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## **TULUNI FESTIVAL AND ALOJI AMONG THE SUMI TRIBE OF NAGALAND: MEANING, CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE**

### ***Abstract***

*This paper will look at the festival of Tuluni and the institution of Aloi among the Sumi tribe of Nagaland. It will read meanings into the festival and look at the relationship between festival, labour relations, and the worldviews of the people which governs peoples' beliefs, practices, and traditions of the society. The interconnections between rituals, beliefs, and practices and its significance in the larger social fabrics of the society is highlighted. Different relationships in the society are celebrated during Tuluni based on social hierarchy, age, gender, marital status, life and death cycle, etc. The centrality of agriculture is seen where different activities of the people are centered around the agricultural cycle. The paper argues that through the celebration of festivals, people rejoice and reconnect with their past. These also play an important role in preserving and maintaining Sumi peoples' identity by bringing them together for celebrations.*

**Keywords:** *Sumi tribe, Tuluni festival, Aloi, Nagaland, Agriculture and agrarian relations.*

### **Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to understand the Sumi festival of Tuluni in terms of its multiplicity of meanings and significance within the larger worldview of the Sumi society of Nagaland. In the process, it will dwell upon how festivals and celebrations are closely interconnected with rituals, beliefs, and practices that govern the social fabrics of the Sumi society. It will look at festival as 'event', a social phenomenon that is celebrated and practiced by the society at large as a celebration of the people's past or identity which connects people's present with the past. The paper also engages with another important social institution specific to the Sumi society called *aloji*; the labour force around which agricultural society continues to sustain. The paper points out that interrelationships between agriculture; labour and class; festivals and marriage;

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marriage and agriculture cycle and the creation of social stratification through marriage alliance are not as simple as it appears, but there are complex dynamics which leads to its functions which will be critically interrogated in this paper. It is important to study these traditional institutions, practices, beliefs and rituals to outline strands of change and continuity within the Sumi society and subsequently to underline significance of the same in the contemporary context.

Before venturing into ‘making sense’ of the festival of Sumi festival of Tuluni, a prior sociological and anthropological understanding of the term ‘festival’ itself warrants a brief description at this juncture. Etymologically the term festival is derived from the Latin word *festum*. There are two terms for festive events in Latin: *festum*, for ‘public joy, merriment, revelry,’ and *feria*, meaning ‘abstinence from work in honour of gods’ (Falassi, 1987: 2). Both these terms were used to indicate that the festival is celebrated for many days with different events and activities as part of the festival which were closely related to the everyday reality and the worldview of the people. David Picard, building on Erwin Goffman’s (1974) notion of frame, engaged with the ‘festive’ as a ‘socially produced conceptual structure by means of which people organize their perception of and participation in the world’ (2016: 600). In agricultural society, festivals are celebrated with rituals and prayers for the bountiful harvest, wealth and fertility, different kinds of relationships based on age, gender, marriage etc., and the world of life and death. Furthermore, according to Jean Grondin, ‘Festival is characterized by a certain temporality into which we are enticed’ (2000: 45). Festivals take place at a certain time of the year and everyone who participates in the festival experience a festive state and is transformed into a festive mood. The spirit of festival, therefore, has a ‘time or place that is festive’ (Grondin, 2000: 46), as we will see in the paper. It is also the celebrations of the different life’s activities. The coming of the festival invokes the feeling of celebrations among the people, to engage in merry makings and other fun activities, and perform different rituals suited for the occasions which the everyday mundane experience does not permit.

In order to ‘read’ meanings and significance of the festival of Tuluni and the institution of *aloji* among the Sumi tribe, the emic and etic perspectives of understanding culture and people is central to this work. According to Kenneth L Pike, an emic unit is a ‘physical or mental item or system treated by insiders as relevant to their system of behaviour and as the same emic unit in spite of etic variability.’ (1990: 28). One of the defining features of emic is that it may be a ‘physical or perceptual behaviour to which individual native participants of a culture either implicitly or explicitly attributes the character of appropriateness for its occurrence in a particular kind of context’ (ibid.,). For Pike, etics denotes an ‘approach by an outsider to an inside system, in which the outsider brings his own structure- his own emics and partly superimposes his observations on the inside view, interpreting the inside

reference to his outside starting point' (Harris, 1990: 49). Again, insider and outsider position of the researcher is an important theoretical position to understand culture. As an insider outsider, the researcher engages with the field 'living intimately with strangers'... or 'strangely with intimates' (Madan, 2004: 203) in order to check his/ her subjectivity as an insider, and at the same time he/ she is also an 'outsider' who has lived far away from the people/ community under study, through which his/ her objectivity mediates.

