2012).

Language and Clans

The Tai Phake community has maintained its linguistic heritage primarily through the practice of speaking Tai within households, ensuring that children are introduced to their mother tongue from an early age. Consequently, most Tai Phakes are proficient speakers of the language, even if their ability to read and write in Tai varies (Baruah, 2003). To sustain literacy, members of the community periodically organize language classes for younger generations. At present, for instance, weekend classes on reading and writing in Tai are conducted by local enthusiasts such as Ngi Than Hailoung, reflecting the community’s commitment to preserving its linguistic identity (Phukan, 2012).

The struggle for cultural preservation extends beyond language to include attire, which continues to be woven entirely within the community. Traditional dress remains an important marker of identity, reinforcing cultural boundaries in the face of external influences (Sharma, 2016).

Linguistically, the Tai Phake language possesses a phonemic inventory of 16 vowels and 16 consonants. It is also a tonal language, where the meaning of a word shifts depending on tonal inflection. There are five primary tones in Tai Phake: high, low, mid (level), high rising, and low falling. These tonal distinctions can occur in both open and closed syllables, making tonal variation central to semantic differentiation (Morey, 2005; Diller, Edmondson & Luo, 2008). Such tonal systems are characteristic of the broader Tai-Kadai language family, but the Tai Phake dialect demonstrates unique features shaped by long-term settlement in Assam and interaction with Assamese speakers.

Through these strategies—daily usage, organized instruction, and integration of oral traditions—the Tai Phake community continues to assert the vitality of its language. At the same time, the interweaving of

linguistic and cultural practices reflects a larger effort to resist assimilation and preserve a distinct Tai identity within India's multicultural landscape.

Clans

The Tai Phake community in Assam is divided into nine distinct clans, each with its own hereditary title and lineage. Historical records indicate that when the Tai Phakes migrated and settled in Assam, the indigenous Assamese-speaking population encountered difficulty in pronouncing or recognizing their clan-specific surnames, which were rooted in Tai linguistic traditions and thus largely incomprehensible to the locals. To address this issue and facilitate identification, the community collectively adopted the term Koa Hai (with Kao meaning nine and Hai signifying clan or branch of the Tai race) to denote their nine clans. Over time, this term was linguistically transformed in local usage into Gohain, which subsequently became a widely used clan designation (Saikia, 2011; Gogoi, 2013). Despite this evolution, the contemporary Tai Phake generations have increasingly sought to reclaim their original surnames as markers of cultural identity and continuity. These include surnames such as Weingken, Thamoung, Sakhap, Hailoung, Chaohai, Pomung, Kheiinlung, Tumten, Chaton, and Maneing, among others (Phukan, 2005). This revival underscores an ongoing cultural negotiation within the community: balancing integration into the broader Assamese sociocultural milieu with the preservation of unique Tai Phake heritage.

The Guardian Spirit of the Tai Phake

Prior to their conversion to Buddhism, the Tai Phake revered an imageless guardian spirit known as Chow Chau Phalong. A modest shed or temple, located on the periphery of Nampakha village, continues to be dedicated to this spirit. Even after the adoption of Theravāda Buddhism, the veneration of Chow Chau Phalong persisted, reflecting the community's syncretic belief system that accommodates both pre-Buddhist traditions and Buddhist practices.

Central to this belief is the observance of Ghena, which occurs twice in every eight-day cycle of the Tai lunar calendar. On these days, it is believed that Chow Chau Phalong roams through the village on horseback. To ensure the spirit's free passage, community members traditionally refrain from outdoor activities such as weaving, agriculture, and foraging. Celebrations or festive occasions are also suspended. Although the practice has become less stringent in contemporary times, its symbolic significance remains strong. Notably, even Buddhist festivals are postponed if they coincide with Ghena, underscoring the enduring reverence for this ancestral spirit.

The Chief Priest (Vante) of the Tai Phake monastery emphasizes three principal forms of offerings that generate punya (merit): (i) the offering of Buddhist scriptures, (ii) the donation of the sibor (the monk's robe), and (iii) sending sons, even if temporarily, to the monastery to undergo Buddhist training. These practices are integral to both religious devotion and cultural preservation. The community's first migrants carried sacred manuscripts in the Tai script to Assam. Over generations, villagers have continued the tradition of manually copying these texts, which are distributed during religious festivals. This has not only ensured the survival of the Tai script but also fostered intergenerational learning. To date, approximately 400 original texts and over 5,000 handwritten copies have been preserved within the community.

In addition, the practices of sibor donation and temporary ordination of sons remain alive, serving to bind the community together through shared religious duty. Importantly, all Buddhist prayers and hymns are recited in the Tai language, reinforcing the link between spirituality, linguistic continuity, and cultural resilience. Together, these customs illustrate how the Tai Phake have preserved their cultural identity, maintaining close ties to Tai traditions, language, and belief systems despite centuries of migration and change.

Tai Phake Villages

In Assam, the Tai Phake community is concentrated in a limited number of villages, primarily within the districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. These settlements represent the continuity of Tai migration and cultural adaptation to the Brahmaputra Valley. The major Tai Phake villages include Borphake, Nong Lai,

Pha Neng, Mung Lang, Man Mo, Long Phake, Ning Gam, Nam Phake, and Tipam Phake. Among these, Nam Phake village in Dibrugarh is considered one of the most prominent centers of Tai Phake culture, owing to its long-standing religious, linguistic, and social institutions. Collectively, these settlements serve as cultural enclaves that have preserved Tai Phake traditions, Buddhist practices, and linguistic heritage amidst the larger Assamese socio-cultural milieu.

