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NOT JUST ANOTHER FESTIVAL : REFLECTIONS ON AGRICULTURAL FESTIVALS OF SUMI NAGA

Abstract

This study investigates the significance of the two main agricultural festivals observed by the Sumi Naga tribe, an indigenous group living in the Zunheboto district of Nagaland, North East India. Agriculture is fundamental to the Sumi tribe's socio-cultural dynamics, influencing various elements of their economic and social life. The study explores the cultural, social, and economic significance of these agricultural festivals in the Sumi Naga community. Despite variances in practises and customs among clans, agriculture remains a unifying element among the Sumi Naga. Festivals offer a break from the year-round toil in the fields and encourage social harmony, feasting, and forgiving others while also praying for divine blessings on the forthcoming harvest. Using a functionalist theoretical framework, the study emphasises the interconnectivity and interdependence of social structures within the Sumi Naga culture. Festivals facilitate to maintain a feeling of identity, build social cohesion within the community, and preserve cultural legacy. Understanding the core of these events offers insights into the rich traditions and practises of the Sumi Naga people as well as their lasting ties to agriculture. The study emphasises how crucial it is to maintain these customs in order to safeguard the tribe's history, ethnicity, and cultural identity while fostering its continued growth.

Keywords: *Sumi Naga Agricultural festivals, Indigenous community, Socio-cultural dynamics, Cultural heritage, Social cohesion*

Introduction

Agricultural festivals hold profound significance in many indigenous societies, serving not only as a means to celebrate harvests but also as pivotal moments that reinforce cultural identity, social cohesion, and economic stability. Among the Sumi Naga tribe of the Zunheboto district in Nagaland, North East India, these festivals play a crucial role in sustaining their agrarian lifestyle and preserving their rich cultural heritage. The Sumi Naga, known for their historical chieftainship and association with headhunting, have long been recognized as an agrarian community where land and agriculture are

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integral to their socio-economic framework and worldview. For the Sumi Naga, land is perceived as a divine gift from God, intertwined with both spiritual and material significance, which helps shape their identity, sense of belonging, and communal life (Achumi, 2005). The Sumi Naga people are primarily engaged in agriculture, and their daily activities revolve around farming. Each day begins and ends with agricultural tasks, making it an intrinsic part of their existence. Despite some geographical and climatic variations, such as the division of the tribe into “*ghabo*” (hotter regions) and “*ajou*” (cooler regions), agriculture continues to unite the Sumi Naga across clan divisions. Historically, the tribe has been classified into the *Tuku* and *Swu* clans, with the *Swu* being regarded as the oldest and the progenitor of the various sub-clans. This connection to the land and agriculture is a shared cultural thread that binds the community, ensuring the continuation of their practices and rituals, including their agricultural festivals. These festivals are much more than a celebration of harvests; they are essential socio-cultural institutions. The two major agricultural festivals—*Ahuna* and *Tuluni*—mark significant moments in the agricultural cycle and act as symbolic representations of the tribe’s relationship with the land. *Ahuna*, celebrated after the harvest in November, is a festival of thanksgiving and preparation for the coming agricultural cycle, while *Tuluni*, celebrated in July, coincides with the sowing season, representing the hope for a successful harvest. Both festivals involve elaborate rituals, communal feasting, and prayers, where the tribe seeks divine blessings for their crops and livelihoods.

Drawing on the functionalist theory, these festivals play essential roles within the Sumi Naga society by fostering social order, unity, and stability (Madgwick, 1936; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Functionalism emphasizes the interdependence of social institutions, and the festivals reflect this principle by connecting various aspects of the tribe’s social life. First, these festivals provide the community with a structured opportunity to take a break from the physically demanding agricultural work. This respite from labor enables the tribe members to come together, encouraging social cohesion through shared celebrations. The gathering of families and clans during these festivals strengthens interpersonal ties, promotes reconciliation, and encourages collective responsibility within the tribe. The feasts, rituals, and communal activities serve as bonding mechanisms, reinforcing the unity and harmony within the community. Second, the festivals serve as a conduit for preserving the tribe’s cultural heritage. The rituals and ceremonies performed during these occasions act as cultural repositories, transmitting the Sumi Naga’s traditions, customs, and values from one generation to the next. These festivals are a key avenue through which the tribe’s younger members learn about their ancestral practices, cultural identity, and connection to the land. This passing of knowledge ensures the preservation of indigenous agricultural practices, beliefs, and the tribe’s history, which is especially significant in the face of modern influences and the gradual decline of traditional ways of life

