
A Study on Village Gates of the Angami Nagas with Special Reference to Kohima Village

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Abstract: *This research aims to explore the traditional gates of the Angami Nagas, which played a central role during the days of headhunting. These village gates serve as the main entrances to Angami Naga villages, embodying significant cultural and ritualistic elements of society. Crafted from a single tree, the gates are wooden structures adorned with symbols that hold deep meaning for the community. The designs on the gates reflect key aspects of cultural tradition, making them a fundamental part of the Angami Naga identity. Figurative and symbolic in nature, these gates are closely tied to rituals and taboos linked to religious beliefs. Their presence is considered virtuous within the village, and over time, they have become an integral part of the community's heritage, blending seamlessly into its cultural legacy.*

Keywords: Village Gates, Angami Nagas, Nagaland, Vernacular Architecture, Wood Carving, Heritage, Material Culture

Introduction

The village gate serves as the entrance to a village, but for the Angami Nagas, it is more than just a doorway; it plays a significant and symbolic role in their society. In the Angami language, the village gate is called 'Kharu.' This tradition of constructing village gates is also shared by other Naga tribes, including the Rengma, Chakhesang, Zeliang, and Mao, all of which belong to the Tenyimia community of the Nagas. The Angami Nagas are one of the major tribes of Nagaland in Northeast India. Early accounts of the Angami Nagas come from the works of scholars such as Hutton (1921), Haimendorf (1939), Butler (1875), Mills (1854), and Archer (1947), who documented the tribe during the colonial period in the Naga Hills, as written records were scarce.

The village gates are typically positioned at the foot of the village in the mountain hill ranges. While other Naga tribes have adopted modern gate designs, they do not follow the traditional practice of constructing village gates as the Angami Nagas do. The arrival of Christianity in Nagaland has led to the decline of many age-old practices and rituals, marking a significant shift in Naga society, though efforts to preserve cultural heritage continue.

The architecture of the village gates is crucial to understanding the cultural significance of the motifs and designs. These gates are ancient architectural works that blend communal and traditional features, representing elements of vernacular and indigenous architecture. This study focuses on Kohima village in the Kohima district of Nagaland. The original name of the village is 'Kewhira,' a term in the Angami language, while 'Kohima' was adopted by the Europeans who could not pronounce the Angami name. Kohima (Figure 1) is the second-largest village in Asia.

