

***VALUES AND ETHICS IN THE ORAL TRADITIONS OF THE SÜMI  
NAGAS***

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

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## DECLARATION

I, Aketoli S. Sumi, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Values and Ethics in the Oral Traditions of the Sümi Nagas* is a bonafide research done for the award of Ph.D. in English under the supervision of Dr. Lemtila Alinger during the period of 2015-2020. That, the thesis has not been submitted either in full or in part or previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or title on the same title to any other university.

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## **PREFACE**

Oral tradition is understood as a form of expression in which beliefs, ideas, art, and cultural items are transmitted verbally and preserved in collective memory. It is not written down but communicated and received through narration, speech, and song. Which means that the creation, telling, singing, and transmission of stories, folksongs, and proverbs are carried out by word of mouth. These cultural and artistic products are often faithful representations of socio-cultural, economic, political, and moral condition of a society. Hence, it is cherished and therefore passed on orally from one generation to another through different forms of expression.

Since Community living is fundamental to Sümi society; stories, songs, and proverbs are used as a medium to inculcate traditional values which are detrimental to improvement and accord in the society. These artistic items not only shows its tangible tradition and practices but most importantly reflects the intangible values that identifies who they are. The timeless traditional values and ethics expressed and internalised in their oral tradition determines their conduct and behaviour, action, and speech as it represents its concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

The present study makes an effort to re-locate and re-imagine Sümi oral traditions so as to negotiate traditional values and ethics in the present time. It also seeks to understand the stability of traditional values in order to allow people to appreciate and imbibe values that has remained stable over time.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1. Introduction

##### 1.1.1. The Sümi Naga

##### 1.1.2. Characteristics

##### 1.1.3. Traditional Beliefs

#### 1.2. Review of Literature

#### 1.3. Significance of the Study

#### 1.4. Delimitation

#### 1.5. Methodology

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

*Nagas* are a group of people indigenous to the land in the North Eastern part of present India: Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur and in the western parts of Myanmar (Burma). The origin of the term *Naga* is still vague due to lack of documented historical record except for oral narratives and folksongs. However, it is understood that the term “Naga” is an exonym because there is no generic term for the tribal groups as a whole. The Naga tribes are known only by their specific tribe names. Some scholars are of the view that the name *Naga* must have come from the Burmese word ‘No-ka’, meaning ‘people with pierced earlobes’ since piercing of the earlobes was a widespread practice among the Naga tribes. While others believe it to have come from the Assamese word ‘Noga’ which means ‘naked’ or from the Sanskrit word ‘Nag’ meaning ‘snake’. However, the assumption of the name ‘Naga’ to have come from ‘Nag’ does not hold ground because Nagas were not snake worshippers. The words ‘No-ka’ and ‘Noga’ and their meaning are plausible sources in view of Naga traditions and customs. Hokishe Sema also considers that “originally the word Naga was used for the naked people of the hills who often came in contact with the people of the plains in Assam” (4). “Naga identity



has not always been fixed” (Longkumer 6) because on the surface level, the numerous tribes that come under the name *Naga* speak different languages and observe their own traditional practices. So, what is more important will be the essential values they share as a group that will form their identity.

In terms of migration too, there has been an ongoing debate and research but it is still inconclusive and much needs to be done in this regard. Many people “postulate that the Nagas are of Sino-Mongoloid and Tibeto-Burman origin” (Shikhu 5). They are different from “the rest of the Indians in their origin, culture and appearance too” (Bendangangshi 1). An observation of the physical appearance and the language of the people shows that they could have migrated from northern China as seen in certain aspects of Naga culture like, tools, megalithic stone settings, wooden posts, etc. They also have yellow and light brown skin and small eyes, use cowrie shells in costumes and ornaments, and speak Tibeto-Burman languages which is highly tonal unlike Indian languages.

There are approximately one million Nagas and they are divided into “different tribal and linguistic groups” (Zetsuvi 1). At present, there are more than sixty Naga tribes living in India and Myanmar. Some of them includes, Angami, Ao, Sümi, Lotha, Rengma, Chakesang, Sangtam, Chang, Khiamunyam, Yimchungru, Konyak, Zeliang, Pochury, Kuki, Mao, Tangkhul, Anal, Liangmai, Makury, Maram, Nocte, Poumai, Tangshang, Leinong, etc.

All these Naga tribes practiced headhunting (the practice of taking enemy heads) through the nineteenth century and as late as 1969 and this “created isolation and a polyglot community” (Zetsuvi 2). Villages were in perpetual war with each other as taking “heads” was a norm. Enemy heads were regarded as war trophies and hence proudly displayed on wooden and bamboo poles; put in log drums and beat in celebration. Due to this practice, highest honour and respect were reserved for warriors.

Nagas lived without outside interference except occasional trade with the Ahoms until the British achieved control of the Naga Hills in the latter half of the nineteenth century. “The British contact with the Nagas began after the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826” when “several Naga villages joined together to oppose the advance and as such the party encountered strong opposition” (Venuh 31).

