

## TRADITIONAL STYLE OF POUMAI NAGA WRESTLING (POYU)

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### **Abstract:**

This research explores the depth of Poumai Naga Traditional Wrestling called 'Poyu' witnessing a leaping growth as a prominent sport in the region. Since the unversed practice of head-hunting in the pre-Christian era, there is a unique belief system in the existential life of Living novel chapter. Poyu reference to the men's role is a cultural practice in the form of physical contestation deeply rooted in the social and religious festivals of the Poumai Naga tribe. The present study presents the significance of cultural and traditional games called Poyu in denoting as a catalyst for promoting community bonds, physical prowess, and its uniqueness of preserving traditional and cultural practice. It also examines the dimension of traditional rules, styles, skills, and ritual practice associated with the games. This game is one of the illustrious religious festivals among the Poumai Naga tribe in Senapati District Manipur. It is demarcated into three circles according to regional convenience. The Lepaona circle played during the famous traditional festivals of 'Paoki' (Paddy Plantation), the Paomata circle played during 'Laonii'(Post-Plantation), and the Chilevai circle played during 'Daonii/Marunii' (seed sowing festival) celebrated according to the 'Lunar Calendar'. The present work on Traditional wrestling has been left uncontested and unrecorded over the last decades. Therefore, the study shall fundamentally delve into the distinct techniques and schemes of traditional wrestling in reciprocity with the ritual festivals.

Keywords: Poumai Naga, Traditional wrestling, Ritual festival,

### **Introduction**

In the rugged hills of Manipur, Poumai Naga is one of the major tribes mainly settling in Senapati District Manipur India. By the artificial boundary, some of the Poumais are settled in the Chakhesang area in Phek District, Nagaland. In geographical terms, the Poumais have four sub-communities inhabiting four major areas viz: Poamata, Lepaona, Chilivai, and Poumai Chakhesang (in Razeza Range's Nagaland).(Ngupani, 2010) After the end of headhunting the wrestling started in the Poumai area. Among all the traditional games 'Poyu' (wrestling) is one of the most popular games played by boys. However, traditional wrestling had different seasons of playing the game varies from village to village. During festivals different villages' organized

traditional style of wrestling ('Poyu') were conducted in the form of inter-village friendly competitions.(Punii & Meyieho, 2020) The people of Paomata organize the game during the 'Laonii' festival that falls in the month of 'Lao khou' (July) while the people of Lepaona region conduct the 'Poyu' competition during the paddy transplanting festival known as 'Paoki' that falls in the month of 'Khana khou' (May).(Taishya & Prasad Das, 2024) The people of the Chilivai region organize the game 'Poyu' during the 'Daonii' festival which falls in the month of 'Roupa Khou' or 'Khonihi Khou' last week of March and the first week of April. The people of Poumai Naga follow the "LUNAR" calendar for its customs and traditions. Poyu is one of the most growing and popular games in the Poumai Naga tribe, in this ritual game women are strictly prohibited and they are not allowed to participate in the events.(Liba, 2020)

Wrestling is a game that enthralls the crowd by displaying the men's physique, tricks, skills, tactics, and strength. (Khalo, 2020) Wrestling plays a vital role in bringing togetherness and harmony among the Poumais where there are no haters against any particular individuals or any villages, it brings good relationships between two neighboring villages or more. The categories of the wrestlers may be between the same age group or a similar weight. (Jadhav, 2024)

The people of Paomata organized the traditional wrestling in the ritual festival called 'Laonii' which is one of the sacred festivals celebrated on the completion of the paddy plantation that falls in the month of 'Lao Khou' (July). Before the festivals all the paddy works have to be done or completed, if any field is not planted before the festivals is to be extremely wicked for the year as it is believed that the paddy transplanting after the festivals does not yield crops. Laonii festival is a twelve-long day celebration during this festival all the villages are strictly prohibited from going and working in paddy fields. During this 12-long festival celebration, the youths are allowed to organize traditional wrestling. (Liba, 2020)