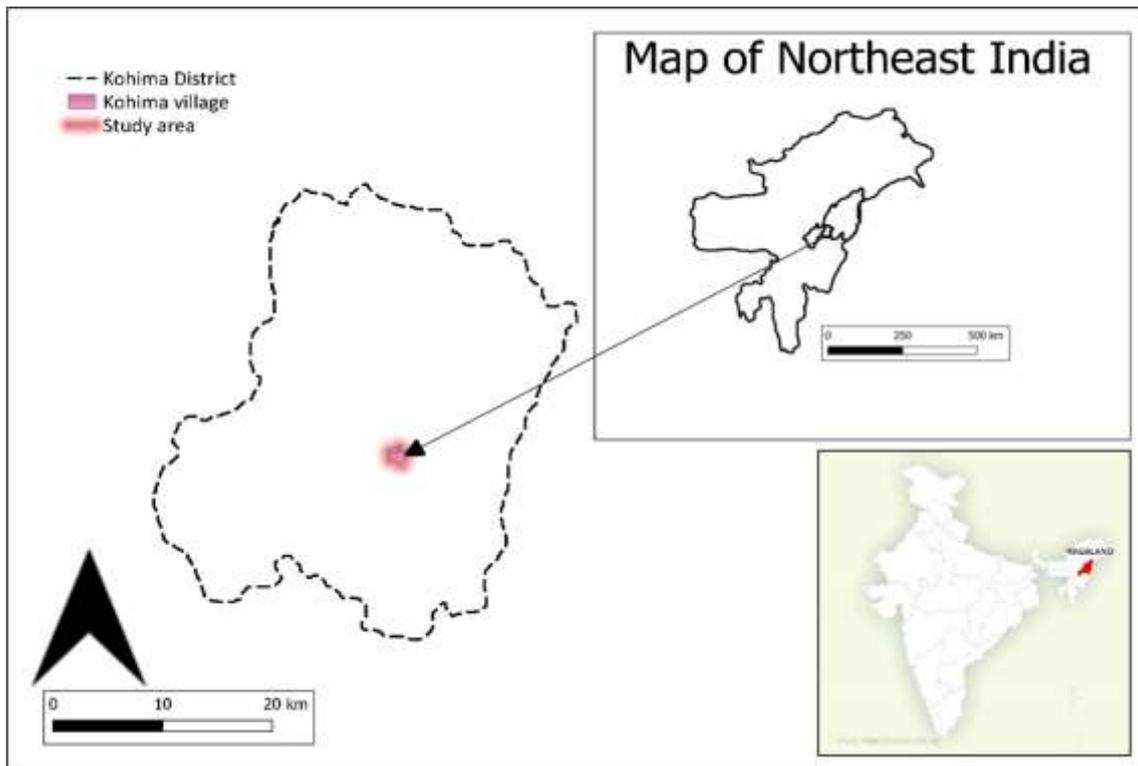


Figure 1: Map of Study area of Kohima Village

The aim of this research is to explore the importance and functions of village gates among the Angami Nagas. The study seeks to understand the reasons behind the construction of these gates, the rituals and taboos associated with them, and the need to preserve them as an essential part of cultural heritage. Studies on village gates have been limited in the past, often overlooked in research on village formation and structure. There is little known about their historical significance, making further documentation crucial. Village gates played an important role, particularly during the days of headhunting, and understanding the rituals and traditions associated with them is vital for preserving the legacy of the Angami Nagas, even though such practices are no longer followed today. Without these gates, a village cannot be truly recognized.

It is essential to document how village gates are constructed and the purpose behind their creation. Few studies have been written on the subject, and it requires special attention to preserve what is an integral part of our culture. Documenting the cultural

symbols and significance of these gates is key to understanding their contribution to the history of society. This research aims to highlight the importance of safeguarding this vital aspect of cultural heritage.

Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary data, including field surveys, documentation of village gates, and the use of GIS software such as QGIS and Google Earth Pro. QGIS and Google Earth Pro were utilized to map the study area and plot the locations of the sites. Primary data were gathered through unstructured interviews with village elders (Figure 2, Table 1), as well as through books written in the Angami language. These books, which serve as primary sources, were translated and interpreted for the study. Secondary data were sourced from existing research, archival materials including travel diaries, journals of European and American administrators, and accounts from travelers and articles.

Field surveys were conducted to understand the layout and patterns of the villages. Interactions with elderly villagers were held to inquire about the village gates. A total of 36 village gates were documented across six villages, with a comparative study focusing on five villages: Chiechama, Jotsoma, Kigwema, Khonoma, and Mezoma. Kohima and Chiechama villages are located in the northern region, Jotsoma, Khonoma, and Mezoma in the western region, and Kigwema in the southern region of the Angami group. The study is divided into six sites: Site 1 – Kohima, Site 2 – Chiechama, Site 3 – Jotsoma, Site 4 – Kigwema, Site 5 – Khonoma, and Site 6 – Mezoma.



Figure 2 a-b: a, Interview with village elder at Jotsoma Village; b, Documenting Village Gate at Kigwema Village with the informant

Fieldwork was conducted in three phases: the first visit took place in January 2023 for four days, followed by a second visit in February 2023. The final field visit was made between April 10 and April 16, 2023, to revisit and revise the sites. During this last

visit, new findings were recorded, including additional gates discovered through site revisitation.

Documentation of the village gates was done through photographs, measurements with a scale bar (90 cm), a ruling bar scale (30 cm), a measuring tape, and both a camera and phone camera. A notebook, pen, pencil, and recorder were used for the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the Angami language, my native language, which allowed for smooth communication with the interviewees. The interviewees were primarily in their late 70s to early 80s and were knowledgeable about the cultural history and traditions of the village. The interviews were unstructured, as the questions depended on the informants' knowledge and responses, focusing on cultural history and traditions. Since the gates are located on narrow paths, photographing them was challenging. The surveys were conducted on foot, walking from one village gate to the next with the assistance of the informants and local villagers.

Table 1: Name of Informants for unstructured interview

Sl. No.	Name of informant	Age	Gender	Native Village	District
1.	Pfurheicha Rupreo	74	Male	Chiechama	Kohima
2.	Pekruiyabei Tsieya	73	Male	Jotsoma	Kohima
3.	Khokhrie Nienu	73	Male	Kigwema	Kohima
4.	Nguluolie Kesiezie	82	Male	Kohima	Kohima
5.	Vilie-o Rutsa	80	Male	Kohima	Kohima
6.	Rhovigwelhou Chusi	73	Male	Mezoma	Kohima
7.	Neichüriazo Chücha	80	Male	Khonoma	Kohima

Literature Review

There has been limited scholarly attention given to the study of village gates, and it remains an underexplored topic across various academic disciplines. Village gates are rarely covered in detail in many locations, though they can be understood in relation to issues in architecture, cultural material, administration, and preservation. The significance and meaning of village gates can vary depending on the community and rural setting, with each gate carrying its own symbolic meaning in its construction. However, a common purpose shared by these gates is their function for defense, as they were often created to protect the village.

