

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SÜMI CULTURAL HERITAGE

##### 5.1.1. Dual Behaviour/ Characteristic of the Sümi cultural heritage

The Sümi before their encounter with the first outsiders i.e. the Britishers were living a life of seclusion and freedom. In the lens of the so called ‘civilised’ race like the British with whom they first encountered and who liberally referred to them as it was with the rest of the Nagas as ‘Barbarians’, ‘Uncivilised’ etc, their way of life was free and independent. They lived in a village republic and the only voice that commanded them was that of the *Akükau* or the Village Chief who similar to the Konyak *Anghs* exerted power and supremacy. Their way of life was deeply connected with their relationship with nature. When we observe the Sümi at present, one will find that the aggressive step taken by the missionaries to ‘civilise’ and ‘Christianise’ them has slowly evolved into the development of school of thought about the significance of developing a balance between the Sümi cultural identity and the Sümi Christian identity because with the passage of time both have become an intrinsic mechanism towards the emergence of Sümi identity.

When we look back at the life of the Sümi before their encounter with the outsiders, it is clear that their lives revolved around their relationship with their natural surroundings and their beliefs and practices was deeply rooted in their encounter with nature. They believed in ‘good spirit’ and ‘evil spirit’ and appeasing the spirits through various rites and rituals were the order of their day. Through such practices originated the various rituals that today have taken the form of festivals as it is being referred to. Many rituals were elaborate and sometimes ineffective. They also believed in the inanimate objects possessing charms and power to make one rich for example the charm stones and the thunderbolts but it was not everyone’s power or fortune to possess such materials which were either passed on from one generation to the other or were procured through one’s ‘luck’ or physical strength. Life for the ordinary Sümi like any other Naga people of that

period were hard i.e. headhunting made their life insecure and made it hard for them to even carry on their agricultural works effectively on one hand and on the other hand the unpredictable climatic condition made it problematic for them as agriculture was their only source of sustaining their livelihood apart from foraging and hunting. In such a scenario their first encounter with the British administrators took place who in theory were not for the natives making changes to their ways of lives but when their policies and their connection with the American Baptist Missionaries is analysed it is clearly seen that they had a hand in the transformation of the Sümi. In the eyes of the British administrators and the American Missionaries the Sümis might have appeared ‘uncivilised’ according to their theory of what a ‘civilised’ person was supposed to be. As it happened in African continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Europeans got an idea about ‘white supremacy’ through Darwin’s theory of ‘Origin of Species’ wherein they saw the conquest of ‘backward race’ by the ‘superior race’ as the natural order and felt entitled to rule over them, we see similar trend in the attitude of the white people towards the Nagas during this period too. This can be proved from their use of derogatory terms to refer to the Nagas and the need to ‘civilise’ the ‘uncivilised’.

The Nagas in general and the Sümis in particular inspite of such references had a system in place. V K Nuh in his book ‘165 Years of History of Naga Baptist Churches’ (2006) writes:

*The Nagas were a people, who though unaware of the democratic principles of the Western civilization, lived and were governed by democratic principles and practices since time immemorial. Perhaps the Nagas are a people which have a heritage of one of the oldest democracies of the world. The Nagas lived in villages and each village was a democratic unit of the tribes they represented. Each village was sovereign and self sufficient in itself.*<sup>63</sup>

With the conversion of Sümi to Christianity in 1904 at Ighanumi village and which spread to Central Sümi region in 1918, there was great change in every aspect of the life of a Sümi. Christianity while bringing about many positive changes in the Sümi society, it also brought about division in the Sümi society and to an extent discrimination between the people. Two new

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<sup>63</sup> V.K.Nuh ‘165 Years of History of Naga Baptist Churches’ (2006), page 17

groups of people emerged in a society that was hitherto united as a strong community. Those who converted came to be known as the ‘*aye luvekemi*’ while those who remained in their old way of life were called ‘*Jishomi*’ literally translated as ‘those who drink’ as in those who drink rice beer because once a person converts to Christianity, he/she was supposed to give up the habit of drinking rice beer. In the newly created division in the villages between the converted and non converted, there came up problems wherein in villages where the newly converted were a minority they were faced with lots of hardships wherein they were supposed to follow all the rites and rituals of the village whereas as a Christian they were supposed to forego all those animist practices. In cases where they did not oblige, they were punished by the Village Chief. There arose new textiles for example the Pastor’s shawl where in place of the traditional motifs, new Christian motifs were used for example the use of the Cross symbol. The initial period of Christianity was a time of hardships and conflicts.

Similar to the Sümi situation, even in Turtle Islands, before the coming of the Europeans, the Indigenous people of the Island had their own complex system of spiritual beliefs which was complex for the Europeans who did not fully understand it.

Indigenous people’s spirituality was rooted in their connection with nature, the earth and with one another. They had creation stories and a spiritual perspective unique to the history of their peoples that varied from culture group to culture group.<sup>64</sup>

One thing unique about the Indigenous people of the world is that their system differed from other organized religions of the world. In particular, many Indigenous peoples carried a collective belief that everything in their environment possessed a spirit including the natural world, peoples, animals and in some cases inanimate objects.<sup>65</sup> This is very similar to the belief system of the Sümi.

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<sup>64</sup> Anon. 24 *Christianity and First Peoples*.

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/Christianity-and-first-peoples/> DOA: Jan 29, 2023

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

This belief system ultimately ensured that the Indigenous peoples and their communities maintained a deep inter connected relationship of respect and balance with nature, animals and human. Maintaining a positive relationship between these components was an integral part of their worldview.

When the Europeans arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the Turtle Islands, they brought with them the religious and cultural ideologies of Europe. In the process, whether intentional or otherwise, at the Turtle Islands the French missionaries played a huge role in the violent colonization of the indigenous communities. In the early years, the French system of evangelization was mixed with the work of ‘civilising’ the natives. To be ‘civil’ was to behave and look like the French men or women and share their beliefs.<sup>66</sup>

While initially the relationship between the Europeans and Indigenous peoples benefitted both parties in the 1600s in the Turtle Islands, this balance shifted as the idea of converting and civilizing the Indigenous population gained popularity back in France.<sup>67</sup>

This is similar with the situation the Sümi Naga found themselves in. Once a person converts to Christianity, he/she was to give up everything connected with their old ways of life. They started wearing the clothes of the westerners, styled their hair and adopted their way of life which was considered to be ‘civilised’ and a life of a believer. When one glean the old photos of the believers one would rarely see them in their traditional garbs because everything connected with their customs and traditions were considered to be of the devil.

In the Turtle Islands by 1760 the British conquered New France and soon adopted the policy of assimilation for the indigenous population.<sup>68</sup> By 1867 the Indigenous population had shrunk while the British presence had grown.

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<sup>66</sup> Anon. *24 Christianity and First Peoples*.

Web: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/Christianity-and-first-peoples/> DOA: Jan 29, 2023

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

The Roman Catholic Church drew fundings and power from the population of Quebec and willingly took a central role in establishing and running the ‘Assimilationist Education System’ – the residential schools formally introduced in 1883.<sup>69</sup> With the introduction of residential schools, Indigenous peoples felt and became subject to the true social cultural impacts of Christianity.

Even among the Nagas and the Sümis, the Catholics have been playing an important role in bringing about quality education among the people. Similar to what happened to the indigenous people of Canada, the assimilation through education system can be observed both among the Baptist missions and the Roman Catholic missions. Education was considered to be a tool to educate the natives so that they would learn the word of Christ and in turn become a tool in reaching out to their families and community at large. There are many instances of Christianity being popularised through the work of young men who studied in the mission run schools and converting and in turn converting their friends, families and communities. The residential schools run by the Catholics also became tools for converting the young people who in turn became a part of the evangelising tools. In this initial phase, no balance was sought, instead the people had to choose only one way of life i.e. either the Christian way of life which would mean cutting off all connection with their tradition and customs and the Non Christian life which was considered to be akin to uncivilised and animistic way of life – inferior to the Christian life.

Religious imposition deeply affected Indigenous communities. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, First Nations, Métis and Inuit identified church-run, government financed residential schools coupled with the introduction and imposition of Christian beliefs during colonization as a key components in the breakdown of their Indigenous communities and cultural identity. The impact of this trauma has been felt across many generations.<sup>70</sup>

Due to the contested and complex history of indoctrination, spirituality among Indigenous peoples varies widely across Canada today.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

Another group of Indigenous people who shares similar encounter is the Native Americans. Religious and cultural differences were part of the landscape of America long before the period of European colonization. The Indigenous peoples of this land Europeans called ‘The New World’ were separated by language, landscape, cultural myths and ritual practices. Some neighbouring groups such as Hurons and the Iroquois were entrenched in rivalry. Others such as the nations that later formed the Iroquois League developed sophisticated forms of government that enabled them to live harmoniously together despite tribal differences.

When the Europeans first occupied the Americas, most did not even consider that the peoples they encountered had cultural and religious traditions that were different from their own. In fact most believed Indigenous communities had no religion or culture at all.<sup>71</sup>

On the whole, the English settlers saw themselves as settling in a ‘Virgin Land’ where ‘real civilization’ had not been established. From today’s perspective, one might argue that even under the best of circumstances, colonial attitudes towards their indigenous neighbours were coloured by paternalism, ignorance of tribal cultures and desire for profit. More often however Christian missionaries did not recognise the customs of the Native peoples as spiritual or religious traditions in their own right and many mission schools effectively removed Native young people from their cultures. Many Christian colonists and missionaries even those sympathetic to the lifeways of Native peoples categorized Native Americans as ‘Heathens’ who either accepted and resisted conversion to Christianity. It was not until 1978, almost 200 years after the Constitution was signed that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act gave specific legal recognition to the integrity of Native American religion.<sup>72</sup>

The question that often gets overlooked but forms an important part of the whole dialogues on Christianity and Natives is how the Natives responded. Thomas S Giles the Project Editor for Christianity in ‘How did Native Americans respond to Christianity? (A Collection of Eye Witness Account) elucidates three responses of the Native Americans towards Christianity:

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<sup>71</sup> First Encounters: Native Americans and Christians – The Pluralism Project, Harvard University.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

1. Some incorporated elements of Christianity into their own beliefs creating a new syncretistic system. Others resisted the faith of their conquerors and held fast to traditional beliefs. Among the Incas of Peru, for example, baptism was considered subjection to conquerors. Some Incan Chief killed those who accepted the rite.
2. The brutality of European settlers led many Indians to reject Christianity not for Christianity's sake.
3. For some they positively responded and accepted Christianity.

The Native American are said to have viewed Christianity through a variety of experiences. They compared it to their own beliefs and saw it practiced by the people who brought it to their world and they made crucial decisions as to whether to accept the new faith or not.<sup>73</sup>

Historical events have given rise to unique hybridized spiritual practices within some communities where elements of the Christian faith are present alongside tenets of traditional Indigenous spirituality.<sup>74</sup>

Like the other indigenous communities across the world who encountered Christianity and influx of foreigners in their lands, the Sümi also went through a period of transition and initially no balance was sought instead the newly converts (Christians) had to make a choice i.e. completely give up their traditional life and anything and everything connected with it and to become a new person i.e. a Christian. Many people who converted to Christianity either destroyed the cultural artefacts in their possessions or sold it to others because these materials were termed by the Christian missionaries as 'satanic'. This practise went on for many years but recently understanding has dawned wherein the Sümi have come to a realisation that their religious identity and their cultural identity are both equally important in their identity as a Sümi. With the dawn of this understanding, a balance has been sought between these two identities. Over the

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas D Giles, Project Editor for Christianity today, 'How did Native Americans respond to Christianity? (A Collection of Eye Witness Account), 1992.

<sup>74</sup> Anon. *24 Christianity and First Peoples*.

Web: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigstudies/chapter/Christianity-and-first-peoples/> DOA: Jan 29, 2023

years one can observe the cultural practices of the Sümi has always been an intrinsic part of their Christian life whether consciously or sub consciously. This has led to the rise of the ‘Dual Characteristic’ in the Sümi cultural heritage. When we observe closely into the life of a Sümi, in spite of all the restrictions imposed after becoming a Christian, it is clear that they did not completely give up their old way of life and this has trickled down from one generation to the other. The traditional practices have always been in their sub conscious mind which has dictated their way of life. Beliefs and practices are always laced with certain superstitious beliefs of the past. From the time a baby is born till his/her death Christian beliefs and practices are intertwined with the traditional practices. For instance when a woman is pregnant though a Christian she will follow food restrictions according to the traditional beliefs, for instance:

### **1. Snakes:**

Pregnant women were not supposed to kill snakes or eat the snake because if a pregnant women kills or eat a snake her baby will keep pulling out his/her tongue like the snake. Therefore it was a taboo and this is believed till today.

### **2. Monkey/chimpanzee:**

While pregnant, a woman should not eat monkey’s meat and not even look at it because her child will be very restless like the monkey when it is born if she has eaten its meat or had looked at it while pregnant. There is an instance narrated by Inato Shikhu<sup>75</sup> according to which a pregnant woman saw the monkey which was hunted by the villager and brought to the village. It is said that seeing the monkey she laughed at it and when she gave birth, her child had certain characteristics of a monkey and people believed it was because she looked at the monkey and laughed at it.

### **3. Slow loris:**

This animal is very shy animal therefore if a pregnant woman eat the meat of this animal while pregnant her baby would turn out to be very shy and wouldn’t be capable of lifting his/her face to people. Therefore it was a taboo for pregnant women to eat this meat.

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Inato Shikhu, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 (42 years), Awotsakili



#### 4. Khechushi/leftover meat of tigers:

This is leftover meat hunted and eaten by the tiger. Pregnant women were not supposed to eat such meats because if she does then her baby would be like the tiger whose anger cannot be controlled.<sup>76</sup>

#### 5. Blue winged laughing thrust:

It is said that this bird has the ability to sing the songs of other birds therefore when a woman was pregnant, when the liver of this bird is cooked and given to the children believing that like the bird the child will also be smart and brilliant<sup>77</sup>.

Though the consumption of these animals are not practised at present, till today such beliefs are in the mindset of the people and are told to pregnant women.

Before the day of the naming is scheduled in order to ward off evil spirit, the baby is given names like 'Khumtsa' 'Khakhu' (bitterness). For the naming ceremony too though prayers are held with the Pastor, the number of days from the date of birth is counted and according to the traditional practise of the number of days, the naming ceremony take place. Sümi names are always given according to the traditional practise of naming a baby according to one's status. Names always carry meanings connected with the type of family the baby is born in. In some villages, in order to ward off an evil way a single strand of dark blue beads is put around the baby's waist. Solid food is given to babies in the sixth month and when a baby produces too much saliva it is believed that the mother wasn't able to eat whatever she wanted when she was pregnant. Babies are always carried using the traditional plain cloth for carrying the baby and they are always put to sleep by carrying them on the back and singing lullabies in traditional tunes 'o oho o o (name of the baby) o zuhavelo, o o o' (o oho o o go to sleep) this is sung over and over again till the baby go to sleep.

