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Tuluni: The Festival of the Sumi Naga

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ABSTRACT

Culture is a root to every society. It is necessary to document and preserve the oral traditions and customs of one's culture. The importance of festivals can be highlighted in the fact that they (festivals) are as old as man himself. Festivals are true embodiments of traditions and cultural, social and domestic lives of the people. Festivals act as a valuable record legends and other aspects of past live. Like all the other Naga tribes, Sumi also celebrates their festivals which are all closely interwoven with their agricultural calendar. There are numerous festivals celebrated by the Sumi like, Asuyekiphe pine, Luu pine, Vesa veli, Inami kupulhu, Saghu pine, Litsapa, Ahuna, Aphikusa and Tuluni. This article will only discuss about one of the many festivals of Sumi ie Tuluni.

Keyword: Tuluni, Taboo, Rituals, Sumi, Naga

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sumi Nagas are the inhabitant of Zunheboto district of Nagaland. Previously called Semas, now known as Sumi as the Government affidavit declared on 24th September 1992, No. GAB 15/6/92- dated Kohima. The name Sumi is derived from the word 'SU' meaning 'SUPU', the name of the first sema settler or leader of the tribe, 'MI' meaning 'people'. Hence, Sumi means 'men of the first settler'. The name sema is, therefore, a corrupt form of Sumi. Zunheboto was named after a plant called *Zunhebo*¹, which grew in abundant in the area. The name of the plant is *Zunhebo* and so the place was named Zunheboto, meaning the 'range of *Zunhebo* plants'.

Tuluni is one of the biggest festivals of the Sumi and it's also one of the most important Gennas associated with agriculture. The Sumi in general could not celebrate the festival together, one of its main cause being the different location or the inhabited area. Tuluni was celebrated in different months and days because of the difference in season and climate. *Tuluni* was celebrated after sowing the seeds in the field, so since seedling season vary from cold place to hot place the Sumis could not celebrate together but in 1966 the Sumi tribal council decided that all the Sumis wherever will celebrate together and on 1972 the first celebration of *Tuluni* was held at Zunheboto (hq of the Sumis) on July 7-8. It is celebrated in a bountiful time when there is abundance of vegetation and plentiful to eat and drink.

Myth and legend

The word *Tuluni* has different meanings according to different located area. Some say that a rice beer called *Tuluji* is drank in this celebration so it's called Tuluni, others say that there are seven type of plantain leaves of which one is called *Atulu Kughu* this particular leaves are used in this *Tuluni* festival, cups are made out of this particular leaf and rice beer is served in it, and so it is called *Tuluni*. Some tell a story that there was once a man named *Tulu* who had performed all the rituals that the ancestors used to do to show their supremacy, or feast of merits, like *Inami kuphulu*, *Aphisa* likewise. At that time in a particular village the festival was approaching but the villagers were worried for they had not prepared for the coming festival, *Tulu* then said to the villagers that he was willing to celebrate the five days festival for them. So when the festival came *Tulu* made rice beer and everyone drank and celebrated as a remembrance of this event that particular festival was named after him. The other sources says that there was two brothers *Tu* and *Lu*, they decided that whoever have more people coming to their house will celebrate the feast. It happened that *Tu* had more visitors so he hosted the feast but the festival was named after both of them as *Tulunih*. There are others who believe that July (*Anih qhi*) is a month where the vegetations are bountiful and it's long awaited by the people because it is a season where even the poor can collect vegetables from the field and eat so it is a celebration of happiness for the bountiful vegetation.

Whatever may be the reason *Tulunih* is a big festival which is awaited by everyone. Like there is difference in meaning of *Tuluni* so also there are two different ways of celebrating it, they are popularly known as *Suphuwo* and *Tukuphuwo*, these two are the two different clans of the Sumis.

The Swu clans are:-

1. *Suchomi* 2. *Tsuqumi* 3. *Shohemi* 4. *Wotsami* 5. *Achumi*
6. *Jimomi* 7. *Khujumi* 8. *Katimi* 9. *Khakhomi* 10. *Shochomi*
11. *Lalami* 12. *Khutimi* 13. *Wokhami* 14. *Chelami* 15. *Kapomi*
16. *Kibami* 17. *Nunumi*.