The literature reviewed for this study is divided into three parts: a) Global studies on village gates, b) Village gates in Nagaland, and c) Studies on Angami village gates. The first part explores the global perspective of village gates, drawing from examples in Southern Serbia, Vietnam, Hanoi, and Southwest China's Dong village. Village gates, as essential cultural elements, have been preserved in the modern world. While their components and purposes may differ, a common feature among these gates is their function as defensive structures. Gates have long served as vital architectural features marking the entry points to cities or villages, though they remain under-researched in the literature.

As architectural forms, village gates represent a recognizable element of heritage in various regions (Turnsek, 2018; Dordevic, 2018). The traditional and architectural significance of village gates has been explored in the works of Turnsek and Dordevic (2018). In the context of Turkish village gates, they are categorized into two types based on shape and structure: covered gates and uncovered gates. Additionally, there are two main designs for traditional gates: one for cart entry and the other just wide enough for pedestrian passage. These gates are typically made of wood, although some are constructed from stone. Research in Southern Serbia has focused on the gates of villages in the Pirot area.

In Vietnam, the cultural and historical significance of village gates has been examined in works by Dang Van Tu (2020), Tuan Tran (2020), and Nhan Dan (2014). These studies emphasize the importance of documenting and preserving historical cultural artifacts, with village gates playing a central role in Vietnamese society. Initially built to protect villages, these gates also showcased traditional architectural styles. Early gates were constructed using wooden materials like bamboo or trees, but over time, stronger materials were used to enhance durability. Some gates feature inscriptions of Chinese characters, further adding to their cultural and historical value.

Xing Ruan (2006) explores the architectural elements of the myths and legends of Southwest China, where the settlement patterns of village gates are closely linked to architectural features. The Dong villages in China are known for their sophisticated and traditional gates. However, in some regions, gates are not constructed at all. The decorative elements of the gates vary according to the type of gates built, and Dong villages also feature side pavilions adjacent to the gates.

In Nagaland, village gates are a significant hallmark of village construction. Defense has always been a crucial strategy, particularly in the context of frequent wars among neighboring tribes. In the past, no village could survive without proper defense arrangements, and since the Nagas were in constant conflict with one another, defense strategies were critical. The construction of village gates has been most prominent among the Southern Nagas, particularly the Angamis and Chakhesangs. Mills (1922) and Hutton (1926) have offered perspectives on village defense, with specific focus on the Ao and Lotha tribes of the Nagas.

The village gates of the Angami Nagas have also been documented in the journal accounts of Europeans and Americans, who provide valuable insights into the history and culture of the region. These accounts are significant because they describe practices that have since been lost, largely due to the influence of Christianity and the abandonment of the old religion. This conversion led to a disruption of traditional customs and practices. However, revisiting these practices through oral traditions has allowed for a renewed understanding of the past. Many of these journal accounts, written by European and American missionaries, serve as dependable sources, as they document practices that were still witnessed at the time but have since faded from contemporary society. Works by Hutton (1921), Marwah and Srivastava (1987), and

Yano (2014) focus on the Angami village gates, with the latter two exploring the symbolic associations of the gates within their respective fields of study.

In addition, there are a few works written in the Angami language that address the village gates as part of the rituals and daily life of the Tenyimia community. These include the writings of Shürhozelie (1981), Vikielie Sorhie (1993), and Neichüriazo (1989), along with publications from the Angami Public Organization and the Khonoma Centenary Mission Society. These works primarily focus on the cultural and traditional significance of the village gates in the lives of the Angami people. While they share similar themes, such as rituals, religious practices, and livelihoods, they provide valuable insights into how the gates are woven into the cultural fabric of the Tenyimia community.

Case Study of Village Gates of the Angami Nagas

The village gates of the Angami Nagas hold a profound significance, serving not merely as entrances but as vital symbols of identity, strength, and spiritual connection within the community. Historically, the gates were the sole access points to the village, emphasizing their strategic and cultural importance. Constructing a gate is as critical as founding the village itself, as it represents the collective spirit and identity of the people. When the Angami forefathers chose a place to settle, they built gates after seeking blessings from *Kepenuopfü*, the revered deity, and inscribed sacred symbols on them to embody these blessings. These symbols are deeply respected and hold spiritual value.

The number of gates in an Angami village reflects the number of *khels* (clans or community divisions) it comprises. Larger *khels* often have multiple gates, signifying their strength and unity. Villages with only one gate are sometimes believed to lack victory or fortune; for instance, Kiruphema, a village with just one gate, is said to have struggled to gain victories in the past. A village with multiple gates demonstrates its resilience and power.

In earlier times, villages were fortified with thorny plants to create natural defenses, leaving the gate as the sole access point. To reinforce this security, a massive tree was cut, carved, and transformed into a proper gate known as *Kharu*. These gates were fitted with sturdy posts, sometimes made from *Thesii* trees, known to cause allergic reactions when touched, thus acting as a further deterrent against unwanted intrusions. Ritualistically, the gates were believed to guard the village against diseases and other calamities.

