

WRITING AND PERFORMING ORALITY: THE NAGA CONTEXT

(Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in English, Nagaland University)

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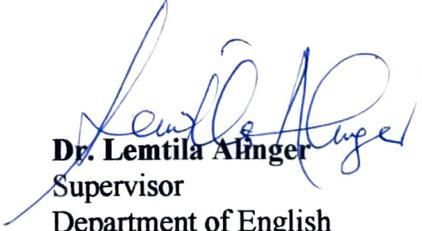
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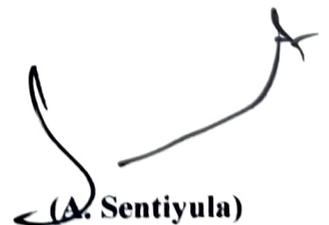
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CONTENTS

Particulars	Page No.
Candidate's Declaration	I
Certificate	II
Plagiarism Free Undertaking	III - IV
Acknowledgement	V
Chapter 1 Orality and Literacy	1 - 21
Chapter 2 Orality and Folklore Theories	22 - 55
Chapter 3 Orality and Performativity	56 - 68
Chapter 4 Folklore Interrupted	69 - 90
Chapter 5 Orality, Language, and the Contemporary	91 - 152
Chapter 6 Conclusion	153 - 168
Summary	169 - 175
Bibliography	176 - 194
Appendices	195 - 209

Chapter 1

Orality and Literacy

Introduction

What is the significance of oral traditions, and how do they relate to our modern literate lives? This has been a recurring question for scholars in relation to oral tradition and literature. Most significantly, it is relevant to take recourse to Walter Ong's work in this area of study. Ong contends in his seminal work, *Orality and Literacy*, that writing alters consciousness and he notes this in his discussion of writing as a technology. He was arguing that writing, as a technology, changes people's minds, claiming that writing has altered people historically and anthropologically and suggested that writing has revolutionized human awareness. Without writing and literacy, humans would have developed differently than they have; this claim has not been universally accepted and scholars have also challenged it since it appears to advocate for a type of technological determinism. This, however, does not resolve the conflict in Ong's contention that technology alters consciousness. Therefore, the question to be posed is whether writing changes consciousness? And with that inquiry, what does Ong's claim mean regarding consciousness transformations? Does his work endorse technological determinism by making this assertion? Put simply, in some ways, this claim supports the technological determinism argument since he recognises the power of technology, however, at the same time, it cannot be overlooked that his argument also recognises the power of mankind. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong concludes that the evolution of consciousness in human history is noted by an increase in minute attention to the subjectivity of the individual person. This is a distanced position, though not necessarily separated, from

the communal structures in which each person is enveloped. This precise idea of interiority is fundamental to Ong's view of humans, particularly how one interior extends out to another.

In today's context, undoubtedly, human consciousness is currently being restructured by contemporary culture. This awareness is founded on an understanding of how civilizations have developed over time, as well as how technology has also influenced human communication and expression. With this primary approach, this study will also investigate Walter Ong's notions of fundamental orality and literary cultures as an initial theoretical grounding. It will investigate how the cultural movements in human awareness from orality to literacy might explain the contemporary shift from literacy to recorded or performed culture within the context of the Naga literature and performance culture. It will be argued that for the Naga literature and performance culture, this phenomenon is being mediated through a plethora of new and developing practices and processes. Corresponding to this argument, this study will also expand on Ong's framework of orality in culture by outlining the communicative and expressive qualities of modern performance culture.

At the outset, it can be noted that human awareness initially became literate under the impact of anchored oral traditions across history. Literacy was gradually used to expand orality specifically using methods of memory and writing. A similarity can also be drawn to how technology currently mediates literacy and other aspects of our contemporary society. However, the move from oral culture to a merging of orality and literacy has been a gradual process. This is also in correlation to how literacy is currently mediated by technology. With the growth of literacy and being

more widely acknowledged, human consciousness increased; this brought about the reform to promote a shift from an orality-dominated culture to a literacy-dominated culture. This is especially significant when considering Ong's claim that writing restructures consciousness. When Walter Ong studied the transition from orality to the beginnings of literacy, he saw not just a change in modality, but also a paradigm shift as humans began to think differently. As a result of the nature of writing, human thought as a species was totally rebuilt. As we collectively interact with one another in more immersive ways, it can be argued that the current society thinking is transitioning to technologically aided or supported consciousness, which implies a radical transition to performance culture as well. A critical understanding of this aspect of human consciousness cannot be confined to standard literacy and orality techniques. Performance culture is also not restricted by orality and literacy, though they undoubtedly inform one another. Furthermore, while modern forms of expression can mediate and realise performance culture, performance is not restricted by them since it contains the character of a potentiality already visible within varied cultures. Furthermore, they are not constrained by the features of secondary orality culture. An in-depth analysis of the primary and secondary orality is essential in order to support the statement. This will be taken up in the following sections.

Key Postulations on Orality and Literacy

Literacy can be defined by both alphabetically written exchanges but also their conceptualization. Simultaneously, orality can be defined as reliance on the oral word in oral cultures, and 'literacy' as the reliance on the written word in literate civilizations. However, literacy and orality are not mutually exclusive. As a result, some societies rely on writing while simultaneously using the spoken word. We may

utilise the concept of a continuum to analyse how orality and literacy coexist in most civilizations today. Orality is afforded more importance in certain civilizations than in others, whereas some societies rely more on the written word however, it is difficult to discover a society that lacks either of these two things. In fact, Ruth Finnegan (1988) has proposed the idea of the assumed naturalness of oral language, where oral communication is assumedly presented as natural to human communication. However, just as literacy or computer technology relied its social and cultural norms on a man-made system of communication, so also is the case with orality; this is the remarkable system of human speech. She argues that human speech is often taken for granted rather even a seemingly 'natural' system of communication requires an in-depth understanding. Both Ong's notion that artificiality is natural and Finnegan's argument that even if we regard spoken language to be natural, it is, in reality, a social entity, and these two concepts are correlated. The fact that every community possesses spoken language does not imply that it is natural, and to support this claim, we must recall that the use of language in various cultures follows distinct conventions. In concurrent, Finnegan notes that discussing 'oral literature' is not wrong. While it may seem logical to refer to artistic work that relies on spoken language as 'oral literature,' it must be asserted that when one reads – or, rather, hears – some of the oral literary forms in oral circumstances, one cannot help but accept that the expression of insight and understanding does not always have to be written. Thus, in her opinion, the distinctions between oral and written literature are not as apparent. As a result, when attempting to characterise the fundamental qualities of literature, no clear distinction can be made between societies that employ the written word and those that do not, emphasizing that these distinctions are unrelated to the existence or lack of literacy. In this context of the study, it also seems reasonable to discuss

‘literature’ in both circumstances; after all, historically, individuals have had an aesthetic sense or intellectual curiosity.

Finnegan admits that there is a generalised assumption that the function of oral literature differs from that of written literature, with the former having a practical, imaginative, or spiritual purpose, or satisfying a psychological need in mythic terms. In contrast to the practical characteristic of written literature, however, it cannot be made obvious that all written literature had a practical impetus. In truth, there is a great deal of written literature that serves practical, imaginative, or spiritual objectives, therefore this is not a means to demonstrate the distinction between orature and literature. Finnegan asserts that there is no reason to suppose that oral literature serves a greater practical function than written literature. In fact, she believes that the roles of literature vary by culture, but not necessarily by whether they are oral or written. As a result of the impacts of reading, writing, and text, oral cultures have now grown into ones that are more focussed on literacy. This may also be observed in some of the novel dynamics formed in the natural forms of performance-mediated cultures, such as in dramatisation, discussion, video, and narrative. In creating new modes and approaches to performance-mediated surroundings, communication and expression are critical to assisting culture in adjusting to changing environments.

Furthermore, sustaining this scrutiny on new modes of performance-mediated culture, one of Walter Ong’s most significant publications, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), can be underpinned as an immediate influence on the consequences of this study. Ong gives a detailed account of human communication and technology in this book, beginning with a description of language

orality, the literate mind, and the problems of the phrase 'oral literature.' The work also offers a review of oral traditions, the features of orally-based cognition and expression, an overview of writing in the context of consciousness restructuring, and the notions of space, print, closure, and hearing dominance. Ong closes this work with a knowledge of media and human communication, as well as a consideration of the text's 'inward turn.' And it can be specifically noted that the concept of 'oral residue,' which Ong employs to investigate the evolution and change in the link between orality and literacy, is one of the markers for change that he has addressed in depth. Before delving into Ong's discussion of oral residue, it is worth noting that the issue of oral residue is laden with chances of misinterpretation. One flaw is that Ong's comments on oral residue emphasise the topic of change over time, and when it comes to change, our society instinctively equates newer with better. As a result, the most typical reading of a scenario in which oral and literate features interplay is to favour the literate. Ong strived to operate outside of the norm, yet he is frequently misunderstood. The word residue is responsible for the second inclination to misunderstand. In general, residue connotes something to avoid or get rid of. These two variables work together to cast a bad light on the concept of oral residue, even though Ong does not imply this. The conflict between valuing and depreciating oral residue complicates growth, transformation, and perception of change through time. While textual definitions of orality might imply that it is a destructive force, in fact, Ong's use adheres to the sociological definition of orality as a basic instinct that motivates human activity and is not the outcome of rational thinking. In the context of his overall work, Ong's use of oral residue was really part of the endeavour to give new ways of thinking about change while highlighting the things we can and must learn from diversity. Even when he saw particular uses of language deteriorate, he

maintained to appreciate the remnant in the ways he pointed it out to us. Yet, when considered in isolation, the notion of residue continues to indicate anything lasting yet undesirable, unnecessary, or out of place. So, while the concept of residue reveals some elements of change, it does not provide a tool or approach for negotiating our present and near future. Therefore, in this context, the purpose of this study is to facilitate such a conception. Ong's work explores the human transformation and he conceptualized the past by the term 'residue', whereas, his discourse of the present and near-future is through the concept of secondary orality.

Primary and Secondary Orality

The concept of secondary orality is what will be of main interest in correlation to this thesis. According to Walter Ong, there are two types of orality in a culture; these are primary and secondary orality. Primary orality is associated with societies that did not have access to writing prior to the appearance or occurrence of any other outside influence. Ong defines it as the untouched orality of mankind unsullied by writing or print and remains more or less operational in locations that are insulated to a greater or lesser extent from the full influence of literacy and which are rudimentary to some extent in all of us. He goes on to describe how the primary oral culture maintains and preserves its orality through repetitions. These avenues of oral culture are the repeated manner of narrative, folklore, and folk songs which were all passed down. And because there was no written language at the time, this was the only way for orality to be maintained, or else, it would have perished. This form of knowledge also required a great deal of energy for arduous learning and repeating. This naturally leads to the production of several new variations or interpretations. The original will never be recognized or tracked because each version and interpretation is lowered and altered depending on oral folktales and folk songs passed down through generations. The

method of repeats in primitive oral societies is placed a high value by scholars. This recurrent succession of oral tale elements does not always increase the unreliability or inaccuracy of the story, rather, repetition simply enhances their values and potential for a cumulative influence on those who hear it. Even when the images in a repeating sequence are similar, the aesthetic effect of the second and subsequent repeats are never the same as the previous experiences or encounters. Since fundamental oral cultures have no defined principles of orality, knowledge, and information, folktales and folksongs that are orally conveyed are passed on in a unique way that the written script does not, and so an oral culture has no fixed text. And because there is no writing, there can never be anything other than the thinker and storyteller of the oral tales. Since there were no texts or written words to govern the mental processes in oral narratives, the main oral culture was aesthetically free. Every telling of the narrative must be presented individually in a unique context, since in oral cultures, an audience must be induced to respond, typically enthusiastically, but in the process of the narration, the storytellers also inject new aspects into existing stories. There will be as many minor versions of a tale as there are repetitions of it in oral tradition, and the number of repetitions can be extended endlessly. Thus, it is obvious from this that memory and repetition play an important role in the foundation of orality. As a result, verbal memory is a valuable asset in oral civilizations.

Walter Ong argues that where humans are currently is the secondary orality. He sees cultural evolution as a progression from orality through literacy to secondary orality. He describes the world of secondary orality as apparently identical to that of primary orality but fundamentally opposed, planned, and self-conscious whereas primary orality is unplanned and not self-conscious. Secondary orality is based on and

emerges from literacy and it requires literacy to function since so much of what appears to be spontaneous oral (but is actually planned and/or staged) is dependent on literacy in the preparation and prodding. Not to mention that the technologies that enable mass communication rely on literacy for their conception and development. Ong's forecast of what happens after literacy is secondary orality, although he emphasizes how we are literates even during the period of secondary orality. In fact, Ong differentiates between the primary orality and secondary orality and describes it as the orality that culture and society receive from the orality of technological devices which depends largely on print and writing for its existence. The secondary orality is brought about with the introduction of an outside influence, unlike the primary orality. Ong states that secondary orality "is in a fundamental way an oral-aural medium. It must have sound and . . . never uses purely visual devices" (Ong, *Literacy in our Times*, 201).

Locating Secondary Orality in Naga Literatures

In the context of Nagaland, it was Temsula Ao who succinctly asks in her essay *Writing Orality*, "How have the literate, educated inheritors of such traditions dealt with their inheritance? This question resonates through the current work to some extent. Some cultures have done an admirable job of dealing with this question. The *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic gathered by Elias Lonrot, is an example of oral tradition's continuation in indigenous people's works. And in Ao's essay, she notes that Lonrot transformed the poems "of the 'little tradition' of ordinary folk into national literature in the 'great tradition' of education and civilization" (Ao 101). Native American literature and African literature are two examples given by Ao. These initiatives aided in the preservation of oral literature and related aspects in their

own civilizations. In the process of revitalising the oral tradition, a new type of literature emerged, fusing elements of the oral tradition with modern conceptualizations of themselves, enabling such writers to “move away from western, euro-centric models and has enabled them to create a completely new literature immersed in traditional sensibilities but imbued with contemporary perceptions” (103). In this regard, a new trend in creative writing has emerged in the Northeast of India, which significantly incorporates elements from the region’s oral traditions and it is in this category, Ao places herself. In the process of “incorporating insights from their oral traditions, they are creating a new literature of their own in a language, though not their own, nevertheless lends a kind of universality to the literature by blending the elements of oral tradition with their creative imagination and synthesising the past with the present, these writers are exploring an exciting and derivative literature which is both oral and written at the same time” (107 - 108). In their endeavour to resurrect past memories through the written form, Ao and other poets in this region’s profound compositions represent a changing threshold between the oral and the written, spawning new literature. Thus, orality embedded in the written provides a spectrum towards newer understanding and senses in this manner.

Temsula Ao is a well-known Naga poet, writer, and academician. She has published five collections of poetry which are now available in a compiled anthology called *Book of Songs* (2013), one book on her own culture called *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*, and two Books of her Short Stories, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* published by Zubaan-Penguin (2006), *Laburnum for my Head* by Penguin (2009) and a memoir - *Once upon a Lifetime: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags* by Zubaan (2014) as well as many essays on culture and literature in prestigious journals.

A number of her poems and stories, as well as essays on folklore, have featured in various anthologies in the country and abroad. The memory of the past has always been interwoven with changing times and realities, and stories are repositories of this essence. Thus, the purpose of this study is to take one's understanding of 'stories' to an alternate perspective and study their movement from the aural level (orality) to the written sphere (writing) and how it is bodily enacted in a performative action. Our existing understanding of writing orality will be tested and advanced as a result of this approach.

In this regard, the Naga culture is predominantly an oral civilization having its own methods of communicating and passing down information and knowledge through orality. Since the Nagas had no written script, orality was firmly ingrained in them, adding to the primary importance and richness of their culture. Due to this, oral storytelling has always been important, particularly in the literary context. Nagas have several folk stories that have been passed down from generation to generation through the means of oral narration, and because orality was the only medium of communication, the ancestral Nagas passed on their wisdom and information orally to the next generation. This results in the transfer of oral interpretations and meanings from generation to generation, where skill and knowledge are passed down by personal engagement and practice. In this way, mental categories are seized in the immediate context of individual conversations and interiorized as common knowledge. Due to the variances in narration by different oral narrators and storytellers, these stories eventually and unavoidably have several variants. However, for each of these kinds of oral literature, there also exists a variety of oral literary critiques. And it is because of all of these issues, collecting oral histories has never

been straightforward, since much of it has likely not been formed, conveyed, or recounted in its most authentic form. In truth, there is no one correct interpretation of a folklore item, just as there is no single correct rendition of a game or song. Since there is little, if not limited, collection of oral literary criticism, determining the version of interpretation may be quite difficult at times. In most interpretations, the knowledge is inevitable from the collector's perspective. In fact, there is nothing wrong with analytic interpretations as opposed to native interpretations, but one does not preclude the other. Unfortunately, in a few cases, the analyst-collector implies that this interpretation is actually the native's own interpretation. As a result, Naga oral literature, particularly folktales, is sometimes dismissed as mere fancy or fable. It should be emphasised that in folktales, natural rules are broken in such a way that they are not implausible. The events in folktales are so strange that they could never have happened in reality, which is what makes them entertaining, and the fact that the story is not based on typical persons or activities in a normal context makes it even more extraordinary. The Nagas have a wide range of oral stories, particularly from the pre-Christian era and these oral tales not only reflect and portray Naga culture, but also Naga identity.

Understanding Orality within the Context of the Study

With the emergence of written language, oral literature was gradually supplanted by written script, and oral compositions and performances were thought to decline.

Despite this, it has to be noted that "oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality" (Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 8). Ong clearly stated his position on the distinction between orality and writing and emphasised the distinction between literacy and orality. He implies that the scholarly

community is just now becoming aware of the oral nature of language and some of the deeper implications of the dichotomy between orality and writing. To provide one example, several Naga stories highlight the numerous instances of man-animal relationships in oral histories. And since the Nagas have always been a tribal people, animal imagery has been incorporated into various areas of their oral storytelling. Ong observes that ideas in oral cultures are typically used in situations that operate on frames of reference and are marginally abstract, in the sense that they are near to the live human lifeworld. As a result, nature and the animal world figure prominently in the bulk of oral folktales. In terms of the oral viewpoint, there is a strong emphasis on the animal world in Naga orality. However, with the arrival of Christianity, these narratives were all dismissed as mere fancy and were relegated to the status of mythological stories spoken orally by savages. With the arrival of Christianity, all of these chants and tales were thought to be the work of the evil forces, who were thought to be attempting to lure people away from Christianity. As a result, these stories were opposed since they were supposed to be stories of contact and communication with creatures from other dimensions, who were thought to be the devil's progeny and worshipers. Therefore, oral compositions, knowledge, and practices of these oral narratives were abruptly halted, and narratives were produced and centred entirely on Biblical ideas and teachings in the Christian era. This is still evident in Naga literature and performances today, although the arrival of Christianity and postcolonialism had a profound influence on Nagas in terms of concept development and production, as well as on their psyche. This approach resulted in a constant repudiation of cultural oral myths, with their ancestral origins and cultural beliefs virtually totally denied and changed by colonisation.

The Nagas rejected their oral legacy completely, and artistic works from the post-colonial period were primarily Christian in themes and structures. This necessitates the occurrence of hybridity in Naga tales and can be considered to be unavoidable among Nagas in the post-Christian age. As a result, the power dynamic was hybridised rather than completely altered. Indeed, Bhabha defines hybridity as the reassessment of colonial identity through the recurrence of discriminatory identity effects. Simultaneously, Naga literature in the post-Christian period reinterprets hybridity, emphasising its narrative nature and so preserving the fluidity of individual identifications. The concept that hybrid consciousness grows as a form of the story as propounded by Mikhail M. Bakhtin can be discerned in these texts. Hybridity is rebuilt from the domain of theory and cultural generalisations and realigned with modes of storytelling that generates narratives of the self through self-discourses. In the context of Naga literature, hybridity may thus be described as an artistic expression that simultaneously controls and includes others' discourses but now narrates the stories of the people, thereby achieving hybrid consciousness.

The concept of hybridity can be further examined in the later sections, however, it also correlates to the close association between orality and folklore in the specific relevance of Naga culture in the pre-colonial and pre-Christian eras. Turning to Ong, he argues that orality is not ideal, and embracing it positively does not imply advocating it as a permanent state for any civilization. Literacy, in fact, opens up the world and human life possibilities that were previously inconceivable. This is especially true with Naga oral culture, as the transfer from orality to writing occurred only after the arrival of American missionaries. Following colonisation, missionaries brought and taught the Nagas the written script, resulting in a rapid shift from long-

held oral expression to writing. With colonisation, there was also a dramatic transition in Naga oral literature, which may be considered to have abruptly ceased or impoverished. The post-colonial Naga society witnessed the change of an apparently primitive group into one that progressively grew literate and educated and as a result of all of this, an animism-based tribal society converted to Christianity. Literacy, along with Christianity, became widespread among the Nagas after missionaries introduced literacy, and there is therefore a hybridity including both the oral and written worlds. There is a notion of embracing both Christian ideals and presenting them in the context of the post-colonial realm while fusing oral culture and Christianity.

Having made this argument, this thesis attempts to investigate how the Nagas changed from an oral civilization to one that values writing. Throughout this process, oral traditions remain present, affecting the written creation, while the written word influences those same oral traditions. As a result, we cannot take for granted that orality and literacy are mutually incompatible. ‘Orality’ and ‘literacy,’ as Ruth Finnegan asserts, are not two separate and independent things; nor (to put it another way) are oral and written modes two mutually incompatible and opposed procedures for representing and transmitting knowledge. On the contrary, they take different forms in different cultures and periods, and are used differently in different social contexts; and, to the extent that they can be distinguished as distinct rather than a continuum. This continuum creates a process in which there is a mutual interaction and affect, such that their relationships are problematic rather than self-evident. The current Naga setting demonstrates how, rather from being two autonomous poles, orality and literacy invariably interact with one another. This study also investigates

how Naga oral traditions and literary works published in English by Naga writers reflect on certain assumptions about primary oral cultures. Among these assumptions is the widely held belief that certain assumptions about the features of both oral speech and written texts are challenged in English-language literary works.

According to Walter Mignolo, “both oral interactions and their conceptualization constitute orality” (When Speaking Was Not Enough, 333). Literacy, according to Mignolo, includes both alphabetic written exchanges and their conception. In the same way that orality is the reliance on the spoken word in oral cultures, literacy is the reliance on the written word in literate civilizations. Again, literacy and orality are not mutually exclusive and as a result, some societies rely on writing while simultaneously using the spoken word. We may utilise the concept of a continuum to analyse how orality and literacy coexist in most civilizations today. Orality is more essential in certain civilizations than others, and some cultures rely more on the written word than others, but it is uncommon to find a community that does not have both of these things.

From Orality to Textuality: Recasting Naga Literature

Regardless of the increase in written literature, Naga oral traditions are not only revived, being practised with renewed enthusiasm, but also affecting these very same written works. Even though authors use the written language to express themselves, their literary works show a clear influence of the oral nature of the Naga language and culture. The value Naga people place on oral traditions has an influence on the texts that have been written in English (both in poetry and fiction). And it can also be noted that in recent years, in various ways, authors use the same techniques that are usually

utilised in oral language, they show a prodigious interest in using the oral story they are narrating as a frame for the written story. Naga writings also often explore the relationship between orality, literacy and civilization. It can be noted that, in addition, the written texts are often references to other texts that do not fulfil their supposed mission of organising knowledge and preserving memory, thereby maintaining oral memory in its 'pure sense.' However, the dilemma that follows from this standing would be to question whether there is a 'pure sense' of recording oral memory.

Finally, the written texts also present the readers with a series of different characters or characterisations, that may differ or be a hybridised re-telling of an existing oral story. Thus, this goes to manifest that the written story can also influence the oral story, undermining the notion that, unlike oral language, written language is permanent. These examples will be discussed in the later sections of this study in the analysis of key texts. Thus, we can affirm that contemporary Naga literature written in English presents a variety of elements of orature but also the textual form. At the same time, the increase of literacy in English language is affecting the different oral traditions in several ways. The fact that, nowadays, most of the people who keep these traditions alive are not only literate, but many of them university educated has an effect on the language used in oral performances. In addition, there are many examples of oral traditions that are being written down with nuances of the author's own perspectives. With literacy, there emerges, what Ong calls secondary orality, which can only take place in literate societies. This secondary orality is also changing the reception of Naga oral traditions. Therefore, not only are Naga oral traditions present in Naga literature, but literacy and its consequences are also present within oral traditions.

Moreover, several Naga literary works written in English today attempt to challenge general assumptions about orality and literacy. For instance, some of them deal with the assumption that orality and illiteracy are related to lack of civilization and that literacy is related to civilizations. Not only do they question this assumption, but they undermine it. In the same way, they challenge the idea of the written text as something permanent to which we can go back anytime in order to acquire knowledge, and oral discourse as a temporary thing that is meant to disappear or change and thus should not be trusted. Naga orature, literature and other verbal art forms that are placed at different points of the orality and literacy continuum which serve to prove that orality and literacy are not two separate, mutually exclusive entities. In addition, they serve the function of going against assumptions that relate orality to lack of civilization and literacy to civilization, as well as those assumptions according to which literacy is a more efficient manner of storing and transmitting knowledge, as it is supposedly more permanent than orality.

Objectives, Preliminary Questions, and Chapterisation

It is in this context of orality that the goal of this research attempts to examine the concept of writing orality in depth. Temsula Ao's concept of writing orality will be the point of departure on the discussion on orality in the Naga context. Despite the fact that there have been several studies on Ao's poetry and literary works, this study will make a threefold contribution. First, this study will examine the tension between 'writing' and 'orality' as two divergent and at times complementary modalities by expanding on Ao's concept of 'writing orality.' The trajectory of this analysis will include some of the challenges that arise when literary works based on 'community' oral traditions become a topic of critical inquiry. And most significantly, when it is

largely represented and narrated by a single writer. Second, the relationship between writing, orality, and performance will be investigated. This inquiry will focus on how stories transition between aural, textual, and corporeal enactments. The study will then look at how a largely oral culture situates narrative performance within the broader field of indigenous studies in terms of questions of representation and performance of identity. This study will argue that literature cannot be separated from the turbulent histories that determine its production, without precluding conversations on the region's socio-political milieu. The threefold direction of this study, thus, will intervene with preliminary questions as listed in the following section.

To demonstrate the significance of the concept of 'writing orality,' literary case studies will illustrate the transition from oral to written and finally to performance as a form of hybridised orature. Contemporary Naga fictional writings will be highlighted and the following questions will guide the critical examination of these stories:

1. What relevance do these stories have for the teller, and what is the tradition behind them? Is there a sense that these stories belong to the community?
2. In contemporary Naga writing, how are stories represented? Are there any new ideas, exaggerations, or omissions?
3. How are stories primarily projected to an audience as 'moral,' 'cultural,' or 'political' narratives through performativity or digital technology?
4. What are the contemporary resonances of oral folklore?
5. And how do these tales fit into the broader context of 'indigenous studies' around the globe?

Methodology and Study Framework

Given the broad framework of the study stated above, this study will proceed with a qualitative approach. Therefore, the tentative methodology of the study will be in the order given below:

- I. Context analyses and theoretical framing
- II. Materials sourcing, observations, and commentary
- III. Case studies - literary analysis

Chapter 1 of the study as discussed has framed the introduction while also laying the foundational contexts in the study of orality and literacy. This chapter has also located the preliminary questions for consideration within the framework of contextual oral culture and traditions of writing. Chapter 2 of the study will undertake a literature review and critical analysis of orality within the context of the study. In Chapter 3 will examine the relationship between reality and literature, using anthropological or survey data as well as colonial literary compositions about Naga communities as sources. The merging of the two components of reality and literature will be the primary subject of this investigation. Folktales, headhunting motifs, spirit world motifs, Morungs, customary rules, tattooing, weaving, and village life, for example, and how they echo within community patterns of performativity. In conjunction with this, it would also be relevant to look into the evolution of such performativity, notably how these stories transition across the oral, written, and digital realms. And as such, what modern technologies are employed to gather, preserve, comprehend, interpret, and retell stories? Chapter 4 will consider the question of writing orality, specifically the transition from orality to performance will be emphasised. This will assess key theories of performance studies in the context of

writing and performance in the Naga culture and the resulting Naga social situation. Chapter 5 will follow the evolution of new literary themes based on current events. Specifically, within the scope of indigenous studies as a subject of study, concerns of identity, political instability, unemployment, power relations, or emerging feminist voices and their presence. Examining the Naga position within, without, and in relation to hegemonic discourses of postcolonial cultures and prevalent western thought will be at the forefront of this approach. The study attempts to use the Fourth World Theory (FWT) to ground this approach (FWT). The FWT's techniques and inquiries shed light on the status of non-state nations and peoples in their political and often violent relations with other non-state nations, as well as with state governments seeking supremacy and control over claimed territory and peoples. Fourth World nations, according to this theoretical framework, are peoples who have been forcibly assimilated into governments and are not acknowledged as having an international identity or keeping their own culture. This theoretical approach will be discussed in light of Nagaland's socio-political situation. The final chapter aims to synthesise the study's primary arguments and content, as well as to comprehend the study's limitations and future directions.

Chapter Two

Orality and Folklore Theories

In 1988, when A. K. Ramanujan delivered the lecture, “Who needs Folklore?”, he maintained that Indian “folklore is only a suburb away, a cousin or a grandmother away” (1). He exemplifies this by mentioning the example of a professor friend who, at his request, gathered a stack of forty tales written down in a matter of hours by his urban (Bangalore-based) pupils. He goes on to say that verbal folklore, in the sense of a largely oral tradition with specific genres (such as proverb, riddle, lullaby, tale, ballad, prose narrative, verse, or a mixture of both, and so on), nonverbal materials (such as dances, games, floor or wall designs, objects of various kinds ranging from toys to outdoor giant clay horses), and composite performing arts (which may include several of the former as in street magic and what we separate as art, economics, and religion is moulded and expressed here (2). He promotes the merging of written and oral traditions, as well as the blurring of lines between the humanities and social sciences. In short, he aimed to improve folklore’s status from that of a collection of old wives’ tales and peasant superstitions to that of a legitimate discipline. But, in order to do so, the lens through which we perceive folklore should be altered, so that we are not only looking at the places we have looked before but also at locations that are regarded as less sacred. If language is a dialect with an army, then these many dialects convey oral literature, which he refers to as folklore. Ramanujan bemoans the fact that only the top of the Indian pyramid has been valued and paid attention to but the wide base of the Indian pyramid Indian literature rests on the local dialect. He expresses his contempt for anthropologist Robert Redfield’s now obsolete classification, according to which a civilization’s ‘Great Tradition’, in the singular,

carried by Sanskrit, is pan-Indian, prestigious, ancient, authorised by texts, cultivated and carried by “the reflective few” (4). Whereas the ‘Little Tradition’ or traditions in the plural, are local, mostly oral, and carried by the illiterate (or nonliterate) and the anonymous “unreflective many” (4).

How do we begin to interpret texts in this context? In the end, all oral traditions create the written form. Whether they be written or oral acts of authorship, plays or weddings, rituals or games, every type of “culture performance” (5) involves texts. Every cultural performance is a text because it not only makes and carries texts, but it is itself a text. *Great* and *little* traditions can be qualified from this point of view while looking at texts. As a result, folk traditions are no longer restricted to a certain geographical area. Folklore elements such as proverbs, riddles, jokes, stories, medicines, and recipes travel because they are autotelic in nature. It crosses linguistic barriers every time a bilingual says or hears it. They travel not only inside the country or cultural area but also across the globe as part of a worldwide network.

Ramanujan goes on to explain the differences and connections between written and oral media. They are not simple opposites; they pervade and combine in a variety of ways. Classical texts, and by extension written texts, are supposed to be static, but folk texts or speech are thought to be dynamic. This crude split, however, will not suffice, therefore he offers three sets of separate oppositions instead. Classical versus folk, written versus spoken, and fixed versus free or flexible are the different categories. He acknowledges that the classical, the written, and the fixed do not always go hand in hand. In both written and spoken texts, the fixed and fluid, or what should be called fixed and free-forms, exist. He refers to the written and oral forms as

a couple that defines and marries each other and is profoundly entwined. Although a work may be created orally, it may also be communicated via writing. On the other hand, it may be written, but oral practitioners keep the text alive by chanting it aloud. Certain texts, such as proverbs and tales, which are often authored and conveyed orally, may never be written down. Texts, like newspapers, may never go through an oral phase because they are authored, printed, then silently scanned or read. As a result, a tale may go through several stages over time, similar to how an oral story is written up or written down. The written text may subsequently be picked up by other audiences who relate the narrative orally, possibly in other languages, and it is written down somewhere else, thereby starting a new cycle of transmission. To better understand this process of transmission, it will be relevant to consider a literature review of orality and the written text which will be discussed in the following section.