The history of the Nagas indicate that they governed themselves without any foreign domination and “remained untouched by higher civilizations” (Furer-Haimendorf 1) until the British came to Assam for tea plantation. In the later part of nineteenth century, the British felt the necessity to confront the Nagas because of headhunting incidents. The problem was that the Nagas came from time to time to take heads. Consequently, the inevitable contact between the British and the Nagas happened and according to Piketo Sema, the “formation of Naga Hills district under the British India system of administration” (25) was established. Otherwise, each Naga village had its own system of governance because “as with all Nagas the real political unit of the tribe is the village” (Mills 176). And the method of governing themselves differed from village to village and from tribe to tribe.

Different types of political systems were followed by the Naga tribes. From the hereditary kingship of the Konyak ‘Angs’, the chieftainship of the Sümi ‘*Akükaus*’, the democratic rule of the Angamis, and to the village republics of the Aos, Lothas, and the Sangtams. Each tribe followed its own system of governance to manage its villages. Domination of one tribe over another was not heard as people’s lives revolved around the ‘village’. The folks led a relatively simple life because these political systems were dictated by time honoured traditions.

In terms of culture, Naga tribes share identical traditions in their nature. The vibrant and colourful costumes, dances, and songs, are found in all the tribes’ culture. However, each tribe also has its own unique customs and traditions, rituals, costume designs, ornaments,

stories, and so on. Interestingly, similarities or links in the folk-oral literature of the various tribes like folktales, folksongs, and myths, can be found. A cursory look at the oral literature of the various tribes will reveal quite a few parallels. For instance, similarities can be found in the story of *Apvuho* of the Lothas and the tales of *Iki* of the Sümis, the god *Lijaba* of the Aos and the god *Litsapa* of the Sümis, and the myth of a supernatural stone, “known locally as ‘*tsotawo*’, ‘*tso*’ meaning stone and ‘*tawo*’ the spirit” according to Lucy and Kevekha Kevin Zehol (93), collectively believed by the Angamis, Chakesangs, Lothas, Rengmas and Sümis are some of the examples which shows the relationship that unites the Nagas as one. There are differences too because it is an insular tribal society but there is a strong fundamental unity, a feeling of cultural and emotional commonality and belonging which prevail over their differences.

### **1.1.1. THE SUMI NAGA**

Among the significant number of Naga tribes mentioned earlier, the Sümi Nagas are one of them. The Sümi Nagas mainly live in Zünheboto District which lies at the heart of the present state of Nagaland under the Indian Union. It is a scenic place of hillocks, covered by evergreen forest and small brooks, serpentine rivers, ravines and valleys. A place for bird watchers, bikers, and organic food lovers and is also home to a variety of wild flowers, medicinal plants, berries and fruit.

Hokishe Sema believes that the Sümi Nagas migrated from a village called Khezhakeno, under Kohima district, in two directions towards “Swemi and Cheswezumi” and then to “Hebolimi and Ighanumi” (6). Other available literature also confirms that the Sümi Naga tribe moved from these two villages to many other places in Zünheboto District which now comprises of about one hundred and eighty nine villages. J.H. Hutton in his monograph, *The Sema Nagas* states that, “whatever the origin of the Sema was, it is quite clear that the

Doyang Valley was the route by which they first entered the present Sema country” (6). The mention of *Doyang Valley* clarifies the earlier statement since the two mentioned villages are closest to Doyang River.

The general personality of the Sümi is “very impulsive and cheery, and if easily depressed he is easily moved to laughter and merriment” (Hutton 26). They have inclination to be rash and hence often times take hasty decision only to be regretted later. Nevertheless, the folks also have the heart to forgive others regardless of the severity of wrong done to them. Thus, their nature is one that is spontaneous and not a premeditated one. They are forthright in their speech and action and very rarely tactful and diplomatic which lands them into trouble every now and then. A Sümi proverb “*Angu athiu momu azüta ayiu no shini*” (“To fight either by spear head or sharp edged dao”) reflects this idea of forthrightness. For instance, a Sümi cannot and will not ‘sweet talk’ because it is simply not in his nature.

Sümi Nagas are also described as the “Irishman of the Naga tribes, generous, hospitable, and frequently improvident” (Hutton 26). This holds true in the fact that, Sümi tribe is known for their hospitality. The choicest portion of meat and other such savouries are offered to guests which very often could be extravagant. A guest is respected and given first priority because in Sümi ethos, *Kungumi* (sky beings) could come in the form of guest. Therefore, they will be ready to offer everything they have even if it means they are left with nothing to eat.

### **1.1.2. CHARACTERISTICS**

Sümi Nagas can be identified on the basis of certain characteristic traits. It is the only tribe among the Nagas “who do not have a dance that has both male and female participants performing together” (Assumi 4). *Akighilhe* (war dance) is specifically a male dance and cannot be performed with female just as *Totimi Kighilhe* (women’s folk dance) belongs to womenfolk.

Each dance is performed separately by men and women. Folksongs are also sung separately such as *Ayeküzü le* (spinning song) which is sung only by women.

The tribe is regarded as a warrior tribe among the Nagas and they take pride in their courage and bravery. This attribute is mainly a result of headhunting practice of the past which honoured physical prowess. A man achieved manhood only by bringing the head of an enemy because unless a man takes an enemy head he was not permitted “to wear the complete warrior’s attire” (Assumi 7). This warrior garb called *Aghünanu* commanded so much respect and awe in Sümi society that a female Sümi would often choose a man wearing such costume over other considerations.