The *Kharu* is made from large, carefully selected trees to ensure durability. Over time, gates are replaced or repaired as they wear out. The carvings on the gates, while varying from village to village, often depict motifs that reflect blessings, aspirations, and cultural values. Common symbols include the Mithun head, which occupies a central position, representing prosperity and strength. In some gates, two Mithun heads may be carved. Other motifs include human heads symbolizing headhunting

traditions and the victories of warriors, as well as the moon (*Khrii*) and sun (*Niaki*), signifying longevity. Warriors holding enemy heads, spears, or *daos* portray the martial prowess of the community. Symbols like rice stalks express hopes for agricultural abundance, while bulls stand for unity and strength. Women's breasts, carved at the bottom of the gates, symbolize fertility and the nurturing essence of women, serving as prayers for the prosperity of future generations.

The rituals associated with the gates are elaborate and deeply ingrained in tradition. These rituals are observed before, during, and after the construction of the gates. On the day of the gate-pulling ceremony, strict taboos are enforced. No one is allowed to work in the fields, and *genna* (ritual prohibitions) are observed throughout the village. It is forbidden to touch the ropes used for pulling the gate unless participating in the ceremony, and even touching the *Kharu* itself is a significant taboo, especially for women, as the gate is considered sacred.

Once the gate is brought into the village, usually during the Angami festival of Sekrenyi, the elders perform a ritual seeking blessings from the *Kharu*. They wear new shawls during the ceremony, shake them off outside the gate, and then proudly don them again, symbolizing the receipt of the gate's blessings. These rituals reinforce the sacredness of the *Kharu*, its role in the community, and its enduring importance as a cultural and spiritual symbol.

Functions of the Gates

The construction of village gates is deeply rooted in traditions, rites, and taboos. Women are excluded from these rituals, as only young boys and men are allowed to participate. The gate, typically kept open on regular days, plays a vital defensive role during times of war or conflict. It is closed during feuds or when certain *gennas* and taboos are observed in the village, with heavy stone instruments placed behind it to prevent outsiders from forcing entry.

The process begins with the careful selection of the tree for the gate. This task falls to the village elders, who are accompanied by ritual performers, known as *Zievomia*, and young unmarried boys, called *Phousemia*. The chosen tree must meet strict criteria—it must be free of cracks, undamaged by insects, animals, or human activity, and not serve as a shelter for other creatures. Its roots must not intertwine with those of other plants or trees. Once a suitable tree is identified, an elder or one of the boys recites the phrase, "*No sei theguo-u shie, n se mhakevi chiituo shie,*" which translates to, "*Your good tree will be used for the good of the village.*" If any imperfections are found in the tree after it is felled, the search for another tree resumes.

The selection is followed by a symbolic ritual involving dreams. On the night after the tree is chosen, the eldest member or a young boy dream to determine whether the tree is auspicious. An unfavorable dream means the process must start anew. If the dream is favorable, a date is fixed to proceed with carving the tree. On this day, known as *Nanyii*, villagers sing folk songs as they journey to cut the tree. The initial cut is made

by a virtuous man, symbolizing purity, and skilled woodworkers then take over, using traditional tools like arrowheads, chisels, daos, and kechie.

The ceremonial dragging of the gate, called *Kharushü* or *Chiesü*, follows. Before the gate is moved, an important ritual, *terhase*, is performed: two elders place a rooster on the felled tree. If the rooster crows and poops, it signifies that the tree will bring blessings to the village. The gate is then tied with wild ropes and dragged by the village's strongest men. To keep the gate from "feeling lonely," one or two individuals sit on it as it is pulled, accompanied by singing and displays of strength. This event is attended by all the men in the village, who dress in their finest traditional attire, making it a proud occasion to recount in the future.

Once the gate is delivered to the community, it is not immediately installed. Depending on the village, the installation may take place seven days later, during the festival *Sekrenyi*, or at any convenient time if the gate was not made during a festival. After the new gate is erected, the old one is set aside next to it, symbolizing the continuity of tradition.

Documentation Study of Village Gates

Six villages were studied to understand the patterns and characteristics of their village gates. The gates were carefully measured and documented through photographs, revealing variations in motifs and symbols unique to each village. These gates are reconstructed when the old ones deteriorate or succumb to age. During the documentation process, remnants of old gates were often found placed behind the newly constructed ones, preserving a tangible link to the past.

The gates fall into two categories: traditional gates made of wood and modern gates constructed from stone. While the traditional wooden gates are crafted and installed with elaborate rituals, the stone gates lack such ceremonial significance. The focus here will remain on the traditional gates, as the modern stone gates are discussed elsewhere. In some cases, traditional gates are painted in black, white, and red to ensure their preservation.

For clarity and organization, the gates have been cataloged alphabetically with site numbers. The designation "VG" stands for Village Gate, followed by the village site number and an alphabet indicating the specific documentation entry. Although all the gates have been documented, only a selection of them will be discussed in detail, focusing on those that best illustrate the patterns and traditions observed.