Orality and the Written Text: Literature Review

When working with written texts, it is important to consider the oral resources available to them. In cultures like the Indian, writing exists in the framework of oral traditions, but orature also coexists in villages and specific communities. Oral traditions, as a result, increase the reach while simultaneously complicating and balancing the texts we already know. On the other side, the oral tradition is ignored. Oral traditions supply us with a variety of deity concepts that complement and complete written concepts, therefore enlightening them. For example, the creation stories are substantially different for different communities. In Sanskritic mythology, it is always the male gods who construct the goddess and bestow their abilities on her. Whereas in an oral folk or the *Purana*, the goddess grants Siva her powers in the exact opposite order. The father figures in Sanskritic myth are the ones who lust after

the daughters. The female's sexual yearning is made apparent in this scene. The male deity deprives her of her abilities, which he then exploits to destroy her. Her sons eventually marry off pieces of their mother, but only after fragmenting and domesticating her. As a result, male-female power dynamics in folk traditions differ significantly from those in more well-known literature. The gods of the *Puranas* and the heroes of the epics have bodies that lack biological processes such as sweating, urinating, defecating, or passing wind. They don't blink, and their feet don't touch the ground. However, in folk tradition, one finds them with tangible bodies, and they are embodied, localised, and domesticated. In many ways, folklore and bhakti traditions are similar in that they both give and receive from one another, sharing genres, motifs, and attitudes, and it appears to not only assign gods to take on bodies but also to picture them as having bodies with all the demands and sorrows that flesh involves. As a result, folk interpretations of pan-Indian myths not only bring the gods closer to the people, making the everyday world magical, but also modernise them.

Much before Ramanujan, in his essay *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, Jan Vansina (1961) asked this question and gave oral tradition, the source of all folklore, its rightful importance. In this essay, he argues that oral traditions are unique historical sources whose preservation is dependent on the abilities to succeed generations of humans to remember. This seminal work, first published in French in 1961 and since translated into English, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, and Hungarian, investigates the possibilities of reconstructing nonliterate peoples' histories through oral traditions. It investigates this by performing literature reviews, providing a taxonomy of oral traditions, and evaluating collecting and interpretation methods. It was universally commended for Vansina's thorough

functional examination of oral traditions. In 1985, it was republished as *Oral Tradition as History*. It is essentially a work that should be required reading for all historians, anthropologists, folklorists, and ethnographers interested in the transmission and potential uses of oral material. *Oral Traditions: A Study in Historical Methodology* is a critical methodological intervention that shows how oral traditions may be used to help rebuild a civilization when there is little written data. Vansina argues that oral history should be valued equally with recorded documents. Sources such as 'oral history' and 'oral traditions' encapsulate tremendous amounts of knowledge about the past. The purpose of gathering them is to safeguard sources from oblivion and to form an initial judgement of what events had occurred. Oral tradition is a custom or practice that is passed down orally or via speech from generation to generation. It is generally written down, but it may tell us a lot about the culture and the individuals who created it, as well as enabling history to be recorded and shared by communities that did not have writing. It was a way to store essential knowledge for communities and to allow both literate and uneducated people to share it. Myths and stories that shed insight on the origins of societies, their social, economic, and political structures, taboos, totems, social conceptions, and behaviours are examples of oral tradition. Orality renders oral tradition prone to mistakes during transmission from generation to generation. However, determining which aspects in oral tradition are credible as data sources are unreliable, and those which might offer hints to the locations of good sources elsewhere can be useful to any researcher. It is critical to get to the heart of oral traditions. to make conclusions credible and worthwhile Traditions must be cross-checked with other traditions, anthropological research, archaeological evidence, but also the outcomes of linguistic approaches and written documents. In this sense, using oral traditions as a historical source is not an easy task. According to

Vansina, oral traditions are crucial primary hypotheses that must be supported by independent data such as documentation or archaeological study. However, any writer may make appropriate use of oral traditions with time and attention, as well as the capacity to transcend one's own cultural and educational prejudices.

In 1985, Richard Dorson, the editor of *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, examined the stated goal of resolving the questions such as, "What is folklore?" "How does folklore work?", and "What does a folklorist do?" This important book was written to be a comprehensive resource for anyone "who teaches, studies, or conducts research in folklore," and the book begins by describing how folklore became a department at Indiana University in 1963. This was the first of its sort in the United States, and the faculty was the driving force behind it. Definitions of folklore and folklife studies are provided in the book's introduction. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (commonly known as the Brothers Grimm) began publishing important volumes of oral folk tales and interpretations of Germanic mythology in 1812, under the title *Volkskunde*. In 1846, William John Thoms, an English antiquarian, wrote to the *Athenaeum*, a popular journal, proposing the use of the new term 'Folk-lore' instead of 'popular antiquities.' The word gained traction and helped to establish a new field of study and research, but it also sparked debate and uncertainty. To both laypeople and scholars, folklore meant falsehood, wrongness, fiction, and distortion. Later on, the phrase 'folklife' competed with, and even threatened to supplant, the term 'folklore.' Folklife, they believed, encompassed the entire spectrum of traditional culture, including folklore. Folklorists, on the other hand, insist that their term encompasses traditional arts and crafts. It is in this context that Dorson divided folklore and folklife into four large groupings:

1. 1. Oral literature is made up of spoken, sung, and vocal versions of traditional utterances with repeating patterns. Under the umbrella of oral literature, *folk narrative* is a broad sub-discipline. Another sub-discipline is *folksong* or *folk poetry*. Traditional tales and songs are based on the written works of writers and poets, but they are passed down by word of mouth and have no known author. Short anecdotes, poems, intricate romances, and epics are all possibilities. Proverbs and riddles are two short forms of oral expression that are also classed as proverbs and riddles. Oral literature, of course, may and does find its way into written literature. A new generation of African novelists educated in England, for example, sprinkles proverbs from their native languages throughout their work. Folk speech refers to local and regional expressions that differ from the standard language taught in schools. The folklorist is interested in such archaic and dialectical words both as part of everyday language and within tales, songs, and sayings. It should be remembered, however, that not all oral folk expression is spoken. Yodels, hollers, shouts, chants, and laments, for example, may have their own unique traditional character based on nonlexical sounds (2).

2. Material culture, often known as physical folklife, is in direct contradiction to oral folklore. Rather than focussing on the aural aspects of folk behaviour, this article focusses on the visible aspects of folk behaviour that existed before and still exist alongside the mechanical industry. Material culture is influenced by techniques, skills, recipes, and formulas passed down through generations, and it is susceptible to the same conservative tradition and individual variance as a verbal art. Material culture research focusses on how men and women in traditional civilizations construct their homes, create their clothing, prepare their food, produce and fish, process the earth's

bounty, fashion their tools and implements, and design their furniture and utensils. All methods are traditional in a tribal civilization, and all goods are handmade, but innovation does occur. The folklife specialist focusses on high civilizations where there is evidence of cultural lag, i.e. when the ancient peasant and pioneer cultures exist in the shadow of the industrial revolution.

3. Social folk custom: Areas of traditional life facing both ways sit between oral literature and material culture. We can classify one of these areas as social folk custom. Individual skills and performances are less important here than group interaction. A physical activity (providing the meal), a shared belief (the premonitory dream), and a material object are frequently included in general and specific customs (the penny loaf). Rituals are customs that have gained magical and spiritual significance. The participation of large social groups in public performances and entertainment results in a new type of social folk tradition known as a festival or a celebration. Thus, celebrations based on both religious and secular traditions may include music, dance, costume, floats, and processions. Tradition, rather than codified rules and regulations, is used to teach some games, recreations, sports, and pastimes. Outside of the institutional church, the religious features of social folk customs cover types of worship. Such modes may date back to pre-Christian times, such as Japanese offerings to unquiet spirits, or they may stem from folk reinterpretations of Christian doctrine and gospel, such as Black American revisions in Baptist services through the incantatory sermon and congregational spiritual; or they may involve syncretism between indigenous deities and monotheistic religions, such as the identification of African gods with Catholic saints.

In cases where a well-known miracle worker saves souls and heals bodies, folk religion and folk medicine may collide. Bloodstoppers, burn healers, wart charmers, cancer curers, and other professionals who, through inherited or transferred powers, can cure maladies that medical practitioners cannot. Practitioners of folk medicine range from those who utilise invocations and secret charms to herbalists and grandmothers who use old wives' recipes that have been shown to have demonstrable curative effects in some situations, such as the discovery of penicillin in bread mould.

4. The fourth sector is the **performing folk arts**. Traditional music, dancing, and drama make up the majority of the show. While renditions of a folktale or a folksong are often commonly referred to be performances, they are less formal than the deliberate presentation of these arts by people or groups using folk instruments, dancing costumes, and scene props. The performing arts intersect with each other and often appear in conjunction. The performing folk arts also interact with the formal performing arts. For urban audiences, regional peasant and tribal dances, songs, and music from Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa have become increasingly popular entertainment fare, and artists have adopted sophisticated techniques and attitudes as a result. On the other hand, high cultural aspects continue to infiltrate traditional repertoires.

These four groups are not mutually exclusive or all-inclusive. Where do we put typical gestures, for example? Despite the paradox of subsuming gestures beneath oral tradition, they could be included alongside 'folk speech' as a kind of folk communication. How do you tell the difference between a festival and the performing

arts? Should superstitions and beliefs be viewed as separate entities or merged with folk religion, storytelling, and rituals?

Ruth Finnegan, meanwhile in her book *Oral Traditions and The Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (1992) tries to explain what oral traditions can be identified in the problems of the ‘simple’ matter of the title. Among the early working titles and subtitles were ‘oral traditions, oral literature, the verbal arts, performance, narrative, folk literature, oral texts,’ to name a few. After much soul-searching and debate with others, it was felt that the current title was slightly less confrontational than some and did offer some sense of the types of themes discussed. Therefore, while the book is primarily directed toward anthropologists, she emphasises the subject’s multidisciplinary nature by suggesting that the new breed of oral historians would be interested in a deeper look at the social context, social and psychological roles, and the structuring of literary formulations. As a result, her work covers a wide range of issues in human communication and performance, including storytelling and storytelling, narrative, myth, song, poetic expression, oratory, riddling, and the many kinds of heightened verbal expression—not to mention how they are performed and built (xiii).

Finnegan’s work largely encompasses the whole of culture and the whole of human life. The usage of precise vocabulary is required to properly describe the subject matter. She goes on to describe what ‘orality’ ‘tradition(s)’, ‘oral literature’, ‘verbal art’, ‘folklore’, ‘folk art’, ‘performance and performance events’, ‘narrative and narration’, ‘discourse’, ‘popular arts’/‘popular culture’ and other terms. According to Finnegan, the often-used adjective ‘oral’ is frequently utilised as a

primary criterion for identifying specific fields or study interests. As a result, 'folklore' is frequently characterised in terms of orally transmitted content, and it is at the heart of 'oral-formulaic' and 'oral literature' research. The dictionary definition states that it is 'uttered in spoken words; transacted by word of mouth; spoken, verbal, and forms the primary meaning in 'oral tradition', 'oral literature', 'oral narrative', 'oral testimony', and so on. The 'oral' is often contrasted with the 'written'. 'Oral also contrasts with what is not verbal or not based on words, for example, sign language. Folklore, such as stories, songs, and proverbs, is therefore distinguished from popular culture. These comparisons are troublesome because they might be imprecise and mirror Western ideas of verbal 'text.' Recent research has focussed on the idea that, despite their centrality on words, orally presented art forms entail more than just words. 'Oral tradition' can refer to any unwritten tradition (including physical monuments, religious statues, or church paintings), or it can refer to simply those traditions that are enunciated or communicated via words (and thereby comparing and varying with the previous examples).

She goes on to say that the more general term 'orality' has gained popularity in recent years, implying a broad contrast with 'literacy,' which is sometimes associated with assumptions about the social and cognitive characteristics of oral communication or the significance of oral culture within broad stages of historical development. Others critique this as technological determinism or dependent on west-centered conceptions of history, while scholars like Walter Ong are concerned with identifying general aspects of 'orality' as opposed to 'literacy.' Finally, she claims that, notwithstanding the ambiguity and debate, the term 'oral' is still widely used. Alternatively, the term 'tradition' can refer to a variety of meanings. It is used to refer

to culture as a whole; any established way of doing things, whether or not ancient; the process of passing down practices, ideas, or values; and the products of such passing down, sometimes with the connotation of being 'old' or having arisen in some 'natural' or non-polemical way. It also has additional undertones. A tradition is frequently assumed to belong to the entire community rather than to specific people or interest groups; to be unwritten; to be valued or (less frequently) outmoded; or to indicate a group's identity (Finnegan 60). Another phrase that coincides with 'oral tradition' but has different scope and connotation is 'oral literature.' It is a phrase commonly used by anthropologists and others for unwritten but somehow 'literary' terms. The study of verbal art or orality is maybe more intricate than any other discipline. Aside from folklore, numerous other humanities and social science areas have contributed to the understanding of verbal art. The realisation of folklore studies' multidisciplinary approach allows us to appreciate the academic accomplishment that Finnegan depicts in her work. She also displays the vitality of folklore studies and their significance to social sciences, but regardless of her scholarly discussions and opinions, Claude Levi-Strauss' structural study of myth has been a crucial role in the advancement of the verbal arts.

Folklore Genres, edited by Dan Ben-Amos, is a collection of articles that includes a description of what is included in the term 'folklore,' as well as a discussion of the genuine and practical difficulties in defining folklore. The efforts at classification and definition are tackled in this particular work. Folklore is an organic phenomenon and hence an inherent component of culture, thus tales, songs, and sculptures cannot be separated from their originating locale, period, or society. The audience influences the sort of folklore genre and presentation method. Folklore

definitions have had to deal with the subject's intrinsic duality by placing folklore objects in various, and even contradictory, contexts. As a result, folklore might be characterised as a body of knowledge, a way of thinking, or a type of art. And these categories aren't mutually exclusive. As a result, folklore is not thought to exist outside of an organised society. Its existence is dependent on its social environment, which might be a geographical, linguistic, ethnic, or occupational grouping. It must also go through the passage of time. As a consequence, folklore represents the whole of a society's knowledge. And linguistic art is the accumulation of a community's efforts throughout time. For an item to be qualified as folklore, it has to be orally passed down from one person to another or to a community without any form of the written materials. As a result, *Folklore Genres* examines a wide range of folklore sources from a number of theoretical viewpoints. The studies are categorised according to their broad approaches to the subject, with the common goal of distinguishing generically diverse varieties of folklore.

According to Ben-Amos, while folklorists' analytical categories are valuable tools for text categorisation, the names that performers and audiences have for their own genres show the location and role of these occurrences in the society's overall communication networks. The pieces are connected by a delicate thread of continuity and consistency, without the repetition that is common in such collections. The most obvious argument is that rhetorical, stylistic, and interactional characteristics of folklore phenomena are relevant criteria for establishing general definitions in the same way of structure, content, and function. There is a strong emphasis on performance, particularly from the perspective of the performer. Folklore, according to Ben-Amos and the book's writers, is synonymous with verbal art or oral literature.

In his introduction to the book, editor Ben-Amos analyses the concept of genre in folklore studies at length and concisely summarises its effect on the subject. He mentions Alan Dundes' claim that folklore cannot be defined until all of its genres are described, but dismisses Dundes' critique of genre analysis for disregarding a vast realm of phenomena that cannot be fit into its theoretical framework.

Dan Ben-Amos' "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," initially delivered in 1967 and published in 1972, is the classic declaration of scepticism. Ben-Amos proposed a post-industrial definition of folklore as creative communication in small groups in order to better comprehend folklore as a process. This criterion can identify folklore that is not traditional, if form persistence through time is the norm of tradition. He was concerned that folklore defined by tradition would hinder the folklorist's topic from broadening to emergent performances in mass culture, referring to tradition in the sense of 'tradition of time' as a weight on folklore studies. He contended that if folklore is exclusively concerned with tradition, it contradicts its own *raison d'être*. If the fundamental assumption of folklore study is founded on the disappearance of its subject matter, there is no stopping science from going down the same path. If the folklorist's primary job is to rescue tradition from oblivion, he reverts to the antiquarian position from which he worked so hard to escape. In those circumstances, it is in the best interests of folklore studies to broaden and dynamically expand the definition of the topic. When he presented a definition without precedent, Ben-Amos ironically made reference to building a tradition. He admitted that this definition may deviate from existing scholarly traditions, but it may also point to potential new approaches. If tradition, as the foundation of folklore, is both invented and inherited, individual and societal, fixed and dynamic, oral and written, of the past

and present, of time and place, of authority and freedom, what does it not include? Is it a shorter form for a sense of connection rather than a transmission process? And, is it feasible to make it empirical when it is so dependent on judgement and perception? Folklore is significant because of its contribution to culture, and it may be objectively evaluated in the same way that other customs and traditions are, in terms of form and function, or interrelationships with other parts of culture. Ben-Amos argued that this was due in part to folklorists borrowing phrases from ordinary use in English and then attempting to imbue them with academic and specialised meanings. Thus, the search for a groundedness in folklore studies appeared to be as relevant in the third decade of the twentieth century.

Barre Toelken's *Dynamics of Folklore* (1979, revised 1996) stresses variation within a tradition, whether deliberate or unintentional, as a key reality of life for folklore, rather than portraying it in opposing terms of conscious creative manipulation or amnesia. In reality, memory is recognised as a distinguishing quality that emerges from context, performance, attitude, cultural preferences, and other factors (Toelken 7). Most American anthropologists have never been concerned with folklore as a legitimate branch of human civilisation. The concept, drawn from Europeans' self-conscious study of European folk cultures, was difficult to reconcile with anthropologists' observations of an apparently quite different reality of non-Western peoples. The phrase had negative implications and, worse, might be seen as representing a European category of experience, whose reckless application to non-European civilizations prompted allegations of ethnocentrism. As a result, despite early contributions, the development of the idea of folklore has mainly been left to folklorists schooled primarily in the humanities, such as Dan Ben-Amos and Alan

Dundes. This trend continues with the publishing of *Dynamics of Folklore* by Barre Toelken, an English professor at the University of Oregon at the time.

The merit of Toelken's work, however, goes beyond the strictly educational, for in it he faces the difficult problem of definition in constructing a notion of folklore that is much more than an arbitrary understanding. He defines it as a continuous process in which significant and valuable objects and ideas are shared among group members. The process's vitality is portrayed through continuous, albeit often modest, creative modification. The dynamic link between folkloric material and a folkloric community, through which identities and socially important roles are created, values are expressed, and meanings are exchanged, is folklore as a process. If the idea seems at once too basic and too encompassing, this is because of the fluid and dynamic quality of the human experience that it describes which diverts from the objective outlook of the scholar scientist. Toelken goes on to define the process in terms of material chemistry, cultural, and contextual elements. He emphasises the complicated interaction of those aspects that contribute to creative variety in his examination of folk performance, making each performance unique. To define this multidimensional experience, Toelken makes considerable use of ideas and notions borrowed from other scholars. In subsequent chapters, the author shifts away from the folk event itself and toward the wider circumstances that give the event meaning. These are the community's values, language devices and implications, and the participants' cultural worldview. Although some of the terms Toelken has coined or borrowed to describe these are unwieldy and may be read uneasily by anthropologists, their meaning in the text is clear and unambiguous, thanks to the author's insistence on never straying too far from the concrete case. To Toelken's great credit these inherently interesting

human events are allowed to demonstrate the usefulness of the concepts, rather than being submerged by overanalysis.

Much of the merit of anthropology can be noted in his work and perspective. This is perhaps most evident in his recognition of the problem of distortion as to how to accurately record the process of folklore without destroying the experience. This is not just in terms of preserving its aesthetic purity, but also in terms of preserving the authenticity of the experience for the folk group, but also for the observer or recorder. This is clearly a focus of interest for Toelken and he devotes a significant portion of the final three chapters to discussing the obligations and ethics of empirical and field research. Toelken describes his approach to folklore as “nearly everyone is a folklorist; some are [just] professionals at it” (264). His idea is that as members of a cultural community, we are inevitably exposed to, study, collect, and perform that group’s folklore.

Current Theories of Folklore

A comprehensive tracing of the existing theories of folklore is relevant for a better understanding of the subject matter. Drawing on Dorson’s genealogy, current theories on folklore can be systematised as historical-geographical, historical-reconstructional, ideological, functional, psychoanalytical, oral-formulaic, cross-cultural and folk-cultural. A brief discussion on the given tropes is necessitated for a better understanding in the context of this study.

Historical-Geographical Theory of Folklore

The comparative folklorist attempts to recreate the history of a complicated folktale, or perhaps a folksong or other folklore item, using the so-called Finnish historical-geographical technique. The approach was created to prevent premature conclusions about the origin and meaning of folktales by conducting a comprehensive and unbiased assessment of each particular tale. This study strategy is referred to as a 'method' rather than a 'theory.' Nonetheless, the approach is based on certain fundamental assumptions, which have caused much theoretical debate. While rejecting dogma, the Finnish approach has chosen one of several alternatives to account for the genesis and diffusion of oral narratives. According to its foundations, a story discovered in hundreds of oral versions must have begun in one time and one location by an act of deliberate fabrication. As a result, this story must have travelled in ever-widening arcs from its origin. The 'wave-like' spread of the narrative will be influenced by easy commerce and transit routes, as well as the secondary effect of manuscript and printed texts, but dissemination occurs throughout an expanding geographical region. This method denies polygenesis, or the independent construction of complicated narratives, dream origins, ceremonial origins, origins based on celestial phenomena, barbaric mentality, or the manifestation of infantile fancies. They also reject antidiffusionists who claim that stories cannot span language and cultural borders. The data from their monographic investigations shows that certain tales and songs easily cross linguistic barriers, even more easily than cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the data suggests that the stories progress from more civilised to less civilised peoples. For example, India and Western Europe are key dissemination centres, but Asia Minor and other European zones are secondary.

The comparative folklorist has certain difficult duties under the Finnish method. After selecting a text, she must gather the texts of various variants from printed collections, folklore archives, and literary versions. She deconstructs the fundamental plot into traits or important components, creates percentage tables for the geographical rates of occurrence of each trait, maps their geographic distribution, examines early literary recordings, and judges the story's oldest traits. Certain acknowledged aspects of oral transmission variation, such as compression, elaboration, and substitution, aid her in reaching this decision. The Finnish school is still the dominating force in folklore science today, but its assumptions and methodologies are under growing challenge, and its defenders have conceded some ground. According to these critics, the Finnish approach reduces research to statistical abstractions, summaries, symbols, tables, and maps, while disregarding artistic and stylistic qualities, as well as the narrator's personal side.

Warren Roberts' (1958) monograph *The Tale of the Kind and the Unkind Girls*, which used the Finnish approach, collected almost nine hundred types of manuscripts from throughout the world. A critic points out the exclusion of nearly a hundred cases, for example. Roberts' analysis acknowledges previous critiques of the historical-geographical method and pays close attention to literary appearances and regional subtypes. It redefines the term 'archetype' to indicate not the initial form of the story but the most influential form affecting the variants found today in a certain place. Research of this kind shows how a complicated folktale changes while retaining its character as it moves from its place of origin via traceable pathways across the Indo-European land mass. The age of a story, in this case the Star Husband Tale, a narrative exclusive to North American Indian tribes, cannot be determined

because there is no method to date its history prior to the arrival of the white man. While the absence of written documents allows for a straightforward analysis of an oral tradition, it hinders the monographer from providing a detailed historical treatment. Critics of the Finnish method point not only to the meagreness of conclusions but also to its limited applicability. The Finnish folklorists codified and systematised procedures that any thorough scholar would at least initiate, which is the gathering together of all available evidence, and the organising of this evidence into meaningful units. One advance in folklore science whose importance the Finnish school has particularly recognised is the concept of the variant. Older folklorists employed the nearest text at hand to illustrate their discussion, not realising that every text is a variant captured at some point in time and place, and undergoing change at every point. The initial presumption that the form overwhelmingly reported today is the oldest or most popular form fails to stand up when tested against early usage. Since the folklorist must depend for his field materials on the collections made within the past hundred and fifty years, he must always encounter difficulties when he seeks to probe behind the nineteenth century for the history of a tradition.

The historical-geographical method recognises the problem and redresses the balance by giving weight to early documentary versions, to early traits surviving in oral tradition, and to major changes that recast the tradition. The comparative folklorist of the Finnish school has diverted attention from philosophical and metaphysical questions of meaning to empirical questions of fact. The Finnish monograph may be described as a protracted, exhaustive, and exhausting annotation. But it ignores some of the questions that most interest scholars. Considerations of style and artistry, of the mysterious processes of creation and alterations, of the

influences of national cultures, the social context, the individual genius, are out of order among percentage tables and plot summaries.

Historical-Reconstructional Theory of Folklore

Certain academics support the use of folklore and folklife materials to recreate disappeared historical periods for which evidence is scarce. The Grimm brothers were drawn to a process known as historical reconstruction. Grimm's theory drew the attention of nineteenth-century folklorists, but with the introduction of evolutionism into scientific thought, historical reconstructionism added a prologue of prehistory to its chronology and looked back to a primaeval savage rather than a cultivated pagan. Lawrence Gomme, in a series of volumes culminating in *Folklore as a Historical Science* (1908), pursued the historical application of folklore most tenaciously. Gomme felt it was feasible to discern layers of folk tradition established on the same ground by succeeding races establishing and conquering. For Britain, he would identify pre-Aryan from Aryan habits now mixed into rural folklore, and thereby rebuild cultural institutions of the original stock. The degree of faith that may be placed in the historical and ethnological content of storytelling traditions is a dilemma for these academics. The debate over the historicity of oral tradition has raged among archaeologists, anthropologists, classicists, African and Polynesian historians, students of Icelandic sagas, biblical scholars, and those who study vocally transmitted chronicles. The solution to this difficult challenge rests in analysing each distinct tradition using certain criteria. As such, have the tradition bearers always lived in the same area, so that observable landmarks strengthen the tale line? Is oral history institutionalised in the culture? Are the tribal traditions supported by other types of evidence, such as linguistic, ethnological, and documentary data, as well as foreign

traditions? If such questions are answered positively, the assumption of historical credibility grows.

Among American folklorists who are combining folkloric and historical approaches, a trend in historical reconstruction is noted. William Lynwood Montell used reminiscences, recollections, and traditions captured on tape or in notebooks to put together the history of a Negro hamlet formed in the foothills of southern Kentucky after the *Civil War in The Saga of Coe Ridge* (1970), entitled "A Study in Oral History." Gladys-Marie Fry used similar research in reconstructing a tradition of *The Peculiar Institution*, a book by Kenneth M. Stampp, using conversations with slave descendants. These two historical monographs show how conventional recollections might be used to rebuild the recent past.

Ideological Theory of Folklore

The ideological manipulation of folklore for the interests of realpolitik in the twentieth century stems from the nineteenth-century romantic nationalisms. Folklorists sought the essence of the people as expressed in native languages, literature exploring folklore themes, and history praising the actions of national heroes. This hunt for a legacy had its advantages as a spur to inventive study and pure national pride, but in its extreme form it became linked with political ideology and violent nationalism, particularly in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Hitler's National Socialist regime was the first to make folklore studies a political priority. Famous folklorists were dismissed, and the name Volk began to have political connotations; the Volk was the country. Folklore and the social sciences in general were focused on German topics and this knowledge was put to use.

Soviet Russia saw folklore as a potent weapon to push communism. The Communist Party quickly realised in 1936 that their folklore scientists were advocating anti-Marxist ideology. Most folklorists' belief that folklore descends from the elite to the folk was swiftly debunked, and the concept established that folklore started as a creative expression of the working class. Russian folklorists had little option but to conform to official trends. Folklore was unique in that it was in the hands of agricultural and factory workers, rather than a small intellectual elite representing popular ideas. The employees were required to not only recite but also fabricate legend for propaganda objectives. Folklore was seen as a battleground, not only between conservative and socialistic interpretations, but also between classes pre-empting worker traditions. Under the Soviet dictatorship, a new form of popular culture, the "martial revolutionary song," sprang to prominence. When Soviet ideology analyses the American folklore scene, it becomes much clearer.

Functional Theory of Folklore

American folklorists have favoured this method. The question they ask is how folklore – a word they avoid for synonyms like verbal art and expressive literature, contributes to the maintenance of social institutions. Simply put, how does folklore function in the culture? William Bascom (1965), a folklorist, draws attention to the diverse functional roles of folklore and outlines four functions of folklore that also work in the family folk group. Folklore, he claims, helps to:

1. Entertain,
2. legitimise culture,
3. educate, and
4. preserve conformity.

Families share tales and celebrate festivals and events because their lore and each other entertain them. Bascom observes that when folklore is performed, there is generally more going on than just entertainment. He admits that certain traditions encourage fantasy and creativity, allowing individuals to picture themselves in a better circumstance or escape the constraints of life and death. However, these dreams frequently relieve tension in order to prepare group members to accept or adjust to their current life problems. Moreover, if family members question how things actually are, often there is a tradition to validate what the family stands for and to indicate how members should behave. Traditions will frequently legitimise earlier actions and attitudes in order to sustain the family as a unit through space and time, even if other possibilities seem enticing or even more realistic. Traditions thus provide an educational purpose, particularly instructing on how to act and live. According to Bascom's studies in Africa, children in nonliterate civilizations are predominantly educated through tales, sayings, and rites. Traditions may be used by families to teach good conduct and to gently or publicly criticise members who make poor decisions. Finally, Bascom claims that folklore will be employed as an internalised check on conduct to support group values conformance. Although Bascom regards folklore performances as preserving the status quo, traditions may also be adjusted to allow families to recognise themselves in the face of changing attitudes or circumstances. For example, in folklore performances, proverbs aid in legal decision-making, puzzles enhance brains, myths justify behaviour, and sarcastic tunes release pent-up hostility. As a result, the anthropologist looks for context as well as content. A story is a living recital provided to a responding audience for cultural goals such as reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressions through imagination, instructional

explanations of the natural world, and application of pressures for traditional behaviour.

Field research in Africa has revealed the widespread usage of proverbs in court procedures. Another role of tribal folklore, particularly myth tales, is the validation of belief, behaviour, and ritual. In dreams, tribal mythology may even serve as an ego-reassurance mechanism. Another practical use of folklore is divination. Divination preserves a vast pool of folktales among West Africans. Ifa is a highly complicated divination method used by the Yorùbá people of southern Nigeria. Ifa is a key aspect of Yorùbá religion, culture, and society, serving as a primary source of information, cosmology, and belief. Diviners reject the independent secular existence of folktales, claiming that the gods first revealed them to Ifa diviners. Polynesian mythical traditions also facilitate divination. The functional theory has received considerable support among the new generation of folklorists in Europe, maybe even more so than in the United States. In contrast to the Grimms, who saw the refined texts of national folktales as the end product, the modern folklorist studies a community in historical depth, resides in it for extended periods as a participant-observer and collector, and gathers information on the occasions of tale-telling, audience reactions, biographies and personalities of the major and everyday narrators, influences on the tale repertoire from popular and art literature, and the meaning of the tale repertoire. Because so much information is acquired, the stories themselves are pushed to the background and can only be printed in illustrative instances. Storytelling cannot exist without an audience. The text itself, according to functional theory, is worthless apart from its living presentation, or performance, to a responding audience. Functionalism may be used to both material culture and oral literature.

Traditional clothing, agriculture tools, and oral folklore may all be investigated from a practical standpoint.

Psychoanalytical Theory of Folklore

The Sigmund Freud psychoanalytic school has created the most speculative corpus of modern folklore theory. In psychoanalytic interpretations of myths and folktales, sexual symbolism has replaced the nineteenth century symbolism of heavenly events. Fairy stories and mythologies, which formerly depicted a heavenly battle, the clash of light and darkness, thunderstorm and morning sky, now reflect the earthly strivings of male and female. The phallus has replaced the solar-hero (Achilles, Theseus, Perseus, Heracles) and the encircling darkness has replaced the womb. Eric Fromm documented the Freudian symbols, which include sticks, trees, umbrellas, knives, pencils, hammers, and aircraft for the male genital and caves, bottles, boxes, doors, jewel cases, gardens, and flowers for the feminine genital. Sexual pleasure is symbolised by dreams or fairy tales of dancing, riding, climbing, and soaring. Castration is shown by hair falling out. To support his discoveries of the subconscious mind, Freud also relied largely on myths and fairy tales, taboos and jests, and superstitions. He stated his idea in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that dreams convey the hidden suppressed aspirations and anxieties of infantile sexuality in symbolic disguises. The next stage was to connect dreams to myths and other types of folklore. Freud discovered a superb depiction of the mythological story that discloses the dark buried impulses and drive of infants grown to adults in the myth of Oedipus. Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer, also had a penchant for folklore. He drew parallels between survivals of life from the race past and survivals from the individual past, a note that was certain to elicit a reaction from a society that had long championed the

idea of survivals in folklore. Jones discusses mediaeval demons such as the vampire, werewolf, incubus, witch, and the Devil in his comprehensive essay on folk beliefs, *On the Nightmare* (1959). Jones saw obvious parallels between the infantile imaginations presented in dreams and folklore in the terrors of the nightmare and the dreaded bogeys of goblinhood. *The Forgotten Language*, written by author Erich Fromm, is a primer for psychoanalytical analyses of dreams, myths, and fairy tales. This study tries to highlight the nuances and variances available in the interpretation of phantasies, much as celestial mythologists in the nineteenth century argued about whether the sun, lightning, or the aurora was the symbol meant in the myth. So, Fromm adds a subtlety to the Oedipus complex, bringing the entire trilogy into play and understanding the myth-drama as a fight between Creon's patriarchal tyranny and Antigone's matriarchal rule, which is backed by Oedipus, who dies suitably in the grove of matriarchal goddesses. The story of Little Red Riding Hood is presented as a tale about women who hate men and sex.