Dress

The Tai Phake women wear colourful dresses woven by them. Their outfit consists of an ankle long skirt (sheen), a blouse open at the front (nang-wat) and fastened around the armpits and a girdle (chai-chin) to tightened the skirt around the waist. The female child wears a skirt (sheen) and a blouse. A white turban (pha –ho) is worn by the women folk on individual preference. The colours of their dresses are expensive of their ages. Dresses include dress proper, ornaments and decoration. Dress proper includes articles of personal clothing as are used mainly for the purpose of covering. There are two dresses for the Tai Phakes: general dress for everyday use, special dress for particular occasions.

A very small amount of ornaments are used as assign of femineity than for enhancing the effectiveness of the personal appearance of the wearer. Decoration which signifies tattooing and marks on the body is however, obviously not present where it should be. The Phakes have a fairly elaborate pattern of dresses and nudity or scanty dress is disliked by all. Even a child below the age of five years is rarely seen to go without the dress. Men and women, young and old cover their body whether they are inside their residence or outside. The Phakes do not possess any traditional ceremonial dress. On a festive occasion, however, washed clothes are used. For their warm clothes, people depend upon the market products like the coat, sweater, scarf, shawl etc.

Male costumes

The dress of the elderly male is generally house woven checkered lungi (Phaa) of green and black color lined with red, yellow or white yarn, undershirt, one shirt (Sho) and a turban (Fa Ho). A white scarf (about 2 metres long and 1 metre wide) with a palin border (Fa Fek Mai) and white long sleeved shirt is worn by the elderly people when they go to the Vhar or to any distant places. For their warm clothes, the elderly male persons prefer shawls (Fa Jang) in the congregational prayer, everyone, except the boys and girls below the age of 10 years, wears the scarf.

Female costumes

The Phake women wear their traditional dresses. The elderly female persons wear one girdle (chin) around the waist extending up to their ankles. It is just like men's lungi with the differences that the stripes in a chin are breadth wise and the waist portion of the Chin is much thicker. To cover the upper part of the body, the women used a long-stripped cloth called Fa Nangwait, about 2.3 metres long and 1 metre wide. A cloth belt Chir chin, about 6 centimetres wide and 1.5 metres long) is worn around their waist. Before the attainment of puberty, girls do not wear Fa Nangwait. Instead, they wear white cloth, Fafek, about 2 metres long and 1 metre wide, with or without borer, to cover the upper half of the body. If a girl has an unmarried elder sister, she does not wear a Fa Nangwait even though she has attained puberty. Wearing a Fafek is a sign of unpreparedness for marriage. All the women wear a traditional white chaddar when they go to the Vihar or to a distant place. The bride during marriage ceremony uses a similar chaddar as a veil. Elderly women wear a blouse called Chekhamchum, which extends up to the waist. Young girls and unmarried women wear blouses of different colors but the use of sleeveless or short blouses is not encouraged. The elderly women wear a white turban all the time while the younger married women wear the same when they visit Vhara or weekly market. The dress of an unmarried grownup girls constitutes a China Fa Fek Mai and a blouse.

Costumes of boys and girls

The boys wear trousers and shirts when they go to Naharkatia or to their schools, while in the village they use their traditional Lungi. Young girls WEAR FROCKS. The school going girls wear their traditional Chin even in their educational institutions.

Dress of the monks

There are special clothes for the monks which must be of yellow colour. It was reported that previously when the marketing centres were not easily accessible, the people prepared all their dyes indigenously. The yellow colour was prepared from the yellowish carnel of the Jackfruit tree. The monks wear four kinds of clothes viz; main cloth that is a lungi (Cham Paying), one chaddar like cloth (Chang Kan, about 9.3 meters long and 1.5 meters wide) which is used in upper part of the body, one sanghati i.e. a locally prepared ganji and one piece of cloth (about 1.2 meters long and 6 centimeters wide) to cover their secret parts. The eight inevitable (Asta Pariskar) of a monk include the above mentioned four varieties of clothes and a filter cloth (jal chakani), a blade for shaving the head fortnightly and thread and needle.

Ornaments

For personal adornment, the Phake women wear few ornaments. In fact, married and elderly women do not show much interest in ornaments. It was reported that till 1950 the elderly women used Kenhu (an ear ornament made of transparent crystal material) but since that year the supply of that material became irregular and the Phake women had to opt for modern ornaments like ear rings, bracelets, gold ring, necklaces etc. It was also reported that until 1950 necklaces made of silver coins were considered as valuable ornaments by the women folk, but today this type of necklace is hardly seen. The reason, as informed by the people is that old silver rupee and half rupee and half rupee coins contained much metal value and the villagers, therefore exchanged those silver ornaments for a much bigger price in terms of new coins, which however contains less metal value. The married women wear a pair of bangles (Beyan) made of either gold or silver. Gold or silver ring (Ungeh) is also worn by those who can afford. Necklaces made of small beads are worn by the small children in order to avoid dangers from evil spirits. Bead armlets are used by some elderly people for similar purpose. Objects of natural beauty like flowers are special favorites of the teenage girls who wear those in their hair.

Hair Dressing

Most of the Phake women wear their hair long while men crop their hair short, except for those who are following the eight precept of Buddhism.

Rituals

1. After buying new clothing the head women of the family has to hit the stairs of the house with a stick. Then after only, a family member can put on the dress. In some other places the domestic dog is hit before the children of the family wear the new clothes. The Tai Phake people believe that ghosts or evil spirits can enter the house if these norms are not followed.