(Hutton, 1921). Third, the economic dimension of these festivals is equally significant. Since agriculture is the primary means of sustenance for the Sumi Naga, these festivals are intrinsically linked to agricultural productivity. *Ahuna* and *Tuluni* offer the tribe an opportunity to seek divine intervention for a bountiful harvest and protection from natural calamities. The festivals are believed to invoke God's blessings on the crops and agricultural practices, which underscores their functional role in the tribe's economic well-being. Through prayers and offerings, the tribe expresses gratitude for the past harvest while seeking assurances for future agricultural success. The functional value of these festivals lies in their ability to sustain the tribe's agricultural economy by aligning spiritual practices with farming cycles, thereby reinforcing the tribe's dependence on agriculture for their livelihood (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Moreover, these festivals provide a platform for reinforcing communal solidarity. The collective participation in rituals, feasts, and cultural performances during *Ahuna* and *Tuluni* enhances social bonding and strengthens the social fabric of the Sumi Naga community. In this sense, these festivals serve as more than just religious or agricultural events—they are vital instruments of social cohesion and unity, fostering peace and reconciliation within the tribe. The communal nature of these festivals also ensures that every member of the tribe, regardless of age, gender, or social status, participates in the celebrations, further strengthening the collective identity of the Sumi Naga people.

The importance of these festivals is heightened by the challenges facing the Sumi Naga community today. As younger generations show less interest in agriculture and traditional practices, and as modernization encroaches upon indigenous ways of life, the festivals play a crucial role in maintaining the tribe's cultural resilience. The need to preserve and adapt traditional agricultural practices, including the use of indigenous agricultural implements, is essential to the tribe's long-term sustainability. Although the Sumi Naga continue to celebrate these festivals with fervor, there is a growing need to integrate modern agricultural knowledge with indigenous practices to ensure the tribe's economic and cultural survival. Thus, this paper aims to examine the cultural and socio-economic relevance of *Ahuna* and *Tuluni*, the two major agricultural festivals of the Sumi Naga tribe. By understanding these festivals' roles within the broader social structure of the tribe, this study seeks to highlight the importance of preserving indigenous practices and the enduring connection between the Sumi Naga people and their agricultural heritage. Through an ethnographic lens, this paper will explore the historical roots of these festivals, their role in shaping the social dynamics of the tribe, and the ways in which they have adapted to changing times.

Methods

The present paper is an ethnographical study of the Sumi tribe of Nagaland focusing specifically on the agricultural festivals as practiced by them

in the early days while highlighting its transition over the years. An exploratory research method was adopted wherein a personal interview was conducted backed by a Focussed Group Discussion to collect and verify the required information. The tools for data collection include an unstructured interview schedule, audio recorder, and FGD. The respondents of the study were divided into two categories- one, respondents for personal interviews, and second, respondents for FGD. Four elderly tribesmen from the Sumi community of Zunheboto district of Nagaland were extensively interviewed using an interview schedule and an audio recorder. After which FGD comprising of twelve elderly tribesmen also from Zunheboto district was conducted where the verification of the recorded data was done. The authors have also procured data from various written sources in the form of books written by the native researchers and authors, which has been duly acknowledged in the references.