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Yikishe Sheqi, (68 years), Mishilimi village (22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022)

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Kiyeli Sema (75 years), Awotsakili village.

Piercing of ears of children whether boy or girl is still commonly practised. Traditionally as retold by Yekamu Sheqi, when a person doesn't pierce his/her ears when they die they would have no place with the death as their relatives cannot recognise them and they end up being killed by the evil spirit.

When it comes to the marriage, it is always conducted according to Christian rituals but pre wedding rituals are still ingrained in the traditional method. The practise of the boy approaching the girl's hand in marriage and the *Atsa Xakutha* or in modern terms engagement is the occasion where the boy and girl's family will meet for a formal prayer and followed by the discussion on the bride price wherein the amount to be spent, the number of animals to be utilised are discussed. According to the bride price asked or taken preparation will be made for the wedding. Weddings are usually held using the western clothes but over the years it is observed that some young people have started using traditional clothes during the wedding ceremony. The decoration for the wedding are also made using traditional material.



Traditional items used for decoration at a Sümi Christian wedding. **Photo courtesy: Abeto Shohe Photography**



**Left:** Traditional Sūmi mekhala and shawl used as gown and waist coat. **Photo courtesy: Abo Yiki Photography.** **Right:** Traditional Sūmi mekhala used as wedding gown. **Photo courtesy: Abeto Shohe Photography**

Another practise is the belief that when a person go to deep jungles or to a new place which doesn't have human habitation, their spirit gets left behind. In such a scenario through prayer person or sometimes from people who have the ability to dream or sense such happenings the spirits are brought back. To avoid this when the author was a young girl, whenever she would go to forage for wild leaves or wood in the jungle her parents would tell her to call her own name and say 'I am going home so you also come along with me'. There is also an instance where the Author's maternal aunt and family while travelling to Dimapur stopped on the way to have lunch at a riverside. They had a toddler and after reaching Dimapur, their toddler started having fever and it didn't subside and was also looking different, therefore they consulted prayer people and it was revealed that her spirit was left behind in the riverside where they had lunch and it had to be brought back after which she became completely fine.

When we look at the celebration of Jubilees of the Churches or to mark any important events of significance, there is the practise of erecting monoliths which can be traced to the practise of erecting stones during the feast of merit. In the Southern Sūmi region, before the monolith is

erected, there is the practise of pulling the stone from the river side according to the traditional method. During the recent past, when the Mishilimi celebrated the centenary in 2021, they had a stone pulling ceremony wherein all the males from the youngest to the oldest took part in the stone pulling decked in their full traditional attire. The women decked in their traditional attires and carrying baskets stood along the way serving them with snacks and water. Traditionally women do not take part in the stone pulling ceremony.

At present lots of importance is given to the celebration of traditional festivals like Tuluni and Ahuna. Tuluni was a very important ritual during the forefather's time wherein certain rituals were conducted before the sowing of the seeds in the field. Ahuna was a harvest ritual in the past. At present both are celebrated as a festival and even in Churches over the past few years, the church is decorated with traditional clothes, ornaments and materials connected with the old ways of life commemorating these festivals. Such were a taboo for Christians in the past but it isn't thought so at present. For Tuluni week, Sümi people are encouraged to wear their traditional clothes commemorating the festival.

In order to revive the significance of traditional clothes, the churches have now made it compulsory for the congregation to wear atleast one Sümi traditional clothes or ornaments for the Sunday service. Even at work places, the practise of wearing traditional clothes once a week has become a norm. When one gleans the Christian songs, one can observe that over the years, gospel songs are being composed using traditional folk tunes which are becoming very popular among the young people. One such group who are famous for using the folk tunes in the gospel songs is the Nagageneous band. The Founder Hojevi Kappo is of the view that usually folk tunes were perceived to be of the devil but he believes what the Bible says i.e. all good gifts are from God, therefore folk tunes are also God's gift to men. A person may belong to different religion but his identity is in his culture therefore if folk tunes are lost, identity will be lost. If a person learns the folk tunes then wherever the person may go he will never forget his culture. therefore one way of preserving culture is through preserving folk tunes. The Nagagenous group not only sing gospel songs in folk tunes but uses traditional clothes. The founder believes using traditional materials for God is a wonderful way of fulfilling God's word. Using folk instruments for God's

glory is a sign of going back and being thankful to God. The first song using folk instruments was a Christian Hymn 'Heavenly sunlight'.

Akin to the feast of merit in the olden days, at present when a man gives the Christmas feast he is eligible to wear the Avi kiyiphi. Giving the Christmas feast for the entire church members is becoming popular among the people.

When it comes to the death, ceremonies are always held according to the Christian rituals but till today certain practises from the animistic practices are still part of the Christian ritual. For instance during the ceremony, when speeches are done, each person would go near the coffin and speak farewell words to the death and sometimes messages such as '*do not be afraid to go to the land of death because I will drop you*' are also conveyed. Such happens when young people or women dies because it is believed that it becomes difficult for them to carry their stuff on their way to the land of the death and also if their spirit is weak they become slow to walk or afraid of the devil. So when such words are conveyed, in the dream of the person who has conveyed the message, he/she would meet the death and carry them to the land of death. Another practise is the '*Akukho kighini*' (prayer of severance) wherein prayer is held on the same day for the separation between the living and the death. In the past this was a ritual that would take place two days after the death has been buried.

During the course of the field work, the Author came in contact with one respondent from Lazami village who possessed the charm stone called '*Amishi gha*' or the 'cattle charm stone' which had the ability to make one rear cattles successfully and become rich. According to the respondent till today though they have converted to Christianity, if he doesn't rear cattle like the Mithun or cows, his villager cannot rear successfully. While the Author was on her way to another village for field work, she met the respondent on the way between Lazami and another village. The respondent was on his way on foot to feed his mithuns with salt. Mithuns are not reared like the cows in the vicinity of the village but they are left in the jungle to roam free and forage for themselves. The owner would often go to visit and feed them salt. They have the ability to track the mithun as well as communicate with it. In spite of this process being very hard

and though he is a rich man, the belief that if he stop rearing mithun and cows it would affect his village's cattle wealth, he is still practising it.

From all these instances, it is clear that the Sümi has the dual characteristics and these two are an intrinsic part of the Sümi cultural heritage.

### **5.1.2. Inter-connectedness between Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Another important characteristic of the Sümi cultural heritage is the inter-connectedness between the Tangible and Intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO's working definition gives the meaning of cultural heritage as the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generation, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of the future generations. According to Fiona Hamilton<sup>78</sup>, generally the cultural heritage of the Indigenous peoples is considered in two ways with each strongly inter-connected to each other and to country, both broadly or specific to a locality or place. These are:

**Tangible Cultural Heritage** – this includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artefacts etc which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These includes objects significant to archaeology, architecture, science and technology of a specific culture<sup>79</sup>.

Objects are important for the study of human history because they provide a concrete basis for ideas and can validate them. Their preservation demonstrates recognition of the necessity of the past and the things that tell its story. Tangible Cultural Heritage has a physical presence.<sup>80</sup>

**Intangible Cultural Heritage** – it includes the tradition or living tradition or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants such as oral tradition, practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skill to produce traditional crafts, food

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<sup>78</sup> Fiona Hamilton, Tangible and intangible cultural heritage

<https://www.shivajicollege.ac.in/sPanel/uploads/econtent/1ce6e978fe3fdeb0b1f032d103efc7b9.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> ibid

<sup>80</sup> ibid

and medicine heritage and digital heritage. Intangible Cultural heritage is defined as not having a physical presence.<sup>81</sup>

Cultural heritage thus is a synchronised relationship involving society (that is system of interactions connecting people) and norms and values (ideas for instance belief system that attribute relative importance).

Cultural Heritage objects are the tangible evidence of underlying norms and values. Thus they establish a symbiotic relation between the Tangible and Intangible. The Intangible must be seen as a broader framework within which tangible heritage takes on its shape and significance.<sup>82</sup>

The Istanbul Declaration adopted at the Round Table of Ministers of Culture organised by Mr Koichiro Matura, Director-General of Culture UNESCO in Istanbul 2002 stresses that ‘an all encompassing approach to cultural heritage should prevail which takes into account the dynamic link between the Tangible and Intangible heritage and their deep interdependence’.<sup>83</sup>

This declaration is an eminently limpid statement to the effect that intangible heritage only attains its true significance when it sheds light on its underlying values. Conversely Intangible Cultural Heritage should be made incarnate to tangible manifestations i.e. visible signs if it is to be conserved. This dialectic may prove particularly fruitful for those cultures that attach more importance to oral tradition.

There are instances where the tangible and intangible are treated independently but it is inevitable to ignore that there are sites whose conservation and representation depend on the equal contribution of both the Tangible and the Intangible. Even if one element is ignored, the heritage value of the place is represented partially. The importance of such an approach can be seen in ‘The Shanghai Charter’ adopted in the Asia Pacific Regional Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Shanghai, October 2002. The Charter recommends

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid*

<sup>82</sup> Editorial, *Museum International* ‘Intangible Heritage’ vol 56, No 1-2, 2004, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, page 8

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

that Museum ‘establish interdisciplinary and cross sectorial approach that bring together movable and immovable, Tangible and Intangible, Natural/Cultural heritage’ and develop documentation tools and standards in establishing holistic museum and heritage practices.<sup>84</sup>

There are three instances of a heritage sites receiving the recognition of world heritage sites because of the significant inter-connectedness between its tangible values and intangible values namely:

1. Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Australia which was recognised for its outstanding tangible and intangible cultural heritage values.
2. Robben Island, South Africa which was inscribed on the basis of cultural Criterion (vi)<sup>85</sup> and the important symbolic significance for indigenous people.
3. Tombs of Bugunda Kings at Kasubi, Uganda whose main significance lies in its intangible values of beliefs, spirituality, continuity and identity.

The ICOMOS Nara Document ascertained the existence of different heritage values and criteria. By ascertaining the ‘truthfulness’ could be culturally contextualised, it admitted a criterion by which an annually renewed mud structure or a ritually rebuilt wooden temple could be designated as both historic and authentic. Ephemerality thus took its place alongside permanence as legitimate characteristics of some kinds of historic structure. If a building or work of art is to be ritually renewed then the actors who affect the renewal become essential elements in the preservation process. In this period, a shift was occurring from exclusive emphasis on material culture to a definition that included performed culture or rather the complex interdependence of tangible and intangible heritage.

Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage are inseparable. The Intangible Cultural Heritage resides within the Tangible Cultural Heritage whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. We

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<sup>84</sup> ICOMOS 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, the Inter dependency of the Tangible and Intangible, UNESCO

<sup>85</sup> Operational guidelines for the Implementation of World Heritage Convention which relates to cultural heritage ‘directly or tangibly associated with events, living traditions, with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance’



can easily study objects and buildings based on the tangible alone but to truly capture the meaning of any item of natural culture. In Intangible heritage there is rarely a complete absence of Intangible. Even in the most intangible of all, oral narratives, there are always references to items of material culture. The inter-connectedness between Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage is very important because it leads to more connected communities and more fulfilled individuals. It creates connection between people and communities in the following ways:

1. As each offer their interpretation of what a place means to them, the potential is created to forge or strengthen ties between historically disparate groups.
2. It opens the door to interpreting the past in a new way, understanding how it endures in the present and allowing us to conceive of a future which is more sustainable, more rooted in place and more inclusive.<sup>86</sup>

Even if Tangible and Intangible Heritage are very different, they are two sides of the same coin – both carry meaning and the embedded memory of humanity. Both the Tangible and Intangible heritage rely on each other when it comes to understanding the meaning and importance of each.<sup>87</sup>

Among the ‘Indigenous and Living Cultures’ as the meeting of ICOMOS Africa region held in Zimbabwe in 1995 expressed, ‘(For Africa) the spirit of site take precedence over the substance’. To the 160,000 Lobi people of South-West Burkina Faso, the imagery of village is more important than the physical fabric. This is the case for the Sümi too. The village is the central of the Sümi life. This is one example of the inter-connectedness of the tangible with the Intangible. Right from the location of the village to the naming one can observe the interplay between the tangible and the intangible. Sümi villages are always established atop hills and mountains which is the tangible aspect. The reason behind this is that the Sümi practised head hunting and inter-village wars was the order of the day, therefore establishing the village atop hills was a wise

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<sup>86</sup> Kristin Catherwood, ‘Untangling Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage’  
<https://heritagesask.ca/pub/documents/Articles/2016%20Untangling%20Tangible%20%20Intangible%20Cultural%20Heritage.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, Museum International, ‘Intangible Heritage’ Vol 56, No 1-2, 2006, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Page 10

practise which enabled the better defence of the village because one could easily make out the enemy approaching. The Sümi were fond of establishing villages and the eldest son would often venture out with his group of followers and the village would be named after him. From the moment they leave the parent village till the time they built houses and start living in the new village entailed performing and fulfilling lots of rites and rituals. According to Sümi customary law, once a person ventures out to establish his own village, he cannot come back, if he comes back he will become '*Aba lekuchumi*' meaning to say that inspite of still having his father and brothers in the village, he would no longer be eligible to inherit property and would live like an outsider, in some cases they would live bonded lives. Sümi society is that of 'pride and shame' therefore such instances are a matter of shame. Even today one can cite instances but keeping the sanctity of privacy such hasn't been mentioned. Tangible and intangible often went hand in hand and one can observe that without the involvement of both, it would be incomplete and would often lead to misfortunes as was the belief system. The Sümi villages are also very important in tracing the migration routes that the forefathers followed in order to come to the present locations. These migration routes are often traced through oral tradition that is part and parcel of every village's history. Disappearance of a village would lead to the rise of gap in the migration stories. Villages would be deserted thus leading to its disappearance due to famines, war, and in some cases being chased away by the devils. There are instances of such villages that got deserted and ultimately disappeared namely... There were also instances of villages moving from one site to the other before permanently settling in their present location due to various beliefs. These old sites becomes important markers in tracing the history of the village and its people. According to Heito of Chishilimi village<sup>88</sup> before the Chishilimi village settled in the present location, they had settled in a place known as 'Kichimiphu'. According to the oral tradition, Chishi was the youngest among four brothers namely Igha, Hebo, Chisho and Chishi. Igha was the first to establish his village, followed by Hebo. When Chisho established his village, his younger brother Chishi stayed with him. After sometime, Chisho's wife told him that they would separate and no longer stay married if Chisho did not kill his brother Chishi. Chisho was perplexed, he could not think of killing his own brother, therefore he took him to the jungle and left him there while he went home hidingly. Chishi did not know his way around, therefore, he

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<sup>88</sup>Interview with Mr. Heito, Ex chairman, Chishilimi Village on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021

spent the night there. The next day when he woke up, he heard a rooster crowing which made him realise that he wasn't far away from human habitation, therefore he decided to settle there. After a while, he went to his brother Chisho's village and told the villagers that if they were beaten by Chisho, they could come and settle at his village. Soon Chishi also had around 30 households. It was believed that Chishi's wife was very intelligent. She would always observe their pig coming back from the foraging with mud smeared all over its body. When Chishi came to know about it, he thought this had some hidden message for him. Therefore they kept ayephi on the pig and decided to follow it. After following the trail for a while, they came across the pig rolling in the mud near a pond. Chishi thought this was a sign for him to settle here. Therefore they shifted to this location which is where the present Chishilimi village is located. They named the place where they found the pig as 'Wozuqa' meaning where the pig bathed. These markers enable the villages to know their boundaries too. In case of any disputes such sites bear as proof of the village's claim over the land. Therefore we can observe how the intangible supports the tangible in order to give meaning to the sites.