Kohima Village Gates

The first village to be discussed is Kohima (Figure 3), the primary focus of this study. Designated as Site No. 1, Kohima village showcases the social structure of the Angami community, organized into four *khels*. Each *khel* is responsible for constructing and maintaining its own gate, reflecting its distinct identity and traditions. In the pre-Christian era, the village gates, known as *kharu*, were revered and held in great respect.

Originally, Kohima had seven gates (Figure 4, Table 2), but with the expansion of the village and changes brought by modernity, the number has grown to 15. For this study, 13 gates have been documented, including 10 traditional wooden gates and three modern stone gates. The oldest gate in Kohima is *Üsou Kharu*, which carries significant historical and cultural importance. During the head-hunting days, it was strictly forbidden for dead bodies to pass through this gate, underscoring its sacred status within the village.

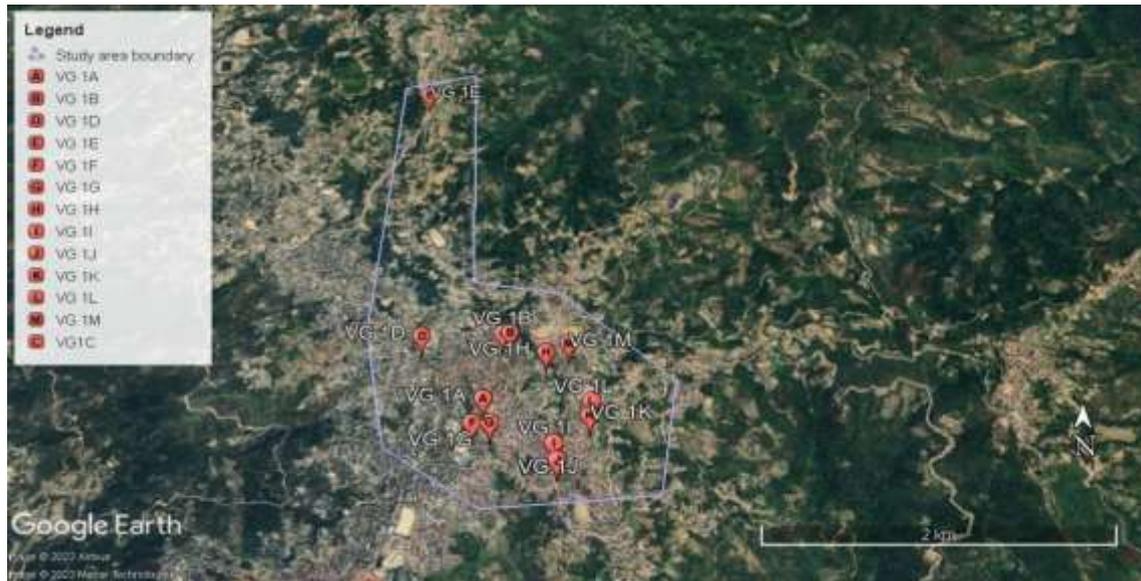


Figure 3: Location of the Village Gates in Kohima

Table 2: Documentation of Gates of Kohima Village

Sl. No.	Name of Kharu	Gate no	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Year of Re-erection	Type	Longitude	Latitude
1	Kijü Kicie	VG1A	2.6	1.6	1922	Wood	94°06'44.53" E	25°40'41.94" N
2	Tsiera Kharu - Pekhro	VG 1B	2.80	1.24	1909	Wood	94°06'48.46" E	25°40'56.61" N
3	Tsiera Kharu Peso	VG IC	2.75	1.20	1940	Wood	94°06'50.23" E	25°40'57.71" N
4	Rhiepfu	VG ID	2.49	1.4	1969	Stone	94°06'29.82" E	25°40'56.29" N
5	Lhisemia Gate	VG IE	3.0	1.5	2021	Stone	94°06'48.46" E	25°40'56.61" N
6	Tsiituonuomia	VG IF	2.49	1.4	1947	Wood	94°06'42.37" E	25°40'36.12" N
7	Cakou	VG IG	2.8	0.67	1941	Wood	94°06'47.73" E	25°40'35.29" N
8	Nousi	VGIH	3.2	1.4	2015	Stone	94°06'57.79" E	25°40'52.37" N
9	Basazou	VG II	2.10	1.49	NIL	Wood	94°06'59.63" E	25°40'32.01" N
10	Keredzükhä	VG IJ	1.98	0.96	1967	Wood	94°11'67.63" E	25°67'44.69" N
11	Rutsa	VG IK	2.71	1.67	1904	Wood	94°11'90.43" E	25°67'64.98" N
12	Üsou	VG IL	2.76	1.32	1969	Wood	94°11'84.82" E	25°67'77.02" N
13	Yakouzou	VGIM	2.48	1.62	1954	Wood	94°11'73.74" E	25°68'17.58" N



