

“Customary Laws and Traditional System of Administration With Special Reference to Sumi Tribal Chief”

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ABSTRACT: When one looks into the tribal society, it becomes obvious that the earliest laws which govern the life of those societies are through customs passed on from generation to generation by way of oral tradition. Customary laws are properly developed unwritten laws outside the framework of our written constitution which controls the conduct of tribal people. The presence of customary laws can thus be seen in many societies till now which holds strong historical precedents. Status is recognized by social position within a social group and it is custom which indirectly determine the status, position, and privileges of a person socially. So in common parlance status simply refers to any socially defined position. The status and position of a person in any society has to be viewed in its proper perspective that is in conjunction with the status of the other members of the society. This paper on the “Customary Laws and Traditional Administration with Special Reference to the Sumi Tribal Chief” is an effort to assess the Customary Laws of the tribal societies in general and the role of Sumi Chiefs in the administration of the village. This is because the sense of administration has been existing since time immemorial in the Naga society with certain unwritten codes and ethics. However, different Naga tribes had different internal administration system and like any other tribe the Sumi Nagas devised their own codes and ethics with the Chief and his councillors to execute such laws which are strictly adhered to by every member. The paper also aims to look into the various factors leading to the changes taking place in the system of administration.

KEY WORDS: Customary Laws, Status, Administration, Chieftainship, Councillors.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nagaland is the sixteenth state of the Indian Union located in the North-East Region of India. All the people living in Nagaland have been divided into various tribes, which goes as far as seventeen recognised tribes as per the sources confirmed. According to 2011 census of India, Sumi Nagas numbered around 3,00,000 in population. The Sumi Nagas have their own distinct culture, customs and traditional political institutions which may be easily distinguished from the other Naga tribes of Nagaland. The entire history of the Sumis is a chapter mostly unwritten, but said to be of mere hearsays, beliefs, monuments, and mostly passed over information from generation to generation by the elders.

Sumi is one among the major tribes in Nagaland. The Sumis are commonly known to the outsiders as the Semas, a term which was popularized by J.H.Hutton, a British colonial administrator in the Naga Hills who wrote the land mark monograph “The Sema Nagas” in 1921. However, most of the Sumi scholars unanimously attest that the word ‘Sumi’ has been derived from two terms ‘Tuku- mi’ and ‘Swu- mi’ which is the two great phrateries of the Sumi tribe. For a very long time the term Sema was used until the 24th of September 1992, when at the initiative of the Sumi Hoho (the apex tribal body of the Sumis), the Home Department Government of Nagaland issued an administrative order that henceforth the term ‘Sumi’ would replace the term ‘Sema’. However, some still continue to use the term ‘Sema’ and this usage is not uncommon even today. Earlier the

Sumi Nagas occupied an area under Zunheboto district spread out on clusters of hillocks but through migration, today, Sumis are found in different parts of Nagaland i.e., Eastern area, Western area, Northern area and also under Upper Assam. This is because Sumi Nagas as compared to other Naga tribes are more prone in migrating.

Customary Laws

Law is one aspect of the system of social control which is an implicit part of every culture. The primacy of the customary laws and practices is to maintain social order while prescribing rules of conduct for each individual, age and sex-wise. Customary laws are properly developed unwritten laws outside the framework of our written constitution which controls the conduct of tribal people. The presence of customary laws can thus be seen in many societies till now which holds strong historical precedents.

Customs and customary laws are not synonymous. There may be various customs without any legal authority but whereas the customary laws have the sanctions of the bulk of the society and if not obeyed, such violator is to be punished. A society cannot get on with its day to day affairs if it permits individuals to be law unto themselves, i.e., to take law into their own hands when they feel aggrieved or have a conflict with another person or group, and so that existence of law in a society can allow the individuals to deal with the new conditions of life experienced in societies changing to other ways of life. Evans- Pritchard states that “Within a tribe there is law; there is machinery for settling dispute and a moral obligation to conclude them sooner or later.” Thus, we see that customary law plays an important role in tribal society, where the society, itself acts as the enforcing agent. The state has a definite role to play in formulating the new laws effecting customs. The unwritten laws of customary usages are ordinarily obeyed far more spontaneously.