Another instance is that of Mishilimi village.<sup>89</sup> According to oral tradition, the forefathers of Mishilimi village namely Ashu Sheqi, Khisho and Visho came to Mishiluqa/Sheqipito located at Ighanumi village area. From here Ashu Visho went his separate ways to Tsuyi riverside and Ashu Khisho and Sheqi went down the Yeti river and moved towards the Doyang riverside to Khagho and then to Kivinye from where they parted ways and Sheqi settled at Pughuboqa and Khisho settled at Fuyeto.

After a long period of time, Visho came from Tsuyi riverside and brought his whole family and started living with Khisho at Fuyeto in the same khel. According to legend, Visho physically well built and was an expert hunter. One day he went with his group to hunt for wild buck/Aqhu and when they were sharing the meat, some of the group members plotted and killed one person and cut his private part and put it into the bag of Visho. The family of the deceased decided to check the hunting bags and whoever had the private part was to be considered as to have committed the crime. They found it in the bag of Visho and they decided to kill him. Out of fear

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Yekamu Sheqi (92 years), Yikishe Sema(72 years), Mishilimi Village, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2022

that night Visho escaped with his family and went in search of Kisho. Before he went to Kisho's village, he told his wife that if they hear the sound of pigs and dogs then they should know that he had died and they should go into hiding but if they don't hear any sound he would come and take them so they were to wait for him at the same spot where he left them. When he knocked on Khisho's door that night, Khisho told his wife to open the door just slightly and he went out from the back door and grabbed hold of Visho from the back and asked him whether he was the person with whom he used to wrestle and play with in the past? When Visho replied in affirmative Kisho again asked him whether he had come alone or with his family. Visho told him that he had come with his family after which Kisho told him to bring his family and from then on they started living together at Fuyeto.

Visho was a hunter therefore he had a hunting dog. It was said that when the hunting dog came home in the evening he would always be drenched in water. Therefore one day Visho tied a package of ayephi and ash on his tail and followed its trail, he found the dog at the present site of the Atozhuki/Ahezhuki or Ato pond/Ahe pond. He came back and told Kisho that on the mountain there was a bountiful pond therefore it would be better for them to migrate to that place. Kisho agreed but he also wanted to inform Sheqi who was living at Pughuboqa and then only leave for the new place. When Kisho informed Sheqi, he also agreed and three of them went and cleared the forest in order to set up a village. That night when they slept, they all got different dreams. Visho dreamed of Pokuna and was saddened, Kisho also dreamt of a man but his name was a woman's name called Ghuvili therefore he too was saddened. Then Sheqi narrated his dream according to which he met a pair of serpents and a pair of hornet. The pair of serpent told him that three of them should settle at the present site and they shouldn't harm the pair as well as the hornet pair even if they see them because they would help and protect them. Therefore after hearing this prophetic dream, they decided to set up village at the present site. Sheqi was made the Awou or Chief Priest because of his prophetic dream, Kisho became the Chief because he was very intelligent and he was the first to live at Phuyeto, Visho was made the warrior because he was well built and was an expert hunter. The clan of Sheqi came to be called as Sheqilimi while the clans of Visho and Kisho came to be known as Wotsami.

The tangible cultural heritage of the Sümi like the charm stones would be considered as any other ordinary pebble or stone without its intangible assets. These charm stones served as valuable assets during the Forefathers' days because it was believed that depending on the type of charm stone a person possessed, he would be blessed with prosperity, cattle wealth, bountiful harvests, etc. Some of the charm stones of the Sümi are found displayed at Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. For a visitor having no knowledge about the Sümi of Nagaland, it would mean nothing if the display didn't carry any description of the Charm stone. Even for a person from the Sümi community such stones would hold no cultural value if it wasn't attached with its deep cultural narratives. This is a classic example of how the tangible is given value by the intangible assets.

The Nara document made a breakthrough when it declared that 'all cultures and societies are rooted in particular forms and means of both the Tangible and the Intangible according to which values of cultural property would be judged on the basis of an interactive matrix of both cultural and physical properties with local, national and regional cultural differences on one axis and property differences on the other'<sup>90</sup>.

According to the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), 'the distinction between physical heritage is now seen as artificial. Physical heritage can only attain its true significance when it sheds light on its underlying values. Conversely intangible heritage must be made incarnate in tangible manifestations.'<sup>91</sup>

### **5.1.3. Sümi Cultural Heritage as a source of Identity, Creativity and Diversity**

The term 'cultural heritage' has evolved considerably in recent decades. While previously referring exclusively to monumental remains of culture, 'cultural heritage' has gradually come to include new categories in particular more emphasis has been put on intangible cultural heritage. There is also increasing recognition of the relationship between communities and cultural heritage. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the value of Cultural Heritage for

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<sup>90</sup> Dawson Munjeri, 'Tangible and Intangible Heritage: From Difference to Convergence' in 'Museum International' Intangible Heritage, 2004, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Page 16

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, page 18

Society defines cultural heritage as ‘group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership as reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from interaction between people and places through time (Art.2).<sup>92</sup>

Both Tangible and Intangible cultural heritage are important for the people as they are the source of their identity and continuity. It can promote social cohesion, respect for cultural diversity and human creativity as well as help communities and individuals connect with each other.

According to Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ‘safeguarding living heritage is very crucial for indigenous peoples because their heritage is the basis of their culture and of course it is the continual transmission of this heritage that is going to strengthen indigenous people’s identities and culture’.<sup>93</sup>

Cultural Heritage is seen as a source of identity for groups, communities, even entire nations, in particular as an opportunity for examining the past, for the capture of deeper and more real truths about current events. It represents the way in which communities constitute themselves as collective action to represent the traces of their past. They interpret the testimonies of their past for current purposes, the main one being the identification of shared identity.<sup>94</sup>

The Sümi being an oral society depend on every aspect of their cultural heritage as a source of their identity. The history and culture of the Sümi people have been passed down from one generation to the other since time immemorial. Over the years the Sümi have been exposed to the outside world through their encounters with different groups of people. Through such interactions and contacts, the Sümi adopted certain aspects of other culture and this influence continues to be a part of their lives. These encounters opened their eyes to their worldview but it also came with a price. Many aspects of their culture were destroyed while on their quest to

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<sup>92</sup> UN General Assembly Human Rights Council 30<sup>th</sup> Session Agenda Item 5, page 3

<sup>93</sup> UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage and Indigenous People’s (The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

<sup>94</sup> Cultural heritage as a source of shared identity <https://net/144787/marketing/culturalheritagesource>

adopt a new identity. In spite of taking on new identities, the Sümi consciously or unconsciously continued to be deeply ingrained in their old ways of life. Through this, the knowledge system continued to remain intact and their history and culture continued to be passed down from one generation to the other. This has been the source of their identity as a Sümi.

Cultural identity is complex and can be defined in different ways and in current interaction and technological development where social interaction and socio-cultural manifestations are in increasing evolution and are exposed in virtual environments, any social group can harbour multiple cultural identities. Generally a community's cultural identity is characterised by its beliefs, customs, values and symbolic traditions of everyday life.

For UNESCO, cultural identity is a concept derived from material and spiritual elements, inherited within a social group that represents a strong authenticity and facilitates the understanding of a culture and increases the community's values. Therefore cultural identity is a determining characteristic of a region; it encompasses its own specific features and contrasts different people's customs alongside identifying the expression that are the results of social interactions between different communities. Hence cultural manifestations will always constantly interact, change and evolve.<sup>95</sup>

Festive celebrations in general and religious in particular are an expression of cultural identity and according to Ramirez are linked to preserving memories and those breaks that invent a possible future. For the Sümi, in the olden days throughout the year there would be various rites and rituals according to the agricultural seasons. These rituals were often accompanied by feasting. At present, the ritualistic practices are no longer in existence but these ritual days are observed as festivals. Two most prominent among them is the rituals connected with the growth of crops called Tuluni festival in the month of July and the harvest festival in the month of November called Ahuna. During these festivals, various aspects of the Sümi cultural heritage comes to life. One of the most important aspect of these festivals is the wearing of the Sümi traditional clothes by the young and old alike. The Tuluni festival is traditionally observed for seven days, each day dedicated to carrying out certain activities or rituals. At present it is usually

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<sup>95</sup> Ruiz Palacio, Miguel Angel et al, Cultural Identity: A Case study in the Celebration of San Antonio De Padua (Lajas, Peru), Heritage 2023 b, page 351

encouraged for the Sümi to wear their traditional clothes, the reason being to showcase their identity as a Sümi. The Sümi take great pride in celebrating these festivals as it gives them an opportunity to showcase their cultural heritage to the other people. Often these festivals are accompanied by various cultural programmes wherein traditional games are played, folk dancing and folk song competitions are held. The traditional practise of sharing meat and food with their loved ones as well as neighbours and friends form a huge part of these festive events. A food package called '*Anagho*' which is packed in the banana leaves and is filled with rice and different curries especially pork is distributed among their neighbours and friends. This form of food packaging has been passed down from forefathers' time. During the Tuluni festival there is also the practise of '*Amalimi kupulhu*' or the son in law's feast wherein the newly engaged or married daughters' husbands would be invited home for dinner. The son-in-laws are usually from different communities but through such an event they are given respect and the Sümi cultural identity is showcased to them.

It is during these festive events that majority of the people engage themselves in singing folk songs and folk dances. Music and dance as cultural manifestations express sensorily and jointly a collective feeling that motivates an emotional psycho physiological reaction which leads to living an experience of connection between the participants.<sup>96</sup> Some even engage in reading folk poetries called '*Leshele*'. These songs and poetries are in the original dialect of the Sümi therefore it gives the opportunity to the young and old to learn the original Sümi dialect. Language is one of the most important aspects of the cultural heritage as it is through language one identifies with a certain community or group of people. In a multi tribal society like Nagaland, the different communities are differentiated based on the language that one speaks. It is through language that one is recognised as a Sümi. This is one of the most important identity marker among the various aspect of the cultural heritage.

Language is an essential part of cultural heritage but sadly according to Linguists half of the world's languages will be gone in the next century and indigenous languages are at the forefront of those going silent. When a language goes silent, we lose more than just a grammatical system

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<sup>96</sup> Ruiz Palacio, Miguel Angel et al, Cultural Identity: A Case study in the Celebration of San Antonio De Padua (Lajas, Peru), Heritage 2023 b, page 352



or a vocabulary. Each language represents a unique worldview or cosmology. In losing language, we lose part of our cultural diversity and priceless record of local biodiversity and cultural heritage.<sup>97</sup>

The Sümi are generally known for their large heartedness and generosity when it comes to sharing food with others and one particular food that identifies with the Sümi is the fermented soyabean pastes called ‘*Axone*’. Gastronomy within a community is an element of social construction that, associated with a particular context of the communities, reflects a true sense of its identity through the form of cultivation, the selection of products, the typical; dishes and the forms to serve and consume. Naturally, typical gastronomy not only encompasses the typical dishes and drinks of a locality but it are also a tangible representation of its eating customs, traditions, techniques and lifestyles of the people.<sup>98</sup>

The word “*Axone*” is derived from Sümi Naga word “*axo*” which means "aroma" or "smell" denoting "deep smell" or "strong smell". Alternatively, the word “*Akhuni*” is also used for this fermented food/dish. However, this is owing to the non-Sümi speakers’ inability to pronounce and speak the guttural “*xo*”. As such we may posit that the usage of the word “*akhuni*” is a malapropism of the original and root word “*axone*”.

There are some Sümi Naga folklore pertaining to the origin and discovery of Axone. The first is a folktale about a young lady by the name *Kujunakali*.<sup>99</sup>

Kujunakali was a daughter of *Apiüza* (grandmother) Mutale. Her parents died when she was young. From a young age, she was looked after by her uncle and his wicked wife. She was brought up in the house where there was least concern for her. Every morning she had to cook and feed her uncle's family and then was made to go to

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<sup>97</sup> Cultural Survival to the Study of UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with respect to Cultural Heritage.

<sup>98</sup> Ruiz Palacio, Miguel Angel et al, Cultural Identity: A Case study in the Celebration of San Antonio De Padua (Lajas, Peru), Heritage 2023 b

<sup>99</sup> Ghovili K. Achumi, “*The Essence of Sümi Ethnic Traditional and Modern Attire*”, Page 32

work in the field all alone, after returning from the day's work at the field, she was made to attend to the house hold works one after the other till late at night.

Everybody at home ate proper food but she was offered only the cold leftovers. In spite of her sincerity and hard work she was ill treated and was denied of parental love and affection. While sending her off to the field in her torn and misshaped clothes, the only edible her aunt packed for her mid day meal was nothing but half cooked Soya beans mixed with meagre amount of shredded bamboo shoots, few rotten vegetables and poultry droppings all wrapped in a banana leaf. After the whole day's toil through the heat and rain Kujunakali would retire to a resting shed made of haystack called *Axapiki* for her meal but on finding that the food which was packed for her was not fit for consumption, she would keep them in the *aghiyi kutsa* (between the layer of the haystack on the roof of the shed) by the fire and go back home without food.

One day she went to the field without food and she was very hungry. That was when she remembered the food that she had kept in the *aghiyi kutsa*. When she opened it, she found the half cooked soya bean was already smelly by that time but it looked appealing to her eyes therefore she tasted it and found it to be very rich and delicious. She dried it in the sun and cooked it with water and that day she ate to her stomach's fill and returned home. After some days she even invited her friends to taste it, when they all tried it, they were full of praise for the exotic taste and the aroma it produced. From that day she named that particular dish as "*AXONE*" and thus the eating and uses of *axone* began. *Axone* is derived from the Sümi word "*AXO*" which means "smell". News about the taste of *Axone* soon started to spread among her friends and they also decided to order *Axone* from Kujunakali in exchange for Shawls and other garments for her personal use. She started earning and saved some money from the little venture she made out of *Axone* and soon she became well known for the wealth she possessed. Her marriage celebration was talked about in the whole village as she declared huge amount of money and a pair of Mithun and other animals as her

"Asana" which means saving by the girl before marriage which she can take with her. All these were the outcome of her sale of Axone. Sümi women are considered to be rich and hard working by the "Asana" they offer during their marriage. That is how one earns honour and respect from her in laws even after their marriage.

