

# Cultural Activities in Agriculture, Zunheboto District, Nagaland

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**Abstract**—Agriculture is one of the main economic activities of the people in the Zunheboto district. People living in the district have rich culture and traditional heritage. The unique culture and traditional life style is the identity of the people. Zunheboto District is a land of Sumi tribe of Nagaland State and Sumi tribe is also considered as one of the major tribe among all the Naga tribes. From the festivals they celebrate to the traditional dresses they wore are all related to agriculture and nature. With the advancement in technology, increase in knowledge and change of life style of the people, many of the traditional and cultural life styles of the people has changed. This leads to the disappearance of many important knowledge, traditions and culture of our forefathers which as a result change the relationship of man with the nature. This paper is an attempt to gather/collect the past knowledge, traditions and culture followed and practiced by the people in the district. Through this paper many of the traditions, festivals, rites and rituals performed in the agricultural fields, taboos and superstitions of the peoples were collected and translated so as to preserve and share our cultural and traditional knowledge which many of our present generations may not be aware.

**Keyword:** Traditional, Festivals, Rituals, Superstitious.

## Introduction

Agriculture is one of the main economic activities of the people and everyone depend on agricultural products for the survival. Agriculture is related to everything on the earth from the Human to the environment. The cultural and traditional life of the people also related to the agricultural activities. In early days, from the beginning of the year till the end and from the weekend to the celebration of their festivals were all related to agricultural activities. Aier (2004), said that 'the Nagas are traditionally an agricultural people. All their major religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals focused on and revolved around the agricultural calendars'. Zunheboto district situated in the heart of Nagaland is a land of Sumi people, where a vast majority of the population resides in rural areas and depends on agriculture and allied activities. The people have rich traditional and cultural heritages. The traditional knowledge like, the best time for cultivation to the prediction of the climatic conditions were all done through their observation from the nature around them. Everything from the selection of the field for the cultivation till the harvesting of the crops were all done in a systematic way by following all

the rites and rituals for the agriculture. Sewell (2008), stated that culture as a category of social life has itself been conceptualized in a number of different ways and said that culture in the sense of learned behavior is the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths and so on build up by humans and passed on from generation to generation. Longchar (1995), explain the oneness of nature and culture and stated that culture of the people must be built around the resources that sustain them and said that the land and forest provide the cultural basis of the tribal people of India. The tribal world of culture can be explained only in terms of the world of nature. We cannot understand the tribal culture adequately without understanding the world of nature as they are inseparably related. Jacobs (1990), stated that Ritual beliefs and practices permeate all of Naga social activity. This does not mean that the individual wanders around in a haze of mystical experience. Most of Naga life is eminently practical. Ritual, however offer the possibility of understanding the world and of changing it. All the traditional knowledge, culture and traditions of the people show that there was a peaceful coexistence with the nature in the past. All the traditions, rites and rituals in the past were all related to agriculture as agriculture was the only source of their livelihood. Ghosh (1992), said that 'We, Indians, are proud of our cultural heritage knowing only a part of our culture. It is necessary that we should know more of our culture to be truly feels about our heritage to give something to entire human world.' He also stated that Culture of class of people cannot be expressed without describing their festivals since their songs, music or dances are generally expressed along with festivals as expression of joy. Lalrinchhani (2015), also said that 'Many stories that passes on from generation to generation are information's about their origin, their daily activities and also the life beyond or the spiritual world'. The process of transforming the oral into written word is problematic and painful. It is also said that many things that are so clearly manifested and visible through performance may not be so in words. Meaning may get lost and most of the time the passion and emotion that are so strongly implicated by oral performances may not always be possible to be transferred into the written word.

## Objectives

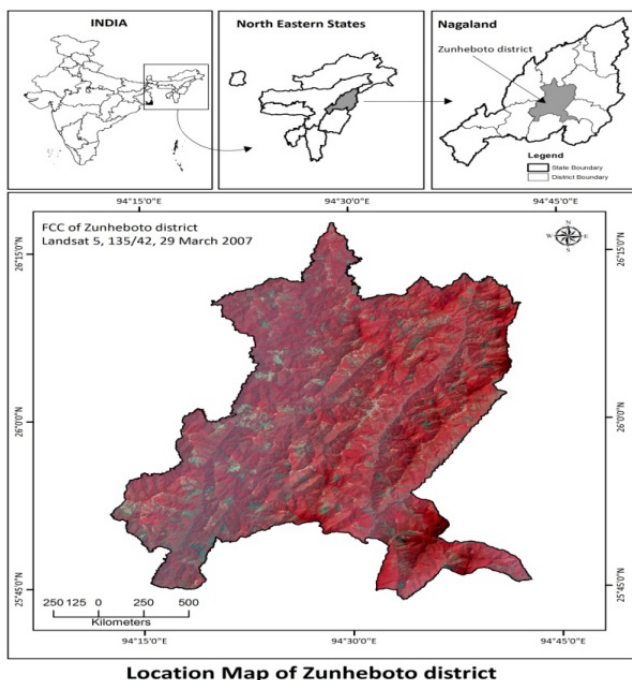
1. To find out the different culture and traditions practiced by the Sumi tribe of Zunheboto District
2. To understand the traditional knowledge related to agriculture followed by the people in the district.