Paonii is also known as Paoki and it is one the biggest and most lavishly celebrated festivals of the Poumai. The celebration takes place every year in the month of 'Khana Khou' (May) to mark the first paddy transplanting day of the year. In the olden days, this festival was celebrated by a few villages which are situated in the middle part of the Poumai region namely; Onaeme (Oinam), Purul, Koide, Maiba, Phuba, Chaonamai (Thingba Khullen) and Shomai (Thingba Khunou), etc. (Ngupani, 2010) Paonii/Paoki festivals are the best for the people of Lepaona, a sub-community of Poumai. Paoki is a four-day long celebrated festival by the people of Lepaona, which starts with 'Ranai', on this day the paddy field is kept ready for planting, and apart from planting the foodstuff is also kept ready for the guests as well. On the second day 'Thaopai' is reserved for seedlings from jhum land during the day time and in the evening of the second day the guests and relatives were invited for the festive to the respective house with the traditional foods with rice-beer, pork, fish, beef etc. On the night of the second day, it marks the most memorable moment for the boys who participated in the wrestling competition where conducted between the host villagers and the challengers from the other villages or neighboring villages, thus sometimes wrestling continue till the dawn of the next day. On the next day the third day 'Khanai' is the main day of the Paonii/Paoki festivals, paddy plantation starts in the

early morning with the ritual performed by the housewife by offering a slice of meat along with drops of wine to God and the paddy field deity asking for fertility and healthy growth of paddy to be transplanted. During the day boys pay a visit to the girls who they are interested in or admire and help them in planting and enjoying delicious foods and wine which is served by girls. On the last day of the festival ‘Khanaitai’ on this day boys usually visit the fields and extend their hands to the families who had not completed their plantation works.(Taishya & Prasad Das, 2024)

The people of the Chilivai (Proumai) region organized wrestling during the festivals of Daonii which falls in the month of ‘Roupa Khou’ or ‘Khoniik Khou’ last week of March and the first week of April. While the other villages which fall under Chilivai celebrate the festivals as marunii. Daonii / marunii is an indigenous festival for Proumai and Raimai, it is the festival of seed sowing and cultivation of crops by tradition. This festival is observed for four days and it’s restricted to villagers to work in the field. On the first day, animals were butchered in preparation for the celebration. Daughters who are married to other villages would be invited along with their husbands and clan members on the next day when they returned to their husband’s villages the daughter's families would be given meat as a traditional token of love and share with the in-laws.

On the second day, ‘Chidzii’, a ritual prayer and offering to the house deity would be performed. On this second day, the wine is poured into each cup and offered to the deity with the words ‘Ra Paipaoh, nehai zaoprai ve sohlou-o’ which means ‘come and be served your cup of wine’. In the evening young men would gather and prepare to wrestle and prove their strength and defend their village from the challengers that come from other villages or neighboring villages and the winner of the wrestling competition would be named as the strongest man of the year and he would be awarded.(Punii & Meyieho, 2020b)

### **Objective of the study:**

- 1) To explore and preserve the cultural significance associated with ‘Poyu’ ( Traditional Wrestling)
- 2) To evaluate the role of youth in instilling cultural pride among the generation
- 3) To analyze the specific techniques, skills, and training method

### **Methodology:**

The methodology used in this research is exploratory, historical, and analytical in design since so far no in-depth research has been undertaken by any other scholar or writer about the Poumai Naga tribe. The study is mainly based on the primary source to be used in the fieldwork conducted and the other sources collected during the fieldwork with the help of individual as well as group interviews, exploration of oral traditions, old documents, and also adopted to the socio-religious and cultural activities, in addition, extensive use of the availability of secondary source in order to get more information in the research.

### **Rules and Regulations of Poumai Naga Traditional Wrestling (Poyu):**

#### **1) WRESTLING PIT/ARENA:**

- a) The length and breadth of the wrestling ring/ arena will be 40 sq ft in diameter.

