

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In the past, the Sumis were involved in head hunting in different villages and from amongst the different tribes. There were no organisations beyond their village borders. The identification of the Sumi tribe to outside world came about as a result of the socio-economic and political changes which accrued after their contact with the British and the concomitant influences of Christianity, western education and market economy among others.

The Sumi Nagas is one of the major tribes in Nagaland. Geographically, it is located at the heart of Nagaland, but administratively it is on the periphery of the State on account of the socio-political factors and the subsequent development of the tribal consciousness vis-à-vis the change in the political scenario which led to a societal evolution. It is characterised by their identification to their tribe or community to which they belong. The emergence of a new class or rulers among the Sumi society based on their political system as well as the transformation of Sumi community encountering modernisation. Therefore, to understand the present Sumi society, it is imperative to study the traditional Sumi community.

The history of the Nagas is shrouded in obscurity so also the history of the Sumi. Ethnologically, the Sumi Nagas are of the Mongoloid stock of the Tibeto-Burman group. The various tribes of the Nagas have accepted Makhel village as the original place from where they dispersed to the different parts of the present Nagaland.

It is believed that the Sumis came out from the bowels of the earth and lived among the thatch grasses. That is why they are called Sumi. *Su* means hard grass and *mi* means people, and thus the Sumis are called hard people. The Sumis frequently migrated to other places and established new villages because of their instinct for adventure and the inherent nature of dispersal. The Sumi villages are small in terms of population. The Sumi has got the hereditary chiefship system because they believed that only the same blood group ensures quality and capacities in a person. Thus, a person born to a chieftain family would be a better ruler.

However, any society cannot be static. It has to adopt to the changing trends brought about by modernisation. Modernity is not only creating rooms for new traditions but also the realisation of the future in terms of the past. In all societies, there is an overlapping of the new and the old traditions. This is true of the Sumi society. Thus it can be said that the Sumi society is moving towards modernisation which maintaining continuity with tradition. The institutional set-up of any society, tribal or non-tribal is of paramount importance in the conduct of the day to day affairs as well as for its credibility. *It has some permanency as well as it creates some degree*

of confidence and sustainability to the system. In the case of a tribal society especially of the Sumi, the institution of chiefship is important. It represents the force of authority and legitimacy. The emergence of chiefship is generally attributed to the collective needs of the group specially of the tribal societies. By and large chiefship has remained traditional in character in all societies and the powers and privileges relating to the office are jealously guarded. The chiefship, however, did play a unifying role in the society by providing leadership and ensuring tribal solidarity. As per traditions, the Sumis attached great sanctity to the office of chiefship.

The Sumi chiefship is hereditary. He is succeeded by his eldest son unless he was hopelessly incompetent. Therefore, it upholds the law of primogeniture in matters of succession and ruled out the possibility of others infiltrating into the power structure or threatening the fidelity of it. The Sumis' customs recognised hereditary chiefship. This system has, however, also permitted the sons of the chief to set-up new villages in the adjoining areas of their father's village subject to the availability of land and a band of loyal followers. This is motivated by two factors: one is economic and geographical and the other political.

Sometimes dissatisfaction and personality differences among the sons or brothers of the chief who wanted to usurp power led them to try to set up new villages. The strength of the Sumi chiefship lies on its economic hold through ownership and

control of land and resources. The concentration of land ownership in the chief's hand was believed to be conducive to tribal solidarity.

Besides the chief's authority, no other central or co-ordinating authority ever existed to regulate the common interest. The authority of the chief was confined to the concerned village only wherein he exercises his powers without any interference from other chiefs. The village administration was conducted by complying to the customary laws and usages. All the chiefs are of equal standing. Unlike the Konyak chief, there is no pyramidal structure like the *Ang*, Deputy *Ang* and Commoners. The Sumi chief has been autocratic in nature and function.

Another feature of the Sumi chief is that, though many are critical about his powers and functions yet no powerful force has emerged from within the group to challenge the chiefship system. The majority of the chiefs on their part, have also tended to adjust themselves to the changing scenario. The critics of the prevalent system do not see any justification in the chief's socio-economic dominance in the present democratic polity. Today, many of the scholars, political and Church leaders of the Sumi society opine that chiefship should be preserved. According to them, abolition of chiefship at this stage would amount to the loss of their identity, tradition and culture. It will create new problems and will result in the emergence of a fragmented community. The institution of Sumi chiefship has been the fountain of power and honour. Therefore, the power and influence of the chief continues to be

very important in the Sumi society. In order to strengthen their position and role, the Sumi Chiefs Association was formed in 1990 to protect their interests and also to maintain continuity. However, the general opinion that emerged was to limit his autocratic and arbitrary power and functions, primarily for safeguarding and preserving the cultural values of the society.

The traditional political institutions have served the society for quite sometime but it has been found that some of them are no more effective in serving the social and economic needs of the people specially with the introduction of modern system of government. However, one would place a special focus on the following characteristics of the society and its chiefship.