The story of an orphan is the second Sümi folklore that talks about the origin of *Axone*.

Long ago, an orphan was fed with a handful of boiled soya beans by his step-mother instead of feeding him with proper meal. This made him unhappy as it would not satisfy his hunger but he was compelled to accept it. So he took it and since it was too less, he left it between the thatch roof. After a few days, he discovered that the soya beans had fermented. He tasted it and liked the fermented soya bean instantly. This is how *Axone* (fermented soya bean paste) became a delicacy for Sümi Nagas.

*Axone* is also known by different names in different parts of Northeast India; *Kinema* (Sikkim), *Bekang* (Mizoram), *Hawaijar* (Manipur), *Tungrumbai* (Meghalaya), and *Peruyyan* (Arunachal Pradesh)<sup>100</sup>. Though the method, usage and flavor may slightly vary this soya bean dish is also well-known in South, Southeast and East Asian countries of Nepal, Bhutan, Japan, Korea, China, Myanmar, Vietnam and Indonesia. It belongs to the broader phenomena of fermentation necessary for food preservation in certain ecological contexts. In that way, flavours generated by *axone* are comparable to that of Japanese miso, which is quite mainstream in Japanese restaurants.

For Sümi Naga *axone* production is home based and not produced on a large scale but just enough for the consumption of the family. Amongst the varieties of soyabean the Sümi Naga prefer the smallest size variety for production as they believe it produces better aroma and texture. Following steps are followed to ferment *axone* that will produce pungent and acidic flavor.

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<sup>100</sup> Sikhamoni Borgohain (2021), *Common Fermented Food Products of North-East States of India*. Journal of Agriculture and Allied Sciences e-ISSN: 2347-226X

Pick and rinse soybeans in freshwater



Soak in water overnight and boiled thoroughly the next day. Boil for 3-4 hours if boiling in pot. 1 hour if pressure cooked. Some people add beans to acquire added flavor.



Drain out the excess water



Arrange a bamboo culm sheath (*apukola*) or wrapping leaves called *tsüzüküghü* or banana leaves inside a bamboo basket and pour the drained soya bean and pack it



Keep near the fire for 3-4 days. Make sure you don't burn smelly fire woods or eat sour fruits nearby the soya bean during this period. Some people also leave the wrapped axone to dry out in the sun to ferment but it may not produce the same taste and smell as the traditional smoke fire method does.



Made into a paste, wrap and dry above the fire again for about 3-4 days. Some dry for 2 days only to acquire more pungent aroma for chutney.



*Axone*



Axone is stored in *aqhupu* (bamboo basket) or containers in cake form near the fireplace, darkening in colour each day.

*Axone* is one of the most Sümi authentic dishes enjoyed and feasted on by people in the region. It is best cooked with smoked pork. *Axone* is also used as an accompaniment or condiment in the form of chutney or pickle, or simply used as a flavour enhancer by adding it to make all sort of meals including veg and meat gravies, snacks and even stews. *Axone*, in its dry form, is also used for garnishing all these meals just to uplift their taste. The aroma is so strong that when one home cooks *axone*, the 4-5 homes that are in the vicinity would know that somewhere *axone* is being cooked.

The way *axone* is prepared as well as cooked by the Sümi has its own distinct style and flavour setting it apart from all other Naga tribes. *Axone* is synonymous with the Sümi tribe and is one of the identity markers.

Van Ginkel links the relevance of cultural connection and Identity formation to show the closely-knit relationship between the social and political identity. He argues ‘Cultural Heritage is one of these defining factors of a person’s identity’. Mclean reinforces this point stating ‘Heritage has an identity-conferring status’. Van Ginkel further comments ‘Living beings change over time, physically and mentally and so does culture change’ and that culture evolves constantly as a reaction to exposure to and interaction with other cultures. In this process identity is exposed to flux of changes and notions of continuity.<sup>101</sup>

Cultures are created by men and similarly they are destroyed by man. It is both the elements of the cultural heritage which form the background of experiences to which societies refer in constructing their present. It is both the material and immaterial heritage which shapes the collective identity of the cultures and the nations of the world. At the same time this collective heritage of mankind create the basis for the formation of respective individual identities...identity includes the production of material assets as well as intangible traditions.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Van Ginkel, Hans. (2004). “Cultural Heritage, Identity Formation and Change in a Globalizing World”. Globalization and Intangible Cultural Heritage International Conference, 26-27 August, Tokyo, Japan

<sup>102</sup> Albert, Marie-Theres, Culture, Heritage and Identity, Institute Heritage Studies, Berlin, March 2020, Page 4

Consequently, cultural heritage is a two-fold way 'present' in the present. Concerning the Intangible aspect, cultural heritage guides people in their lifestyles and in interpreting their everyday lives. More precisely, cultural heritage is the product of the reconstruction of the past which is determined by the needs of the present.<sup>103</sup>

Both Tangible and Intangible cultural heritage are highly important for the formation of identities. The protection of both is consequently important to safeguard peace. The destruction of cultural assets has been part of historical processes throughout many social systems and many generations with the aim to establish new political orders.<sup>104</sup>

Similar instances occurred among the Sümi through their encounters with the British, the American Baptist Missionaries and the Indian Army operation. Many aspects of their cultural heritage were destroyed during these periods of encounters. There was destruction of not only the tangible cultural heritage through burning of villages during the Indian Army Operation but also of intangible cultural heritage when men and women who had knowledge about the cultural heritage were either killed or died of starvation and diseases. This caused a huge loss as well as created in the knowledge gap which affected the Sümi greatly. In spite of such instances the Sümi stood strong and deeply rooted in their identity.

It is said that a positive cultural identity can provide an individual with a sense of belonging, purpose, social support and self worth. This process may occur through an attachment to a cultural group whereby belief systems, values, obligations and practices are shared and reinforced in group member.

When we observe the Sümi cultural heritage, it is an important source of creativity and diversity too. Sikszenmihalyi observes '*creativity does not happen inside people's head but in the interaction between person's thoughts and a socio cultural context. It is a systematic rather than an individual phenomenon*'.<sup>105</sup> He goes on further to say '*without creativity there would not be*

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, page 5

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, page 7

<sup>105</sup> Sikszenmihalyi, Mihaly, 'Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention, Harper Perrenial, 1996, page 24

*music, poetry, paintings, literature and all creative activities associated with art and cultural industries. Creativity contributes to the making of culture.*<sup>106</sup>

The Sümi cultural heritage is laced with creativity which has been passed on from the forefather's time and recreated by one generation to the other. Like other Naga tribes, the Sümi also depend on agriculture for their livelihood. When we observe the way they coped with the harsh weathers and toils of working in the field from morning to evening every day of their lives, one can see how creatively they established the working patterns. For instance, they had the system of working in groups called '*aloji*' wherein they exchanged labours. Each would get their turn of getting the work at their field done by the whole group. These groups were composed according to age, gender and mixed but even if all male group they would always include two three ladies in order to serve them food and rice beer. Working at the field became easier as they bore each others' burden and they also had feasts together during the important festivals. The Sümi has a category of folk song called '*Alu Kumla le*' which are songs sung while working at the field. They would always sing folk songs while working at the field and this made them more enthusiastic and pushed them to work even harder. Through such songs they would boost each other's spirit.

The Sümi also are gifted in different crafts which are practised by both men and women. Men are skilled in making different varieties of baskets with intricate designs as well as simple ones made of bamboo, some are experts in wood carvings and other skills. Women on the other hand are expert weavers. Over the years many women have introduced new patterns and designs commemorating certain festivals and events, for example a woman's mekhala named ahuna mini was introduced commemorating the Ahuna festival. Along with the traditional textiles, new textiles such as these add variety to the richness of the Sümi heritage. But there is another concern wherein instead of using the original designs whether traditional or modern textiles, one start creating motifs and patterns according to one's whims and wishes which distorts the meaning and the value attached to the cultural material therefore such practises should be avoided. Weaving have also undergone a lot of changes over the years. whereas in the olden days

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<sup>106</sup> Sikszenmihalyi, M. Creativity, Harper Perennial, 1996, chap, p 317.

the traditional method concentrated on planting one's own cotton and producing fibres out of it which were dyed with natural dyes and used for producing varieties of textiles. Over the years these have been replaced by readymade synthetic fibres.

The Sümi being an oral society doesn't have any written record but they possess rich oral tradition and these have been passed on from one generation to the other. Over the years some of these have been documented. In the recent past, the Sümi writers have started writing fictions based on Sümi culture. The characters, stories and plots are all based on the Sümi culture and way of life. Even the cover of these books are also illustrated with the Sümi characters wearing Sümi traditional attires, for example books like '*Anoke Hebo*' by K Nishena Nekha, Sümi and the Dance of the Dark Spirits by Toinali Sema, Orchid of the Dark Forest by Inovi Awomi to name a few. Some writers like Inato Y Shikhu has even started ethno-musical research on Sümi folk music/ folk songs emphasising on its characteristics, forms, scales, rhythms, stylistic devices etc in his book '*Folk Music of Sümi Naga: Reviving the Past and Preserving for the Future*'. Attempts have also been made to transcribe Sümi folk songs into staff notation.

Another creative aspect of reviving Sümi folk music is by folk music groups like 'Nagagenous' who are famous for using the folk tunes in their musical compositions. Even while performing their songs they wear full traditional attires and uses indigenous musical instruments and the sounds of nature in a traditional Sümi house setting. Important aspect of their music is the revival of folk tunes and popularising it.

Diversity is another fundamental aspect of cultural heritage and it should be cherished as a source of strength. By recognizing and respecting the diverse cultural expressions within a society, individuals can learn from one another, building bridges of understanding and promoting social cohesion.<sup>107</sup>

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the General Conference of the UNESCO states 'Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. The diversity is

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<sup>107</sup> Celebrating Cultural Heritage: Embracing Diversity and #Sharing Humanity



embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.<sup>108</sup>

By 2006, the UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura had put in place a scheme called ‘Proclamation of Master Pieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity’ which was to be the advance guard of the Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003). The intention was to recognize and manage embodied cultural heritage in societies where perhaps the built heritage was less significant. The push to protect tangible and intangible heritage can be seen therefore as a further step in recognising cultural diversity and the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) and the International Convention on the Protection of Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions (UNESCO 2006) seek to engage states to binding legal instruments representing a commitment to cultural diversity.<sup>109</sup>

Sümi cultural heritage is noted for its diversity. One important aspect is in terms of language. In the Southern Sümi region, every village has their own distinct language which cannot be comprehended by the people from the other villages. This has been the norm from the Forefather’s time. In this sense, the diverse language sets one village apart from the other. In the other parts of the Sümi region, a common Sümi language is spoken which is used by the people from the Southern Sümi region to communicate when they are interacting with people from outside their village.

Another important aspect of diversity is the richness in textiles. In the Southern Sümi region, almost every village has their own distinct textiles for men and women. These have been passed down from the Forefathers. In most villages one will still find the original textiles. The memory

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<sup>108</sup> Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the General Conference of the UNESCO 31<sup>st</sup> Session, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2001.

<sup>109</sup> Logan, William. Cultural Diversity , Cultural Heritage and Human Rights: Towards Heritage Management as Human Rights based cultural practices in International Journal of Heritage Studies, 2011, page 1-14

of some textiles is lost which has made the authentication process difficult. In spite of this, when one looks through the textiles and ornaments of Sümi men and women, it can be seen that its beauty lies in the diversity. There are textiles that are common for all the Sümi people too. Therefore when the traditional textiles from the Southern Sümi region are added to the commonly used textiles, the richness of the Sümi textiles becomes incomparable.

The Universal Declaration makes it clear that each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his/her own identity within societies that are themselves plural. Only in this way can cultural diversity be preserved as an adaptive process and as a capacity for expression, creation and innovation.<sup>110</sup>

## **5.2 STATUS OF THE SÜMI CULTURAL HERITAGE AT PRESENT**

The Sümi cultural heritage has undergone a lot of change as no culture is static. In making an analysis of the status of Sümi cultural heritage at present, one can observe the following:

### **5.2.1. Status of 'Memory'**

The Sümi like other Indigenous people is an oral society and depends on oral sources to understand their culture and heritage. Such knowledge was derived from the memories of the elders of the community as well as some young people who possessed such knowledge.

According to Jan Assmann, 'Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity) both on the personal and collective level'.<sup>111</sup> Halbwachs, the French Sociologist was of the view that memory depends on socialization and communication and can be analyzed as a function of our social life and that every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. This is true in the case of the Sümi who depend on oral sources.<sup>112</sup> The process of transmitting knowledge about the past always involved telling and

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<sup>110</sup> UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted by the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2001

<sup>111</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory' In Astrid Erll, et. al., 'Cultural Memory Studies' (An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook) (Berlin : Walter de Gruyter Gmb & Co., 2008), page 109

<sup>112</sup> Swu, Ngutoli Y & Juri Gogoi Konwar, 'Degeneration of Memory: The Case of Sümi Naga' in Journal of Indian Anthropological Society, Soc. 56(2): 138-153(2021), Page 139.

retelling of stories and events. Most of these activities took place in the venues like the male and female dormitories called *Apuki/Iliki* and also in the agricultural groups who worked together for exchange of labour like the *Aloji*. The interactions at these venues made sure the knowledge of oral tradition and culture was passed on from one generation to the other and no gap was created in the transmission of knowledge. This was because from the day a boy or girl attains puberty, they would be required to start living at their respective dormitories till they get married. The boys' dormitory would be an independent building which would be built by all the members of the dormitory as well as some elders. It would be fully decorated with culturally significant objects. The girls' dormitory on the other hand would not be an independent building but; would usually be at the house of a rich man. Rich men would usually have huge houses therefore they would chalk out part of their house for the young women to sleep. The reason for this was to protect the sanctity of the young women.

These dormitories were training grounds for the young boys and girls where they would be taught all the skills that they would require to live their life. Not only the members of the dormitories but also elders from the community would often visit the dormitories and teach the young ones skills in folk song, folk dance, spinning cotton, weaving, making weapons, basketry, defence, wood carving, oral traditions etc. These skills and knowledge were smoothly transmitted from one generation to the other because each batch entered the dormitories according to their age group.

Young men in the dormitories would be accomplished warriors. They would be engaged in the defence of the village and they kept vigil towards the defence of the village. These young men would be expert in warfare and also in all activities that is deem worthy of a brave young men.