## ***Clans***

The patriarchal Sümi Naga is divided into two major clans *Tuku* and *Swu* and all the present Sümi clans like *Achumi*, *Yepthomi*, *Jimomi*, *Awomi*, *Chishi*, etc. are an off shoot of the two clans. These two clans have some variations in terms of rituals although the core substance remains the same. It is believed that the *Swu* ritual is more elaborate and rigid unlike the *Tuku* ritual which is a simplification of the *Swu* ritual. For example, there are two types of rituals to perform while establishing a new village called “*Tukuphuwo-Tukuchine* and *Suphuwo-Suchine*” (Achumi 79). The latter is an elaborate rite for establishing a new village and the former is relatively simpler. In celebrating festivals and ceremonies too, there are slight differences between what is practised in the *Ghabo* (warmer parts/Doyang valley) and in the *Ajo* (colder parts/ Tizü valley). The popular use of *Tuluni* in Tizü areas and the use of *Ani* in Doyang areas for the same festival is one such example.

In matters of marriage, it is usually decided and agreed upon by family without much interference of the clan as a whole. Only when cases of same clan marriage happens, the elders of the clan are consulted. In this event, the elders trace their common ancestor. Generally, it

becomes permissible when their common ancestors goes up to seven generations. However, same clan marriage takes place even when there is a gap lesser than seven generations. There is no known taboo involved and no strict social restrictions imposed unlike in the Ao or Lotha Naga customs. However, it must be noted that same clan marriage is discouraged in Sümi society.

In terms of village administration and polity, the founding clan is the *Akükau* (chief) who holds power in village matters. However, he is assisted by other assistant chiefs chosen by him. This is so because no clan can found a village on its own. At the time of founding a village, other clans, loyal to the *Akükau* or preferred by him, are also taken along who assumes chieftainship of lower order. Accordingly, they assist him in running the village administration. In other words, the writ of the *Akükau* is carried out by the respective clan chiefs and administered to their respective clan members.

### ***Chieftainship***

Sümi Naga follows hereditary chieftainship and each chief of the village enjoys permanent authority and is completely independent. This feature can be compared to the Konyak Nagas where the village administration is held by the *Ahng* (chief) appointed by *Pongyin Ahng* ('great *Ahng*'). The powers and functions of a Sümi *Akükau* and that of a Konyak *Pongyin Ahng* is similar in almost all aspects. The underlying difference is that Sümi chieftainship is an 'open' system whereas Konyak *Ahngship* is a 'closed' one. The *Akükau* has political and administrative sway over a single village which is founded by him or his ancestor. Whereas, in the case of the *Pongyin Ahng* of the Konyak Nagas, his powers extends over a larger territory, having 'satellite villages' under his control. (Konyak. interview). The Sümi chief is called *Akükau* which literally means the "one who reigns" (Nekha 11) and below the *Akükau*, there are few *Kükami* who assists the *Akükau* in running the village. The *Akükau* is

traditionally entitled for free labour twelve times a year from each household of his village apart from free labour he received from his ‘dependents’ called *Anukishimi* and *Aqhü-Axemi*. These *Anukishimi* were the landless who cultivate in his land and *Aqhü-Axemi* are the ones whose bride-price was paid by him.

Moreover, the *Akükau* also enjoys entitlement to receive ‘heads’ and ‘limbs’ from any hunt brought by his villager. He also enjoys the same kind of privilege in fishing and bird trapping. The decision of the *Akükau* is final and binding on all the villagers. Whether it is for choosing which part of land to cultivate for the year or announcing the time to sow or reap, the *Akükau* has power over it which no villager can go against. The announcement is made by his *Chocho-u* (village crier) all over the village. No family in the village can sow or reap, burn the field for jhum cultivation, or start the harvest without announcement from the *Chocho-u*. It is also the will of the *Akükau* to decide any communal event or work. The kind of unparalleled power held by *Akükau* has implications for migration as well. No one can migrate or found a village without the approval of the *Akükau*. Migration of any villager can take place only with the blessings of the *Akükau* which is the reason why tracing of village foundation chronologically becomes easy for the *Sümi*.

In the past, a chief would often demarcate land to his son or sons for establishing new village. Since the power and privilege of the *Akükau* is immense, the son would then readily accept it. Today, this tradition is still practiced with a modern twist. At present, any *Sümi* who could afford to buy huge tracts of land can found a village and become an *Akükau*.

Once a new village is established, it is “usually named after the leader of the migrating group”. (Nekha 11). However, sometimes it is also decided by the nature of the place. For instance, the origin of the name ‘Zünheboto’ comes from the name of a plant called ‘Zünhebo’ (Hairy White-Wand/*Leucosceptrum canum*) which was found abundant in the place. And the suffix ‘to’ refers to ‘hill’.

Nagas are known generally for their migratory instinct. However, migration was more vigorously practiced by the Sümi Nagas as “the traditional Semas (Sümi) are migratory in habit. (Maitra 38) and therefore today they are not only confined to Zünheboto District but settled in different parts of Nagaland and even Assam.

