Chapter Seven

Summary and conclusion

Among numerous conceptual definitions of cultural competence in social work, Green (1982) first defined it as “the ability to conduct professional work in a way that is consistent with the expectations which members of a distinctive culture regard as appropriate among themselves” (p. 87). According to Brandt (2003), Community knowledge refers to the knowledge possessed by the different communities and societies all over the world that is utilized to carry out the day-to-day activities. Community knowledge includes i) scientific and codified knowledge associated with occupations and life-styles influenced by industrialization and ii) knowledge associated with traditional occupations, practices in local cultures still engaging a large majority of populations, especially in developing countries. Vijayalakshmi (2004) addressed issues pertaining to indigenous social work knowledge, arguing that the social work profession has failed to develop a knowledge base around the philosophy of social work by not including an understanding of all human ways of life.

In Mary Richmond’s (1907) book ‘The Good Neighbor in the Modern City’, to be friendly and to connect with the poor was a central theme in the evolution of social work internationally. In social work terminology, this phenomenon is called establishing a relationship. Thus, culturally appropriate practice requires social workers to be educated in basic beliefs that influence the lives and interaction of the people who come to practitioner. Desai, (2000), outlines the emergence of social work philosophy from a historical perspective. Desai defines the term philosophy as “a study that seeks to understand the mysteries of existence…and examines the relationship between humanity and nature and between the individual and society” (pp. 224-225). The author addresses the history of the philosophy of social work first from the medieval period to the era of industrialization to postmodernism. The argument follows that to adequately understand the philosophy of social work, we must first understand how oppression and systemic marginalization evolved from hunter-gatherer societies of the past to the postmodern societies of today, and understand how discrimination and biases we observe today are
interconnected with perceptions still lingering from the past. Several authors emphasized that Indigenous worldviews are vastly different from the dominant cultural worldview in Western societies (Little Bear, 2000; Walker, 2004). Noel and Rita (1977) were of the opinion that Social workers should always attempt to place clients in their context and similarly, this should be their aim with the historical study of their own activity. Hampton (1995) published an article in the Canadian Journal of Native Education titled “Memory comes before knowledge”. This magical, mysterious, and sensible phrase captures the connections inherent in indigenous worldviews. It helps to understand so many pieces of the circle that contribute to tribal ways of knowing and seeing the world.

As a tribal, the researcher always had an interest in the existence of traditional and professional social work among the Sümi tribe and how it has been involved in community for the past several decades. This is the reason why the researcher wanted to know Sümi people’s understanding of social work from their own social and cultural perspective, traditional knowledge that is empirical, acquired through practice and experience. The question was raised as to what would be Social Work in Sümi dialect. It may be noted that the Sümi tribe does not have their own script and uses Roman script, which was introduced by American Christian missionaries. It was found worthwhile to let the participants respond in their own dialect as it gives meaning and their understanding of Social work. The Participants responded using the terms like, ‘Aqho-aho Kumla’ meaning ‘Social Work’ and ‘Aqho- Aho Kivipu Kumla’ meaning ‘Social work for the good of community’. Though there were differences in the usage of these terms, the meaning remained the same. In one of the urban area- New Colony, one of the leaders gave a new dimension of Social work. He believes that social work is ‘Kumsa Kumla Kughutha’ (literal translation- free work) or a ‘voluntary work rendered to community’, which is driven with a notion to serve God. However, both the terms ‘Aqo-aho Kumla’and ‘Kumsa Kumla Kughutha’ used for describing Social Work are interdependent e.g. ‘Niye Aqo- aho ghenguno kumsa kumla shitsu ani’ (I am giving free service or work for the community). In order to know more about Sümi people’s view on social work the researcher probed by asking what kind of activities are considered as
social work and the responses from both rural and urban areas can be grouped into two broad categories:

1. Doing community work collectively by a group of people or the whole community voluntarily
2. Help extended to others in need at the time of crises—damage incurred by any natural calamity.

