

A Study on Cultural Heritage of Sumi Naga: an Indigenous Tribes of Nagaland

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ABSTRACT

The present research aims to study the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga tradition of Nagaland, NorthEast India. This study seeks to better understand the Sumi Naga tradition's tangible cultural heritage, such as Historical Heritage Stones and Farming Area, Caves. The intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga Tradition includes Oral Traditions such as Oral Literature, Folk Tales, Festivals, Indigenous Games, and the Indigenous Education System. The present study is designed as ethnographic research. A total of 40 elderly people residing in the Pughoboto Sub Divisional Area of Zunheboto Districts of Nagaland were included in the sample. The purposive sampling technique was used to select participants in the study. The tools used in the present study include a Questionnaire developed by the researcher, a semi-structured Interview and Observation. The data was analyzed using content analysis. Finally, summarization was done. The exact findings of the study were reached which helped the researcher to conclude the study.

Keywords: Tsaphimi Village, Tangible Cultural Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Morung.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nagaland has many tribes. Each tribe has a unique cultural heritage of their own. The Sumi Naga tribe inhabits the District of Zunheboto. Due to extensive migration, the Sumi tribe today is divided into Central, Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern Sumi based on their geographical location. The Central Sumi comprises the present Zunheboto district, the Eastern Sumi falls under the districts of Tuensang and Kiphire, the Western Sumi occupies the district of Dimapur, the Northern Sumi is found in parts of Mokokchung and Wokha districts and finally, the Southern Sumi comes under Phek district. The present work was conducted in the Tsaphimi village in the Pughoboto Sub-Divisional Area of Zunheboto Districts.

Pughoboto - A profile

The Sumi Naga tribe originated from Pughoboto and is called Aphuyemi. Ighanumi Village was the first to accept Christianity in the Pughoboto area. The place was called Pughoboto because it was surrounded by many dense Oak trees. The name of the tree is called Quercus (The Oak Tree Family). It is considered one of the oldest Subdivisions in the State of Nagaland with 24 Government recognized villages.

The Sumi Villages of the Pughoboto area

The Sumi Nagas that arrived from South-East Nagaland inhabited the center, the heart of Nagaland, where the Sumis migrated in different directions. These are the original and early villages of the Sumis, their names were given range-wise in Table 1.

The literacy rate and population of Zunheboto Districts in comparison with the state of Nagaland is given in Table 2.

Tsaphimi

Tsaphimi is a small village located in the Pughoboto sub-division, Zunheboto District. It is 40km away from sub-district Pughoboto and 55km away from Zunheboto District bounded by the Lothas in the

North, Kitami, Ghokimi, Puneboqa, and Asukiqa in the East, Hapholuto in the West and the Rengmas in South. Before the advent of the British, Tsaphimi village was known as 'Kaphimi' however after the arrival of the British, they named Kaphimi as Tsaphimi village. From there people started to use it everywhere as Tsaphimi and today, it is known as Tsaphimi village.

During the year 1875, the British government ruled the Nagas and let them obey the rules and regulations. In every village they kept G.B known as Gaon Burahs. The selection of G.B. was not random, only the people who were from the same clan and had multiple lands were allowed to be Gaon Burahs to look after the village. The first G.B. from Tsaphimi village was Kiqheno, father of Mixipu from the Khutio clan.

Table 1: The villages Under the Pughoboto Sub Division

Sl. No	Range	Village Under Pughoboto Area
1	ASUKIQA	Tsaphimi Village
		Kitami Village
		Ghokimi Village
		Asukiqa Village
		Puneboqa Village
2	GHATHASHI	Ighavito Village
		Ighanumi Village
		Iphonumi Village
		Awohumi Village
		Ghathashi Village
		Tukuliqa Village
		Kichilimi Village
		Shesulimi Village
		Mukalimi Village
3	KUCHO TSUYI (KT)	Kilomi Village
		Chisholimi Village
		Hebolimi Village
		Chishilimi Village
		Khughutomi Village
4	PUHOKITO	Lazami Village
		Pughoboto town
		Mishilimi Village
		Laza Phuyeqa Village
		Natsumi Village