Owing to this migration practice, Sümi language has two dialects. People of Lazami area which falls under Pughoboto district speak different dialect from the rest general Sümi. According to Rotokha, the words used in Lazami dialect is found more meaningful and hence this dialect can be regarded as the authentic language of the Sümi Nagas. Example of which include words like, *Ajukhu* (cup) in common Sümi dialect, the ‘*Aju*’ in the word ‘*Ajukhu*’ does not have any relative meaning. While *Ajikhu* in Lazami dialect meaning ‘beer-cup’ explains the fact that rice-brew was a traditional drink of the Sümi Nagas. Also ‘*Ana chuvamo?*’ (‘had food?’) in common Sümi is ‘*Akhuna chuvamo?*’ in Pughoboto dialect. Here, ‘*Akhuna*’ is made up of two words ‘*Akuna*’ and ‘*Ana*’ which means ‘plate’ and ‘cooked rice’. It must also be mentioned that Pughoboto dialect has affinity to Angami, Chakesang and Rengma languages which connects to the dispersion of Naga tribes at the legendary village called Khezhakeno mentioned in the beginning.

Interestingly, the dialect spoken in Laza, Ighanu, Mishili, and Iphonu villages in Pughoboto district is largely different in each village. Each village dialect is different from the other and likewise to all other Sümi. However, they can understand common Sümi language because Christianity came first to the north-west of Zünheboto and therefore the Bible and Church Hymnal were translated into the common Sümi dialect.

### ***Bride Price***

Another important feature of Sümi culture is the practice of *Ame* (bride-price). Among all the Naga tribes, Sümi, Lotha, Rengma, and Konyak Nagas practice the custom of bride



price. Out of which, Sümi *Ame* and Rengma bride-price share identical characteristics. Both customs require certain number of Mithuns (now paid in cash) to be gifted as a token to the bride's parents for years of dedication in bringing up the daughter. Sümi men give *Ame* to secure a wife. On the part of the bride's family, they would send gifts of all kinds to their daughter especially; household items, grain, traditional woven body-cloths, waist-cloths, and ornaments. This is similar to Lotha Naga bride-price because in Lotha culture too, payment of bride-price (*Loman*) is culturally to be reciprocated by the receiver with something in cash or kind. (Ngullie. interview). Sümi *Ame* can be categorised into four types, "*Axeh jeli bidi*" (Sheyepu 26). According to Sheyepu, they are:

#### 1. ***Aminikimji Xe* (Symbolic Beaded Body-cloth Bride-Price)**

It is the highest *Ame* where the groom's family give an *Ame* of sixteen Mithuns. In return, the bride's family gifts the daughter traditional neck pieces like, *Achikula*, *Achipula*, *Achixathikütsa*, *Züchuyi*, *Achikuhu* and *Akichelochi*, pairs of every variety of wrap around waist-cloths and body cloths, and a symbolic wrap around skirt that tucks in at the waist called *Aminikimiji* decorated with five strings from every Sümi traditional neckpieces; "*Sumi chi jeli kümtsü ala pungu sü cheni*" (Sumi Totimi Hoho 10). For this reason, this *Ame* is called *Aminikimji Xe*.

#### 2. ***Ashoghi Xe* (Basket Bride-Price)**

This *Ame* is also composed of all the items mentioned in *Aminikimiji Xe* except that there is no symbolic waist-cloth and only ten to fifteen Mithuns is offered. Both *Aminikimji Xe* and *Ashoghi Xe* can be practiced by sons and daughters of *Akükau*, warriors or the rich.

### 3. *Latha Xe* (Common Man's Bride-Price)

*Latha Xe* can be called as common man's *Ame*. Here, *Ame* is asked or given according to the status of the family. It varies from one to five Mithuns according to the economic condition of both the families.

### 4. *Topunasho Xe* (Second Marriage Bride-Price)

It is an *Ame* particularly for woman who marries for the second time. When a woman re-marries, her *Ame* is decided by her *Ame* in her first marriage. For example, if her first *Ame* belonged to the first category then in her second marriage too she has to follow suit.

Generally, negotiations take place with regard to the *Ame* or *Aphiathome* before a marriage can take place. This event is called *Amekükügha*. In this event, the prospective bride's parents and relatives would mark a price, which was often in the form of livestock, according to the worth of the would-be bride. The worth of the prospective bride was considered on her purity, bloodline and skills. At times the inability to pay the *Ame* leads to annulment of marriage. Clearly, there are negative aspects of this practice. However, the positive aspect of this practice is that cases of "divorce is considered rare" (Maitra 38) in Sümi culture as the practice of *Ame* secures the bond of marriage because after an *Ame* is paid it is difficult to part ways since a fine is imposed corresponding to the *Ame* which is generally costly.

The practice of *Ame* provide status for the man and some kind of security for the woman under the patronage of a patriarchal system. The ability to pay *Ame* for the man represents his economic and social position. On the other hand, higher bride-price signifies higher worth of the woman. It secures her marriage because such marriages demonstrate that the family is worthy for bringing up an honourable daughter. Thus, she lives with her head held high.

## ***Cultural Markers***

Some common cultural markers shared by Naga tribes can be seen in their use of fundamental colours like dark blue, red, and yellow in their textiles, cowries and beads stitched into their weaves, usage of ivory as ornament, animal hair as part of costume, and the traditional use of log drums, machete, spears, and shield. Wood carving is also common to all Naga tribes where they usually carve machete holder, human figure, tiger, mithun, hornbill, horns, astronomical symbols like crescent moon and star.