## Methodology

To find out the different culture and traditions followed and practiced by the people of Sumi tribe in Zunheboto district in Nagaland, primary data have been collected through interviews, discussion with the elderly people and secondary data have been collected from different books, journals and magazines of different villages, internet and Sumi MIL text books etc.

## Study area

Zunheboto district has been called as a land of Sumi tribe. It has 13 circle and 191 villages under it with a population of 140,757 according to 2011 census. Zunheboto District is situated in the central part of the state of Nagaland between 94.52° East Longitude and 25.97° North Latitude with an area of 1595.88 sq.km (Landsat data) bounded by the districts of Mokokchung on the North, Tuensang on the east, Phek and Kohima on the South and Wokha on the West.



**Location Map of Zunheboto district**

The name Zunheboto is derived from two sets of words from sumi dialect, 'Zunhebo' and 'To'. 'Zunhebo' is the name of a flower shrub or small tree with white leaves and 'To' means the top of a hill. Thus, the district is named after a flower shrub or small tree which was found on the top of the hill during the creation of Zunheboto town. The district is divided into two broad physiographic divisions, i.e, the Eastern Zunheboto and the Western Zunheboto. The area on the

Western part is much hotter and usually called 'Ghaboh' implying a hot climate area and those on the Eastern part are called 'Ajo' relatively colder area. The Sumi tribe has rich culture with different traditions and beliefs which has been passed on from generations to generations.

## Origin of the Sumi tribe

The Sumi Naga tribe is said to have its roots of existence in Khezakeno village. It is said that the Sumi's from lazami village and the Khezakeno village have confirmed the relation between the two villages, affirming the bygone and beyond 2000. According to the two villages great forefathers, the generation of Naga began with one group of people led by person named Khepiu who had come to Kezhakeno village from Makhel. It is not denied that every Naga tribe has its version of migration. It is said that according to the forefather's version, Khepiu had a son named Supu whose son was koza and Koza had three sons namely Khrieu, leo, and Seo. Khrieu- present Angami tribe) as the eldest, Leo – present Chakhesang tribe is the second son and the youngest is Seo- present Sumi tribe. The word SUMI means the people of SUPU in which 'SU' stands for Supu and 'MI' stands for the people. The meaning of Sumi was after the name of the founder as this Supu was the son of Khepiu.

## Agricultural activities of the people in early days:

Agricultural activities are closely related to life of people in all the ways as it was the only economic activities of the people in the olden days. Agricultural activities bring closeness and oneness among the people in the villages as all the rites and rituals for agriculture were performed and observed together. In the olden days, agricultural activities were permeated with rituals from the selection of field for the cultivation to the clearing of the forest till the burning and clearing of the field, sowing of the seeds and it continues till the reaping of the crops etc. so the beginning of the year starts with the rituals for the selection of field and ends it with the harvest of the crops by celebrating different festivals relating to agriculture. Different dresses were also made and designed related to agricultural activities. The people were able to predict the weather conditions through the sign and observance from their surroundings and nature. They know the best times to sow the seeds in the field and best time for the harvest of the crops. All the rites and rituals were done as they believed in the existences of spirit which helps them in the growing of crops. All the rites and rituals start with the killing of animals as a sacrifice and offering to the deity for the blessing and protection and also thanks giving sacrifice and celebrations for the harvest of the crops.

## Belief and tradition of the people related to agriculture:

There are many beliefs and traditions in the past which are believed to have come true according to their saying and beliefs. The following were some saying, omen and belief which were followed by the people in the past relating to agriculture.