T. N. Madan writes that the anthropologist who study his own culture, 'is an insider who takes up the position of an outsider, by virtue of his training... and looks at his own culture hoping to be surprised,' through which he gains new understandings (2004: 203) of what people believe in and do, and the relationships and meanings of the beliefs. For M. N. Srinivas both the 'insider and outsider have each advantages as well as disadvantages, and it is dogmatism to assert that one or the other is bound to fail' (2004: 415). While talking about insider versus outsider as an anthropologist, he writes that 'not only is the anthropologist part of his own society but also carries it along with him as well. Over a period of years, it should be possible to train him to observe his own society, to try and see it as stranger would' (Srinivas, 2004: 419). The importance of having multiple views of the same culture was emphasised where 'the insider and various views can be complementary even when – or especially when – they differ from that of each other' (Srinivas, 2004: 420).

It is with this theoretical background, both the emics and etics perspectives have been used to do a 'gendered' understanding of Sumi society and culture with a critical feminist lens and at the same time conscious of the researcher's own insider-outsider social location. The researcher being an 'insider' - being a Sumi tribe has always been interested in understanding Sumi culture, traditions, practices, beliefs and rituals. The process of 'researching' her own community began during her doctoral work. The fieldwork for this study was conducted between 2007-17 through multiple visits to the field in the months of May-June and December, to Satakha area under Zunheboto district, Nagaland.

### ***Traditional Sumi Society: Location and Worldviews***

Sumi are one of the major Naga tribes inhabiting the present state of Nagaland. It is not clear how the name Sumi originated, but there are different stories/myths associated with the origin stories. One oral tradition says that, Sumi is derived from 'Chokri' 'Semi'. 'Se' refers to the number 'three' and 'mi' implies 'of that people' and therefore 'the people from the third' (Jimomi, 2018: 103). Inavi Jimomi writes that, according to the Chokris, the Sumi is the third son of Khezhakeno, which might be true but it doesn't necessarily mean that Sumi is derived from 'Semi' (2018: 103). It is also claimed that the name of their progenitor is Sumi. It is said that there was once a man with three sons. His youngest son had two sons; the elder son was named Ishe, and the younger

one Holoho. Ishe became *Tukumi* and Holoho became *Swumi* (Zhimo 2011: 57-58). *Tukumi* and *Swumi* are considered the two moieties of the Sumi tribe, to whom every member traces their origins.

Sumi tribe settled in Zunheboto district which is in the central part of the present state of Nagaland. They have also spread out to Dimapur, Kiphire, Mokokchung, and Wokha districts of Nagaland. Several old Sumi villages are also found in the present day Phek district (Jimomi, 2018:104). The language spoken by the community is known as 'Sumi' which belongs to one of the subgroups of the Tibeto-Burmese family. The people speak only one language but with a difference, which lies in intonation and expressions. Marked difference in speaking Sumi is seen between Pughoboto area with the rest of the Sumi. Sumi are also popularly known as Sema. According to Avitoli G Zhimo, the word '*Sema*' is known to have derived from the Angami Naga word '*seme*', the meaning of which is not known. However, the Angami used the term to refer to the Sumi people, which gradually fabricated into '*Sema*' (2011: 54), the use of which was given political sanction under British colonialism. As a result, other Naga tribes started identifying the 'Sumi' as 'Sema' but the word does not have a meaning attached to the Sumi people. On September 30, 2005, the Government of Nagaland officially changed the name 'Sema' into 'Sumi' through order No. Home/SCTA-16/94, Government of Nagaland, Home Department, Home Branch official notification.

The people of the Northeast region are meat eaters. Sumi in particular and Nagas, in general, are meat eaters and consume both pork and beef along with other meat items and the staple food of the people is rice. Meat and rice are integral items of the dietary practices of the people and it is also exchanged in times of festivals and celebrations. During festivities and celebrations, meat consumption and distribution along with rice beers among family members, relatives, friends, and clansmen is an important practice. Among the Naga tribes, different tribes are identified with the different food items and their speciality in preparations which is central to their dietary and gastronomic sense. The Sumi tribe is identified with '*Axone*' which is made from fermented soya beans. In Sumi language, '*Axo*' is smell and '*ne*' is a derivative of '*thonhe*' which means 'strong/pungent/aromatic/flavourful,' etc. Thus, the literal translation of *Axone* is 'strong/pungent/aromatic/flavourful smell.' Fermented soya beans is a necessary part of the dietary practices among different Naga tribes and tribes of North East India, but the process and techniques of preparation and fermentation differ from tribe to tribe and are also known by a different name. The Sumi preparation of *Axone* with smoked pork curry is celebrated and raved for among the different tribes of the state.