Social Structure of the Sumis

Social structure is referred to patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent and determinant of the actions of the individuals. The notion of social structure emphasises on the idea that society is grouped into structurally related groups or set of roles with different functions, meanings and purposes. The concept of social stratification, which refers to the idea that society is separated into different strata or levels, guided if only partially by the underlying structures in the social system is a type of social structure. Social structure is also seen to influence important social systems including the economic system, legal system, political system, cultural systems and others.

Social stratification as a type of social structure is a concept involving the classification of people into groups based on shared socio-economic conditions. When differences lead to greater status, power or privilege for some groups over the other it is called Social Stratification. It is a system by which society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy evaluated on their achieved and ascribed characteristics. It is also a trait of society that is carried over from generation to generation and involves not just inequality but beliefs as well. People are ranked in positions of social superiority and inferiority with respect to one another. In all societies such differences serve as a basis for differences in roles, positions, and prestige and Sumis are no exception to this as is observed in their system of administration through Chieftainship.

Among the Sumi Nagas, social stratification under a single leader or Chief emerged with little stratification but great differentiation. This can be substantiated through the relationship found between the Chiefs and his dependents which is a kind of debt slavery or slavery by descent in all the Sumi villages. Hutton (2007), wrote that, the basis of the Sema society is the village, which is under the control of a chief. He goes on to say that the ‘real pivot of Sema society is the chief’. Because, a village may comprise of many clans but the predominant position of the chief and his agnates, leads to the classification of the people in the village.

Retaining Chieftainship

Status is recognized by social position within a social group and it is custom which indirectly determine the status, position, and privileges of a person socially. So in common parlance status simply refers to any socially defined position. The status and position of a person in any society has to be viewed in its proper perspective that is in conjunction with the status of the other members of the society.

Chieftainship is a very powerful secular Institution based on kinship structure for the purpose of village administration which is the highest and independent political unit. The Sumi Nagas are patriarchal and by tradition have the autocratic system where the Chieftain enjoys hereditary status, an aspect of the Sumi tribe which differentiate them from other Naga tribes. Chieftainship is also a form of self- governing institution with political and economic powers. The Chief is usually called ‘AtoKukau’ which means the ‘main ruler’. He maintains his position not just through his hereditary rights but also through his personal qualities as a person of great social standing and wealth. One source of this condition is to be found in the exclusion from the Chieftainship of a man whose hereditary claim is incontestable but whose personal unfitness disqualifies him.

The process of succession to Chieftainship is hereditary among the Sumis which passes from father to the eldest son however, the succession by paternal uncles is possible if the Chief dies without a heir. Hutton also

rightly observes that, "The generally accepted rule, however, is that the eldest of the original chiefs sons who remains in the village ultimately succeeded his father and is again ultimately succeeded by his own son, the interludes of brothers and uncles being temporary, and not affecting the general succession" In case the Sumi chief's son is not hopelessly incompetent he can still hold the post of the chief and if the heir is a minor then the mother of the heir can also act as a regent in the place of the chief. The Chief is not elected but the person who establishes the village automatically becomes the Chieftain and his descendants continue to rule over the village. This indicates that the Chief of a new village need not necessarily be from the Chief's family but any man capable of establishing a village could be the Chief.

Since the founder of a village ultimately becomes the Chief, when an elder brother settles in the village established by a younger brother, the elder brother becomes the subject to his own younger brother. Then the eldest son of the Chief succeeds his father if he has not already established his own village, but more often, it is the dead Chief's younger brother who succeeds and whose secondary place is taken by the dead Chief's son if the dead Chief was himself not the successor of an elder brother. On the death of the new Chief, his nephew, that is, the son of his elder brother succeeds and the secondary place vacated by custom goes to the latter's brother. However, it is generally accepted that the eldest of the original Chief's son who remain in the village ultimately succeeds his father and is passed on to his own son.

Therefore traditionally only the sons of the Chief or the Chief's brothers and paternal uncles could inherit the status of a chief. Today the contrasting fact is that, this typical hereditary Chieftainship is found only in rural areas and not in the urban towns and cities even among the Sumis. It is also observed that even the so called 'Anulikishimis' (Mughumi' and 'Anulikishimis' are generally referred to those who have become bonded slaves through debt or by descent) of the 'Kukamis' (are referred to the Chiefs of the Sumi villages) in the original village can be 'Kukamis' with or without repaying their debts if they establish a new village. Therefore, it would be interesting to know as to whether the rise in their status as 'AtoKukami' (is referred to a Chief of a village) of new village still gains the due respect and regard from others?

