

Changes in Agricultural and Cultural Practices among the Sumi Nagas: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

Social change is inevitable, even in tribal communities living in hilly areas. At present most of the Indian tribes are in contact with others – both physically and virtually, and are undergoing rapid changes in their ways of life. Accordingly, among the Sumi Nagas, their traditional agricultural practices along with agriculture-induced cultural components are undergoing many changes. In the olden days, the types of agriculture practiced by them were both terrace cultivation and shifting cultivation, but at present 96.7% are practicing shifting cultivation only. In the earlier days, the harvest for the cultivated crops was done only once a year, but at the present with the introduction of improvised seeds and the changing weather condition, harvesting is done by midyear, and some crops are harvested twice a year. Currently, there is no practice of community cultivation, which once was a common practice. The two main agricultural festivals among the Sumis are *Tuluni* and *Ahuna*, which are also undergoing changes, mainly due to changes in cultivation practices.

Keywords: Agricultural practices, Culture, Sumi Naga, and Change.

Introduction

Defining the term ‘tribe’ in contemporary rapidly changing societies is a complex issue. Many of their traditional features are getting either eroded or adapted to changing needs of the time. In earlier times, mainly anthropologists and sociologists tried to study tribes and their issues, but at present most of the disciplines are dealing with them. The undergoing changes or evolution of their ways of life can be traced in the works of some of the classical thinkers like Emile Durkheim, L H Morgan, Max Weber, and many others of later periods,

including B Malinowski, A R Radcliffe-Brown, E E Evans-Pritchard, S F Nadel, Marshall Shalins, Maurice Godelier, and Sir E R Leach. Many scholars also tried to define and study Indian tribes, including SC Roy, W H R Rivers, Nirmal Kumar Bose, J H Hutton, T B Naik, DN Majumdar, Surajit Singha, TC Das, PK Chattapadyay, BS Guha, BK Roy-Barman, PN Mishra, LKA Iyer, GS Ghurye, Verrier Elwin, SC Dube, LP Vidyarthi, A Aiyappan, MN Srinivas, Andre Beteille, Virginius Xaxa, and others with immense interest and diversities of opinions and approaches to study Indian tribes. For example, Andre Beteille echoes that Indian tribes have more complicated social organization, hardly any tribes exist as a separate society, they have been absorbed in different ways into wider society, and no tribe in India has exclusively separate political boundary except North Eastern Frontier Agency (mostly the present seven-sister states in N E India). It may be noted that the already differing opinions on the concept of the tribe have further got complicated by changing times and the present way of life of tribal people. The tribes of India are classified into different groups on the basis of geographical location, language, race, and levels of socioeconomic development. On the basis of the mode of livelihood, Indian tribes can be divided into various categories as food gatherers and hunters, pastoralists, hill cultivators, agriculturists, horticulturists, simple artisans, folk artists, labourers, and industrial workers.

Agriculture is considered as the backbone of rural economy and many are dependent on it for livelihoods. However, the form of cultivation varies across the world from permanent/wet-rice cultivation to shifting/*jhum* cultivation, from seasonal to throughout the year, etc. Shifting cultivation can be traced as early as 10,000 BC in a varied array of distinct socioeconomic and ecological conditions, from montane to low-lying ecosystems, and from tropical forests to grasslands. It was common in the temperate zones of the Mediterranean and Northern Europe till the 19th century, also in North America till the 1940s, and is at present practiced mainly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Thrupp et al 1997). In shifting cultivation, the varieties of crops and the manner of the plantation, significantly vary from place to place.

In Nagaland, the staple crops grown are rice, millet, maize, and pulses; while the cash crops like chilies, ginger, soybeans, etc. are also becoming popular. As plantation crops, coffee, cardamom, and tea are also grown. However, rice is the dominant crop and also the staple diet of the people, like in many other states. It also may be noted that there are many indigenous agricultural practices among the Nagas, like zabo farming, alder-based, and contour banding shifting cultivation, integrated agro-forestry, irrigated bench terrace farming,

home gardens farming, etc. The two common cultivation methods among the Naga tribes are *jhum* slash and burn or shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation.