When one looks at the tradition of the indigenous community, labour and agriculture are the defining roles of the society. Thus, the customs, memory, politics, and culture of the Sumi people revolve around labour, work ethics, and division of labour of the community based on age, gender, marital status,

etc. It is therefore the work culture in practice, food habits, and agriculture practice, beliefs and rituals that defines the worldview of the people. This is reflected in the usage of different expressions. In many societies, a common greeting when one meets a friend or peer is 'how are you' but among many Naga tribe, the first expression is 'have you taken your meal or not' and in Sumi, one is often greeted as '*Ana chuva chumph*' or have you eaten rice or not, implying whether one has taken a meal or not. The literal meaning of '*ana*' is rice. The important insight to be drawn from this expression is that while talking about food or meals, the common or literal expression used is, 'have you eaten your rice or not?' This points to the centrality of rice in the everyday dietary practices of the people, which is seen through their everyday expressions as part of their identity, and as a sign of wealth and status.

In earlier times, wealth and prosperity were measured in terms of the paddy stored in the granaries and the labour power that is at the disposal, which in turn is affected by the politics of alliance prevalent among the chiefs and the powerful. A great sense of solidarity persists among the Sumi villages which was reflected in the work culture. The sowing and harvesting activities were jointly carried out by the villagers. The first reaping and sowing in agricultural cycles was initiated by an old person calls *amthau*<sup>1</sup>, the first reaper. The whole village comes together during festivals for worshipping, performing, and observing the rituals, and during this season the poor and the weak in the village were helped by the rich and the Chiefs through giving them the meal - rice and meat.

Two major festivals of the Sumi are Tuluni and Ahuna. The festival of Ahuna is celebrated by the Sumi when the last harvesting of the season is completed and is brought home. The term Ahuna implies 'the rice that is prepared from the top of the newly stored granary' (Jimomi, 2018:182). It is a celebration to appease the spirit for the bounty harvest and to plan/check out the forecast for the next agriculture cycle through ritual performance and sacrifice. Ahuna celebration also indicates the completion of agriculture work for that particular cycle where people can rest before the next cutting of Jhum fields (Sema, 1985:22). Earlier, Ahuna was celebrated during the full moon night/days in November for two days (Jimomi, 2018:182). Presently Ahuna is also a recognised festival of the Sumi in the official State calendar of Nagaland and is celebrated on November 14 every year. For this paper, Ahuna festival is discussed here in brief to give perspective to the society.

### **Chine Chini (*rituals/ gennas*) of the Sumi**

The Sumi tribe has two moieties; the *Swu* (*sumi*) and *Tukumi*, and based on that, the formation of a new village also has two forms. When the *Sumi* establish a new village, and the *Tukumi* make necessary arrangements, it is called *Suphuwo*. On the other hand, when *Tukumi* establishes a new village, and the *Swu* makes necessary arrangements, it is called *Tukuphuwo*.

All the *achine* (rituals) are performed according to the *Swu* and *Tuku chine*. The division of different clans into these two moieties are as follows. In the *Swu* moiety are included the clan of Suchomi, Tsuqhumi, Shohemi, Wotsami, Achumi, Jimomi, Khujumi, Katimi, Khakhomi, Shochomi, Lalami, Khutimi, Wokhami, Chelami, Kapomi, Kibami, and Nunumi. The *Tuku* moiety consists of Awomi, Ayemi, Chopimi, Chiqhimi, Kinimi, Murumi, and Yephthomi (Sema 1985:19).

The *Swu chine* is performed by cutting meat into pieces and throwing it inside the house and by blowing the rice beer on the field ground. The *Tuku chine* is performed outside the house on the day of Tuluni festival by planting a banana stem/tree on the ground. The banana leaves collected from the field are used for pouring rice beer and calling out the name of God and spirits. After this, *ayilo*<sup>2</sup> or Elsholtzia Blanda plant is kept at the side of the house (Sema 1985:20). It may be mentioned here that all the rituals and *achine* were performed by men and it is the sole domain reserved for men. Thus, it is a taboo for women to take part in *chini* and as a result, till today, during the festivals, it is the men who perform the *chini*. This also reflects the unequal gender relations while performing rituals and it continues till today.