In both rural and urban areas, most of the participants view social work as voluntary work done collectively for development and betterment of the community. There were only few people in urban areas who believed that helping people was social work. Thus, the concept of Social Work or ‘Aqo-Aho Kumla’ according to the participants is ‘voluntary work done by individuals and groups for the community as a gesture of solidarity with others and well-being of the community’.

It was found that the word ‘Aqo-Aho Kumla’ or ‘social work’ is not used in terms of helping sick, poor, etc, but another term ‘Kikimiye Kumla’ (help given out of love) is used for any kind of charity work.

**Components influencing changes from traditional social work practice to modern social work among the Sümi tribe**

Northeastern tribal writes such as Riamei (2014) and Ranee (2014) stated that the professional social work in Northeastern states of India is still in cradle or organic stage. Among the Sümi tribe, many do not know about professional social work both in rural and urban areas. However, it was found that external and organized social welfare services given to Sümi tribe began with the coming of both Protestant and Catholic Christian missionaries’ and belief in charity as its spiritual responsibility, church based social work activities gained prominence.

1. The British Colonial period and American Christian Missionaries

Before colonial period, every Sümi village in Nagaland was independent. The Akükau and Chochomi solved the community problem. The first external intrusion to change the community was the British people. The first Europeans to enter the hills were Captains Jenkins and Pemberton in 1832. The colonial interests in Assam, such as tea estates and
other trading posts suffered from raids from tribes who were known for their bravery and head hunting practices. In February 1851, at the bloody battle at Kikrüma, numerous people died on both the British side as well as the Kikrüma Naga tribe side; inter-tribal warfare followed that led to more bloodshed. After that war, the British first adopted a policy of respect and non-interference with Naga tribes. From 1851 to 1865, Naga tribes continued to raid the British in Assam. The British India Government, fresh from the shocks of 1857 Indian rebellion, reviewed its governance structure throughout South Asia including its northeastern region. In 1869, Captain Butler was appointed to lead and consolidate the British presence in the Nagaland hills. In 1878, the headquarters were transferred to Kohima (http://www.nagaland.name/history.html). The British appointed District Commissioners as colonial authorities for newly established districts. The British did not bring much change in judicial system because they found traditional system effective but introduced a new police force and prison system and a way for ordinary people to bypass the Akükau and Chochomi’s courts.

Among the Sümi tribe, it was told that British created the posts of ‘Gaonburas’ (village elders) and ‘Dobashi’ (interpreters) to assist them in the administration. The Dobashi, in the course of interpreting for British administrators, were liaisons between the British Government and their local people. Being knowledgeable about customary laws, Dobashi advised the British officers in the settlement of cases. Subsequently, the Dobashi courts evolved to decide cases according to Sümi customary laws. Dobashi enjoyed the respect of the native people. This brought a change in the power structure of the village governance. Before the colonial period, the village Akükau had all power and responsibilities towards the people. He along with few of his assistant decided for the community.

In parallel, since mid 19th century, Christian missionaries from United States and Europe, stationed in India, reached out into Nagaland and neighboring States, playing their role in converting Nagaland's Naga tribes from Animism to Christianity. The first encounter between western Christian missionaries and the Nagas took place in January 1839, when an American Baptist missionary Miles Bronson went to the Namsang Nagas in Arunachal Pradesh but this mission was terminated in two years. 30 years later, in
1871, EW Clark, an American Baptist missionary in Assam (Thong, 2010; Sema, 1986; Iyer, 1994), sent an Assamese evangelist named Godhula to the Ao Nagas. Unlike the disastrous encounter with the Ahom Prince in early thirteenth century and their experience of the initial approach of the British in the nineteenth century, they found American Baptist missionaries to be simple, humble, and prepared to live like them in the villages and climb the inhospitable forest covered hills along with them (Iyer, 1994). This behavior of the first missionaries impressed the Nagas who were otherwise hostile to the outsiders.