In Nagaland, *jhum* farmers normally grew multiple crops as decided by the community. The pattern of *jhum* practiced in the state consists of the burning of trees, felling, drying, and burning of the *jhum* field followed by sowing, inter-cultural operation, harvest, and fallowing. To sustain cultivation on the slopes they put in place a number of mechanical and vegetative barriers. *Jhum* or shifting cultivation has been criticized regarding its ecological and economic impacts. This method of cultivation is in vogue among the Sumis, Aos, Lothas, and also among many other hill tribes. Jhuming has its obvious disadvantages as a large area of land is required for such cultivation, besides the crops are dependent on rainfall.

A more modern method is that of preparing terraced fields. The complete hillside is cut, and beautiful terraces whose width would depend on the gradient of the feature, are made. The fields are irrigated by a network of water channels. Normally the terraces are so graduated that water flows down conveniently from one terrace to the other below it, and so on. Bamboo pipes are used to regulate the flow of water. The excavating of the terraces requires a colossal effort, and one marvels at the amount of human energy expended in cutting them into shape, but these terraced fields, once prepared, are much easier to maintain than the *jhum* plots. They have also the advantage of being closer to the village site. The state government is trying to persuade the villagers to change over from jhuming to terrace cultivation.

The Sumis or Sümi Naga is one of the major ethnic groups in Nagaland. They mainly inhabit the Zunheboto District, parts of the Dimapur District, and the Kiphire District. They practiced *Aki Kiti* and were head hunters like other Naga tribes. It is one of the recognized scheduled tribes of India. The ancestral religion of the Sümis was the worship of nature, but with the arrival of Baptist missionaries in the 20th century, they adopted Christianity. Presently 87.9% of the population in Nagaland are Christians (Census, 2011). The genesis of this tribe is also said to have its roots of existence in the Khezhakeno Village which is claimed to be the centre point of Sümi history. They celebrate many festivals which have been carried down for generations. Most of these festivals usually mark the beginning of new seasons, harvesting of new crops, etc. The two major festivals popular among them are – Tuluni and Ahuna. In fact, Apikimti is another important festival among the Sumis.

People of Nagaland depend on agriculture and therefore most of their festivals revolve around agriculture. Most of these festivals usually mark the beginning of new seasons, the

harvesting of new crops, or victory at war. The two festivals relating to agriculture celebrated by Sumis are *Tuluni* and *Ahuna*. *Tuluni* celebrated on the 8th of July is a festival of great significance for the Sumis. This festival is marked with feasts as the occasion occurs in the bountiful season of the year. In earlier days, drinking rice beer essentially formed part of the feasts. Rice beer was served in a goblet made of bamboo or made from the leaf of plantain. This drink is called *Tuluni* which gives the festival its name. *Tuluni* is also called *Anni*, which denotes the season of plentiful crops. This midyear festival is a time of communal harmony and merry-making for the Sumi community. Slaughtering of pigs, cows, and Mithun was also an important feature of this festival.

Ahuna is a traditional post-harvest festival of the Sumis. *Ahuna* signifies the celebration of the season's harvest in thanksgiving while invoking the spirit of good fortune in the New Year. On this occasion, the entire community prepares and feasts the first meal of rice drawn from the season's harvest cooked in bamboo segments. The receptacles for cooking or serving on this occasion are freshly made, curved, or cut, from locally available resources prolific and abundant in the countryside. *Ahuna* is a Sumi traditional agricultural calendar-end *Tiqhetini* (festival) signifying the completion of successful agricultural work. It marks the time when all food items, grains, tubers, and a variety of vegetables from the year-long farming are collected and stored in the *Aleh* (granary). *Ahuna* is celebrated on November 13 and 14 and now holds the status of the official festival of the Sumi Nagas because it falls in a dry season and accessibility for visitors is better. However, *Tuluni* is still the most respected festival for the local Sumis. The *Tuluni* festival and the reason for its celebration found that it is celebrated to mark the end of the dry season and the beginning of the new fruits. Originally *Tuluni* is celebrated for seven days and some of the signs are babysitters, piercing ears, young people, enemies, widows, orphans, poor and needy, and abundance and joyous moment for all.