1. Luffa plant was planted near the tree in the field to protect the field from the lightning because they believed that the blessing for the growth of crops will flee away if the lightning strikes the tree in the field.
2. It was believed to be bad omen if the cloths were burned during harvesting.
3. During the harvesting time, the harvesting of crops was first done by rich people to let that year be a plentiful harvest of crops.
4. The strangers were not allowed to cross the threshing floor during the harvesting as they believed that the blessing may flee away.
5. During the sowing season, they don't make the head bald as they thought that the flood will destroy the field.
6. They believed that if there is a plentiful harvest of grapes in that year then there will be plentiful harvest of others crops like beans and soyabean.
7. Coming of Shefu bird (hornbill family bird) indicates rainfall, there is a good harvest on which side the bird fly. If the bird flies low then it is said that there will be rainfall suitable for the crop growth.
8. Harvesting time starts after the arrival of Kashopapu (cuckoo) birds.
9. The sowing of the seed of millet start after the fully bloomed of the neddlewood tree.
10. They don't go to the field if anyone died in the village as they believe that the crop will not grow well.
11. At the time of any misfortune in the family they were not allowed to eat walnut, orange, maize, beans and cucumber as the crops in the field may die soon.
12. If any good rulers in the village died then there would be a famine in the village.
13. Fruits were not eaten on the tree as they believe that the insects will affect the fruits.
14. During the harvesting season, flute was not played because the wind may destroy their field.
15. Millet is sown during the blooming of the peach tree and harvest of millet start when the peach fruit is ripped.
16. The first harvested crop and first animals from the house was given to the parents as parents were considered to be next to God and that shows the sign of respect to the parents.
17. The remnants of rice from the barn were given to the parents.

From the above, there are many points which are hard to believe and also which are not applicable in the present generation but there are many things which can be learned

from the past beliefs and traditions like planting of luffa plant in the field to protect from lightening, indication of rainfall, good harvest and time of harvest from the coming of different birds around the field, knowing the right time for sowing and harvesting of crops by looking at the blooming of trees, sharing of first harvest crops and animals to the parents etc.

#### **The yearly festivals of Sumi tribe:**

In early days in all the Sumi villages, people observe and celebrate many different festivals in a year. All the rites and rituals for the celebration of the festivals differ from place to place and village to village. But it is said that majority of festivals were common to every villages. Among all the festivals, only two festivals were still followed and celebrated in the present time. The following are the festivals which were celebrated and observed by our forefathers in early days.

1. **Asuyekiphe pine:** This festival was observed for making the purification for the starting of the new field for cultivation. During the festival, people were not allowed to do any works. After this festival, clearing of the forest for the cultivation was done.
2. **Lu-u pine:** This festival was celebrated after the clearing of the forest for cultivation. During this festival, the rites and rituals for the burning of the field were done.
3. **Visavela:** This festival was observed before the sowing of the seeds in the field to ascertain the program for the cultivation is known as vesavela. This festival was observed for the protection of the field from the bad climatic condition and insects from destroying the crops.
4. **Litsapa/Kichimi yeh:** Litsapa means a blessing ghost and kichimi yeh means old usages or practices. Some people called this festival as litsapa festival while some called it as kichimiyeh. It was celebrated twice in a year. One before the sowing of seeds and another before the starting of the harvesting. This festival was observed for the litsapa to bless the crops in the field.
5. **Asukuchu pine:** This festival was also observed twice a year. One before the sowing of seeds and another before the harvesting of crops. This festival means killing of pig and having feast on the foot path of the field before the sowing and also before the harvesting.
6. **Amutukusa or Alu chike keu pine:** This festival was observed when the crops in the field started to grow up and when the time for the cleaning of the field started. Weeds in the field are cleaned during this time.
7. **Tuluni or Anni:** One of the most important festivals for the sumi people. Tuluni was a celebration for the plentiful growth of crops in the field. Tuluni is the month of joy and making peace not only with the relatives but with others as well.
8. **Ashi aghu phikimthe:** This festival was observed in the beginning of the year just before the clearing of the new

field for cultivation. It was a festival for the purification or cleaning of their body, dao, spears and clothes etc.

9. **Saghi:** This festival was celebrated after Tuluni when all the harvested crops were brought home. It was a celebration of plentiful or abundance of crops after Tuluni festival.
10. **Ahuna kuchu:** Ahuna is celebrated after all the harvested crops and paddy was brought and kept inside the granary or barn. The new rice is pounded and tested by cooking the rice in bamboo.
11. **Ana phikimthe:** This festival was observed once after every three years. All the man in the village go to the resting place away from village and prepares a camp to sleep overnight and have a feast. And the next morning they will clean their dao, spears, wash their cloths and went home. The next day they burn a new fire in a new grill and cooked with fresh water.