Géza Rheim views dreams as a forerunner to, rather than a counterpart to, myth and narrative, or as a synthesis of unconscious phantasies to generate myths. The psychoanalysing folklorist may extract hidden information from a wide range of folk materials, not just myths and tales. On the sexual literature of folklore, Gershon Legman authored the *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor* in 1968. Aside from its Freudian interpretations, it acknowledges the joke, particularly the off-colour joke, as the dominant folk tale form in modern culture.

In 1913, C.G. Jung cut intellectual ties with Freud and created his own school of analytical psychology in Switzerland. Jung and his followers classify themselves as

a separate field of psychology, rejecting the term and sexual symbolism of psychoanalysis. However, in terms of mythology, Freudians and Jungians have a lot in common. Folklore is seen as an essential component of both disciplines. Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung both used symbolism to analyse mythology and fairy tales. Jung meant a deeper layer below Freud's 'personal unconscious' when he spoke of the 'collective unconscious.' All males shared the collective unconscious, which Jung referred to as 'archetypes.' However, the archetypes reflected form rather than content. Archetypal dream imagery evolved from a collective unconscious master mould and were occasionally related with the contents of the human unconscious. Jung saw shadow characters and settings expressing the evil half of the psyche in myths and folktales, as well as dreams and phantasies. Jung makes frequent use of folklore in his writings. Orthodox folklorists and anthropologists have reacted to psychoanalytic theory in a variety of ways, ranging from horrified rejection to hesitant, partial acceptance and, in some cases, total support.

Structural Theory of Folklore

In the 1960s, structuralism was the most prominent and appealing theory to emerge in American folklore circles. The earliest important study was Vladimir Propp's book, *Morphology of the Folktale*, which was originally published in Russian in 1928 and in English translation in 1958. In 1968, it was reprinted with an introduction by Alan Dundes. *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (1964), Dundes' own work used structural analysis to a corpus of tales hitherto thought formless, and established his view of structural theory in wide philosophical context. Propp is the genuine father figure of the new movement, and he purposefully proposed his system to displace Antti Aarne's taxonomy. He believed that grouping folktales by dramatis

personae, as Aarne did, was deceptive, because the same deed may be committed by an ogre, a dragon, the devil, a giant, or a bear in different tales. However, the action remained consistent, and one action episode followed another in a defined pattern, at least in the body of Russian fairy tales from Alexander Afanasyev's collection that Propp examined. The action is divided into variable characters who fit props called functions, and generic actors whom he dubbed the Hero and the Villian. Propp listed thirty-one functions, the sequential ordering of which formed the fairy tale's morphology. Every Russian story in the corpus might be condensed into a single skeleton storyline idea. Propp's Morphology signalled a tremendous, though rather tardy, watershed moment in folklore studies. This transition from typology by content to typology by structure captured the spirit of the 1950s and 1960s. The vagaries of random field collection were mirrored in the types and themes. They have no basic link with one another. Now Propp had built a model and released the design that showed how all Russian skazki were built.

As Dundes saw, the intellectual vogue in the 1930s and 1940s had evolved from piecemeal to whole, from atomistic component to unified notion. Propp's objective was refined by Dundes in his own *Morphology*. For Propp's colourless term "function," he offered "motifeme," a coinage taken from linguist Kenneth Pike, and "allomotif" to describe motifs that appear as part of the motifeme. Dundes felt that by doing so, he might bridge the gap between Stith Thompson's ambiguous usage of motif, which was generally accepted in folklore circles, and a much stricter language based on structural models that exactly reflected folklore genres. If structural analysis works in one situation, it should work in another. It explained the Russian fairy tale, then the North American Indian tale; its supporters argued that it could reveal other

tale repertoires and genres, such as superstitions, games, and riddles; that it could represent the social context and linguistic texture as well as the folklore text, diagram cultural preferences, predict acculturative behaviour, link genres, and sharpen functional and psychological studies.

In his famous work “The Structural Study of Myth,” Claude Levi-Strauss presented a whole new approach to mythological interpretation. Why do tales from throughout the world have so many similarities? He felt that the answer may be found in the human mind’s logical framework. He examined the Oedipus story and some North American Indian stories as examples, using “bundles of connections.” These recurring story motifs showed some common themes, such as “the rejection of the autochthonous origin of man,” as symbolised by heroic heroes defeating monsters. Another collection of features balances this aspect with the concept of “the endurance of man's autochthonous origin,” as evidenced by lame individuals, such as Oedipus, who rise from the underworld. The Oedipus myth attempts to reconcile the cultural idea that man is aboriginal with the realisation that he is born of man and woman. Every myth variety attempts to mediate between such diametrically opposed concepts. This framework explains the trickster’s contradictory personality, as he mediates between opposites, whether sky and earth, untamed and civilised, masculine and female, good and bad. Levi-Strauss’ arrangement seeks a paradigm or philosophical framework underpinning the myth, whereas Propp investigates the grammar, so to speak, of the story. These and other structural expositions attempt to simplify folklore genres into universal models and formulae.

Oral-Formulaic Theory of Folklore

The narrator and his performance, according to this view, hold the key to the creation and structure of epic, ballad, romance, and folktale. In order to distinguish oral epic from written epic, we have found that the formula, which involves a study of the line; enjambement, which involves a study of the way in which one line is linked with another; and the them, which involves a study of the structure of the poem as a whole, is a statement given by one of its proponents, Albert Lord. This formulaic analytical approach, Lord contended, may be used to different genres of folklore such as folktales and ballads.

Cross-cultural Theory of Folklore

Prominent schools of folklore theory that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century made broad generalisations about all human societies. Folklore preserved primordial ideas shared by all races of mankind at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder. Anthropologists slashed these notions to shreds in the twentieth century and emphasised the hazards and fallacies of superficial cross-cultural comparisons and focussed on comprehensive research of specific civilizations. Instead of a closed evolutionary framework, they advocated for a pluralistic open-ended world in which each community has its own history and values. Nationalistic folklorists replied to this assumption by looking for the essence of their people in their land's traditions. Nonetheless, cross-cultural folklore theory made a triumphant return in the 1960s, armed with all the sparkling artillery of the social sciences. Alan Lomax defines cantometrics as a method for evoking performance style from style recordings, but he wished to broaden his study to include cross-cultural expressive arts such as dance, which would be evaluated using choreometrics. The academic tone of Lomax's book

Folk Song Style and Culture (1968) follows the academic style of the time. It is the work of a team of behavioural scientists who specialise in languages, kinesics, ethnology, psychology, ethno-history, musicology, economics, and sociology. It is generously supported by foundation and government donations. It has created hard data for the computer, the ultimate arbitrator of quantifiable knowledge. Every stage is based on statistics tables. It uses talismanic terminology like prediction, communication and expressive systems, data banks, and so on. It is based on actual evidence from field tapes and videos. It symbolises the social sciences' belief that hard-nosed researchers can foresee rules of human behaviour.

Folk-cultural Theory of Folklore

It can be noted that folk-cultural folklore is more hortatory than theoretical, ethnographic than philosophical. Their main request, and complaint is to widen folklorist concerns such that they include actual folk goods, as well as the entirety of folklife. Individual folklife studies deal with physical description (typically accompanied by pictures and sketches), historical reconstruction, and distributional assessments. The best student of folk culture, according to Henry Glassie, is both a fieldworker and a theorist, and a modern study of material culture might include the detailed description and ordering of field data, the historic-geographic connections of types, constructions, and uses, as well as functional and psychological speculations. The folklorist is concerned with difficult theoretical issues such as the nature of folk aesthetic, the relationship of folk arts to popular arts, defining regional areas of folk culture, the interaction of the movement of ideas and objects, the satisfactions of material culture in a world of mass technology, and the development of an American folklife style. His emphasis is on the geographer rather than the historian, on

geographical diversity rather than chronological uniformity. Michael O. Jones develops a complicated theoretical paradigm for the study of handcrafted utilitarian products of material culture. The model takes into account the local economics of production and distribution, the psychological kinds of artists, external influences of taste and demand impacting the folk community, and the ecological elements governing the folk community. Jones tries to include into the folk art process every historical, individual, cultural, traditional, artistic, economic, and environmental factor.

Resulting Concerns in the Context of the Study

Given the voluminous discussions of existing theoretical insights on folklore, a better understanding can now be discerned of what the phrases folklore, oral tradition, orality, oral literature, and verbal arts mean after reading over the many meanings. The consequential questions in relation to the bulk of theoretical approaches would be to explore how can we carry stories from the oral to the written to the stage of performance in the Naga context? How 'pure' is it if one oral tradition can be put together to be designated as a Naga oral tradition? Is it possible to follow this evolution in a world of migration, globalisation, and cross-cultural interaction? Can oral traditions in a culture survive in today's digital age, when everything is shared on the internet and remixed, edited, and replicated in seconds? Even while the researcher investigates these topics, it is evident that technology has produced an environment in which orality can thrive. In recent years, oral performers have become more visible, and some have been successful in promoting their talents. Folktales have been retold and adapted into works of fiction. Folk-inspired poetry and melodies are increasingly being composed. Linguists are starting documentation projects and trying to save and

revitalize languages on the verge of extinction, while academics investigate these topics. Grants are utilised to support source documentation digitalization projects. The interaction between oral literature, the written word, and technology in handing down the Nagas' stories will be studied in the following chapters, taking into account the theoretical framework outlined in the works of the specified theorists, with methodological approaches of the structural theory of folklore in correlation with performativity as a method to orality.

Chapter Three

Orality and Performativity

Understanding Performance Studies

Performance is sometimes referred to be a controversial concept of study since it is differently envisioned and applied as a concept, technique, event, and practice.

Performance means and does different things for and with different individuals on numerous levels. At one level, performance is often defined as theatrical practice, such as acting, or putting on a show. For some, performing is viewed as extracurricular, insignificant, or something you do in your spare time. These restrictive concepts of performance have developed an 'anti-theatrical' attitude in certain sectors of the university, reducing performance to mimicry, catharsis, or plain entertainment rather than as a creative force and critical dynamic within human behaviour and societal processes. However, the notion of performance has experienced revolutionary changes in recent history. Thus, performance has grown into means of understanding how humans fundamentally create culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world. The stress on performance as a mode of production and being, as opposed to the long-held concept of performance as entertainment, has sparked a movement to explore and express the phenomena of performance in all of its forms and imaginings. As a result, understanding performance in this larger and more complicated context has raised a slew of new problems, some of which both challenge and expand our fundamental understanding of history, identity, community, nation, and politics. When we comprehend performance beyond theatrics and identify it as basic and intrinsic to life and culture, we are presented with the uncertainties of many situations and places that are strange,

disputed, and frequently under assault. We even move towards the mundane, the everyday and analyse its symbolic cosmos in order to find the complexities of its exceptional meanings and practices.

In this sense, we can no longer characterise performance as simply mimetic or theatrical, but rather as a combination of numerous aspects inherent in performance and the dynamic of altering realms of theory, technique, and event. The three processes of theory, method, and event are commonly interpreted as follows:

1. Analytical frameworks are provided by performance theory;
2. Performance technique enables real application.; and
3. An aesthetic or notable event is provided by a performance event.

Although theory, method, and event are all components of the great possibilities of performance, Dwight Conquergood's work can also offer a more precise set of triads that guide us more thoroughly to the content and intricacies of performance through a sequence of alliterations. He refers to these as the i's, which stand for imagination, inquiry, and intervention; the a's, which stand for artistry, analysis, and activism; and the c's, which stand for creativity, criticism, and citizenship. According to Conquergood, performance studies is ideally adapted to the issue of weaving together divergent and stratified modes of knowing. We can consider performance along three intersecting channels of action and analysis. We might consider performance to be:

1. a work of imagination, an object of study;
2. pragmatics of inquiry (both as model and technique), an optic and operation of research; and,
3. a strategy of intervention, an alternate arena of conflict (2002, 152).

Conquergood encourages us to comprehend the pervasive and creative power of performance that extends beyond the theatre. Conquergood defined performance as the very human cultural interaction that is generally the subject of ethnography. He did, however, value performance as a separate socio-aesthetic activity examined in the ethnographic field. In this sense, ethnographic research techniques are also classified as performance. He suggests that fieldwork is a sacred act in that it elicits its own specific set of ethnopolitical sensibilities and draws attention to the fieldworker's position. To disrupt the traditional hierarchies of labellings that are performed in and via fieldwork, he referred to both the ethnographer and the human 'subjects' of ethnography as 'co-performative witnesses.' This perspective, while debunking 'performed' in the traditional sense, provides a realistic, bodily experience of the sensations and sensitivities of ethnographic encounters. In this sense, Conquergood's work is significant to the subject of performance studies since he operated entirely outside the normal academic paradigms of theorisations.

Performance is defined by three characteristics that define text-context relations and can be formulated as framed, reflexive, and emergent. First, a performance breakthrough is framed, that is, separated from surrounding discourse and anchored by performance traditions of certain speech groups. The performance frame creates a contract between the artist and the audience and takes this communication in a specific way, as a narrative experience. Second, performance is reflexive in the sense that the performer is an audience to her or his own experience and then returns to signify this lived world with and for an audience. The storyteller recounts pivotal moments in the process of returning to experience, and thus, performance is a doing and re-doing that allows for analysis of experience, self, and

world. According to Dwight Conquergood, the verbal artistry of folklore literature is conservative, representing forms and traditions that sustain standards. The third aspect of the discussion is that performance has the possibility for emergence, which means that re-doing anything may result in a different outcome. Such an emergence can be related to new text structures, event structures, and social structures, or it can also allude to new and alternate tales, storytelling events, and identities. Conquergood defines emergence as “that force which crashes and breaks through sedimented meanings and normative traditions and plunges us back into the vortices of political struggle” (1998, p. 32) rather than transcendence to a higher level. With a focus on antistructural emergence as transgressive cultural action, performance is defined as a political act. Performance as a political act stresses performer creativity to base options for action, agency, and resistance on the performance’s liminality; the performance is liminal as it suspends, challenges, plays with, and modifies social and cultural conventions. Similarly, personal narrative presents a distinct potentiality for emergence, since it is entrenched in the uniqueness of the performer’s body telling a personal experience to create a self-text for audience judgement in a specific performance event. The formation of a self-text unique to each body and performance promotes societal change. As a means of breaking through sedimented meanings, normative traditions, and master narratives, performance truly embraces the feminist phrase ‘the personal [story] is politi-cal.’

Dwight Conquergood also explores the Christianisation of Anglo Saxon England through the prism of performance, both that of the converted and that of the converters, in his work ‘Literary and Oral Performance in Anglo Saxon England.’ This essay offers a number of significant contributions to the field, ones that have

come to define performance studies. First, Dwight explains the close link that exists between text and performance. He observes that literacy is infused with orality, even in silent reading, such that the apprehending body manifests itself in/as performance. Furthermore, he investigates the many tropes of oral performance that are more commonly linked with literary and hence an elite endeavour. In a similar vein, in his article 'Rethinking Elocution,' he explores the complex interplay of text and performance in the oratory and writings of enslaved and previously enslaved African Americans. He was able to trace culture as porous, as laced with power relations, as performatively produced, resisted, and consumed by embodied subjects in specific economic, historical, and political contexts. Conquergood saw performance as a node point where the materiality of/in cultural practice, the particular of individual bodies, historical forces, the strength of theory, persistent optimism, and the potential of change united. Conquergood saw performance as a nodal point where the materiality of/in cultural practice, the particular of individual bodies, historical forces, the strength of theory, persistent optimism, and the potential of change united. Thus, performance provides critical theoretical and methodological tools for probing both the "complexly determined and deciding circumstances" (Abbas and Erni 2005, 8) of cultural practice as well as the real practices.

Through the view of Victor Turner in his book *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), we come to see that the debate over which comes first, experience or performance, is analogous to the chicken or the egg conundrum. We can note in Turner's work that both came first and second, such that performance elicits experience, and experience elicits performance. Turner's three-part taxonomy of performance - cultural performance, social performance, and social drama,

exemplifies the reciprocal link between experience and performance. It can be briefly summarized as the following:

1. Cultural Performance: The phrase ‘culture performance’ was coined by anthropologist Milton Singer in 1959, who stated that these types of performances all have a “defined time span, a beginning and an end, an ordered programme of activity, a group of performers, an audience, and a venue and occasion” (1959, p. xiii). And because they are defined by cultural conventions, cultural performances are viewed as more traditional types of performance. Plays, circus acts, carnivals, parades, religious events, poetry readings, weddings, funerals, celebratory events, jokes, and storytelling are examples of cultural performances. In all of these instances, self-conscious and symbolic behaviours are presented and transmitted inside a defined context.

2. Social Performance: Action, contemplation, and aim are not as clearly defined in social performances as they are in cultural performances. The typical day-to-day contacts of individuals and the implications of these interactions as they progress through social life are referred to as social performances. Social performances are not mindful of the fact that they are culturally choreographed, and they become manifestations of a culture’s and subculture’s specific symbolic practises. These performances are particularly remarkable when compared with other cultural conventions, such as greetings, dining, clothing, courting, strolling, staring, and so on.

3. Social Drama: Working arrangements within a certain social unit are coordinated in social harmony. There is a split or breach in the synchronization when a social drama unfolds. This occurs when the social unit is disrupted and the persons

concerned dispute. Turner observes that social life, even in its seemingly quietest periods, is 'pregnant' with social tragedies. It is as if everyone of us has a 'peace face' and a 'war face,' as if we are wired for cooperation yet ready for battle (1982, 11).

Turner describes social drama in four stages: breach, crisis, redressive action, and resolution. A breach would occur when, "there is an overt non-conformity and breaking away by an individual or group of individuals from a shared system of social relations" (Turner, 1974, 38). Conflict is more visible during the second stage of a crisis. The opposing forces are openly at odds, the masks are removed or exaggerated, and the fight escalates. During crises, the breach has widened and become apparent. In the third stage, redressive action, a mechanism is put in place to prevent the crises from causing additional disturbance to the social system. This might take the shape of a mediator, a court system, or opposing forces banding together to try to settle the crisis. Resolution is the ultimate stage. According to Turner, it is here that the troubled parties are reconciled and re-integrated into their common social structure. The parties may reconcile with adjustments, or they may recognise a "legitimate and irreparable schism between the parties" (1982, 8) that will remove them from the social system, or they may build a new social system. There is generally some form of ceremonial rite to signify the separation or a celebration of the reconnection in reintegration. Turner believes that all performance, whether cultural performance, social performance, or social drama, takes place under the umbrella of structure or antistructure. Structure is everything that makes up order, system, preservation, law, hierarchy, and authority. Beyond systems, hierarchies, and limitations, antistructure is all that characterises human action. Turner's three domains aim to contain and arrange the complete spectrum of performance and its purposes in culture and identity.

Turner's explanation of performance in social and cultural life, on the other hand, has been further complicated and developed by subsequent discussions and arguments around the idea of 'performativity.'

In contrast to the early researchers of cultural performance—for example, Richard Schechner, Dell Hymes, and Victor Turner—whose task it was to identify and theorise various cultural practices as performance, it is also necessary to trace how the term 'performance' had been formalised in other paradigms of research and how 'performance' had already been produced in other types of practices and studied under this term. When Victor Turner defined performance as 'creating' rather than 'faking,' he did more than just confront the antitheatrical attitude. He centred performance on a broader perspective of culture as produced, embodied, and processual. The repercussions of this shift include and go beyond a concentration on the theatrical, or even on actors in a broad sense. They extend to broader themes of cultural poiesis and enactment, such as community growth and maintenance, social life and the power of memory, and the creation and consumption of material culture and its settings. Dwight Conquergood addresses the link between performance and cultural development in his famous essay "Rethinking Ethnography." He questions, "What happens to our thinking about performance when we move it outside of Aesthetics and situate it at the centre of lived experience?" (1991, 190). The important element to remember is that aesthetics provides vocabulary for investigating how art operates and develops meaning. However, aesthetic principles, values, and languages regulate where art works and means: in social time and in social place. Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*, or spontaneous moments of ego-dissolution that tie performers to audiences and audience members to one another, also pointed to the

potentially world-changing power of performance. This world-making power, however, may also be seen in the daily mechanisms—rhetoric and rituals—that create performance in certain groups. The relational, embodied quality of context is emphasised in performative theories of place and time. In doing so, they contribute to other academics’ critical formulations of the literal substrate of aesthetic perception.

Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, theorises time as a social location in the chapter “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” from his book, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981). He claims that the chronotope identifies the inherent interconnectedness of temporal and geographical interactions. He notes, “time, as it were, thick-ens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of plot, time, and history” (1981, 84). Chronotopes are numerous and they explain structuring and supporting roles of representation and meaning in the same way that technique acts as the infrastructure shaping corporeality and narrating place in folk performance.:

The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. (1981, 250)

Bakhtin created the chronotope to investigate historical poetics in literature, but he also suggested more expansive readings. Thus, the chronotope, like technique, works as a dialogic junction of the world and the representational grammar and protocols that organise and reproduce it. Bakhtin’s organic language here harkens back to another physiological metaphor he used to depict the chronotope, “time takes on flesh” (1981, 84). Performance and performativity, on the other hand, are based on the assumption that culture, and the many acts of everyday poiesis that make it, are

always in motion. On the contrary, the viewpoint on cultural poiesis (and cultural poetry) that performance studies provides to human-science academics is based on the type of dialogic exchanges between numerous texts, conversations, and views that qualitative researchers refer to as triangulation. It sees research as a sort of cultural poiesis, an ensemble performance complete with all the political, artistic, and emotive domains important to memory, location, and the human and nonhuman players that inhabit them.

Oral Histories and Performativity

Oral histories bring together (historical) truth and (storied) metaphor in the perilous, cocreative process of memory-making. However, oral history also entails acting out dialogue in the rather artificial setting of an interview. It immerses its participants in a heightened, reflexive contact with each other and with the past, even as each person and the past appear to be summoned into being and becoming by an unknown future. The interviewer is a symbolic presence, conjuring not just other, unseen audiences but also guaranteeing, as if by corporeal contract alone, that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and acted upon in some manner, that it will make a difference. Oral histories effectively write the past into the present on the promise of a future that has yet to be envisaged, if not unthinkable. They dream about the past, acting out what happened as a vision of what could happen in the future. Oral histories weave what is with normative statements about what may be to tell the past in order to tell the future—not to anticipate, unveil, or foreclose it, but to capture it in ethical strands woven in the act of telling. Human disputes among people, organisations, communities, and nations, according to Victor Turner in his book “From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play” (1982), are a social drama

that is an integral aspect of social existence. As previously said, he separates this social drama into four stages: breach, crisis, redressive machinery, and finally, the process of reintegration. He claims that these stages, in the framework of theatre, with a sub-variety of performances, act as a redressive agent in conflict collaboration and resolution:

... performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them...(Turner 11)

Similarly, folklorist Richard Bauman offers five arguments concerning communication and expression, particularly the significant shapes it might take in culture:

1. Communication refers to the exchange of information, ideas, and attitudes between individuals, organisations, nations, and generations. Communication is a socially constructed concept that is formed in the course of social life.
2. Culture's expressive forms, such as art, play, display, and performance, provide an especially fruitful vantage point on culture, society, and communication.
3. Communicative forms are social resources, or living equipment.
4. Communication styles and practices are valued and available to people of society in diverse ways.
5. Communication techniques and practices vary between cultures and across time.

Bauman's notion of communication situates social activity inside and beyond language, order, roles, identities, and culture. It can be contended that performance

studies should investigate how communicative activities organise, develop, and reproduce society. Furthermore, there are numerous expressive forms of culture formed through and via communication practices: art, play, performance, ritual, cinema, theatre, dance, conversation, jokes, political demonstrations, advertising, carnivals, family stories, and so on. According to Bauman, these communication forms are expressive because they are intentionally designed in performances to achieve three goals: to heighten experience, remark on experience, and make experience open for reflection. Bauman's final assertion, that expressive forms are resources, is based on Kenneth Burke's work. Burke's renowned work, "Literature as Equipment for Living," argues that literary pieces, like proverbs, are tactics for summarising a situation. These techniques, in turn, give important recommendations for both individual and group action. Proverbs, jokes, stories, folktales, organisational stories, myths, and stage plays, according to Bauman, are not goals in themselves, but rather means to social and political purposes. Performance not only binds life together, but it has the power to reshape it. Performance may also be used to question the current quo of social and political life, therefore creating something new and, ideally, better. Bauman's fourth assertion, that all expressive, communicative modes are valued and accessible differently, is simply proved by looking about us. This is evident from a brief assessment of the crowds and performers at a stage play, a dance event, a stand-up comedy show, a passionate religious service, a professional wrestling bout, or any group activity. The worth and availability of these acts are socially ingrained, economically charged, and politically fraught. Value and accessibility will be vital in this context. Finally, Bauman believes that communication forms and practices vary between cultures and throughout time. What constitutes a performance is ingrained in a certain culture and historical period. These

differences attest to the expressive forms' variety and vitality, as well as their cultural centredness and historical transitions. Bauman's five communication claims – its forms, productivity, resources, diversity, evaluation, and embeddedness – account for performance as a particularly rich process and result of communicative engagement. Where one stands in regard to that interaction—within or without its historical, cultural, ethnic, racial, or gendered lines is crucial to framing performativity of folklore.

Chapter 4

Folklore Interrupted

Nagaland, the Indian state with an area of 16,579 square kilometres was carved out of the Naga Hills area of Assam in 1963 after negotiations between the Indian Government and the Naga nationalists, and a significant number live in the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. In Myanmar, Nagas occupy the western borderlands of Sagaing District, contiguous with the Indian states of Manipur and Nagaland. Some Naga groups such as the Konyak, Khiamniungan, Yimchungrü, Tikhir, Makuri, and Tangkhul have villages on either side of the international border. Officially, there are 14 recognised Naga tribes along with five recognised scheduled tribes in the state of Nagaland. To consider them as a single group would be too simplistic because each tribe has different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic attributes. The generic title Naga refers to a number of ethnic groups who dwell in the lower reaches of the Eastern Himalayas on the borders of northeast India and northwest Myanmar and speak a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages. There are around thirty-two Naga tribes that are widely seen by both insiders and outsiders as having different languages and cultures, despite aspects of partial overlap. Indeed, certain traditions of migration are shared, as are commonalities in material culture, particularly textiles and accessories. During the British colonial period, the word 'Nagas' was used to refer to a group of people who lived largely in the mountainous terrains of what was known as the Naga Hills. The Nagas have a shared culture, yet they also have significant cultural differences, particularly in terms of language. As a result, the Nagas as an ethnic group and the Naga homeland are still developing concepts. Having said that, the Nagas, like any modern nation-state, have the right to

establish or reconstruct their political and cultural identities. As a result, the term ‘Nagas’ will be used in this study to refer to how most contemporary Nagas see themselves politically, culturally, and geographically. In the following sections, the researcher will focus this study on key theoretical framework of performance studies in the light of Nagas in the state of Nagaland, as well as the impact of modern cultures and languages on such performativity of folk tradition.

This chapter will consider the relationship between reality and literature, using anthropological or survey data as well as colonial literary compositions about Naga communities as sources. The merging of the two components of reality and literature will be the primary subject of this investigation. Folktales, headhunting motifs, spirit world motifs, morungs, customary rules, tattooing, weaving, and village life, for example, and how they echo within community patterns of performativity. In conjunction with this, it would also be relevant to look into the evolution of such performativity, notably how these stories transition across the oral, written, and digital realms. And as such, what modern technologies are employed to gather, preserve, comprehend, interpret, and retell stories?

In this approach, the study will seek a more thorough method of reading literature that is found in most linguistic techniques, in order for the act of reading to become an effective manner of seeing the world from a new perspective. Most recent studies on tribal communities in India have given limited attention to the artefacts of imagination, which are now recognised as key markers for understanding the link between the individual self and the public world. The majority of research on the languages of smaller ethnic groups has focussed on issues of bilingualism, language

change, and language as a rallying point for tribal autonomy movements. However, the challenge of language as a medium for conveying the developing crises in an underdeveloped society attempting to create solutions to cope with modernism's demands has received little attention. While the influence of linguistic colonialism in the formulation of educational policies by successive governments ruling over India's tribal regions has harmed the production of creative literature in tribal languages, the incursion of the English language has opened up a plethora of avenues for literary writing in English in the hill states of North-East India. Almost every tribal state in the region rejected Hindi as a medium of instruction and replaced it with English, which became the state's official language. The newly developing tribal elite in the states had realised that no regional language in modern India, no matter how sentimental one may be about one's mother tongue, can empower the masses as much as English. Thereby, the focus of this research will be on the framing of the Naga and her cultural capital, taking into account the exogenous effects on the region's tumultuous history.

The Discursivity of Naga Origin

The origin of the term 'Naga' is a source of much controversy and debate. According to anthropologist Andrew West, "Naga was a disparaging blanket word applied by the plains people to the hill people meaning 'naked hill peoples' and signifying foreigners who were uncivilised due of the lack of their clothing" (West 64). Many colonial officials and anthropologists believed it was also a name used by plains people. James Johnston, who worked as a colonial administrator in Naga Hills and Manipur says: "Naga is a name given by the inhabitant of the plains, and in the Assamese language means 'naked'. As some of the Naga tribes are seen habitually in that state, the name

was arbitrarily applied to them all” (Johnstone 33). Many Naga scholars believe it is a phrase borrowed from the Burmese word ‘Na-Ka’, which means “people or men or folk with pierced ear lobes” (Sema 3) and which the Burmese coined to characterise the Nagas. Regardless of where the phrase originated, it was British colonial authorities and anthropologists that popularised it in their writings to identify and categorise people, giving it a sense of permanence that was before lacking. Later on, Nagas felt it to be a valuable term for defining and describing their collective identity in the context of colonialism.

Walter J Ong’s 1982 book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* examines the differences between orality and literacy, as well as how the use of writing has altered primary oral civilizations, i.e. cultures with no knowledge of writing. The act of writing was the beginning of literacy, and it progressed to include print. Ong’s argument takes both print and writing into account. It is also indicated that electronic processing of the word and thinking, such as on radio and television, as well as via satellite, is mentioned. According to the author’s preface, our knowledge of the contrasts between orality and literacy evolved only in the electronic age, not before. Contrasts between electronic and print media have made us more aware of the older contrast between writing and orality. The electronic era is also one of secondary orality, or the orality of telephones, radio, and television, which is dependent on writing and print to exist. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong finds that the way we communicate — whether through voice, writing, or print — affects how we think and act. According to him, writing, the tool that moulded and fuelled modern man’s intellectual activity, was a relatively recent development in human history. Literacy is a very modern phenomenon, dating back only around 6000 years. Humans were able

to break free from the shackles of memory thanks to writing, and its value cannot be overstated. According to Ong, writing was and continues to be the most significant of all human technical creations. It is not an afterthought to speaking. Because it transports communication from the oral–aural realm to a new sensory world, that of vision, it affects both speech and cognition.

Oral cultures rely on people's recollections; a knowledge that was never repeated could disappear. And, because memory is fragile, it was reinforced by repeating a message. As a result, oral societies relied on repetition to keep their knowledge and recall their history. People did not sense themselves located every instant of their lives in an abstract computational time of any kind. According to Ong, before writing was deeply interiorised by print, most people in medieval or even renaissance western Europe would not be aware of the number of the current calendar year. What is the value of knowing the current calendar year in a culture where there are no newspapers or other current dated information to influence consciousness? In reality, the abstract calendar number has no meaning. Most people have no idea and had never tried to find out what year they were born in. Literacy, in this sense, thus, extends as a means of self-consciousness. A similar correlation can be drawn with the case of the Nagas and their encounter with literacy.