The Tuku clans are:-

1. *Awomi* 2. *Ayemi* 3. *Chophimi* 4. *Chiqhimi* 5. *Kinimi* 6. *Murumi*
7. *Yeptthomi*

Significance of Tuluni

Tuluni is specially celebrated that the insects and worms and bad calamity may not harm or destroy the vegetation and that the crops will grow healthy and yield good harvest. It is a festive when engaged couple were invited to feast in their in-laws place and also a feast of reconciliation and peace. For the celebration of *Tuluni* people form *Aloji*², the *Aloji* collectively earn money and buy a cow or mithun or a pig then the animal is killed and shared among the *Aloji*, the head of the animal slaughtered is given to *Alojitou* or the leader of the group, they cook meal, feast and sing *Lejole* (folk songs). During *Tuluni* even the poor and the orphan gets meat to eat. The forefathers did not put salt in the meat curry because it was believed that good food should not be eaten together but those rich and affordable put salt in the curry, those who could not effort would use *Athum*³ powder as a substituted for salt. During these festive days one is forbidden to go to fields and everyone had to remain chaste in order to ward off ill- luck to the family.

Tuluni is a joyous time for the nannies or the baby's caretaker because special treatment is shown towards them on this day. A hen with a rope tight on its leg is given to them as a gift for them to play with and lots of meat is cooked and given to them.

From time immemorial for the Sumis the custom called '*Alhukho Pekili*⁴' has continued till date generation. The girl's family would invite the boy for the meal. Rich people would invite the girl for meal to see her manners and characters. When the boy is invite he comes with his close friends and dines in his in laws. Plenty of meat is cooked and given and also send to his house, the rich give half of the pig along with the head, after this '*Alhukho Pekili*' if one returns the word that they cannot marry then the group which returns the word will be heavily fined and sometimes it may even let to dispute to court.

Tuluni is a time to make peace, if there is any misunderstanding in the family or misunderstanding between relatives and friends then it is a day to really seek forgiveness and make peace, it is a day to cook rice and meat and give to relatives, friends and neighbors as sign of goodwill a sign of respect, peace and love. Girls who are married off to persons from other villages would come and visit their parents and relatives; they are never sent home empty hand.

Rituals

The *Swu* rituals were all performed inside the house, pieces of meat were thrown on the floor and rice beer from the bowl made of plantain leaf were blown down for the spirits, the meat and the bowl of rice beer were tight up to the *Atsukucholo*⁵ in *Abidelau*⁶. The *Swu* forefathers perform '*Kusho Kullu*' for their children that they may have good physical and healthy body and mind. To perform this ritual the father would go to the forest and bring mint and young plantain leaves and places the plants on the door side. A meal is prepared and then he gets ready for the rituals, for his male children he would slice 12 piece of meat and place six pieces on top of the rice and six pieces under the rice. For the girl children he would slice 10 piece and place five on top of the rice and five under the rice, after the package is done for every child in the family he ties the packages to '*Atsuphi*' (pillar of the house), in the morning on '*Anigheni*' (Thursday) he would untie it and give it to his wife and children to eat. The father then goes somewhere else and leaves the wife and children to eat, the father should not eat this food it was believed that if the father eats it then there will be hatred among the father and the children. Even if there was left over it could be eaten only by the sisters of the father. After *Kusho Kullu* meal six slice of meat piece are wrapped in a clean plantain leaf untrodden by the worms and snails, the package is then placed on the roof top, young boys then climb to get it, whoever gets there first eats the meat. The nannies are given a large piece of meat and the parents of the nanny are as well. At the end of the ceremony they will be casting a lot, meat was sliced and thrown down and rice beer served in the plantain leaf was blown down near the pillar and a prayer was prayed like this, '*Nono iti, I nu jukutsu luvetsuke gheguno o shikimthivea, apu anga alhoh vipeniu, axupishu, alho pushu peniu*' which means, I thank you for taking care of my children, may they have good physical and may they have a long life, with this the ceremony could come to an end.