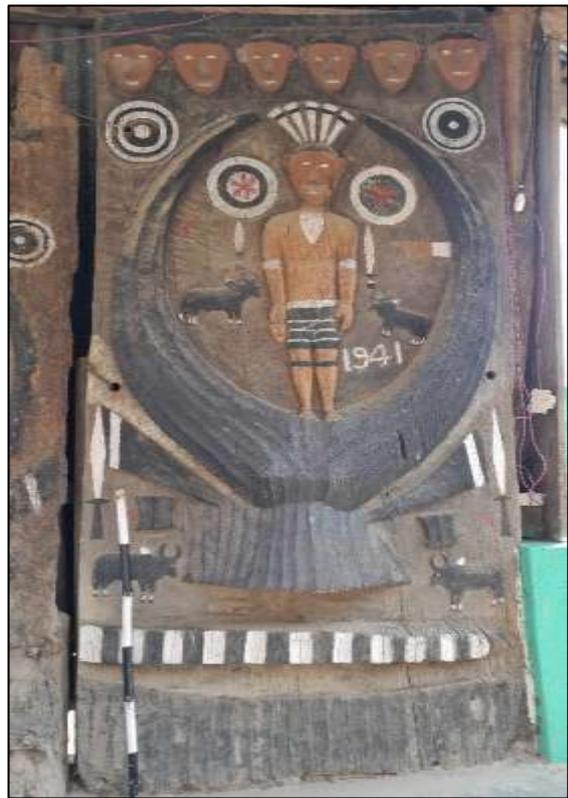
a



b



c



d

Figure 4: a-d Village Gates of Kohima Village: a, VG1A; b, VGIG; c, VGII; d, VGIL



Figure 5: Location of Chiechama Village Gate



Figure 6: a-b Chiechama Village Gate: a, Entrance of the Village Gate; b, Image of the Leitei tree (Rubber tree) used to hang the heads of the enemies

Chiechama Village Gate

Chiechama Village (Figure 5) is highlighted in Site No. 2 of this study for its distinctive stone gate, known as Ziekhou Keke Kharu or Terhü Kharu. This gate is unique as it is

the only one in the village and is constructed from large stone boulders (Figure 6). Similar gates are characteristic of Naga tribal architecture, serving both defensive and fortification purposes. The gate holds special relevance in the study of megaliths in Nagaland due to its material and cultural significance. Adjacent to the gate stands a prominent monolith, historically used to sharpen weapons like daos and spears by headhunters before battle. These weapons were wielded to decapitate enemies, whose heads were then displayed on a tree within the gate, symbolizing the village's strength and valor. This feature underscores the pride and identity of Chiechama Village, showcasing its rich heritage and martial traditions.

Kigwema Village Gates

The village is designated as Site No. 3 in this study (Figure 7). It originally consisted of three khels (clans), with two additional khels later incorporated to establish it as a complete village (Figure 8, Table 3). For the people of Kigwema, the Village Gate holds cultural significance and is traditionally constructed and installed during two major festivals of the Angami tribes: *Sekrenyi* and *Terhiinyi*. These festivals play a crucial role in the creation of the *Kharu* (gate), with specific rituals performed as part of the gate's construction process.



Figure 7: Location of Village Gates in Kigwema Village

Khonoma Village Gates

The gates of Khonoma Village (Figure 9) exhibit distinctive features and symbolic significance, making them unique. Designated as Site No. 4 in this study, Khonoma Village comprises three khels (clans). Notably, the gates here are characterized by uniform dimensions, with a consistent thickness of 11 cm—an uncommon feature, as most other gates studied lack such uniformity (Figure 10, Table 4). Among these, Gate VG4A stands out as the oldest gate in the village, reflecting its historical importance.



a

b



c

d

Figure 8: a and b, Thorny Plant planted near the gates; c, VG3B; d, VG3A

Table 3: Documentation of Kigwema Village Gates

Sl. No.	Name of Kharu	Gate no	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Year of Re-erection	Type	Longitude	Latitude
1	Khami	VG3A	3.07	1.5	1920	Wood	94°07'37.35" E	25°36'16.72" N
2	Makhuma	VG 3B	3.35	1.21	1941	Wood	94°12'86.49" E	25°60'75.76" N
3	Khami	VG 3C	2.77	1.24	1944	Wood	94°12'70.66" E	25°60'36.73" N
4	Khami	VG 3D	2.8	1.25	1970	Stone	94°07'36.13" E	25°36'17.72" N
5	Makhuma	VG 3E	2.7	1.5	1999	Stone	94°07'50.66" E	25°36'28.19" N