It may be noted that the ownership of land among the Sumis is of different nature. There are family (household) land, clan land, and common village land or virgin land. The family and clan land are inherited by the descendants, while the common village land is everyone's property. The common village land can only be used with permission from the village chief for the cultivation or felling of trees. As per as group labour is concerned, like in many tribal communities, Sumis also practice the exchange of labour (*Ajoli*) in the form of working on each other's land in turn, not for money, but a feast for the day is provided by the respective owner of the land. Such group labour is regulated mostly on kinship lines and also among same age groups. There is also a tradition of working in the fields of the village chief –

depending on needs sometimes everybody works in his field, sometimes one member from each household, and sometimes all the husband-wife of the village. In fact, on those days, the chief provides feast.

In spite of agriculture being the main occupation of the people, the people of the state still have to import food items from other states. This has happened because of unsuitable agricultural practices such as the jhuming method which has led to the loss of soil fertility due to soil erosion. However, still about 61% of the total households in the state practice shifting cultivation. Traditional tribe-related festivals revolve around agriculture, as a vast majority of tribes are directly dependent on agriculture. At present, the younger generation does not have much knowledge and less interest in the agriculture practice and the importance of agriculture and its relation to the festival celebrated by the tribal. Due to the changing pattern of modernisation and the introduction of improvised agriculture seed, the indigenous agricultural practice is decreasing and less availability of indigenous and organic crop substances are found.

Review of Literature

There are many studies across India including NE India on agricultural practices and changes in it. However, only a few studies are found changes in shifting and terrace cultivation in the context of Nagaland. In explaining the agrarian social structure, Beteille (2007) focused on the agrarian classes, namely landowners, peasants, and agricultural labourers, and explained how the differentiated institutional structures of various kinds have emerged. This study is indicative of the shift from caste-oriented studies to class-oriented studies of rural stratification. Cagliariini and Rush's (2011) study focusing on the developments in the agricultural sector in India, mentioned some of the areas of progress and challenges for India's agricultural sector, such as productivity, water management, government policies and programmes, and food distribution and storage, productivity gains and integration with global food markets. It also discussed some of the challenges for future development like land distribution policies, access to credit water management, and food distribution which will further enhance productivity and help India meet its growing demand for food. Meijerink and Roza (2007) pointed out how the disappointment with agriculture led many donor organisations to turn away from agriculture, looking instead to areas that would increase the well-being of poor people, such as health and education. Further, Pongratz (1990) focused on traditional peasant culture as a subject of rural sociology. He mentioned the development of agriculture in the past decades and how it has been determined worldwide

by modernisation measures such as mechanisation and intensification of production, rationalisation of farm management and adaptation that was usually regarded as outmoded and the remnant of a tradition, which exerted a disruptive influence on the modernisation process. The author also mentioned how in recent years, analyses in the field of research in developing countries and cultural-anthropological studies have cast a new light on the significance of farming culture, and how their internal structures and processes, traditional regional cultures have usually successfully adapted to the needs of people and the demands of the environment.

Anooja Chacko (2017) exemplifies the dynamics in the agrarian livelihood of a tribal community, which reveals that a shift in the pattern and practices of cultivation is enforced by the outside elements as a direct outcome of the injection of the money economy. It has disrupted not only their resource base but also their livelihood fabric. It is observed that the agricultural sector has marked a shift from subsistent food crop cultivation to market-oriented cash crop cultivation practices, which has resulted in a sharp reduction in the area under cultivation and output of food crops.

Kaushal and others (2016) opine that traditional agricultural practices have demonstrated a coping mechanism against adverse changes in climate. They suggest designing interventions that combine traditional practices with modern scientific knowledge, new agricultural initiatives should be able to sustain the economic viability of the tribal farmer. Further, human food, fiber, fodder, and bio-fuel need to be addressed and should protect and enhance environmental quality and natural resources.

Elizabeth Edison and Rugmini Devi (2019) discussed the negative impacts of land alienation on the Adivasis of Attappady in Kerala, which have fundamentally affected their way of life, agricultural practices, and food culture. They also pointed out that the tribals not only suffer discriminatory treatment by non-tribal settlers but also by state authorities' restrictions on access to local forests and forest produce. They hint at abuses of power in land alienation processes, analyse unequal power structures, and claim that better obligation of traditional tribal culture and its ecologically holistic approaches should dictate policies for local sustainable development.