For *Tuku* rituals on the day of *Tuluni* they plant a banana tree outside the house and make bowl with plantain leaf and pour rice beer into it and pour down calling the name of god. A mint plant was plucked and placed in the house; mint has a scent so it was a sign of praying to god that he may grant love and respect among friends. The *Tuku* also pluck a *Apughu*⁷ and hang it outside the house to say to god that they do not want bad things. The *Tuku* forefathers performed '*Shimto Kichi Kughu*' it was performed for the children. It was believed that if they don't perform this ritual even once in their life then they will not be able to raise their

2. A peer group

3. Sumac

4. This is a practice of inviting the son in law to be for a meal

5. Main post/ pillar of the house

6. A side passage inside the house, a way to the hearth

7. Stinging Nettle

children well. Ill fate may befall them, the child might be born as physically challenged or mentally retarded. To perform this ritual the father will go to the forest in the morning and bring a plantain leaf untrampled by snails and worms. On *Ashigheni* (Wednesday) the father cooks and calls his sons one by one and would slice 12 pieces of meat and place 6 pieces on top of the rice and 6 under the rice he then will call the girls and slice 10 pieces of meat and place 5 on top and 5 under the rice, after he had done for all his children he says a prayer, '*Tsutsala inoh kihi pimive aghimu nono kihiluvelone*' which means, even if I have miscalculated you count it again. Then he prays like this again '*Hino apu sala, hino anga sala*' which means, this is for the father, this is for the child, then he places the meat inside the utensil which is then covered properly and kept on the ceiling, on *Anighini* (Thursday) the father removes and sees, if there is a sign of a big tooth then, they believe that it's the spirit of the living who has eaten so the next day the whole family performs cleansing Gennas, that they will not befall sickness, death and other bad calamities. If the food has a sign of a small tooth then it's believed to be by the spirit of the death and it means that there will be good luck and long life. It is also believed that after performing this ritual the children become more active and healthy. After this prayer, blessing was bestowed to the children and the generation to come, with that the ceremony comes to an end. The food and plantain leaf that were used for the ceremony were all tied together and placed on the right side of the door after it dries up it's thrown. These rituals for both *Tuku* and *Swu* could only be performed during *Tuluni* and not in other seasons. This feast was a time for asking blessing for the children.

The seven days of *Tuluni* are celebrated as follows:-

1. Asuzaniil (Monday);- According to the season of cultivation the first crop to be sowed was *Asu-o* (millet) so it is the first day of *Tuluni*. On this day no one was allowed to travel it was a day to clean the village area, one was forbidden to sharpen the tools. This day they would brew rice beer with millet and share with the neighbours and family members. They prepare for and get things ready for the feast.

2. Aghizaniil (Tuesday);- From time immemorial *Aghi-o* (rice/paddy) had been the main cash crop, but it was sowed only after millet so it comes as the second day. On this day the remaining works which could not be completed were done. Firewood, water and vegetables were collected for the festival. Then tools were kept in a dry place and made sure that water and rain could not reach it, it was done so that there might be good vegetation. They would brew rice beer with *Aghi-o*.

3. Ashigheni (Wednesday); - The third day was a very important day because it was on this day that both the *Swu* and *Tuku* would prepare for *Kusho kullu* and *Shimto Kichi Kughu*, it was also on this day that the animals which the *Aloji* had bought were killed and meat was shared equally between the members irrespective of the sex, the head of the killed animal was given to the head of the group and a large portion of meat was set aside for *Anighini* (Thursday). It was believed that if you don't eat on this day then the crops will not grow well. *Ashi* means meat and *Ghe* means cut, so it literally means a day of killing animals. Large portions of meat were exchanged between relatives and friends.