Christian Missionaries and the Advancement of Literacy

The British and American Baptist missionaries arrived in Assam in the 1820s and 1830s. While the British came with the goal of consolidating political authority over the frontier areas that divided the Indian subcontinent from Burma, the missionaries came with the goal of evangelising areas beyond Burma into China and subsequently

Central Asia after being invited by the British. For political, economic, and religious reasons, the British and missionaries have long felt compelled to pacify and dominate the tribes living in the hill tracts surrounding Assam, which included the Nagas. Both entities began seeking to invade the Naga territories in the 1830s in order to achieve this goal. However, due to the Nagas' tenacious resistance, they were only able to reach these areas and secure their dominance in the 1870s and 1880s. The American Baptist missionaries were the first to arrive in the area. The American Baptist missionaries in the Naga territories increased their activity by establishing mission fields, followed by schools and itinerant preaching tours in and around the mission fields. The villages were primarily antagonistic to their arrival, owing to their theology of 'salvation through Christ alone' and cultural ideals that praised the exceptionalism of the white American experience. Their attitude toward existing Naga ceremonial and cultural activities was contemptuous, if not hostile. Furthermore, when their work drew a small following, existing village groups became divided along religious lines, and established cultural traditions became contestable. The Nagas' conversion to Christianity is an excellent example of how a national society views and defines its collective political self influences how it imagines and writes its own history. Throughout the twentieth century, the Nagas' conversion and subsequent western education undoubtedly created and expressed a unified political Naga identity. In mediating the formation of this communal political identity, American Baptist missionaries and later the Naga Baptist Church played a major role. In fact, their contribution was significant enough to influence how Nagas think about and understand their own past.

The Indian administrators, who were hesitant to recognise the Nagas as nationality and preferred to think of them as ‘tribal,’ were given a rude awakening after the Nagas continued to reject any of their paternalism gestures and insisted on their right to national self-determination even after the Indian independence. In the Indian national image, Nagas had suddenly become the ‘undisciplined tribal.’ As Dolly Kikon notes, the Nagas had become “the reluctant citizens who were not attuned with the ‘great modern desire’ to forge a new post-colonial Indian nation” (85). Since the British days, “the hillsmen, who were inherently more distrustful and revengeful than the group of the scheduled tribes of hither India had maintained their predatory habits in full swing and had antagonised the non-tribals of the region to the utmost,” (Ghurye 142) Ghurye further notes, it was critical to assimilate the Nagas with the “civilised and peaceful living” (143) people of the plains. The Indian government’s efforts to impose a tribal identity on Nagas, complete with all the trappings of ‘wildness,’ ‘primitivism,’ and ‘backwardness,’ were bolstered by anthropologists’ study and research works. Academic scholars researching and writing on the northeast, most notably Sanjib Baruah, have recently criticised the Indian state’s efforts to ‘nationalise’ the frontier spaces in the Indian national imagination, in order to “reinforce among the people of the region the sense that they are a part of a pan-Indian national community.” (Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, 33). This nationalisation of the frontier space, according to Baruah, has been attempted through the creation of a “cosmetic federal regional order,” (59) which has pushed forward a certain developmentalist and cultural agenda in the region with the goal of creating a sense of belonging to a pan-Indian national community. This type of counter-insurgency policy has only served to militarise the region and increase public hostility. Using the Nagas as an example, he notes that the Nagas began the process of

building their collective identity in the context of colonial transition. The development of this collective identity was founded on the desire for a territorially bound national homeland drawing on colonial knowledge and actions, which relied on “a very different spatial discourse than one of overlapping frontiers and hierarchical polities that precedes it” (101).

The colonial administrators who worked in the northeast, particularly among the Nagas, had a strong anthropological heritage. In fact, much of what we know about Naga history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comes from anthropological materials compiled by colonial administrators stationed in the Naga Hills. Military officers who went on military excursions to the Naga Hills provided much of the anthropological writings prior to this. Following that, the essays were either published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* or combined into full books. Identifying and locating the Nagas as a distinct group of people inhabiting a specific geography was one of the main thrusts of anthropological writings during this period, as this would allow the coloniser to conduct effective military expeditions and thus protect the British commercial interests in the plains. The British began to be more concerned with the administration of Naga lands in the late nineteenth century, and in order to establish effective administrative techniques, they needed more extensive knowledge of Naga culture. The previous anthropological works served as a starting point for a bigger attempt to understand the Nagas. As a result of this requirement, the anthropologist-officials became more involved with the Nagas and gathered more anthropological data about them. Knowing local languages, customs, administrative practices, histories, tales, songs, and so on, recording them, and publishing them as reports, books, and journal articles were all highly valued.

Early Contacts: Historical Accounts

Historically, it has been recorded that a party of Ao Nagas travelling down to the plains to trade in the late 1860s came into something peculiar. That was their first contact with a small mission school in session, and the only “black and white things” (Yonuo 113) they observed in the children’s hands were books and slates. Aside from the children’s schooling in the mission centre, the Nagas also witnessed typesetting, printing, and binding at the press building, which was close to the mission school. These peculiar behaviours piqued their interest to the point where they would set aside time each time they visited Sibsagar to stand by and monitor what was going on at the mission school and the press facility. They were anxious to learn to read and write since the benefits were numerous, particularly at a period when the state and the people of the plains relied heavily on it for political and economic operations. The Nagas spoke with E. W. Clark and urged him to come to the hills, but Clark declined due to safety concerns. Finally, one day, a huge group of them arrived at the mission bungalow and addressed the teacher. One of the elders approached Clark and pleaded with him:

Sir, we are the men from the town of a thousand warriors. We come to request you to return with us in order to teach our children the way of knowledge.

Though we ourselves are too old to learn, we will give you our children that you may teach them, the new way (Bowers 198-99).

Prior to Clark, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society had been in Assam since 1836, and many American missionaries had come and gone. The Ao Nagas who travelled to Sibsagar to meet with Clark could not have chosen a better time to offer their invitation to the white American mission school teacher. The Nagas had discovered the practical utility and advantage of reading and writing as a result of

their frequent trading with the plains. As a result, they were really eager for the instructor to come up to their hamlet and teach their children to read and write. All they expected from the teacher was that. E. W. Clark, the American Baptist missionary in Sibsagar, made his first visit to the Naga Hills in December 1872, escorted by roughly sixty Nagas, despite the fact that he was afraid for his life because the Ao territories had yet to be brought under British rule. He eventually took up residence there in March 1876 (Bowers 199; M M Clark 13). The American Baptist missionaries, shaped by a past that linked mission with political conquest, embraced the political conquest of the Nagas and did not hesitate to lend spiritual and logistical support. They found nothing wrong with it from a political or ethical standpoint and considered the eventualities as both a requirement and a prerequisite for preparing for the mission field.

In general, none of the agencies that have been at work among pre-literate Nagas has had the same wide-ranging impacts as Christianity. The Church as an institution is a phenomenon in the Naga community, providing people with an alternative to the chaotic and perilous existence by providing a common objective and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it sparked a viable manifestation of pan-Naga identity and unity, despite socio-cultural differences. The lack of a profound philosophical foundation provided only feeble opposition to emerging kinds of religion, such as Christianity. This supplantation sparked social and religious unrest throughout Naga territory. It should be emphasised that new villages should be sanctioned by Ao custom confederate heads, and authorisation was provided to the new converts of the Ao village of Molungkimong. As a result, Molungyimsen was founded in October 1876, led by Rev. E. W. Clark, and broke Naga traditional norms

associated with the construction of a new hamlet. The Christians ceased contributing to the larger confederate heads' subscriptions and boycotted the *Ariju* and any events associated with the old traditions. At the village and tribal levels, similar divides occurred throughout Naga regions. In addition, the British ban on head-bunting and punitive expeditions accelerated the decline of Naga cosmic order and ushered in a type of socio-economic set-up hostile to the traditional system. As a result of the dual institutionalised systems represented by missionaries and the colonial force, the Naga religious order was split apart.

The Nagas and Literacy

Literacy and writing were introduced to Naga primary oral cultures during a time when people in Naga society were unaware of the calendar year in which they were born. The Nagas are a Mongoloid people that inhabit India's North East, in the erstwhile Naga Hills. Nagaland is presently one of the country's states, with a population of 19,78,502 people according to the 2011 Census, but it is undoubtedly considerably more. "Till the early 19th century, Nagas lived unknown and untouched by the outside world. Then, with the first explorations by the British (1832) and the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries (1872), the ancient life-ways of the Nagas took a drastic turn" (Aier 1996). Kiremwati in his work *Education and the Nagas: with special reference to the Ao Nagas* (1995) writes that there were old linkages for commerce and links for mutual coexistence between the Nagas of the hills and the inhabitants of the neighbouring lowlands. There is no record of any official school's teaching and learning of any script or opening. If education may be seen without literacy, the Nagas had it well derived from indigenous methods time-tested to meet the necessities of those times for their survival and progress. It was

Rev. Miles Bronson who developed a spelling book and a catechism for the Nagas, according to Kiremwati. Bronson began working among the Singphos and Nagas around 1838-1841, according to Mary Mead Clark (1978), and he also developed a spelling book and a catechism in the Naga language for each of these people. He and his family went into the highlands, but he had to depart owing to ill health, a lack of proper food, and inadequate lodging. Godhula, an Assamese teacher and missionary, volunteered to work among the Nagas in 1872 under Dr. E. W. Clark's leadership. Godhula arrived at Dekahaimong (now Molungkimong) and began preaching and teaching. Dr. and Mrs. Clark of the American Baptist Missionary Union arrived in Naga Hills a few years later, in 1876. In the same year, a new village called Molungyimsen was founded, and it was here that Mrs. Mary Mead Clark opened the first official school in the Naga highlands, as it was known at the time. In 1883, a tiny printing press was erected, which was originally meant for women.

One key aspect of the Nagas' encounter with literacy was also the discernible loss of traditional knowledge systems such as the Morung. Further discussions will also be made in the later sections of the study. The Morung was reserved for young men in most Naga clans. Morungs were training centres where people learned how to cope with opponents, hunt for animals, etiquette, history, culture, arts and crafts, games, and athletics. Kiremwati observes that with the advent of Christianity by the American Baptist mission, and concurrent contemporary administration by the British, literacy was brought for the first time for the purposes of reading and writing the Bible, as well as becoming office clerks. The function of morungs was taken up by churches, who built schools with hostels in locations where students might live. In communities, churches built separate dormitories (rooms) for young men and young

ladies. The transition from morungs to schools and dorms was enthusiastically welcomed, but it also resulted in the deterioration of previously compact social systems. Many Nagas became literate but not educated in the true meaning of the term because education was limited to book knowledge.

Ruptured Indigenous Institutions

It can be noted that the *morung* (a bachelor dormitory) was one of the institutions that suffered as a result of Christianity's advent. The *morung* was a sort of traditional learning institution, where unmarried young men from the village gathered and lived together to learn essential community living practices. For such an institution, different tribes have different names for it. It served as a form of leadership training place for the youth, as well as a place for teaching, discipline, and ceremonial purposes. It was also a place where ethical principles were taught in terms of behaviour, socialisation, and conduct. A youngster came to the *morung* because he understood he had to study, not because he was forced or forced to learn. The *morung* was where the majority of the crucial social conversations took place, as well as where the village's plans were drawn out. The village elders educated the children about life, jobs, skills, values, and so on. In addition, warfare tactics such as headhunting were an essential discipline. The opponent was instructed to defend and assault the youth. When a villager took an enemy's head, it was taken to the *morung* for rituals and ceremonies, as well as to be displayed in it. The *morung* was also a place for artistic education and training. They also learned to sing and dance. The youth were also taught how to manufacture various crafts and ornaments. Surprisingly, there was no *morung* for women to learn or train in the same way as males did. However, they learned the majority of their abilities and training at home

and from various other women. In addition, women were not allowed to go outside or to the field alone because enemies awaited them. The *morung*'s primary role toward women was to provide safety at all times and in all places. The loss of cultural practices has resulted from the disappearance of this socio-cultural institution.

The decline of the Nagas' cosmological religion is another facet of the socio-cultural developments at this time. Much of this religion's traditions were passed down orally through ceremonies or the leadership of a local elder or shaman. In truth, Nagas' living patterns have undoubtedly been influenced by mythic visions. Sacred limitations regulate the basic patterns of social life, and clan social units can be traced back to a legendary guise. This legendary core thus extends to rites associated with village foundation, economic activities, and clan rights. While introducing the tenets of Christianity in the hill districts of erstwhile Assam, the missionaries to some extent refuted the belief system of the tribal religions on which the customary laws were grounded. In Nagaland, for example, the *morung*, a young men's dormitory that played an important part in their socialisation, eventually vanished. Another important institution that perished was the Feast of Merit, which was led by individuals for their village and featured a lot of singing, dancing, and merrymaking. Alemchiba (1972) describes the demise of these social and cultural organisations, as well as their negative impact on Naga society, where ceremonies such as the great Feasts of Merit, in which the religious aspect was far less important than the social, had not only been remodelled along Christian lines, but had been completely abolished among converts. The inclination was to abandon the old thing suddenly and substitute individuality for the strong group sense that had allowed tribes to endure for so long. Not only was this individualism wrapped in a strong focus on personal salvation, but it also elicited a

direct and natural response against all the old things that mattered in village life and the tribe's social genius. As a result, there was a cultural conflict, not necessarily a clash of weapons, a conflict between the interests of the group and the individual, which generated cultural friction in the society (479-80). Horam (1990) agrees with Alemchiba's assessment of the loss of rich cultural and religious activities as a result of Christianity's advent. While the missionaries forbade these culturally significant rituals, they failed to replace them with alternative practices. While Christianity spread a new faith and introduced a modern education system, it also had a negative impact on their customary rules.

For the Nagas, their origin stories serve as mandates for social structures and behaviours, as well as validation and legitimisation for ancient customs and beliefs among Nagas. Thus, their rituals and beliefs are unquestionably indicative of societal order and cohesion. Aside from that, the material culture that falls within the purview of ritual and customary practice provides a great deal of insight into Naga socio-political institutions. Through a kinship system based on myth, morung institution, headhunting, and worldview, this chapter explores the idiosyncratic cosmological expressions of different Naga segments. The Aos, for example, believe that there are two layers of sky above him. The *Anung Tsungrem* (Sky-god) occupies the first tier, while *Kotaker* (Sky-folk) occupies the second. Other Naga tribes, such as Chang and Ao, have an ideal arrangement of lizard or crocodile at the bottom, with vertically placed pictorial representations of tigers, mithun, human heads, and hornbill feathers overhead. The latter collection of symbols, in theory, corresponds to life after death. A tripartite is, therefore, mirrored, which encompasses prenatal, present, and post-mortal life, as well as symbolising concepts of life and death. Alternatively, the lizard

or crocodile represents the female and pre-natal life, or birth. It is also believed among the diverse Naga tribes that salamanders and the hornbill feather represent the male and post-mortal life. Whereas as depicted by the mithun, which is the focal emblem, the animal is an important motif for all the tribes. This sacrificial animal appears to be an animal, but it is actually a human being in the sky. This is supported by Ao and Chang's claim that men's mithun are souls of sky dwellers, just as sky people's mithuns are souls of world dwellers. Then, in this world, killing one mithun entails the execution of an individual, whose soul is nothing more than a human up there. According to their reckoning, sacrificing a large number of mithuns results in a reversal of the sky world's soul depletion sequence. As a result, the Angamis prohibit a big man's disproportionate success in headhunting and mithun sacrifice.

There is an age-group system and *Putu-menden* in the case of the Aos. The former is linked to the *Ariju* institution, while the latter is a cyclic generation for village governance. Citizenship is granted to a male member at his enrollment into a *zunga* of a specific *Ariju* alongside his coevals, tying an individual to his age group until death. This qualifies an individual for a position in the *Putu menden*. At the age of six, a new *zunga* group enters *Ariju* every four years. This system prevents naturalised or adopted people from holding positions in the *Putu menden*; only his progeny will be granted such political privileges when becoming a *zunga*.

Communal fishing is another way for the Aos to start their new *Putu menden*. Here, the newcomers must go fishing together and deliver their catch to the incumbent councillors. Annual communal fishing also clearly establish inter-village alliances. This strongly suggests that social relationships, authority, and legitimacy are being

renewed or reborn. They also begin their mithun sacrifice ritual by catching fish. A live cock is placed inside a basket that is hung up over the mithun's neck and ornamented with hornbill feathers. It can only be tied to the sacrificial pole after that. After that, a sacrificer's associate, preferably a slave (*alar*), cuts off the mithun's head. Without a doubt. The sacrificer must perform it, or else he will die a *menen* (polluted) death.

A ritual meaning emerges for the Aos, in addition to the objective of bringing new members to the *Ariju*. A flower garden, for example, was always maintained by the *Ariju*'s members. This was thought to be a link to the sky-folks. Ao folktales warn their forefathers against marrying sky-folk's women, who were frequently 'caught' in these flower beds in the morung premises. This could be a cautionary note that inter-tribal marriage is prohibited outside of village connections. *Ariju* membership has cosmological significance, and it provides a reason for existent kinship ties. As a result, a clear distinction is made between *Ariju* induction and naturalised or adopted citizenship status in a community. This approach applies to all Naga tribes, even ones whose morung significance is ambiguous. The belief system in *Aren*, which is a form of natural power, is another noteworthy ritual procedure among the Aos. This is a belief in the unique presence in social life, symbolising unusual fertility or success and conceived of as a power inherent in all kinds of natural items. This *Aren* is tied to the belief in soul-matter and can be likened to *Mana*. The Aos believe that a dead man has the capacity to bestow or withhold natural prosperity to his descendants, the *Aren*. And as a result, some form of ancestor worship could have been developed. The conviction that death continues to exist in the netherworld in the same way that it did

on earth is central to the Ao concept of death. The concept is strongly believed that man himself passes on to the next world to join his forefathers and mothers.

Naga Cosmology in Oral Tradition

It can be identified that the Nagas' religion was centred on man, and they viewed spirit deities as mirrors of their own flaws. As a result of their traditional faith, Nagas believe that bad spirits are immoral, unstable, and untrustworthy. An unsettling or anything that generated disarray was associated with a network of spirit powers in this cosmology. Then, naturally, anything that disrupted this simulation of a mythically imagined world order in an individual resulted in an 'exceptional' death. As a result, the importance of *genna* and rituals became critical in striking a correct balance. As a result, their religious worldview saw them as tied to ancestors, malevolent spirits, and godlings, and they offered sacrificial animals to pacify them. The Naga sees himself as a part of these dynamic forces due to the reality of spirit forces. Obviously, this results in a symbolic relationship with the physical world and subsequent life. This was also a convenient way to defend their discrepancies in kinship and personal rank, not to mention the differences between Naga segments. The oscillation of status discrepancy organised by clan seniority against achievement orientation of great men appears to be regarded as the activity of spirit powers. As a result, there was a constant need for reconciliation and equilibrium, which was carried over to other social lifeworlds as well. This was achieved through a continuous series of rites, sacrifices, and other rituals. The Nagas' reverence for the supernatural and fascination with unravelling the enigma of existence was so communicated. Animism, in its broadest form, refers to the belief that inanimate objects and natural phenomena have a living soul, as well as the belief in the presence of a soul or spirit apart from inert

matter. Animism is defined as the belief in the phenomena of animal existence as being caused by an 'immaterial' anima in a formal definition. Thereby, the Naga was an animist who believed in the existence of souls or spirits within matter. He recognised the existence of an unseen greater force that had control over man's fate and deserved to be revered and worshipped. As a result, it can be established without a doubt that the Nagas' beliefs were animistic to a great extent. All tribes share the belief that there is a supreme deity, the creator, who does not need to be appeased because he is seen as good and never harms mankind, and other gods of blessing who must be appeased with ceremonies and gifts if he is not to give them harm. There were also beliefs in other earth spirits who openly mixed with the mortals. The Nagas also believed that everyone had a soul and that there is a place for the deceased. Due to their widely varied dialects and a lack of communication amongst the tribes at the period, the translation of these ideas may vary.

For the Naga, social institutions are commonly thought of as the fundamental factors of social organisation, which are common to all civilizations and cope with some of the most basic universal concerns of social order. Naga villages, in theory, are territorial subdivisions of patrilineages within a larger ramified clan structure of a tribe. Clan membership does not reflect true patrilineal genealogical ties. Then there's reduced social cohesion, and then there's actual acknowledged and patrilineal groups. This is also true on a tribal level. Only the politico-administrative colonial estimations, which may or may not always approximate the real groups, provide an absolute demarcation of Naga tribes. To demonstrate this notion, a few examples are presented. The Naga myths and legendary prose narratives demonstrate how social solidarity is articulated among distinct sectors, as well as the basis for oscillation

between them. In the case of Ao Nagas, it is widely acknowledged that Mongsen is a submerged segment. Chongli and Mongsen, according to legend, both arose from six stones at Chungliyimti. And their progenitors were namely *Tungpok*, ('gored-open') *Longpok* ('Sprang of stone'), and *Longchakrep* ('Shattered stone') and three females. Another example of myth articulation used to bring disparate groups of migrants together is the Chongli-Mongsen segment. According to Ao legend, their Mongsen sub-segment was the first to emerge from the earth, settling at Kubok, a spot on the west bank of the Dikhu adjacent to Mokokchung village. The Chongli settlement, on the other hand, forced the merging of these two sub-segments through an overpowering institution known as *sendenriju* ('gather-morung') and stamped social hierarchy based on the story of Lungterok's emergence. Their dialect is classified as part of the Naga languages' central sub-group and is separated into two sub-groups, Chongli and Mongsen. (Grierson 22). The motive of polity construction before colonial administrative promulgation was considered in the preceding sections on the Nagas' origins and socio-cultural belief systems. In the following sections of discussion, the study will also look at how traditional codes are still being used in current political institutions to claim an ethnic-based political articulation for a composite Naga identity.

Anthropological Corpus of Writings on the Nagas

The extensive anthropological investigation begun by notable ethnographers like Henry Balfour, T.C. Hodson, J.H. Hutton, and J.P. Mills could not be continued, according to Haimendorf, the noted ethnologist who studied the Nagas. The abrupt end of such studies was caused by the Second World War and following political events that disrupted Nagaland's tranquillity, resulting in the region's re-isolation

from the rest of the world. According to Aier (1996), anthropologists like Haimendorf feel this loss extremely profoundly since he discovered that the process of cultural change occurring in Nagaland differs from the forms of culture change occurring in many other regions of the world under colonial regimes. The Naga situation is unusual in that the Nagas are considered as free to carve out their own way of life, balancing traditional values with the need to adapt to the contemporary world.

Richard Kunz and Vibha Joshi in their *Naga: A Forgotten Mountain Region Rediscovered* (2008) notes that during the British colonial period, the Nagas — around 30 ethnic groups that live along the Indo-Burmese border — were among Asia's best recognised and best recorded peoples. Due to protracted conflicts following Indian independence in 1947, the entire north-eastern part of India was closed to foreign visitors and researchers (except for field visits by Fürer-Haimendorf in 1962 and 1970 and Ganguli between 1963 and 1992); even Indian nationals required (and still require) special authorization known as 'inner line permits.' As a result, academic communication with the outside world was severely limited, and the Nagas fell almost completely into oblivion. Things began to change when India opened up the region in 2000, allowing international visitors to enter and foreign scholars to do limited study, both with specific permission known as 'restricted area licences' (Kunz *Introduction*, 10). Kunz's introduction urges readers to reconsider German anthropologist Adolf Bastian's rather static understanding of culture, as well as his belief that 'primitive peoples' were incapable of adapting to and absorbing change, and that therefore saving their culture before it vanished was of utmost urgency. Encounters with 'western civilisation' were not the first time that people from the 'tribal world' interacted with individuals from other cultures. In reality, cultural contact and the mutual effects and changes it brings are arguably one of the

few constants in human history. It claims that Naga culture is as vibrant and vigorous as ever now. This isn't to say that the Naga world remained unchanged after coming into contact with 'Western civilisation' in the mid-nineteenth century. It did so, and it continues to do so, while simultaneously injecting new energy into Naga culture and propelling it forward on a new, fascinating path.

As a result of these circumstances, material aspects of Naga culture have been preserved in western museums, partly due to the objects' eye-catching nature, the political significance of being in international border areas, and also because anthropologists felt compelled to preserve them for posterity before they vanished. As such, the Nagas are one of the most anthropologically recorded ethnic groups on the Indian subcontinent. The Nagas have incorporated modern ideas and concepts into the exploration and formation of a new and contemporary form of identity, but they are also relying on their traditional culture, or, to be more precise, current beliefs about their traditional culture. This begs the question of how successfully oral traditions, verbal traditions, and historical stories have been recorded. What are the mechanisms that have kept society's fabric together for decades and continue to do so today? What part do these tales play in the preservation of Naga culture? But who are the Nagas, first and foremost?

Chapter 5

Orality, Language, and the Contemporary

Humans require a version of reality, even if it is flawed that best meets their needs. This is the knowledge and meaning sufficient for us to comprehend and navigate the world around us. This chapter is based on the idea that there appears to be an inextricable separation between language, which we employ as a fundamental and maybe unique cognitive tool in our endeavour to comprehend the world, and the rest of the universe. It can be noted that literature, particularly fiction, is able to not only transcend language's inherent flaws but also foster societal solidarity in the process of moulding reality. As a result, the evolution of new literary themes based on contemporary events will be examined in this chapter. Tropes of identity, political instability, unemployment, power relations, or growing feminist voices and their presence will be addressed within the ambit of indigenous studies as a subject of study. This method will focus on the Nagas' place within and in connection to hegemonic discourses of postcolonial cultures and dominant western thought. In addition, the study attempts to present a preliminary discussion of the Fourth World Theory (FWT) to ground this approach (FWT). The FWT's techniques and inquiries shed light on the status of non-state nations and peoples in their political and often violent relations with other non-state nations, as well as with state governments seeking supremacy and control over claimed territory and peoples. Fourth World nations, according to this theoretical framework, are peoples who have been forcibly assimilated into governments and are not acknowledged as having an international identity or keeping their own culture. This theoretical approach will be discussed in light of Nagaland's socio-political situation.

“This layered process of figuring out what someone else [whether human or animal] is thinking... is both a frequent literary trope and a necessary survival skill,” (Cohen) according to a New York Times piece explaining, among other things, why humans care so much about fictional characters. The link between literature and reality has long been a source of debate in literary theory. The relationship has been described in many different ways. The literary work ‘represents’ or ‘imitates’ reality is a well-known viewpoint with a lengthy history and countless, subtle variations. Almost as well-known is the idea that the relationship should be viewed in terms of ‘expression,’ with the literary work serving as a vehicle for the author to convey his or her reactions to reality. In recent years, it has become fashionable to view the relationship in terms of ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth.’ In his book *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination*, David Novitz argues that literature not only supplies significant knowledge about the real world, but also the knowledge that is “richer and more diversified than that offered by empirical research” (Novitz 233). However, this may be sufficient to demonstrate the emphasis that theorists have placed on defining the link between literature and reality, even if communication between the two is hampered by the language barrier. Despite the fact that even a cursory knowledge of literary theory suggests a lifelong fascination with the nature of this interaction, there appears to have been far less interest in investigating and defining the concept of reality itself. Despite this, the word is frequently used interchangeably with expressions like ‘human experience,’ ‘human nature,’ or even ‘the realities of ordinary life.’ However, it is uncommon to come across a thoughtful attempt to explain what these phrases mean in the context of literary theory, and much more uncommon for any such attempt to be more than a brief phrase or sentence. Literature and history can both be considered to be concerned with the reality of the human

experience. And the centre of history is, more appropriately, a communal reality — the experience of people as a whole. History's interest, like that of related fields such as political or social thought, is not with an individual's thoughts and feelings in and of themselves, but rather with how they are viewed as having consequences and hence as part of a world in which individuals act upon and react to one another. In his well-known work *Literary Theory, An Introduction* (1995), Terry Eagleton, for example, asserts that literary theory is less an object of intellectual study in and of itself than a specific perspective from which to interpret the history of our times. This should not come as a surprise to anyone. For any body of theory concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling, and experience will inevitably engage with broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and societies, power and sexuality issues, interpretations of past history, versions of the present, and future hopes (195).

Eagleton's concern here is literary theory, but his ideas have significant consequences for literature itself. The very broad and imprecise descriptions he gives of both lend credence to his confident assumption that there is an inevitable connection between the problems of literature and those of history. Nonetheless, his argument is based on the unquestioned assumption that the viewpoints of history and literature are inextricably linked: the two "inevitably engage." Undoubtedly, literature has its own essence and purpose, and it aspires to depict a unique reality of history itself. It is on this rationale that a departure into comprehending the academic norm of indigeneity is necessary because of this theoretical premise, the inescapable relationship between literature and history.

Perceiving Indigeneity

There is a widespread propensity in political, academic, and social organisations to take for granted the meaning of ‘indigenous.’ Terms such as ‘indigenous’ or ‘native’ are often used interchangeably in political art and academic convention to describe people or peoples’ group. Using the terminology in this manner distinguishes individuals who are members of an ancestral community with ancestral links to land and territory from settler populations or their descendants who cannot claim such ancestors. In recognising these characteristics, imperialism or colonialism is also implied. Therefore, ‘indigenous peoples’ are distinct cultural and political communities that have been colonised. As a result, the category of ‘indigenous’ is created by statism or centralised authority by virtue of exerting power through the state political machinery and through the execution of universal laws within the delineated territory. It has evolved into a political term of art used by the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO), state governments, and many Fourth World nations to refer to peoples colonised and re-colonised by newly constituted states. Indeed, the processes of neocolonialism are at the root of many regional conflicts that are often commonly referred to as ‘civil wars’ or ‘ethnic skirmishes’ when, in reality, they are and could be wars of self-determination or land control between the state and internally colonised peoples.

Long before the modern state emerged, nations struggled to retain their cultural and political identities in the face of invading and assimilationist forces. Military conquerors and invading migratory peoples started to control the historical narratives that eventually formed the genesis tales of today’s states, with countries becoming discursively consumed under those narratives. Despite these exogenous

coercions, there are examples of nations and peoples who have kept their national identities while being absorbed into states. By the mid-twentieth century, there was a need for a theoretical framework that would give notions helping in the formulation of social, economic, political, geopolitical, and cultural understanding of countries and people persisting as newly differentiated national identities separate from states. As state after state was engulfed in political and military confrontations for land rights, collective rights, self-determination, and cultural determinism, these nations and peoples' groups had become a strategic and geopolitical fact. The nations and people are those who are caught in the fight against state assimilation, corporate claims, and encroachments on their identities and territory. In the context of rapidly moving geopolitical and social events during the 1960s and 1970s international bodies, agencies of states' governments, and academic institutions were faced with the need for an intellectual framework within which research, analysis, peaceful dialogue, and policy development could take place in a consistent manner. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights worked to eventually form working committees to evaluate indigenous peoples' situations. Scholars also began work to formulate a theoretical framework within which the disparate influences could be better understood and explained in the context of a developing political lexicons, peoples' movements, regional and sub-regional conflicts, and emerging international multi-state inquiries into the situation of indigenous peoples.

Understanding Fourth World Theory (FWT)

Fourth World Theory emerged in the 1970s, as representatives of states began to engage in international institutions, especially in relation to indigenous and human rights. It became clear that a common lexicon, focussing on a socio-cultural-political

dilemma, would aid in a deeper understanding of what was increasingly acknowledged as a shared experience. The term “Fourth World” first appeared in the current political language in the early 1970s, during the height of the worldwide indigenous engagement movement and the North American Indian civil rights movement. This was also initiated by the late Secwepemc Chief George Manuel’s seminal book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. Manuel proposed that Indians were not just nations inside states, but also nations within greater geopolitical processes. They existed within and outside the conceptual confines of the state, struggling to retain their cultural and political identities. The FWT seeks to bridge the gap between international relations theory and indigenous studies by providing a conceptual framework that recognises the international political nature of controlled peoples while de-naturalising the contemporary state system. Most prominently, it also acknowledges nations’ quest for political self-determination.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the FWT as an indigenous research technique that is well-suited to comprehending the nuances of indigenous nationhood in the context of the contemporary geopolitical world order. This will be in addition to establishing the theory’s conceptual applicability in its application to current knowledge building anchored in the native knowledge systems of indigenous peoples. Historically, not much is mentioned about the structure, principles, norms, and concepts of indigenous knowledge anchored in the culture of each different people, as well as how these indigenous knowledge systems may connect to one another or be applied to complex social, economic, and political problems. Indeed, some of the most ardent supporters of indigenous peoples and their knowledge struggle to articulate the very system of knowledge they claim must be honoured, let alone how

that knowledge will be used. The Nagas have a similar knowledge system, relying on anthropological literature or oral traditions. These traditions are further complicated by the challenge of textualizing oral culture. Thus, one of the ways in which this research will seek to identify knowledge systems in this setting is through the framework of the FWT.

