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Identity in crisis: The impact of education on ethnic culture among the Muser

Nguyen Quang Dung

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of Thai education on ethnic culture through a case study of the Muser in Amphoe Mae Sot, Tak Province, Thailand. It also studies the process of culture preservation, integration and assimilation of Muser hill people through formal, non-formal and informal education. The study finds that besides knowledge conveyed in central Thai language, Thai identity is inculcated in students through Buddhist teaching, mainstream ethical and moral values, and nationalist ideology. Elements of Muser traditional culture such as cuisine, music, folklore, religion, language and costumes are maintained less by young Muser in comparison with their seniors.

This article focuses on cultural change among young Muser under the impact of education. The aspects of culture examined include food, costume, language, religion, traditional games, folktales, music, social structure, and family interaction. First, the article examines the interaction of formal and informal education with individual identity. Second, the opinions of senior villagers about culture preservation by youngsters are presented. Finally a comparison is made to gauge the cultural identity gap between generations.

Data were collected through participatory observation, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews in two villages, Huaiplalod and Sompoi, over two months in 2008.

At schools in the two villages, I attended classes, the national children day ceremony, musical performances, traditional dancing, traditional costume shows, games, and Buddhist practices. I lived with the Huaiplalod headman’s family and spent time with other

families. Focus groups were conducted with students of primary grades 5 and 6 and lower secondary grades 1 to 3. Groups of male and female students were held separately for convenience; it was easy to convene a group of boys after a football or volleyball game, and to find a group of girls reading entertainment magazines in the library. Each group discussion with schoolboys and girls lasted 20 or 30 minutes. Group discussions with senior villagers were conducted in both villages at nighttime around a big teapot, with eight selected seniors aged 50 upwards and two experienced Puchan. In-depth interviews were conducted with the headmen of each village, the principal and vice principal of Huaiplalod school, a Muser teacher at Sompoi school, and five other Thai teachers of the two schools. One Muser teacher provided follow-up information by telephone. All the key informants of group allowed disclosure of their names.

Parsons (1949) identifies culture as patterns of behavior and the products of human action that may be passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes. Banks and McGee (1989) further define culture as the primary constituent of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. Values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives distinguish one people from another in modernized societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways.

Damen (1987: 367) defined culture as follows:

Culture is learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind’s primary adaptive mechanism.

Useem and Useem (1963: 169) state: “Culture has been defined in a number of ways, but most simply, as the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings” This shared behavior includes the way people dress, interact in a family, follow the same religion, and so forth. Over time, however, new values and behavior may be adopted, leading to new aspects of identity.

The Muser share patterns or models of living. Their unique
identity is formed by their shared values and behavior. In the modern era of globalization and socialization, they have been introduced to education and cultural assimilation. Youngsters and seniors no longer share all the same values. The individual identity of youngsters and seniors differs in some ways.

Three aspects of Muser culture that are experiencing transformation are costume, language, and religion.

Costume

Clothing or ways of dressing represent one of the most visible aspects of culture. From the perspective of Parsons, the traditional costume of the Muser is a historical product, inherited through generations. The preservation of ethnic identity is bound up with the retention of a meaningful heritage (Roach and Eicher, 1973).

The way Muser people wear clothes, and the attitude of both adults and students about their traditional Muser clothes, are undergoing change. Students at schools are obliged to wear uniform on weekdays. However, every Thursday they wear Muser clothes to school as required by school regulation. Parents buy the school uniform but ask a Muser tailor to sew them one or two sets of Muser clothes. Students can also display their Muser clothes at big traditional Muser ceremonies or festivals like New Year days. At other festivals or events organized by the school, such as national children day, mothers’ day, fathers’ day, or sport events, students also wear Muser clothes for parades and musical performances. Students have one or two splendid sets of Muser clothes to wear at important ceremonies, plus one or two more normal sets to wear daily and on every Thursday at school.

After schools, students like to dress like lowlanders. Muser trousers are inconvenient for boys to play or work on the field. They prefer jeans, shorts, and T-shirts. Their Muser clothes are made from natural fabrics, dyed by themselves. They fade quickly with washing, and need to be dried and kept in a wooden or metal box. Nowadays, Muser people order clothes from factories in Chiang Mai. They use color-fast fabrics, and send the design to the factory. In neither village is there anyone who can weave cloth. Fifty years ago, as the seniors recounted, Muser people still made
their own clothes.