### ***Aloji and community work culture***

Agriculture and agricultural related activities were the main activities that used to govern people's lives and community lives during the earlier times. One of the key features of village life and agricultural work is that of the *aloji*<sup>3</sup> or field company. *Aloji* is derived from the word *aju sa* - taking labour (persons) to the field, and *aloji* means a flock, a group, etc. Members in the village form working groups as *aloji* and the *aloji* members take turns in working for each other's fields. The *aloji* members consist of a person of about the same age group and a person enters into *aloji* as soon as he or she is old enough to be left behind to their own devices. The entry of the individual into *aloji* may also be seen as a 'rites of passage' to use Arnold Van Gennep (1960) into adulthood, where the individual started contributing to the larger family economy for sustenance with his/her labour by becoming a member of *aloji*. It connects the individual to the larger community where he/she participates in different community activities and rituals and becomes a responsible member of the family and community.

The *aloji* group comprises both sexes in the case of the unmarried group, and it is very well organised. The members of the *aloji* take turns working in each other's fields, and sometimes they also help other members of the village, once the group finishes their cycle of working in their fields. For the labour provided, the *aloji* members were paid either in cash or kind which can be in the form of paddy, cow, or pig. Every *aloji* has its leader who is called *alokitou* (leader of *aloji*), and he/she decides which field to be worked at every day by his/her *aloji* (Jimo, 2008:56). J. H. Hutton while writing about the

institution/practice of *aloji* among the Sumi writes that after marriage, women leave their *aloji* and join the *aloji* group which comprises married women and widows (1968:153). There were different kinds of *aloji*, such as *mucho* (married men) *loji*; *topu* (married women) *loji*; *illi* (young girls) *loji*, *apumi* (young boys) *loji* and *lothem* (youth) *loji*. As a result, every village has different groups of *aloji* based on age, gender, and marital status.

### **Tuluni festivals of the Sumi: Meanings, Representations and Significances**

Among the Sumi tribe, festivals are celebrated in relation to agriculture cycles and processes. Tuluni is one of the major festivals of the Sumi which celebrates the harvest of the first fruit in the month of July. It celebrates human and community relationships and forged relationships by sharing different agricultural produce, fresh vegetables, rice, and meat, etc. As a result, the social harmony and working relationship in the community were sealed through the festival of Tuluni. It has significant meanings attached to the customs, traditions, practices, beliefs, and *chine* of the Sumi tribe. There are different meanings and interpretations to the word Tuluni. In Sumi dialect when a person is seen carrying a heavy load, it is common to say, 'go and *tulu*', which means to go and help. Thus, *tulu* means helping or supporting. After heavy or rigorous work, a day set for rest is called *ni*. Tuluni thus means helping each other, and when all the works of the season are over, a day set for rest is called Tuluni (Zhimomi 1985:53-54; Achumi 2005:35-36, and Jimo, 2008: 56). According to Najakhu Y. Sema (1985:19), the word Tuluni implies the time when there is plenty of food to eat and drink and make merry with the surplus. They observe the *chine* by making *tulu* rice beer and drinks with merrymaking. It celebrates 'the harvest of the first fruit' and 'gave support for one's well-being' (Jimomi, 2018: 179). Tuluni is also known by another name as *anni*.

*Anni* denotes the time of the year when fresh vegetables bear abundant fruits with a bountiful harvest in the middle of the year. To prepare for the celebration of Tuluni, right after the weeds are cleared from the field, a straw is tied to the *akuwo* (an iron tool used for clearing and cleaning small weeds from the field) and placed at the side of the field. This is meant to be a sign that Tuluni will be celebrated very soon (Jimo, 2008: 56). It is a festival not just for performing rituals for agricultural activities but a social festival with several rites and rituals attached to it. The *Awowu*<sup>4</sup> announce the coming of Tuluni during the last quarter of the moon in the month of July. The month of July is also called *anni qhi* which means Tuluni month (Jimomi, 2018: 179).