Framing the Naga Narratives in the Contemporary Contexts

Various insights can be highlighted from the foregoing examination of critiques of anthropological and sociological academic writings on the Nagas, and there are certain core common themes. In correlation to this, the quest for a theoretical and methodological field within which one's knowledge of orientalism might achieve some coherence, therefore, becomes necessary. Edward Said developed the endeavour on the theoretical framework of orientalism. Understanding other peoples and cultures have always been difficult, let alone creating a tradition of knowledge or research about them. Edward Said notes that "the fundamental problem is . . . how to reconcile one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples." (Said 69). The knower must recognise and speak about an item in order to generate knowledge. In other words, knowledge is created when the Self interacts with its object, the Other. Within the social sciences, one is talking about the researcher, the teacher, and the policy-analyst, including the sociologist, the anthropologist, the political scientist, the strategist, the diplomat, and others, who are addressing the object, which is a specific society, political system, religion, or tribe with its own peoples and cultures. In this context, it is worth noting that there's a proclivity to rely on strict institutional techniques. And as a result, any study, investigation, or perception of a particular social or political system, in which

the one who studies solely deals with his or her object's various institutional contexts and not with the context of the subject's own position, may result in a potentially incorrect view of affairs. In order to produce any valuable information, the self/other dichotomy must be regarded as a relationship of contextualities rather as detached and impartial entities. In the same vein, Jacques Lacan, notes that the Other is both the structure that produces the subject and the location where the subject positions itself (Moi 99). The self/other relationship is further complicated by the intertwining of knowledge and power. In most circumstances, the Other becomes the subject's site of power exercise. The Western heritage of knowledge about the Orient, orientalism, is thus rife with power mechanisms. In dealing with the issue of communicating the Orient, the concept of a discourse, rather than language itself, will be beneficial. To appreciate the reality of this depiction, one could approach the system of knowledge on the Orient, that is, orientalism, as discourse, as a discourse of power. Said calls for "conscious willed effort of overcoming distances and cultural barriers" (Said, *Islam*, 156), distances in both time and space of the texts produced in alien cultures. And he reminds that "there is never interpretation, understanding, and then knowledge where there is no interest" (Said, *Islam*, 158).

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines discourse as "a collection of verbal performances" at the most basic level and then goes on to describe it as "that which was generated (maybe all that was produced) by the groupings of signs" (Foucault 107). This Foucauldian concept of power and knowledge and its mutual implication is crucial to comprehending the orientalist discourses' formative and distributive processes. The inextricable power-knowledge linking effect entail the formation of subject-object (occident-orient) postures and the orientalist scholarly

mode, cloaked as 'pure' knowledge. The orientalism discourse, then, is a point of intersection, a contested site for power.

Said nearly completely ignores anthropology in *Orientalism*, with the exception of a few references to Clifford Geertz. Other writers who practise literary theory and critical theory, on the other hand, did not take long to write about anthropology and 'the savage Other,' 'the primitive Other,' and simply 'the Other.' Much of what we know about Naga identity comes from early anthropological western writings on the Naga people as a social and cultural group. As a continuing trope of analysis, the following sections will consider some contemporary literatures of Naga writings in English with a focus on themes drawn from oral tradition and also as a stance against one-sided interpretations of being a Naga. It will be examined, through the analysis of select literary texts, how contemporary Naga writers have also appropriated dimensions of Naganess or the Naga being. It will be argued that this has also been through multi-layered narratives of the self and their community, thus contributing to new knowledge systems of the Naga.

Narratives of Indigeneity in Temsula Ao' Select Poetry

One of the approaches to the study of FWT is grounded on certain parameters that attempt to frame the knowledge systems of indigenous cultures. It states that the developing and dynamic link between humans (animals, plants), the land, and the cosmos defines human cultures, as it does the cultures of other animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and lands. External factors and the onslaught of colonial traditions have frequently bulldozed indigenous cultures. This can be said to be true of the Nagas when they embraced Christianity. As mentioned in previous chapters, the Naga

worshipped nature through their songs, myths, stories, folktales, folksongs, and proverbs, and these practices came to be labelled pagan following Christianity. The new literary tradition replaced the earlier oral tradition. Under the influence of the missionaries, the indigenous began to reject the existence of their own literature in their rich oral traditions. Vital components of their tribal origin were lost in the process, and Temsula Ao's poem, *Blood of Other Days*, depicts the same process that occurred in Naga history:

Blood of Other Days

In the by-gone days of the other life
 Before the advent of the WORD
 Spilling the blood of foes
 Was the honour-code

Head-takers became acclaimed
 Tribal heroes, earning the merit
 To wear special cloths and ornaments
 And live in grand houses.

We believed that our gods lived
 In the various forms of nature
 Whom we worshipped
 With unquestioning faith.

Then came a tribe of strangers
 Into our primordial territories
 Armed with only a Book and
 Promises of a land called Heaven.

Declaring that our Trees and Mountains
 Rocks and Rivers were no Gods
 And that our songs and stories
 Nothing but tedious primitive nonsense.

We listened in confusion
 To the new stories and too soon
 Allowed our knowledge of other days
 To be trivialized into taboo.

We no longer dared to sing
 Our old songs in worship
 To familiar spirits of the land
 Or in praise to our legendary heroes.

And if we ever told stories it was
 To the silent forests and our songs
 Were heard only by the passing wind
 In a land swept clean of ancient gods.

Stripped of all our basic certainties
 We strayed from our old ways
 And let our soul-mountain recede
 Into a tiny ant-hill and we

Schooled our minds to become
 The ideal tabula rasa
 On which the strange intruders
 Began scripting a new history.

We stifled our natural articulations
 Turned away from our ancestral gods
 And abandoned accustomed rituals
 Beguiled by the promise of a new heaven.

We borrowed their minds,
 Aped their manners,
 Adopted their gods
 And became perfect mimics.

Discarded our ancient practice
 Of etching on wood and stone
 And learned instead to scratch on paper
 In premature tryst with the magic Script

But a mere century of negation
 Proved inadequate to erase
 The imprints of intrinsic identities
 Stamped on minds since time began.

The suppressed resonance of old songs
 And the insight of primitive stories
 Resurface to accuse leased-out minds
 Of treason against the essential self.

In the re-awakened songs and stories
 A new breed of cultural heroes
 Articulate a different discourse
 And re-designate new enemies

Demanding reinstatement
 Of customary identity
 And restoration of ancestral ground
 As a belligerent post-script to recent history.

In the agony of the re-birth
 Our hills and valley reverberate
 With death-dealing shrieks of unfamiliar arms
 As the throw-back generation resurrects. (Ao *Book of Songs*, 296 - 98)

Temsula Ao's works largely reflect the customs, traditions, practices, and beliefs of Nagaland's Ao tribe, a community with its own extensive cultural heritage. She is, however, more than a writer-informant in the region. She is heavily influenced by her surroundings, yet her interests are humanitarian and worldwide. Time, love, death, beauty, nature, and other recurring themes appear throughout her poems. She also discusses identity, colonialism, moral and cultural degradation, and modern existential crises, all of which are global (rather than just North-East Indian or feminine) concerns. As noted by Tilotamma Misra (2011), Ao, whose own writings display a sensitive blending of the oral and written, claims that the new literature, rich with indigenous flavour, that is being created by modern storytellers and poets from the North-East, does not appear to have a political agenda like the postcolonial literature that is emerging in Africa and amongst Native Americans in recent times. Ao is correct in stating that the people of North-East India are mature enough to embrace their differences from the rest of India as a form of uniqueness and so her poetry is a criticism of the concept of country. She attempts to demonstrate the limitations of the nation. Though the concept of country tends to bring people together, it also develops the concept of centre and edge. Naga authors such as Temsula Ao attempt to articulate this marginality, which always includes a process of negotiation between the centre and the margin.

Ao's acclaimed poem "Blood of Other Days" attempts to illustrate how the people of Nagaland have been driven to the fringes from the pre-independence era,

which contributes to the development of a sense of cultural loss. The emergence of the Indian nation-state, with its covert agents of nationalism, has remained a repressive power over the Naga way of life. What Ao is attempting to convey via these words is that when the Nagas are driven to the periphery due to the development of the Indian nation state, they become more aware of their lost cultural heritage and find a voice to communicate in front of the mainstream country. It should be underlined that the entire cultural process is built on and reinforces the binaries of “colonizer/colonized, centre/margin, and us/them” (Ahmad 25). The language in the poem is sharp and piercing. She discusses colonialism, the arrival of Christianity, and its consequences. She describes how there came to be:

a tribe of strangers
 Into our primordial territories
 Armed with only a Book.

In critiquing the culture of hybridization that followed from colonialism to the arrival of Christianity, she succinctly notes:

We borrowed their minds,
 Aped their manners,
 Adopted their gods
 And became perfect mimics.

The language is strong, and the poet expresses herself unequivocally by declaring how the indigenous knowledge was “trivialized into taboo.” Ao’s poetry is undeniably influenced by the indigenous archives of the Ao-Naga people. Such that her poetry is filled with images and references to her culture’s mythology and history. Despite the fact that the situation is local, her anxieties are universal. In this sense, her poetry discusses violence, cultural decline, and environmental deterioration. She also discusses femininity and patriarchy’s hold on women. Thus, her works allow for postcolonial, feminist, and eco-critical readings from global viewpoints, rather than

just reiterating the region's stereotypes. The same might be true about most, if not all, of the region's contemporary female writers. The ethnic and gendered identity conveyed by the concerned corpus of literature merely opens the way to a form of aesthetic appeal. Given the present tendencies of ethnic, cultural, and gendered fetishism, such approaches may increase the exposure and the popularity of regional literature. When the literature (and, by extension, the people of the region) are bracketed inside such manufactured spaces, they are delimited in and dominated by the many essentialisms assigned to the location. This is one of the threats that the Fourth World Theory also attempts to counter. Furthermore, the objective of identity assertion becomes a difficult and complex undertaking as a result. Any attempt to define the genres of indigenous literature in the North-East (in relation to its difference) risks belabouring stereotypes while eliminating such stratifications of genres means imposed uniformity and loss of visibility. Yet, with the addition of a writing culture to modern activities, there is growing skepticism among the young about age-old cultural norms as well. In "Night of the Full Moon," Ao mentions the dissensions of the youngsters and their disregard for customs in relation to this anxiety:

The youth had prevailed in the huddle
 Where the new strategies were planned,
 But some old ones are deeply disturbed
 At what was resolved,
 Because unlike such other nights
 Tonight they walk
 With no customary tributes
 For their king. (Ao *Book of Songs*, 261)

Ao appears to be asserting that, despite external pressures of modernity compelling individuals to take on confused identities, the substance of one's identity

remains the same. The poet seems to be implying this in the final lines of “Night of the Full Moon”:

We may have altered our name
But our person remains the same. (266)

This presents a dilemma for the native; what is it that makes a Naga? How does the Naga negotiate lines of tradition and modernity? This dilemma is frequently revealed in the worlds of Ao through her poetry. Temsula Ao asserts in her essay, *Writing Orality*, that attitudes toward oral tradition are adverse in countries with a long history of literacy and written tradition. Rather, there appears to be a dismissive attitude toward it. In many civilizations, the oral form is associated with the uneducated, if not the uncivilised. The indigenous peoples themselves appear to be in a hasty rush to abandon their age-old cultural customs in favour of imitating their new ‘masters’ as noted in the “Blood of Other Days”.

Undoubtedly, animism is an important aspect of poetry from the Northeast. According to the native worldview, all natural objects have souls and such a worldview envisions that animals, plants, rivers, mountains, and other natural phenomena are said to embody spirits. These spirits are said to have not only human-like characteristics but also supernatural powers. In the midst of this lifeworld is man, depicted as living in perfect harmony with nature within the mythos of the Naga indigenous worldview. These spirits which are frequently elevated to god statuses in the pantheon are believed to wreak havoc in the disturbance of nature’s equilibrium. These powerful views are also expressed in the poetry from Nagaland, providing opportunities for reading and analysis from the perspective of the FWT. To provide an example, one can turn to her poem, *Stone People from Lungterok*. In this poem, Ao

returns to her ancestors' history and outlines the different pursuits, both physical and cerebral, that made her people both 'savage and wise.' According to the Ao mythical origin narrative, their earliest progenitors sprang from the soil at *Lungterok*, or Six Stones. They were made up of three males and three women, in fact, the Aos still believe in this genesis narrative. She explains the story and concludes with the vital question:

Was the birth adult when the stone broke?
Or are the STONE-PEOPLE yet to come of age? (111)

The poet is attempting to highlight the assumption that oral traditions are inferior to written ones with this inquiry. The fact that she values oral history is obvious in the lines before the questions above, where her forebears are referred to as "poetic and balladic." These were people who, in addition to being good observers of nature, could comprehend bird and animal language. They were skilled people with romantic values and above all, spiritual people who worshipped the unknown and believed in the afterlife. 'And still, you think that these people have yet to come of age?; the poet may as well have said. It is a testament to the poet's brilliance that she is able to express her argument so concisely using this style. Regardless of these perspectives, what happens to oral tradition when literacy and civilization arrive in oral cultures across the world? In *Writing Orality*, Ao succinctly notes, "...what is the relevance of an oral tradition in such a situation and how have the literate, educated inheritors of such traditions dealt with their inheritance?" (100). It is a question she poses not just to her readers, but also to herself.

To make a point in reference, it can be noted that some civilizations have coped wonderfully with this dilemma. The Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, composed by Elias Lonrot, is an example of oral tradition's continuance in indigenous peoples'

works. Lonrot is credited with transforming the poems “of the ‘little tradition’ of ordinary folk into national literature in the ‘great tradition’ of education and civilization” (101). Other examples also include Native American literature and African literature. These endeavours aided in the preservation of oral literature and its related elements in their particular peoples’ group. In such a process of revitalising the oral tradition, a new sort of writing evolved, fusing parts of oral tradition with modern conceptualisations of themselves and assisting writers in moving away from extrinsic models. This can pave the way for the development of new writing that is steeped in traditional sensibilities but imbued with current views.

In the Northeast of India, there is a growing tendency in creative writing that draws extensively on the region’s oral traditions. Ao considers herself to be in this category. In order to incorporate insights from one’s own oral traditions, there is a need to create one’s own literature. Although this claim to literature is in a language other than their own, it provides a form of universality to the literature by merging aspects of oral tradition with creative imagination and syncing the past with the present. Thus, this type of writing investigates an interesting and derivative literature that is both oral and written at the same time. To demonstrate this argument, Ao has written about this process in verse in the closing section of *Blood of Other Days*:

But a mere century of negation
 Proved inadequate to erase
 The imprints of intrinsic identities
 Stamped on minds since time began

The suppressed resonance of old songs
 And the insight of primitive stories
 Resurface to accuse leased-out minds
 Of treason against the essential self.

In the re-awakened songs and stories
 A new breed of cultural heroes

Articulate a different discourse
And re-designate new enemies

Demanding reinstatement
Of customary identity
And restoration of ancestral ground
As a belligerent post-script to recent history.

In the agony of the re-birth
Our hills and valleys reverberate
With death-dealing shrieks of unfamiliar arms
As the throwback generation resurrects

In the same manner, the poem “Heritage,” emphasises the irony of seeing objects from her tribe placed behind glass cages in a European museum. She feels powerless and despaired when she witnesses her ancestors’ heritage caged in the display cases and feels as if she is caught between the opposing forces of near familiarity and stark detachment. The grim reality is thus presented in the lines:

They languish, these uprooted
Treasures of my heritage
Caged within imposing structures in designated spaces (*Ao Book of Songs*, 239).

This poem addresses the romanticising of cultural items in off-shore places, an act that alienates them from their origins, reducing them to mere display objects. This jeopardises their identification for the poet from the very same things that she calls part of her heritage. The feeling of being on the outside pushes the poet to come to terms with her isolation and yet embrace the difference that the dislocation of place has caused. Temsula Ao, as a writer, wants to give her community a voice, and as part of the pursuit for identity assertion, she attempts to rebuild her past and rewriting tradition. The poet views the exhibition of her heritage icons as an offence and threat to her identity and having overcome her initial shock and feeling of helplessness, resolves to bring the lost heritage back to their place of origin. This seems to her a

way of redeeming herself of the identity crisis arising from this cultural alienation. Identity is a subject of culture, and it is the full achievement of the human intellect in interpreting and comprehending the given reality, including oneself as a living creature in this universe. This delicate link between identity and culture is jeopardised in this age of globalisation, which, while increasing alternatives for identification on a personal and societal level, has also led to identity fragmentation. Ao's poetry seeks, on a personal and eventually collective level, to resurrect her community's lost identity through raising awareness of her cultural heritage.

She adds to the discourse of recreating a past long ignored and on the risk of being forgotten in her poem "History." The folklore alluded to as songs in this poem takes on a life of its own, finding expression through the poet's words after lying dormant in her being, being compared to like latent seeds awaiting germination. Folklore is an essential aspect of cultural legacy that is passed down through generations through the medium of oral traditions. As a result, folklore plays an important role in shaping a specific people's identity. The discourse of the ethnospecificity of culture, including folklore, results in the vital question - cultural identity, and this has been the main emphasis in the culture and politics of Northeast India for several decades. The significance of the relationship between identity and folklore cannot be overstated. Folklore is the most essential source of collective identity development, articulation, and persistence since the interaction between members of a group or community dictates it. This is because it prepares cultural symbols, which are fundamental components of an identity system.

They now resonate
 In words of new
 Discernment
 To augment the lore

Of our essential core (*Book of Songs* 239).

A similar point of view may be found in Ao's poem "Songs Dedicatory." The poet strives to preserve her folklore and heritage through her poetry, and she elevates the tradition above her particular self, becoming a vehicle for the tradition to be handed from oneself to another. The words that transmit the traditions vary with the generations, since each generation creates a new vernacular to fit its narrative and style; yet, the song remains the same.

These are songs which
Lay inarticulate
Inchoate
And now vibrate
For a kindred heart
Who heard and understood
Long before I knew them (*Book of Songs* 4).

The sense of the memory of one's home can be noted in her poem, "My Hills." She laments the loss of calm and the verdant nature of her home. She focusses on a sense of estrangement that irks her in the present, as well as a yearning for bygone days.

The poet uses natural imagery to represent the hills former, and she reminisces in the lines:

And happy gurgling brooks
... The seasons playing magic
On their many-splendored sheen
... The hills echoed
With the wistful whispers
Of autumnal leaves (*Book of Songs* 157).

However, the last three paragraphs lament the misfortune of these hills, which have lost their calm and have become linked with political turbulence and social unrest. Expounding on the problems in the North-East, this region has been regarded as the problem child since the establishment of the Indian Republic. It has also been

the most protracted theatre of separatist guerrilla conflict in South Asia, a place where armed action is frequently the first, rather than the final, choice of political protest. In reference to the valley's brutality, the poet writes:

But to-day
I no longer know my hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by the staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry (*Book of Songs* 157).

In "The Old Story Teller", Temsula Ao reiterates her role as keeper of her cultural heritage:

I have lived my life believing
Story-telling was my proud legacy (240).

Using free-flowing rhymes, the poet begins in an upbeat tone, appreciating the responsibility she bears for keeping her legacy alive. The poem opens in a casual tone, discussing how the poet inherited her grandfather's history of story-telling, and then gradually transitions into its content. A remark in the concluding lines of the poem describes the origins of the Ao-Naga community's oral tradition. It claims that in ancient times, the people had a script that was written on a hide for all to read and learn. However, the writing was lost forever when a dog accidentally devoured the hide. Since then, the people have passed down every detail of their life through oral tradition (240). The poem alludes to old stories about the origin and the similarities between people and animals. However, the tone shifts to trepidation at the end of the poem when the poet laments the younger generation's mistrust of their people's cultural history:

The rejection from my own
Has stemmed the flow
 And the stories seem to regress
 Into un-reachable recesses (*Book of Songs* 242).

It is worth noting that the poet is not a blind follower of her traditions and critiques the practices that have lost significance in modern times. For instance, in “The Spear,” the poet shows a hunter’s innate brutality and predatory inclinations as he mindlessly throws a spear at a moving figure, which turns out to be a doe giving birth to a calf. Recognizing his error, he is overcome with guilt and anxiety for the unborn kid. This moving story depicts the cruelty of hunting and the devastation it brings to the natural environment. Recognising this demonic impulse in his head, the hunter states:

For now I knew
It was not the spear alone
That caused it all (279).

In the same manner, “Trophies” shows the inhumanity of the famed Naga practice of severing the skulls of foes killed in the brutal conflict and publicly displaying them as a mark of courage and social prestige (Ao 284). The poem is a feminine counter-discourse in the voice of a woman who laments the terrible tradition that produces men drunk with alcohol and conceit who are entirely unaware of their household obligations. Changes in the nation, particularly in peripheral populations, are perilous in the name of modernisation and change. The loss of the region’s nature and the scenery is also a degradation of the people’s tradition because nature is a vital aspect of culture and ethnic identity. That is why it can be argued that any wrecking of nature is a ruin of the peoples’ culture and attempts to protect it. Temsula Ao’s poetry exemplifies this resistance, and she is one of the most forceful lyrical voices from the Northeast responding to the general cultural upheavals occurring in the region. For instance, she laments and mourns nostalgically for earth that was once “verdant”, “virgin,” and “vibrant” in her poetry titled “Lament for an Earth”:

Once upon an earth

There was a forest,
 Verdant, virgin, vibrant
 With tall trees
 In majestic splendour
 Their canopy
 Unpenetrated
 Even by the mighty sun,
 The stillness humming
 With birds' cries (1-10).

The loss of the brilliance of the forest or the tainting of nature's purity is made analogous to a woman's ruin. The choice of the word "virgin" indicates that Ao is drawing a parallel between the land and the woman. The canvas of the forest conveys its egoistic attitude through her unwavering voice as she resists the enormous sun's inquisitive rays. There is harmony in its quietness, as its serene atmosphere is filled with birds singing. Ao writes again in the same poem:

Cry for the river
 Muddy, mis-shapen
 Grotesque
 Choking with the remains
 Of her sister
 The forest.
 No life stirs in her belly now.
 The bomb
 And the bleaching powder
 Have left her with no tomorrow (53-62).

To the poet, the river and the forest appear to be joined in a sisterly knot. Regrettably, the river's flow is now obstructed by human debris and the shifting of the peripheral surrounding riverbank is threatening the water. The river's lush edge has now been supplanted by man-made structures. Thus, the poet bemoans the death of a life that Mother Nature protected in her cocoon. She unequivocally says that the

continual damages inflicted on this territory as a result of armed violence to capture insurgent communities have left the Nagas with “no tomorrow.” There is a note of melancholy that permeates in the death of her people, like the destruction of her land.

Alas for the forest
Which now lies silent
Stunned and stumped
With the evidence
Of her rape (21-25).

The poem, written in the style of a lament, expresses Ao’s concern for nature, which she compares to the embodiment of a woman and mother. She also indicates the link between woman and nature in her poem “Requiem?” in which she writes:

Who will mourn?

Who will mourn this blackened mass?
This charred carcass
Of a recent blushing bride
Roasted on the pyre
Of avarice
Lit by the gluttony
Of the scavengers
And abetted
By the kitchen stove.

Who will mourn? (1-11).

This poem depicts a newlywed bride being burned to ashes by her in-laws due to their thirst for money and property. However, it may be argued that Ao here compares a newly married woman with all her new dreams to a land hoping for a bright tomorrow. And if the bride represents the essence of the Northeast, then the greedy in-laws represent members of the so-called progressive world, whose never-ending hunger has consumed the region’s peace. On a darker note, contrasting with the title, “Blessings” is a poem by Ao that is critical of the concepts of progress and

growth, and, in a manner, of human civilization as a whole. She appears to be so dissatisfied with civilization's rules that she writes in an oracular voice:

Blessed are the unborn
 For they cannot mourn
 The loss
 Of what they
 Never had (26-30).

With a sardonic note, the poet believes that the blind are more blessed than those who have sight since those who have sight do not appreciate nature's light:

Blessed are the blind
 For they see not
 What they with sight
 Have done to the light (11-14).

When she argues that the deaf, dumb, or even the lame are more blessed than those who can hear, talk, or run since they are incapable of saying or hearing falsehoods, and the lame are already out of the game performed by society in the guise of norms and culture. With vehement desperation, she laments:

Blessed are the deaf
 And the dumb
 For they hear not
 And cannot
 Utter lies.

Blessed are the lame
 For they are out of the game
 That people play
 Unmindful
 Of the norm
 They themselves form (15-25).

Almost the same tone of condemnation can be heard in "To the Children of the World," in which she dismisses her native land's future, its tomorrow. Her maternal worries are revealed in these fears. She believes that, while women are regarded as the

givers of life, and it is their exclusive obligation to provide a tranquil and pure atmosphere for their children, however, she remains doubtful of such a future for her people. She bemoans the previous generations for raising children in such a corrupted world:

To all you children who are born,
 And are yet to be born,
 Just one word of advice --
 Never ask
 Why you were born.

Some of you were born
 To inherit
 The plunder of the ages... (1-8).

Death, in fact, is a reoccurring motif that can also be seen in Ao's poems. She not only believes that the duty of older generations is tremendous in raising the next generation in a corrupted world, but she also accepts responsibility and is worried about the future generations, as seen by her poems. The poet defiantly protests against the erosion of tradition, but she constantly fears the loss of her land. This dread appears to be ingrained in the minds of her people as well. The notion of land is associated with life for her people, and the loss of land represents the loss of life. Ao remembers this clearly in her poem "Dying":

Dying has a look
 Unseeing and dark
 Like a bottom-less well.
 And is as vacant
 As a pair of eyes
 From where
 The soul has
 Already fled (14-21).

The motif of death, which appears often throughout Aos poetry, including “Death,” might be read as a fear of the extinction of a society as well as the land. In Aō’s death poetry, death does not provide comfort, but rather serves as an unavoidable end to existence, crushing everything into dust:

When it renders
The immortal-assuming sensibility
Into mere remnants
Suitable only for the hollowed earth (6-9).

The violence that pervades in the Northeast is noted in the poem “A Strange Place”, Aō cites this to be a significant cause of the damages done both to the land and its people:

This is a place where
Armaments become
National policies,
And diplomacy
Another name
For the clearing-house
Of dollars and pounds
And transit camps
For spies and spy-catchers (19-27).

The poet blames the destruction of her land and her people on the government, which has long ignored the improvement of peoples’ lives. She compares it to a gradual slaughter that causes an identity issue for the people who live there. It is apparent the poet is concerned not just with a destroyed environment, but also with the rapidly changing lifestyles of the indigenous people and the threat to their values and ethics. Aō’s poems about nature not only lament the deterioration of nature, but also express passionate opposition to the tools of change that are accountable for its destruction. For instance, in the poem “Earthquake,” she even warns society and

patriarchy about the terrible consequences of adulterating both the devout soil and the woman:

When the earth rumbles
 And contorts
 To throw up her secret
 Like a pregnant woman
 After conception,
 It is no portent
 Of new life.
 But of death and disaster
 For those who dwell
 Upon her swell (1-10).

A natural catastrophe such as an earthquake is plainly understood as nature's retaliation against human civilisation. The picture of earth here is of a pregnant woman who conceives not to give birth but to kill life by releasing magma from her womb. The poet's sentences contain a raw honesty when she says:

She gapes open
 To devour
 Toppled towers
 And torn limbs,
 And incites
 Mountains to slide,
 Rivers to rise
 And volcanoes
 To vomit
 Lava and deadly ash.

She heaves and hurtles
 As if to uproot
 The very moorings
 Of life (11-20).

Temsula Ao is a poet who writes to awaken and revive the spirits of her community. She writes with the obligation of preserving the oral heritage passed down from her forefathers. Her poetry expresses a genuine concern for the changing

social landscape, particularly in the face of the changes that threatens to destroy the roots that connect with tradition. And thus, her poetry reworks her cultural inheritance and makes it relevant for a new generation, reviving a lost identity. It shows the historic and cultural riches of her people, as well as a vision of her home devoid of violence. This emerging ‘native’ or indigenous writing is the consequence of a well-utilised opportunity and making the most of what one has to bring about a new literary sensibility. In this sense, Temsula Ao’s literary tradition can be noted as a paradigmatic shift towards emerging Naga literature. The Ao-Naga oral traditions, which comprise myths, stories, folktales, and beliefs, demonstrate a strong cultural link to the physical environment.

The focus on physical place and land is another trope of research inquiry in the FWT method of study. Nagaland, like other Northeast states, has undergone and continues to witness drastic cultural shifts as a result of globalisation, but the impeded transition is due to insurgency. Furthermore, like in other parts of the Northeast, the drive for growth and widespread industrialisation and urbanisation has resulted in severe exploitation of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity but also human migration in recent years. It may be argued that such development not only changes the physical landscape of an area, but also erases the myths, stories, folktales, and belief systems linked with the people. In this sense, erasure poses a significant existential danger to indigenous cultures and traditions. Contextually, this region’s writers have lyrically expressed concern about the causes that bring about cultural and environmental changes. Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire’s literary voices, in particular, are distinctive in that they not only grieve the loss lyrically but also attempt

to oppose the extrinsic forces by employing key aspects of their indigenous culture for social but also political change.

FWT and the Geopolitics of Place

Some of the key concerns of the FWT is the focus on history, memory, and mental processes, which are considered to be multidimensional. This is in the sense that the linear past flowing to the future - fatalistic, cyclical, or providential are all interconnected. Furthermore, in the geopolitical context, the FWT presents an alternative and thorough analysis of the intricacies of international and inter-state interactions, with a focus on the dynamic interplay between humans and location. As a result, the indigenous concept of place, land, or territory is critical in the formation of peoples' voices.

Ao and Kire draw references to the old myths, folklore, folktales, and beliefs transmitted in oral tradition as stories or narratives. And it may be said that these narratives are essential components of their contemporary culture. These authors document the oral in the form of written texts while actively recounting the stories in writing form in order to retain the traditional meaning of location. Since the stories are deeply rooted in the notion of place, the act of retelling also supports the land claim of the indigenous communities against development which displaces and dislocates the local people from their traditional place. As noted, the central study of this section is understanding the complex function of Ao's and Kire's retelling the oral stories in the written form in relation to the notion of place from the FWT approach. Literary representation is a strong medium for transcribing tangible events, and as such, it gives a perspective on reality and our perception of the world. Human

viewpoints, particularly subjective perceptions of location and the cultural values associated with the intangible qualities of those encounters, have also inspired FWT to resort to literary expression. Indigenous knowledge systems and challenges are far too frequently overlooked and ostracised on the grounds that such epistemologies and community solutions lack reason and are naively localist. According to Shawn Wilson, indigenous settings and worldviews should be explored via an indigenist paradigm that focusses on “the philosophy behind our search for knowledge that makes this new knowledge a part of us, part of who and what we are” (194). As a result, engaging with the challenges of an indigenous community necessitates awareness of the people group’s complex localist relationality with the place/land. As a result, in order to connect with a community and its location-based challenges, we must first interact with the local significations of place entrenched in the community’s epistemologies. In an indigenous sociocultural organisation, the concept of place turns a rich source of information that increases the relationship of traditional socio-environmental knowledge to the place through oral tradition stories. Because the premise of location is the primary material underpinning for indigenous existence, FWT study works with an environmental setting, a place or landscape where events occur or a plot unfolds in a literary work, to investigate the human-environment interaction. It is worth noting that many indigenous writers throughout the world have used the literary form to communicate their socio-historical situations and environmental linkages, although this form has not received adequate attention for geographical study.

In the same way, Ao and Kire’s works frequently recreate traditional narratives in order to build a feeling of place/land at a time when their community is

losing its customary ties with the land due to dispossession. Their literary engagement with the indigeneity of place through storytelling supports the cultural background and community connection while increasing the level of connection with the place/land. The literary indigenization of place/land through narratives not only provides resistance to the factors that undermine the traditional attachment to place, but it also mobilises the community to reclaim the ancestral traditional land. As a result, an FWT reading of indigenous literary works, that is sensitive to the prosaic recounting of ancestral traditions, exposes the depth of human-place connection.

Having considered Temsula Ao's poetry in the FWT framework, the following sections will further conduct an analysis of Easterine Kire's selected texts in the concerns of writing oral tradition within the circumspect of the FWT.