2. The Tai Phake people offer any edible to their children after heating it in the fire if the item is bought from the market.

3. The entry of the snakes or animals to the houses is also considered ominous.

4. Thomtra ritual: Thomtra is a ritual which Tai Phakes perform on lot of festivals. Villagers spend all day sitting in the monastery chanting. They generally start in the early morning by offering flowers to Lord Buddha.

Calendar of Tai Phake:

Tai Phakes follow a different calendar. They follow the Tai Calendar. Independent on the western calendars. In their calendar they have eight working days and after that there are two holidays. All the Tai Phakes follow this calendar. They work in the fields for these eight days and then the next two days they take rest and do household things.

The Name Giving Ceremony:

The name to the new member of a family is given on a special day. The ceremony in which child is given name is called “Aulowng nu naai”. Close relatives, old women are invited in the ceremony. The name is decided by the parents of the child. The name of the Tai Phakes is a combination of three words. The first word is the pre xed name. This word is according to the Birth order. This name is based on the order of the birth of the child. It also takes into account the gender of the child. The second word is the actual name of the child. This is the name by which the child is referred in society and the last name is the surname of the family name.

The pre x for male and female child are as follows:

Male	Female
First : Ai	First : Ye
Second: Ngi	Second: Ee
Third: Saam	Third: Aam
Fourth: Sai	Fourth: Ay
Fifth: Ngow	Fifth: Ok
Sixth: Nuk	Sixth: Eit
Seventh: Nak	Seventh: Aat.

Marriage

The Tai Phakes usually marry within the community. They are monogamous although polygamy is not prohibited provided the man has the requisite means to support such a family. The tai Phakes do not keep any matrimonial relations with people of other caste or tribes. Widow and Cross cousin marriage take place in the Tai Phake society. The marriage is celebrated with a detailed ceremony. Divorce is not a common affair in the tai Phake society. The husband or a wife files a divorce case before the “Chow mann” who takes a decision in the meeting of the village elders.

Festival associated with Death

Cremation is the rule for normal death. For abnormal ones, burial is prescribed. The purification ceremony, in case of normal deaths is observed on the 7 th day after death. Entertainment of the villagers with a feast and gift to the monks are the salient features of their purification ceremony. The Tai Phakes have special provisions for the disposal of the dead body of a monk. The monk’s dead body is not disposed off on the same day, rather it is kept for a year or so in a water tight coffin. After about one year a big festival is arranged and all the Ti Phakes of different villages are invited and the dead body of the monk is ceremoniously celebrated.

Food habits

Rice is the staple food of the Tai Phakes. Their meals consist of cooked or steamed rice wrapped in banana or tara or kau leaves that known as “khau khau” and boiled vegetables. Moreover, many wild leafy vegetables such as “pukut”, “khi kai” etc. are eaten by them. Besides this their meals comprise fish, meat, egg, dry fish, sour fish, rice cakes. Tea is their favourite beverages.

Traditional food of the Tai Phake**1. Kopat**

The sticky rice which they eat is made with a special technique. This traditional method of cooking rice is called Tang hou he. The rice is made in double decked pots. The lower pot contains water which is set on fire. The upper pot contains rice. Hot water is added at regular intervals to this rice in the upper pot. This method of preparing rice makes it sticky. When the rice is cooked, it is spread on a bamboo plate called Della and then cooled. This rice is made in morning by the ladies of Tai Phake family. Then small portions of rice are made and are stored in banana leaves known as Koupat. These small portions of rice is called as Hou hu.

2. Paasa

Paasa is a traditional Tai Phake delicacy and is made on special occasions. This is a curry of fish and other ingredients. This delicacy can be made with variety of fishes but generally Large Varaje is prepared for the dish. To make this dish, leaves of olean are collected from the gardens of Tai Phakes. The main ingredient of this dish are, Fish, olean, leaves and spices. To make this delicacy, first various herbs and spices are collected. Fish is then cut in slits with knife, this ensures proper cooking of fish. The fish is then grilled on direct fire. Olean leaves are then chopped in a mortar. Once the fish is cooked finely. The chopped olean leaves are then dipped in hot water, the juice of olean leaves is then induced in this water. Spices are added to the chopped fish and then blended properly. The water and the olean leaves are then separated and this water is added to the chopped fish. This is then thoroughly blended. This paasa soup formed without cooking on fire is now ready to serve.

3. Paisoo

Paisoo is another traditional and beloved delicacy of Tai Phakes. This is made on very auspicious moments and occasions like wedding or naming ceremony of a child. It takes about a week to make this delicacy. Fish needs to be preserved in a very special way for a week to make this delicacy. To make this dish special kind of baskets are woven, by the men of Tai Phake family. Various ingredients are weighed for the correct proportions of ingredients. The mixed ingredients are then stuffed in the banana leaves and which are stuffed in the special baskets made for the fish. This is then covered with leaves and then tied tightly in the basket. These baskets are left undisturbed for a week. After the week, Paisoo is ready to cook. It is then either fried or boiled in water.

4. Khaau putt peetha

Khaau putt peetha is the traditionally made sweet item of the Tai Phakes. This sweet is made from sticky rice and sesame. The rice is first cooked in the traditional way of Tai Phakes and then sesame is added to rice. After that, small round shaped patties called peethas of the mixture is made.

5. Ping Hou Khar:

Ping Hou Khar is another traditionally prepared sweet food item of the Tai Phakes. This is also a type of peetha. To make this sweet, powered rice and muass are mixed with small proportions of water. Then it is wrapped in Kopat leaves in a special manner and steam cooked like sticky rice. Once cooked, these small packets are unwrapped and are ready to serve.