The term 'manor' has been used by Hutton (2007) in 'The SemaNagas' for what is really the unit of Sumi society, the organised society, that is, with the Chief at the head of it. This 'manor', has had its origin in the system of colonization by the son of a chief accompanied by a number of his father's dependents, and also perhaps, by any 'Kupokichemi' runaways/ fugitives, thieves, or broken men generally that he can pick up.

Chief and the System of Administration in Socio-Cultural Aspects

The Sumi society has a system of administration centred on the authority of the chief or AtoKukau. The Sumis were well organised and were ruled by the chiefs. It is autocratic in the sense that the chief ruled by himself arbitrarily and his assistants were subordinate to him. Hutton confirmed this view when he wrote that "the extent to which he would consult his elders depend almost entirely on the personal character of the AtoKukau himself". Administration includes the act or process of administering or conducting the affairs of everyday aspects of life. AtoKukau as an administrator seeks to get the most appropriate and desirable solution in view of the public interest.

Thus the duties of a Chief comprises not only of personal matters but also of public functions. He has to direct the village in war. He being the land owner decides which land is to be cultivated in each successive year. In religious matters, when gennas are to be performed, it is the Chief's duty to see to it that gennas are performed according to custom and issue orders of the day in which the village performs as a whole. The Chief also decides on matters like theft, land disputes, life and death decisions, bride-price related issues etc. It is the Chief who has to bear the burden of welcoming and entertaining the village guests as well as shoulder the responsibility of the poor people in his village. The Chief decides on all these matters within the village and other neighbouring villages in consultation with his village elders called the 'Chochoomis' or Councillors (are the council of ministers chosen by the chief in a Sumi village to assist him.)

Who were also the Chief's messengers? Councilors are usually elders in a village typically selected by the Chief to assist him in the functions and execution of laws in the village. Once selected, they are meant to assist the Chief throughout their lives in the village administration. However, consulting with the elders depends on the nature and character of the Chief. This is because; certain villages have Chiefs who are despotic and tyrannical rulers taking decisions according to his whims. The AtoKukau's verdict was final and binding on all matters. In case of defiance by any individual, the punishment may be in the form of fine and in extreme cases it may result in his expulsion from the village. Whatever the kind of rule, the duties of the Chiefs in the Sumi villages in general were very arduous.

The chief's position in the village was indeed that of a benevolent ruler for all those who lived in the village as his 'Mughumis' meaning 'orphans' and 'Anulikishimis' meaning 'children like' (having different connotations but used synonymously) as they were looked upon as his own children. He was bound to help them in their adversities, counsel them in their difficulties, reward them in their achievements and punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. The villagers, in their turn, were to

obey his orders implicitly, carry out errands assigned to them individually and collectively and help the chief in all possible ways even during wars. The chief was exercising judicial powers including power of life and death but the Chief too depended on his ‘Anulikishimis’ for various purposes which indicates a kind of interdependence from both ends, a reciprocal relationship existed between them.

Thus all people living therein were subjects to the Chief, as head of the local Government, and only by moving away or migration could they escape his control. Outsiders are not allowed to settle in his territory without the Chiefs’ permission. If the Chief allows, they, the settled outsiders, became his subjects. In case they disobeyed him they were expelled. He not only regulated the distribution and use of the land but also decided the fate of his subjects on the basis of customary laws.

Village Administration of the Chief

Each Naga village pursued an independent policy and implemented its own customary laws on all walks of life for its citizens. On the one hand, administration was indigenous and independent on the other, economy was local and self- sufficient. The Naga tribes which had ‘Kukami’ like the Sumis, Chieftainship certainly constituted an important element in their polity and the village administration was carried out by the Chief assisted by his ‘Chochomis’. The village was thus under the control of the powerful ‘Kukami’ among the Sumis. As per the customary laws administrations of justice, enforcement of executive function, maintenance of social practices and customary law, including religious performances are the areas of village administration under the Chieftainship and his Council of Minister. In fact, traditional political life of the Sumis is deeply rooted to their customary laws in their society even today.