At the end of hard day's work at the field, the work for the young women didn't end. They would bring back cotton from the field and would engage themselves in spinning the cotton which would be used during the off season of agriculture to weave. Each person would get different assignment for spinning the cotton. As they engage themselves in the cotton spinning process, they would make fire in their *Iliki* and young men from the *Apuki* would come to visit them and sing *lejole* for them. During such moments, young men would sing for the women they

are wooing and messages would be conveyed through songs. The young women on their part would make rice beer and serve the young men. One remarkable thing about such exercise is that they did not engage in immoral activities but were chaste. Through such activities the singing of varieties of folk songs thrived. It is said that young men from the *Apuki* would take turns to guard the village. They would go around the village for security.

The other source of passing on memory was through the '*Aloji*' or the groups formed for agricultural work i.e. exchange of labour. During the olden days, people depended on agriculture for their livelihood therefore the cycle of seasons was counted according to the agricultural cycle. Words used in the Sümi like '*Ashe tolu*' i.e. to reach the goal is actually derived from the agricultural practise wherein every time they work in the field they would start working from the bottom of the field and their goal would be to work till they reach the top of the field. The *Aloji* would be according to age group, gender or mixed. But even if its an all male *Aloji*, they would always include two-three women in order to serve food and rice beer while working in the field. One category of folk song sung was the '*Alu kumla le*' or song sung while working in the field. One such song, *Thighale*, was sung by the Sümi women while working in the Jhum field. During Jhum cultivation, men would dig up the soil, followed by the women, with an agricultural tool made of wood, called *Athughasü*, to soften the soil and make it suitable for sowing. During the course of the field work, women from the Mishilimi village performed the following song, the lyrics of which are presented below:

*Oho he achholeu*

*Oh ishio ahe, oh ho ohe oi*

*Hiyelo ho ahe*

*Oh achholeu – I a lothaliu ohe*

*Oh kupuli sutsa, oh navilo pina*

*Oh pinaliu ingui*

*Oh sache la – I nakulu lu sahe*

*Ishe chehu lapa, oh lapa aghuna la*

*Oh alosu sutsa, oh navilo pina*

*Oh lojilimi ni, oh kujona kiu*

*Oh kiu dolona, oh kimine lu he*

*Oh na ishe asa, oh asa kukholo*

*Oh kimine luche, oh atampui,*

*Oh na ishe umhi*

*Oh kuchopi saxo, oh na ishe aju*

*Oh ajuhu lono, oh na ishe ale*

*Oh aleu nanu, oh mugha shitsulo*

*Oh ishe oh oh oh oho o*

*Hiyelo oh ahe.*<sup>113</sup>

Similar to the dormitories, the members of *Aloji* would also be engaged not only in agricultural work but they would tell and retell oral traditions and sing varieties of folk songs. The type of crops for the type of soil, the season for weeding out the weeds, the time for planting certain crops etc were all determined from their experience of being engaged in agricultural work and such knowledge were imparted to each other. Men were very chivalrous, at the end of the day when the work at the field would end, the men would cut down firewood for the women to carry home. During festivals members of the *Aloji* would feast together and such feast would take place at the house of the eldest member of the *Aloji* who is the leader of the *Aloji*.

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<sup>113</sup> Swu, Ngutoli Y & Juri Gogoi Konwar, 'Degeneration of Memory: The Case of *Sümi Naga*' in Journal of Indian Anthropological Society, Soc. 56(2): 138-153(2021), Page 144 and 145.

These two sources were the venues through which memory of oral tradition and cultural heritage was passed on seamlessly from one generation to the other. But over the years, like the other Naga tribes, the Sümi also came into contact with outsiders like the British colonial administrators, the American Baptist Christian Missionaries and the gruesome episode of the Indian Army Operation of the 1950's.

Encounters with the British colonial administrators were the first point of contact which led to the changes in the traditional administrative system of the Sümi. Further change occurred when the American Baptist Christian Missionaries started evangelising the Nagas. Christianity came to the Sümi in 1904 at Ighanumi village through Ghopuna and Ghusuna. With the coming of Christianity, all the materials and practices connected with the traditional life and culture of the Sümi were declared as 'Satanic' and those who converted had to give up all the materials connected with their old ways of life and embrace their new identity as a 'Christian'. In such a scenario, the Sümi converts destroyed the tangible cultural heritage in the form of ornaments, decoration on their houses, rich and colourful textiles and any materials that was considered to be not conforming to Christianity. During this period, the Sümi lost many aspects of their cultural heritage. It is also without doubt that Christianity brought about many positive changes which served as a strong foundation for the development and advancement of the Sümi. For instance, practices like headhunting were greatly discouraged by the Christian Missionaries as a result of which with the passage of time, this practise totally disappeared. Thus we can observe that the activities of the American Baptist Christian Missionaries had its positive as well as negative aspects.

The next encounter which left a deep impact on the transmission of memory of the Sümi was the Indian Army Operation of the 1950s. The next encounter of the Sümi Nagas occurred after the British left India in 1947. According to the memorandum submitted by the Nagas to the Simon Commission (1929), the Naga people declared their independence on August 14, 1947, a day prior to India's independence. They even took the step of informing the United Nations about their declaration. The persistent refusal of Naga Hills to be a part of the Indian union led to many negotiations between the Indian Government and Naga people for some years after

independence. However, these negotiations failed and the Indian Government denounced the agreement made with the Nagas. Subsequently, the armed conflicts erupted and ultimately the Naga Hills was annexed to the Indian union.<sup>114</sup> In fact, the Nagas were never under Indian territorial control even prior to the arrival of the British.<sup>115</sup>

The resultant Indian Army Operation to subjugate the Nagas and its Underground Army started and it affected almost all the Naga tribes. The Sümi were also greatly affected by this operation. Many villages were grouped together, villages were burnt to ashes and many endured punishments, torture and death in the hands of the Indian Army. Many women were also raped and people had to face untold atrocities. During this period those who were grouped together suffered torture in the concentration camps while many who hid in the deep jungles and faced starvation and diseases died in the process.

The difference between the encounters of the Sümi with the American Baptist Christian Missionaries and the Indian Army Operation was that while with the American Baptist Christian missionaries, cultural materials were destroyed but the human lives were not affected but when it came to the Indian Army operation, human lives were lost both young and old which resulted in the rise of memory gaps. This caused irreparable loss to the Sümi cultural heritage.

During the course of the field work whenever interviews were conducted, there would often be reference to the loss caused during the encounter with the American Baptist Christian Missionaries and the Indian Army operation wherein tangible cultural heritage were lost to a great extent which couldn't be recovered and the loss of human lives led to the loss of the memory of cultural heritage. This formed the basis of the loss of the Sümi memory. Over the course of the field work there were many instances of elders as well as people who were deemed to have knowledge about the Sümi culture and traditions but in the process of retelling and recounting there were many gaps. Some of the reasons for these were either due to old age or due

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<sup>114</sup> Aosenba , *The Naga Resistance Movement Prospects of Peace and Armed Conflict* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2016), page 107

<sup>115</sup> Swu, Ngutoli Y & Juri Gogoi Konwar, '*Degeneration of Memory: The Case of Sümi Naga*' in *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society, Soc.* 56(2): 138-153(2021), Page 145

to the inability to share such memories with either their counterparts who had passed away or with people who were interested to learn or talk about it. One such instance is that of a woman from Mishilimi village who was believed to be from the last batch of women to live at the women's dormitory/*Iliki*. According to her she had a very sharp memory and she was known among her peers for that quality. But while she was recounting stories and singing folk song in connection with it, she couldn't remember the words of the folk songs inspite of trying very hard. She was very shocked at herself and she attributed the reason for such to her receding age as well as her counterparts being all dead and not having anyone to share or talk about such things anymore.

This is just one instance among many such encounters. From all these one is filled with apprehension about the future of the Sümi cultural heritage because the belief that the elders of the community and most of the people living in the villages have knowledge of the cultural heritage seems to be becoming a sort of legend because they do know but the problem is they cannot fully recollect what they know.

There is not only memory gap between different generations but such gaps are getting bigger because there is gap in transmitting the knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation. Young people for prospect of better future tend to migrate to urban areas and one thing that used to bind the young and old in the rural areas i.e. agriculture is becoming an unpopular practice due to availability of varied options apart from agriculture. When people were engaged in agriculture, they would learn about the cultural heritage from the elders or from their counterparts and till today those who are engaged in agriculture still are fluent in singing the folk songs and have knowledge about certain aspects of the culture.

The younger generation seems to be more interested in their pursuit of other avenues and more engrossed in those ventures and in the process they tend to get influenced by other cultures. These are factors contributing to the rise of memory gaps.

On the other hand it is also encouraging to observe that the Sümi society as a whole in the past few years are developing an awareness towards the significance of preserving the Sümi cultural



heritage and efforts are being made towards it. For instance there is revival in the usage of ornaments and attires among the young and old. Through such initiative as well as the recurrent message about the importance of preserving the cultural heritage, there is a hope for the memory to live on and to be passed on from one generation to the other.

### **5.2.2 Cultural Appropriation**

In order to understand cultural appropriation, we first need to understand what culture is. The term culture is quite broad and refers to practise, beliefs, ideas, values, tradition, rituals, language, speech, modes of communication, material objects and performances that are central to the social life of any given group of people. When we come to the context of Cultural Appropriation, it is basically defined as the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

According to Sabina Giado, a Filmmaker, cultural appropriation is taking someone's cultural artefacts without their consent and profiting from it whether that's in actual money, fame or some other intangible benefit<sup>116</sup>.

Cultural Appropriation could also mean purchasing a piece of jewellery or clothing that may have cultural significance to that culture but without acknowledging that fact, one simply use it as a fashion statement.

Another definition of cultural appropriation is 'taking from a culture that is not one's own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artefacts, history and ways of knowledge'<sup>117</sup>. Simply put, cultural appropriation is the illegal, unfair or unjust usage or taking of something that belongs to someone else. When someone is accused of cultural appropriation, they are accused of taking elements of a culture to which they do not belong.

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<sup>116</sup> Quoted by Ashmi Desai, PhD in [https://www.bouldercountyarts.org/sites/default/files/documents/ashmi\\_desai\\_cultural\\_appropriationappreciation\\_workshop.pdf?266](https://www.bouldercountyarts.org/sites/default/files/documents/ashmi_desai_cultural_appropriationappreciation_workshop.pdf?266) (DOA: 22<sup>ND</sup> August 2020)

<sup>117</sup> Siems, Mathias. The laws and ethics of Cultural Appropriation. <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/30309/1/30309.pdf>

Cultural appropriation is often misunderstood with cultural appreciation, cultural exchange. What we take to be cultural appreciation or cultural exchange can unintentionally turn out to be appropriation if we are not cautious. It is important therefore to understand what cultural appreciation and cultural exchange is. Cultural appreciation is when someone seeks to understand and learn about another culture in an effort to broaden their perspective and connect with others cross-culturally. It involves respect and value. And cultural exchange is a mutual sharing of cultures by individuals or groups.

In the context of Nagaland, there is the practise of unity in diversity. There are 16 recognised tribes and each tribe has their distinct culture and tradition. Among the rich tangible cultural heritage that each Naga tribe possess, the traditional clothes and ornaments of the Nagas holds a great cultural significance. These are cultural identity markers for each tribe and have been passed on from one generation to the other. With the passage of time the raw materials might have undergone great change but the designs and the colours have remained the same. The reason being each colour, each design has a cultural significance and a story to tell about the particular community. To an outsider, all the Naga tribes may look the same and they may not be in a position to differentiate one tribe from the other. But for the Nagas, it is always easy to visually differentiate between different tribes based on the cultural identity markers i.e. the textiles and ornaments.

There are also see some pages on instagram promoting Naga indigenous textiles and crafts but the caption they use to advertise such products are merely 'Naga men's shawl' 'Naga women's mekhala'. Naga is not a single entity and as such there is no such thing as a Naga men's shawl or a Naga women's mekhala. They produce mekhala of different Naga tribes as well as shawls of different Naga tribes and put it up on sale in that manner. Now the question to ponder upon is: does the tribe to which that particular mekhala or shawl belong to have any idea about what is going on? Is the designer or the person behind such pages aware about the cultural significance of each cultural item that he/she is putting up on sale?

When we look back at the history of the Sümi, we find that the Sümi were exposed to various encounters with outsiders like the British, American Baptist Missionaries, the Indians and each left their indelible mark on our culture. However keeping that aside, when we observe the changes that are occurring in the Sümi society at present, the mindset and attitude seems to be going far away from what the forefathers used to believe and practise. Believing that culture can never remain static, it is apparent that change will surely occur in one way or the other. As we observe the generations of Sümi, we see that people in their late 50s and 60s are somehow in touch with the history and rooted in the culture. But when we take the case of the millennial and centennials, i.e. those born after 1980s we find some imbalance in the way culture is perceived and in its portrayal. On one hand the fascination for foreign culture the most popular among the millennials and centennial being the K-pop and Korean culture is scary. On the other hand, when we observe the **#backtoroots #roots** etc. trend on popular social media platforms being used by the millennial and centennials, at first look, one feels great appreciation and pride but on a closer look it is also scary to see how for aesthetic appeal many young people including people holding position of significance are mixing up the cultural materials taken from different tribes and decking themselves up without any acknowledgement or without understanding the significance. This kind of mixing and matching of cultural materials belonging to different Naga tribes are tagged with captions as being from a particular Naga tribe without truly describing which material actually belongs to which Naga tribe. This creates confusion and controversies.

There are many instances of appropriation being practised. For instance the Sümi women headband and earrings have become a popular trend among all the Naga tribes. These are produced in different colours according to one's whims and wishes and no acknowledgement about the source is given and is simply given names like 'Naga tassle earrings' 'Tribal earrings' etc. These are very popular not only among the Nagas but also among the Non Nagas too due to its sale over social media sites as well as its sale by the designers during the Hornbill Festival. This tassel earrings seems to have become just another common earring that we buy off the street without any cultural significance that in one post where a certain tribe's accessory was being showcased, the model is seen wearing this tassel earring too in red which is the original tassel earrings but in the description the accessory of the showcased tribe is described but no

information is given about the tassel earrings. The headband which is traditionally red florals with yellow weaves are reproduced in colours like yellow without any acknowledgement about the source of inspiration. These are produced and sold as if it is the creation of a particular designer or group of sellers. The headband traditionally was worn by a newly engaged woman and it was a simple band with two three florals at the front and back but with the passage of time the whole band was filled with the red florals. These were made from goat's hair dyed in red color and the yellow weaves made on the band were made from the orchid stem. At present even those tribes who never have the history of using this band and earrings are using it to complement their traditional attires.