Handicrafts:

1. Pup shel kau: This is actually a pot used to serve food to the aged one.
2. Weighing machine: The Tai Phakes have an unique Weighing machine. The specialty of the weighing machine is that one need not require a counter weight to weigh. The weighing machine itself acts as a counter weight -1 kg, 1/2 kg and 1/4 of a kg can be weighed by the weighing machine.
3. Psa shung shung: This special kind of pot is used to serve to the monks.

4. Phaak phaa: The knife cases are called Phaak mit aun and the dau cases are called Phaak phaa.

Manuscripts:

Tai Phakes have old historical manuscripts which are written in Tai language. The two important manuscripts which tell the history of the Tai Phakes. These two historic documents are ---- LikKhoukhun and LikKhoumoung. The history of migration of the Tai Phake people has been described in both these books. LikKhoukhun explains the origin of the Phake---“A cave was created following a rift (Phat) in a gigantic stone. Therefore, the people who lived in that particular region were called Phake. The King was also named as Phake. These manuscripts also talk about Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata which are written in Tai Phake language. Few scriptures are as old as 200 years. Few of the scriptures have in unences of Burmese language along with Tai phake language. Because of this these scriptures are unread as no one now knows how to read these languages. As these scriptures are very old, they are getting degraded. Currently, archaeological department of Government of India is trying to preserve these manuscripts by chemical processes. These manuscripts also tell us about lots of things in human history about creation and destruction. There are few structures which also depicts hell. These beautiful documents also describe with illustrations symbolizing the punishments in hell due to bad deeds which are drawn by the ancestors of the Phakials.

Construction Architecture of the Tai Phake:

The Tai Phake villages are usually situated near rivers, especially near the Dihing River. They live in a single hip-roofed stilt house (Houn-hung), constructed in a well-managed campus, enclosed by bamboo fence (ta). The platform is constructed 5 to 6 feet above the ground and the underneath space is used for different purposes such as storing different items such as firewood, keeping the cattle, or establishing the loom. The average length and breadth of a house is about 60 feet and 20 feet respectively. The houses are constructed in north-south direction and the main door (chuptoo) faces the north cardinal direction. A bladder (hokkrai), placed in east-west direction, is used to climb to the initial open veranda-like space called “patle.” The kitchen (houn-on/hountang-khao) is a parallel separate structure on a slightly squatter platform. Apart from this house, a granary (yey) is constructed to the east of the main house.

The house is internally partitioned into compartments. The first room attached to the patle is known as Kan-nok/Houng-top, which is the living room where guests are entertained. In earlier days, the Kan-nok had no closing walls. From the Kan-nok, a corridor (taitin) leads to the inner compartments of the house. Three compartments are used as bedrooms (kan-non/ti-non) which do not possess any door. The southernmost rear room is called “Kamtheu/Kham-tang-chom/hongpai-fra,” which is the domestic prayer room of the house. In the eastern wall of the Kanthou, a raised and protruding platform altar is constructed in a similar fashion to the Khakfraa of the Khamti people. This altar is called Xingfra, where the icon of Buddha is kept for family prayer. The room adjacent to the Kanthou is the room for the main couple of the family. The main post of the house, called Phinam/Chao-phi-nam, remains in one of the corners of this room. The Phinam post is regarded as sacred, auspicious, and revered. Hence, there prevail different taboos and this room has restricted entry. The other rooms are used by the other members of the house.

Constructed parallel to the residential house, the kitchen is approachable from the patle. The kitchen is partitioned into two halves and the inner half contains the fireplace (fang-fai) in an approximately central location. The other half is used as the dining area where different household articles are also stored. The Fang-fai is constructed on the bamboo platform with earth, held within a wooden frame. The fireplace supports a three-legged hearth called King. Above the Fang-fai, a one- or two-tiered hanging shelf called Kha-phai is made, while a ledge called Khing is made in the opposite wall to keep utensils. The kitchen possesses a back door, opposite to the main door, that leads to an open bamboo platform. This open platform, called Chan/Zann, is used as the scullery and to sun clothes. The prayer room Kanthou is accessible from Chan through a door. Sometimes, there remain two Chan in a home. The Chan is a very

significant place of the house where elderly members sit and young members listen to different folktales or songs from them.

Traditional Dyes of Tai Phake:

The tradition of dying and making traditional dresses in traditional loom is one of the unique age-old cultures of the Tai Phake. Conservation of the dye yielding plant resources as well as forest coverage can provide a greater chance to protect the gradual erosion of availability of natural dye or fascinating hues in the traditional costumes of the Tai Phake. Every woman and girl of Tai Phake are expert in weaving their own traditional dress. They collect natural dye from bark, fruit, flower, rhizome, leaves of the plants and mixed with water. The process of extraction and dying on muga silk is a lengthy one. Traditional costume of Tai Phake are adorned with full of bright colour combination. They have the technical knowledge of extraction of yellow dye from *Garcinia xanthochymus* to increase fastness in Muga silk yarn and from *Steolulenthus Cusia*, they extract dark green dye. The bark of *Garcinia* has yellow dye which becomes brighter when addition to the extract of the leaves of *Maesa reticulata*. Noteworthy that, the process of dying of yarn has always been done in the winter season and the water which is utilized in the process is collected from a river. In winter season the river water becomes calm and almost clean and they store this clean water in earthen ware for future utilization. Traditional costume of Tai Phake are adorned with full of bright colour combination. Every woman is an expertise weaver. They have the technical knowledge of extraction of dye and dying method to increase fastness in Muga silk yarn. They use a special type of traditional loom (Ki hook).