Usually it is the ‘AtoKukau’ who performs dual function of religious as well as secular head of the village. Although the actual religious practices and rites were performed by the ‘Awou’, the presence of the ‘AtoKukau’ in the proceedings was always necessary. The chief inaugurates all ceremonies and presides over all village festivals. He also gives genna signal. The decision of the chief was final in most cases. However, the chief was not to ignore the ‘Chochomis’, who assists him in taking decisions. It was the chief who would summon the ‘Chochomis’ to help him in settling disputes and educe opinion of the community on any particular point. Matters relating to the effective defence of the village were also the responsibility of the ‘AtoKukau’ and other ‘Kukamis’ who were also his councillors. This was because, pervasiveness of feuds among different villages for one or the other reason, and head- hunting practiced by the Nagas, the question of defence of the village was a matter of utmost importance.

The ‘AtoKukau’ would make arrangements for the stay of the visitors and guarantee their safety as well during their stay in the village. It was also the ‘AtoKukau’ who fixed the dates and time of the meetings in the village. He presided over all such meetings, would initiate all discussions and present the cases before the assembly. After hearing the case and arguments from parties involved in the case, the ‘AtoKukau’ with the aid of his councillors would deliver the judgment or the decision. Sumis, basically being an agricultural people, the ‘AtoKukau’ had to initiate activities relating to agriculture as well. It was his duty to fix dates for clearing the forest, sowing, transplanting and harvesting the paddy by the villagers. The ‘AtoKukau’ thus acted as a judge, administrator, and commander and also played the role of a priest with the help from his ‘Chochomis’ in his village.

It may be noted that the powers of the chief varied from tribe to tribe, and also from village to village among the Nagas, likewise, among Sumis too, the power of the ‘Kukamis’ varied from village to village. Thus in some Sumi villages the ‘Kukamis’ were quite liberal and in some villages they were tyrannical. Whatever be the case, the status and position of the Sumi village ‘Kukamis’ are indispensable overture for understanding the Sumi administrative system. The ‘Kukamis’ are the influential persons of most consequences in their respective villages.

During the colonial rule, it was the village council with or without the chief, the supreme body to settle all matters relating to the village in the Naga society. Among the tribes having Chieftainship, the chief was the head of the administration, and it was he who settled matters on the advice of their councillors. The village council covered areas of executive, administrative and judicial functions. The village council executed all decisions relating to the developmental activities and took actions to overcome all the hurdles. As far as administration was concerned, the council was responsible for the maintenance of roads, bridges and supply of essential commodities etc. In case of judicial activities, in the traditional Sumi society, ‘AtoKukau’ with ‘Chochomis’ forms the highest court of justice in the village.

The British colonization brought about certain changes in the administration of the Nagas. At the supervisory level, the responsibility of the day- to- day administration was left at the hands of the Gaon Buras who were appointed at the beginning of 1882, following a local practice and the customs of various communities. Thus, among tribe like Sumi there were village Chiefs and the Gaon Buras/ Assistant Gaon Buras to assist the colonial administration. The techniques of control and administration remained informal and the system functioned under British paramount. These techniques were believed to serve dual purpose of keeping

the Nagas free to govern themselves in their traditional ways and at the same time immensely reduced the responsibility of the government from the detailed and costly affairs of administration. The British government thus utilized two layers of native administration agencies. The Chiefs and Gaon Buras whose traditional leadership at the village level was utilized for village administration were presented red blankets symbolizing their special responsibility and relation with the administration.

The administration of justice was thus assigned to the Chiefs and Gaon Buras who maintained law and order in their respective village jurisdiction and the authority of the district officer was limited to receiving the collection of revenue from the Gaon Buras. This system left the Nagas free to run their local administration without much intervention from the British and left the Chiefs and Gaon Buras as agents of the colonial administration. Thus, while continuing to be the leaders of their people, at the same time they became an important link between the British government and the masses. This also led to the structure of the district administration in direct link with the alien rule. However the British rule did not seriously affect the basic social structure of the Nagas and thus it remained traditional in character.

The powers and functions of the Gaon Buras as representatives of colonial administration were however determined by the government and had no participation in formulating the policy regarding their own affairs. They received directions and paternalistic supervision from the district officers. The introduction of this new administrative system by the British government brought changes not only in the Naga culture but also altered the traditional legal procedures through the introduction of the Dobashis and weakened their polity as well.