Another form of appropriation is the printing of images of the Sümi textiles on mobile phone covers, mugs and selling it on all platforms without due permission from the apex bodies and without even understanding the cultural significance of the cultural materials used. For instance Sümi men's shawl called 'Avi kiyiphi' is traditionally to be worn only by men who has given feast of merit by killing a Mithun. There was a taboo on the usage of this shawl in the past but at present this prestige shawl have also been found on the mobile covers, mobile grip, mugs which in turn is devaluing the cultural value attached to this shawl. In some instances shawls are also used as table covers or podium covers in some events. Such practises devalue the cultural significance of the traditional shawls.

There are also instances of 'Knowledge Appropriation'. There are many Non-Nagas contributing towards research and documentation but there are also another category of so called researchers publishing research papers and books without any proper research. There are two books on the Nagas which were purchased by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland sponsored by Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation to be distributed to the rural and urban libraries across Nagaland. The cover page of these two books had the same picture and the irony is the authors were different, secondly there is no information about the authors and thirdly, no cover photo credit is given in both the books. The quality of writing as well the content of the book was dismal. In the book 'Life Of The Naga People Tribe And Clan Traditions', the author Mohan Kumar has dedicated one full chapter to Naga kingdom pages 19 to 37 and here, he talks about

naga race of Mahabharata period which has nothing to do with the Nagas. The whole pandava-kaurava story is written. And next chapter goes on to the conflict in North East India which has no mention about Naga culture. The whole book is full of wrong information and includes 'pick and choose type' of information.

Similar is the next book called culture of Naga people by Hemraj Singh. Leaving the entire jumbled up story aside in page 100, at the end of the page he forgot to remove an information in a bracket which says (browse through our Nagaland tour packages). Under tradition and culture he writes about the state of Mizoram, Meghalaya and this is nothing about relationship between Nagaland and these two states but just general information about where Mizoram is located, its population and same information is given about Meghalaya where he mentions about a famous waterfall. These are just two but it is a point to ponder and be apprehensive about how many more are out there.

Except for the knowledge appropriation, the intent may not be of appropriation and it maybe to show appreciation, support as well as the feeling of acceptance and unity but such act without deep rooted understanding of a particular culture may have long term effects. While most of the millennial Nagas may or may not have the knowledge about the historical significance behind each cultural material of one's own tribe, the culture of 'mix and match' wherein without really understanding the cultural significance of a particular cultural material of a particular tribe, allowing aesthetic appeal to surpass the need to maintain a boundary line between what is acceptable and what is not is a dangerous trend. This is a dangerous trend as this practise at present may or may not be a deliberate appropriation but it may become a breeding ground for tomorrow's confusion about certain aspects of our cultural heritage especially traditional clothes and ornaments i.e. a day will come when we wouldn't know which cultural item belong to which tribe.

One has to realise that each tribe has their own tribal bodies for e.g. for the Sümi there is the Sümi Hoho, the apex body and the custodian of Sümi tribe, then we have the Sümi literature board who looks after the preservation of the Sümi language and oral tradition and then the Sümi

Totimi Hoho who are the caretaker of the Sümi traditional clothes and ornaments along with their other responsibilities. Therefore, if one needs to use a cultural material, especially for commercial purposes, one should atleast take the permission of such bodies for a start and not just do as one like as such acts are harmful.

Certification bodies of each tribe need to be set up so that random research and random writings do not happen not only among the Nagas but also the Non Nagas. This should be done so that people outside do not believe the half baked information spread by so called experts on the Naga culture and history and knowledge appropriation is stopped. To cite an example of similar practise being practised by other indigenous people, there is an instance narrated by Inato Y Shikhu. When he submitted a PhD research proposal to the University of Auckland, New Zealand to undertake research on Moari people in the Department of Applied Humanities (Cultural Anthropology) he was referred to Ethics Committee and also to the Moari Studies Department of the university. The Moari Studies Department asked him to take up some Maori Studies subjects and also spend a year in Moari Marae (Morung like) prior to taking up the coursework and research. This was despite him living there for five years and after doing a reference study on Moari people on his M.Phil dissertation. So we see that such controlled environment of knowledge dissemination enables a non-Maori to properly understand and develop a respect as well get a thorough understanding of their culture and tradition before embarking on researching on them. If such measures and similar practise is adopted, then it will go a long way in not only proper and ethical documentation of various aspects of the culture and tradition but also develop value system and respect for the Sümi culture.

### **5.2.3. The Sümi of Upper Assam**

Those Sümi who came to Upper Assam (Tinsukia district, Marghertia sub-division) were young men who were working with the British and moved along with them, some moved because of the ill treatment by their step parents. Some served the British, some worked with the oil company and in 1904 the Sümi worked on the construction of road to the present Digboi Refinery which is

recorded in the Assam Government as well as central government record. Some of them were the returnees of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War Labour Corps also known as Naga Labour Corps<sup>118</sup> in Nagaland. Before this in the 1850/60s, the British measured the land and installed a stone. This was at Longtong and some Sümi came here and settled at Longtong. But it was at Tsalikyu that many Sümi gathered together and worked at the tea gardens, oil company, coal India etc. When the British left, some went back to Nagaland but some stayed back.

In the past there were 9 Sümi villages. By 1986 there were only 7 but one village called Dihing does not exist anymore and even the GB also died. At present there are only 6 Sümi villages in Upper Assam.

In the Balijan area, the Sümi stayed at Sadiya but when the volcano erupted around 1951 they went away and came to Lalpahar and later established their village at Balijan. Even Paharpur villagers also came from Sadiya to Lalpahar and then later established a separate village called Paharpur. Tinkupathar founder was Vikhupu from Aichisaghemi. Balijan founder was from Phisami village. Lalpahar founder was from Naghutomi and Longtong was from Sürümi while Tsalikyu was from Sangtam but he became a Sümi.

Longtong was actually an Arunachal village but the Sümi came there and established their village. Tinkupathar village is filled with Tinku tree so it was named like that.

When the GB of Lalpahar was a young boy he had come to Kohima and used to be the *durpi* (driver of the horses) of the British. The British took him to Upper Assam and he started working at their houses and at the oil company. When the time came for the British to leave, they asked

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<sup>118</sup> It is estimated that 2000 Nagas were recruited by the British in 1917 to be sent to Europe for the First World War under the leadership of the Naga Hills Deputy Commissioner Herbert Charles Barnes. Out of 2000 recruited, 1000 were Sümi Naga. The Naga Labour Corps arrived in France in two main groups; the first on June 21, 1917 and the second on July 2, 1917. They were divided into the 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, and 38<sup>th</sup> (Naga) Labour Companies. They worked in various places around France on salvage work, road repairs among others.

the Sümi whether they wanted to stay or go back home to the Naga Hills. Some wanted to go back but others wanted to stay back. The founder of Lalpahar told the British that they would stay back therefore the British should give them a permit for land so that they could establish their village and continue living here. The British political officer G D Walker gave them the permit and even directed them to a place where they should establish their village. He pointed to a mountain which had red soil and he even named the village as Lalpahar because the mountain had red soil. Thus, he named the village and offered them to settle there. However they couldn't stay there for long and they moved to the present location while retaining the same name that was given by G D Walker. This was in 1926. The official permit was issued in 1936. In the initial location another person was the Akükau (GB) but after coming to the present location, the Akükau Yezütha took over the administration as the permit was taken out of his name. There were no inhabitants before them in this area and the Sümi were the first to settle in the present location. The Government of Assam had meeting with all GBs and found that the GB Yezütha was found the best under Margharita. Even the British had given him a commendation for being a sincere *durpi*. Initially there were lots of trouble from the elephants and tigers. Some animals were killed and some were chased and since in this area there were no other and Lalpahar land extended upto Lekhapani but with the passage of time, these lands were sold off. Due to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the British asked them to move for a while and so they went and stayed at Tsalikyu for 9 years and came back to Lalpahar in 1946 and the church was established on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1946. The establishment of village with permit was 1936, establishment of church was 1946. Initially they also built their houses with structures similar to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh bordering them.

The Sümi settled here have no education due to which they are not able to catch up with the others. Though they were the first settlers they still do not have strong political voice and representation. Unlike them, the Nepalese have been able to put up their MLA.

There are good numbers of non-Sümi who have settled in these Sümi villages; Nepalese, Adivasi, Bihari, Assamese, Muslims etc. These people are mostly men who married Sümi women and wanted to settle in the village. They have also converted to Christianity. The reason for not



speaking Sümi is mostly the men who married women from other communities who doesn't speak to their wife and children in Sümi language instead they use Assamese and Nagamese.<sup>119</sup> There are around 2000 Sümi in Upper Assam.

### **Status of Cultural Heritage of the Sümi in Upper Assam: Challenges to maintaining the 'Sümi' identity:**

#### **Migration and its impact:**

Identity is a process, and everything a person encounters and experiences has an impact on their identity. One's identity goes through a process of change in the process of migration because in the process of migration, one leaves behind many of the facets of their identity, including but not limited to "social status, family, and social networks.

In some migrants, this loss may manifest itself in feelings of loneliness and anxiety, in an unfamiliar place, potentially forcing them to reimagine, rebuild, or rewrite (or some combination of these) their identity to gain acceptance in their new locale). Some migrants may also be more or less likely to engage with locals when they arrive, potentially seeking instead to connect with anybody who may have also migrated from their origin.

In addition to reimagining their identity in a new place, migrants also may also re-imagine their expression of their identity as they seek to adapt to a culture that may be different from their point of origin. For example if people migrate to a place where they are a minority in terms of culture, religion etc, there may come up the misunderstanding of how they self represent. When they face ridicule or criticism for the way they are, they may end up altering their identities in order to seek acceptance.

All of the experiences go into their identity and their expression of that identity. On settling down in the new culture, their cultural identity is likely to change and that encourages a degree of belonging; they also attempt to settle down by either assimilation or bi-culturalism.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Rev Akheho Yephthomi, 70 years, Lalpahar, Date of interview: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022

In the case of the Sümi in Upper Assam over the years they have lost their lands not because of external aggression because of the lack of an understanding that they are a minority and they need to preserve what they have for their future generation. There seems to have developed a lackadaisical attitude towards maintaining their Sümi identity. When interview was conducted among young people, an astounding majority of them could not speak the Sümi dialect and the root cause was found to be associated with their parents not conversing with them in Sümi dialect at home rather using other languages like Nagamese and Assamese and in some cases Nepali too. They were of the view that they were more comfortable speaking in other languages rather than Sümi dialect. For indigenous people like the Sümi in Nagaland, language is the backbone of the cultural heritage, the very name of the tribe Sümi is named after the name of its language. The dangerous case of the Sümi of Upper Assam is that since they have almost given up speaking and using the Sümi dialect, understanding the oral traditions have become a hard task for them. There is lack a sense of connection with their past.

Since the forefathers of the Sümi of Upper Assam were all young men who had left home under different circumstances, they married women from other communities in Assam and this was the first step towards assimilation.

As they were a minority in a land that was alien to them despite given a legal right to establish their villages, they needed to learn the language of the majority populace in order to gain employment and also to be able to carry on with their day to day activities. Therefore unconsciously they adapted themselves in a state wherein they shifted their focus towards learning new language and in the process their children are at present in a state wherein they are unable to speak the Sümi language and having the difficulty to identify themselves as Sümi though they have the consciousness of their identity as Sümi and wanting to connect with their roots. However, the medium of connection through which they can connect, i.e. the Sümi dialect has become a missing link as many of them are unable to speak or understand the Sümi dialect. Understanding this need, the Sümi Literature Board of Nagaland had been sending a Sümi language Teacher to teach the young peoples how to read and write in Sümi. This Teacher has

been working in all the 6 Sümi villages on a rotation basis. The Churches have also been organising seminars on the Sümi as well as the cultural heritage for the young people so that they develop a consciousness and pride of their identity as a Sümi.

### **Assimilation**

It is a broader concept as described by sociologist Jean Piaget and refers to the manner in which people take new information. Assimilation is a process whereby people of a culture learn to adapt to the ways of the majority culture.

Assimilation is the loss of one's original cultural identity by acquiring a new identity in the host culture. The goal is to become indistinguishable from other people in that culture.

Sociologists have often used four areas to measure how immigrants can assimilate into a culture through their interactions. These are

Socio economic status: represents the level to which immigrants can climb the social ladder and make a good life for themselves

Spatial concentration - is how people of the same culture disperse and stop grouping together.

Language assimilation - is the process by which immigrants adapt and learn the local language and dialect and use it as their primary form of communication. Since the language barrier is one of the biggest challenges for immigrants or people of a minority group, learning a new language is necessary to gain employment and other socio-economic opportunities.

Cultural assimilation - also means intermarrying. As the minority culture marry and reproduce with the major groups, there is some form of cultural legitimacy for the couple and the children they sire.

For the Sümi of Upper Assam, the process of Assimilation has started in three areas namely socio-economic status, Language assimilation and cultural assimilation.

When it comes to socio economic status, since they got the legal permit to establish their villages and become a part of the Assamese society, they also became eligible for all the services that the Assam Government had to offer. With the passage of time, they entered Assam Government services in various departments like Police, Oil companies, Tea Corporations, etc. Even in private sectors many were engaged in various works and even started undertaking private businesses. All these had a deep impact on their outlook and perspective. The way a Sümi in Upper Assam think and function became slightly different from that of Sümi from Nagaland. This in turn affects the way of life and the culture.

Language assimilation in the case of the Sümi of Upper Assam can be seen as the biggest factor in the assimilation. As discussed earlier the Sümi being a minority in order to survive and get employment had to adopt the language of the majority like Assamese. In the process many of them started speaking this language even at home which resulted in their inability to speak the Sümi dialect. In job sectors, the mode of communication was the language used by the majority and also they had to adapt themselves to the environment and the culture which had a deep impact on their Sümi identity. They also started speaking and using other dialects like Nagamese, Nepali, etc. With the basic identity of a Sümi being entrenched in the Sümi dialect, when they stopped using this dialect their understanding and connection with the Sümi cultural heritage also suffered a great deal. With the assimilation process, they started losing interest in the Sümi way of life for example Sümi women usually practice weaving and according to interviews it was revealed that some Sümi missionaries taught the women of Upper Assam how to weave but with the passage of time they stopped altogether and their Sümi traditional clothes are bought either from people who come selling it from Nagaland or when they themselves travel to Nagaland. Most of the young people cannot read, write or speak the Sümi as a result of which in Churches the Pastors have to preach using Nagamese/Assamese in order to let them understand the word of God. When one looks at this scenario, one would assume that the Sümi of Upper Assam have no sense of value for their cultural identity as a Sümi but when one look at their history it is to be seen that when their forefathers migrated to the present location, they were all young men and they married women from the local communities as a result of which the cross cultural marriage contributed towards this development. But it is without doubt that there is a need for the

development of consciousness about the value of identifying and taking pride in their distinct identity as a Sümi.