Sümi Nagas did not practice the art of tattoo like the Ao or Yimchungru Nagas. For the Sümi Nagas, it was rather a style of haircut that signifies one's merit and social position. A Sümi proverb, "Leave a large patch of hair on my head" (*"ikütsüqha kije ghütsülo"*), speaks of how a Sümi man could fashion his hair according to his socio standing. The style of haircut was round in pattern traditionally starting right above the ear till the top; more hair on the head suggesting higher social status. Furthermore, a special kind of wrap around skirt called *Akichelochi* is worn by a Sümi female. It is an elaborate beadwork sewn all over a hand woven knee length skirt which is not worn by any other Naga tribal woman. It is a symbolic skirt that reflects Sümi value of women's purity and honour. It is believed that female sanctity is protected by wearing this unique skirt (Sumi Totimi Hoho 18) as the cowries and beads in the skirt safeguards them from ill-meaning men.

## ***Community Life***

Community living is central to Sümi culture where people live as a community. In the past, each individual, excluding children and the aged, belonged to a group called *Aloji* (work group); consisting of five to thirty members. This *Aloji* system is still practised in rural villages. It is connected to field work where each field is cleared together by the *Aloji*. A special time for the *Aloji* is the celebration of *Tuluni*; a Seasonal festival celebrated in the month of July

when vegetables are abundant. It is a time for rest and to have a good time. Typically, the *Aloji* would kill a pig or cow or both during the celebration. A good portion of meat is kept aside for the grand *Tuluni* feast and the rest is shared equally amongst themselves. The number and size of pig or cow or Mithun the *Aloji* manage to slaughter during this time is a mark of pride. People in the village would often talk about it in admiration. The sense of fraternity and belongingness among the villagers is powerful that construction of individual house in the village is the responsibility of the whole village. In times of natural calamities or death, people come together as a group to help one another rebuild lives.

Earlier, the existence of *Morung* (dormitory) called *Apuki* (boys dormitory) and *Illiki* (girls dormitory) was instrumental in shaping the lives of young people. This institution called *Apuki* and *Illiki* served as modern schools for youngsters to engage with each other in a meaningful way. It was in these dormitories that teaching and learning took place. Life skills like weaving, basketry, knitting, pot-making and such other crafts were imparted to boys and girls. Oral traditions like, folktales, folksongs, proverbs and so on were also transmitted through these dormitories. These dormitories were, in some villages in Satakha area (Yeptho. interview), attached to rich man's or chief's house. However, in other parts of Sümi areas, it was a separate house built by the community for common purpose.

### ***Physical Arts***

*Akighilhe*, a war dance, is a fine example of the tribe's physical agility. This dance is performed by wearing a 'warrior costume' ('*Aghünanu*') complete with *Avabo* (head gear), *Amlaküxa* (chest strap), *Ashola* (a loin cloth for men adorned with cowries), *Apukhu Kükha* (woven piece of cloth adorned with cowries to cover the calves), *Aküthaghi* (ivory armlet), *Angu* (spear), *Azüta* (dao/machete) and *Azüto* (shield). The dance steps is rhythmic, hypnotic, and accompanied by loud ululations. In addition, there is a part in this dance where a couple of

performers display their fighting skills by using spear and dao. They would throw spears at each other to show the use of shield to protect oneself.

Another feature of Sümi culture is a male sport called *Angü küpsü* (spear kicking). In this game, a spear is planted on the ground and the participants have to jump with both feet to touch the spear-end. The equivalent sport for female is *Püxakuxu* (Sümi jump) where the participants jump with both feet touching their backsides and the one who jumps the longest time is declared winner. Both these sports are gender exclusive and therefore not culturally appropriate for a male to participate in *Püxakuxu* as much as it is unlikely for a female to take part in *Angü küpsü*.

### **1.1.3. TRADITIONAL BELIEFS**

Religion is a belief in essence and since Sumi Nagas believed that natural objects other than humans have souls, they can also be called Animists. The word ‘Animism’ comes from a Latin word ‘Anima’ which means “breath, spirit, life” ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism)). It is a religious belief that objects, places and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. This idea of animism was developed by Sir Edward Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture*, in which he defined it as the general doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings in general. According to Tylor, animism often includes an idea of pervading life and will in nature. Sümi believe in the existence of spirits in natural objects in order to give meaning to the activities which cannot be explained otherwise. These spirits are, what Hutton in his book, *The Sema Nagas*, calls, “earth-spirits” (192) and they live with man –ever-present at home, fields, caves, hills, forests, etc. This belief is at the heart of their culture.

Some scholars are of the view that, Sümi Naga religion was a combination of “theism, animism, superstition and supernatural elements which are connected with sorcery, exorcism and magic” (Khala 33). It shows “definite signs of being animistic in nature” (Yeptthomi 19)

because people believe that stones, trees, rivers, caves, hills, and so on have life in them or that spirits dwell in those objects and places. They believe that every natural thing is a spiritual being or that they possess soul or spirit in them that need to be revered or feared. Thus, superstitions and chants are used to protect themselves or to placate the spirits.