Today, the Sumi officially celebrate Tuluni on July 8 every year. One of the activities which every member looks forward to is the pork fats eating competition which the young men of the village take part in, especially those men planning their marriage in the near future and the son in law. Earlier, this competition usually takes place during marriage feast and the 'Feast of

Merit'. Today, one comes across this pork fats eating competition being carried out among young men even during Tuluni as a symbol of the continuity of people's past culture and practices.

### **Beliefs, practices and rituals around Tuluni<sup>5</sup>:**

Tuluni is a weeklong festival of the Sumi, celebrating the first yield of the agricultural crop. It marks the end of the sowing season. The first day of *anni* celebration is called *asuzani* (Monday). Millet is the first crop to be sowed in the field and so it is called *asuzani* (*asu* = millet). It is the day reserved for cleaning the village area, which implies the restrictions for the villagers from going out of the village gate or travel to another village. Rice is the most important staple food of the Sumi but at the time of sowing, millet is the first to be sowed, followed by paddy, and hence the second day is called *aghizani* (Tuesday) (*aghi*= paddy).

People who have fulfilled all the *achine*<sup>6</sup> prepare rice beer called *aghicho jicho* for Tuluni feast. On this day, 'certain rituals are observed and the first fruits are brought home... and is offered to the *Amthau*, the Chiefs and other family members and friends' (Jimomi, 2018: 180). When it was announced that, 'tomorrow will be *aghani chine* (village genna),' the same day the whole villagers take the leaves of the plant called *Ayilo* and put them at the door of the house. The symbolic marking of the *Ayilo* in the house implies that the villagers are observing *chine chini* and therefore no outside guests or spirit should look into or visit their house. Thus, the placing of *Ayilo* has strong symbolic meanings attached to it. It symbolises the casting away of the bad spirits from the house as well as to prevent and discourage people from other villages visiting during *chine*.

The third day is *ashigheni* (Wednesday). Every *aloji* gathers the resources and during Tuluni festival either slaughters a cow or pig to distribute the meat pieces among the members to celebrate. On this day, the wealthy people slaughter animals and distribute the meat chunks amongst relatives, children, and in-laws. The chiefs and the wealthy of the village also sees to it that the old, poor, and needy of the villagers are taken care of and provided with rice, meat, and other vegetable produce during this time. It is said that, if meat is not consumed during this time, the crops in the field will not give a good harvest. Thus, every villager makes it a point to cook meat on this particular day to consume, which is called *ashigheni* (*ashi*=meat, *gheni* day for cutting meat), or meat cutting day. Every member of the village must remain inside the village gate. During this time, the *Kukami* (chiefs) of the village are given a share of meat piece called *Akūka sa*<sup>7</sup> (Chief's share) by all the *aloji* groups of the village and other village members (Jimo, 2008: 56). The *aloji* group also takes out meat for *Amuthau*, *Awowu*, etc. According to Sumi tradition and practices, it is taboo to refuse meat. Meat pieces are therefore given to the person whose feelings and sentiments was hurt, during the past months of the year as a peace offering to amend the relationships and this meat piece serves



as 'peace meat' or 'meat of compromise' (Jimomi, 2018: 180). Both husband and wife are to abstain from sexual intimacy on this day.

The fourth day is called *annigheni* (Thursday); the main celebration day in *anni* festival, which is the happiest day; one for merrymaking, as the best feast is prepared to forge friendships and celebrate life. On this day, nobody goes out to work in the fields or touch the crops for the fear of natural calamities coming and destroying the fields. It was taboo to wash hair on this day as it is believed that the rainwater will come and wash away the crops. It is also said that married people who have maintained abstinence offer meat pieces and rice beer to *Latsapa*<sup>8</sup> by throwing it at the foot of the *Astuphi* (main post) of the house (Jimomi, 2018:180) invoking blessings for good agricultural harvest. Every member of the village and *aloji* members put on their finest clothes and take part in the merry-making and compete with each other in different traditional games, arts and crafts.

The fifth day is called *mucholani* (Friday). *Mucho* means married men thus *mucholani* is the day for the married men. On this day the menfolk of the village clean the path to the field, the surrounding village area, and the entire village road to avoid any trouble during the paddy harvesting. It is also a time when peace and understandings between men and women of the village are strengthened. '*Kivhimini qhi*' or 'Elders Day moon' is used for the moon that rises after Tuluni celebrations (Jimomi, 2018: 181).