The Sümi tribe heard about Christianity and the gospel of Christ through contact with Ao and Angami tribes. Two Angami evangelists introduced Christianity in the year 1904 to Ighanumi village (Yeptho, 1995). Initially Christianity was opposed and many problems arose between animist and the new converts. Partially because missionaries forbade Naga converts from engaging in any cultural practices they thought were sinful or not compatible with Christian living, such as indigenous dances, songs, festivals and drinks, to mention but a few. The missionaries’ involvement included the establishment of churches, schools, and mission centers (Aye, 2006; Thong, 1997; Shikhu, 2007). They also introduced reading, writing, and Christian rules for new converts and translated the Bibles into native languages. In spite of strong opposition in the beginning, the Sümi people embraced Christianity. Today, 90% of the Nagas are Christian, most of them Baptists. Social work services are based on a variety of belief systems. Family counseling agencies are church-related; churches are the backbone of service. As mentioned in chapter 5, both rural and urban areas, churches have over time involved themselves in community care driven by spiritual incentives. The church gives one to one counseling based on Biblical teaching to prisoners. Gives counseling at the time of death and bereavement to the family members, and provides relief to widows and widowers/aged people occasionally. The church also organizes Community awareness programmes on issues such as old age, young mother, health- especially HIV/AIDs, and agriculture- self sustenance etc.

Churches have been organizing traditional and culturally defined social work activities and in Zunheboto town it has set up church based organizations for doing social work to
dealing with difficult issues and for providing professional help to those in need though there was not even a single professionally qualified social workers. Cnaan, Boddie, & Danzig (2005), pointed out that social workers should consider the contributions made to the discipline by religious thought and the tenets of caring for others as prescribed by different spiritual viewpoints.

2. Post colonial period.

In Nagaland, there has been a prolonged political conflict with the Government of India and a long struggle for self-determination. By the early 20th Century, as the Indian national movement gained momentum and discussions took place to transfer the colonial power to the Indians, the Nagas made it clear that they hoped to be excluded from the new constitutional arrangement. This conflict has brought rampant violation of human rights. There have been killings, displacements, militarization, and economic disparities.

It was told that in Zunheboto district, the settlement pattern was first disrupted when soldiers of the Indian army burnt the entire village - their properties, houses, and granaries on 31 March 1956. Villagers fled and took shelter in caves and thick jungles. The army also tortured village Kükami and imposed grouping in 1957. The villages in Zunheboto area were totally disrupted and grouped or resettled in grouping centre to isolate insurgents from the general population from which they take their support, food and other supplies. In 1957, villages on the North Zunheboto area- Yezami, Lochomi, Asukhomi, Lizumi (four hamlets) and Baimho villages were grouped and camped at the present Zunheboto Government College. During this period, under strict vigilance, people were not allowed to cultivate or go to the agricultural lands. They starved and occasionally sneaked to collect wild vegetables. People were made to labor at road construction, sites, made to collect wood and bamboos to put fencing, collect firewood and clear the jungle around the army camp. Though the village survived, the pattern of settlement changed. In few incidents, women were molested and mentally tortured. The Naga conflict has brutalized the entire Naga society but it has inflicted the Naga women most. The main gender impact caused by the ongoing Naga conflict is the use of sexual violence as an arm of war. There have been various reports of sexual
violence inflicted on women in the form of rape and sexual assault not only by the Armed forces but also by the insurgent groups.

Post Independence, organized social activities in Nagaland began in 1968 with the establishment of department of Social Security and Welfare provides supplementary nutrition to the children and expectant and nursing mothers in rural areas. Since then the department has been extending planned social welfare activities such as programmes for improving socially and physically handicapped women and children who constitute the weaker sections of the community. Provides Grand-in Aid to Non-Governmental Organizations to assist orphans and destitute children in various children homes, It provides financial assistance, childcare, and nutrition in the areas (Singh, 2008). Social welfare department provides Rupees 1800 to the old aged people. The government agencies such DRRA, ICDS are assisting the community by providing 10 kgs of Annapurna rice in a month to old aged people and widows. Through the project Anda diya, the distribute rice 3 times in a year to blind people. All these external interference brought in the concept of individualism within the community. In the traditional Sümi society, people shared and gave fruits and vegetables free to relatives but over the years, people have come to value their time and energy and have started to market the products in Zunheboto town.