The Dobashi system was first started in 1842 as a trial system and continued as the system proved to be useful for the promotion of Anglo- Naga relations. This institution served both as an instrument of pacification on the Nagas and as a native team of intermediaries between the British government and the masses, the chief means through which the British government established successful relations with the Naga tribes in general. As pointed out by Echa (2014), the word Dobashi of recent origin coined by the British colonial empire is neither found anywhere in the world or in any Dictionary except in the state of Nagaland; which is universally accepted as legal by the Government of Nagaland Officially. The services of the Dobashis were effectively used by the district officers in many other ways like strengthening the Deputy Commissioner in his administration, enabling him to have free access to the local people in perfect security and even his tours were escorted by the Dobashis who did everything for the entourage.

The Sumi communities whose social institutions are influenced overwhelmingly by tradition and customary laws have a strong faith in Chieftainship has effectively managed their administrative affairs as well as in the dispensation of justice. As a matter of fact, the institutions of Chieftainship being vested with the power and authority to resolve and settle all disputes, be it major or minor including criminal and murder related cases which occurs between different individuals or groups within the jurisdiction of the communities has been dealt with in accordance to the customary laws, thereby impacting a huge administrative relief for the authorities of public administration from involving themselves into the affairs of these communities. Thus, the administrative system of Sumi under the Chieftainship is comparatively laudable and given this fact discussed above, even in this modern age it deserves an appreciation rather than simply looking upon it as an obstacle on the anvil of land reforms in the tribal areas just for a cause of legal right or title over ownership of land for individuals without deeply considering the substantial contributions it has made to the public administration.

Today, however, though the basic framework of the village is unchanged and chieftainship continues, villagers are increasingly beginning to look upon the chiefs with mixed feelings and regard chieftainship as inconsequential and of little importance. The habit of going against the village Chief is becoming contagious and in other ways the Chief's power seems to be dwindling. These changes have come about not just with the adoption of Christianity but also due to the emergence of modern sub- divisional and district courts and adoption of the practice of election. Further, the chiefs of Sumi villages no longer spend their wealth on feasts of merit which was highly valued and appreciated. They are also not as wealthy and powerful as some individuals today.

Administration of Chief in the Process of Migration

Migration is a major demographic process that has been an integral and salient feature of human history since time immemorial. It has been an important means by which human civilization has spread out, enriching cultures, disseminating ideas and generating social, political and economic changes at the place of origin and of destination. In the event of migration taking place, there are certain significant cultural and customary elements that are changing. It is thus, deemed fitting to briefly discuss the early process of migration for a better understanding of the village administration.

It needs to be mentioned here that establishment of a new village required lots of preparations and elaborate ritual performances that only wealthy people could afford to do so. In this context, shifting and establishing of a new village was never easy and only the Chief's sons or well off persons socially and economically could afford the expenses of migration and establishing new villages. At the same time settlement

in a new village requires a lot of precautions and specific rituals are performed to bring good omen. Traditionally, the works were initiated well ahead of the day before the people finally occupy it. The appropriate site is selected following a divination trick, which is followed by clearing the jungle and levelling the ground. The most important work, however, is to magically cordon off the area so that it is protected from any kinds of evil spirit. The next turn is building a ‘Morung’ or bachelor’s dormitory. This is the most gigantic architectural making in any Sumi village, which is constructed near the village gate.

Usually the land is first surveyed by two or more people along with the person who would become the ‘AtoKukau’ in the new village. It was necessary that the ‘AtoKukau’ select some people for a specific purpose before establishing a village such as the ‘Aru-u’ (is referred to a close friend of the ‘AtoKukau’ who for some Sumi villages is the second in command) who is second in command, a good friend of the ‘AtoKukau’ and he would sometimes even give some of his share of meat given to him by the villagers as ‘Akukashi’ (this is a share of meat entitled to the Sumi chief). The ‘Aru-u’ was entitled to free labour in his field two times in a year. The ‘AtoKukau’ would select his ‘Chocho-u’ (is referred to the assistant selected by the chief to assist him in the village administration), who would help him in passing on information to the villagers for any activity that is to take place in the village. This he does by ‘Ashe kushu’ i.e., (implied for making an announcement by shouting so that the whole village hears the information). The ‘Chocho-u’ was also entitled to free labour depending on the village ‘AtoKukau’s’ decision. Then comes the ‘Awo-u’ the village head priest and a prominent figure as, without his rites and gennas could not be performed. The ‘Awo-u’ is selected from the Awomi clan among the Sumis. ‘AtsuKupu-u’ (the person who carries the dog while migrating). ‘AwoKupu-u’, is the person who carries pig for them in migration ritual. It is said that usually there were nine more people who carried pigs to be killed during the nine days genna in a new village since each day a pig was killed to be eaten. ‘Ashphu-u’ the person who would be the first to always cut/chop the pig or cow killed. ‘Azukhe-u’ the first person who fetches water from the new village well/ spring. ‘Amthau’, the first reaper during harvest is usually from among the rich, based on the belief that if he reaps first, there would be a rich harvest. ‘Lapu-u’ a mediator whose intervention is required during certain rites performed to appease the spirits. ‘AmoShou-u’ the burier i.e., he disposes the bodies of the deceased in the village and is usually a poor man. There were also ‘Ashimpi/ Aghutou-u’ who is a strong warrior. These people were selected carefully to perform all the different duties. As opposed to the hereditary system of the village Chief, the rest of the people selected to perform different duties during migration is not hereditary.