Richard Mahapatra (2018) shows that between 2001 and 2011, the number of tribal cultivators reduced by 10% while the number of agricultural labourers increased by 9%. Further, about 55% of the country's tribal population now resides outside their traditional habitats, probably in search of better livelihood and educational opportunities. Subrata Guha and Md Ismail (2015) explain the promising situation of Indian tribes with reference to

Santhal communities in the Birbhum district and find out various cultural as well as food habits, religious practices, social systems like marriage, and various types of awareness. It found that more than 35% of people are not following and have not good ideas and practices of their ancestor festival due to the level of modern influences. Further, only 17.5% of the villagers' practices their own traditional art & craft, and 82.5% are not interested in nurturing their skill in this matter.

There is much literature on the Nagas and their culture. The entry of the Nagas into the written history of the world dated back to 24th February 1826 (Wettstein, 2008) -the representatives of the Kingdom of Burma and the British military signed the Treaty of Yandabo on that day, in which Burma renounced all claims to Assam and Manipur. A G Zhimo (2018) noted that before the arrival of the British in Nagaland, the Sumis lived in autonomous villages, ruled by the chief and his subordinates; where the lives of the villagers revolved around the agricultural cycle, animistic rituals, and headhunting. However, the advent of the British and the entrance of American Baptist missionaries, along with the beginning of new administration and new beliefs, directed fundamental deviations in most of the institutions.

Senotsu & Kinny (2016) opined that in shifting agriculture about 73% of the total population of Nagaland is engaged, which is an integral part of the Naga society and culture. They also cited that due to population growth and influences of modernization such as the introduction of monoculture and exotic species, traditional shifting cultivation is facing various challenges. Kuotsuo et al (2014) focused on the shifting cultivation, integrated organic farming system, and its environment, and opined that the age-old traditional shifting cultivation affects the soil health and ecosystem and suggested its remedial measure of adopting an integrated farming system of organic cultivation.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective is to study the changes in the agricultural practices in Sapotimi village. The specific objectives are:

- i) To analyse the changes in agricultural trends, and
- ii) To look into the diminishing culture from the viewpoint of agriculture.

The methodological approach of the study is both qualitative and quantitative. Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, published and unpublished materials as well as from internet sources; while primary data are collected through fieldwork using interview schedules and observation techniques. A

sample of 30 was selected from 30 households of Sapotimi village, using a convenience sampling technique, chosen on the basis of availability and cooperation from the respondents.

Sapotimi is a village in Suruhuto Subdivision in Zunheboto district of Nagaland, India. It is located 24 km north of the district headquarters Zunheboto, and the nearby villages to Sapotimi are Surumi (6 KM), Kholeboto (7 KM), Lumami (7 KM), Sutemi (8 KM), and Zaphumi (8 KM). Suruhoto Tehsil surrounds it towards the east, Akuluto Tehsil towards the west, Chare Tehsil towards the north, and Longkhim Tehsil towards the east. Mokokchung, Zunheboto, Tuensang, and Wokha are the nearby towns of Sapotimi. The total geographical area of the village is 1005 hectares. The village has a population of 694 of which 355 were males and 339 were females and with a total household of 148 (Census, 2011). In Sapotimi village, the population of children (0-6 years) is 96 which makes up 13.83 % of the total population of the village. The average sex ratio of Sapotimi village is 955 which is higher than the Nagaland state average of 931, but the child sex ratio is 745, lower than the Nagaland average of 943. The literacy rate of Sapotimi village was 90.64% compared to 79.55% of Nagaland, of which male literacy was 92.33% while female literacy rate was 88.93%. A total of 99.1% of the population is Scheduled Tribes. As per the constitution of India and the Panchayati Raaj Act, Sapotimi village is administered by a Sarpanch (Head of Village) who is elected representative of the village.

The working population in the village is 527 (75.9%), of which 262 are males and 265 are females. There is a total of 212 main workers of which 122 are males and 90 are females. Among the main workers, 140 are cultivators, 21 are agricultural labourers and 51 are other workers. Further among the 315 marginal workers, 39 are cultivators, 264 are agricultural labourers, 02 are household industry workers and 10 are other workers (Census, 2011).

The significances of the study are many. It is observed that – i) Organic farming reduces the vulnerability of farmers to climate change and fetch high market price; ii) Decline in the use of self-produced food and an increase in the use of the market product due to the availability of many market goods at a cheaper price; and iii) The changes are inevitable in any society and in any social institution, so the changes in agricultural practices in Sapotimi village are related to changes in the socioeconomic and cultural lives of the people. Thereby, it is significant to study the said changes in the context of the specified village.