All the above festivals were related to the agricultural activity. All the rites and rituals were performed and observed before and after the cultivation of crops. The blessing for the growth of crops and harvesting of the crops was one of the most important for the people. Therefore all the festivals throughout the year were all related to the agricultural activities. But with the advancement and development in the present generation and with the coming of Christianity, many of the rites and rituals of the past were not followed and people depend more on the advancement of technology and knowledge for the better cultivation of crops without performing the rites and rituals of the past. But as a Christian, the prayer before the sowing of crops in the field is done in the church for the blessing Known as Ghixu kighini tsala (Sowing prayer day) in the month of March, Ghile kighini tsala (Prayer day for harvest) invoking God's help to start the harvest were done in the month of August and thanksgiving prayer and offering to God is done after the harvesting of crops.

#### **Two main Festivals which are still followed by the people:**

Among all the festivals of Sumi tribe, only two festivals were observed and celebrated in the present generation but all the rites and rituals followed in the past were not followed in the present generations. At present, these festivals were celebrated in a simple way to remember and passed on the culture and traditions of our forefathers. Festivals are important for all the tribal people and each tribe celebrate different festivals in different time and seasons. Sumi tribe in Nagaland celebrate two festivals in July and November, Tuluni and Ahuna. Tuluni is celebrated before the harvest season and Ahuna is celebrated after the harvest season.

#### **1. Tuluni Festival:**

Tuluni or anih is one of the most important festivals for the Sumi tribe. In early days during our forefather time, Tuluni festival was celebrated by the Sumi people in different time

according to the villages as there were differences in the western dwellers and eastern dwellers. But in 1966 the Sumi tribal council decided to celebrate this festival on the same day and declared 8 July as restricted holiday in Nagaland state. Tuluni festival is celebrated in the month of July or anih qhi. In early days it was believed that the paddy and other crops in the fields do not grow well if this festival was not celebrated. It is celebrated for one week, the fourth day being the most important where prayers and offerings to the deity for the fruitfulness who grow and protect the crops takes place. Tuluni is also a festival for a peace making, forgiveness and day for happiness. Following are the seven days celebration of Tuluni Festival:

- I. **Asuzani (monday):** The word 'Asu' refer to millet. Millet is the first among all the crops to be sown in the field so it is observed on the first day. On this day, the first harvested millet is cooked and tasted as millet is the first harvested crops among all the planted crops.
- II. **Aghizani (Tuesday):** Aghi means paddy. Paddy is the second crop to be sown in the field and it is one of the most important crop among all the crops. So Aghizani is observed in the second day. On this day, a kind of rice beer called as aqqhicho was prepared and drinks. After that, all the tools used in agricultural activities were kept in the safe place away from rain and water so that the paddy and millet will grow well.
- III. **Ashighini (Wednesday):** Ashi mean meat. It is the day where animals were killed for the Tuluni feast. This day was considered as one of the important day among all the days. It is said that if the meat was not cooked on this day then the crops does not grow well. So for the crops to grow well, they have to cook meat by any means.
- IV. **Annighini (Thursday):** This day is also very important day of Tuluni festival. This is the day to share happiness and joy to other. It is a day to make peace with others. On this day they don't do any work as they believe that cyclone might come and destroy their field, they don't touch the plants thinking that the crops may clings among themselves and also the people don't comb their hair thinking that the flood may destroy their field.
- V. **Mucholani (friday):** This is the day when all the men clean the footpath of the field, surrounding of the village and paddy barn or granary. All these clearing and cleaning of the barn and footpaths was done so that there won't be any problems during the harvesting season. First they eat food and clean the barn because if they clean the barn with the empty stomach then the barn spirit may bring quickly exhaustion of the foodstuff. It is also a day of making peace and forgiving each other.

**VI. Tupulani (Saturday):** Tupu means young. On this day all competitions for games and sports were played. Tuluni is a festival for making peace and making compromise among people if they have any conflicts before the festival. During the Tuluni festival, people make peace among themselves as during this festival God make peace with people. It is the day for giving meal to other for making peace by inviting poor, orphan, baby sitter etc. In some village, women folk went to field for collecting vegetables. Some called this day as Laghe pine as the footpaths connecting their village to other villages, agricultural field and resting place were clean on this day.