Cross cultural marriage is a major factor towards the Sümi of Upper Assam losing their identity as Sümi. Marriage is an effort to harmonize two different cultures, both in broad terms such as race, ethnicity, skin color, customs and in specific terms such as habits, individual characteristics, characteristics and thoughts (mindset). Culture influences how the family builds a family. In a cross cultural marriage Each partner incorporates their background, education, and beliefs into their expectations about the relationship and the future together. When couples come from the same culture, there is many overlapping traditional beliefs and values, but there will still be many differences in how each views the relationship. When couples also come from two different cultures, the difference can be huge.

Over the course of assimilation, individuals acquire elements and behavior of another culture as they are incorporated into larger groups.<sup>120</sup> This is typically an intergenerational process caused by both conscious and unconscious actions of individuals and households.<sup>121</sup> As these processes unfold, there is an increase in the interaction between individuals from different backgrounds eventually leading to a blurring of the boundaries between groups.<sup>122</sup> The extent of the assimilation process depends on the characteristics of the different groups in the population and their willingness to accept one another.<sup>123</sup>

The growth of intermarriage (i.e. marital assimilation) is seen as a key outcome of structural assimilation, the large-scale entrance of a minority group into the social cliques and institutions of the majority. Intermarriage describes the willingness of the minority to assimilate.

Blau, Becker, and Fitzpatrick describe intermarriage as a precursor of assimilation – an act that resembles acceptance and the product of a process in which the boundaries between groups become less profound allowing individuals to commit to long-term unions.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7055899/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7055899/) (DOA: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022)

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*

<sup>122</sup> *ibid*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid*

Bisin and Verdier concentrate on another aspect of intermarriage; the desire of parents to transmit their own cultural traits to their children. In this sense, each individual's choice of a marriage partner crucially determines his/her ability to transmit his/her set of cultural traits to the children.<sup>125</sup>

All these are observed in the social setting of the Sümi of Upper Assam. Cross cultural marriage became the basis of their society and one aspect of this cross cultural marriage is that it was not only confined to the men marrying women from other communities but in the case of the Sümi from Upper Assam, Sümi women who married men from other communities did not leave their homes instead these men became a part of the Sümi society. These men from other communities settled in their wives' village and converted to Christianity and became a part and parcel of the Sümi society. But the impact that can be seen is that children developed the inability to adopt either of their parents' language or culture. Parents on their part also started interacting with their children in language that was common for instance Nagamese or Hindi or Assamese, etc. When young people were interviewed and were asked as to what could be the main reason for their lack of knowledge about the Sümi language and culture, they attributed it mostly to the social setting as well as the failure of their parents to impart such knowledge to them.

The present case scenario of the Sümi of Upper Assam is the impact of assimilation and the dangers of being completely assimilated into other culture and the Sümi losing their identity as a Sümi because the very essence of identifying themselves as a Sümi i.e. the ability to speak or understand the Sümi dialect is sadly being lost. Therefore if no efforts are taken by all age groups i.e. elders, youngsters, men and women the next generation would be in a huge cultural turmoil or there is even a great chance of the Sümi of Upper Assam being completely assimilated into other culture and completely losing their cultural identity as a Sümi.

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<sup>125</sup> Alberto Bisin and Thierry Verdier. (2000). "Beyond the Melting Pot": Cultural Transmission, Marriage, and the Evolution of Ethnic and Religious Traits. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115(3), 955–988.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2586900>

#### **5.2.4. Sümi Cultural Materials at Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford**

The collection of Sümi cultural materials at Pitt Rivers Museum was a result of the contribution and donation made by J H Hutton and J P Mills. They were British administrators and had keen interest in the culture of the Nagas. As a result, along with their administrative works, they also engaged in research work and collection of materials which were either gifted or sometimes taken by them.

Processes and actions of colonisation have resulted in the disruptions to the referencing, practise, transmission and provenance of Tangible and Intangible Indigenous cultural heritage. For example tangible indigenous cultural heritage items have been collected and removed from their context 'country' for many purposes including display in museums. In many cases, no detail about the location or owners of these cultural heritage items was recorded.<sup>126</sup>

During the course of the documentation work carried out at the Pitt Rivers Museum in January-February 2023 through the Nehru Trust UK Visiting Fellowship, it was found that out of the 5749 Naga collection, there were 701 Sümi cultural materials. The Sümi cultural materials consisted of 184 textiles, 118 ornaments including baskets, figures, 61 accessories including fishing and tobacco apparatus to name a few.

The main objective behind the documentation of the Sümi cultural materials at Pitt Rivers Museum were:

1. To understand the extent of loss of cultural materials of the Sümi and to research further towards the possibility of the revival of the lost cultural materials.
2. To analyse whether there is any proof of the origin of the many controversies over the claim for 'original ownership' of the cultural materials by researching and documenting the textiles, objects and manuscripts preserved by the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

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<sup>126</sup> Hamilton, Fiona, Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage  
<https://www.shivajicollege.ac.in/sPanel/uploads/econtent/1ce6e978fe3fdeb0b1f032d103efc7b9.pdf> DOA: 30th January 2023

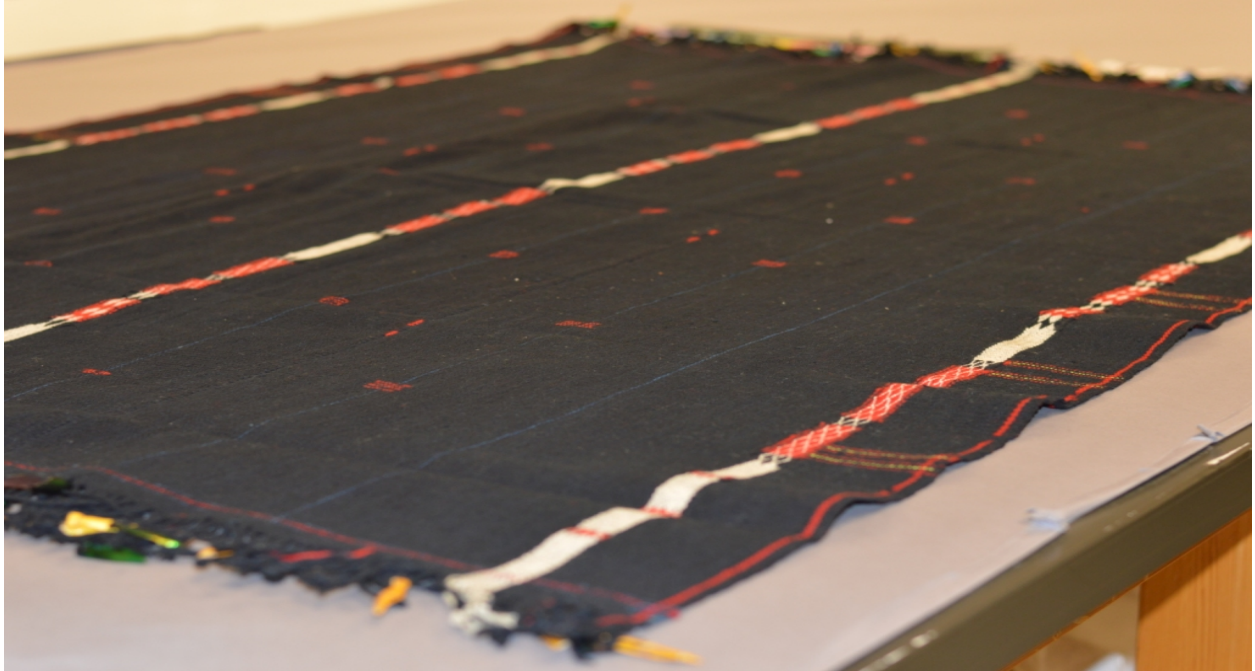
89 textiles were documented which consisted of male and female Shawls and Mekhalas. Some of these are still used and some are not to be seen at present. These were all collected in the 1920s mostly by J H Hutton and J P Mills. The material used was indigenous cotton dyed in different colours. In most of the women wraparounds, one find ample use of cowrie shells and different coloured beads. One particular wraparound that was found in good number was the bridal skirt called Amini kimiji. This was used only by the daughters of those parents who had completed all the rites and rituals. It was a taboo for those who hadn't completed all the rituals to use this for their marriage. The beads used on this wraparound were of varied colours and such aren't to be seen at present.



Pitt Rivers Museum Accession No. 1946.7.35

Another women's wraparound that was observed was the early version of Lotosü which had green beetles, birds' feathers and yellow orchid stems stitched on to the tassels of the wraparound. The Lotosü design is still used at present but the usages of beetles, birds' feathers and orchid stems are no longer used at present.





Pitt Rivers Museum Accession No. 1928.69.1544

During the course of the field work at Lazami village, there was an old woman's shawl which was supposed to be decorated with cowries and worn by the wife of a feast giver but the owner of this shawl as well as no one in the village had no knowledge about how this shawl looked like and they reproduced a new one according to their imagination of what this shawl would have looked like. At the Pitt Rivers Museum the researcher came across a shawl collected by J H Hutton with Accession number 1923.84.410 with the description 'cloth worn by wife or daughter

of a Sema (Dayang Valley group) who performed the full series of ceremonies'. Lazami village is located at Doyang valley and the description matches with the narrative of the shawl given by Lazami village. Therefore the researcher is of the view that this must have been the shawl that is no longer in the memory of the people of Laza.



Pitt Rivers Museum Accession No. 1923.84.410



Pitt Rivers Museum Accession No 1928.69.1393

This is a shawl decorated with green beetles. This shawl is no longer found among the Sümi.



Pitt Rivers Museum Accession Number 1923.85.13 Sema (Sümi) Necklet of long conch shell bead. (A Men's necklace)

This is a man's necklace and though through photographic records, it can be seen that in the olden days men wore this necklace, for some years its usage had waned but in recent years Sümi men have started using this necklace. This necklace was being displayed at Pitt Rivers Museum without a name. The researcher on enquiring from the Sümi elders found its name to be Ashighila chi/Ashitsughu chi and it has been recorded. In the olden days this necklace was used only by men of status.



Pitt Rivers Museum Accession no 1936.36.50 Women's work basket Aochagalimi (Awotsakilimi), Naga Hills

Pitt Rivers Museum Accession no 1928.69.779 basket in which a bride takes away things from her father's house, Aochagalimi (Awotsakilimi), Naga Hills



These beautiful baskets found at Pitt Rivers Museum are no longer produced by the Sümi people. The skilled craftsmanship with which these baskets were woven is to be greatly admired and the need to revive such skills is greatly felt. A basket used for working in the field had such detailed design and ornamentation which is no longer found among the Sümi craftsmanship. Such speak about the skill and dedication of the Sümi forefathers.

These are just few objects and textiles among the many cultural materials that were found at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. The Sümi are very rich in their cultural heritage and in spite of having lost all these cultural materials they still continue to possess huge collection of cultural materials but with the change in the societal setting, there has come up a thin line between the traditional and the modern creations. In order to maintain a balance one need to be clear about the traditional materials that has been passed down by the forefathers which includes even the cultural materials found at PRM. If conscious effort is made to recreate and reproduce these cultural materials, it will further enrich the cultural heritage of the Sümi. There is a need for an indepth research on these lost cultural materials of the Sümi which consequently will lead to the strengthening and the enrichment of the Sümi cultural heritage. The researcher has made an effort to correct and update the names of items and places that were entered incorrectly in the past.

### **5.3. WAYS TO PRESERVE THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE SÜMI**

Culture means the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual, emotional and material features that characterize a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters as well as human modes of life, value systems, creativity, knowledge systems, traditions and beliefs<sup>127</sup>. Every country, region and community possess its own unique cultural heritage shaped by centuries of interactions, migrations and local influence. It is through cultural heritage that we gain insight into the lives of our ancestors, connecting us to our roots and providing a sense of belonging<sup>128</sup>. For the Sümi, cultural heritage is a source of their identity. Being an oral society with no written records, the knowledge about their cultural heritage is what has been passed

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<sup>127</sup> ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage

<sup>128</sup> Celebrating Cultural Heritage: Embracing Diversity and #sharing Humanity

down from one generation to the other. Over the years certain gaps have come up in the transmission of these knowledge which in turn is affecting the way the Sümi perceive their tradition and history. The Sümi cultural heritage consists of the Tangible and the Intangible with its plethora of components. When we talk about preservation it is important to first understand the value of cultural heritage.

According to Cathy Lynne Costin, the value of cultural heritage is as follows:

*Cultural heritage represents eras and sometimes civilizations that have passed. Much of this heritage symbolizes a florescence of a region's tradition and cultures. Heritage is often of particular importance to non literate societies often ignored in conventional 'historical' documents. In countries such as Australia, we see the implications of cultural heritage in connecting Aboriginal communities with their past and with continuation of traditional lifestyle.*<sup>129</sup>

The cultural heritage can provide aesthetic, emotional experience for viewer leading to personal growth and development. Moreover the buildings, artworks and artefacts can serve as a creative inspiration for contemporary artists both working within traditional forms and those working in a modern style.

Archaeological sites, monuments, historic building, quarters and archaeological and ethnographic materials in museums is an important focus of tourism in many nations. As such this tourism which can be local, national or international generates employment and revenue.<sup>130</sup>

Because a significant part of the cultural heritage is finite and non renewable it confronts a threat more perilous than the possible destruction facing the biological diversity of the natural heritage.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Creamer, Hound, 1983, Contacting Aboriginal Communities in Australian Field Archaeology: A Guide to Techniques, Canberra: Australia, pp 10-17

<sup>130</sup> Costin, Cathy Lynne, Legal and Policy Issues in the Protection of Cultural Heritage in South Asia and the Pacific.

Cultural Heritage deserves protection for historical, religious, aesthetic, ethnological, anthropological and scientific reasons spanning both utilitarian and non utilitarian rationales. From utilitarian standpoint, the cultural heritage embodies invaluable non-replicable information and data about the historic and prehistoric story of humankind. From a non utilitarian4 perspective, the desolation of cultural resources where they form part of the religious and cultural traditions of people and civilization desecrates the sacred.<sup>132</sup>

The global importance of tangible and intangible remnants which embody expressions of indigenous peoples in sites, oral and written records, life and folkways and living culture are not adequately recognised by international treaties.<sup>133</sup>

The Tangible cultural heritage, be it monument, a historic city or landscape is easy to catalogue and its protection mainly consists mainly in conservation and restoration techniques. Intangible cultural heritage on the other hand is made up of processes and practices and therefore needs another safeguarding approach and methodology than the Tangible cultural heritage. It is fragile by its very nature and therefore much more vulnerable than other forms of heritage because it hinges on action and social and environmental condition which do not change too rapidly. Safeguarding Intangible heritage involve collection, documentation and archiving as well as protection and support of its bearers. While the tangible cultural heritage is designed to survive long after the death of the person who produced or commissioned it, the fate of the Intangible heritage is much more closely related to its creators as it depends in most cases on oral transmission.<sup>134</sup>

Taking into account the different needs for conservation of monuments, cities and landscapes on one hand and for safeguarding and transmission of cultural practices and traditional knowledge on the other hand, it will therefore be necessary to develop a 3 fold approach which will be:

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<sup>131</sup> Gurusamy, Lakshman & Jeffrey Mcneely (eds), 1998, Protection of Global Biodiversity: Converging Strategies

<sup>132</sup> Gurusamy, Lakshman et al, 2013, Protecting the Cultural and Natural Heritage: Finding Common Ground, Tulsa page 714

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, page 715

<sup>134</sup> Editorial, Intangible Heritage in Museum International, 2004, Vol 56, No 1-2, page 9

1. Put tangible heritage in its wider context
2. Translate intangible heritage into ‘materiality’
3. Support practitioners and the transmission of knowledge and skills<sup>135</sup>.