The sixth day is *tupulani* (Saturday), where young men and women take turns inviting each other for a meal. In case there was a misnomer between friends and different parties, this was a day where all relations were forged. It may be mentioned that marriage alliances were formally announced on this day. They sang, danced, make merry, and entertained each other, learning and celebrating people's past and the present. The seventh day is *Tughakhani* (Sunday). The festival and *chine chini* of Tuluni ends on the sixth day but there was a restriction for the villagers to travel outside the village or to go to the field to work on *Tughakhani*.

If we look at the celebrations of Tuluni festival, it becomes very clear that it is interconnected with different relationships between the living and the death, between men and women, the baby sitter and the child, the chiefs and his subjects, the implications for a marriage alliance, etc., in the village which has different meanings and significance attached to it. Some of these interlinkages are now briefly discussed.

### ***I. Celebration of life: Anga Kupumi and the agricultural economy***

The festival of Tuluni is not only for the elder members of the family and village but everyone old or young look forward to the festival. Tuluni is a special time for young baby sitters called *anga kupumi* (*anga* = baby, *kupumi* = person who carry, literally means a person who carries the baby or baby sitter).

They are honoured and paid tributes during Tuluni for taking care of the young ones throughout the agriculture season. During this time, a chicken is tied with a rope on its leg and is presented to the young *anga kupumi* as a pet or toy. Another practice is called '*ashi leqhi shoküba shikeu pesüno tsülüküba ipino anga kupumi saye shitsu cheni.*' Here, the meat piece sliced into two with one edge called *tsülüküba* (more like Y stick) is given to the baby sitter during Tuluni (Zhimomi, 1985: 54; Sema, 1985:19). This special meat piece is taken out, to thank them, recognise their contributions and keep them happy. Here we can see how the community recognise the significant contribution of *Anga kupumi* in the larger economy of the community for taking care of the young ones- the new life and enabling the adult members to work the field.

## **II. Betrothal and Masculinity: Announcement and Representation**

Tuluni is also a time to make known one's intention of marriage and forge the marriage alliance among different villages, clans, and groups. During this season, young people who were courting invite each other for a festival meal and gift each other with a basket of rice, meat, and rice beer known as *aghulhukho* (Zhimomi, 1985:54). The food gifts they received from the to be in-laws are brought and distributed among families and relatives, friends, and *aloji* members as a sign of the formal announcement of the engagement. After the exchange of *aghulhukho*, it becomes obligatory and difficult to break the words of commitment given to each other.

It may be pointed out that marriage alliances were also in sync with agriculture cycles and Tuluni festival. During Tuluni festival, couples contemplating marriage made public their intention and after the harvest, marriage takes place. Till today, the marriage season for the Sumi is from January to March and October to December, which in agricultural cycle is before sowing and after harvest. According to Sumi custom, between sowing and harvesting, marriage does not take place. It is believed that if marriage takes place after sowing in the field, the millet and paddy do not yield much seeds and other vegetables do not give much produce/harvest.

According to the custom in practice, during Tuluni it is the boy who first invites the girl for the feast in his house, and the girl and her family reciprocated by inviting the boy and his friends for the feast at her house. During this feast, the man, while going to the in-law's place for feasting, takes his friends who are smart and strong, witty, articulate with good oratory skills and also in singing and dancing, etc. In the early past when invited to the girl's place, the manliness of the intended groom-to-be was tested by serving food in a big wooden plate called *asukhu* (wooden plate) with a big portion of pork fats with rice and other items. It is said that if they managed to eat everything that was served in their *asukhu*, they were considered to be smart, and are praised and appreciated for their true manship or masculinity (Connell, 2005). However, if he could not finish the food served, he was ridiculed, laughed at, and taunted

with people exclaiming that he cannot even finish the food on the plate, how will he set up and care for his family, or go out and compete with other people in the real world. If in case the marriage arrangement was between different villages, the groom-to-be was tested through different traditional games. It is thus said that if a person wants to take a wife from different village, he has to be smart, good physique, with a big-heart, with oratory skills exhibiting an 'able' characteristic quality of 'masculinities'.

Masculinity among illegible men is measured through these practices of eating, playing games, and working in the field and one of them is also the ability to eat as much pork fats as possible. Different societies have different ways of performing masculinities which is also seen among the Sumi, in their effort to get a suitable partner for marriage. Here, we see different/multiple masculinities at work as theorised by R W Connell (2005); the 'hegemonic and subordinate masculinities.' In order to prove his masculinity, he has to pass the test of eating food prepared by his to-be in-laws which will place him and his masculinity as 'superior or hegemonic' while failure to the test will place his masculinity below other men as 'subordinated masculinity.' Culture and practices therefore demarcate and inform different kinds of masculinities where hegemonic masculinity is clearly distinguished from other masculinities especially the subordinated masculinity. To quote:

'Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832).