Table 2: Literacy Rate and Population of the State Nagaland

District	Literacy	Total Population	Sex Ratio	Density
Nagaland	80.11	19,80,602	931	119
Zunheboto	86.26	1,41,014	981	112

Source: As per the 2011 census

The Sumis had their traditional way of culture. In this modern era where youngsters are trained and taught in a developed educational system unlike in the past, it is often forgotten that there is a need to adopt some practices of the early system of Sumi Naga tradition which will benefit not only the learners but the society. With the advancement in technology, increase in knowledge, and change in the lifestyle of the people, many of the traditional lifestyles of the people have changed. This leads to the disappearance of many important knowledge, traditions, and cultures of forefathers which as a result has changed the relationship of man with nature. Present educational programs are stuffed with examination-oriented curricula, and there is absolute neglect of man-making education, hence, the lack of value amongst the present generation is the major concern. That calls for an overhauling, revival, and preservation of cultural values for which the Nagas were once known. This study is significant because it tried to find and trace the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga because the Sumi Naga traditions have so much to offer to the new generations to learn. Thus, there is a need to trace and retain the history of the traditional way regarding the Sumis.

Objectives of the study

- i) To better understand the tangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga tradition.
- ii) To explore Historical Heritage Stones, Caves, and Farming Areas of the Sumi Naga tradition.
- iii) To explore the intangible culture of Sumi Naga Tradition.
- iv) To explore the Oral Traditions such as Oral Literature, Folk Tales, Festivals, Indigenous Games, and the Indigenous Education System of Sumi Naga Culture.

There are very few studies that have spoken about tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi tribes. Assumi, (2009) conducted his study on the Sumi Ahuna where he talked about the intangible festivals of Sumi Naga. Zhimo, (2011) explored the ways to identify those cultural practices and institutional features which changed due to Christianity and modernization in Sumi. More elaboration was on the Morung Institution of Apuki and Iliki. Jimomi, (2018) highlighted the history of Sumi which gives a broader sense of how the Sumi festivals give importance to folksongs, folk dance, and other performing arts. Yepthomi and Wangshimenla, (2019) have done an interesting study on the cultural dress and ornaments worn by the Sumis. The present study focused on the tangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga tradition such as Historical Heritage Stones and Farming Areas and the intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Naga Tradition includes Oral Traditions such as Oral Literature, Folk Tales, Festivals, Indigenous Games, and the Indigenous Education System. It reflects the history, values, and belief system of the Sumi tribe which are supposed to be crucial for the development of modern society.

METHODOLOGY

To have a better understanding of the problem, the present study is designed to have ethnographic methods. A purposive sampling method was used in this study to select participants. The respondents were purposively selected from the Pughoboto sub-division under Tsaphimi village to represent the Sumi Tribe. A total of 40 community elders of the Sumi Tribe of the Pughoboto area under Tsaphimi village were included in the sample. Respondents include both literate and illiterate; native language speakers and foreign language speakers; male and female. The task was accomplished through the administration of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, discussions, and observational techniques. The researcher spent three months in Tsaphimi village among the respondents. They had much knowledge about the tangible cultural aspects like Historical Heritage Stones, Caves, Farming Areas, and intangible cultural aspects like Oral Traditions such as Oral Literature, Folk Tales, Festivals, Indigenous Games, and the Indigenous Education System. Both the Closed and Open-ended types of questions were used in the questionnaire for the data collection. The discussion sessions with the respondents were also useful for the study, where the respondents shared their opinions on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Sumi Tribe. The second type of method used was the observational method, where the researcher visited the places of historical stones, cave, sites of farming, and indigenous educational institutes. They witnessed the important festivals, folk songs, folk dance, and indigenous games of the Sumi Tribe, and noted the important points in the field notebooks. Oral literature like folk tales was collected from interviews and available literature. Secondary sources of information include documents, literature, images, etc. collected from books, souvenirs, and historical documents available in the Sumi (vernacular) dialect related to the study. The Data was interpreted using content analysis. The transcribed textual data were codified based on the similarity and dissimilarity of those obtained code. Themes and categories were developed. The themes and categories are then analyzed to come up with the main idea. Finally, summarization and generalization were done. The exact findings of the study were reached which helped the researcher to conclude the study.