The Naga political situation and the change in the community due to development also gave rise to many CBOs and NGOs. Various community-based organizations such as Sümi Hoho, Sümi Totimi Hoho, and Students Union were formed in order to tackle different problems prevailing in the community. In Zunheboto town, a more organized and formal organization was started by a group of like-minded people who were mostly born and brought up in Zunheboto town formed the CCF in 1999. In 2010, the CCF in collaboration with Kripa foundation that was started by Mt. Carmel Church in 1981 with its center head in Mumbai opened a rehabilitation center for one to group counseling and Family therapy for Drug users. Other NGOs like Akimbo society and Prodigal’s Home have been channelizing funds to Salvatus Christian society, which is in Zunheboto. Local voluntary groups are the backbone of society therefore robust democracy must be encouraged and let local people practice democratic engagement through local organizations and have a sense of belonging and a pride.
Social work as profession among the Sümi tribe is still at budding stage and has not been recognized by the people but in urban areas, there is a gradual development and changes in functioning social work agencies and the workers. As mentioned in the previous chapters, it is evident that the traditional knowledge of social work exists and is derived from Sümi people’s way of coming to know. One aspect of social work knowledge was of traditional institutions and Deogaonkar (1994) points out that bond and commitment to the traditional institutes is firm and is considered as pious duty. It is due to this reason that even today; any interference with their social or political institutions is not tolerated. Another aspect was that of family and community structure, and knowing both the different functions and authority roles within communities. In this context, Perlman (1979) describes relationship as the spark that passes from one person to another, building a bridge between them.

In situations where there were no professional Social workers, the helping process is visible through family, relatives and in fact the whole community. Thus, Bennett and Zubrzycki (2003) rightly pointed out that the family is a part of the helping process. The strongest potency among the Sümi community are independence and interdependence among individuals and families. Although these features differ in scope, their firm presence may be an assessment point for social workers providing service delivery. Social service providers must be mindful that in such a place like Zunheboto district, both rural and urban are not very big, and thus, Social Support in the form of family members, neighbors, or friends are very important. There is a sort of primary group relationship and mutual aid is as natural and spontaneous. There is no need of organized charity because any kind of misfortune is not faced by the individual but collectively. Neighbors share the burden. Sampson & Groves (1989) observed that Neighborhood as primary social organization, including high levels of local participation, the ability of residents to guide the behavior of others toward pro social norms, mutual support for children, and the density of local friendship networks to work against criminal deviance. However, there are also evidences of community breakdown due to pressure of political, economic, social, and religious changes.
Thus, it may be concluded that though it is too early to claim Sümi tribe model of social work, Most of the participants have grown up getting involved in Aqo-aho kumla or Social work activities initiated by the community. Social workers who are knowledgeable of such occurrences and have an understanding of the particular community’s ethos will be better suited to formulate tailored treatment plans and strengthen informal networks where needed. In a society submerged with social, familial, and economic challenges affecting the daily well-being of its inhabitants, due diligence should be given to each sphere of human services (Keith A. Alford, Jeanne F. Cook & Pat Conway, 2012). The social structures of Sümi tribe may be describes as an enormous number of small and practically Independent unit where everyone is intimately acquainted with everyone else. It may prove helpful to utilize the community spirit present in them through their traditional organizational structures rather than trusting upon them the new pattern of administration.