This is also seen in the enactment or performance by the groom to be, to the feast prepared by the girl's parents in their preparation to either accept or reject him as their son in law. The practice of the betrothed couple inviting each other for the meal during Tuluni where the masculinity of man is centred continues till today in one form or the other. The unequal power relations between men and women are also clearly displayed through the performance of masculinity where only by 'proving' his masculinity to his in-laws, he is able to exhibit and display the 'qualities' of man to be the 'provider' and 'protector' for his wife and children.

### ***III. Aloji: Centrality in village and community life***

Another important characteristic is that despite the social stratifications prevalent in the Sumi society, the labour of every member was equally important where both the chiefs and his family, and the commoner go and work together in the fields. In fact, a person's capabilities and worth were recognised through his or her skills of working in the fields. Thus, labour or

work was central to the community in the traditional set-up where the worldview of the people was reflected through the dynamics of work and agriculture. *Aloji* and agriculture work was in a sense the meeting point that brought different members of the village together - assembling the chiefs and the commoner to the same platform. This might have helped in the smooth workings of the village structure and administration, despite having a hereditary chieftainship among the Sumi, where there is stratification among different members of the society in a social ladder. Again, *aloji* plays a very important role in the events of celebration of festivals, marriage, or in times of mourning and loss such as sickness and death, etc., thereby give meanings to the inter-relationships.

It may be noted that the sharing of food and meat is very central to the festival especially the delicacy of pork, beef or *Mithun* (*Bos Frontalis*), fish, chicken, etc., are very close to people's heart, culture, and identity and hence central part in the celebration, rituals and beliefs associated with good/bounty harvest. In anticipation of Tuluni celebration, different *aloji* begin the preparation of gathering resources by working an extra day in other villagers' fields. With the extra money earned, they buy either a pig or a cow or both, to be slaughtered for Tuluni feast. When the animals are killed for the Tuluni celebration, the damsels in the *aloji* are given a special share of meat which is specifically taken out. Even today, during Tuluni, in villages, different *ajoli* groups celebrate together. In towns, this is the festival where every villager in the town comes together and celebrates.

#### ***IV. Death rituals and the separation of the dead from the living***

People's life and world views are centred around agriculture and its related activities. As a result, if a person dies in the family before Tuluni, the family members would mourn more, saying that that s/he left without tasting the new crops that they sowed in that particular agriculture cycle. However, in case a person dies after Tuluni festival, it is said that even if s/he is no more but it was his/her time and they left after testing the fresh agriculture crop. It, therefore, gives some sort of closure to the family members about their loss. Tuluni is also the time of the agriculture cycle where the dead soul of the *aloji* members departs from the group (Zhimomi, 1985:54). In case the member of the *aloji* dies during the beginning of the year, the *aloji* members continue to serve his/her share of food and drinks first before the other member of the *aloji* eats till Tuluni. It is only after Tuluni festival, it is considered that s/he is no longer a member of the *aloji*. It has a symbolic role of 'separating' the dead from the living where the last rituals of sharing their food and meat portion are done during the Tuluni feast. It is the time when the relationship between the dead and living members are severed in a particular agriculture cycle. This ritual marks the end of the mourning period for the *aloji* members and allows them to move forward with a sense of peace for being able to fulfil

all the rites and rituals associated with the dead member of their *aloji*.

### **Conclusion**

During the festival of Tuluni, people prepare the best feast, put on their finery to celebrate life, culture, and traditions thereby give meanings to their existence. Even today, through the magnificent and colourful varieties of fresh agricultural produce, rice, and meat, and people dressed in their fine costumes and ornaments display Sumi people's culture and traditions connecting their past with the present during the festival of Tuluni every year. Through this festival, peoples' valour of 'glories past' is recreated and choreographed which are a visual feast to the eye and attracted different kinds of attention from visitors, travellers, tourists, and also scholars. In this sense, the participation and performance in the festival can therefore be seen as 'producing social meanings' (Frost, 2016: 573) to the people, their culture and tradition.