- b) The wrestling arena will be encircled with strong ropes.
- c) For the safety of the wrestlers, enough space will be provided, for which a minimum space of 5 feet should be there in between the ring and the rope.

## 2) WAIST BINDER:

- a) The organizers or host villages will provide the waist binder to both wrestlers.
- b) The waist binder will be 1 meter in breadth and 2 or 2 ½ or 3 meters in length, which should be cotton cloth.
- c) The waist binder will be tied in 2 rounds around the waist on the navel.
- d) The wrestlers will check their opponent's waist binder before the first bout and will not complain whatsoever before the completion of that bout. In the second and third bouts also the same rule will apply with that of the first bout.
- e) In the process of wrestling if the waist binder breaks or loosens incapacitating further wrestling, then the referee will stop the bout and tighten the binder properly and the opponent will not complain after that.
- f) The waist binder will be tied binder in a traditional reef knot.
- g) For each bout, the waist binder can be re-tied.
- h) Once the wrestling starts, no wrestlers will complain about the belt before the completion of the bout of two minutes.
- i) Both the wrestlers will stand in the proper position so that each one can hold their opponent's waist binder with both hands. Kneeling, moving away to escape his opponent from holding the binder before the start is not allowed.
- j) The tournament officials will tie the waist binder of the wrestlers from outside the arena to save time.

## 3) TIME:

- a) Two minutes will be given in each bout. If it ends in a draw, two minutes will be given for the third bout to decide the winner.
- b) In the first bout, if both the wrestlers waste the allotted time, they will be made to stand straight, their toes and stomach touching each other and facing each other face to face and start the bout allowing each other to apply the tactics. If the wrestlers return to the same passive position, within 5 seconds the referee will ask the wrestlers to re-start the standing position till one is victorious. The same will be applied in the second and third bouts to decide the winner.

## 4) FALL:

- a) If the chest, back, shoulder, buttock, or thigh touches the ground, it is a fall.
- b) The elbow, knee and head touching the ground is not considered a fall.
- c) If a wrestler had applied the tactics from within the ring and if the opponent fell on the line or outside the arena, it was a fall.
- d) The wrestlers may still be applying tactics but if they have gone out of the arena. The referee can stop the match and bring them back to the center of the arena to restart the match with the remaining time.

- e) In the process of wrestling if both wrestlers have parted and not holding each other, then the referee will call them back to the center of the ring and re-start the match with the remaining time.
- f) Wrestlers will not be allowed to go out of the wrestling arena without informing the referee. If anyone does so the referee will declare the opponent as the winner.
- g) In the process of wrestling, if anyone puts down his opponent to a kneeling position but cannot apply further tactics, then the referee can ask both to stand up and restart the match. But if the wrestlers continue to apply tactics, the match will not be stopped.

**5) TIME OUT/ REST TIME:**

- a) Only in the case of injury, time out or rest time of 2 minutes can be availed. In about wrestler can be availed only for once for an injury time out, but on the advice of the physician another 2 minutes may be added to the injury time. If the injured cannot restart the match after a lapse of injury time out, then his opponent will be declared the winner.
- b) There is no rest time or time out given to any player other than injury.

**6) RESTRICTION:**

- a) If wrestlers, with ill intentions, intentionally apply tricks which is dangerous to their opponent then the referee will give a warning to the guilty, but if the warning is not heeded, then his opponent will be declared the winner while the guilty will be barred/expelled from the tournament.
- b) In the process of wrestling pushing their opponent's thigh or pulling their ribs/chests will not be allowed.
- c) No wrestler will hackle each other with ill intentions but will wrestle in a friendly way.
- d) If any player removes/untied his waist binder before the completion of the bout then the referee will tie the waist binder accordingly as a punishment.
- e) Wrestlers will not apply oil on their bodies or use other substances that are banned by the organizers.
- f) Wrestlers will not be allowed to participate with long nails (fingers and toes).
- g) Wrestlers will not be allowed to pull/push the thighs/legs of their opponents. Such actions call for a warning from the Referee.
- h) During the bouts, no wrestlers are allowed to have eatables while still in the Arena.