The Buddhist monastery of Namphake Village:

The Namphake is the largest Tai Phake village in Dibrugarh District with about 70 households, 600 individuals which was established alongside the Burhidihing river in 1850. However, the preservation of their Tai customs has not been easy. The community proudly states that their conversion to Buddhism about 1500 years ago has helped them in preserving their original practices –the Tai traditions, culture, language and even their early religious practices alongside Buddhism. The Tai Phakes follow the Hinayana sect of Buddhism, similar to those of the other Tai clans of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka. The Namphake Buddhist Monastery was established in 1850 along with the village. Over the years, the Tai folk culture and Buddhism have assimilated and are helping each other to survive. The Namphake monastery is one of the oldest and most respected Buddhist monasteries of Assam. As the Monastery was established by migrant people of Thai origin, it is also known as the Mini Thai Monastery. In the year 2009, the Princess of Thailand visited this monastery. The Namphake Monastery is surrounded by its unique natural setting and new serene atmosphere. The monuments and relics found in the monastery; their religious serenity and rites remind of the glorious Buddhist culture and traditions. There is a water tank inside the monastery campus which is named as the Mucalinda Tank or Nong Ming Chiringta and is considered to be very holy. Ashoka Pillar situated near the monastery is another point of attraction. In addition, there is a beautiful library just beside which has preserved the ancient relics (texts, dresses, Buddhist symbols) in a systematic way which provides beautiful insights about the history of Namphake Monastery. This monastery is regarded as a meditation centre. People often visit this place to meditate and the calm surrounding of the place is added to its serenity. There is Dihing Patkai National Park which is 8 km away from Namphake Monastery.

Events in Monastery

Every day of the Namphake Village starts at around 4 am. The woman prepares the food for the entire day in the morning. The steamed rice is cooked in the traditional form and stored in banana leaves which can be consumed the entire day. The rest share of food is given to the monastery by every family in the village. Junior monk accepts these food offerings. The offering consists of a share of rice and a bowl of curry. Once all the offering is collected, a part of it is offered to Lord Buddha. After the offering to Buddha, one

of the Monks rings the bell in the monastery. This bell can be heard by every house in the village. All families have food only after the bell is rung. The villagers also offer food and clothes to the monks on all occasions.

Administrative Structure:

The Tai Phakes are essentially democratic and simple. Although the people do not possess any formal council, yet the meeting of the village elders headed by the Chow mann (village chief) exercises the highest legal and judicial powers. Any dispute among the people is settled by the village meeting headed by the village chief. The Tai Phakes possess a written code called “thamchat”, which is referred to by the village elders while deciding of local nature. The penalties for breach of law, the idea of right and wrong, appear to be genuinely indigenous to their culture. The rules of conduct that the “thamchat” enjoins on its members are mainly based on ethical principles.

Economy:

The main occupation of the Tai Phake people is agriculture. They cultivate crops such as rice, paddy, mustard, potatoes. Besides agriculture, they also have other subsidiary sources of income from which the people earn a good income. They also rear cattle, buffaloes. Fishing is a major practice of Tai Phakes. Events in the monsoon months of Nun Ha and Nun Hok, which according to the Gregorian calendar are April and May (the Tai Phake calendar starts in December). It describes a flood scene and what ensues when the overflowing river brings with it fallen branches, wood and lost boats. Mo Kham Soy Yoy was sung by women when they congregated for thrashing rice. With manual threshing of rice being practiced less and less, even the practice of singing Soy Yoy has decreased.

Women as preservers of Tai Phake literature:

Women as preservers of Tai Phake literature, especially children’s literature was an unconscious development. Since women were children’s bearers and carers, their involvement with children included rearing them and entertaining them. A child learnt to repeat what his/her mother spoke and learnt to repeat lullabies and remember them as he/she grew up. This was also how girls watched and learnt the skills of survival from their mothers or grandmothers. Such an exercise meant that there was no need for the girls to learn the script. Tai Phake boys, on the other hand, as a part of the Buddhist tradition of being ordained as monks for a few years, lived in the monastery and learnt to read and write the Tai Phake script there. But the tradition of collective learning was a part of the community. There was a practice of elderly men reading the Lik (religious texts) in the village community hall called Chung with everyone, including women listening to them. Such a practice ensured that everyone was well versed with the Lik. Moral idioms were a part of a normal day-to-day conversation.

Taboos:

There is a prevalent different traditional belief practices and taboos in respect to construction of house. Thus: The first son of the family usually does not undertake any auspicious work in Nun–Si (March) and the second son in Nun–Sam (February), because it is considered taboo for them in those months as in the saying “Ai Kam Si, Ngi Kam Sam” (Ai–first son; Kam–taboo; Si–four/fourth month; Ngi–Second; Sam–three/third month). This taboo is followed by the Phakes.

Living Museum

The Namphake village itself appears to be a living museum with its salient features such as the Buddhist monastery, the typical bamboo stilt houses, the festivals, their food habit, rituals and practices. The ecology of Burhidihing river flowing through the heart of the village has influenced the lifestyle of the people through time immemorial. The Tai Phakes of Namphake village belongs to the Tai race which migrated to Assam from the Howkong valley of Myanmar in 1775 AD. Tai is a generic name of a major

branch of the Mongoloid people of Asia. The Tai Phakes came through Assam's eastern mountainous corridor. The concept of a living museum can be used to celebrate the Tai Phake community, through their folk songs, folk dances, traditional houses, textiles, customs, practices and the achievement of their craftsmen and skilled workforces. Their cultural heritage are being carried from generation to generation through their intangible cultural heritage.