Significance of Agriculture among the Sumis

The agricultural practices of the Sumi tribes like all the other Naga tribes are guided by Indigenous Knowledge Systems which have been in practice that dates back to the origin or the introduction of agriculture itself. As the land is considered a gift from God, the utility of land is carefully monitored. The Sumi indigenous people were originally nature worshippers. As pointed out by J. H. Hutton (1921) they were said to be 'Animists'. The people believed in the existence of a supreme God whom they referred to as '*Alhou*' (or *Timilhou*) who is considered to be the creator of life on earth, interfering little in the affairs of man. They also believed in the existence of '*Tüghami*' an evil spirit with a supernatural power that was said to have existed in various forms, beneficent only when propitiated otherwise harmful. Hence people often try to please it on every possible occasion to prevent it from incurring any harm. The farmers observe *gennas* time and again in an effort to propitiate the spirits (Nekha, 2015). And so, the completion of the rites and rituals provides a sense of security to the farmer allowing them to carry on with their agricultural activities with relief. Otherwise, any and all causes of misfortunes are implicated as the act of the evil spirit. Therefore, it was said that, before the commencement of any activities, rituals are performed to please the spirit so that it stays in their favour. This paragraph reveals how the Sumi tribal farmers live attached to agriculture, not only by physical engagement day in and out but also by investing spiritually and socially.

Like various other aspects of life, the yearly calendar followed by the Sumi tribe is entirely determined by the agriculture system and process practiced by them in *Jhum* cultivation (Chishi, 2009a). Sumis are predominantly an agricultural tribe, their way of life is mostly centred around agriculture either directly or indirectly. The yearly calendar followed by the Sumi tribe is divided based on the various stages of cultivation where the months are classified by the nature of work performed by them in *Jhum* cultivation.

Months of the year followed by the Sumi Naga

- *Liphi qhi*/December: The Sumi agriculture year starts with the month *Liphi qhi*/December because the first *Jhum* cultivation activity is performed in this month. '*Liphi*' refers to the "clearing of the paddy stalk" which was previously cultivated and '*qhi*' meaning 'month'. This operation is performed mostly by the womenfolk in the month of December.
- *Lu-u qhi*/January: On the second month, "*Alu iva*" ('*Alu*' meaning 'field' and '*iva*' meaning 'clearing') is performed, i.e, the jungle is cleared for cultivation purposes. It is not absolutely known as to why the term *Lu-ü* is used to address the second month of a year, however, it is speculated to have derived from the word '*Alu*' meaning 'field' and '*aqhi*' meaning month, hence the term '*Lu-u qhi*'.
- *Suphu qhi*/ February: Millet or *asü* is one of the major crops cultivated by early Sumis. In this month '*asü*' (millet) is prepared for the seedling. Since this operation is done in the third month (February), the month is called *Suphu qhi*.
- *Lusa qhi*/ March: The term *Lusa* is a combination of two words '*Lu*' meaning 'field' and '*sa*' meaning 'cleaning/clearing'. The branches of the burned trees are trimmed, the unwanted leftovers are cleared and the seeds beds are prepared for sowing the paddy seeds this month.
- *Ghixu qhi*/ April: '*Ghixu*' is a combination of two words '*aghi*' meaning 'paddy' and '*xu*' meaning 'sowing'. On this month the seeds of paddy are sown in the field, therefore this month is called *Ghixu qhi*.
- *Moza qhi*/ May: *Moza* refers to the clearing of weeds in the field. Since the clearing of weeds is done this month. The month of May is known as *Moza qhi*.
- *Amuha qhi*/June: *Amuha* refers to the state of poverty or scarcity, which falls in the month of June. This is the period when the harvest of the previous year is all exhausted while the harvest of the current year is yet to be procured.
- *Ani qhi*/July: *Ani* means 'available' or 'sufficient'. It is the month when supplementary crops like cucumber, pumpkin, beans, corn, etc are harvested. It is also the month where the '*Tuluni*' also known as '*Anih*' one of the most significant festivals of the Sumi is observed. It falls in the month of July.
- *Saghi qhi*/August: '*Saghi*' literally means 'to bring'. On this month *Asü* (millet) and other vegetation are harvested and brought home, hence the name *Saghi qhi*.

- *Amutha qhi*/September: The tenth month is called *Amutha qhi* named after the 'first reaper', '*Amuthau*'. The *Amuthau* brings home the first paddy harvest after performing certain rituals that month, hence the name.
- *Ghile qhi*/October: '*Ghile*' means 'harvest' in the Sumi dialect. The paddy is harvested this month, thus the month is called *Ghile qhi*.
- *Ahuna qhi*/November: After all the harvested paddy is brought to the village, the Sumis observe an important festival known as '*Ahuna*' which marks the end of the current agricultural season and thereafter starts preparing for the next season.