**VII. Tugha khani/Tugha lakha (Sunday):** The celebration of Tuluni festival end on the 6<sup>th</sup> day and the 7<sup>th</sup> day was prohibited for going on a journey or to do any work. This day was considered as the wicked day and it was the scared day for everyone. In early days, Tughakhani day was spend carefully and the Tuluni festival was concluded on this day.

## 2. Ahuna Festival:

**Ahuna** is a traditional post harvest festival celebrated in November (Ahuna qhi). 'Ahu' is the act of taking out the first part of paddy or rice and 'Na' is rice. Ahuna is celebrated after all the harvested crops and paddy was brought and kept inside the granary or barn. The new rice is pounded and tested by cooking the rice in bamboo. To take out the first rice from the barn, it was done very carefully by saying 'Chumpa shompamo no chupuh shopuh peniu' meaning "Let there be no early exhaustion of foodstuff but let there be abundant in consumption of this food" and they take out the rice. The next morning the rice will be cooked in the bamboo and in the evening they will take that empty bamboo to the field and will toss for the next year cultivation. They slice that burn bamboo into two pieces and it will be thrown into the air and say 'In this time of cultivation, let there be no sickness, death and let there be no misfortunes in the family'. If both the bamboo falls on the same position, it was considered as a sign of ill omen. If both the bamboo pieces look downwards then it is considered as a sign of death or short life, and if both the pieces look upward then it's the sign of quick exhaustion of foodstuffs. But if one piece of bamboo look upward and the other one face downward then it shows the sign of good fortune for the next cultivation. After that they throw away both the bamboo piece, one on the wet area side and other on the dry area side of the area.

### Traditional dress of Sumi tribe and their meanings:

The dresses and ornaments is the identity of the tribal people and it reflects the culture of the people. Differentiate among different tribes can be done through the dresses and ornaments they wear. There are many varieties of traditional dress and ornaments for both the men and women of Sumi tribe and each and every dress and ornaments has significant meaning

and origin. The following are some of the important dress which has been made for the specific reason for it to wear in the olden days.

### Women dress:

1. **Achita mini-** This is the traditional wrap around (mekhala) for the women. This wrap around is named after the bird Achita (Bugun Liocichla) which is a small beautiful bird and it is compared to women while singing the folk song. It is said that achita bird is compared to the women as this bird is the most caring, loving and helpful bird among all the other birds like the women who are very caring, loving and helpful. This wrap around was made so that people will be able to understand and know the value of their life when they see the wild life.
2. **Ahuna Mini-** This wrap around was named after anuha festival. In early days, ahuna festival was done without women so the black colour in the wrap around symbolized the upset of the women and white colour symbolized the coming of winter.
3. **Awuti mini-** Awuti means chicken. This wrap around was made for the orphan women who were brave enough to live comparing the life of chicken who were able to survive without mother.
4. **Anishe Mini-** It is said that in early days, one woman named Nisheli who turn into Anishe flower and grasshopper name Anishe come out from that flower. So this wrap around was made for preserving the old folk stories for the generations.
5. **Aghukiya mini-** In early days during the time of head hunting, one woman killed the enemy with her weaving stick during the absence of the men folk in the village. The enemy falls down by sliding from the drying jobstear outside the house. So this wrap around was made in the name of that women in which aghu means enemy and kiya means killing.
6. **Ghile mini-** This wrap around was made for the harvesting season. In early days, harvesting of crops was done wearing all the traditional dress, so this ghile mini was made to remember the harvesting season.
7. **Mini Tughu mini-** This is first wrap around for the Sumi women and it is called Mini tughu mini which means the first worn wrap around. This is the first dress they made after they learn how to make wool with cotton. It is indigo blue in colour.
8. **Tsughu mini-** In early days, people with poor status were not able to wear this wrap around but they will be able to wear it after their granary is full and in abundance. This wrap around is worn by all the women in the present generation especially during the festivals and cultural programs.

9. **Tixi mini-** Tixi means autumn season. This is the season where all the crops were grown fully and in abundance. This wrap around is green in colour with yellow and red in it where the green colour symbolized the meaning of plentiful crops in the field and red and yellow symbolized the coming of dry season. Design like the paddy in the wrap around symbolized the fully ripe of the paddy and how paddy seeds were preserved, comparing how the beautiful life of the young people aged with times.
10. **Tsulichepu Mini-** This wrap around is named after the bird Tsulichepu (Minivet bird). It is a beautiful bird. This wrap around was originally pink and red in colour but now it has been modified by the present generation.