Inequality and stratification among the Sumis are linked with property which in turn has a bearing on the political and administrative system. Social stratification among the Sumis was not simply status and prestige- oriented because it is guided by economic and political factors. The traditional system of land holding is seen on the basis of ‘Kukamis’ the land owners and ‘Anulikishimis’ the dependents. This classified Sumis into two broad categories of classes, the nobility and the masses. The ‘AtoKukamis’ are assisted by ‘Chochoomis’ in their village administration and thus, traditional system of authority, leadership, and administration was vested to such families while others were deprived of such privileges. Such stratification uncommon in an egalitarian tribal setting was possible due to the concentration of both economic and administrative power in the hands of few.

Social stratification is based on Chieftainship and commoners where the Chiefs emerged as sole leaders while the rest depended on the Chiefs. The Chiefs are the supreme authority and are entitled to various privileges such as, landownership and the privilege to keep ‘Anulikishimis’ or bonded slaves, further the authority of chief is the privilege to requisition to labour of the villagers in his field all for free. It is sufficient to mention that Sumis had a practice of keeping slaves. What is interesting and crucial in this finding is that slave keeping adds to the economic advantage as he gets free labour. More than that, it was a prestige for those who had slaves. Further it was found out that slavery emerged out of the situation namely debt slavery and slavery by descent. However, what has changed in the traditional practices of Sumi culture and tradition is the fact that such slave keeping practices have been condoned with the coming of Christianity.

Chieftainship constitute an important element in the polity and administrations of Sumi villages but study reveals that the use of power by the chiefs varied thus in some villages the chief are quite liberal while in some, they are found to be tyrannical. The introduction of Dobashis that started in 1842 and the Gaon Buras (G.B.) in the village council through the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act of 1978 altered the traditional legal procedures. This has not only changed the administrative system but drastic changes are observed in the basic infrastructure, reducing the functions of the traditional authority of the chiefs as the highest arbiter and decision maker. Further, other entities of State creation such as the Village Development Board (V.D.B.) compromise the traditional authority. It is interesting to note that Sumi chiefs still enjoys respect and is accorded public services to certain extent but they do not exactly reflect the past prestige. However, there are chiefs with personal merit and personality who do manage to gain respect from the villagers.

II. CONCLUSION

This study has been concerned broadly with the Sumi community of Nagaland, giving an emphasis on the customary laws and the traditional system of administration among the Sumis. This is because the sense of administration has been existing since time immemorial in the Naga society with certain unwritten codes and ethics. However, different Naga tribes had different internal administration systems and like any other tribe the Sumi Nagas devised their own codes and ethics with the Chief and his councillors to execute such laws which are strictly adhered to by every member.

Among the Sumi villages, changes in the material aspects are evident and the outlook, aspirations and expectations of the villagers especially that of the younger generation greatly differs from that of their parents. A significant finding in the structure of the Sumi society is the losing ground of the traditional institution of chieftainship. This is born by the fact that there is the onslaught of Christianity on the one hand and modernity on the other hand. The introduction of statutory rules in modern times weakens such traditional institutions. However, in spite of the changes in the lifestyle and the spirit of individualism overtaking, we still find that the institutional and organizational structure of the villages in Sumi villages is based on the tradition and customary usages. The value system attached to Chieftainship is still strongly upheld by the Sumis.

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