As it is seen in the above description, the months of the year as followed by the Sumi Nagas were determined by the agricultural activities. Even now the farmers of the hill would be seen following this order in respect to agriculture. This shows how agriculture is engrained in the minds of the people.

Agriculture system and Social hierarchy

The social fabric of the Sumi indigenous community was found to be very tight-knit with agriculture. Even the administrative structures of the village to some extent were in a way determined by agriculture (Chishi, 2009b). For instance, the role of an individual during agricultural activities determined his/her position in the village. Furthermore, the size of land cultivated, and the number of livestock owned by a family also influence an individual's position in the village. In the early Sumi villages, the order of the village affairs was regulated by the elders based on the hierarchy that consists of the *Akükau* (the village chief) at the top, who is the head of the village: all decisions pertaining to the village administration or any issue concerning the village and its people are taken by him and his verdict is considered just and final. The next in line is the *Awou/Aruu* or the priest, who is responsible for performing all the major rites and rituals, especially during the agricultural period; he is a close aid to the chief who consults him in various crucial matters of the village. The next is the *Amuthau* also known as 'the first reaper' for he takes the first pick or cut, of any crop that is to be harvested. He takes charge in absence of *Awou*. His role is to perform rites during the first cut of the harvest. Then comes *Lapwu* (the burier), the one who performs funeral rites. Meat played a very significant role in the Sumi social settings and therefore a man referred to as *Ashiphu* was assigned to look after the arrangements and distribution of meat on occasions when animals are butchered for meat. Another significant member of the village who works as a close aid to the chief is the *Chochou*. He is known as the 'messenger' or 'announcer', he runs errands for the chief and also assists the priest during the rituals. Further, a group of an agricultural working crowd may be found in the Sumi villages consisting of mostly ten to

twenty households known as the *aloji* or the working group. The number of people in the working group in a village depends on the population of the village. The small village would have one or two groups with fewer members whereas big villages would have more groups with more members in each group. The tribal people have this system of working together as groups in the agricultural fields. The group functions during the agricultural season and also during the celebration of the festivals. Soon after the priest commences the agricultural work after the completion of rites at the beginning of the agricultural season, the group members would altogether work in the field of the chief of the village. After the work in the chief's field is completed they move to the next field belonging to their respective group, in this way they take turns to work in the field of each member, helping each other out until the completion of the cycle.

Agricultural rites and rituals

The Sumi's *achineh* ('rites' and 'rituals') may be broadly classified into two forms, one which is believed to be in its original form i.e., *Swu chineh*, and the other which is a simplified form – *Tuku chineh*. The chief priest of the *Swu chineh* is called *Awou* and the priest of the *Tuku chineh* is called *Arüü*. Before the coming of Christianity, the Sumi Nagas used to observe many agricultural rituals almost on each stage of cultivation right from the first agricultural activity (i.e. clearing of the forest for *Jhum* cultivation) till the harvest and the celebration of festivals during and at the end of the harvest. *Jhum* cultivation is the most common agricultural system practiced by the tribe. Though there are many festivals and events observed by the tribe throughout the year such as *Asüyekiphe chine*, *Vesavela*, *Ghixu chine*, *Tuluni*, *Saghini*, *Ghile chine*, *Ahuna*, etc. (Sumi, 2019; Yeptho, 1991); however, many of these have gone out of practice and only two festivals are most popularly observed by all till date, namely- *Tuluni* and *Ahuna*. These festivals have their own significance and are observed at different phases of agricultural activity throughout the agricultural year.

***Tuluni* festival**

Tuluni is one of the most significant festivals of the Sumis celebrated to mark the harvest of the first fruit. It is observed when there is an abundance of vegetation and therefore it is also known as '*ani*' meaning 'available' or 'sufficient' implying the availability of crops in bounty. The festival is observed during the last quarter of the moon in the month of *Aniqhi* (July). This festival is not only an agricultural festival but it has a social bearing as well. Social, in a sense that it brings together friends and foes under one roof enabling them to work out their differences and make amend. This festival also gives an opportunity to the young men to approach the parents of their love interest seeking the hand of their daughter in marriage.