RESULTS

The tangible cultural heritage of Sumi Naga

1. Historical Heritage Stones

❖ TsaphimiPozhe-

The study includes the historical heritage stone named TsaphimiPozhe of Tsaphimi village. TsaphimiPozhe is considered part of the tangible cultural heritage of the Sumi tribe because myths are associated with it. The myths are influenced by the idea of spirits. According to respondents the name Pozhe is taken from the description of a big rock. It has been named after Pozheaquenoadu (husband and wife). Sumi people believe in Spirits. Their oral tradition is filled with various spirits.

Pozhe was an animal spirit who possessed wings and could fly. TukahuJaputo's spirit wanted to kill Lumsaye Rock's spirit. But Tukahu's spirit failed to do that and headed back. While heading back, they met with Pozhe's spirit. Tukahu beheaded PozheAqu-u (wife). Pozhe Adu

(husband) then came and tried to take revenge. But he was also split into two with a Machete. Sumi people believe that Pozhe after this incident, turned into a stone. To this day the Pozhe rock stands at the same spot where they were killed by the enemy on the Western side of Tsaphimi village. Villagers believe Pozhe could predict the future of the people of the village, how their harvest would be, and could also warn them if there would arise any conflicts or war in the future.

This historical stone lies in the Tasphimi village and is considered a cultural heritage of the society. It conserves traditional myths and folk tales that the tribe values most.



Fig1: Tsaphimi'sPozhe Stone

2. Heritage Farming Areas

❖ Aluza je (Farming Area)

Sumi tribe-dominated areas are characterized by different types of traditional methods of agricultural farming. Jhum Cultivation or slash-and-burn cultivation (Shifting Cultivation), Terrace Farming, Integrated Farming Systems, and Alder-based farming are widely used in these areas. Aluza je is known as the agricultural farming area. Sumi tribal people have been using their agricultural farming area outside and around the villages from long past. It is considered a heritage to them. The names of different important farming areas are known as LotsughutoSuye, Imiye Suye, Ghileto or Lupasa, ApitolaTikiu, Pughutola, Khumbototola, Muju Phala.

There are several myths and folk tales associated with this farming area. The Cave and the Story of Ghishe- Ime-U is one of the most popular among them. According to respondents,

The story talks about a cave in the middle of the cliff surrounded by a dense forest where two spirits, Ghishe-Ime-u used to live. Both possessed sleeping charms and charms to lure women. One of the charms was in the form of the feathers of a white bird and the latter was like the leaf of a wild plant. Sumi villagers believe that the two of them use sleeping charms to sneak and steal all the valuable jewelry from the ladies. When the villagers go to their fields, the female group would carry the wine containers and rice baskets for the male groups. So Ghishe-Ime-u would set up a trap to steal all the wine and rice carried by the ladies. It has been said that on some auspicious day, when the charm that looked like the leaf of a wild plant bloomed and its scent traveled to the village, many young boys and girls would indulge in the practice of unholy marriages. Still, villagers believe inside the cave where Ghishe-Ime-u lived, many expensive and authentic female jewelry could be found which were stolen by them.

The story depicts social evils like stealing and indulging humans in unholy practices. Thus spreads a moral value. This cave is located in the South of the Tasphimi village and still carries the myths associated with it and considered a heritage place by the Sumi tribes.



Fig 2: View of different Farming Areas.