This can also be seen through the different relationships initiated and celebrated during Tuluni, such as the meal for peace-making, the announcement of marriage alliance, the performance of masculinity and different gender roles, the celebration of the baby sitter, or the bidding of the farewell to the departed soul among others. It is also a representation of the existential reality of people's experiential aspect of the festival through their involvement in different rituals such as the rites of purifications, rites of conspicuous display and consumption, ritual dramas, and rites of exchange (Falassi, 1987: 4-5). In this sense, the festivals allow modern subjects to 'connect to and experience the otherwise distanced mythical condition of the "natural state"' (Picard, 2016: 612) associated with their beliefs till today. Another defining characteristic of the festive is its ability to 'allow people to mediate different forms of life crises' (Picard, 2016: 600) which is seen in the form of sealing friendship through the exchange of meat piece, the refusal of which is taboo among the people, or the serving of the last meal for the departed soul of the *aloji* members during Tuluni to make a closure of the ties between the living and the death. The sense of belonging created through the institution of *aloji*, is an important traditional institution which brings people together to learn and depend on each other, as the members meet every working day of the week, work and spend time together thereby creating a sense of belonging and accountability.

We see that festivals on the one hand, work in creating political reproduction of the social and ritual aspects, and on the other end provides spaces for cultural creativity, festive circulation, change, and continuity of community identity, culture, and tradition. According to Fallasi, in social sciences, the meaning of the festival is taken from common everyday usage and language covering many different events in life such as 'sacred and profane, private and public, sanctioning tradition and introducing innovation, proposing

nostalgic revivals' (1987: 1). In this sense festival, becomes a site for the survival of the most 'archaic' folk customs, as part of people's identity and also reinforced the traditional gender roles which might be detrimental to women and others at the margin, at the same time, it also celebrates different relationships, through art and performance. Festivals indicate,

a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview (Falassi, 1987: 2).

Thus, the symbolic meanings and the social function of the festivals relate closely to many of the values and beliefs of the community and their worldviews. The Tuluni festival of the Sumi as we have seen is a celebration of people's identity, their past, and history in the present, where the past is celebrated through different symbolisms and ritual dramas which are played out by/in different *aloji* in the village. It is also closely related with the everyday of the people and the social institution such as *aloji* is central to people's wellbeing and sustainability in the past which also continues even today in the villages. At present, Tuluni brings people of the community/village together despite being located in different colonies or towns or across the region, state, and country. Therefore, Tuluni festivals can be seen as an 'altered social forms' (Frost, 2016: 572) which brings and binds the Sumi people together in the changing times, space and place.

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### ***Notes***

- 1 The person who initiates and performs all the rites and rituals related to agricultural activities.
- 2 *Ayilo*, is a wild medicinal plant used by the Sumi people both for its medicinal values as well as for ritualist use. It has a symbolic meaning that when *Ayilo* plant is seen hanging outside the door of the house, the occupants are going through *chine/genna* and that it is taboo to visit. This message if given the visitor who can be human or spirit. The Botanical name of *Ayilo* is *Elsholtzia blanda* and it belongs to the family of Lamiaceae (mint family). It is commonly found in the Himalayas, from Nepal to Bhutan, Bengal, North East India, South West China, Burma, Indo-China,

- Malaysia, at an altitudes of 800-2500 m. For more detail see: <https://www.flowersofindia.net/catalog/slides/Pleasant%20Himalayan%20Mint.html>
- 3 Agriculture is the lifeline of the people in the village where labour is central to work the agriculture field. In a village, every age group in every *Asah/khel* have field company/ working group who work together and takes turns working each other's field and this working groups are called *Aloji*. It comprises of both the boys and girls and the member can vary from ten to twenty and they take turn working in each other's field.
  - 4 Every village has an official priest called *Awowu*, who performs and initiates all the rituals in the village, and his help or substitute is called *mishilita*. The *awowu* is selected by the *Kukami*, *chhochhomi* and the elders of the village. A person with knowledge of the entire agricultural and domestic chine was chosen for this responsibility and he also performed different kinds of chine according to the needs and circumstances.
  - 5 Based on the interview conducted during the fieldwork in Satakha, Nagaland between 2007 to 2016.
  - 6 Performing rituals around the beliefs and practices of the people which are associated with prosperity and wellbeing.
  - 7 The Chief of the village is known as *Akükau*. *Kukami* is Chiefs. *Aküka sa* literally is translated as chiefs share or portion.
  - 8 *Latsapa* is an agricultural spirit which is invoked during Tuluni for bountiful harvest of agriculture produce such as millet, paddy, corn etc.

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