**7) JUDGES AND REFEREES:**

- a) There will be three judges to manage the match and the result will be decided by the majority opinion. In case there is no clear verdict to decide the winner, the bout will resume with the remaining time allotted for the bout.
- b) For all the bouts, and its interval the referee will start and stop.
- c) Before the start of any tournament – Referees /judges' oath and clinic taking will be held for the smooth conduct of the tourney. If any officials fail to attend this then they will not be allowed to officiate in the tournament.
- d) Referees/Judges were highly aspect intoxicants during the tournament, if anyone was found guilty then his official registration shall immediately be suspended or canceled without any further notice from the association.

**Traditional Style of Poumai Naga Wrestling (Poyu):**



*Figure 1: Lei Pfiiyu*

*This technique to takedown relying on strength, and timing to unbalance and defeat the*



*Figure 2: Pohyu*

*This technique demonstrates raw strength, control and tactical position making an*



*Figure 3: Kou Daoyu Nya Right*

*This technique the wrestler maintains body contact and positioning to ensure he dictates the direction of the opponents fall.*



*Figure 4: Khou Khe Yu*

*The wrestler gripped his opponent waist and gaining advantages position in the process of controlling his lower body and making it easier to takedown*



*Figure 5: Natya/ Nearai Right*

*The wrestler has tightly gripped his opponents' waist and lifting him off the ground by using his hips and lower back to generate power for a high-impact throw*



*Figure 6: nearai*

*The attacking wrestler has wrapped both arms tightly around his opponent body and applying strong pressure to control the movement and takedown with minimal effort*



*Figure 7: Va Dao*

*The wrestler used his right leg to trap his opponent's left leg causing him imbalance and by pushing his opponents upper body backward for easier takedown*



*Figure 8: Kou Pfiyu*

*This technique the wrestler lifted one leg of the opponent from the ground and use of a hip or thigh block to disrupt balance*



*Figure 9: Khou Teayu*

*This technique the wrestler has secured a tight hold which is essential for controlling the opponent's movement and his hip positioned should lower than the opponent's to takedown*



*Figure 10: Liikhea Right*

*This technique is a combination of body control and leg positioning makes its highly effective for throwing the opponent's off balance*



*Figure 11: Siikha Nya*

*This is a powerful takedown technique where the wrestler in black shorts has secured a body lock around the opponent's waist and attempt to lift and off-balance their opponents. It relies on body control to execute a clean takedown*



*Figure 12: Phihi Daoyu*

*This technique depends on torso control, balance disruption and forward drive to execute an effective takedown*



*Figure 13: Phihi Daoyu*

*The wrestler with the purple sash has secured a strong grip around the opponent's waist and lifting them off the ground, this type of throw is commonly used to off-balance and pin the opponent effectively*



*Figure 14: khou khe veiyu*

*The wrestler are engaged in by the collar and elbow tie-up with a body lock grip, it is a common stance in traditional wrestling style, the positioning may setting for a takedown or throw*



*Figure 15: Liikhea right*

*This is a technique where the attacker lifts the opponent from behind and either throws them backward or takedown. This move is common in indigenous wrestling styles that focus on body lock and throws*

### **Conclusion:**

‘Poyu’ is a traditional practice by the Poumai Naga tribe in Senapati District Manipur and it is not only a vibrant expression of cultural heritage but it’s played a significant role in shaping the male identity and profound demonstration of discipline. Poyu plays a role in fostering community bonds and preserving the unique identity of the Poumai Naga tribe. Traditional wrestling serves as a means of imparting values among the males such as respect, honor, and resilience to the younger generations. Traditional wrestling upholds the potential to promote cultural pride and also unity among the Poumai Nagas.

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