The Sumi society was a chief centred one and the paternalistic control of the chief was very obvious in the traditional context. Since there are many small Sumi villages, the number of chiefs too is many and their power is therefore territorially limited.

With the advent of the British the institution of chiefship was recognised and strengthened. The chiefs' were agents of the British governing system in order to consolidate their position.

However, under the changing socio-economic ethos and the emerging political system of democracy, there is the fear of it becoming ineffective. Over and above that, the dynamic transformation that is taking place may cast alien shadow on the system. Under the condition of equality in political and economic participation, the subservient ethos may not last forever.

In a tribal system, especially in the case of the Sumi village, the issue of governance needs special attention for the systematic delivery of justice and the distribution of resources and creation of infrastructures since these are made available only through the village organisations. The governance is basically autocratic, depending upon the chief but he sought the help and advice from his elders. The *Chochomi* and a few elders assist the Sumi chief. The chief himself chose these. They were normally wealthy and influential, kinsmen and close friends of the chief. They constitute the privileged group in the traditional Sumi society. The main reason for forming the council of elders and the *Chochomi* was to inform the chief of all that was happening in and around the village and to assist him in various administrative duties and functions of the village.

The selection of the *Chochomi* and elders is done by the chief. Usually they were influential persons from each clan and well versed in the customary laws of the Sumi. Obviously, there has been complete openness in this system and therefore, it is being respected by all and its full adherence is maintained.

It is important to mention here that the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act, 1971 enacted by the Government of Nagaland is the juxtaposition of the traditional and modern Village Council system. Structurally it appears modern since the democratic methods of election of its members and their tenure is fixed. Further, funding of the Village Council and the Development Board set up by the Government has been seen to be important. But on the other hand, most of the activities of the Village Councils are governed in the traditional pattern of functioning. For example, settlement of land disputes, theft, marriage and divorce, debt, adoption, observing of feasts, distribution of meat, all these decisions are taken on the pattern of the traditional customs and usages. It has been found that the traditional institutions are more effective than the modern method of deciding cases in the court.

In the decision making process of the Village Council, the chiefs' opinion and views take precedence over the other elected members. Some of the chiefs are still the Chairmen of the Village Council. Since the Village Council Act of Nagaland has provided that the villages inhabited by the Sumis and Konyak which are having the hereditary chiefship, will have them as Chairmen of the Village Court.

The *Chochomi* or elders have a lot of duties to perform in the life of the village. They settle all disputes, quarrels, murders or misunderstandings along with the chief who presides the meetings as Chairman. They form the highest court in the

village. The dispensation of justice to all is the primary duty and concern of the elders. They also settle boundary disputes with the neighbouring villages and tribes.

In the Sumi society too there used to be two Dormitories for the unmarried: one for boys called *Apuki* and the other for girls called *Iliki*. They were important institutions around which the village social life revolved. The functions of these dormitories were to protect the village in case of surprise attacks, to control accidental fire, hunting of any dangerous animals and rescue people from any emergencies and accidents.

The functions of the *Iliki*, i.e., girls' dormitories were to help the villagers at the time of death, sickness, the poor and also cook in the chief's house during the feasts. In spite of their social values and relevance, the institutions of *Apuki* and *Iliki* have completely disappeared today as a result of modernisation.

The British, in order to facilitate their control and develop the instruments for pacification of the Nagas, introduced the institution of *dobashis*, i.e., men with two language expertise. They acted as intermediaries between the rulers and ruled. Later, they were employed as native judges and were given police powers as well. In the process of giving more powers to the *dobashis*, the position of the chief was considerably reduced.

The chiefs in collaboration with the selected few in the Sumi villages have been responsible for governance and there has been tacit obedience by the villagers. In real terms, it is the pro-chief elements which enjoy full command over the village affairs and they have been the overall beneficiaries.

The societal change and development is essential to balance the corresponding change in the environment. Sometimes the changing scenario has offered a response to the endogenic forces, the exogenic imposition or both. A balance needs to be maintained between these two sets of influences. In case the balance is not there, then one may expect distorted outcomes in terms of new challenges.

The animistic stage of the Sumi society was controlled by the belief in some supernatural powers. There were too many gennas which hampered their economic life and they wanted to liberate themselves from the bondages of a superstitious life. Thus the easy conversion of the Nagas into Christianity was because of the vague concept that they had of God and his relationship with men. This was not clear in the animistic beliefs and also due to the absence of a deep and viable philosophy in such faiths. Moreover, the Nagas' belief in supernatural power and *Alhou*, the *Creator* of everything in the universe seems similar to that of the new religion of Christianity.

The spread of Christianity in the Sumi area was more difficult than in the case of the Ao areas. The missionaries visualised that the only way to spread Christianity in

the Sumi area was to befriend the chiefs and convert them to Christianity. They commented that the Sumis have got the hereditary chief who was autocratic and powerful. They found that if the chief was first converted only then the whole village can be easily converted. Thus with the conversion of the important leaders in the Sumi area the spread of Christianity became faster.