The festival was said to originally observed for seven days. The *Awou* (the priest) proclaims the commencement of the festival by making an announcement which is followed by performing certain rites and rituals. The first day of the festival is called *Asuzani*. The term *Asuzani* literally means cleaning and soaking of *asü* (millet). On the first day, the millet is cleaned and soaked as a process of fermentation for wine preparation. Since millet takes longer to ferment it is soaked ahead so that it gets ready to be consumed by the day of the *Tuluni* feast. The second day is known as *Aghizani* meaning cleaning and soaking of rice. The rice is cleaned and soaked on this day as a process of fermentation for preparing rice wine to be consumed on the day of the *Tuluni* feast. The third day is called *Ashigheni* meaning ‘meat butchering’ where the livestock are butchered at different capacities (typically pork and beef). Each household who can afford would slaughter a pig or *Mithun*, and gift the meat to the chief, the priest, neighbours, the betrothed family, and also to their apparent foes and to those who have been hurt by them in the past. This piece of meat serves as a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the foes and therefore refusing the meat is regarded as a taboo, acceptance of which brings peace and harmony. On this day the households belonging to different working groups or the *Aloji* would also cut pork and beef, and distribute it to the *Akükau*, *Awou*, *Amuthau*, and other persons of influence who are considered affluent in the society. The people also exchange among themselves the harvest of the first fruit which includes meat as well, depending on the person’s social status and capability. Further, the chief and the rich would give alms to the poor and old age in the form of rice, vegetable, and meat. It is made sure that each and every household in the village receives a piece of meat at the end of the day. The fourth day is called *Anighini*; the day of feast i.e. the day of *Tuluni* feast. This day is observed in multiple ways simultaneously. On this day the married couple performs a ritual by preparing liquor and meat which is thrown at the foot of the main post known as *Atsaphi* of the house as an offering to *Litsapa* (a spiritual entity). On one side, the betrothed maid’s parents invite the groom-to-be and his friends for lunch or dinner where he is given the chance to impress the girl’s parents with his charisma. On being successful, the parents of the groom are invited to the bride’s house to initiate the process of marriage. While on the other side, the *Alojimi* (people belonging to a particular *Aloji*) dressed in their best traditional attire gather at an elderly person’s house and compete with each other in various traditional games and activities such as folk songs, folk dances and traditional games such as *püxa kuxu* (Competitive jumping sport activity for women), *akhetsu küzü* (Top spinning), *Angukupusu* (Spear head kicking), *Apukhu kitiki* (Kick fight), *Sholupah kitchhe* (Spearing a rolling object), etc. Later that day the villagers gather at the house of the *akükau* where they partake in the mass *Tuluni* feast. The day ends with the elders singing folksongs, narrating tales of the past, and sharing their experiences with the young ones transferring traditions as they sit by the fireplace. The fifth day is called *Mucholani* (*Mucho* meaning

'men folk', 'la' meaning 'pathway', 'ni' meaning 'day') or 'Laghephe' (meaning 'clearing the pathway'). On this day all the menfolk of the village gather early in the morning and clean the pathway of the village leading to the fields. The sixth day is called *Tupulani*. The term *Tupulani* is derived from the native word "*Tupu-ili*" meaning 'youth'. This day is regarded as the day of the youth. On this day the youths of the village both male and female get together and engage in various games and cultural activities such as *puxakuxu*, *angukupusu*, *akhetsu küzü*, *apukhu kitiki*, etc. They spend the day joyously merrymaking throughout the day. The seventh day i.e, *Tughakhani* is the last day of the festival. By this day all the rites and rituals are done with. And so, on the seventh day, no rituals are performed to appease the evil spirits. This day marks the completion of all the rituals and thereby shutting evil spirits from causing any harm in the village, hence the name *Tüghakhani* ('*Tügha*' meaning 'Satan', '*kha*' meaning 'block'/'shut' and '*ni*' meaning 'day'). This day marks the end of the observation of the *Tuluni* festival.