Stories of Place in Easterine Kire's Narratives:

In literature, an intimate interaction is one method of engaging with the concept of place. And, in indigenous knowledge, the uniqueness to place and society, as well as indigenous peoples, provide for a comprehension of this knowledge through an everyday engagement with and experience of the phenomenology of place. As a result, in a novel or a poetry, the landscape, nature inside the land, and even inanimate things are linked to the characters and their interactions with the setting. In their literature, the Romantics, for example, acutely represented this phenomenon. Every location is inscribed with stories, and the storied location lives on in the minds of the people. The stories elicit place-based thinking, making individuals aware of the deep ties that bind them to the location. As such, storytelling in indigenous cultures is an important medium for transmitting cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs to the next

generation, and it provides a strong link between the past and the present, as well as the histories and the rites. And stories may be viewed as a rich source of community knowledge that enables indigenous peoples to learn from the past and make decisions in the present. The stories help to build a community's sense of identity and act as a political instrument in resisting the forces that drive indigenous peoples away from their native land. Among other themes, Ao and Kire often employ their communities' most important legend, the myth of creation, in their narratives. This myth continuously reminds community members of their origins and confirms that their culture evolved in-situ, and hence the land which belongs to the Nagas. The recounting of the creation myth makes indigenous people more sensitive to their origins and aware of their moral obligation to preserve the sacred land.

Bitter Wormwood (2011), a novel by Easterine Kire is about the Naga independence movement, and this is one work where the many aspects of indigeneity appear. These themes have been explored even among her other works such as *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *Mari* (2007), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2010), and *A Respectable Woman* (2019). Kire's works depict the Naga peoples' indigenous way of life against the backdrop of British colonial administration, the Japanese invasion during WWII, and later attempts to proclaim independence from the postcolonial Indian state. These novels depict how modern political groups use the history of the world wars to create an identity that enables them to make politically coherent aspirations for independence. The regional focus of these books on border insurgencies has also meant that the local experiences of insurgency and the state brutality that has resulted have not been adequately investigated. As a result, reading these works requires an understanding of the significance of writing in representing

reality as the local recounts it. Kire's novels vary in that she tells a different story of how these revolutionary forces creatively rework tales and experiences of British colonialism to build their little nationalisms. Rather than passively accepting their designation as a martial race designed to serve the requirements of the reigning powers, the people use their memories of servitude in the British Army to make political claims for a distinct state. Furthermore, the orientation of separate state is based on western concepts of statehood, but claims of independence are rooted in indigeneity. It should be emphasised that, while these books acknowledge indigenous claims to native territory, they also contrast an indigenous identity with a common idea of shared identity. The indigenous way of identification gives a more extended imagined history, a connection with the land, which corresponds more neatly with the concepts of a people driven by a shared culture. *Bitter Wormwood*, in this sense, take a daring step in depicting the ongoing relevance of the history of extrinsic influences on the Nagas, while finally pointing to the more conservative viewpoint of a national identity founded on the notion of indigeneity.

Overall, Easterine Kire's narratives on the Naga peoples portray the original inhabitants of the area as they face modernity and military assault. Kire, being the first Naga writer to publish books in English, possesses the type of native knowledge that allows her to access her self-anthropologizing work. Kire has written a succession of books concerning the impact of the Japanese invasion on the Nagas' everyday life since her debut novel, *A Naga Village Remembered*, was released in 2003. *Mari* (2007), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2010), and *A Respectable Woman* (2019) are examples of works that have received extensive recognition through national awards like as the Hindu Prize, as well as a worldwide audience through translation into

many languages. Kire might be considered as a symbol for her peoples' traditional ways of life, values, and organisational principles, which are besieged by the forces of the modern world. She connects the impact of militarism during the Japanese invasion to the Naga peoples' ongoing battle for independence. Rather than opposing indigenous identity and military history, Kire's works depict a contingent negotiation of these connected histories, both of which have a part in how Naga peoples view their place in relation to the postcolonial state.

Kire aims to offer a clear sketch of the Nagas' political representation and objectives in the paratext of her novels. This is done through a presentation of anthropological and legal documentation of the Nagas' efforts to interpret their reality into terms that the state and an external audience can understand. The two discourses of indigenous identity and the prolonged insurgency that are invoked to legitimise their claim to political sovereignty provide a dramatic frame within which this is done. For instance, *A Naga Village Remembered* relates the history of Khonoma village, and appendices are included for the Angami words that are scattered through the novel. The fact that she traverses into the native tongue to narrate succinct traditions is itself a claim of indigeneity. This documentation of oral histories and place names, intended at preserving and disseminating the tribes' traditions, illustrates the local anthropological framework as a resistance to modernity's advancing erasures. As such, the conflict is between the Nagas' ageless traditions and the destructive modernity begun by the nineteenth-century contact with the British. *Bitter Wormwood* begins in the twentieth century, and while the novel offers dates for character births, they correspond to historical events that are inconsistent with the Indian nation-narrative state's and chronology. Kire begins the novel with a history of

the Nagas' quest for independence and the coercive tactics used by the Indian state in response to their denial. The narrative overlaps with important phases of Naga political history, starting with the 1832 British occupation of the Naga Hills. It also documents the various claims to independence made by the Nagas throughout independent India's history, up to the peace document signed for Naga reconciliation in 2009. In addition, several historic documents and agreements are referred in the story. Thus, a vast collection of paratextual materials, along with the novel's storyline meticulously tracing historical events, resistance activities, and Acts passed to legitimise military occupation, suggests a more restricted narrative of the fight for political recognition.

Kire's works might be viewed as an act of conscious political representation for her people, as she was the first Naga writer to write about the region in English. While literary elements are important, her works are mostly characterised as political interventions. In this way, her narrative, therefore, provides an account that has been concealed by conventional assertions. In the next sections, a study of her narratives will be examined to support the framework of this study.

Indigenous and Eco-Consciousness in Kire's Select Works

The ecological concerns, as well as indigenous beliefs in literature, are central to Kire's narratives. Her works show a fascinating and dynamic Naga culture, as evidenced by the plethora of oral and historical narratives of Nagaland, which has always captivated the outside world. Her narratives speak about culturally-based life experiences through creative imagination that frequently presents an existential truth. The spirit of tradition, preserved in the forms of stories, dances, myths, and legends,

represents beliefs, cultures, and relationships with nature, demonstrating the community's vigour and vibrancy. As a result, one may claim that Kire's fictions depict history, culture, and Naga indigenous spirituality. Furthermore, she was extremely concerned with the writings about her and her people's hardships and the sort of life they led throughout the first several decades of the terrible conflict between the Indian Army and the Naga freedom fighters. She was directly affected by the burden of living in such dread. Her motivation to convey the heritage stems in part from her personal experiences as well as knowledge gained from people's collective memories. Her English fictions' key themes include people's relationships with environment and society, the struggle for identity, women's suppression, and their silent tales. For this study, selected text in the genre of folklore adaptations, oral history and women's consciousness have been examined.

According to Kire, the second silencing of Naga narratives was triggered by the conflict because people were scared and worried about restoring their destroyed villages as a result of the conflict during the war (public lecture 2016). There were several well-educated Naga authors who could write and teach the Nagas at various schools. During the war, no one had time to write since people were more concerned with survival than with anything else. Kire believes that the Naga literature has been misunderstood by many people and that it is still in its infancy. She attempts to identify and correct misinterpretations, claiming that Naga narrative traditions has existed since the settling of forebears in several villages. She encourages people especially the younger generation to visit communities, connect with the seniors, and listen to them since they are living books with literature in their minds. Literature has expressed diverse ecological concerns in various forms, and the purposeful attempt to

preserve nature is reflected in the aforementioned ecological issues. In marginal and minority societies, various communities have a relationship with environment and view it as a tradition. It connects and relates the ecosystem's five elements: air, water, fire, sky, and earth. Nature should be valued because ecological equilibrium is necessary for the existence and well-being of species. Therefore, it is man's ethical obligation to conserve and appreciate nature because it is the source of all physical and spiritual things. The Nagas' traditional religion is classified as animistic on the basis of their economic, social, and cultural existence, and the rites they followed were similar to animism. Kewepfuzu Lohe argues in *Naga Village: A Sociological Study* that there is no recorded doctrine regarding the concept of God and faith and places like thick forest, boulders mountains, springs, lakes, rivers, and other natural things are thought to be the abodes of these spirits. Because reproducing mental ideas of spirits and deities in carvings or paintings is a difficult endeavour, no attempt has been done. It has been documented that the ancient Nagas worshipped and believed in two sorts of spirits: benevolent and malevolent, and were thought to offer sacrifices or rituals in order to gain favour from both spirits. Kire claims that the spirits were not hostile to those who conducted the rites. Their religious and moral lives were strengthened by the rites and ceremonies they conducted. Despite the fact that their religious and spiritual beliefs are intertwined with secular ceremonies and rituals, they believe in the presence of a supreme god. Thus, the Angami referred to this supreme entity as *Kepenopfu*, the Sumi referred to it as *Alhou*, Ao referred to it as *Lijaba*, and Konyaks prayed to *Guwang*. The Nagas, as nature worshippers, had a distinct identity. In such a belief, man must approach nature in order to discover the roots of his civilization. The ceremonies were carried out by the village seers and shamans. It is also noted that certain taboos or gennas existed in its spiritual ceremonies. The taboos

and gennas were done to maintain correct order and right relationships with supreme beings, spirits, nature, and fellow human beings. It was supposed to bring blessings, success, triumph, joyous life, achievement, propriety, and long life to those who kept it, and cursing, failure, mournful life, poverty, and short life to those who disobeyed it. To study the cultural history or the roots of people, there is a condition that to naturally shift to the primordial age, one must have the most profound grasp of the subject of man, culture, and nature that co-existed. Before the arrival of outsiders, nature was inextricably linked to the Nagas' ancient customs. The shift to modernity along with literacy also erased the particular indigenous culture and identity of the Naga society.

The question is how future generations will study the current era in which the Nagas live? Is culture and tradition still valued? The solution can be found in narratives that have been adapted to modern literacy. Furthermore, the current study has concentrated on how literary forms have expressed in a revision or rebirth of indigeneity among the Nagas. One method is through the ecological concerns identified in English writings among the Nagas. This is the human interaction with the environment; it has investigated the wilderness and the spiritual tradition, which signified a search for ecological habitation. This new element of nature has been addressed using selected Easterine Kire tales, invoking the concept that restoring nature is restoring culture. Over time, the Nagas have lived in close proximity to nature and realised the value of nature in their existence. With the development of modernisation and urbanisation, the region has refused to respect nature by exploiting natural resources, which has affected their connection with nature. Kire comes from a culture that is profoundly established in tribal heritage. Her works are lauded for their

contribution to the rich cultural heritage. It conveys a strong impression from the oral tradition, which is an important aspect of Naga culture. Kire assumes the position of a custodian and environmentalist, tasked with conserving oral tradition and cultural heritage and rescuing them from the intrusive forces of modernization. She is distinguished by an astute ecological sense, which makes her work suitable for eco-critical reading and analysis. One of the primary purposes of environmental literary criticism, or ecocriticism, is to assess texts and ideas in terms of coherence and use as answers to environmental crises. Oral tradition is particularly important in Naga history and culture, and they rely extensively on stories, poetry, and songs to chronicle their history. One of the most significant means of tracing history in Naga culture was the transmission of knowledge through storytelling. It is a ritual in which youngsters congregate around the fireplace in the evenings and elders tell or narrate stories to them. Stories are told not just for amusement but also to teach essential life lessons. In Kire's *The Log Drummer Boy*, the two youngsters Hekani and Vitoto sit with their grandmother as she tells them a story. The plot opens with the conventional narrative beginning of "Once upon a time...". The grandmother continues to tell the children a story about a log drummer boy named Nokcha, who was interested in learning the ancient skill of log-drumming. The young boy was overjoyed when he learned that his grandfather agreed to build him a small log drum. Since then, Nokcha kept practising on the drum to the tune of various beats. The log drum was a highly essential object for people to use while announcing war or a large event, and as a result, the beat's rhythm was crucial to indicating different situations. Nokcha had hurt his ankle during the harvest and was unable to accompany his grandfather to the field on that specific day. On that day, the enemy warriors unexpectedly arrived to lay siege to the settlement as those were the days of war. Startled by the imminent threat

and encouraged by his babysitter for the day, the boy ran to the village log-drum and began beating a warning continually with his small hands moving as quickly as he could. Children are not allowed to play the drums among the Nagas, despite knowing this, Nokcha beat the drum to save the villagers. The sound of the drum alerted everyone, including the enemies, because it seemed like a large group of men were playing it. The sounding of the log-drum also alerted the villagers, who ran back to the village, causing the enemy to flee. However, several adversaries fell into the hands of the villagers. The locals praised the child, Nokcha, for saving the village from invasion and as a result, he was named honorary drummer.

It is also necessary to consider the importance of the log-drum or *sungkong* in the context of the narrative. *Sungkong*, or log-drum, is derived from the Ao dialect words: *sung* (wood) and *kong* (crows). It might thus refer to a ‘crowing’ wood. The rooster crows to alert the dawning of the day, therefore the Ao’s usage. In the past, the villagers would hew vast trees from the forest so that they could create a log-drum which was used during festivals but also as an alarm for all the inhabitants in the village. The log drum is considered an essential feature of the Naga culture. It plays an important part in their socio-religious and cultural aspects and the locals regards it as a living divinity. Men beat on log-drums to deliver particular information to all residents on all occasions, from births to festivals to funeral announcements. Most importantly, it indicates the time for the elders to gather in order to provide warnings or proclaim an emergency when attackers are spotted, or to launch coordinated attacks to combat them. Women also beat the drums at festivals and the *yimkulen* ritual, which is a kind of ‘village worship’ ritual. To bring the log-drum into the village, several rites are undertaken. To begin, a man of the village must agree to contribute a

tree from his own forest or execute certain rituals to assist them in selecting the appropriate tree. The tree is then felled by the community youths, and the sole instrument used for the cutting of the tree is a *dao*, a type of machete used by the Nagas for a variety of tasks. Only once a rite is completed is the tree felled. As a result, it takes seven days to get the tree from the forest to the village. When the desired traditional artwork is completed, the log-drum is transported to the people through an indigenous method, this becomes the space where rites and ceremonies are held. Similarly, it is customary for all the women to offer food and beverages for the young people who haul the log, and as a result, it is recognised as a very large celebration. Kire's *The Log Drummer Boy* explores Naga culture and environment through the symbol of the log-drum, which is revered as a living deity. In this scenario, indigenous beliefs play a significant influence. The Nagas' indigenous beliefs are deeply rooted in rituals and deities, and worshipping unknown deities and spirits becomes part of their everyday activities and ways of life. The Nagas believed that the log-drum had intrinsic worth and that it should be revered rather than taken for granted. Nokcha, the small boy, was intrigued by the wood drum's significance. He has a lot of questions about the log-drum? "Why did they speak to the log drum?" (19) he inquires of his grandfather. "In olden days, we were told that the log-drum is a spirit and that it protects the village..." grandfather continues, "...that is why we respect it and give it an honour. We believe we should address it as an honoured member of the community" (19). The deep forest, rocks, mountains, and rivers are thought to be the homes of spirits, which may be both malicious and friendly. The indigenous people's values and ethics, thus, can be identified here. The so-called lifeless items of nature, according to the native, are components of the vast design of the cosmos, utterly pulsing and pulsating with life and force and powerful with

remedies. Thus, mountains, rocks, trees, rivers, and even little stones on river banks are said to be sentient and possess healing abilities. In the civilization, all natural elements had spiritual importance. When the little child describes how the log-drum is produced, he asks his grandfather whether it is simply a piece of wood. His grandfather gave him a comprehensive explanation of how the log-drum was created. He responds, “Before we cut down the tree, we talk to it and we tell the tree we need it to come and be the guardian of the village” (20). This description depicts the relationship that existed between humans and non-humans. Their lives are intertwined with the cycles of nature, which is in the form of images of trees and wood, i.e., the log-drum, provides and directs the entire village. This suggests that the Naga people accepted and supplicated to natural spirits to act as a protector for them. It demonstrates respect and dignity towards non-human nature. Nature becomes not just the guiding spirit but also the defender of culture as a result of these deeply-held beliefs. All of the positive and values in these beliefs are provided by the mutual interaction and mutual dependency on nature. Nature is shown as superior and distinguishes between the self and the other.

Folk Dance and Songs in *The Dancing Village*

Easterine Kire’s *The Dancing Village* is a comprehensive literary description and picture portrayal of environment and culture. In the natural world, trees and forests are shown. It still works as it did in actuality, imparting true ecological lessons. For instance, in the description when Kire notes, “there was a bountiful huge forest in the villages, with fruits and vegetables” (23). The story’s surroundings between the two villages were lush paddy fields and deep woodland. Festivals, music, and dances are used by the Nagas to worship and glorify nature. As a result, the issue of leaving this

culture and natural activities enlarges the surface of ecological learning. Thus, the book not only displays pleasant elements, but it also discusses humans' alienation from nature and civilization. Similarly, this novel begins with two children, Vitoto and Hekali, who yearn to hear a story and ask their mother, "Mother, will you let Grandmother tell us a story?" (13). The grandma began relating the story of Rongsen, a little boy who lived in a small Ao village with his parents. Kire's story entertains both children and adults while teaching them about the rich Naga traditional folk practises. The seven-year boy, Rongsen's desire to dance bridges the divide between the Aos and the Zeliangs. In the narrative, the small boy inspires a whole Ao Naga village to dance to the rhythm of Zeliang traditional dances, causing the two tribes to embrace the celebration of nature and their friendship. Rongsen's village is located in a place where the backdrop setting thrives with the external environment, which is densely forested. The villagers engaged in jhum farming, demonstrating the ecological aspect that existed in the area. Rongsen's parents were wealthy, with a large plot of land on which they performed jhum farming and produced various vegetables and fruits. It is appropriate for tribal people to gather natural resources in order to benefit from them. As the tale progresses, Rongsen is excited to go to his mother's village, which he refers to as "papaya eating place" (17), because the last time he visited the area, it was papaya season. Even his mother considered returning to her village this season because the people there would be busy working in the fields and there would be plenty of fruits. Lungzue wanted her son Rongsen to have as much fun as she had as a youngster. In the story, the small boy is joyfully roaming about the village garden, happy that he has arrived to his mother village at long last. Rongsen awoke the next morning to the sounds of the drum. He could hear the Zeliang Nagas

singing a folk song and performing a folk dance that they were practising for their festivals when he listened intently.

So, what exactly are folk songs and dances? The term 'folk' refers to a community's traditional art or culture. So folk dances include a specific dance that is believed to be a part of the people's specific tradition of that particular place. Folk songs are traditional songs that are passed down by oral tradition from one vocalist or generation to the next. The celebration of several festivals demonstrates the richness of tradition and culture. The festivities are incredibly important and have become a part of their culture. The Nagas celebrate a variety of festivals. It differs from one community to the next. Above all, people hold celebrations throughout the harvest season to thank nature for blessing their harvests. Naga folk melodies have been regarded as passionate and historical. The songs tell the story of several legendary legends or ancestors. Seasonal songs evoke the tasks carried out throughout a certain agricultural cycle. Folk songs were related with spirit worship, specifically nature, conflict, and immortality. It was heavily influenced by tribe-specific customs and rules. Such that, the tone and purpose of the songs differ amongst tribes, and folk songs are sung to obtain benefits. During the harvest season, Nagas typically have festivities. Aside from folk singing, folk dances and music are also key components of each Naga event. During festivals and religious events, men and women perform synchronised folk dances in a communal setting. They execute battle dances and hunting dances, which are usually performed by men. Men and women wear various traditions and jewellery when performing ethnic dances and songs. They thank and praise nature through their songs and dances. Traditional musical instruments are also used during the singing and dancing. *Tati*, a single-stringed instrument in the Angami

language, is also used for songs. Bamboo flutes, bamboo trumpets, bamboo mouth-organs, and log-drums are also utilised, but with the arrival of Christianity, these traditions were condemned as being related with spirit worship and immorality. As a result, translated versions of western hymns replaced indigenous music and songs in the Naga Hills.

Kire's story vividly brings to life the character of the little boy, Rongsen. He discovers and learns the Zeliangs' song and dance. It was really simple to learn the dance pace. The symbols in each traditional dance have deep meanings, where the motions of many birds, animals, and insects are imitated in the Zeliang folk dances. The hornbill dance is the name for this dance. The underlying significance of the Zeliang dance is about a little kid who transforms into a hornbill bird because his stepmother mistreated him. Rongsen's mother tells him of this significance of the Zeliang dance. It was time for Rongsen and his mother Lungzeu to leave that village and return to their Ao village. Rongsen awoke early in the morning expecting to hear drums, but instead he hears birds chirping sweetly. Nature, as a source of beauty and amazement for all beings, contains all of the great mysteries. It is something that all humans may feel and appreciate. Rongsen's grandmother, Temjenwala, was upset when he reveals how he learned the Zeliang dance. They represented the Ao community, which was not the same as the Zeliang. Grandfather Lipok responds in anger, "It is not right to teach your son the ways of another tribe. We are not Zeliangs, we are Aos. Your son is an Ao. He should learn to play the log drum, not dance the Zeliang dance" (39). This episode demonstrates that the notion of ethnic distinctions was prominent in society. This exacerbated the friction in the family's multicultural bond. Rongsen and his mother went fishing at the river on one occasion. Suddenly, he

said, “Oh look, the fish is doing a dance!” (41). The mother could see the small boy’s enthusiasm in this comment. Lungzeu realised they had made a mistake by prohibiting him from dancing. She also recognised her own mother and father as the greatest dancers in their community. As a result, both the grandfather and grandma realised that teaching the children the Zeliang dance would be beneficial to everyone. The villagers were eager to learn the dance, so Lungzeu and her son Rongsen stepped forward and began to sing and dance together. Everyone in the community began learning the steps to the rhythm of the drum beats, and grandfather Lipok carried a small log-drum with his friends. They all took part to play the drums and dance the Zeliang folk dance in the Ao village. In this manner, the youngster brought the two cultures together and celebrated friendship and kindness with nature and culture. This story demonstrates an effort to teach about the fundamental value of nature through culture. The text’s cultural and environmental exposition is a plea to return to nature, since restoring nature restores culture.

Kire, who might be regarded a custodian of cultural heritage, wishes for the youth to heal the gap that Naga culture has created between Naga culture and environment. Her storytelling, which try to unite cultural legacy, express the concept of being spiritual with nature. It conjures the fundamentals of Naga culture in order to give the people a voice. The mythological myths about spirituality transport us to the past. The folk music and dances in the narrative demonstrate the linkages between the environment and landscapes that existed during the ancestors’ time. Kire’s narratives about folk music and dance help the Nagas connect the past and the present, as well as fill in the gaps that people have left. Folk music and dance have the potential to restructure linear time into a cycle in which the distance between the past and present

folds and allows access to events and ancestors from another era. Kire reflects the deep-rooted rituals of the Naga culture by introducing folk dances and folk melodies. Thus, traditional dances and songs in the form of music become a symbol to remember cultural values, allowing people to adhere to them. Kire brings the children, young and old, into contact with their cultural heritage in this narrative by invoking memories of the period that were an intrinsic part of their ancestors' events and rituals. It is past time to revalue nature. The impact of the environment on prehistoric life and culture calls into question the importance of how culture is depicted in her narratives with the present culture, as well as what are the ecological and technological trends today, and by examining the trends, what can be predicted about the future in Naga society. Without a doubt, the sense of nature can be found in everything that characterises Naga culture. They have a deep awareness of culture that is deeply anchored in nature, which they regard as sacred. As a result, societal shifts away from nature generate ecological problems. This comprehensive understanding is spread through Kire's literary works, which depict history and culture. Kire personifies this tale by using allegories for present Naga youngsters such as uniqueness, self-acceptance, kindness, and generosity. She has also employed more personal themes, and aims to recreate fresh concepts for her audience as an author documenting folklore and orality, removing labels of preconceptions. She undoubtedly aims to teach the current generation in order to instil all excellent ideals in life. One of the ways she attempts to demonstrate this in her novels is through the motif of nature, which is revered as the giver and guiding spirit in Nagas culture and awareness. It was more of a "living deity," but with the coming of Christianity, the Nagas no longer saw nature as sacred, but rather as a means of survival, giving nature a radically different perspective. As a result, Nature and humans are considered as

intertwined. Because nature and culture are hybrids that should not be firmly divided, the connection between culture and nature must be reconsidered. Human civilisation has a direct impact on the entire world and natural phenomena, and every culture that creates materialism causes environmental deterioration and natural disaster. So one can stay in or keep a tradition since it should be preserved, but one must also go forward for the betterment of society.

In *Theory and History of Folklore* (1984), Vladimir Propp writes, “The folktale, and especially the tale of everyday life, is an ancestor of written realistic literature” (20). The stories in Kire’s books are unusual, yet they represent the ordinary life of the people and hence are authentic to the social side of Naga history. Kire used the fiction genre to retrieve and document the Naga oral heritage, presenting it in a new form to a new public educated by literacy. *When the River Sleeps* is one such significant work. As previously mentioned, the novel is crucial in comprehending Naga past history since it is a contemporary folklore, the people’s past collected and given in written form in current times. J.H. Hutton in *The Angami Nagas* wrote, “To enumerate the various superstitions of the Angamis would fill a book in itself,…” (251). The myth of were-tigers is one such belief which is reflected in Kire’s work. In the novel, Kire writes, “Vilie lay pondering ... It was this miracle of transformation that amazed him the most – that a man could choose to metamorphose his spirit into a tiger... the way the tiger had left when he challenged his lack of courtesy, made him feel certain that there was some truth to the whole matter” (*When the River Sleeps* 28). Kire outlines two types of inter-village conflict in *A Naga Village Remembered* and *When the River Sleeps*. The conflict in *A Naga Village Remembered* is the consequence of a long-standing dispute between two

villages, as well as an attempt to assert superiority over neighbouring villages. *When the River Sleeps*, however, it is in revenge for the unprovoked murder of a community member. The protagonist of the tale, Vilie of Zuzie village, is a witness to a murder committed by one of his travelling companions from Dichu village. He is pursued by the residents of Dichu, who believes Vilie is the killer. In both circumstances, the men looking for heads are motivated not only by bloodthirstiness, but also by an inherent social connotation that is for the welfare of a town and to maintain its prestige.

Another aspect of the Nagas' head-hunting culture worth considering is their religious system. The Nagas thought that in some situations, murdering might appease an evil spirit. Hutton notes this particular practice by noting that "... all the tribes in this district consider that by killing a human being in certain cases they are doing the most effectual thing towards averting the displeasure of some peculiar evil spirit (terhoma)" (qtd. in Hutton 160). The villagers would also take up this practice for appeasing the benevolent gods, especially for getting a good harvest. The occurrence of inter-village conflict is visible in Kire's stories, but she never mentions that the Nagas were motivated purely by their brutality; instead, she artistically portrays the motivations behind those battling. At the same time, she did not deny that Nagas are a warlike race, "... women were widowed early by the love of war among the men. The men called it battlesport and itched to be on a raid when they felt they had been home too long," and the reason for this is the, "... reputation of the village [which] triumph[ed] in these raids" (*A Naga Village* 15).

Gender Concerns in Kire's *Don't Run My Love*

Naga women authors, such as Kire and Ao, revisit old community practices and describe the lifeworlds of their communities through their creative recounting of oral

history. For example, Kire's eco-consciousness and feminist concerns are rooted in the notion of gender as a social construct. *Don't Run My Love* is a cautionary story about love and betrayal, and Kire tells a love story that outlines societal conventions in a patriarchal society. In the story, Visenuo and Atuonuo, a mother-daughter duo, who meets a young and handsome man named Kevi, after which their lives are abruptly turned upside down. Visenuo is a young widow who could remarry but does not want to, and her only child, Atuonuo, is of marriageable age. Kevi is naturally attracted to Atuonuo and the young man leaves meat presents to demonstrate the patriarchal Angami Naga tribes' marriage proposal rituals. The concept of a woman's property rights and reputation, which are social constructs, are being questioned here. The two women, Visenuo and Atuonuo, are not regarded by society or their family because it was deemed inappropriate for a widow woman and a young unmarried girl to openly interact with a man. This novella discusses the socially and culturally constructed status of women in society, as well as how a man who appears to have good qualities at first develops an aggressive temperament towards the conclusion of the narrative. The plot is designed in such a way that it twists and turns the occurrences. One can also note the presentation of the pastoral scenes in the lines, "the heat brought out the scent of new paddy. It was a sweet and strong smell like sunshine trapped between husk and grain" (6). Nature helps the tale advance, especially in the chaotic setting detailed in the novel. Kire also depicts a break with convention, which impacts both women's lives, and so both women are represented in the course of the emotional storm. The tale employs a real folkloric approach in which the two ladies discover a solution. Through the assistance of the seers, the methods of folk knowledge bring tranquilly into their lives. She focusses on and resolves the conflicts that women have before and after meeting a man. Kire discusses the

traditions of were-tigers in his folk tales. She elevates it to a higher level by deviating from the norm and incorporating the concept of fairy tales. Kire's *Don't Run My Love* is a prod to the feminine consciousness that confronts Naga society's gender-based system. Atuonuo and Visenuo are required to live and behave in specific ways throughout society. It demonstrates how gender is formed. Women and men's roles have been emphasised. Kire discusses how women are expected to abide by specific standards and customs, and how women unknowingly promote male dominance.

For example, at the start of the novella, the concept of property inheritance is introduced. The ancestral property, known as *Seiphro*, is exclusively given to the male child, although a widowed lady, like Visenuo, can and has the right to use her deceased husband's land, as does her daughter. Land held by the community or inherited by the women can be passed on only to men. In fact, the land is inherited by the next male relative in the event of the death of the family's head, which is the father. She must work hard in order to survive without inheriting the land. Even today, customary rules continue to have an impact on the social and economic standing of Naga women. Customary rules continue to be prejudiced in Angami culture, where women are meant to be governed by social institutions, social norms, taboos, and beliefs. Customary law is mostly conceived by men from a masculine perspective, which excludes women. It becomes difficult for women, preventing freedom and instead constraining them. As a result, the village organisation is controlled by men. Kevi, the young man, assisted the two women by carrying their sacks in exchange for Visenuo and Atuonuo insisting on a lunch. This was the conventional manner to express gratitude to someone who had assisted you. Any woman from the Angamis community is required to undertake common

responsibilities and chores. *Thenumia* was the performance of domestic tasks such as cooking, child care, and agricultural labour. A woman always works in the field with their baskets and infants. As observed in the text, women's roles are always limited to the house and the field, just as her mother requests that Atuonuo bring wood. They must work in the field every day. All home chores were delegated to the daughters. They were not permitted to attend school and were expected to look after and govern the household after marriage. Kire writes, "At eighteen, Atuonuo was almost as strong as her mother. She had reached the age of marriage. In fact, her grandaunt thought she was in danger of being passed over because girls younger than her were already married and had borne children" (5). This demonstrates how women themselves may be the primary advocates of conventional statuses to culturally create gender roles. The women were confined to their homes, seldom leaving them, and their lifestyles were severely controlled. In fact, women who knew and did all of the domestic chores were highly valued by society. Thus, the women who were committed and worked hard were requested for marriage, and this notion is mirrored in the text, where Atuonuo is asked for marriage at the age of eighteen but rejects. It was customary among the Angamis for a young man to propose to each girl and marry the one who said yes. At the same time, the girl has the option of accepting or rejecting the suitor. Parents were seldom forced to marry off their daughters, and incidences of females marrying against their will were uncommon (Hutton 168).