Apart from the above mention, there are many dresses for women, they are Aye mini, Pulosu mini, Lahupichikha/Lahumini, Litashi mini, Lotosu mini, Abomini, Chopilimi mini, Kati mini, Amini kimiji, Kiyepu mini, Lazami mini, Aphuyelimi mini, Hekutha qhumi, Totitsukuda phi, Miyi phi.

#### Men's shawls

1. **Asudaphi-** This is the most important shawl among the men's shawl. This shawl was decorated with the achipisho which is also called as asu. The design of stars in the shawl symbolizes the life of the people living a good life like the stars in the sky. In olden days it was worn only by the people who have done all the rites and rituals, able to feed the people by killing of animals and it also symbolized protection.
2. **Abophih-** This is also an important shawl for the men and it can be worn only by the men who have done all the rites and rituals by killing animals. But it is worn by every man in the present generation.
3. **Avikiyiphih-** Avi means bison/mithun and kiyi mean killing. So avikiyiphi is the shawl of the people who have killed bison/mithun. In olden days, this shawl was worn only by the people who have killed the mithun but now it is worn by all men.

Apart from the above there are Aphikuh, Lusuphih, Tubo phi, Aqhumi/ Kichimi qhumi, Abophi, Avi mhoje phi.

#### Ornaments of Sumi Tribe:

**Men:** Azuta (dao), Angu (Spear), Kinissupha (Cotton earring), Avabo (Coronet), Mllusaxxe (Drongo tail), Amlakuxa (Sash), Asapu (Casket), Aminikuda (Cories apron), Lapucho (Small apron), Ausukukha (Gauntlet), Akuhaghi (Ivory armlet), Asukhih (Dao holder), Asukixi (Hold strap), Azuto (Shield), Ashiyiko Zuto (Skin shield), Apukhu kukha (legging), Ashighila/Ashitsughu, Aminihu ( Bore tusk).

**Women:** Akutsu kukha and Tsukoli (Coronet and earring), Akusa and assapu (armlet and bracelet), Akichelochi (bead girdle), Achiku and Achipu (precious beads single necklace),

Achi xathi, (bead necklace), Achixathi/Achiphho (bead necklace), Achigho and Achipa (precious bead necklace).

It is necessary to discuss and learn about the dresses and ornaments of different tribe as it reflects the culture and traditions of a particular tribe and it is through the dresses and ornaments, people from different tribe are identify. But with the change of time and because of the modern life style of the present generation, traditional dresses are worn by all the people without restrictions and most of these dresses are worn in a modern way of dressing during special occasion and the present generation does not value the importance of the old traditions and culture.

#### Conclusion

Culture is the identity of the tribal people and the people of Sumi tribe has rich culture and traditions which has been passed on from generation to generations but with the advancement of science and technology and modern life style, the value of our culture and tradition which has been passed on from our forefathers are becoming less important and in an urge of extinction. All the culture and traditions followed and practiced by the people in the past were all related to agriculture in one way or the other way. The beliefs and sayings, the taboos and superstitions were all related to agriculture and the knowledge and beliefs which they believed and followed shows that there was a good coexistence between the people and the nature. Life in the past is all influenced by nature and people depend on the nature for their survival. The dresses and ornaments they wear and tools they use were all influences and extracted from their surrounding and all these were done without harming or destruction to the nature. But the present generations do not take their culture seriously and mixed it with the modern world which shows the sign of erosion of their rich culture. And also with the coming of Christianity, all the beliefs and taboos are not followed and are not believed in the present generation. Through this study, it is observed that the relationship between the nature and man has changed and peaceful coexistence between them has disappeared as they have lost the value to preserve the nature for their survival because they have started depending more on the modern technologies. Many of the knowledge, culture and traditions is not followed by the people at the present as most of the traditional beliefs and activities are not applicable in the present generation but there are many knowledge and traditions which will be useful for present and future generations and there are many things which can be learned from it for the peaceful coexistence with the nature. If this knowledge, stories and art of making dresses and tools are not learn, listened, recorded and preserved, then all these culture, traditions, stories and useful knowledge of the past will die along with them which will be a great loss for the present and future generations. Thanmawia (2015) quoted "when an elder dies, a library burns". Therefore, it is an important responsibility for the present generations to collect and learn all the information, culture, traditions and useful knowledge of the past from the elders and grandparents before these

important knowledge and information dies with them. If the culture and traditions of the past are not preserved then the identity of a particular tribe will be lost and the future generation will be left with mixed culture without knowing their original identity or their origin.

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