Analysis and Interpretation of Primary Data

Some of the important findings of the study are as follows:

1. The age groups of the respondents, show 50% of the population belonged to the age of 20-40 years; 23.3% to the age of 41-60 years; 20% to 61-80 years; and 6.7% to 81-90 years. Further, 36.7% were male and 63.3% were female respondents; the majority of them (76.7%) were married, followed by widowed (16.7%) and single (3.3%), and separated (3.3%). Data also shows that the majority of them i.e., 46.7% were under-metric, followed by 10+2 qualification (26.7%), metric (20%), and graduates and post-graduates (3.3% each).
2. The major occupation of the respondents was farming (66.7%), followed by teaching (16.7%), police service (6.7%), pharmacist, pastor, and peon (3.3% each). However, even though there were different occupations that were being practiced, agriculture was widely practiced by each household as a secondary income. The data relating to the agricultural annual household income among the respondents revealed that the majority of them (73.3%) were earning Rs 10,000 to 30,000; followed by 16.7% earning Rs 31,000-50,000 and 10% earning Rs 51,000-70,000.
3. According to the respondents the changes in agricultural practices were:
 - i. In the olden days the type of agriculture practiced was only shifting cultivation, but for the past few years only 01 respondent i.e., (3.3%) was practicing both terrace cultivation and shifting cultivation while the remaining respondents (96.7%) were practicing only shifting cultivation.
 - ii. Another change that could be seen in the period of harvesting. In the earlier days the harvest for the cultivated crops was done only once a year but in the present time with the introduction of improvised seeds and the changing weather conditions harvesting was done by midyear and some crops like maize, potato and beans could be harvested twice in a year with less effort.
 - iii. In past years, the crops were cultivated only for consumption but in the present times with the introduction of improvised seeds like chili, cabbage, ginger, cardamom, etc. they are used not only for consumption but also for earning profit.
 - iv. Another change was that the introduction of salt spraying in the paddy field made the workload easier for the farmers.
4. The reason mentioned by the respondents for the change in agricultural practices were:

- a) The respondents stated that with the introduction of modernisation they started to learn more about the change in agriculture and the different agricultural crops.
 - b) Another reason given by the respondents for the change in the agriculture practice was the introduction of cash crops like chili, cabbage, ginger, and cardamom, where they could earn more profit.
 - c) Another reason given by the respondents was the construction of an Agri link road under MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), where the constructed road helped the respondents carry their cultivated crops by vehicle instead of head load.
5. The merit given by the respondents in agriculture was the earning of profit with the sale of agricultural goods and they can consume their own cultivated organic food. The demerit in agriculture was that they get very less support from the agriculture department and so it is purely hard labour. Another demerit was the loss in cultivated crops due to the sudden change in the weather condition.
 6. All of the respondents were using improvised seeds, technology, and transportation. The improvised seeds used by the respondents were cabbage, ginger, chili, bitter guard, and cardamom. Its merit was that they get better seeds for cultivation and with transportation, there was easy transport of harvest goods and easy business. The demerits of improvised seeds were that some seeds do not match the climate condition of the village i.e., cabbage during heavy rainfall.
 7. Majority of the respondents (93.3%) stated that the new agricultural practice was better than the old one. The reason given by the respondents was that with the new agriculture practice their workload was less; double harvest could be done in the new agricultural practice and so earn more profit. The other respondents i.e., 6.7% stated that along with the merits the salt spraying method for paddy cultivation was affecting the health of the people.
 8. All the respondents (100%) preferred the local good product because it is more organic. The type of cultivated crops that benefits the respondents were ginger, chili, and cardamom (seed and sucker). They used purely hard labour during cultivation. Further, all of them used their harvested crops for commercial purposes. All of them stated that the present agricultural practice is beneficial, the reason behind it was the new agriculture practice used for commercial purposes.

9. Data on ownership of cultivated land showed that 40% used their own land for cultivation, 20% did not have land for cultivation and the land used for their agriculture was from their relatives. Whereas the other 40% used their land as well as of their relatives depending on the type of soil that they had during shifting time. The people of Sapotimi Village started their new agricultural practice for the past 9 to 10 years.
10. Problems faced for the exportation of crops showed that the majority of the respondents i.e., 53.3% faced transportation problems for the exportation of cultivated goods and the rest 46.7% of respondents did not face any transportation problems. However, with many benefits in the agriculture profession which could be used both for self-consumption as well to earn profit from the market with sold goods, all the respondents supported agriculture as a profession.