Students report that they like to wear T-shirts, shorts, or skirts and school uniform in classes. Normal clothes are convenient and easy to keep, with no worry over fading. The price is lower than a splendid Muser outfit (schoolgirls Nalataprayud, Nakhuu and Palita Khaniduanli, 16 years old). A “chud Temyok” or set of ceremonial clothes for girls costs around 300 to 500 baht, not including additional silver decoration. Students feel that school uniforms give them a feeling of being Thai, being important in Thai society, and sharing similarity with others, lowland students. What is more, they will be punished by the teachers if they do not wear uniform. When they wear uniform, other people will know that they are students and they are proud of it. When students go downtown, they never wear Muser clothes because they do not want the lowlanders to know that they are Muser or *dek doi*—hill tribe kids.

Female students dislike Muser costume because it is hot, heavy, and inconvenient for them when they study or do other things. However, when they are selected to be representatives of their schools at events or ceremonies, they feel proud of their Muser costumes. Among students from other backgrounds, they feel a sense of their distinctive identity. The awareness of ethnic cultural diversity and the uniqueness of each tribe in terms of costume make the students feel proud of themselves as Muser. School events thus inspire pride in identity among Muser students.

Muser youth fear they will be perceived as backward, and looked down on by lowlanders if they wear Muser costume in town. Roach and Eicher (1973: 123–4) argue that in a traditional society ruled by custom, an individual is limited in dress by age, sex and perhaps occupation, while in a modern society, the individual may accept the cultural standards of dress (the dominant fashion of the time) or may reject them and replace them with those of a sub-cultural group with whom people affiliate or with their own idiosyncratic preferences. Through education, Muser youth are introduced to compulsory uniform and other forms of dress. They are no longer limited in dress by their ethnic background. They are now students belonging to the Thai educational system. Through contact with mainstream Thai society through formal education,
they accept new cultural standards of dress, both consciously and unconsciously. They feel proud of their traditional Muser clothes in situations involving their other hill tribes, members of the same sub-cultural group. When students feel proud of their Muser clothes in those events, they are achieving individuality and achieving personal distinction from others in the hill tribe group. Individual identity remains and it is inspired in such contexts. When students return to schools and daily life, normal clothes as worn by lowlanders become their favorite.

Roach and Eicher (1973: 53–6) argue that human beings are very versatile and resourceful at cultural adaptation through limited adjustments, both short term and long term, to changing environments. Versatility in individual dressing is one example of this cultural flexibility. In one way, schools oblige students to wear uniform, and in another way schools create a stage for them to show off their traditional clothes. Even though it is compulsory to wear uniform, students like it. This is evidence of cultural adaptation to mainstream dressing culture.

Education exposes them to a broader world. They learn about mainstream society in particular and the world in general. Schools do not teach them that they are backward and inferior, but they evolve this view of themselves. A person that does not know much about the outside world does not compare the self to others in the outside world. But education gives the Muser a sense of themselves as a small group in a broader society, and a sense of inferiority. To cover that inferiority, they want to change the way they appear to others.

The fact that schools oblige students to wear the same uniform as other Thai students, but also encourage them to wear their Muser clothes on certain days and occasions fosters cultural pluralism. Within this pluralism, the Thai school uniform is worn most often, and this frequency is hegemonic and nationalistic. The subordinate ethnic sub-group is being assimilated to the tastes of the hegemonic culture (McCaskill, 2008). At the same time, the fact that Muser still display their traditional clothes to other tribes or in the downtown on occasion of festivals or events is a conscious assertion of the self in relation to a social group rather than the operation of unperceived automatic mechanisms (Lola, 2008). An
ethnic identity is developed through time and takes on various meanings in the course of one's life experience, as a person contrasts his or her social group in some measures against the dominant culture and against other groups within it.