Ahuna festival

Ahuna is a post-harvest festival celebrated on the twelfth month of the Sumi agriculture calendar i.e, *Ahunaqhi* (November). It is celebrated after the harvest is brought home (Assumi, 2009). *Ahuna* is a festival of thanksgiving. It is usually observed during the full moon night. The term *Ahuna* is derived from the word '*Asupuhu*' also known as '*Ahu*' which is a cylindrical vessel made of bamboo. On the day of *Ahuna* the rice is prepared in *Asupuhu* (cylindrical bamboo vessel), hence the name. The term "*Ahuna*" is also believed to have another derivation as expressed by many. It is believed that since on the day of *Ahuna* the rice to be cooked is taken from the upper surface of the storage, hence the term *Ahuna*, here '*Ahu*' means 'upper surface' and '*na*' means 'rice' in the native dialect. Although the festival is celebrated only for a single day its preparation takes a long duration and so the preparation starts ahead of a week or two. Preparation of cylindrical bamboo vessel "*Asupuhu*" is done ahead to be used on the day of the feast. On the day before the festival, the requirements of the festival such as bamboo mats, storage basket, bamboo vessels, bamboo mug, platter, etc. are prepared. On the day of *Ahuna*, all the male members of the village wake up early before the crowing of the rooster, wash their face and mouth with fresh cold water, with the belief that by doing so they would receive the blessing of long life from the *Kungulimi* (Angel). During the day the womenfolk soaks the rice, covers it with a plantain leaf, and put it into a bamboo vessel which is then cooked by placing it in a fire or charcoal. This cooked rice is called *Ahuna* ('*Ahu*' meaning 'bamboo vessel' and '*na*' meaning 'rice'). On this day all the utensils to be used must be newly made and all the old ones are kept aside. The liquors are brewed and drank from a bamboo vessel. After finishing the liquor the *Awou* performs a ritual by splitting the bamboo vessel horizontally into two parts, if the bamboo is cut clean it is believed to be a good omen, if not, it is believed that illness and bad health

would prevail in the coming year. Further, the bamboo is thrown up in the air, if the bamboo land with both the parts on the same side it is considered a good omen, but if the two parts land on the opposite side it is considered a bad omen. After partaking in the *Ahuna* feast the villagers or the clansmen gather at the elder's house at night and share their experiences and stories. They would reminisce the past glory and narrate folklores to the young ones. They spent the night joyously merrymaking, singing, and dancing. This festival marks the end of the agricultural season and the year as well, according to the Sumi agricultural calendar. Post celebration the villagers go to the river and clean their body, clothes, and tools and keep it ready for the next agricultural season.

Transitions observed

In the early years, the day of celebration depended entirely on agricultural activity. The Sumi Nagas being spread broadly in two regions; *ghabo* and *ajou*, those living in the *ghabo*/warmer region observe the festival earlier than those living in the *ajou*/colder region. However, with the change in climatic conditions and gradual transition of occupation from primary to secondary and tertiary, it was revealed that the day of observation of the festival has been decided to be held on a common day for Sumi all over. Hence, the community assigned the 8th of July (*Ani ghi*) and the 14th of November (*Ahuna ghi*) as the common day of celebration for *Tuluni* and *Ahuna* respectively. Although the festivals are no longer observed in their truest sense, they are still observed with colourful activities that exhibit the rich cultural heritage of the tribe. The activities that are being continued include folksong, folk dance, traditional games, and other cultural activities. People participate in these activities individually or in groups and compete with each other, with the winner being rewarded popularly with meat in the past and money in the present. All, young and old must wear traditional attire on this day, falling which would invite certain repercussions. In fact, though at present, *Tuluni* is observed only for a day i.e., 8th July, it has been made mandatory for all the Sumis to wear at least one piece of traditional attire for the entire week, defying which the defaulter would invite a penalty. All the activities occupy an important place in the celebration since they had a significant bearing on the lives of the Sumi forebears and are today regarded as a significant part contributing to the preservation and transmission of the cultural heritage. With the change in time, there has been a variation or rather a transition in the observation of these festivals. The festival is now celebrated more as a remembrance of the old practices or more as an obligation to follow the tradition. Further, with the coming of Christianity, the observation of these festivals has undergone tremendous change especially in performing rites and rituals. Performing rites and rituals on every occasion to propitiate the spirits no longer are continued; it has been replaced by a Christian prayer initiated by the priest on every occasion. The role of the traditional priest has been taken over by the Christian priest and so, at present with the decline of the