One of the characters, Vitso strongly asserts that a woman's duty is "to fetch the firewood, draw the water, cook the food, and brew the liquor besides working in the fields and weaving clothes at home" (82). The two women had to return home while carrying hefty loads in their *kephou* (a sturdy woven basket). Kire provides a

comprehensive description of nature to the text, narrating the clearing sky. Despite the fact that there were a few clouds in the distance, they chose to take each laden bag. As they walked on, they saw that “the grass was still wet, but the sun was shining fiercely” (10, 11). Kire conducts a more in-depth examination of the actual scenario. She focusses on a common understanding of bereaved women's situation. Widowed women had few options; they had to labour hard in the fields or sell herbs, vegetables, and home-brewed wine. Visenuo, for example, desired to work hard with her daughter in their field rather than live a life selling vegetables and home-brewed wine. In her well-known work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses gender and one can oppose the concept of gender as masculine and feminine. Gender justice may be achieved through altering or rebuilding the way people think about gender. Instead, people may tear down gender barriers by promoting equality and justice. Gender is performative; this gives insight into how gender as an identity is constructed via the execution of certain activities. Butler notes that gender is , “... performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre exist the deed” (35). Visenuo, as a widowed lady, is undoubtedly scrutinised by society because she is without her spouse. Naga society is so embedded with patriarchal standards that when a male member of a household is missing, the community restricts or cautions that family with various taboos and rules. As a result, biological distinctions between men and women serve as a type of backdrop for the gender system. In the narrative, a man named Vilhu asks the widow and her daughter to assist him in carrying their heavy goods. Visenuo respectfully declines since she does not want to displease Vilhu’s wife. Visenuo had once said that Vilhu was more concerned with helping the widow than with his own well-being. A number of young moms with their newborns tied to

their backs would stand at the village's entrance (a circular setting place). According to Kire, these men and women would return home and notify their relatives about how late or early the harvesters had arrived (26). This demonstrates the general standard followed by people in society. Kire focusses on the norms, taboos, and ceremonies observed by the patriarchal Angami culture in the context of marriage as the novel continues. The following day, when Atuonuo and Visenuo arrived to their hut, Atuonuo yelled, "AZUO! Someone has left us meat again!" (27) Atuonuo was concerned and pondered who could have preserved such a large amount of meat. Visenuo, her mother, recognised it as the work of a suitor seeking to marry the eighteen-year-old girl. This is how the Angami Nagas perform if a young man develops feelings for a girl and wishes to marry her, he will bring her presents on a regular basis before proposing marriage. The Naga Angamis rigidly adhere to two types of marriage: ceremonial weddings and casual marriages. Ceremonial weddings are celebrated with pomp and formality, whereas informal marriages include a woman being taken into the home of a man. Among the Angami tribe, the woman is extremely significant in marriages. The *liethomia* (the middleman/matchmaker) is invariably a female. When a girl reaches the age of eighteen and is capable of doing all household tasks, she is considered of marriageable age. These chauvinistic rules are so deeply embedded in society that they tend to dictate and govern the lives of women, therefore displaying gender-stereotypical roles. Visenuo and Atuonuo, who took turns cooking meals whenever they came into the field, exemplify the principle of performativity. Atuonuo also realised her mother was gently reminding her to begin preparing the supper. She "cajoled the fire back to life. She got down on her knees and blew at the little embers until the bamboo crackled into life" (35). For her, this was routine labour. A Naga mother or woman in a household has a regular job

regimen. She begins her day by gathering firewood, obtaining water, cooking, and then going out into the field. Kevi joins them for dinner and agrees to assist them in carrying the heavy baggage. He was carrying the *kephuo* that Visenuo and Atuonuo had lifted upon his back. It was already late dark when they arrived at *Kija* (village). When the widowed mom and her eighteen-year-old daughter arrived with a stranger, the women and men were intrigued. The villagers started questioning, “Who was the stranger? Was he a relative of Visenuo’s? ... no one had the answer to the question uppermost in their minds: Was this a suitor for Atuonuo?” (41).

The arrival of a young handsome man to assist the two women caused quite a stir in the community. If Visenuo’s husband was still living, the villagers would have no way of interfering in their private affairs. When a young man enters a woman’s home without any male members, society deems it a major concern for the woman and her family’s standing and reputation. The position of women in traditional Angami culture might be determined by looking at the responsibilities that women play. Kire depicts the conflict that plagues the lives of its women, particularly those without proper male relations. After hearing about the young man Kevi, Visenuo’s paternal relatives Abau and Khonuo pay Visenuo a visit. Abau was agitated and remarks:

The whole village is asking about the young man who carried our paddy home. We could not sit at home any longer and keep saying we know nothing about this business... She was in her seventies and considered it her right to know all that was going on ... especially when it pertained to the female members (42).

The passage above emphasises how the family and society regulate the actions of women. It demonstrates how gendered culture manifests itself in Naga culture. A woman's reputation is crucial, especially when a man pays a visit to a widow. In the story, we find that the villagers get quite interested in this matter. Judith Bulter says that society determines what is acceptable in society and how the interactive process might affect the development and functioning of marginalised female youths and beyond. Because the notion of gender has already been created by society, the individual has no meaningful function of choice. The person merely has the option of how to execute pre-existing gender roles in society. A similar trope of narrative may be seen in the novel when two of Visenuo's paternal aunts were more worried for the young widow and her marriageable daughter. They warn them that there are other girls her age in the community who have married and become wives and mothers, so any interaction between the two of them with a male would not be a good omen for Atuonuo's marriage. The lives of women were governed by society. Through the character of Abau, she makes a powerful point in the book. She chides the mother and daughter saying, "You live in a community. You must heed the rules of the community or risk being talked about by the members of society" (43). Women must follow the norms and regulations established by taboos and laws. Naga women are classified in the traditional context. In the Naga culture, a woman's position in the home should be that of a virtuous lady who stays at home, learns domestic chores, and maintains her status as a woman. Visenuo's paternal family contribute to gender inequity by oppressing females in a male-dominated culture. They use the two ladies to maintain the community's culture. Kire emphasises the manner in which gender inequality exists within the same gender. Atuonuo's aunt becomes a victim of the patriarchy that so tightly binds the Angami culture. Gender is expressed differently in

different contexts, whether in a tiny culture or a large country. Kire also emphasises the significance of each community's respectability and reputation, particularly in the case of women. Atunuo's aunt Khonuo contends that, "Nnia just wants to make sure your reputation is safe" (42). This sheds insight on the severe or inflexible adherence to tradition. Despite the effect of westernisation and changes within the Naga people's traditional framework, traditional beliefs, values, and conventions continue to cause issues. Women's concerns have not been alleviated by modernity. Traditionally, rank and reputation are important in a community. The role of women in Naga culture is influenced by cultural values and traditional beliefs. Thus, gender is the state of being male or female in order to produce a social and cultural distinction.

Kire concludes the tale with a fantastic twist. She begins the story with a very youthful, attractive man and finishes it with a really strange character. The female characters reconcile and recognise their own value. The novel's female characters recreated standards and ideals. The character Atunuo, who thinks and acts aggressively, embodies the characteristics of a woman who is provocative and daring. Visenuo, a widow, is shown as brave. The two women worked well in the field without relying on anybody. They strive and triumph in the end, making this novella gender conscious. Kire does not only talk about the female character, she also talks about the masculine power through the character Kevi. Easterine Kire believes in the equality of all human being whether it may be a male or a female. Kire takes the myths and folktales to bring out the idea of the were-tiger. *Tekhumevimia* is a word used by the Angami Nagas. Its direct translation is "tiger grown into shape of" (Heniese 102). *Tekhu* means tiger, and *mevi* means to transform. Humans and non-humans or animals interact in many ways. The indigenous Nagas believe in

lycanthropy as well. Heneise claims, “Angami beliefs about the tekhumavi straddle two worlds - the world of human, waking reality, and a very different other, seemingly mythological one - a vast universe of spirits, signs, and omens,” (99). It is stated that the presence of tiger-men or were-tigers among the Naga tribes has been greatly diminished since the arrival of Christianity. The existence of were-tigers is not regarded particularly novel in Naga civilization. This is crucial since Kire’s literature on the Naga *tekhumevimia* is presented in a simple Angami setting. It is also stated that the were-tigers appear in the villages during the rainy seasons amidst the foggy valleys. The were-tigers transformed into humans and lured the small children away. When a human shares the liver or heart of a chicken with a were-tiger, it is thought that the person also becomes one of them. There is also a method of becoming a were-tiger. The individual will first be converted into a very little animal, then as he grows older, he will be transformed into a larger animal. The lives of the person and the were-tiger are inextricably linked. In this story, the tekhumavi, or Kevi, as a fabled person with heroic attributes, ends with a tragic aspect. It is also thought that the person who transforms into a were-tiger prefers to reside in the jungle and hunts wild animals, similar to the figure Kevi. He is utilised as a metaphor for society to be cautious of the warnings that may appear in anyone’s life. This character cautions against being misled by initial impressions. In this way, Kire incorporates the indigenous belief in lycanthropy into the story. Easterine Kire has a same aim of bringing about change in society and eliminating gender inequality in order to eliminate prejudice. She promotes a life of freedom and strength in all aspects of life. When it comes to Naga women’s political, social, and economic empowerment, they continue to strive and battle. Kire also claims that Naga women are still not fully

empowered. Thus, from a feminist standpoint, Kire's *Don't Run My Love* may be seen as a work that reflects woman-consciousness.

Kire and People Stories

The fundamental concerns of indigenous authors in marginalised places were the loss and recovery of their histories and cultures. The writers from the Northeast through the medium of fiction, address issues of politics, society, and history, both written and unwritten. The discussion of current Naga writing might be broadened through folkloric genres. It is clear that Kire, as a poet and writer, is passionate in recording and collecting as many stories and tales as possible. She draws her resources from the Naga people's history and upholds the oral tradition. She makes a comment on the wars that repressed Naga tales. It also disrupted the context, which was critical for the continuance of folktales and the collapse of oral tradition. The oral narratives were muted for a long time after the military operations began in 1956 in response to the Naga conflict with India. Kire emphasises the necessity of sharing one's tales, stating that narrating a narrative is more of a spiritual activity that becomes a fundamental factor in mending people's psychological traumas (Kire). If the tales are suppressed, a nation's wounds may not be healed. Because of strife, warfare, and bloodshed, the Nagas' identity was in conflict, displacing their ways of existence. Kire maintains that, in addition to the loss of folktales, the Naga people's endless and diverse stories were suppressed. These are neither fantastic or legendary stories, but rather depictions of ordinary people and their lives. Kire thinks that individuals need to communicate their experiences and that they deserve the opportunity to do so. Easterine Kire founded the Barkweaver initiative in order to preserve this living literature. She seeks to tell the stories of the folk lifeworld, and her book *Forest Song*, released in 2011, is

a compilation of seven short stories. Several of Kire's stories are narrated in the style of a Tenyimia Angami folktale, and often examining the Nagas' ceremonies, she traces the belief system, which can be likened to animism. This is the Naga spiritual cosmology, in which gods, spirits, people, and nature, basically everything, played a role in maintaining the intended equilibrium within all of creation. Kire's tales about her people exemplify Naga realities while also including folk elements. Kire's tales may be classified as people stories in this sense; the only difference is that she perpetuates the history of storytelling by adopting the framework of fiction and writing them in a new manner.

When seen in historical and cultural context, the recounting of the stories is expected to be remarkable. Stories are extremely essential, and through her brief narrative, the lives and experiences of ordinary people, as well as the significance of literature in Nagaland, are grasped. Asserting the threat of changing times, Elizabeth notes "storytellers have an influential role to play in creating an impact on the Naga psyche through writing" (Elizabeth & Tsuren 45). Therefore, this study has attempted to investigate the new ways and styles in which folklore organises the idea of Naga writing, as well as how Easterine Kire's narratives and Temsula Ao's poetry are placed into the new genre of folklore, which is written form of realistic literature emphasising particularly Naga rituals and culture. A closer examination of the realities of Naga lifeworld, which have gotten little scholarly attention, is critical for this society. These realities form the culture and identity of the Naga people, and manifest the basic aspects of life which are denied and ignored in the larger context. Kire and Ao's writing provides real narratives because there are certain aspects of life which cannot be explained with logics and reasons. Their narrative and re-telling

skills aptly demonstrate how the art of writing can safeguard, recreate and revive cultural traditions through folklore which moves toward written realistic literature.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

FWT and Storytelling

Stories or narratives impose, remove, and regulate time and space in order for the mind to learn, explore, remember, change, expand, and constrict ideas, experiences, and perceptions. It is therefore possible to move oneself or a group of people to another location, another time, and another dimension through the storytelling and narrative process, making what may be impossible in the tangible world entirely and fully feasible and accessible. In the Fourth World societies, the use of the story as a narrative medium functions as a learning process, a process of remembering past, a process of foretelling the future, and a means of explaining the present. So far, in the context of this study, the researcher has employed storytelling in two circumstances:

1. To consider or conceive how an issue can be understood and solutions tested, and,
2. To construct a virtual environment in which a collection of persons functioning as information sources may reveal their views, experiences, memories, dreams, and current perceptions.

According to Ryser and Whitaker, storytelling and narratives have many various tasks in a community, but in study it acts as an essential approach and method of inquiry for understanding and describing tangible and immaterial phenomena of a certain ethnic group. For millennia, narratives have played a vital role in study and society.

Undoubtedly, a skilled storyteller may make significant and lasting contributions to human knowledge and addressing human needs. Memory is closely related to

storytelling and narrative, and while it may appear to be a self-evident technique in research, it is all too frequently overlooked. A memory might be triggered by an event, symbol, or social contact in which people share their views. And the function of memory is one of the oldest strategies for obtaining accurate knowledge about the past, present, and future. It should also be noted that the ability to remember is an important aspect of research when dealing with a large number of variables that must be relationally appraised or retrodicted by evaluating variables from the past to forecast what may exist or come into being in the future. As a result, the methodologies to be used in this study will take into account the distribution of memory outcomes in the Naga environment. This might include acts of sharing such as oral storytelling, narrative patterns, cultural themes and motifs, dreams, and visions.

The disappearance of the stories would herald the disappearance of history, territory, and identity as these stories serve to raise knowledge and consciousness about important aspects of culture. The stories' existence suggests the continuity of existential history and vital tradition. Naga cultures are transitioning from oral to written tradition, and Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire deploy traditional storytelling as a kind of resistance to cultural influences that seek to destroy their local oral-historic notion of place. At a time when the oral form is dwindling in importance, Ao and Kire's work use the written form to impart important components of their traditional culture to the current literate age. These writers do not bemoan the transition from oral to written culture; for them, the most essential concern is the survival of the stories and the preservation of location for the continuing of their traditional culture. And, despite the fact that they write in the coloniser's language, they target both

indigenous and non-indigenous readerships at the local, national, and worldwide levels. It can be argued that they use this global language as an appeal to conserve their culture on the one hand, and to resist entities that erases locally emplaced stories. The narrative in Ao and Kire's works connect the fabled locations with the physical places, and the physical place emplaces the culture. These stories seek to legitimate the Nagas' land claims while simultaneously opposing the development narrative, which disrupts indigenous peoples' relationships with their land. To gain control over a place, the stories linked with it must be retold in order to delimit and ground new place-relationships and organise community members to take responsibility for safeguarding and sustaining the native land.

Narrating the Future: Mediums of Orature and Performance

Marshall McLuhan's assessment of the media and its implications for the future, first published in 1964, can be regarded ahead of its time. *Understanding Media*, which investigates how language, technology, and speech influence human behaviour, exhibited a thorough understanding of emerging mass media and its possibilities. "The Medium is the Message," as the first and arguably most poignant factor for comprehending McLuhan, is a reasonable place to begin. This is the concept that the medium is the message and is not only a break from the standard understanding of innovation, but also serves as the major foundation for all of the author's perspectives. According to McLuhan, technology merely augments what we already are, as such, "any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex" (McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 4). This is a departure from traditional thought because humans want to believe that they have more control over their

activities than they actually do. McLuhan argues why it is unpleasant for humans to accept that the medium is the message rather than the other way around:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message” (7).

The author sees media as extensions of our human senses as a key scope of the media being the message. As a result, they charge our personal energies and construct our consciousness and experience. In this sense, what is imaginatively or innovatively created, the literary narratives, in this case, are extensions of the human senses. And as discussed in the previous chapters, the formative content being entrenched in claiming traditional stories or reshaping myths, legends and even a retelling of history. By this understanding, undoubtedly, the formative power in the media is the media themselves and by extension, the basic tenements of the media being the message which can be established for/by the reader.

In the discussion so far, the study has attempted to realign the lens with which we can view the works of contemporary Naga writers. The trope on which these narratives are structured has been defined through the framework of the Fourth World Theory. In the process, these works recover an alternative narrative of the people by exposing the everyday lives, rhythms, and realities of Naga people that have been forgotten and suffocated in the clamour of dominant historiographies. It is, therefore, pertinent to re-examine more of such texts, which have a strong potential to both explore and expose how the dominant narratives smothers all voices from the margins. As a result, these little narratives/'traditions are the authentic voices that should be re-examined in order to redefine a people's identity and indigenous origins.

The power of literature is inherent in expressing and writing about people's everyday lives.

Ao and Kire reveal a different side of Naga life by highlighting the less talked about ordinary lives. It has also led to an awareness that developing new genres gradually represent a society's current ideals and values for the future. Their narratives resurrect historic customs and combines them with the past and contemporary structure. Today, it has attempted to produce numerous literary styles in Naga literature in English. Their work illustrates the importance of being rooted in one's culture and embracing ethical viewpoints, especially when it comes to being in tune with one's people. For instance, Kire's narratives get a new layer of folklore when combined with a true narrative. Kire's narratives get a new layer of folklore with a true story, which progresses into written realistic literature. Her stories reveal the existence of both the spiritual and physical worlds on the same level, which portrays people's experience. In this age of modernism and sophistication, the author offers optimism for the youth. As a result, Naga literature may be beneficial in offering a chance for children throughout generations to respond to cultural knowledge, social and psychological development, creativity, and literary history. As discussed in previous parts, her works on women's concerns and Naga culture in general symbolise the hallmark of shifts from traditional practices of early marriage and advise all women to be wary of being misled by initial impressions and being foolish to the true character of men. Through traditional accounts, she lends a voice to the Nagas that has been silenced by wars and decentring, and thus, she portrays the native as the subject rather than the object of discourse. The stories preserve the culturally distinct history. She claims to be able to reconstruct the past through nature,

which leads to a knowledge of how to ensure cultural survival. The Naga traditions were discovered to have various dimensions of culture and nature in regard to the spiritual realm until they were ousted by the changing tides of Christianisation that spread into Western society. As a result, indigenous traditional values have been ignored and supplanted. So, in order to maintain the heritage, Kire greatly provided a wide variety of works for the next generation through a documentation of her people's lifeworlds.

It can also be argued that the Naga memory of traditional values and customs is being forgotten in the contemporary times. For instance, the Nagas once considered the log-drum to be an essential element of their life, culture and social practices. It was performed in all the villages for various events, but with the effect of modernisation and social changes, it is now considered antiquated. In current times, log-drums are occasionally heard being played on special occasions. However, the Naga cultures are not gone; traditional songs and dances are still performed on important occasions to promote and preserve their legacy. The rising quantity of creative works among Nagas draws our attention to the flare that has contributed to the creation of this literature. Close examination of any creative Naga literature would therefore reveal the brilliantly depicted existence of the earlier times. Simultaneously, one would be able to perceive works about modern authors such as Ao and Kire, who have based their writings on their experiences of the world in which they have lived and continue to live. They are not just the people's voice, but also the intellectuals of ordinary Naga people. This theory suggests that they have become storytellers from the past and encourages the audience to seek out ancient information from village elders since they are living books with literature in their minds. Ao and Kire rebuild

long-forgotten Ao and Angami Naga legends based on their culture and spiritual understanding. Several narrative themes are investigated through their folktales and story recreations. For instance, *tekhumiavi* or were-tigers in the Angami setting, and *lungterok* in the Ao context. The tradition or culture of were-tigers were thought to be prevalent among the Nagas, although the belief is now diminished as a result of Christianity. It is also noted that according to the most recent evidence, it has been found that almost “hundreds of tiger-men and tiger-women possessing different supernatural powers exist in the society.” (Jamir and Lanunungsang 302).

The writings of Naga authors today also express worries about fast cultural shifts as urban, consumer-based cultures, diverse political and religious agendas, and the forces of that vague word globalisation influence indigenous folk cultures. We can interpret ethnographic poetry created by regional poets who convey a range of emotions about what are seen to be negative or ambiguous elements of cultural change and loss using folkloristic and ecocritical theories. The narratives are produced amid the waves of dynamic changes that affect a diverse range of cultures in Northeast India. This is a region with old cultural ties but also harsh terrains; at the same time, the territory’s borders are imposed by controversial modern nation-state concepts. Individual authors, as a result, employ ways of expression that frequently appear to be extensions of the thoughts and concerns of their specific communities. Much poetry and narratives written in the Northeast regions have themes and images that draw on local knowledge, folk traditions, nature, and present societal challenges. Attention to such knowledge and experience is a vital component in establishing approaches to these literatures born of both change and tradition that, in spirit, cross India’s boundaries. In this way, North-East India’s narratives and poetry are

diversified, with age-old traditions descended from the oral heritage of folktales and folksongs. These oral traditions were passed down from generation to generation in informal structures such as dormitories and other settings via chants, songs, and stories. In reality, many villages in Northeast India have a thriving storytelling culture that has had a strong effect on literary output until this day. These oral traditions were crucial markers of identity since they featured creation stories, myths, and folktales, as well as indigenous knowledge. Longkumer speaks of the importance of Ao-Naga oral tradition, stating that it was their oral tradition that had a significant part in defining not only their history, but also their religion and social life. As discussed, the poems in Ao's collection tend to concentrate on themes and images shared by both regions: origins, migration, material culture, rituals, and natural and human-manipulated environment aspects. Though the cultural and linguistic relationships between these poets are complicated, many of their poems echo in ways that appear to transcend boundaries and build poetic homes for their unique voices within the geography of this upland area. In the works of Ao and Kire, the identified themes have incorporated folk customs and traditional folk life and include:

- 1) stigma over what others may consider backward or uncivilised habits (such as head-hunting, blood sacrifices, homemade rice-beer drinking, and so on);
- 2) speaking in the voices of tradition bearers at the crossroads of the dying past and the emerging new;
- 3) acculturation, cultural change, and minority status;
- 4) nostalgia, and romantic, or ambiguous attitude toward tradition; and
- 5) the concept of poetry or narratives as a channel for cultural transmission and rebirth
- 6) counter-discourses opposing organised religion or civilizing societal norms;
- 7) meta-references to folklore or ethnological studies (e.g., folk song or dances);
- 8) interest in or loss of languages or heritage.

Above all, there is a strong awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that comes with negotiating with other cultures, which is a recurring theme in the literatures of the Northeastern states. Each minor community or linguistic group has responded to interactions with majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside through oral or written communication. Poets emerge in this environment, which asks for a different voice, and as noted in the words of Nongkynrih, writers are, “chroniclers of subjective realities” representing a region “striving to reach out to the rest of the world from its historically and geographically marginalized position” (Misra xxix). That “the fissures within the modern nation state and its hegemonic project has clearly led to the reinforcement of ethnic voices” (B. Baruah 3) is clearly noted in the works of the writers. Thus, these writers “define the uniqueness and diversity of their cultures, customs and social practices through their oral and written literatures” (Baral x). It can be accepted that creative authors are chroniclers of subjective realities, and that they have written about the lives they know and desire to share with the rest of the world. They have talked of their shock at violence, corruption, government apathy, and other everyday challenges of life in a mostly neglected region. However, interpreting their works in the context of violence and fear has constrained the works’ borders and reach. Many anthologies of works from the Northeast appear to have chosen texts that echoed similar subject matter. The substance and subject matter of works created by Naga writers are similar to that of works published everywhere in the world, particularly by oppressed groups. Today, it is necessary to read writing from Nagaland as a literature of resistance not only as an alternative history challenging the official history of modern India, but also against such critical practice positing literary outputs from the region as exotic thereby asserting the literary value of writings from the region. Although political and social

opposition to any institution or ideology is more forceful and demanding, written resistance is more subtle and gives a wider, more compassionate appeal, which is equally vital.

Resistance through writing strives to delve deeper into orality than history, and in addition to generating resistance, it also asserts pre-historic identity, providing authors with the incentive to investigate their ethnicity. It is a resistance that does not seek to see perfunctory changes, but rather is one of repeated resistance that is consolidating itself over time. As previously noted, the region's authors have taken on the role of chroniclers of their history by subverting the prior written word and presenting alternate voices via their narratives. In doing so, the writers aim to restore history that had been erased by colonial historiography. To the authors writing in English, many of their poems become, to quote Temsula Ao, "an alternative history challenging the official history of modern India" (Baruah 3). In such cases, the act of writing itself becomes a highly political act, with the authors taking on the roles of not just creative entities but also historians, with the responsibility of providing alternative history of their people. While sensational news muffles and misrepresents the voices of ordinary people affected by ethnic violence, the sensitive hearts of these authors reveal their grief and anguish in describing what happens around them. Since colonial times till now, the power with which texts are created has mostly remained in the hands of others: even today, the Northeast region is recognised as an insurgent territory, a place of bloodshed and strife. There have also been prejudices in the representation of the region in the media, particularly in newspapers. The myriad concerns and problems that people in the Northeast experience continue to be underrepresented in the news and other kinds of media. Northeast India has been

underestimated from various perspectives since colonial times and is currently recovering. This is a recovery not just from the impacts of its numerous regional conflicts and brutality, but also from the various biases that have been levelled against it over time. This is where the region's poets have taken on the role of chroniclers, seeking to present a counter-discourse to the dominant discourse that had pushed them to the sidelines by giving an alternative narrative in their poetry through linguistic renderings of their histories, beliefs, and ethnicities. This counter-discourse, however, is not an attempt to undermine colonial discourse, but rather to expose and destroy the politics of colonial history. By writing about their past, the writers have attempted to recover the loss of their history in the dominant discourse and to propose alternatives by engaging in the discourse to present diverse voices on behalf of their people. In addition, by stealing the administrators' vocabulary, the authors have found a way to express their opposition to colonial representation and its influence on their daily lives. In the face of dissolution and fragmentation, they have sought some type of wholeness through their literature. Resistance has been described as a local adoption of its contradictory power techniques, and in fighting the politics of colonial history, the writers have discovered an intervening space in their tales, providing a forum for the oppressed to speak. The writers from the Northeast are not just chroniclers of their cultures; they are also conscientious instructors who protect cultures by discerning approaches of the self/other paradigm. Even in matters of love and marriage, a woman's freedom of choice is compromised in the process. The writers' views on interracial marriages are tinged with ethnic nationalism.

Writers have taken on the duty of chroniclers through the medium of writing, presenting their current reality and thereby rejecting false preconceptions about the region and its inhabitants. KC Baral addresses one of the main features of the diverse

genres of literary productions in the Northeast in his Introduction to *Earth Songs: Stories from the North-East* as “seeking for some kind of wholeness in the face of disintegration and fragmentation” (xi). In fact, viewers of works created by Northeast writers notice ambivalence in their portrayal of their subjects and issues. This ambivalence evolves into love; love not only for one’s fellow man, but also for the country and culture. Although the writers write on themes that they think are damaging to their civilization’s growth or express their resistance to power dynamics within their society, their love for their hometown is unshakeable. Even in the face of loss and rejection, authors strive for completion by understanding that nothing is ever completely done. Writing is a cultural artefact, and its practitioners in the Northeast are sensitive to the different, and sometimes contradictory, forces at work in their lives. They are aware of external influences, but they also study their own interior features. This would contradictorily shape their perception in order for them to understand heritage and identity creation. Myths are not only stories to the tribal society; they represent primal history and ethnology whose reality is significant in their lifeworlds. Given that myths and legends constitute folk history or ethno-history, they are significant because they may give helpful raw materials and provide hints to missing linkages. In the topic of postcolonial authors’ basic features, it may be stated that in dealing with space, postcolonial writers are firmly located to their communities since territorial sovereignty, limits, maps, and routes are vital to the very concept of the country.

Similarly, postcolonial writers from Northeast India have used myths and folktales in their narratives to locate themselves in their communities and recover the concept of the country as opposed to colonial rhetoric. Myths and tales are crucial to the lives of the Naga people since their whole history, religion, and social life are

moulded by oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. Oral tradition has been employed not just as a means of communication, but also as a recorder of all aspects of life, including village development, wars, and intra-village dispute resolution. It is also critical that the older generation in the community ensure that young people are educated not just to learn but also to master their oral traditions so that they can recount them when the circumstance calls for it. However, colonialism damaged the Naga oral tradition by causing changes in cultural and oral traditions, as the new Acts of Governance issued by the British government enforced rules that undercut the previous heritage of tribal customs and laws. This had reduced the importance of the oral tradition since these new Acts had overwhelmed the ancient ones, eventually leading to the degeneration of orality among the people. The unfortunate situation of the Nagas, who have no common language or script and speak a variety of ethnic languages and dialects, demonstrates that English remains a viable means of communication. However, there are constraints to communicating important ethnic imports in the adopted language. It should be noted that the authors in the Northeast have a unique phenomenon, which is their near connection to their mythical region. Indeed, despite changes in their ways of life and conveniences brought about by technology, the inhabitants of the Northeast nonetheless enjoy a high degree of connection to nature.

Furthermore, because to the lack of the written word, many communities in the North-East rely on nature to identify territories or borders that remain unquestioned even though their importance has been passed down by word of mouth. This is reflected in various works by the authors discussed in the earlier sections.

Because identity is interchangeable and pliable to outside pressures, the ethnic identification of people in the Northeast is subject to change throughout time. Although the current identities of many cultures have undergone considerable shifts during colonisation, they have arrived at the formulation of an identity that is mostly the result of acculturate stress. This is an identity that has been hybridised as a result of centuries of civilizations interacting with one another; this identity may go through transition again because identity cannot be established for all periods and in unchanging stabilities. The sense of loss and healing that pervades the narratives of the Northeast reflects the writers' understanding of their situation. The writers' endeavour at recovering the past does not imply actually retrieving symbols and signifiers of the past, but rather advocates intellectual recovery of their history in order for their ethnicity to dominate in the intellectual make-up of their people. The works of Northeast writers has not provided an easy remedy for all the afflictions caused by history as well as the writers' personal seclusion. The contemporary voice of opposition and variety in poetry, on the other hand, is a positive symbol of national democratic orders and academic freedom, both of which are being called into question. The newly established tradition of resistance and regaining identity has been consolidated in English language poetry, which is widely regarded as distinct and consistent in India's diverse literature. Although critical attention has been paid to the works of a few regional writers, little attention has been paid to the aesthetic worth of their works, which will necessitate further research in the future. However, there has been a response to the 'moral' purpose of writing as seen through works that depict the writers' preoccupation in their role as 'moralists' whose desire is to instruct their people on the validity of their traditional ways against the corruptive forces of commercialism and globalisation. The writers' responsibilities in offering voices to

the unrepresented in history and now, to the culturally oppressed, marginalised, and politically exploited people, as well as their roles as chroniclers writing their oral histories into the visible space through their works, have been evaluated. Folksongs and dances are regarded a continual process of oral heritage even now. It is a link between the past and the present. For instance, because folk songs are entirely based on memory, they tend to fade as individuals age. Some folk songs have been lost, while others have been passed down to the new generation, allowing society to retrace the social lives and conditions of their forefathers. In the past, folksongs were sung to entertain themselves and others, or as a personal note or love, or it may also be a cry for help, yearning for people to hear it out. Today, all of these have become a mirror of people's prior lives. Folksongs' setting, characters, and topic are all influenced by the period and circumstance in which the oralist had created. In oral civilization, one cannot track back the precise date and period of the past, but one may still make educated guesses and grasp the century to some extent. For example, when one hears a folksong of conflict during the headhunting period, one can tell that it was written before the coming of Christian missionaries. Despite the emergence of the written script with the coming of Christian missionaries, folk song continues to be an important component in upholding tradition and also their history. Folktales may be based on personal experiences or on whims and imaginations. In any case, it aids society in passing on 'moral ideals', which are attached to their identity and inspiration to the next generation. Some folktales conclude with a moral lesson to educate people moral principles, while others are amusing and caustic to point out the faults of the people. Folktales teach individuals how to behave, respect, and obey the ideals required in society. The characters in the folktale are well-known to the local people, and the topic addresses themes that were prevalent in the culture at the time. It

is shared and narrated in any of the leisure time or even in a busy time to teach or relate it to the situation. Like folksong that portrays the past to the present, folktale has also its own role to play and help the people to know about the past social life. Folktales and folksongs have evolved dramatically in response to changing times and circumstances. The spread of Christianity in the society has shifted the centre of oral tradition to the Biblical centre such that it is possible to confuse their community's origin stories in their oral tradition to that of the Biblical story. Despite the outside impact, the oral narrative of the community continues to engage for space through narratives, especially by insightful authors like Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire, by altering and adapting to the changing needs of time and situation in their textual records.

Summary

What is the significance of oral traditions, and how do they relate to our modern literate lives? This has been a recurring question for scholars in relation to oral tradition and literature, and it is one of the primary concerns of this study. Most significantly, this study has seen relevance to take recourse to Walter Ong's work in this area of study. Ong contends in his seminal work, *Orality and Literacy*, that writing alters consciousness and he notes this in his discussion of writing as a technology. He argued that writing, as a technology, changes people's minds, claiming that writing has altered people historically and anthropologically and suggested that writing has revolutionized human awareness. Therefore, the question to be posed is whether writing changes consciousness? And with that inquiry, what does Ong's claim mean regarding consciousness transformations? Does his work endorse technological determinism by making this assertion? In today's context, undoubtedly, human consciousness is currently being restructured by contemporary culture. This awareness is founded on an understanding of how civilizations have developed over time, as well as how technology has also influenced human communication and expression. With this primary approach, this study will also investigate Walter Ong's notions of fundamental orality and literacy cultures as an initial theoretical grounding. It will investigate how the cultural movements in human awareness from orality to literacy might explain the contemporary shift from literacy to recorded or performed culture within the context of the Nagas literature and performance culture. It will be argued that for the Naga literature and performance culture, this phenomenon is being mediated through a plethora of new and developing practices and processes. Corresponding to this argument, this study has also expanded on Ong's framework of

orality in culture by outlining the communicative and expressive qualities of modern performance culture.