Figure 9: Location of Village Gates of Khonoma Village

Table 4: Documentation of Khonoma Village Gates

Sl. No.	Name of Kharu	Gate no	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Thickness (cm)	Year of Re-erection	Type	Longitude	Latitude
1	Semoma	VG 4A	2.9	1.7	11	1948	Wood	94°01'15.60" E	25°39'20.56" N
2	Chavikha	VG 4B	2.25	1.35	11	NIL	Wood	94°01'15.18" E	25°39'25.24" N
3	Kiyaba	VG 4C	2.16	1.31	11	1938	Wood	94°01'14.20" E	25°39'21.48" N
4	Kuotsu	VG 4D	2.5	1.35	11	1928	Wood	94°01'12.08" E	25°39'15.24" N
5	Tobokha	VG4E	1.9	1.6	11	1983	Stone	94°01'20.19" E	25°39'09.28" N
6	Merhüchazou	VG 4F	1.16	1.6	11	1983	Stone	94°01'22.51" E	25°39'09.59" N



Figure 10 a-b Image of Khonoma Village Gates: a, VG4A; b, VG4B

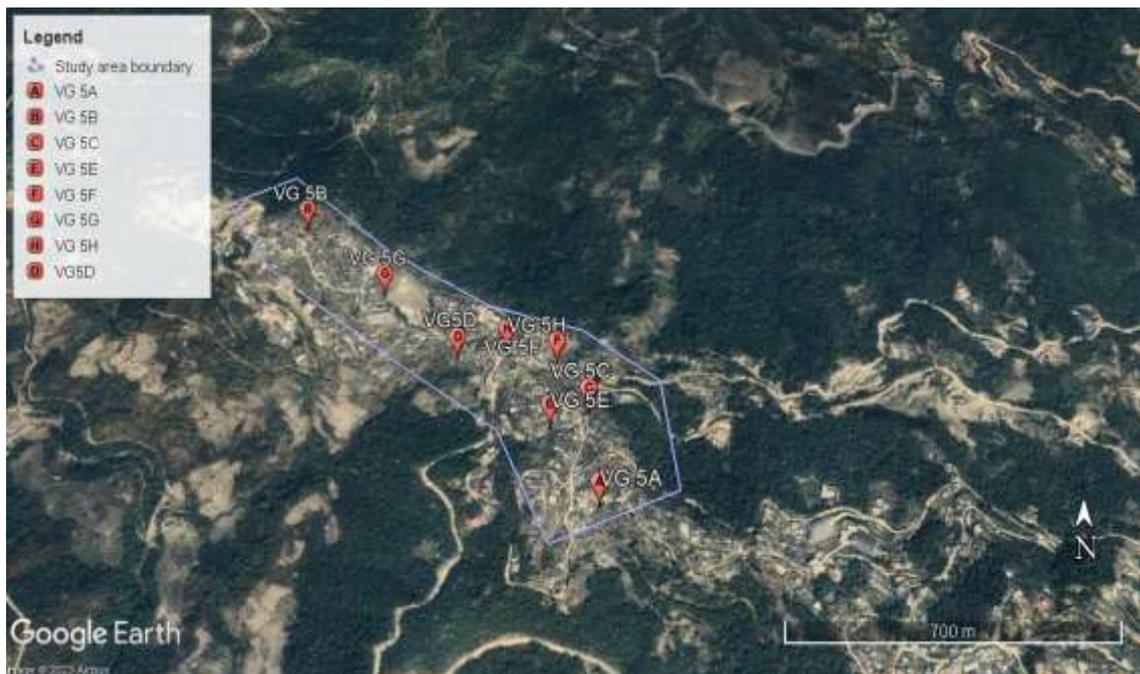


Figure 11: Location of Village Gates of Jotsoma Village

Jotsoma Village Gates

Jotsoma Village (Figure 11), identified as Site No. 5 in this study, comprises four khels (clans) (Figure 12, Table 5). The oldest Village Gate, belonging to the Tholoma khel,

holds significant historical value. According to local informants, the gate is believed to have been constructed in the late 1800s, though the exact date of its construction remains uncertain. This gate is illustrated in Figure 12 (VG5A).

Table 5: Documentation of Jotsoma Village Gates

Sl. No.	Name of Kharu	Gate no	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Year of Re-erection	Type	Longitude	Latitude
1	Tholoma	VG 5A	2.84	1.42	NIL	Wood	94°03'50.00" E	25°40'19.50" N
2	Thekrünoma	VG 5B	2.4	1.27	1947	Wood	94°05'80.16" E	25°67'70.19" N
3	Tholoma	VG 5C	2.47	1.32	NIL	Wood	94°03'49.22" E	25°40'26.40" N
4	Tsileyama	VG 5D	2.27	1.35	1954	Wood	94°03'38.07" E	25°40'31.62" N
5	Tsileyama	VG 5E	3.15	1.2	1970	Wood	94°03'25.40" E	25°40'25.40" N
6	Liezocha	VG 5F	2.7	1.2	1998	Wood	94°03'46.54" E	25°40'30.60" N
7	Thekrünoma	VG 5G	2.62	1.2	2013	Stone	94°03'31.35" E	25°40'36.23" N
8	Khwüma	VG 5H	2.7	1.2	2021	Stone	94°03'42.45" E	25°40'31.55" N