➤ The intangible cultural heritage of Sumi Naga

1. Kughakiche (Oral traditions) of the Sumi tribes

The oral traditions passed on from different generations of the Sumi Nagas are composed of proverbs, folk tales, legends, songs, etc. After a long day of hard work in the field, a forlorn lover expresses his or her deep love to his or her beloved in the form of folk songs, through recitation of stories, and poems. The bachelor dormitory, known as Morung, was the place where the oral tradition was taught and transmission used to take place.

❖ Folk tales

Folk Tales are fictional but provide moral and social lessons to the listeners. Some folktales are amusing and entertaining. The Sumi oral traditions have a rich array of folktales that have been passed on from bygone days. It must be noted that though the characters remain the same; the stories are told with slight variations in different villages or regions of the Sumi. Some folk tales are specific to a particular village. The folk tales of the Sumis Nagas always have a moral lesson to teach. One such folktale, Kasho Papu has been illustrated by Jimomi, (2018) which is very popular among Sumi people.

The story is about an old man called Kivigho. On his deathbed, he called his only son Kasho and said, "I shall pass away soon, but do not worry. I shall send you a message through a seasonal bird that will come proclaiming my name as Kasho Papu (Kasho's father). So, when you hear the bird calling out 'Kasho Papu' start sowing seed in your field". After the death of his father, Kasho cleared the jungle for cultivation. He sowed the paddy seed on his field when the Kasho Papu bird conveyed to him the message every year. Kasho went on to have a rich harvest year after year, but the villagers fared poorly in cultivation. After that, the villagers also learned the time to sow the seed from Kasho, and they too had a rich harvest. The Sumis till today wait for Kasho Papu to arrive in their country to announce the time of sowing paddy. As the years rolled by, the villagers forgot the valuable knowledge that Kasho had brought to them. They started encroaching on the land of Kasho. He spent a tortuous day and sleepless night. One fateful night in his dream, his father told him, "After all the jungle is cleared for cultivation, call the elders of the village and come to the field that has been grabbed from you and put a demarcation stone on every spot that I perch on for that is the real and true Aghuthu (a demarcation stone that marks the boundary of a land, be it a site or a field)." So, Kasho did the same. Village elders searched for the spot on which the bird perched. To their surprise, they saw the old demarcation stone. They were dumbfounded but soon became aware and replaced the original demarcation stone on every boundary. The bird Kasho Papu then flew away and till today it returns every spring to announce the time of sowing. The folk tale is a classic example of the proximity of man and nature that the Sumi people value most. They always learned from nature. The appearance of certain clouds in the sky and the birds indicates the time of certain agricultural activity. The folk tale also teaches them not to forget about the old values, and beliefs and respecting elders in times of dispute.

❖ Folk Song

Folk songs play an important role and are composed for different occasions. The Sumi ancestors have varieties of folksongs which they sing according to the agricultural cycle and according to different

occasions. Its usage wasn't restricted to a particular occasion or season. Their folksongs include agricultural songs, courting, rice pounding songs, songs sung while going to the field or forest, lullabies, orphan songs, cotton spinning songs, hunting songs, etc. There are different songs which were usually connected with war, deeds of various persons, different seasons for cultivation, etc. These folksongs have become very vulnerable over time and many of these songs have vanished. The different types of Sumi folk songs are Ayekuzule, Thigha Le, Tixi Luxa Le, Agha La Wukiche Le, Sache Jusulo, Au Shekusu Le, Aphi Le, Hango Le, Lejole.

Most of the folk songs reflect love and blessing for their motherland and village. It tries to picture the nature and beauty of their land. Sometimes folk songs take the form of prayer to God for security against evils like disaster, war, and demons. According to one of the respondents,

The most popular folk song of Tsaphimi village is "OhllokeuGhakhuTsaphimi Phu"(Oh, My Beautiful Tsaphimi Village).

There are various folk songs like this kind that portray the love and belongingness of the Sumi people towards their land.