Information on diminishing culture showed that -

1. The traditional agricultural method was shifting cultivation also known as slash and burn method or jhum cultivation. At present, all these respondents use only the shifting cultivation method, except for one household that practiced both terraces and shifting cultivation.
2. Traditional crops cultivated were local maize, paddy, soybeans, and local potatoes. The new crops that were cultivated in the present time were chili, ginger, cabbage, cardamom, and improvised maize.
3. All the respondents stated that there was no community cultivation done for agriculture, cultivation was done only for individual purposes. However, group labour was done for community social work like during the shortage of water and cleaning of paths, etc., and also the non-farming economic activities are largely collective.
4. The practice of farmers working together in a group is known as *Aloji*. In the olden days, each group with a total number of 15 to 20 practiced rotation cultivation within the groups and during the *tuluni* festival, the group members came together for festival celebration. However, at present, there were very fewer people who were still practicing group farming and each group had only 4 to 5 members. The reason behind the change was, to save the economy spent during group cultivation and celebration of the festival as a group.
5. The salt spraying method for paddy cultivation is relatively new. The respondents stated that before the salt spraying method was introduced, everything during paddy cultivation was done through hand or physical labour.

6. Majority of the respondents i.e., 66.7% knew about the age-old practice of agriculture during cultivation. While the other 33.3% did not know about the age-old practice. The respondents who don't know about the age-old practice asked their neighbour or relative when the cultivation of crops would take place. The respondents stated that according to the full moon and half-moon the crops were cultivated. The age-old practices of cultivation were - in olden times the full moon was considered good for the plantation of crops; the brighter the moon, the better the cultivated crops; but at present, the full moon is considered bad for cultivation because of the change in the climate and the crop-eating insect-like beetles, butterflies, bugs, grasshoppers, etc destroy the cultivated crops.
7. All the respondents agreed that the new agricultural practice has widened the interpersonal relationship among the farmers. They stated that with new agricultural practices they encouraged and helped each other to do better.
8. In olden times paddy cultivation was done by everyone, but now only a few of them were cultivating it. However, the cultural festival of *ahunawas* still continuing. With the new agricultural practice, with less hard labour and in search of an easy way the farmers left the old practice and tried new improvised seeds to improve modern sales.
9. There are two festivals relating to agriculture *tuluni* and *ahuna*. The changes observed in these festivals were:
 - i. In the olden days, ancestors celebrated the *tuluni* festival in the month of June. But, the date for the festival got changed to July. Because of the change in climate, a change in the growth of crops has taken place.
 - ii. With the introduction of cash crops, at present harvest was done twice a year. So, the festivals were celebrated not according to the reason for the celebration of festivals but it was celebrated in order to just preserve the forefather's identity and to preserve culture.
 - iii. At present, unlike in the olden times the practice of cultivation of paddy crop *ahunawas* done only by very few people. But, the *ahuna* festival was still celebrated by every Sumi people.
10. All the respondents agreed that jhum cultivation was a good practice. The reason given by the respondents were:
 - i. It was through jhum or shifting cultivation they earned their livelihood. Easy cash crops and also for easy consumption in crops was through this jhum cultivation.

- ii. Another reason given by the respondents was that, if the yearly shift did not happen there was erosion in the soil and so less harvest of crops was done after a year and so without the fertiliser; it was difficult to continue planting in the particular land.

Conclusion, Suggestions, and Discussion

From the above analysis, we could not only see the change in the agricultural practice but also the change in the meaning of why the festivals were celebrated. With modernization, the agricultural practice also changed. The introduction of improvised seeds and new technologies like easy transportation, the establishment of roads, salt spraying method, etc. had led to a change in the agricultural practice, where with less labour people could earn more profit from the present practice. The changes in the reason for the celebration of the festival could also be seen. Where unlike in the olden days, crop harvest could be done twice in a year and very few people were cultivating the *ahuna* crop. The pre-harvest festival *tuluni* and the post-harvest festival *ahuna* were just celebrated in order to preserve the traditional culture.

