



# Hega Festival: A Cultural Tapestry of the Zeliang Nagas

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**Abstract:** Hega festival, which is a major cultural festival that embodies the Zeliang Nagas of Nagaland, India, is a colorful celebration of the community's rich past and customs. Considered as one of the most revered and significant festivals of Peren people, Hega is a celebration of thanksgiving and for seeking almighty's blessings for a prosperous year ahead for the whole community. The festival also offers a time for rest and get-together with siblings and relatives before the year's work commence. This paper provides a thorough analysis of the celebration, examining its cultural significance, rituals and ceremonies associated with the festival and relevance of the festival in the contemporary world. This paper provides a detailed view of the complex aspects of the Hega Festival, explaining its importance in sustaining the cultural identity of the Zeliang Nagas in the face of modern challenges by drawing on anthropological research, historical documents and indigenous perspectives. This paper uses an interdisciplinary approach to add to the body of knowledge on cultural anthropology, indigenous festivals, and the value of cultural preservation by drawing inputs from both primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Hega Festival, Zeliang Nagas, Nagaland, cultural heritage, indigenous festivals.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nagaland, a small state located in the northeastern part of India, is a land of diverse indigenous tribes, each with its unique cultural practices and traditions. Among these communities, the Zeliang Nagas stand out for their distinct and vibrant celebration of the Hega Festival. The Zeliang Nagas are an indigenous tribe that mainly live in the state of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam in Northeastern states of India. They place great cultural value on the festivals, among one of which is Hega festival, celebrated mainly by Peren village community of Nagaland. The Hega festival is one of the biggest and most significant festivals for the Zeliang Nagas living in Peren district of Nagaland. This annual event festival takes place in February between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> every year at Peren Village with traditional fanfare. Hega is a celebration calling for the almighty God to provide wealth, good fortune, and bravery on his people. It is also a celebration of happiness, relaxation, feasting and gatherings among the community members and relatives. The festival offers a platform for the people to ask the almighty god for protection and direction for the year ahead. Young couples who are engaged or to-be-married couples hold a high stature during these days of celebration. Special rituals and prayers are dedicated to the to-be-married couples so as to purify and sanctify their souls for the bright future.

## 2. METHOD:

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the Hega Festival examining its cultural significance, elucidating its intricate rituals and ceremonies, and analyzing its contemporary relevance within the socio-cultural context of Nagaland. This paper provides a detailed view of the complex aspects of the Hega Festival, explaining its importance in sustaining the cultural identity of the Zeliang Nagas in the face of modern challenges amid globalization and cultural integration by drawing on anthropological research, historical documents and indigenous perspectives. This paper uses an interdisciplinary approach to add to the body of knowledge on cultural anthropology, indigenous festivals, and the value of cultural preservation. The paper relies on the secondary sources of data such as published books, magazines, journals, news dailies, online portals and webpage, government data.



### 3. DISCUSSION :

#### Hega- The Festival

All of the preparations are completed in advance and all the people waits anxiously for the grant celebration to begin. The festival opens with a range of events and feasts. The celebration goes on for five days with fanfare and jubilation. The first day is known as Hegateu, which marked the commencement of the festival. Every household prepares grant feast with their love ones and relatives. In the evening, the bride-to-be family hosts the groom-to-be in a sacred ritual known as "leidi". The second day is known as Herie Kap, where the gate keeper of the village, after performing a sacred prayer to almighty god goes into the forest and chopped down the tree supposed to be picked by the almighty. Then he will carve it into the shape of a hornbill and then place at the village main gate. In the afternoon, young boys compete to pierce the heart of the carved hornbill with spears for good luck. On the third day (known as Tsing Rak), the bride-to-be girls went and chop firewood and brought the freshly chopped firewood home. Then these soon-to-be-married girls lead the other girls by carrying the Nkangkie (pieces of firewood finely shaved and painted) at their back in a specially woven baskets and goes round the village road to signify their purity. The fourth day is known as Rodi, which is the day for the boys and men folk to compete in traditional wrestling and long jump. The fifth and last day of Hega is known as Kwaksui, which is considered as the most eventful and entertaining day and also marks the culmination of the festival. Men folk and young girls, dressed in their best traditional attires, sing and dance at the hallowed ground located at the centre of the village in the presence of all the community members.

#### Cultural Significance of the Hega Festival

At the heart of the Hega Festival lies its deep cultural significance, which functions as a medium for social cohesion, spiritual renewal, prosperous health and agricultural prosperity. The celebration of the changing seasons of the year symbolizes the blessings of ancestral spirits for an abundant harvest, and the Zeliang Nagas utilize traditional dances, songs, and rituals to reinforce their cultural identity and fortify community ties for the year. In addition, the festival provides a platform for the generational transfer of cultural knowledge and values and a sense of continuity and belongingness among the people in the community.