❖ Folkdance

J. H. Hutton, (1968) in his book, the Sema Naga states that-

Male folk usually dance with spears and dao. Most of the people indeed danced in heavy costumes which included spears, dao, ornaments, etc. which was a tradition practiced and followed by the people. There are varieties of folk dance, and each dance is related to their daily activities.

The following table shows different types of folk dance performed by Sumi tribal people.

Table 3: The different Folkdance of Sumi

Sl. No	Folkdance	Significance of the Folk Dance
1	AphiloKuxu	This folk dance is performed during the various festivals of the Sumi Tribe. It is also considered one of the important folk dances practiced by the Sumi Naga.
2	GhilehKighile	This folk dance is performed during Harvest time. Therefore, it is called Harvest Dance.
3	AghuKeghileh	This folk dance is significant and usually performed on various occasions. It is called War Dance because it served as a cultural reminder of Sumi's warrior heritage and to honor the bravery of our ancestors. Every piece of ornament that is worn during the dance has meaning and significance.

❖ Festivals

Festivals are one of the hallmarks of the cultural identity of the different tribes in Nagaland. The Sumi tribe is identified by the Tuluni and Ahuna festivals.

• Tuluni Festival

An elder respondent from Tsaphimi Village told that

In the traditional past, Tuluni was celebrated at different times according to the climatic zones. The warm region is known as Ghabo and the cold region is Ajo. It was celebrated after the fourth month of sowing as a prayer offering to their God, seeking for healthy growth of the crops in the fields. Due to the climatic conditions, the Ghabomi used to celebrate their Tuluni ahead of the Ajomi, (Sema,2019). Traditionally Sumi spent seven long non-working days meticulously observing the various rites. Each day was as important for them and conducted with absolute commitment and discipline.

In the present-day context, Tuluni has been compressed into a one-day token celebration. A feast is organized, and fiancées are invited by their fiancés. The Elders were also invited by the young ones preparing a feast for them in their homes to seek a blessing from them. Slaughtering of pigs and killing Avi (Mithun) is a usual practice by the Sumis.

• Ahuna festival

Sema, (2019) reported that-

It is celebrated as a post-harvest and a thanksgiving festival. It serves the dual purpose of making the end of an agricultural year as well as the onset of the new agricultural year. Throughout the year many rites and gennas are observed to ensure a good harvest and culminate in the Ahuna celebration. The Ahuna festival begins after all the grain and crops of the field are gathered and stored in the granary. In the festival, the most significant act is the cooking of the newly harvested rice in a bamboo vessel, which is then eaten during the festive feast. Ahuna is observed among the

different clans, and in common with the whole Sumi Community. However, the core concept and practices are maintained among all the groups celebrating this festival in different areas. In the contemporary Sumi society, there are several terms regarding the etymological of the term Ahuna. In Assumi (2009) it was said that-

It is derived from Awonakuchu (first eating rice of the newly stored crops) and it probably means the eating of the rice by the priest, Ana kuchu (rice eating). Ahuna signifies new rice taken off the granary which is pounded to remove the husk. For this reason, Ahuna means newly rice taken off the granary. The most accepted view of the word Ahuna is derived from two words Asuphu or Ahu (bamboo vessel) and ana (cooked rice). Therefore, the meaning of the word Ahuna is rice cooked in a bamboo vessel.



Fig 3: Ahuna Rice cooked in a bamboo vessel during the Ahuna Festival

5. Indigenous games

Indigenous games are played on every occasion. It also helped people to keep themselves physically fit. There are many traditional games. Some of the popular games practiced by the people are Amikukula (Fire Making) and Apukhu Kishi (Leg fight)

❖ Amikukula (Fire Making)

One veteran player from the village said that-

“Amikukula” is a traditional indigenous game played on every occasion. In the olden days, players used only the items that were provided by nature to make fire. To make fire three objects were mainly used, Akikhi (a rope made of a particular type of bamboo). Secondly, Amilakishu (a small wooden shaft made of a particular tree). Lastly, Qhupteni (a wooly unused part of bamboo when it is made into ropes). Firstly, the wooden shaft is kept on the ground in a horizontal position and stepped on by one foot. The rope is pulled from one side to another with the wooly part of the bamboo placed between the rope and the shaft. This friction produces heat which results in fire.