Muser students enjoy a double identity through their proud feeling about Muser clothes on some occasions and their preference for school uniform and mainstream dress in everyday situations. When they dress in uniform, they feel they are Thai students, just like their lowland friends; more or less this is a nationalistic awareness implanted over time for hegemonic purpose. When they wear Muser clothes, they are proud to be Muser; this is part of the state's fostering of multiculturalism. An individual's identity is rooted partly in such traditional dressing and the pride in traditional clothes. But within this flexibility of identity in dressing, the Thai aspect tends to dominate the Muser aspect.

Parents and other senior villagers prefer Muser clothes. Men may wear T-shirts but their trousers are usually Muser. The seniors always encourage students to wear Muser clothes but the students are reluctant and the parents generally understand and do not try to force their children to comply. They will not be punished by their parents for not wearing Muser clothes, but they will be punished at school for not wearing uniform. The hegemonic ideology of education policy only recognizes one identity of students at school.

The seniors preserve their Muser identity both unconsciously and consciously. They did not have access to education as their children now enjoy. Therefore, their awareness and feeling about dressing differ from their children. They just dress Muser without any inferiority complex. They have more pride in their Muser clothes than their children. The seniors also see there is a risk that the culture of Muser dressing will fade away. Therefore, they try to convince their children and grandchildren to wear Muser clothes more often. They say that for more than twenty years, Muser have lost their culture of weaving clothes and now it is risky that the next generations will lose the culture of wearing Muser clothes also.

Language

Language is one of the most important components of culture.
Much of culture is transmitted in oral and written forms. It is impossible to understand the deep meanings of another culture without knowing its language well.

Muser students and Muser seniors use language in different ways. The seniors aged 50 upwards cannot speak Thai other than some common words. Other adults can speak Thai well because they have frequent contact with Thai people in the markets or Thai teachers at schools. Some speak very clearly, while others have a strong accent. Children who attend school from the age of six have the chance to learn to read and write Thai according to the national curriculum. They speak Thai more fluently than adults do, while conversely adults speak Muser more fluently than students do.

Standard Thai is used as the medium of instruction in all Thai schools. It is also the language of mass media, such as newspapers, radio, and TV broadcasting.

Muser students have flexibility in their use of language. They know that teachers and other staff workers cannot understand Muser, so they have to use Thai language. At home, adults prefer speaking Muser language, so students change to speak more Muser at home and sometimes mix some Thai vocabulary into their sentences, especially when there is no equivalent word in the Muser language, or the Thai word is “easier to understand than the Muser word” (schoolgirl Panita Khaniduanli). They make their own decisions which language to speak when they talk to different people.

Muser language does not have a written script. Over time, there is a risk that Muser words will be gradually replaced by Thai and forgotten. But students do not feel this is a risk. “I feel it’s a normal problem; there is no worry for Muser language being replaced by Thai language; we are still able to speak Muser” (schoolboy Sorawit Khunsawinhok, grade 3, aged 15). “We must adapt ourselves in the Thai society. We are Muser but we are also Thai; therefore, we should speak Thai with Thai people. Sometimes, when we speak Muser language, downtown people look at us and are unable to understand, so we feel ashamed” (schoolgirl Nala Japrayud). “When we can speak Thai well, we can trade with Thai people well, we can earn more money. We can understand Thai movies and sing songs we like” (schoolboy Kathon Tapayun, grade 3, age 15). Students
are ready to use Thai in any context or under any circumstance. Speaking Thai language is another means that helps them escape from the inferiority complex of being a small, backward group in a broader society.

Thai language is compulsory at school. Through the school curriculum and daily contact with Thai teachers, Muser students gain good command of Thai language. Those who finish primary school have no difficulty communicating in Thai. Students at higher grades of school can communicate in Thai fluently. Outside school, informal education in the form of mass media contributes to the use of Thai language. Students learn more vocabulary including slang and abusive terms from Thai movies, TV news, newspapers, teenager or entertainment magazines, and cartoons.