With the spread of Christianity, many of the traditional customary practices have been subdued though not completely forgotten. Many Sumis have abandoned their traditional way of life and dress and brought changes in their mental make-up. Though the motive of the missionaries from the beginning was to civilise and educate the Nagas yet it was only one sided. Their main target was to Christianise them and not to develop the all round personality of an individual.

As a result, the converted Christians who got educated in the mission schools thought only in terms of Christian doctrines and did not understand the other aspects of life. They did not understand the difference between religion and culture and this brought in a lot of confusions. However, with the spread of Christianity and education, a middle class has emerged that controls education, Government jobs, commerce and trade including technical and medical education. In fact, this middle class has been the agents of social change in the Sumi society. However, the absence of industrialisation and urbanisation and the rampant corruption in the higher echelons coupled with subsistence economy and poverty have prevented any progressive changes.

Many had no sense of responsibility and concern towards society. They became individualistic. In this context, the traditional society was community oriented and education has made them individualistic and selfish. The best example can be seen in the area of economic development in the State where people of different status who claimed themselves to be Christians are not dedicated and devoted to their work. It is interesting to note that so far no project undertaken by the Government has been successful in Nagaland. One of the significant aspect of Christianity and education vis-à-vis the traditional institutions, is the decline in the sanctity of the latter. Christianity and education has played down the role of the chief.

Despite all these shortcomings, Christianity has made far greater impact than the British on the Naga society. For the first time, the Naga dialect was put into writings and schools were opened to educate the people. The Christians doctrine of peace and love towards one another brought all the tribes closer. There was cessation of head hunting between the villages and between the different tribes of the Nagas. It was due to Christianity that the chiefs could not marry more than one wife. It was a prevalent traditional concept that having more wives brought in more honours and respects especially from the economic point of view.

The education imparted by the missionaries to the Nagas was utilitarian in purposes, in the sense that they wanted these literates to convert these Nagas into

Christianity. On the other hand, the British wanted these people only to assist them in their offices as clerks and recorders. Higher education was provided to the Nagas only after the Second World War. Today, there is a rethinking among the educated Nagas, both secular as well as religious, that the rich cultural heritage which has been neglected by the early Christians because of their ignorance should be revived.

As mentioned above, for the first time, the Naga dialect was put into writings in 1878. The missionaries opened schools to educate the Nagas. The then educated become the new leaders in the Sumi society. They became administrators, officers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, etc. and they played an important role in the Sumi political and social life.

Coming to parliamentary democracy, the study of election was found to be very important. The election study includes both the rulers and ruled. It also provided an opportunity to observe the spatio-political behaviour of the people and their expressions about the politicians and their activities. Elections are crucial in a democracy to determine the ultimate fate of the people and the country. This is an exercise which eventually affects the quality of the polity as well as the future of the democratic institutions. At one level, politicians are engaged in continuous struggle for electoral support, while at the other extreme end each citizen possesses a vote to give or withhold as one opted. *The elections satisfy the desire of the masses for a share in*

political power although the opportunity of participation in the political process has made them just uncrowned sovereigns.

The present study attempted to study the voting behaviour in the Sumi area of Nagaland. Most of the Sumi areas have had no tradition of election in the modern sense for appointment to political offices in the traditional society. Nor were there any tradition of political participation in decision making in the traditional Sumi community. It has been found that the introduction of election has greatly affected the chiefship. Some of them actively participate in electoral politics and depending on *their economic status they could sway the voters.*

Coming to the election held in 1998 though it was boycotted by the Naga underground on the issue of Naga sovereignty, with warnings of stern capital punishment to those who defied yet the process went on uninterrupted. The regional party which supported the Naga underground and the Naga Hoho on the issue of Naga sovereignty did not control the election. The Congress party defying the threats filed nominations in all the 60 constituencies.

The boycott call made by the NSCN (I.M.) faction failed as they could not *prevent candidates from filing their nominations. These were elected unopposed.* It was found that the Undergrounds and the NGO's did not try to mobilise public support

from the grassroots level and win the support of the village level party workers. Moreover, the success of the 1998 election was due to the fact that capital punishment was withdrawn those who filed their nominations. This emboldened the morale of the candidates who contested. Over and above that, the undergrounds were not sure and could not guarantee the Nagas whether they could bring a lasting solution to their problem. They feared that if they failed in their mission they shall be blamed and they have no answer to explain why the talk could not succeed.

Political participation in Nagaland, specially among the Sumi revolved round local issue, and factors. Images do matter but there is a definite factor of distance decay. Tribal ethos still prevailed and immediate gains matter rather than their philosophical and political ideology. Tribal norms, practices and experiences still count to prevail over political participation and actions.

It can be concluded, that the concept of the Traditional Political Institutions among the Sumi Nagas, have by and large, remained intact, though changes have also taken place especially with the advent of Christianity, education and the introduction of electoral politics. However, despite such factors, the institutions of chiefship and the village council have been a cementing force for the Sumi people. The institution of chiefship in particular has been jealously guarded since it signifies the traditional culture, though great erosions too have taken place with regards to its functions and importance.