a



b

Figure 12: a-b Jotsoma Village Gates: a, VG5A; b, VG5E

Mezoma Village Gates

Mezoma Village (Figure 13), designated as Site No. 6 in this study, has the second fewest gates among the villages examined. The village consists of four khels (clans). Despite having fewer gates (Figure 14, Table 6), this does not reflect a lack of strength or resilience. According to local accounts, many of the original gates were destroyed during foreign invasions, and new gates were constructed after the conflict ended. Rituals were reportedly performed during the construction of these gates, VG6A and VG6B, as Christianity had not yet become widespread in the area at that time. Both gates were built in 1970.



Figure 13: Location of Village gates of Mezoma Villa



Figure 14: a-b Mezoma Village Gates: a, VG6A; b, VG6D

Table 6: Documentation of Mezoma Village Gates

Sl. No.	Name of Kharu	Gate No	Length (m)	Breadth (m)	Thickness (cm)	Year of Re-erection	Type	Longitude	Latitude
1	Phetsuma	VG6A	2.32	1.27	6	1972	Wood	94°00'55.98"E	25°40'17.81"N
2	Phetsuma	VG6B	1.57	1.2	8	1972	Wood	94°00'54.26"E	25°40'15.06"N
3	Vihutsuma	VG6C	2.67	1.76	7	NIL	Wood	94°01'05.79"E	25°40'23.98"N
4	Nyiesenoma	VG6D	1.80	1.25	7	NIL	Wood	94°01'08.15"E	25°40'26.51"N



Figure 15: a-b Modern Village Gate of Kohima: a, Modern Entrance Gate; b, VGIE

Modern Village Gates

Modern village gates (Figure 15) are constructed to preserve the legacy and cultural heritage of traditional village gates. However, as they lack the original form and ritualistic significance of their traditional counterparts, they are not held in the same regard. Traditional gates were integral to village life, created through the performance of elaborate rites, as discussed earlier. Contemporary gates, made from massive monolithic stones measuring 9–11 feet in height, are carved to resemble the ancient gates but are no longer associated with ritual practices. Unlike the traditional gates, which were often located along narrow pathways, modern gates are built at the expanded entrances of villages, reflecting changes in infrastructure and road systems.

Village gates, found in every Naga settlement, symbolize authority and pride. While modern gates are widely seen at village entrances today, they are primarily appreciated for their role in preserving heritage rather than for any ritualistic or

spiritual significance. In contrast, traditional gates, constructed through ritual ceremonies before the widespread adoption of Christianity, were deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of Naga society. The historical association of village gates with headhunting practices underscores their importance in Naga customs and traditions. This connection is significant across many Naga tribes, highlighting the profound cultural role these gates played in their communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

As previously noted, village gates held profound ceremonial and traditional significance in the religious and daily lives of the Angami Nagas. These gates symbolized honor and played an integral role in the cultural framework of the Angami people, or Tenyimia, whose traditions and laws were closely intertwined with *gennas* (ritual observances) and taboos. The *gennas* represented a deeply revered spiritual practice, reflecting the core of Angami religious life. Village gates also provide valuable insights into Angami art history and traditions. Cows and mithuns were historically used as forms of payment, with the depiction of mithun heads and large horns on gates symbolizing wealth and prosperity. The positioning of these gates was often influenced by the hilly terrain of Angami settlements. Kohima's villages, for instance, are noted for having the greatest number of gates among the Angami Nagas, strategically placed throughout their communities for defense and security.

This study primarily focuses on the gates of the Angami Nagas, delving into the methods and rituals associated with their construction and use. The designs and symbols carved on the gates play a significant role in their ritualistic importance, with each village showcasing unique motifs. For example, the gates of Kigwema are notably long, while those of Khonoma display uniformity in both dimensions and symbolic designs. The study also seeks to highlight the cultural heritage embedded in these gates, raising awareness about their historical and material significance. The arrival of Europeans in Naga territories brought significant societal changes, including the adoption of modernity and the gradual abandonment of animistic and ritualistic beliefs. While these changes have led to a disintegration of certain cultural practices, they also underscore the need to preserve and document traditional heritage to maintain its vitality.

Preservation of these traditions is imperative to ensure their continuity. This paper emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage management, showcasing how the study and documentation of Angami village gates can help sustain their legacy. By acknowledging the past and integrating its values into the present, society can ensure that the rich traditions of the Angami Nagas remain dynamic and meaningful for future generations.

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