Adults cannot hide their anxiety about language loss. “Looking back into the past around thirty years ago, villagers all spoke Muser. Muser identity was very primitive with no mixture of Thai language like nowadays” (Mrs. Naphuu Khongkhacharuu, aged 50). “There were no insulting words in Muser language like today. Students speak so many bad words that adults cannot accept” (Mr. Chaha Sompoiluang, aged 60 of Sompai village). Older adults are witnesses to the process of Muser language loss. They can list examples of words that are no more used among students

When students cannot communicate well in Muser language with their grandparents or other old-aged adults, they are criticized. “I am criticized by Puchan and my grandmother for not being able to speak whole sentences in Muser language. I mix Thai words usually. When talking to adults, I feel I do not know around thirty percent of words. I do not know some proper words to call things in Muser language” (teacher Nauu, Sompoi school, Sompai village). Adults are worried that in no more twenty to thirty years to come, Muser language will be forgotten. They are willing to teach children Muser language all the time. They try to talk in Muser language so that students have a Muser language environment. They implant in them the love for Muser language by convincing them to speak Muser more often. Yet adults also recognize it is necessary for students to learn Thai because the world is changing and Muser people need to integrate into the broader society. Adults sympathize with children speaking Thai better than Muser because
of their need to integrate into Thai society. However, consciousness of the risk that the Muser will suffer “a tragedy of language loss” (Joshua A. Fishman cited in Conversi, 2004: 86–7) makes them try to implant in students a love for the language.

The target of national unification, national identity, and cultural assimilation is successful to a certain extent through language teaching. If the students do not know the Muser language, they will also lose the history, folktales and songs about the great deeds of their forefathers, the mountains and forests and supreme God. Barbour and Carmichael (1998: 196) identified the importance of language as follows:

The cultural coherence of an ethnic group or a nation is often partly expressed by language. This works in two ways; a distinctive language may help to demarcate the ethnic group or nation from other groups, and a common language may facilitate communication and hence coherence within a group. Language can hence be extremely important for ethnic identity, national identity and nationalism.

A nation cannot exist without its language. Survival of an ancestral language is essential for national continuity. At the level of an ethnic group, language is critical for identity. An ancestral language maintains the culture continuity of the tribe. Because the Muser language has no script, history, folktales, ceremonies, and other cultural and historical goods are transmitted by spoken word, and hence are at risk along with the spoken language.

Beside the nationalist ideology of education through language teaching, pluralism of multicultural ideology is also included. Lingual pluralism is found in non-formal education programs in specific hill-tribe localities. The Office of Non-Formal Education Commission through the Non-Formal Education Development Division, Northern Regional NFE Center has launched a project named “Bilingual Project” for bilingual education. Wisanee Siltragool of the Non-Formal Education Department, Ministry of Education explained bilingual education in 2008 as follows:

The “bilingual approach” is a very challenging approach for literacy promotion. In Thailand, this approach enables ethnic minority groups to use their own language for initial learning and helps them learn Thai in order to communicate with the majority
of the people in the country. The approach, therefore, can provide a social and cultural linkage between tribal groups and the majority Thai people in order that they can live together peacefully. The problem is that the bilingual approach is new to Non-formal Education specialists in this country. Most of the literacy programs currently use the curriculum and guidelines designed for majority language (Thai) learners. Even though there have been efforts to initiate literacy at local level, the bilingual approach is rarely used.

In the case study of Muser tribe in Tak, there is a program named “One day one word,” designed by Huaiplalod School for both Karen and Muser students. Young learners have the chance to study English, Muser spoken language, Thai, and even Karen language. Every morning, students gather in the main schoolyard. Two representative excellent students hold a board with the words of the day on and read them out loud for others students to repeat. Each word will be written and pronounced in Thai, English, Muser, and Karen spoken languages.

While Thai is the main language of formal education, some effort is made to help Muser students learn English and also retain their own language. According to Blachford (cited in UNESCO, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2005: 87), “bilingual education is seen as the most feasible policy and effective practice to solve minority language and education problems, and to maintain a balance between national unity and minority aspirations.” Adults in the villages expressed their approval of the program on grounds that it contributed to the preservation of the Muser language. Muser and Karen, both adults and students, agree to use Thai as middle language, but can communicate in each other’s tongues to a small extent. The diversity of tribal affiliation among students is the prerequisite for the diversity in language learning, as exemplified by the “one day one word” program of Huaiplalod School.

In addition, languages are being changed by daily contact. Within the multilingual school community, students adjust their languages in several ways. Words are borrowed and exchanged among English, Karen, Muser, and Thai. New sounds may be introduced and morphological and syntactic constructions may be
altered. Most commonly, Thai words and constructions are borrowed into Karen and Muser, especially by students. Sometimes this leads to miscommunication between youngsters and senior villagers. The generation gap is also a gap in language use. Communication is no longer as smooth and simple as when they still used only one spoken language.