Sumi customs, rituals and taboos are all inter-related to their beliefs. For instance, newborns are called *Khumtsa* (bitter), *Akhakhu* (bitter tomato/*Solanum aethiopicum*) and *Akhüshi* (slippery gourd/*Cyclanthera pedata*) before the naming ceremony is performed. It is rooted in the belief that by keeping such names it could save the children from *Tüghami* (evil spirit). This kind of belief influenced “their thinking, attitudes, values and behaviour” (Yeptomi 19) in the past and even in the present time. The strong attachment to old beliefs and set of social norms remain powerful and “despite the fact that the bulk of the Naga population has accepted Christianity as their religion, the Naga people’s links with their traditional beliefs and customs has not been snapped” (Datta 53) even today.

### ***Spirit Beings***

In the hierarchy of gods in the Sümi pantheon, *Alhou* (God/creator) or *Timilhou* (creator of man) is the Supreme God who is a remote being “interfering little in the affairs of men” (Hutton 191). People know that *Alhou* is ‘there’ somewhere to judge man’s actions and bless whenever needed. But the *Alhou* does not take any part in the day to day activities of man. This *Alhou* is regarded as the Creator and hence powerful and almighty. Life and death is believed to be the will of *Alhou*. *Alhou* is considered to be benevolent and patient over its creations. Next to *Alhou* is the *Kungumi* (sky beings). *Kungumi* are benevolent and sometimes come down from the sky and participate in the affairs of the people by helping the poor and blessing good people. There are also stories about *Kungumi* marrying human beings.

In the last group is the *Aghaw* (spirits, both good and evil). *Aghaw* is called by different names: *Tüghami* (evil spirit), *Litsapa* or *Kichimiye* who is “*Ana ghashu. Akini ghashu*” (god of wealth) (Achumi 46). This spirit-god is propitiated twice a year. There are also *Müzamüza* (tree and cave spirits/wood nymphs). The *Müzamüzas* “are less harmful than the dark spirits. Unlike the dark spirits who devour the souls of men once they take them, tree spirits like to entice and ensnare humans with their unearthly songs” (Sema 24). Among all the spirits, *Tüghami* is the most feared because *Tüghami* is malevolent and it needs to be propitiated which is why most of the rituals are performed to please *Tüghami*. Famines, earthquakes, landslides, unnatural deaths, etc. are all attributed to the work of *Tüghami*.

### ***Rituals and Taboos***

Traditional rituals and customs are deeply embedded in its taboos and beliefs. For instance, it is regarded taboo to kill a snake when the wife is pregnant because the action of the husband would have an adverse effect on the mother and child. After the delivery, the mother is “prohibited from entertaining guests by displaying an “*Ayilo*” (*Hyssopus officinalis*) and “*zünhebo*” (*Leucosceptrum canum*) at the main door” (Achumi 9) during the observance of ten days *genna*. It is also “believed that the spirit of the dead men do not leave the village till the *Ahuna* festival is celebrated” (Assumi 16) because the dead would want to know the outcome of his/her labour.

Some of the rituals performed during *Tuluni* (celebration of new crops) festival includes *Alu Chine* (field ritual). A person performing this ritual would carry freshly brewed rice, meat, and egg and go to the field. Each of these item is used for propitiating the spirits for bountiful crops in the field. The ritual performer would at the end of the ritual exclaim, “*Okuhu no qhüilo azülo hesü, onika no iko iqho atohelo!*” (May your roots reach till the waters, and your leaves open up till the hills! (Sema. interview).

After the death of a loved one, some clans like Awomi were forbidden to eat “*khetsüshih, shehushhi, eno tiyetüzü*” (Asumi 36) which are animal carcass left behind by the killer and new vegetables. If this ritual is not followed strictly, it is believed that the person would become mad.

### ***Condition of the Soul and the Afterlife***

There are also rituals connected to migration. The first ritual is performed by making fire to observe “the direction of the smoke as it went up. If the wind blew the smoke towards the village it was believed to be a bad omen” (Ayemi 77). However, if it goes up straight then it is believed to be a good omen and hence the group would set out. Further, when the group sets out to migrate, it is taboo to look back towards the old village. Such an act is considered as ‘*Aba lechu*’ (‘to eat one’s own waste’). The act is believed to be a ‘disgrace’ and hence taboo. On a psychological level, ‘*Aba lechu*’ prevented a person from thinking to return to the old village.

It is also taboo to steal from the snares someone has laid because it is thought that the thief would suffer the same pain and agony as the bird that died in the trap. These kind of taboos act as a deterrent because the word *Chini* (taboo) is the last word for the Sümi Nagas. It guides and influences their behaviour and attitudes as they try to make meaning of their existence.

There are also numerous stories about man-tiger, man-python and man-wild cat which speaks about folks’ belief in dual soul. These beliefs are sacred and enjoy community acceptance because “folklore operates primarily on the cultural level, because its aesthetics, choices, and performances are dictated more by the group than by the individual, the expressions themselves reveal more of group values and assumptions than of consciously framed individual opinions” (Toelken 318). Sümi also believes in the immortality of the soul.



The *soul* called *Aghungu* is thought to live on even after one's death. When people die, the *Aghungu* goes to the *Kithilato* (mount of the dead), believed to be somewhere in the Wokha hills for the folks living in Doyang valley and in the Naruto hills for those in Tizü valley, where the soul lives forever. This belief in the *Aghungu* determines their actions in earthly life. Thus, taboos, belief in the creator and the acceptance of the existence of spirits, belief in the soul and after-life, faith in one's good or bad fortune as a result of one's own action reflects Sümi worldview.