It may be noted here that a Naga village is divided into *khels* and each village has its *gennas*, which largely control agricultural operations including the festivals. *Khel* is a Naga institution that brings together several clans within the village community, membership of which is decided by either birth or heredity and is the most important and effective institution in village governance (<https://www.google.com/...khels+among+Nagas...>). *Genna* refers to the complex of magico-religious ceremonies around which Naga life revolves. Some *gennas* are communal, e.g., relating to the agricultural cycle or the prevention of illness, while others are individual and are associated with life-cycle events. Various prohibitions on individual behavior (*kenna*) and community activity (*penna*) form part of the *genna* observances (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion...>).

The majority of the Sumi Naga community is primarily agrarian and depends on forests for both food and livelihood. They use several traditional indicators to facilitate agricultural practices and foresee seasonal variation. For example, the fruiting of mulberry trees indicates spring and their harvest means starting of summer; the influx of wagtails and Amur falcons in October means starting of winter; if a culturally significant new shoot of a particular genus of bamboo rise higher than the parent plant, heavy rainfall is expected and if they stay low, less rain is predictable. However, such perceptions are vanishing with the passage of

time.(<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/agriculture/how-sumi-nagas-traditional-knowledge-helps-them-navigate-nature-s-vagaries-80413>).

In the olden times, the Sümi months were named according to agricultural cycles. In their tradition, all crops were sown only during the time when the moon is waxing, if seeds were sown on the waning moon they believed it would be a poor harvest (<http://thevillagemicroscope....sumi-calendar-and-tuluni-week.html>). In fact, the advent and spread of Christianity have largely affected traditional cultural practices among the Nagas. In this context, Verrier Elwin (1961) has pointed out many specific cultural changes among them. It may be noted that in the context of cultural change, ethnographers like J H Hutton (1921) remarked, “Old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten, the number of Christians or quasi-Christians is steadily increasing, and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life.” Sumi society has changed a lot, especially after the widespread conversion to Christianity, like many other hill tribes. It is observed that particularly the youth are encountering contradictory values of tradition and market-centered globalization. In fact, most of the cultural elements are continuing in modified form, despite the forces that induce change (Zhimo, 2018).

Looking into the changing scenario of agricultural practices and the subsequent cultural changes, some of the suggestions might be:

1. As at present terrace cultivation was practiced by only one household of the entire village, the farmers should try to search for remedial measures like storing water in an established dam and continuing the terrace cultivation.
2. All the respondents agreed that jhum cultivation was a good cultivation method. However, they were not aware of the fact that the deforestation and soil erosion caused by jhum cultivation was changing the climatic condition and that it would continue to keep on changing. The farmers should be made aware of the effect that it causes to the environment, so they could come up with other means of cultivating crops like irrigation and terrace cultivation which have less effect on the environment.
3. The people who were not aware of the changes in the meaning behind the celebration of festivals should be made aware of it. The past history of why the ancestors celebrated the festivals and the changes that have occurred should be made known to the younger generation.
4. There was very less support from the government in general for agriculture and particularly on the supply of improvised seeds. So, the village council members or the

headman should try to approach the agricultural department for better growth of agriculture and more supply of new improvised seeds.

5. With the change in agricultural practice, more profit was earned economically. It was not only leading to a change in the livelihood of people but also helped in the contribution of the economic development of the state. So, more help and emphasis should be given to the growth of agriculture.

Therefore, it is clear that the Sumi Nagas are undergoing changes like any community anywhere in the world. The changes in agricultural practices, especially in terms of timings, durations, techniques, crops, and consequent cultural practices, propelled multiple debates and discussions. One may pretend the changes as evolutionary phases or modernization, while others may call it assimilation or endangering the identity of a tribe. Whatever lines of thinking and justification may be, our main concern is the concept of a 'tribe' – whether a traditional tribal community that is practicing the modern way of life can we call it still a tribe or should we use some other terminology to explain it. This question is put forward for further analysis, opinions, and research. Further, we can even link the changes in agricultural practices and consequent cultural changes with many other interrelated and interdependent factors like education, information technology, advances in agricultural sciences, a market economy, climate change, etc. which are having influences on the Sumi Nagas, like in other communities.

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Photo 1: the only terrace cultivation field in the village



Photo 2: Barren terrace land

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