4. Anighini (Thursday);- *Anighini* is the main day of *Tuluni* festival. The biggest celebration, the biggest meal, the greatest happiness, greatest acknowledgement, greatest peace and the time to be happy. The *Swu* and *Tuku* will perform *Kusho Kullu* and *Shimto Kichi Kughu* respectively. No one would go to the field on this day and no works are done for they say, if they work then storm will destroy the crops, they don't touch the vegetables for fear that the stem of the beans will tangle with each other, they don't comb their hair on this day because they believe that the flood might destroy the field. The *Aloji* would contribute rice and cook food in the *Alojitou* house and eat together, there will be lots of competition among different *Aloji*, the boys would compete among themselves in kick boxing, kicking the leaf tied on the peak of the spear with both legs at a same time and high jump. The girls will compete in *Puxa kithe*⁸. *Lejole* (folk song) and *Leshela* (poem) were also competed. *Alojitou* was held with great respect because he had all the responsibilities vested on him for his group, he met the needs of his group; no one can go against his words. He is the leader and leads them in everything even song and other cultural things. The group will come and feast in his house and make rules and regulations, they will discuss about the group's welfare and make plans. Meal is cooked and packed in plantain leaf and given to relatives, friends and neighbors. The person who receives the gift in return also gives a gift (money, hen or anything that they can offer). People who cultivate in others field or land would give meat or cooked meal to the owner of the land. *Tuluni* is altogether a time full of meat, rice beer and happiness. Children took gifts for the grandparents and seek their blessings, the grandparents usually pray for them like this, "*o pukhu mutsu owu mutsu ishelu peni; o ti kughuko no thalaxu ti kughuko shi achuwa ti kughuko shi ikolu peni. Mugha peni*"⁹ This day is very important for those who were engaged because on this day they will invite each other for a meal. They will even fix the date of marriage on this day, in Sumi culture it was very difficult to break the engagement after this. If the engagement was to be broken, heavy fine will be imposed on the party who were guilty.

5. Mucholani (Friday);- On this day all the men would take rice beer, *Ashikimthe*¹⁰ and egg to the field. On the way the rice beer is blown down and a piece of meat is buried and when they reach the field they will make fire in the hut and bury meat, blow the rice beer and go to a higher place and shout to the vegetables, 'may your roots grow till the water, your leaves reach the hill', then he cuts the *Thumsu*¹¹ and places an egg between the twigs of the *Thumsu*. The road to the fields and village ponds were cleared so that it will be easier for villagers to ply during harvest. Then they eat lunch in the *Aghuno-a*¹² a piece of meat is left in the *Aghuno-a*. After their lunch they go to clean the barn, they clean the barn in full stomach because it was believed that if you clean in empty stomach the spirit of the granary will bring poverty. It was a day of peace, if there were any misunderstanding among the family members, friends or relatives they would make peace on this day.

8. An act of jumping in which both the feet hit the butt

9. Translated as 'may your nails grow and may your offspring be like spider and crabs offspring, may you be blessed'. In other words, may you be rich, live long and that may you have many offspring.

10. Preserved meat

11. *Rhus chinensis*, the Chinese Sumac or nutgall tree

12. Resting shed on the way to the field

6. Tupulani (Saturday):-This is a day for youngsters. It is a day of peace between them if they had any misunderstanding. On this day the young engaged couple would be invited to dine in their in laws. The poor and orphan are also invited for meal. For married couples the in laws, uncles, aunties and friends are invited for meal. It is a day of reconciliation and acknowledgement between man and man and between man and god. Lots of competitions are carried out on this day like singing competition, kick boxing, kicking the leaf tied on the edge of the spear, top spinning, high jump, jumping dance for girls, tug- of -war between young boys and man, top toasting and javelin throw. It was a time when the young boys choose the good girls and the young girls observed the talented boys. In some villages women were send to fields to collect vegetables so it was called *Tupulani* (*Topumi* means women), since the next day was *Tughakhani* which was a forbidden day for people to go out. Some call this day *Laghe Pine* because on this day the road link between the villages were cleaned (*Laghe* means road, *Pine* means observation of festival day).

7. Tughakhani (Sunday):- After celebration of Tuluni for six days the seven day was called *Tughakhani* or *Tugha Lakha*, the day was spend in much carefulness and silence. On this day no one was allowed to travel or go to field. It's a day after all the rites and rituals are performed the festival is over and the worship of the spirit is over. On this day there will be no physical intimacy for fear that they might meet ill fate or die in an accident. The houses are locked and people stay inside no one goes outside for fear that they might meet ill-fate, accident and may even die. It is an obnoxious day so it is spent in silence and everyone feared this day.

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