In the context of Nagaland, it was Temsula Ao who succinctly asks in her essay *Writing Orality*, “How have the literate, educated inheritors of such traditions dealt with their inheritance? This question resonates through the current work to some extent. The memory of the past has always been interwoven with changing times and realities, and stories are repositories of this essence. Thus, the purpose of this study has been to take one’s understanding of ‘stories’ to an alternate perspective and study their movement from the aural level (orality) to the written sphere (writing) and how it is bodily enacted in a performative action. Our existing understanding of writing orality has been tested and advanced as a result of this approach. In this regard, the Naga culture is predominantly an oral civilization having its own methods of communicating and passing down information and knowledge through orality. Since the Nagas had no written script, orality was firmly ingrained in them, adding to the primary importance and richness of their culture. Due to this, oral storytelling has always been important, particularly in the literary context. Nagas have several folk stories that have been passed down from generation to generation through the means of oral narration, and because orality was the only medium of communication, the ancestral Nagas passed on their wisdom and information orally to the next generation. This results in the transfer of oral interpretations and meanings from generation to generation, where skill and knowledge are passed down by personal engagement and practice. In this way, mental categories are seized in the immediate context of individual conversations and interiorized as common knowledge. Due to the variances in narration by different oral narrators and storytellers, these stories eventually and

unavoidably have several variants. However, for each of these kinds of oral literature, there also exists a variety of oral literary critiques. And it is because of all of these issues, collecting oral histories has never been straightforward, since much of it has likely not been formed, conveyed, or recounted in its most authentic form. In truth, there is no one correct interpretation of a folklore item, just as there is no single correct rendition of a game or song. Since there is little, if not limited, collection of oral literary criticism, determining the version of interpretation may be quite difficult at times. In most interpretations, the knowledge is inevitable from the collector's perspective. In fact, there is nothing wrong with analytic interpretations as opposed to native interpretations, but one does not preclude the other. Unfortunately, in a few cases, the analyst-collector implies that this interpretation is actually the native's own interpretation. As a result, Naga oral literature, particularly folktales, is sometimes dismissed as mere fancy or fable. However, this study has emphasised that in folktales, natural rules are broken in such a way that they are not implausible. The events in folktales are so strange that they could never have happened in reality, which is what makes them entertaining, and the fact that the story is not based on typical persons or activities in a normal context makes it even more extraordinary.

Literacy, in fact, opens up the world and human life possibilities that were previously inconceivable. This is especially true with the Naga oral culture, as the transfer from orality to writing occurred only after the arrival of American missionaries. Following colonization, missionaries brought and taught the Nagas the written script, resulting in a rapid shift from long-held oral expression to writing. With colonization, there was also a dramatic transition in the Naga oral literature, which may be considered to have abruptly ceased, impoverished, or altered. The post-

colonial Naga society has witnessed the change of an apparently primitive group into one that progressively grew literate and educated and as a result of all of this, an animism-based tribal society converted to Christianity. Literacy, along with Christianity, became widespread among the Nagas after missionaries introduced literacy, and there is, therefore, hybridity including both the oral and written worlds. There is a notion of embracing both Christian ideals and presenting them in the context of the post-colonial realm while fusing oral culture and Christianity. Having made this argument, this thesis has attempted to investigate how the Nagas changed from an oral civilization to one that values writing. Throughout this process, oral traditions remain present, affecting the written creation, while the written word influences those same oral traditions.

The current Naga setting demonstrates how, rather than being two autonomous poles, orality and literacy invariably interact with one another. This study also investigated how Naga oral traditions and literary works published in English by Naga writers reflect on certain assumptions about primary oral cultures. Among these assumptions is the widely-held belief that certain assumptions about the features of both oral speech and written texts are challenged in English-language literary works. It can be noted that, in addition, the written texts are often references to other texts that do not fulfil their supposed mission of organising knowledge and preserving memory, thereby maintaining oral memory in its 'pure sense.' However, the dilemma that follows from this standing would be to question whether there is a 'pure sense' of recording oral memory. Finally, the written texts also present the readers with a series of different characters or characterizations, that may differ or be a hybridized re-telling of an existing oral story. Thus, this goes to manifest that the written story can

also influence the oral story, undermining the notion that, unlike oral language, written language is permanent. These examples have been discussed in the chapters of this study in the analysis of selected texts by Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire. Thus, we can affirm that contemporary Naga literature written in English presents a variety of elements of orature but also the textual form.

Moreover, several Naga literary works written in English today attempt to challenge general assumptions about orality and literacy. For instance, some of them deal with the assumption that orality and illiteracy are related to a lack of civilization and that literacy is related to civilizations. Not only do they question this assumption, but they undermine it. In the same way, they challenge the idea of the written text as something permanent to which we can go back anytime in order to acquire knowledge, and oral discourse as a temporary thing that is meant to disappear or change and thus should not be trusted. Naga orature, literature, and other verbal art forms are placed at different points of the orality and literacy continuum which serve to prove that orality and literacy are not two separate, mutually exclusive entities. In addition, it is argued that they serve the function of going against assumptions that relate orality to lack of civilization and literacy to civilization, as well as those assumptions according to which literacy is a more efficient manner of storing and transmitting knowledge, as it is supposedly more permanent than orality.

It is in this context of orality that the goal of this research has attempted to examine the concept of writing orality in depth. First, this study has examined the tension between 'writing' and 'orality' as two divergent and at times complementary modalities by expanding on Temsula Ao's concept of 'writing orality.' The trajectory

of this analysis has included some of the challenges that arise when literary works based on 'community' oral traditions become a topic of critical inquiry. And most significantly, when it is largely represented and narrated by a single or few writers. Second, the relationship between writing, orality, and performance has been investigated in depth. This inquiry has focussed on how stories transition between aural, textual, and corporeal enactments. The study has also considered how a largely oral culture situates narrative performance within the broader field of indigenous studies in terms of questions of representation and performance of identity. This study, therefore, argues that literature cannot be separated from the turbulent histories that determine its production, without precluding conversations on the region's socio-political milieu. To demonstrate the significance of the concept of 'writing orality,' literary analyses of selected texts have illustrated the transition from oral to written and finally to performance as a form of hybridized orature. Contemporary Naga fictional writings and critical texts have been highlighted to demonstrate the main arguments.

Examining the Naga position within, without, and in relation to hegemonic discourses of postcolonial cultures and prevalent western thought has been at the forefront of this approach. The study has attempted to use the Fourth World Theory (FWT) to ground this approach (FWT). The FWT's techniques and inquiries shed light on the status of non-state nations and peoples in their political and often violent relations with other non-state nations, as well as with state governments seeking supremacy and control over claimed territory and peoples. Fourth World nations, according to this theoretical framework, are peoples who have been forcibly assimilated into governments and are not acknowledged as having an international

identity or keeping their own culture. This theoretical approach has been discussed in light of Nagaland's socio-political situation and contemporary writing culture.

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Appendix I

Lecture delivered by Rev. Dr. Wati Aier at The Annual Charlie Kevichusa Memorial Lecture on 24 November 2018, Dimapur.

Beyond Tribal Seduction: A Personal View

Dr. Wati Aier

Delivering this annual lecture in memory of the late Charlie Kevichusa, a person of seminal personality among the Nagas, is an honor and I am humbled. In his time I found Charlie to be a rarity—one among a handful of lucid and luminous individuals invested in safeguarding Naga rights. In my tribute to him, I have imagined Charlie's dream and vision and this evening, I have chosen to team up with him in these foregoing thoughts.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have entitled the topic of this lecture: "Beyond Tribal Seduction – A Personal Reflection."

Historically, among the Naga Nations (I am using the words "nation" or "nations" in its right place, from our heyday, as opposed to "tribe" or "tribes" given by outsiders), the term "tribe" gained currency with the advent of the colonial enterprise. The lived ethos of the tribe then, the nostalgia of the tribe after, and the academic romancing of the tribe now, have been clouded with thick layers of *a priori* concepts and colonial interpretations, often biased and naively arrogant because, tribal identity was assigned to a particular nation with the imputed connotation of primitiveness and backwardness. I like to think that such popularization of the term by colonial anthropologists is a particular corpus and not a general pattern. Nevertheless, with anthropology being one of the "premier colonial sciences," the currency of the "tribe" is floated through cultural and social instruments to this day.

Our challenge, accordingly, is to look beyond the singular use of the term "tribe" and the ensnarement that follows it. I begin with this remark because in the Naga context, our ideal calling is neither for rationalization nor justification of the self, but for a simple human understanding that in this age, Nagas should acquire a history and a

character that heightens the health of our personality and safeguards an identity reflective of the Naga imagination. Simply put, our challenge is to sustain the Naga ecology of belonging.

It is in this context that tribalism lurks as a notorious seducer of community. Today, tribalism is a tool of self-exclusion and communal division and can too easily be used to incite one against the other, often leading its victims to an embattled withdrawal of sorts. Psychologically, turning inward will only resurrect outmoded spirits and the dominant modes of the past that turn us against our own. This is dangerously in the making today.

The “tribe” has become a double-edged means by which social iconoclasts seduce the public for numerous reasons and ends, often at the expense of the public’s chance to act generously for the common belonging. As such, this seduction repeats itself by situating the “tribe” in the past (where we once again find ourselves operating within the same cycle of narrow definitions and singular perspectives), ultimately reducing the nation (tribe) to a mere political entity in the midst of an overarching Naga belonging – the larger entity.

Notable Naga pioneers of the early twentieth century, on the other hand, were ahead of their time and their generation. With their innate imagination, these pioneers knew of the seduction of the “tribe,” of imperial policy of situating the “tribes” in the past, and of the danger of romancing the “tribe” by “others” in the guise of anthropological epistemology. More importantly, I presume, they knew that the meaning of independence in our context lay in protecting and preserving our common identity.

Dr. A.Z. Phizo and others traversed the length and breadth of the “Naga-lands,” as opposed to the Indian State of “Nagaland,” meeting every Naga nation and constructing the pan-Naga identity and movement. This was no easy journey for Phizo as the history of humanity and of nations is a history of construction. Indeed, the constructionist movement of the Naga people is no less than the sum total of the world’s socio-political movements. To be human is to construct and to flourish, and Nagas have no less right to do so.

Analytically, the de-constructionist malignancy of the tribe is one of the reasons for our present socio-politico-theological fragmentation and hostility. Lest I am one-

sided, by the same token, this tendency is prevalent not only among the nations, but also the Naga national groups' hegemonic attitude towards Naga nationalism. It seems that we are incapable of moving past our usual, tired patterns of reactive justifications and defensive reactions. For once, can we truly say “forgive me, I have made a mistake and I ask for forgiveness from God and my brothers and sisters”?

Naga people want to see wisdom in our leaders – a wisdom that assures us that our lives and communities will not be used as mere objects of interest. Throughout our modern history, the politics of divide and limit and subtle domestication has only led to one group scapegoating the other, and has only fanned the flames of mistrust and violence. This kind of politics is the fastest way of isolating oneself from the whole. It has not worked in the past and it will not work in the future.

We must also note that within the larger entity of Naga belonging, regional interests in transformative culture, educational advancements, protection of human values and rights, and the overall flourishing of people must be encouraged and supported. In contrast, we need to be wary of the undertakings that are immaturely, and deviously, conceived and borne out of socio-political relativity. While these undertakings are all too prevalent and normalized in our society, they are ultimately limiting and shortsighted. Most often, social iconoclasts convince people that it makes no sense to sacrifice for the common belonging. On the contrary, it should make no sense for us to forfeit ourselves for a unit that is not willing to make sacrifices for the common belonging. From this present “senseless comedy” of social-cultural-political folly, often devoid of aesthetic quality needs immediate redirection on the stage of the Naga world view that is being observed and watched by the world at large.

A Call

We require imagination to awake from the current ethos of numbness and the violence of the Naga spear that is at the centre of our belonging. An idea is ontological and it is most potent either to create a finite good or to annihilate.

To many of us, it seems that we are destroying the “thing” we all want. What an irony! Paradoxically, at least, no one is letting the “thing” go, and I take this state of “not letting go” to be ironically, our strength. It is two facets of the same quality. We must remain imaginative by creating new possibilities of untapped potential within us

and build around the primordial idea of belonging. Now, we must not look backward by trying to resurrect the past. Within this backward-looking view of history, the Naga narrative has been seductively immobilized, often to the point of tragedy. Believing in our creative energy, we must accordingly forge an alternate history, one that rises above the prevalent defeatist frames of our cultural ethos.

What is this alternate history? It is the history of common belonging, and a history constructively woven into an identity called “Naga” that is spread across lands beyond the present state of Nagaland. Hope, illumined by the spirit of God, is the secret of this alternate history.

Naga historical and political rights with all its human finitude, is a *de facto* within history—a Naga history and political stamp in time. Needless to say, historical moments should not be treated as a tool for employing the rhetoric of backward-looking ideologies of the past that will only lead to never-ending conflicts. We must move on without departing. Nagas, more importantly people in respective positions and people in academia, must come to terms with the fact that we all need one another, and we also need competent people with new ideas, models, and visions if we are to come of age as an enlightened, democratic society.

Crucially, the question Nagas should be asking ourselves is how we go about resolving our malignant internal conflicts. No matter how daunting this task, part of the solution lies in overcoming these conflicts with a sense of urgent acceptance. We can only begin to construct the alternate historical imagination once we fully commit to the reality of our situation.

There is today, a voice of fury from within the Nagas at the way things are, and at the same time, a hope calling for a realistic change of mind and thereby, a chance for the emergence of a mediating factor. When it is clear that Naga political history remains the only memory of common belonging, culturally it remains a taboo to quash this *de facto* in favor of a mythological memory that has no history. Such a cult of rationally-developed theses cannot be the plumb line for Naga people. Nagas who remain aware of the sacredness of Naga history must vigilantly safeguard against the desperate rationalization of any bedrock.

Difficulties exist in the imaginative formation of effective relations between Naga groups as perceptions of the “other” continue to escalate among the Nagas. Though hard to accept for some, we must understand the fact that the Naga groups are functioning institutions in their own rights. By the same token, Naga groups are hesitant to form “relationships of cooperation” because of their accumulated ills and mistrust of one another. But on the subtler side, each group has become too comfortable within its own boundaries that even a slight note of change is taken as a threat. Nonetheless, it must be made clear that the idea of relationships of cooperation do not mean that the Naga groups will mitigate or diminish their institutional responsibilities and obliterate themselves. Indeed, the complex backdrop of mistrust, differences, and years of hurt complicate the potential dynamics that Nagas need now through relationships of cooperation.

At the end, it is the Naga groups, with peoples’ solidarity, who will have to steer the Naga people to the finishing line. This is a reason enough to embark on relationships of cooperation. Functioning Naga institutions share aspects of their respective socio-cultural-political ethos and the Naga spirit in a subtle manner, oftentimes without any formal acknowledgement, and are therefore connected to each other without any political awareness. To say the least, this subtle connectedness between the Naga institutions creates an inevitable inter-dependence. The sooner the Naga institutions learn of this intricate formula, the clearer our path ahead will be. Clearing the air of fear, mistrust, and all stereotypes, Naga institutions and citizens must scale higher planes in inter-relationships. Our future, though not fully understood now, is intertwined.

Mutual interests of peace and flourishing are our common goals. Naga institutions and citizens yearn to use our assets effectively and efficiently, provide a safe and fruitful environment for all people in our lands, and safeguard natural resources and sustain vibrant economics. A successful paradigm can be forged when Naga institutions move beyond sectarian mentalities and invest in relationships of cooperation. Only then will we witness a heightened awareness of our respective obligations as Naga institutions and as intelligent, responsible citizens.

Appendix II

5th Lecture Series at Dimapur Government College, Nagaland by Dr. Visier Sanyii, President, Overseas Naga Association; Member, Forum for Naga Reconciliation; Advisors, Naga Scholars Association, New Delhi on 29 August 2020.

Reconstructing Naga History from Oral Tradition: Retrieval and Evolution

Visier Sanyii

Whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation. How it is possible for a mind to remember and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, messages and instructions for living which manifest continuity over time is one of the greatest wonders one can study, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral tradition should be central to students of ideology, of society, of psychology, of art, and finally, of history.

(Jan Vansina, *Oral History as History*, Wisconsin, 1985, xi)

Introduction

We know of course that human beings exist in time and space. The events and experiences that make up our lives occur at some time, in some place, and work in a dynamic, interactive relationship. So, remembering is not a simple phenomenon. But being able to remember and recount what our lives are made of is central to our sense of who we are, and who we might become -- both as individuals and as a people. We know, too, that the foundational categories of time and place, and the constitutive experience of becoming, occur in a complex environmental and social context we broadly refer to as culture.

Remembering and Narrating Living Cultures

Nagas have a rich repository of oral traditions, being home to hundreds of tribes and languages. They are the meeting point of the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages and cultures.

Each tribe has unique traditions, cultures and histories, with much still remaining to be explored. The diversity of culture, language, and traditions of Naga tribes have much to offer the world as it continues to evolve. Fortunately, we now have many competent and reflective research scholars who are tapping into this precious mother lode of stories, traditions, and oral histories. In addition, with the onset of new technology, the living cultures and ancient stories are being recorded in community events and festivals in villages across the region. These traditional 'oral' accounts, where our Ancients and elders speak and interact across generations, are being captured on film, including on video by everyday people even on their mobile phones and uploaded to social media as instant, virtual records. So, the community has become available in new ways, and its voices reach us in multiple modes, with greater immediacy than was ever possible.

This is for the most part a positive and promising development. I opened my talk with an epigraph, a quote from the famous oral historian Jan Vansina, because his words have a bearing on the cultures of the Nagas. It was Vansina who laid the foundation for a worldwide theoretical framework for research in oral history. Let me reiterate his key idea on the relationship between memory and culture: "Whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds." What he says here about the pivotal role of memory, inflected by repeated narration and lived experience, is critical to keeping alive the immensely rich and diverse cultures. Until recently most of our histories and indigenous cultures existed in the form of oral tradition. We knew all along, of course, that the lives and minds of our ancestors from centuries past were continually recorded in the living memories and performative arts of the successive elders and story-tellers, and passed down the generations. So, we are receptive to modern scholars like Vansina who speak of the centrality of oral culture in human development and societal evolution as a whole. If as Vansina argues, transmittable memory is inseparable from the very workings of the human mind, then oral history to indigenous societies like the Nagas is the book of life itself. The main takeaway from both Vansina and the oral traditions of indigenous peoples is that a living culture is one that renews itself through iterative narration and progressive enactment for evolutionary growth. This is the reason behind Vansina taking his argument one step further and recommending that Oral tradition be made a component of formal education, be it the study "of ideology, of society, of

psychology, of art, and finally, of history.” In short, it is to Oral culture that indigenous people owe their collective identity, hence, also, their survival and growth.

Threats to Living Cultures: Past and Present

There are serious threats to the oral traditions and the indigenous people. If oral tradition can engender and nurture its own community, as historians and indigenous cultures agree it does, then if and when an oral tradition dies, so does the community. We don't need to recite the list of cultures that have gone extinct. Too many groups have died off altogether or have “disappeared” themselves into oblivion through assimilation. We also know that the threats to a people with a living culture can come from within and from outside forces. The people of this region have faced and continue to face threats to our existence on both levels, from the 19th century on to the present. We are living through a critical period of transition.

A ready example of internal threats -- a major weakness to say the least -- is tourism culture. We often hear about cultural days and events where people wear their traditional costume, dance, sing, and party in exotic make-believe villages and venues. Occasions like the annual Hornbill Festival come to mind. These festivals may serve modern-day purposes and needs, but we know they are staged shows. They are merely shadow images of our culture. There's no harm celebrating our culture for and along with tourists, of course, provided the celebrations are manifestations of a living culture within the communities. But that would require us to ensure that what we sing and perform reflect states of being in the interior life of the community that gave birth to the songs and dances. In other words, indigenous culture has meaning and value only to the degree that its narratives and performances have lived equivalents in the community, down to the home and family, which are the basic units of any whole and cohesive society. Alternatively, at the very least, the tourism culture we exhibit for commercial consumption should help us recognize the absence of equivalency in real life and prompt critical self-examination for corrective change.

Another ready example that comes to mind – this time of threats from outside – is what happened our villages several decades ago. The Indian Army burned our villages in 1956-58. We went into hiding in the jungle for years. We then returned from the

jungle and relocated to new villages. After being displaced for so long, we experienced an unexpected social phenomenon. We went through a new cultural upheaval.

What happened to our way of life as a result of the long period of displacement and suffering merits recounting because it brought about something strange and remarkable. I can only describe it as a cultural renaissance. New songs were written; new myths and legends were created; traditions were altered, and taboos were broken out of desperation. Festivals, weddings, and funerals began to change as a result of a deep search for meaning. The physical hardships forced us to look at the world from a different perspective. Deprivation led to changes in our food, our belief system began to change, and many superstitions melted away. Many converted to Christianity during this period due to factors known and unknown to us, most beyond our control, including our inability to observe traditional rituals adequately, or observe taboos, which we were compelled to break because of the changed circumstances. For three long years the jungle gave us life and nurtured us, and forever changed us. The shock of physical and cultural disruption disoriented us. We were confused and shaken, and were desperately searching for something within and beyond that would bring healing and give meaning to our harsh and altered landscape. Our worldview was so disrupted we had to reinvent ourselves in response.

The Challenging Opportunity of Cultural Reinvention

What Nagas experienced from mid-1950s to 1970s was nothing short of cultural trauma as a result of massive physical force imposed on us from outside.

The transition for the Nagas as a whole has nonetheless been one of estrangement -- a prolonged, disorienting separation from the oral roots and traditions that had nurtured us for centuries, probably longer. It is easy to observe the still unresolved struggles from the anxiety of separation in the Naga society today.

As some of you would know, the ancient Angami Sekrenyi festival has been dead for some years now. It went through a slow death for nearly 50 years before disappearing altogether. Then recently Christian Angamis have revived the traditional festival in a new form. I attended this year's celebration of the newly "birthed" Sekrenyi by a church community in Medziphema.

There were a few of us present who had experienced the traditional Sekrenyi in our own lifetime. We realized that what we were observing this day bore absolutely no resemblance to our ancient festival. For me, it was a day both of mourning and of celebration. I was mourning the death of Sekrenyi, a precious and beautiful part of my Angami culture that was now forever lost. At the same time, I rejoiced and embraced the birth of this new Sekrenyi, waiting to be given a renewed lease of life. It occurred to me that I was witnessing firsthand the evolution of my culture from ancient times to the 21st century. Sekrenyi was being reinvented and given a new narrative and performative form.

Celebrations like these show that we could be in a crucial moment of cultural redefinition. Christianity is a relatively new faith in Naga history and culture. We know Christian theology and exegesis, like in other faith traditions, are colored and shaped by culture. The indigenous peoples of the North East, particularly the hill tribes, are now Christian -- a Christianity that came packaged with colonial Western culture. The early missionaries were extremely ethnocentric and convinced of the superiority of their faith, culture, and race. They forbade converts from performing traditional rituals and taking part in festivals. They were very particular about the formal signs of conversion. They urged converts to discard their native appearance by dressing in Western clothes and changing their hairstyles to make their conversion to Christianity visible, to mark their difference from their supposedly "benighted" past. These Eurocentric attitudes undermined some of the priceless values of indigenous culture, like the Naga sense of self and place within the cohort, which was intimately connected to the community's wellbeing as a whole, alongside that of the life-giving natural ecology. The evangelical missionary attitudes also caused social disharmony in many villages and created confusion of values for generations.

Given this history, today's Christian communities attempting meaningful cultural rebirth, like the celebration of Sekrenyi, will find the process perplexing. But we will need to ensure we do it right on two main fronts. The first is how to facilitate the transfer of the old to the new in terms of ritual changes. This will require creative imagination but will be the easy part. The harder task will be merging the best of both worlds into the renewed festivals in communities and villages which are now for the most part Christian. How do we nurture the ancient ethos of the common good back to

everyday life such that our ancestors will find a comfortable home among us in the churches and the society at large? The occasional anxiety and growing pains in the transition process should not discourage us, because in the end the result will be deeply satisfying. It could become the starting point of healing for society.

Supposed Inferiority of the People of Northeast India

On the broader political front, the estrangement of this region's indigenous societies from customary forms of government seems to be already decisive. It happened over decades. For Nagas, the disruption of traditional institutions started with India's repression of the freedom movement and the creation of Nagaland state, along with the introduction of party-based rivalry in electoral politics, followed by political intrigue and infighting among Naga national factions. All of this has left the Nagas physically and psychologically wounded. The effects are too deep to get into at this conference.

What is more to the point here is the current sociocultural climate in the Northeast as a whole, in relation to mainland India's persistent domination of the region. The Central Government's imposition of its political will has a history that includes an assumption on its part of a natural inferiority of the people compared to Indians on the mainland. The Northeast's satellite status was put into policy by the leaders of the newly Independent Indian government back in the mid-twentieth century; it was consistently pursued by the successive Central Governments; and has now reached a new level.

The BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has unabashedly ratcheted up its dominance over the region. The governance structure built around this assumption of inferiority has resulted in an outcaste-like state of national exception for the region. But the institutionalization of inferiority has gone beyond governmental structure and policy. It has translated into forms of racism in everyday life and acts of ethnic discrimination and open violence against Northeastern people in the mainland. Over the decades, the uneven power relation has morphed into an insidious group mentality: unthinking sense of superiority on the part of mainland India and subordination fatigue for the region. Even intellectuals and professionals

now seem untroubled by the naturalization of the northeast's status as India's outcast region.

Morbid Symptoms of Communities in Crisis

Colonial history is replete with chronic problems it generated among the native peoples of the world from being uprooted. You combine close to a century, or longer, of colonial British rule of the region with another close to a century-long takeover by postcolonial India, and all of that history now culminating in the current BJP government's feverish agenda of a monolithic India, and what you have is a perfect recipe for societal breakdown. This state of continuous control under the two dispensations of divide-and-(mis)rule have not afforded the people of this region a viable chance to work through their crises of identity. We have been consistently denied the wherewithal to make a transition from colonial to postcolonial self-rule. State autonomy and productive intra-regional collaboration are hard to come by in the northeastern part of the world's "largest democracy." Meanwhile, history marches on -- as it has always done -- and the world has become even more complicated in the 21st century. So the people of this region have no choice but to muddle through as best we can the political debris from several generations past, in addition to the uncontrollable challenges currently coming at us from the forces of globalization.

The depressing signs of our crisis at all areas of society (political, social, psychological, and moral) have been evident for a long time. They can be seen in the public sphere as well as in local communities and individuals across the region. Among these include: chronic micro-nationalisms, insurgencies, intra-regional rivalry, extortion by underground groups in the name of Christ and for patriotism, corruption in electoral politics, nepotism in public life, inadequate rule of law, violence, depression, alcoholism and substance abuse, loss of human dignity, so on and so forth. These are group and individual responses of a society uprooted and imposed upon by external forces, without the means to reconnect with their cultural roots for replenishment from enduring traditional values. For the people of this region, particularly the indigenous groups, the age of colonialism never ended. We have been, still are, living under what Italian political theorist and writer Antonio Gramsci said back in the 1930s about "a great variety of morbid symptoms" (*Prison Notebooks*,

1929-1935) that predictably attend periods of failed transitions of this nature. The people of this region are no exceptions to human frailties in the face of trauma.

Challenges and Ways Forward

How then do the Naga people recover from the history of subordination and loss, and work our way to becoming a region of diverse and living cultures, co-existing side by side in mutual cooperation in the interest of a plural society?

We face a two-faceted challenge: a monolithic national assimilationist drive on one hand and globalization on the other. And the way to meet them can be summed up in two words: retrieval and evolution. Avoiding cultural oblivion is the first step and this is done through retrieval of the old traditions. The other is evolving from the old traditions to new modes of being in the current realities of the 21st century world.

Retrieving oral cultures:

I started out this talk with a premise, based on historian Vansina's theory of oral culture and the existential history of indigenous societies, that the health and growth of a people are reflected in the dynamic fusion of their narrative and performative cultural repertoire that arise from lived reality. The Nagas have lost much of the traditional stories and the worldviews they gave them birth. We need to retrieve them from our archival memories, and we can do that using conventional methods as well as new technologies. The crucial thing to bear in mind is -- as we attempt to reconstruct history and document culture from oral sources -- accuracy of the material being recorded and integrity of interpretation we bring to that material. There is considerable responsibility in committing stories to the written record, or into video format, so the responsibility should be well considered. In pursuing oral tradition while reconstructing history and birthing the language of a new emerging culture, we must employ methodologies that are ethical, preserve human dignity, and are in search of the truth. The application of oral traditions varies from place to place. So, pursuing the study of oral culture requires that detailed work with and interviews of older generations and traditional storytellers should be diligently conducted. The stock of folk tales, legends, sayings, poems, prayers, and proverbs enrich our understanding of a society, and careful attention given to them from perspectives of an insider can urge us to pursue questions we hadn't considered, forcing us to engage

with material in new and deeper ways. Because oral traditions in Naga areas are in the process of being freshly documented, we need to be especially aware of the need for patience and discernment in this process. As I ponder this question, I am reminded of an old saying among my people: “*Niaki kele tieki rei phichii mia diezelie.*” Loosely translated, this means: *Listen to the voice of your elders even as the sun is setting. When all seems to fade in the face of impending darkness, the wisdom of the Ancients will be your beacon.* The hope lies here -- in the voices of the Ancients. They are the basis for nurturing the birth of the new when the old day has waned. We need to listen to them and retrieve what we can.

Evolution: reinventing selves in the present realities:

At another level, the globally interconnected world of the 21st century requires of people everywhere to forge new alignments and collaborative relations with others near and far. We cannot begin to do these things empty handed. Every group has to bring something, offer something, to the new ventures. Only a people with a cultural identity of their own can engage in mutually beneficial relations with people different from themselves. So those ancient voices, stories, and traditions we retrieve must help us grow and evolve as a people. The process would involve renewing our society on the basis of the old in the changed circumstances of the present. Like the trickster of oral culture, we will need to acquire new skills, learn new languages and idioms, and adapt to new situations. We will have to reinvent ourselves. As we put the interior cultural life of our group in functioning order, it will be necessary to look out to our neighbors in the region, and farther out to the rest of the world. The historical trajectories of the people of the region suggest certain shared sociocultural values. They can act as guiding principles for our ever-expanding relationships. Those values come from our shared past that has taught us about the importance of social justice and human rights for all and the wellbeing of community and environmental health going forward.

Conclusion

Physical dislocation, cultural disruption, spiritual disorientation are all common human experiences throughout history. The recent history of the peoples of this region encompasses all of these situations in large measure. What lies ahead, namely cultural reinvention and retooling, is an uncertain and arduous process, yet it must

continue, because without it we fade into oblivion. We escape oblivion by strengthening the cultural life of every culture-group, forging lasting social structures within and among the diverse groups, along with building bridges and relationships with people in mainland India, and extending lines of connection beyond the country out to the rest of the world. We do these things from a position of strength in our diverse cultural identities. We just need to work together to make it into a thriving multicultural *society*. The Internet and global travel are opening new lines of cross- and inter-cultural interaction with the wider world. As T. Sakhrie said, we are taking a leap, as it were, “from a distant past into the glare of the present century”. At this juncture, from the relative isolation I reflect that we would do well to consider the journeys of our indigenous brothers and sisters from other parts of the globe, like Australian Aborigines, who have had to navigate the risks and challenges of multiculturalism and are embracing the emergence of new avatars of identity. We can picture ourselves as a people staring down a two-lane road to a viable, thriving future. One lane is freedom from the ghosts of oppressive history -- whoever they have been or may want to continue haunting us. We are a small nation with strong and diverse traditions and rich biodiversity. We have differences among us sometimes, but we should all be agreed on one thing about how to deal with dominators: We refuse to be people in any country whose government and citizenry use us to feel superior and to act as though they were. The second lane would lead every tribe to a revival of ancient traditions for holistic wellbeing, and from the strength of that foundation to evolve further out to forge relations among the peoples of this region and beyond to the fast-changing world. The potential of a culturally multifaceted, plural society that this region offers can open us to greater horizons, a wider sense of common humanity, and a shared embrace of the best in the human spirit. But travelling on the fast-track highway of monolithic nationalism and unbridled globalization is a difficult and dangerous adventure. Our values and spirit will need keen awareness and insight as we make the journey. I can hear the words of my Elders: “*Kezhiimia mu ketuomia ketsolie yamo shie*” - *He who sleeps will not catch up with the one who walks.*

May we walk with our eyes open.