Festivals:

Maiko Chumphai Festival

Just after the completion of Bhogali Bihu for 10–15 days the young boys and girls get absorbed in fetching wood, drying them up and erecting a tall tower meiji in the village. On the day of Maghee Purnima these young boys and girls get ready for celebrating Maiko Chumphai, one of the important festivals of the Tai Phake. The Maiko Chumphai festival is a religious cultural festival of the Tai Phake of Assam. The day is called Maghee Purnima because it is a full moon day of the lunar month Magh, which generally falls in January–February. The word Mai-Ku-Som-Phai which in Tai language means – is to set fire a stack of firewood.

On this day, the Tai Buddhist-monastic and lay-assemble in an open field and burn a high towering meiji (of at least fifteen feet high) made of straws, bamboos and woods. The height of the meiji indicates how long time the community has spent in preparing for the event before it is celebrated. The village youths prepare for this festival with great vigor and promptness several days before the event and their verve never fades when it comes to this occasion. It surely is a mark that the village youths are still anchored to their culture and tradition. However, it is not only a ceremony for the youths, people of all age groups also participate and play their respective roles in this event. Then, the youths must make sure that they finish erecting the meiji two days before the day of Maiko Chumphai. The village community assembles in the Vihara or Monastery in the evenings. As the Chief Monk and other monks chant mantras, they join hands and pay homage to and seek blessings from them. The devotees offer alms, flowers and sky lantern or Phom phai (or Bomphai in the Tai language) to the monks. Then the chief monk releases the first sky lantern which is followed by several others by the devotees. The flying sky lantern gives a serene look to the awakening night sky of the Assamese spring that often attracts the people of other traditions. In many cases, the young boys spend the night in their hard-built meiji which provides them a temporary night shelter.

The next day in the morning the villagers gather in the open built. The monks stand in front of meiji when the devotees stand facing them. As the beginning ritual of the festival, the monks chant mantras. Then an elderly man with permission from the monks sets fire on the meiji. As the meiji is burned off, the village folk eat Khoyako, a special hotchpotch prepared of rice, various types of vegetables and leafy vegetables (some of them mix meat and fishes as well). In the cultural front, the festival has a close affinity with the Bhogali Bihu of the mainstream Assamese celebrated during the end of Puh and the beginning of Magh of the lunar calendar (in January). The practice of erecting and burning meiji is common in both traditions save the time of celebration. Then the ritual is not only deeply rooted at the cultural level, but it also mirrors a religious significance in Tai Phake community of Assam. There is a popular belief in them that the Buddha declared his parinirvana day on this day. That he would leave his mortal body on the full moon day after three months from that day. Thus Maiko Chumphai is celebrated to mark this great historic event of the Buddha.

Again, Khoyaku, the special food that they take on that day has a deep root in their Buddhist faith. Their belief goes that the Buddha was sick for some time before his parinirvana. This concerned his disciples very much. Worried, they tried their best to get their master back to his health. Hence they prepared food for the Buddha by boiling rice with a lot of vegetables so as to get sufficient nutrition. Moreover, for a Buddhist monk like him, who partakes of solid food once in a day, it was necessary to take nutritious food

to sustain weakness. This was the reason behind adding plenty of vegetables with rice. The Tai Buddhists are still keeping alive this belief of healthy food through Khoyaku. Maico Chumphai sends out this message that the festivals of the Tai Phake have a deep root in their faith, belief and in their ways of life. Under the veil of the rituals, meaningful or trivial, they have some rationales that can only be discernible to us when they are willing to accept the diversity in beliefs and the ways of life. Performing rituals of Uposatha (observance day) and observance of the Pancha Silas (Five Precepts) by the Theravada Buddhist laymen and ordained members of the Sangha are some other highlights of the festival.

Sang Kan (Water splashing Festival)

It is the main festival of the Tai Phakes. It is held on 12th, 13th and 14th of April every year. On the day of the festival, every member of Tai Phake family gather at the monastery and chant prayers for the whole day. The women spread sadoos all along the path and the men transfer the statues one by one at the Kamphra. While this is done, women standing all along the line sprinkle Akhoi on the statues. The statues are kept at the Kyamphra for 52 hours. During the time of Sangken, the Tai Phake women get up early at dawn to make all the preparations for the prayers, before the Lord Buddha's statues are kept at the Kyamphra. A small packet of rice is prepared and kept in Horovi (a small handicraft basket). This is presented to the Lord Buddha by every member of the family along with flowers. Water to bathe the Lord is brought from the nearby river by all the Tai Phakes. All the members of the family come for this festival in their traditional dress. The Tai Phakes collect water from the rivers and splash it on the statues of Buddha. Along with the bathing of Lord Buddha, the Phakes also bathe their religious leaders. One time of the day is decided and the villagers call the monks at the public space and pour water on the monks one by one. One of the villagers then wipes off the water of the monks. Later the monks give discourses on Buddhist philosophies. During evenings the villagers pray at Kyamphra by lighting candles, burning incense sticks and offering flowers. This tradition is called "Luv Suv Mi". Every member of the Tai Phake family takes part in this tradition. After 52 hours, Tai Phakes again gather near the Kyamphra and perform prayers and rituals. Then they bring back all the statues one by one to the monastery. Young Tai Phake boys play drums while others are bringing the statues back. The statues are painted by locally made colors. The women join and help in cleaning the monastery. After the statues are cleaned, they are put back to their original places. The next day the villagers again gather at the monastery to chant the Thomtra. On this day, scented water is sprinkled on everybody to purify them. The day after, a pillar of clay is erected at a particular location. This is called "Je ti Kau Hung". By this way, the Sangken festival is concluded.