In order to safeguard Intangible heritage, it needs also to be ‘translated’ from its oral form into some manifestation of materiality be it archives, inventories, museums, audio-visual records. Although this might be regarded as ‘freezing’ Intangible heritage into documents, it should be clear that this is the only one aspect of safeguarding and will require great thoughtfulness and care with regard to the most appropriate methods and materials chosen for this task. One fruitful mode for supporting practitioners and the transmission of skills and knowledge might be Japan’s policy for protection of ‘Living National Treasures’ system designed to enable tradition holders to pass their know-how on to the future generations. When artists, craftspeople and other ‘living libraries’ gain official recognition and support, better care can be taken to ensure the transfer of their skills and techniques to others.<sup>136</sup>

When it comes to the Tangible Cultural heritage of the Sümi it is deeply connected with the Intangible, they are like two sides of a coin. Over the course of the field work, it was observed that in many villages the connection between the tangible cultural heritage of the forefathers’ days have mostly been abandoned due to the adoption of Christianity and the development of the notion of ‘futility’ of these materials and objects which are no longer connected with their daily lives. For instance, in the Sümi ancestral villages, one find the King post which had a place of highest honour were now being used as a barricade at the bottom of the door to stop the rain water from entering the room.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid page 9

<sup>136</sup> Ibid page 9&10



Similar was the case of the traditional items which had been left abandoned. The introduction of plastic made goods have also contributed a lot towards the abandonment of the traditional materials, for instance the traditional bamboo baskets have been replaced by the cheap plastic baskets. From such instances we can observe how the tangible and intangible together are losing its place. The traditional craftsmen of these arts should be encouraged and provided avenues to earn their



livelihood through such crafts because in many villages such crafts are slowly disappearing. When it comes to the intangible, since they are deeply inter connected with the Tangible, the disappearance of one causes the other also to perish.

Moreover the cultural heritage and affiliated cultural items of a people fosters dignity by promoting the identity and comprehension of their own cultures<sup>137</sup>. For the Sümi too it is through their cultural heritage, their identity as a Sümi is promoted and through this a sense of pride is instilled in them as it gives them an understanding about their unique identity. Nagaland has various tribes and each tribe has their distinct cultural heritage. In such a scenario, understanding the value of one's cultural heritage instil a sense of pride in one's identity as a Sümi. The Sümi over the years have developed an understanding about the importance of preserving their cultural

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, page 717

heritage and have developed various means whether big or small to preserve it. For instance, in many Sümi churches, it has been made mandatory for the Sümi people to wear atleast one item of their traditional attire during the Sunday service. During the time of festivals like Tuluni, the Sümis are encouraged to wear their traditional attire and ornaments during the 7 days' observance of the festival. We also observe the Sümi using the traditional materials to decorate their wedding venues and also usages of traditional clothes and ornaments which were hitherto confined to the usages of Christian style of wearing gowns and suits and the setting in full western style decors. Many Sümi whether young or old have started developing a sense of pride in wearing their traditional ornaments and attires.

In recognition of the UN International year for the world's Indigenous Peoples, the nine tribes of Mataatua of Aotearoa, New Zealand convened a Conference on Cultural and Intellectual property Rights of Indigenous People in 1993. The Conference led to the adoption of the Mataatua Declaration. The Mataatua Declaration asserts the rights of Indiegenous people to self determination and the ownership of cultural and Intellectual Property while remaining mindful of their ability and willingness to act as a stewards or custodians of that heritage for the benefit of humanity. Specifically, the preamble of Mataatua Declaration states:

‘Indigenous Peoples are capable of managing their traditional knowledge themselves but are to all humanity to all humanity provided their fundamental rights to define and control this knowledge are protected by the International community’,<sup>138</sup>

Similar to this, the Nagaland State Government in 2022 with a view to prevent the misuse of Naga traditional Attires, Motifs, Designs and Ornaments set up a State Level Documentation Committee headed by Seven Nagaland Government Departments namely – Nagaland Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation Ltd (NHHDC), DUDA (Department of Under Developed Areas), Tribal Affairs, Art and Culture, IPR (Information & Public Relations), AH&VS (Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences) and Science and Technology Department. With this in view, the Committee organized a State Level Consultative Meet of all Tribal Hohos at Kohima on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022. All the tribal Hohos within the state of Nagaland

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, page 724

attended this meet and were asked to set up their own documentation committees in order to document their tribe's traditional attires, motifs, designs and ornaments. Some Naga tribes have received the Geographical Indication patent for their traditional attires and similarly the Sümi are also in the process of getting their traditional attires patented. This efforts in a way is creating awareness among the different Naga tribes about the significance of some elements of their cultural heritage. This as a stepping stone will definitely lead to concerted efforts in preserving their cultural heritage.

In order to understand the importance of the Indigenous people and the preservation of their cultural heritage, it is important to look at the various comprehensive schemes that have been adopted in countries which have indigenous population.

In the United States of America, they passed the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) which imposes protection on 'districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American culture'. Once an object or Site has been deemed as 'protected' it is considered to be either 'Historic property' or a 'historic resource'. The preservation of Native American sacred sites may be obtained through the NHPA.

Secondly, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act governs the federal and Indian lands which have been found to contain archaeological resources.<sup>139</sup>

Thirdly, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act establishes mandates and processes for repatriation of the physical remains of ancestors, funerary objects and other sacred items that are in the custody of federal agencies or federally funded museums to tribes, Native Hawaiian organisation and lineal descendants.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, page 734

<sup>140</sup> Dean B Suagee. 1996. Tribal Voices in Historic Preservation: Sacred Landscapes, Cross Cultural Bridges and Common Ground, 21 VT.L.REV 145, 202

As its most basic level, NAGPRA requires return of all culturally affiliated material to the rightful owners...if it determined that these are cultural affiliates between the remains and the people, the museums are required to return the remains to the tribe.

Even in Australia, there are several measures of federal legislation which protects the rights of indigenous people. Protection of Movable Cultural Act of 1986 prohibits the exportation of Indigenous cultural property without a permit. Native Title Act of 1993 provides framework for determining Native title and method for calculating compensation when it is extinguished. Australia created the Australian Institutes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Studies which recently conducted a study in order to examine the concerns of Indigenous people, the existing legislation affecting cultural property and the need for amendments or new legislation.<sup>141</sup>

Many Australian states have enacted legislation protecting the cultural property of Indigenous peoples. For instance, Victoria enacted the Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act which enables the designation of archaeological areas in order to preserve the cultural relics.<sup>142</sup>

In Canada the Canada's 1970 Act provides certain protective measures for Indigenous people of Canada and their cultural property. Specifically the Indian Act 'prevents damage or destruction of specified cultural property.

In New Zealand, the New Zealand's Antiquities Act places the Government in a protectionist role and allows the Maori Land court to decide issue of ownership concerning any Maori artefacts found anywhere in New Zealand. Specifically the Antiquities Act provides:

'Every person who, after the commencement of this Act, finds any artefact anywhere in New Zealand or within the territorial waters of New Zealand shall within 28 of finding the artefact, notify either the Secretary or the nearest public museums which shall notify the Secretary'.

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<sup>141</sup> Gurusamy, Lakshman et al, 2013, Protecting the Cultural and Natural Heritage: Finding Common Ground, Tulsa page 735

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, page 736

Once the Secretary has been informed of the discovery, the Maori land court determines ownership. In addition, the Government of New Zealand has attempted to assist the Maori in repatriating their cultural property. For instance, in 1988, the New Zealand High Court issued an injunction against auctioneers in London to prevent the sale of a tattooed head. This action prompted the settlement and the head was returned to the Maori in order to receive proper burial.<sup>143</sup>

Similar instance is underway among the Nagas. The Nagas are in the process of repatriating the ancestral human remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. These human remains are human heads that were taken away by the British Administrators. The process is to bring them home and give them a proper burial.

The action of each of these countries demonstrates an international effort to protect the cultural property of indigenous people and to recognise their rights to continued preservation and possession of their heritage.

When we look at the UN Economic and Social Council report<sup>144</sup>, we see the principle and guidelines for the protection of heritage of Indigenous People elaborated by the Special Rapporteur of the Sub Commission Mrs. Erica-Irene Daes as follows:

1. The effective protection of the heritage of the Indigenous peoples of the world benefits all humanity.
2. To be effective, the protection of Indigenous people's heritage should be based broadly on the principles of self determination, which includes the right and the duty of Indigenous people to develop their own cultures and knowledge systems and forms of social organization.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, page 737

<sup>144</sup> E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/26, 21 June 1995

3. Indigenous peoples should be recognized as the primary guardians and interpreters of their cultures, arts and sciences whether created in the past or developed by them in the future.
4. International recognition and respect for Indigenous people's own customs, rules and practices for the transmission of their heritage to future generations is essential to these people's enjoyment of human rights and human dignity.
7. To protect their heritage, Indigenous peoples must control their own means of cultural transmission and education. This include their right to continued use, whenever necessary the restoration of their own language and orthographies.
8. To protect their heritage, Indigenous peoples must also exercise control over all research conducted within their territories or which uses their people as subjects of subject.

In this regard, there are rampant researches being conducted by the outsiders i.e. not belonging to the particular tribe and using the help of interpreters. In the Southern Sümi villages, every village speak different dialects. In most cases, there is difficulty in understanding each other. In such a scenario, when researches are conducted, it is difficult to comprehend the end result. Therefore, the researchers should practice ethical research by enabling the people whom they have worked on to have the last word on the end product i.e. take their due consent before such materials are used for any form of distribution or publication.

9. The free and informed consent of the traditional owners should be an essential precondition of any agreements which maybe made for the recording, study, use or display of Indigenous people's heritage.
10. Any agreements which maybe made for the recording, study, use or display of Indigenous people's heritage must be revocable and ensure that the peoples concerned continue to be the primary beneficiaries of commercial application.

These two points are very important. For the Sümi, there is a need for such awareness in order to create a holistic environment for the protection of traditional knowledge and to avoid its misuse so that the people are benefitted and not become a subject of exploitation. One practise that was found over the course of the field work was the practise of keeping record of all the visitors to the village by the Lazami Cultural Committee. This committee has been formed and they take care of all the cultural materials as well as keep a check on the outsiders entering their village for any type of research work. The visitors are required to fill in their details in the visitors register and mention the purpose of their visit, the research work for which they have come to the village and provide a passport photo as well. The cultural committee also requests a copy of the completed work from the researchers but it is believed that they haven't received such work. But this is a novel way of keeping a check on the people conducting research in the village and ensures protection of the knowledge from the village from being misused to some extent.

### **Recovery and restitution of heritage**

21. Human remains and associated funeral objects must be returned to their descendants and territories in a culturally appropriate manner as determined by Indigenous peoples concerned. Documentation maybe retained, displayed or otherwise used only in such forms and manner as maybe agreed upon with the peoples concerned.
22. Movable cultural property should be returned wherever possible to its traditional owners, particularly if shown to be of significant cultural, religious or historical value to them. Movable cultural property should only be retained by universities, museums, private Institutions or individuals in accordance with the terms of recorded agreements with the traditional owners for the sharing of custody and interpreting of the property.

### **National Programmes and Legislation**

25. National laws should guarantee that Indigenous peoples can obtain prompt, effective and affordable judicial or administrative action in their own languages to prevent, punish and obtain full restitution and just compensation for the acquisition, documentation or use of their heritage without proper authorization of the traditional owners.

26. National laws should deny to any person or corporation the right to obtain patent, copyright or other legal protection for any element of Indigenous people's heritage without the adequate documentation of the free and informed consent of the traditional owners to an arrangement for the sharing of ownership, control, use and benefits.
28. National laws for protection of Indigenous people's heritage should be adopted following consultation with the peoples concerned in particular the traditional owners and wherever possible should have the informed consent of the people concerned.
29. National laws should ensure that the use of traditional languages in education, arts and the mass media is respected and to the extent possible, promoted and strengthened.
30. Government should provide Indigenous communities with financial and Institutional support for control of local education through community managed programmes and with the use of traditional pedagogy and language.<sup>145</sup>

The above measures if adopted by the Indian government can go a long way towards the preservation of the cultural heritage especially of the indigenous people also categorised under the Scheduled Tribe of India of which the Sümi is a part of.

The other ways in which the Sümi can preserve their cultural heritage is the proper documentation of their language. The Sümi is also the name of the language spoken by them. Language is what identifies one Naga tribe from the other and it is the most important source of identity marker. Preservation of the language is the most important task for the Sümi in order to retain their identity as a Sümi. In this regard, importance should be given towards the compilation of dictionaries. One such attempt was made by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland wherein the Anglo-Sümi dictionary was also published. There are also such Anglo- Sümi dictionaries compiled by the elders of the Sümi community from long ago before such initiative was taken up by the Department of Art and Culture. But the need of the hour is to prepare a standard dictionary which can cater to the needs of the younger generation as

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<sup>145</sup> E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/26, 21 June 1995



sometimes these dictionaries tend to carry different word meanings which creates further confusion towards the usage of the language.

Initiative in documenting storytelling as part of the traditional expressions i.e. folklore, traditional poetry etc is also another important way of preserving the cultural heritage which can be undertaken by the Sümi. The folklore and traditional poetries are very important source because they are usually in the dialect spoken by the forefathers and documenting such not only helps in preserving the original dialect but also the various values and life ways that existed during the forefathers' time. For instance, folklores usually speaks stories about the type of people that lives, their lifestyle, traditions, the environment as in the type of plants, trees, flowers and animals that existed during that particular periods of time, the human relationship and its intricacies.

The government whether central or the state should give support for training in the preservation of traditional arts and crafts that are threatened by extinction. The timely documentation of cultural heritage is essential, it is too late when a site is already under threat or an object has disappeared. Documenting an object allows immediate transmission of data to cooperating bodies when something is missing and this greatly improves the chance of recovery.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Prott, Lyndel V, The Impact of Policy on Cultural Heritage Protection, page 10

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