Fig 4: Demonstrating Indigenous game Amikukula

❖ **Apukhu Kishi (Leg fight) or Akikiti**

Leg fight is a traditional game practiced by the Sumi indigenous tribe; it is played by the men. This game is usually played between two men. However, an expert, if challenged, can play against two juniors at a time. It is a form of martial arts. One respondent elaborated on the rules of the game and said-

In Apukhu Kishi (Leg fight) players attempt to bring down the opponent. The only weapon and defense are the participant's feet. The player who touches the ground first even with his finger or the whole body, is declared as the loser. However, there is a strict rule that the fallen fighter should never be kicked when is down.

6. Indigenous education of Sumi

❖ **Morung**

The Morung, is popularly known as a 'dormitory' or bachelor's house. It is one of the most significant social institutions found among the tribal societies of the world in different forms. This institution is the fundamental basis of the Naga cultural heritage. According to Jimomi (2018),

Apuki for men and Iliki for women are known as Morung in the Sumi tradition. The word 'Morung' was of Ahom origin. The oral traditions claim that Morung is as old as the village because, in the olden days, Morung was constructed simultaneously with the establishment of a particular village. The Primary aim was to discipline villagers and keep the village in order and safe from the enemies.

According to the historical documents found in the Christian Missionary Church in Tsaphimi village-

The first person to bring Christianity was Vishepu Assumi. To learn more about Christ, he went to Kohima and stayed at Kiyeho and Honili house for 2 years (1930-1931). In 1932 he came back to the village and built a church made with a hut. He was baptized in November 1933. Thachela, wife of Vishepu was the first women leader at Tsaphimi village. They were the first to embrace Christianity at Tsaphimi village in the year 1929.

With the coming of Christianity, modern education was introduced in the Sumi community. According to historical reports,

It is generally accepted that formal education was brought to the Sumi tribe by American Missionaries. In 1937 first Mission School was started in Aizuto by Rev. B.I. Anderson. In Tsaphimi village, the first person to attend school was Pukhalu Assumi. He joined the school in the year 1937 at Tsuminyu old village in L.P Government School. In 1945, K. Atsa Achumi was the first person to pass class II, and in 1951 class VI. S. Akhato Achumi was the first to clear matriculation in 1975, and in 1979 he became the first graduate. The Government Tsaphimi L.P School was established in the year 1964 on 17th January. The first person to teach at Government Tsaphimi L. P School was K. Sukhavi Assumi from Tsaphimi village.



Fig 5: Sumi Morung (Kisama Heritage)

Education in the Sumi area and Nagaland actually began in full swing after India's independence. However, the missionary people must be appreciated for their efforts to give the foundation of institutional education and make the people interested in education.

CONCLUSION

With the modernization of society, many changes were taking place in the lifestyle of the Nagas. The process of globalization and its impact have reached our home. Information technology revolution, mass media, privatization, and global market competition are inevitable in this fast-changing world. Isolated tribal societies like that of the Sumi Nagas are going to be threatened more seriously on all fronts. In such a situation, the preservation of our cultural heritage has become a matter of urgency. We know about the history of other people of different countries because we read them in our syllabus. But we failed to know about our own history, culture, and society. There is nothing wrong with knowing about the history of other people of the world, but it is more important to know about our own history, culture, and society.

In this world of rapid changes, we can no longer uphold rigid traditions, customary practices, and traditional belief systems. We need to educate ourselves in discovering and redefining education, learned from our mothers right from day one when we were born. This calls for pragmatic plans for the preservation, enrichment, and transmission of cultural heritage to the next generation for which the Sumi people were once known.

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