**Religion**

The beliefs and practices of animism play a paramount role in shaping the identity of the Muser from ancestral times. They unify the whole village and help to establish the cultural identity.

The history of Buddhism in the two villages can be traced back to the Dhammacarik movement in 1986. When many children of Huaiplalod village died of a strange disease, local people asked for help from the spirits through animistic ceremonies but to no avail. The number of young dead kept increasing to the extent that the seniors turned to people outside for help. Medical staff arrived to help eliminate the epidemic. At the same time, a Buddhist monk, Phra Ajarn Den, came to the village under the government’s Dhammacarik project to spread Buddha’s teachings among hill tribes. He told the villagers to place a statue of the Buddha at the center of the village in order to chase away the bad spirits causing the disease. Since 1986, Buddha images have been enshrined in the village at a very revered place.

Buddhism started to spread within the village from that year. However, Buddha has taken a place alongside other good and helpful spirits. Animism has not been replaced by Buddhism. Phra Ajarn Den taught basic Dhamma education. The villagers have adopted those new teachings because they find them close to their animistic beliefs. Seniors of the village say that Buddhism has been welcomed for a long time. They say it is acceptable to adopt Buddhism because this religion is similar to their animistic beliefs. By contrast, the villagers had reacted against Christianity brought by several missionaries as incompatible with their cultural values. Muser adults consider the five precepts of Buddhism (*sin ha*) similar to Muser ethical teachings passed down over generations.

Since schools were established in the two villages, the values and
practices of Buddhism have been taught to Muser students. Education has brought Buddhism to the Muser in a more official and scientific way. Muser students are implanted with Buddhist values through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities such as a five-minute morning meditation (sa-ma-thi) and praying (sa-at-mon). In festivals or various events of the schools, Buddhist ceremonies are performed ahead of the main activities. Through such activities, Muser students become more familiar with Buddhism and this religion is gradually adopted. Gradually, their belief in animism fades away. They start to wonder whether their ancestral spirits can control their lives and take care of them or not. They convert to the thinking that individuals succeed, fail, and become happy or miserable due to the bun (merit) they make. They do not share the adults' belief that the Lord Gusha would bless them with happiness and prosperity during their life. Instead, happiness in their opinion is the result of merit-making in the previous or current incarnation. In addition, they believe that when people make merit, they should do it from the bottom of their hearts so that they can get good return. Whenever bad spirits are mentioned, students feel scared. At home, parents perform ceremonies to feed and worship the ancestral spirits, and students consider it is an expression of filial duty to participate in these ceremonies. They think of their ancestors and feel attached to their families thanks to this kind to ceremony. However, they find the number of such ceremonies is too large. Most male students are asked to join the ceremonies and learn how to perform them. They believe the current roster of some twenty ceremonies should be reduced by half. They find them difficult to perform and wasteful. Some schoolboys say it is not necessary to kill pigs many times for so many ceremonies. The amount of pork can be reduced to avoid waste of money.

Boys are also asked to join animistic ceremonies to chase away bad spirits. In bigger ceremonies such as at New Year or the ceremony to establish a god temple (khuunsanchaw), they are asked to observe so that can perform themselves when they become adults. However, the language that spirit-doctors (mo phi) use in ceremonies is so complicated and difficult to understand or learn by heart that they lose interest.
Meanwhile, at school, students become knowledgeable about Buddhism through teachers’ explanation, curriculum, and school activities. Buddhism is introduced to them as a religion with the Lord Buddha, meditation, homage paying to the Buddha, chanting, merit making, temples for various religious ceremonies, and many important religious days. Students are taught that meditation helps their mind find peace and helps them to study better. Most students do not understand the meaning of Pali chanting, nor can they explain the meaning of such Buddhist practices. They say that they join those ceremonies and follow the practices according to the school regulations. Initially, they follow teachers’ instructions but gradually Buddhist values are implanted unconsciously in them. This is a building process for establishing new values.