Before the Christian era, it was seen that any kind of help and assistance was centered within the family, extended family, and particular village community. In spite of gradual development of other external social agencies, this practice is retained even today. The collective aspects of family life solidify the meanings of sharing and cooperation among the members of the group and make them an integral part of community. Over the last few years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of professionally qualified social workers among the Sümi tribe though unknown to general population. Some important aspects to reduce dependency on the expertise from outside which is so often inappropriate and irrelevant while providing service are as follows:

1. Workers understanding of the concepts of ‘social work’ ‘family’ and ‘kinship’.

It may also be noted that among the Sümi tribe, kinship and family structures are still cohesive forces, which bind people together. In both rural and urban setting, the participants agreed that family provide psychological and emotional support in spite of practicing nuclear family system. The family reflects cultural values, involving kinship responsibilities. Like in indigenous community of Canada (Clarkson, et el, 1992), among the Sümi tribe each individual could expect to be connected to a large group of extended family members. The family does not only mean mother, father, and children that formed
the nucleus of the family, but it usually consisted of aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and grandparents as active members of the daily operations of family life. Among the Sümi tribe, kinship and family structures are still cohesive forces, which bind people together. There community should be encouraged to have stronger bonds where relationships between diverse groups are strengthened and the risk of social breakdown is minimized.

2. Acknowledge Role of leaders and voluntary social work in community

Role of elderly people in community is revered. Addressing each other by name is not appreciated because they often use relationship terms such as brother, aunt, cousin etc. Community leaders especially Akükau and village council chairperson with regard to community development work should be consulted. Voluntary social work is the core of Sümi community life. One of the characteristics of social work that is based on the cooperation of individuals with each other in order to meet the needs of their community, and this leads to the essential point that social work was based on an understanding of the needs of the community. It should be noted that the contribution of individuals in social work comes as volunteers among the Sümi tribe and the individual to provide a service to the community without expectation of material reward in return for their effort. Holland, et.al. (2010) mentioned to identify natural leaders. It is important to encourage these leaders to talk to others until a consensus emerges about the important issues. It is necessary to identify, recognize, and support community leadership within community.

3. Acknowledge the Interconnectedness

Among the Sümi tribe, each individual intimately related to all immediate and extended family, as well as the tribal family and nation. There can be cultural difference between the traditional community social work practice and the professional social work practice models that markedly stress on interventions with individuals, client self-determination based on Western personality theories. Among the Sümi tribe, the idea of confidentiality while dealing with the individuals can place a family member at odds with his or her extended family. This kind of interventions may be perceived as interfering, daunting, and culturally subversive. Therefore, according to what Noel and Rita (1977) said,
external service providers and professional Social workers should always attempt to place clients in their context and similarly, this should be their aim with the historical study of their own activity. Gray et al. (2008a) also discussed what aspects indigenous cultures can improve and enrich in mainstream and western social work. Indigenous context can therefore enlighten culturally relevant social work practices. They stated that this is applicable in other cultures with indigenous people.

- Indigenous approaches may enhance the mainstream social work by humanitarian goals and the value of connecting with the clients, as these qualities are described as being central in indigenous approaches.
- Indigenous worldviews can enrich and strengthen the social work profession. There are alternative ways of helping and different knowledge.
- If mainstream social work can accept other values and approaches from non-Western cultures, the so-called “universal” social work methods will be more effective in non-Western countries.
- Western and non-Western social work are not opposites, they share common qualities. It is important to value both discourses. Accept indigenous ways of helping rather than romanticize indigenous worldviews as something exotic and innovative.

Donna Hurdle (2002) writes, “Culture influences how problems are defined, as well as the nature of problem resolution” (p. 186). If social workers do not consider this, they will never know what kind of assistance clients want that would fit with their cultural views on problem resolution. Hence, when it comes to practice, social workers must have diverse ways of acknowledging the Sümi tribe knowledge, values and problem solving capacities.

Thus, it may be concluded that though it is too early to claim Sümi tribe model of social work, Social workers must understand contemporary roles of indigenous people’s families, community structure. The purpose of this study was to help fill the gap in current research in Social work practice by exploring the concept of social work among the Sümi tribe and see their perceived traditional social work practice and the gradual changes that are taking place due to development of various modern organizations. This study also looked into various aspect of community life, people’s participation in
community social work activities, participant collective efforts, and sense of community. The researcher believes that findings from this study will help social workers, academicians and other community practitioners to measure and target their interventions more effectively, and develop strategies to enhance organizational capacity while working with Sümi people.