Kham Sang Festival

In every Tai Phake family, there is a tradition in which every male member of the family decides to be a monk. Kham Sang is a festival for this tradition. Every year few boys of the village are decided by their family members which will undergo this ceremony. The boy becomes a monk at least for a day. He can continue to stay monk for any duration after that. It is left to the boy's and his family members' discretion. In this festival, all the monks along with the new monks carry a procession in which people give donations to them. In this festival, all the monks along with the new monks carry a procession in which people give donations to them. In this festival, the new monk is treated as a King for a day as he is turning into a monk. He is been served with several dishes prepared by the villagers. The kid who is turning into monk goes through all the processes of becoming a monk. This festival shows why Tai Phakes are so deeply connected to the monastery and monks.

Pet Moun Si Heing Festival

It was observed that Dihing River in Namphake plays an important part in all the events of Tai Phakes. This festival is celebrated on the banks of the river. Tai Phakes do not celebrate all the festivals yearly. Villagers decide every year the festivals the village will be celebrating every year. Pet Moun Si Heing is celebrated once in 2-3 years. In this festival, small stupas of Buddha are created on the bank of the river. Thousands of such small stupas are created for the festival. The preparations start few days before the

actual festival. All the members of the family contribute in making these stupas. The rituals are then performed on the river bank and then in the monastery.

Poi Pa Te Saa Festival

Poi Pa Te Saa is the festival of giving for Tai Phakes. Independent of the economic state of the family, each family celebrates this festival by donating things. In this festival, a procession is carried out in which a huge tree is carried in the procession. This tree is like a “Kalpataru” on which all your demands are fulfilled. The tree is created with the same thought that all the things which people wish for should be found on it. With the same spirit, villagers donate the things that they possess. This procession is carried in the village and villagers come out and put something on the tree. Finally, all the donations are offered to the monastery by the villagers. The traditional songs of the Tai Phakes are very melodious and these songs praise nature and its beauties. Most of the songs are folk songs. A song called “ballad” is sung when a person dies by his/her relatives. In festivals, Tai Phakes play their traditional musical instruments. The drum is called “Kong” which is used a lot for rhythm. Also, “Mong” which is a cymbal, “Yam Loving” which is a bigger cymbal, “Mar Phang” which is a cymbal, and “Toro” which is a harp are used.

Royal Kathina Robe Ceremony

The cultural roots that connect the Tai Phake community of Namphake village in Assam’s Dibrugarh district to Thailand were strengthened with the observance of the Royal Kathina Robe offering ceremony by Thailand’s Royal family in the Buddhist monastery of this village. The migration history of the Tai Phake people in Assam can be traced back about 650 years to China’s Yunan province via Myanmar. A 23-member royal delegation from Thailand headed by Kiattikhum Chartprasert, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, brought Royal Kathina Robes and other gifts sent by the King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej, for the monks of Namphake Buddhist monastery and handed them over to the Chief, Gyanpal Mahathera. Mr. Chartprasert also handed over a donation of Rs 5.07 Lakh by the King for renovation of the monastery. Kathina offering or Poi Kathin is an ancient Buddhist tradition of offering special robe and other necessities to monks who maintain strict discipline of retreat during the rainy seasons. Each year the Royal Kathina ceremony is observed in only one Buddhist temple outside Thailand and Namphake Buddhist temple is also one of them which had been selected in the year 2013. In February 2009, Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn had visited the Namphake village. The main purpose of the ceremony is not merely for religious belief but also to strengthen the relationship between Thailand and other countries. In the year 2013, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej designated the Chief, Gyanpal Mahathera, to present the Kathina robe to the congregation of Buddhist Monks who have gathered at Namphake Buddhist temple in Namphake village, the home of Tai-Phake people whose identities, traditions and cultures are very much similar to the Thai people.

The Royal Kathina ceremony was in line with the policies of both India and Thailand in promoting Assam and the North East as the gateway between Southeast Asia and India. The Tai Phake people of the village migrated from Kunming in Yunan to the Howkong valley in Myanmar about 650 years ago and subsequently came to Assam in 1775. They migrated from one place to another before finally settling down at Namphake on the bank of the river Burhi–Dihing in 1850. The Namphake monastery was also established in the same year. The Tai Phake families in Namphake village speak both the Tai Phake language and Assamese.

Poi Nown Howk

Poi Nown Howk is celebrated by the Tai people in accordance with the Buddha Purnima. Here Poi means festival, Known means month and Howk means six. It means that the festival which is celebrated in the sixth month of the year is Poi Nown Howk. There are no specific norms to celebrate this festival. It is celebrated with religious rituals and other functions according to the convenience.

Me Pi

The Tai Phake people celebrate Me Pi festival after 15 days of Poi Nown Howk. As a celebration of this festival, the villagers keep thorny branches of trees at the doors and windows of their houses. They believe it prevents evil spirits from entering their homes.

Mangala and Aantre

The families celebrate these festivals of their own for their peace and prosperity in the beginning of the new year. The particular family invites the villagers and the monks on the morning of the very day where they organize prayers in the presence of all. On the other hand, Aantre is another celebration like Mang – Kala where the prayer is organized in the evening.