This celebration, which is celebrated in February, heralds the beginning of not only the agricultural season but also all socio-economic activities for the community. The Hega festival, which is celebrated after clearing the jungles for agricultural activities and before the start of the planting season, is also an agricultural celebration. The celebration intends to ensure a bountiful harvest and to ask the gods for blessings on good weather and an abundance of crops. During the celebration, the community teaches the next generation about its customs, values, and beliefs through traditional dances, music, and rituals. It provides not only a platform to showcase the rich cultural heritage but also a forum for identity maintenance and cultural transfer. Hega festival fosters a sense of unity and solidarity among the people in the community by bringing them together. This promotes communal bonding. In order to commemorate their common cultural history, people from other villages especially of the same clans get together for social events, feasting, and joy. In this manner, the celebration helps the community to preserve their rich culture and custom. The festival also has religious significance, where people have deep spiritual beliefs, which are reflected in the ceremonies and rituals held throughout the festival. They ask their gods for favours for a plentiful harvest and general health and blessings for the new couples who are soon-to-be-married.

The Hega celebration represents the uniqueness and identity of the Peren village people in particular and the Zelaing Nagas in general. It helps people feel more a part of their cultural heritage and distinguishes them from other communities. Their distinct customs and way of life are reflected in the festival, which is manifested in the festival's five-day long events. Hega festival is a vibrant celebration that encompasses agricultural, cultural, social, and religious dimensions, reflecting the richness of the cultural heritage of the Zeliangs.

#### Rituals and Ceremonial Significance

A number of intricate rites and ceremonies, each having a deep cultural significance, are performed during the Festival. In advance, communities gather to prepare traditional foods and indigenous beers, adorn village, and practice ceremonial dances in anticipation of the event. The event culminates in a magnificent dances performed in the designated arena in which young girls and men folk decked out in traditional garb and style. It is said that these gods are essential to the community's welfare and the prosperity of the harvest. Prayers are offered as an expression of thanksgiving and respect to the divine beings thought to control the land's fertility and the well-being of its inhabitants. The festival is a time for spiritual regeneration and cleansing for the community. Devotions and introspection are performed in an effort to purify their spirits and remove any hindrances to a bountiful crop or communal peace and for health of everyone in the community.



However, these prominent features of the rites and ceremonies are not so much pronounced in the present day celebration of the festival unlike those days in the past, partly due to cultural dilution and modern day's life style. Yet the objective and purpose of the festival remains the same, with minor changes without affecting the basic fabrics of the Hega festival.

### Contemporary Relevance of the Hega Festival

The Hega Festival remains essential to the preservation of the Zeliang Nagas' cultural legacy despite industrialization and globalization. There are initiatives in place to preserve and revive the festival's customs while also adjusting to the present. This festival support tourism and cultural interaction and provide as proof of the Hega Festival's continuing significance in the modern world. Additionally, the festival acts as a forum for inter-communal communication and cultural expression, which promotes a better communal harmony and appreciation of the vast diversity of Nagas cultural landscape.

There are various reasons why the Zeliang Nagas' Hega celebration is significant in today's context. The Hega festival is a potent instrument for protecting and promoting the distinctive cultural legacy of the Zeliang Nagas in a period of fast globalization and cultural integration. By giving the next generation a platform to learn about their customs, ceremonies, and beliefs, it helps the people to maintain their identity in the face of outside influences and thus, promotes cultural preservation.

Customary celebrations are essential for promoting a feeling of solidarity and cohesiveness within this fast-paced, globally connected world of today. Within the Zeliang Naga community, the event enhances collaboration and mutual understanding by bringing together individuals from various community and villages. This festival has the potential to draw travellers and tourists from various corners who wants to have a firsthand look at indigenous customs and cultures of the Zeliang community. Through exhibiting their customs and by extending an invitation to other communities to partake in the celebrations, the event can foster intercultural communication and interaction, augmenting comprehension and admiration of cultural multiplicity.

The Zeliang Naga community can benefit economically from festivals like Hega, especially when it comes to tourism-related events like local food markets, handicraft sales, and traditional music and dance performances. The community can assist local artists and business owners and develop sustainable careers by utilizing the cultural diversity of the event. The only prerequisite condition is to create a viable environment through collaborative efforts by the stakeholders. In general, the Hega festival holds a potential to transform it into a widely popular event.

### 4. CONCLUSION:

To sum up, the Hega Festival is a live example of the Zeliang Nagas of Nagaland's tenacity, inventiveness, and cultural diversity. The festival celebrates the past culture while also reaffirming the community's collective identity and cohesion and ambitions for the present through its rituals, ceremonies, and festivities. The Hega Festival is a painful reminder of how important it is to preserve and maintain indigenous cultural legacy for future generations, especially as Nagas navigates through the challenges of this fast-pace twenty-first century. The festival is quite significant today as it represents economic empowerment, community cooperation and cultural resiliency. Its celebration acts as a reminder of the value of maintaining cultural diversity in a world that is changing quickly, as well as the lasting significance of indigenous customs.

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