role, the traditional priests have ceased to exist in most of the villages. The festivals are now mostly organised by various cultural committees or groups with the aim of ensuring the continuation of practices through the celebration. In matters of traditional marriage leading from these festivals, some wait for the day to introduce their to-be-spouse to the parents. While many couples get engaged to their betrothed on the occasion of *Tuluni* as a sign of respect as well as acknowledging and reliving the age-old tradition. Further, the invitation of a son-in-law by the in-laws is one tradition followed by all. As many people have diverted from the traditional agriculture practice, the festival that started as a part of agricultural activity now has transitioned more towards social activity, bringing the community together under one platform. In the era of globalisation, the shift in the occupation from agriculture to the manufacturing and service sector is unavoidable. Further, with the advance in transport and communication systems, these festivals are no longer confined to the Sumi community alone. People from other tribes also take part in the celebration where the interchange of cultural items takes place establishing inter-tribal relationships and spreading the message of brotherhood, peace, and friendship ultimately realizing the significance of the festivals.

Significance of the festivals to the community:

- In the absence of written records and with the discontinuation of traditional learning systems, these festivals play the most crucial role in carrying forward the cultural and traditional knowledge and practices of the community to the next generation.
- All major indigenous festivals of the Sumi are directly associated with agriculture. The idea of sharing the historical accounts, such as their struggle and accomplishment helps instil among the younger generation the culture of hard labour and a sense of consciousness to carry forward the values.
- Unlike the early years, these festivals are now observed on a given common day i.e. eight of July for *Tuluni* and fourteen of November for *Ahuma*. This allows every member of the community to plan ahead and make the celebration possible for everyone to come together, gather with their fellow tribesmen and observe the festival irrespective of their occupation and location keeping the tradition alive.
- With the change in time and with the coming of Christianity, changes, as well as transition in these festivals, have been observed. However, the continued celebration of the festival allowed even some old and obsolete practices to be remembered and acknowledged.
- Lastly, these two festivals play a vital role in igniting the sense of belonging, of unity, of identity, of harmony, and of brotherhood among the tribesmen. It creates space for enhancing social harmony and

strengthening the cultural identity of the people of the community.

Conclusion

As evident in the above discussion, festivals form an important part of the life of a tribal community. It provides an occasion for exchanging values and beliefs among the members of the community. Truly, festivals connect people to their roots; establish cultural identity thereby offering a sense of belonging culturally, socially, and geographically (Sumi, 2019). Festivals are observed at different levels under various themes such as cultural, religious, social, political, recreational, etc. Although the practice of the festival may have lost its truest essence along the way, retaining the tradition of observing such festivals has become a necessity as an instrument of reminiscing and maintaining the rich cultural heritage and ultimately preserving the very identity of the community. Such events bring people together in one place which may not necessarily be at the chief's or an elder's place or anyone's home for that matter, however, what matters now is the intention, the spirit of integrity, and connecting people who share the common cultural root and origin. These festivals in their truest senses had an intense bearing on the conduct and values of the life of the people, which is somewhat lost over the years. However, the observation of such festivals even in their transitional state is still bringing people together under one roof sharing meals and exchanging gifts and also ideas and experiences, and the tales of the past glory that contributes to instilling basic moral values such as social solidarity, tranquillity, and cohesiveness among the community. Hence, the observation and continuity of these festivals are essential for understanding the history, origin, ethnicity, culture, and tradition of the tribe ultimately contributing to the growth and progress without compromising the precious cultural heritage and identity of the tribe.

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