## **1.2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Available literature relevant to the topic under study can be discussed in four categories. Firstly, there are western ethnographers like, J.H. Hutton, Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, Elwin Verrier, et al. who have written about the Nagas as a people and their cultural practices. Hutton's book, *The Sema Nagas* (1968), remains the first book that provides an account of the Sümi Nagas as a Naga tribe. The book has documented Sümi habits, social customs, occupations, weapons, ornaments and dresses, physical traits and general characteristics including domestic life, laws, popular beliefs and folktales. He also made an attempt to trace the origin and migration of the Sümi tribe in the book. Furer-Haimendorf's, *The Naked Nagas* (1968), describes feasts of merit, ritual dances, communal life in dormitories, and head-hunting. It is a book mostly on the Konyak Nagas but it reflects on the traditional Naga way of life. Elwin Verrier's, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (1969), gives a comparative view and elaborates on festivals and dances, personal appearance, domestic life, social organisation, religion and customs of the Nagas. In another book, *Nagaland* (1961), Verrier observes the nature of Naga people. Besides, there are also recent writings on Nagas by non-Naga writers related to the present study. *Folklore and its Motifs in Modern Literature* (1998), by Kishore Yadav presents a cohesive view of the tribal people's psyche, their religious

and spiritual fantasies, ritual practices, dances, songs, games, and woven textiles. Kiranshankar Maitra's *Nagaland: Darling of the North-East* (1991), gives a broad observation on the historical and socio-geographical account of the Nagas.

In the second category, there are Sümi scholars who have attempted to provide a better understanding of the Sümi tribe. *A Re-Discovery and Re-Building of Naga Cultural Values* (2007) by Inato Yekhetu Shikhu analyses the impact of Western Christianity, modernisation, and Indian annexation and occupation. He postulates that, for the Sümi, tradition, religion, individual life, and community are inseparable and further underscores that a person ought to be valued not in terms of possession and wealth but on moral and ethical standards. In *Women and Agriculture in Nagaland: A Gender Study of Sümi Customary Law and Custom*, Khatoli Khala maintains that customs and traditional laws stand in the way of bringing gender justice in the society. *The Sümi Ahuna* by Zhekugha Assumi discusses myths, rites and omens in the celebration of the *Ahuna*, a Sümi harvest festival. Piketo Sema's, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland* (1991), explores the impact of British rule in the Naga Hills and the significant transformation of the Naga society brought about by Christian missionaries. K.N. Nekha's *Tracing Specific Folk Values of the Sumi Tribe of Nagaland* (2015) reflects on the cultural and human values practised by the Sümi Nagas and the spirit of social harmony. The book underlines the relevance of folk values in the context of an increasingly complex world. Shitovi Yeptthomi's *The Initial belief of the Sumi Nagas and their Acceptance of New religion* (2016) discusses Sümi Naga Animism, traditional beliefs and practices. Toinali Sema's *Sümi and the Dance of the Dark Spirits* (2017) is a combination of folklore, fantasy and a fairytale. It is a story that is engaging and educative as it attempts to instil folk wisdom in young minds. While Ahikali Swu's poetry book called, *A Glimpse of Long Ago: Sümi-English Folk Poems* (2014), documents Sümi poetry in order to understand and share her culture, custom and a way of life to the outside world. In addition, it can also be mentioned

that there are Sümi folklorists who have written in Sümi language which has been of great help to scholars in understanding Sümi worldview as they faithfully document what they have heard and observed. Scato Swu's *Sülekuthoh* is a booklet on Sümi proverb expressions approved by Sümi Literature Board. The documented proverb expressions in the book is accompanied by simple literal explanation of each proverb. *Apuh-Assü Leshe* is a Sümi Literature Board publication compiled by S. V. Sheyepu where a good number of Sümi folksongs can be found. *Kichitssathoh* is another Sümi Literature Board publication; a book meant for high school students. Some popular Sümi folktales are compiled here.

In the next group, we have Naga writings in English. Bendangangshi in his *Glimpses of Naga History* (1993), mentions the belief systems of Nagas before Christianity. *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English* (2016), is a book by K B Veio Pou. In this book, he has highlighted the status of women in Naga society and how Naga women's 'freedom' has been limited because of various socio-political and cultural underpinnings. *Nagas at Work* (1996), is a Scholarly edition of Naga Students' Union Delhi and is a research work on the origin of the Nagas and their migration. *Communication and Naga Culture* (2007) is another scholarly edition where a section titled "The Image of Women in selected Naga Folklore and its Impact on Naga Women Today" describes how women have been depicted in folklore and underlines the fact that women images presented in it reflects cultural attitudes towards women. In *Naga Society: Culture, Education and Emerging Trends* (2014), a scholarly edition, Lungsang Zeliang identifies Naga traditional values and practices in reference to Naga women and sheds light on how Naga women can be empowered through various ways in his paper "Naga Women in Traditional Values and Practices and Their relevance in Modern Context". In section 2 of the book, *Studies in Contemporary Naga Writings* (2019), Bendangsenla writes about subaltern consciousness in Naga writing and attempts to show how Nagas themselves can be a voice and not be represented by others alone. *Taboos, Myths and*