Hong-Khonis

Hong Khaonis is a customary celebration. The meaning of the word Hong-Khon is "Address the soul". They believe the sudden illness of a person caused as he owned a weak soul and by observing the Hong-Khon, they try to make the soul of the person strong enough to face the illness. This is observed in two different ways. Sometimes the womenfolk of the village do fishing in the river with a particular equipment called Jakoi n Assamese and sometimes they recite books at home.

Naun Wa

Naun Wa is not a festival in general, but an important religious practice in particular. This festival is celebrated for three months period in which no marriage or constructive works are done. In each month during the day of Purnima, people gather together in the monastery and they offer prayer. After three months celebration of Naun wa, or sometime during the end of Naun wa .

Poiok – wa

Poiok – Wa festival would celebrate where people offer their prayer into God to forgive them for their faults which could happen during Naun Wa.

Buddha Purnima

Buddha Purnima is also celebrated by the Tai Phakes. It marks the birthday of Lord Gautam Buddha. On this day the people gather together in the Buddhist Monastery and offer prayers to God. This is followed by a feast. Along with Buddha Purnima they observe Poi Naun. Houkin is the sixth month of their calendar.

Poi-Khauwais

Poi – Khauwais observed in the full moon day of the eighth month. From this day they observe several particular rules for three months. The Buddhist monk do Barsha Bash or fasting for a period of three months from the full moon of the month. It is not a festival but an important religious occasion. This is not hard and fast rule for everyone. These three months period is known as Naun –Wa and during this period no marriage or any welfare works are done. In each month during the day of Purnima the people of the village gather together in the monastery and offer prayers. It is not only a festival but an important religious occasion. On this day the union of the Buddhist Monks gather in a particular place and pray to forgive them for all their sins. Cha-Leis observed in the full moon day of the tenth month of their calendar. On this day the villagers offer basket full of food items like rice, fruits in the monasteries.

Cha-Le

On the fifth day from Cha- Le and on the Amavassya (Dark fortnight) they observe Me Pi.

Poi-Naun –Chi

Poi-Naun –Chi is celebrated on the full moon day of the fourth month. This festival is celebrated with different observance like Poi-JE-ti; Poi- Mang-Ka-Pa.

Poi-Longis

Poi –Longis a Shradha death rituals of the Buddhist Monks. Tai Phake people take part in these rituals as they considered it as a sacred or heavenly pursuit. Ngap –Maan is an observance which is organised by the welfare of the society with religious rituals.

Folk Songs of the Tai Phakes:

The folk songs of the Tai Phakes can be divided into several categories according to their time, styles, and subjects. These are:

1. **Sa–Oi:** These are the songs of love. The beauty of flowers, butterflies, and nature is described in these songs. The songs are particularly popular among the young people of Tai Phake tribe.
2. **KheKhang:** Khe Kang is a group song. These songs are rhythmic. No one can sing or compose it without much knowledge about the tune and rhythms.
3. **Cradle Songs:** Lullabies or cradle songs are integral parts of the folk literature of the Tai Phakes. They are sung for the children.
4. **Kham Non San:** These songs are like lullabies. Through these songs, various moral lessons are conveyed to the children.
5. **Kham Pai Fra:** These are the prayer songs. No instrument is used while singing these songs.

Folk Dances of the Tai Phakes:

1. **Ka Kong:** Ka means dance and Kong is the drum. Therefore, it signifies the dance which is performed with the drums. Since the traditional drums get prominence in this dance, therefore it is called Ka Kong. The group of dancers perform this dance form in a circle. Many circles are created within the circles according to the number and genders of the participants. The hand moves are given importance in this dance.
2. **Ka–Pan:** The meaning of Ka Pan in Tai language is a dance with Bota (a special kind of utensil that is used to offer betel nuts to the guests). This dance is performed while there is a religious festival in someone's home. At the end of the programme, the head of the family dances with that special utensil of bamboo adorned with flowers seeking forgiveness from Buddha for any mistake. This dance form is almost similar to the Ka Kong. The head of the family dances at the centre of the circle with the Bota (the bamboo utensil to offer betel nuts). The women dance with the rhythms of the music by folding hands. This dance form is almost similar to the Ka Kong. The head of the family dances at the centre of the circle with the Bota (the bamboo utensil to offer betel nuts).
3. **Ka–Song:** The meaning of Ka–Song is the dance performed with umbrellas. The Tai Phake people have been preparing this umbrella with bamboo, colourful papers, gum, etc. It is similar to Chinese umbrellas. The Tai Phake girls perform this form of dance taking this umbrella.
4. **Ka Freefai:** The Diamond Dance of the Tai Phakes.

Conclusion

The Tai Phake community of Namphake village in Assam exemplifies a harmonious blend of cultural richness, religious devotion, and environmental adaptation. Their festivals, rituals, folk songs, and dances

not only reflect a deep-rooted Buddhist faith but also preserve their ancestral heritage and social cohesion. Practices such as Maico Chumphai, Sangken, and Kham Sang reveal the integration of cultural, spiritual, and practical dimensions, where community participation strengthens intergenerational transmission of values and knowledge. Women play a crucial role in safeguarding literature and oral traditions, ensuring that moral, social, and survival skills are imparted to children. The community's careful observance of taboos, religious festivals, and agricultural cycles highlights a lifestyle that is closely attuned to both ecological rhythms and spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, the celebration of events like the Royal Kathina Robe Ceremony demonstrates the transnational connections of the Tai Phakes with Thailand, reinforcing cultural identity and international Buddhist solidarity. Overall, the Tai Phake community of Namphake serves as a living repository of intangible cultural heritage, offering insights into the resilience of indigenous traditions and the enduring significance of cultural preservation in shaping collective identity, spirituality, and social cohesion.

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