Festivals in Frames

Stories, Traditions and Celebrations across India



Chapter 3:

Wangala



When the Garo Hills Dance to the Beat of Wangala



Every November, Meghalaya's Garo Hills become a stage for rhythmic drumming, vibrant attire, and spirited traditional dances. This is **Wangala**, a much-loved harvest festival of the Garo people.

Dedicated to **Saljong**, the Sun God associated with fertility and prosperity, the festival expresses gratitude for a fruitful harvest and marks the close of the agricultural season.

Through Wangala, the Garo community celebrates nature's generosity as well as the rewards of their hard work.

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A Harvest Rooted in Heritage

Traditionally, many Garo families practise ***jhum***, or shifting cultivation, adapting their farming to the land and seasonal cycles. The harvest, in turn, brings more than just food. It offers a reason to express gratitude and gather as a community.

For the Garo people, **Wangala** reflects a close bond between farming, nature and community life. Its customs, songs, and dances have allowed generations to carry their cultural heritage forward.



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Blessings Before the Beats

Wangala begins at the **Nokma's** (village head) house, where the ***Kamal*** or priest, conducts rituals and presents offerings like cooked rice and rice beer, honouring and thanking the deity, **Misi Saljong**, for a successful harvest. This ceremony is called ***Rugala***.

It expresses the community's gratitude before the festivities unfold in a burst of music, dancing, and celebration.



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When a Hundred Drums Take Over

As the rituals give way to celebration, the sound of the ***nagra*** drums fill the air. Gongs, flutes, and buffalo-horn instruments join the rhythm, drawing everyone into the festivities.

Dressed in traditional garments, ornaments, and feathered headgear, Garo men and women perform energetic dances in unison. With every beat and movement, the gathering grows livelier, turning Wangala into a joyful expression of harvest and community.

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An Old Tradition, A New Generation

From village celebrations to larger cultural gatherings, Wangala continues to bring the Garo community together. Today, the festival reaches wider audiences through colourful performances that showcase the music, dance, and customs of the Garo people.

Yet, beyond the music and spectacle, Wangala remains a celebration of gratitude for the harvest and respect for ancestral customs. It continues to connect the Garo people to their land, their heritage and their culture.