A significant change in their belief concerns life after death. According to the Muser belief system, if they have made merit by good behavior, the dead go to heaven and stay with the Lord Gusha and their ancestors, while the immoral are cast down to hell. However, some students who have converted to Buddhism believe in rebirth. Merit earned in a previous life will result in a good rebirth as someone beautiful or handsome, rich and talented, while a bad rebirth is due to past demerit or crimes.

At home, they are taught by their grandparents or parents about animistic ceremonies. At school, they are taught about Buddhism and instructed to follow Buddhist practices. Some of them wear Buddha amulets for protection from bad spirits. They combine belief in the Buddha with a concern over protection against bad spirits. Two kinds of belief are mixed together. The religious identity of adults is almost exclusively centered on animism with little or no admixture of Buddhist values. But the religious identity of students has been markedly changed as a consequence of their education. Adults have become more and more concerned about the changing religious belief of students.

Adults do not attend temples in nearby Thai villages or towns on major Buddhist days. If youngsters ask for permission from their parents, the parents will answer that they may go if they want. Some of the students want to have a Buddha image at home, and their parents do not object. Parents are open-minded in religious belief and respect their children’ interest. “I comply with my
children to have Buddha's image at home. It is good also to worship the Buddha. As for me, I worship ancestor spirits, the primitive religion of the Muser. The Lord Buddha is also a good god who teaches us to do good things” (Mrs. Setara Khiviwutlay, aged 45).

However, parents are unhappy if their children ignore the animist ceremonies while being eager about Buddhist ceremonies. They worry that a Muser community characteristic will be lost because not many youngsters join animist ceremonies at other’s houses. Whenever a family performs an important household ceremony like a wedding or new house party, villagers will join a collective dancing performance (ten chaukhuu). Adults also worry about the belief of youngsters in God Gusha. Puchan Sompoi said:

Muser youngsters must not forget our animistic culture. If we lose this religion, we lose Muser identity. If we do not believe in God Gusha, we will meet bad luck, miserable things and cannot develop ourselves, cannot earn a living.... Boys must learn how to perform animist ceremonies to uphold the tradition. As for girls, if they get married with men outside the village, they must come back home on important festivals to join the village. It is not moral and not good for them if they forget their own religion, supreme god, and ancestors.

Adults try to implant in youngsters the spirit of worshipping the Lord God Gusha in order to revitalize traditional religion as a counterbalance to Buddhism. The adults’ mixture of tolerance and advocacy is sensitive to contexts and situations. Adults accept changes in students as a result of education because they realize the need for them to integrate into mainstream society. That acceptance involves many aspects. They can accept students’ speaking Thai often; they also accept students’ following Buddhism.

In the process of religious change, Muser seniors who are experienced animist believers are able to observe the intervention of Buddhism into their local beliefs. They can see most clearly how risky it is for their animism to be ignored by youngsters who are more familiar with Buddhism through education; however, they respond in a compromising way. They do not ask their children to give up Buddhism but remind them to look back and uphold their tradition. Consequently, youngsters have a double ethnic religious
identity. Young individuals of this ethnic culture tend to simplify animistic ceremonies but still uphold them along with their belief in Buddhist teachings and practice what they learn from school. Religion shows the most evidence of acculturation, assimilation and integration in this case study.

Conclusion

A decline in the frequency of wearing traditional costume is removing a key visible expression of ethnic culture. To overcome their inferiority complex, young people increasingly adopt the same dressing style as lowlanders, resulting in a flexible, double ethnic identity in costume. However, the trend is for the Thai element to increase. The gradual loss of the Muser language is a significant threat to the maintenance of Muser ethnic cultural coherence. Students are increasingly adopting Buddhist beliefs and practices, making adults concerned over the decline of animist ceremonial and practice. Senior villagers resist these trends but are still uncertain how best to avoid the loss of cultural tradition.

Notes

1 Headman of activities and ceremonies. The voted head of ceremonies is the expert in mythology. The seniors of the village will consider and choose among them the most experienced and knowledgeable one to become the head of ceremonies. This one is very knowledgeable about all regulation and rules of the village. He will make the final decision after thorough discussion with an assembly of seniors. This kind of headman is called Puchan. This headman will take care of affairs related to sacred places. In case there is any problem of a certain family or of the village, he will be the first to be notified. Then he will help solve the problem according to traditional beliefs.
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