*Legends* (2012), edited by Visakhonü Hibo and R. Chumbemo Ngullie, is another academic edition which focusses on the relevance of taboos in understanding Naga culture and tradition. *The Legendary Naga Village-A Reader* (2009) by Lucy and Kevekha Kevin Zehol is a book that documents and discusses the myth of the origin of the Nagas which has been traced to the legendary Naga village called Khezhakeno. Temsula Ao's *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), documents Ao Naga oral traditions which provides specific insights into the Ao Nagas' tradition but is also replete with accounts that hold good not only for the Ao Nagas but of all indigenous communities facing similar situations like marginalisation and the loss of traditional values. *On Being a Naga* (2014), is a collection of essays by Temsula Ao. It is an important book which relates to the way of life and culture of the Nagas. The book concerns the cultural loss suffered during the colonial period and stresses on the urgent need to search for historical roots that can define the 'Naga identity', not as perceived by 'others' but as viewed by 'insiders' as it would find acceptance and home to the Nagas.

Finally, there are folklorists from around the world whose works have contributed to the growth and development of folkloristics as each of them have added new perceptions into how culture can be viewed and studied. Among them, Alan Dundes is widely credited with helping to shape modern folklore scholarship. In *Interpreting Folklore* (1980), Dundes' is concerned with the valuation of materials collected by folklorists so that folklore can be used to increase our understanding of human nature and culture. In *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (1984), Dundes defines myth as a sacred narrative that explains how the world and humanity came to be in their present form. The volume brings together classic statements on the theory of myth by William Bascom, James G. Frazer, Theodor H. Gaster, C. G. Jung, Bronislaw Malinowski, Claude Levi-Strauss, et.al. It is an anthology of twenty-two papers by leading experts on myth representing comparative functionalist, myth-ritual, Jungian, Freudian, and structuralist approaches to studying the genre. *International*

*Folkloristics* (1999) is another collection of essays by Dundes. The volume is an anthology of key texts and can be considered as the basic historical textbook for the folklorist. The work confirms the significance of international folkloristics as an independent, worldwide, scholarly academic discipline. Introductions accompanying each article in the book provide short biography and historical background of the scholar and present the historical and current significance of scholar's ideas and offer related bibliographical references, past and present. Another important book by Dundes is *The Study of Folklore* (1965) where he gives an introduction to the history, theory and methodology of folklore.

Another significant folklorist is Richard M. Dorson's whose *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (1972) brings eighteen scholars' ideas together. It can be regarded as a handbook for folklorists around the world. *The Dynamics of Folklore* (1996) by Barre Toelken is a comprehensive introduction to folklore where Toelken discusses the history and meaning of folklore with insightful examples. He asserts that the tension between "materials" and the "group" makes folklore "folklore"-through the variation in expression that is created. And the essential point is the balance between the "conservation of tradition itself" and the dynamics of change in the performance that gives meaning to the event. Oring's *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres* (1986), consists of a series of essays by leading scholars that give the folklore scholars a compressed sense of major folklore topics and interpretive techniques. It discusses classic and recent works in diverse directions and provides the reader to new problems by introducing alternative perspectives. The book includes Toelken's essay "Ballads and Folksongs" and Oring's, "On the Concepts of folklore." Dan Ben-Amos' *Folklore Genres* (1975), deals with the concept of genre and with the history of genre theory. Several articles compiled in this anthology shows folklore forms as complex, symbolically rich expressions. The essays here lead to an understanding of the forms of oral literature as multidimensional

symbols of communication and to an understanding of folklore genres as systematically related conceptual categories in culture.

### **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Understanding Oral Tradition as the “process by which the myths, legends, tales and the lore of a people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing” (Momaday 1967) is essential in identifying Sümi culture as oral tradition. Sümi oral tradition dates back to centuries where the culture and tradition of the folk is transmitted orally through collective memory. In Sümi society, stories are ‘told’, songs ‘sung’ and proverbs ‘used’ in a shared system of community living. For example, narrators create stories and narrate to the listeners. These stories are accepted by the community and hence re-told. Thus, the creation, telling and transmission of stories, folksongs, and proverbs are carried out by word of mouth. As such, their literature is oral which is now classified as ‘oral literature’ and ‘oral tradition’ is a significant part of it.

Sümi oral tradition shows that items in it not only depicts its tangible tradition and practices but also reflects the intangible values that identifies who they are. These values as expressed and internalised in their oral tradition determines their conduct and behaviour, action, and speech. It marks them who they are and not as it represents Sümi concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Traditional values are cherished and passed on orally from one generation to another through different forms of expression because cultural and artistic products are often faithful representations of socio-cultural, economic, political and moral condition of a society. It serves as a window to the distant past which otherwise would remain dark and unknown.

In an attempt to study the ‘values’ and ‘ethics’ in Sümi oral tradition, it is important to understand these concepts even if concisely. ‘Values’ can be defined as broad preferences

concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what 'ought' to be. In normative ethics, value denotes the degree of importance of something or action, with the aim of determining what actions are best or what way is the best to live or to describe the significance of different actions. It may be described as treating actions themselves as abstract objects, putting value to them. It deals with right conduct and living a good life, in the sense that a highly, or at least relatively highly, valuable action may be regarded as ethically "good" –adjective sense, and an action of low in value, or somewhat relatively low in value, may be regarded as "bad".

While Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of 'right' and 'wrong' conduct. The term ethics derives from Ancient Greek 'ethikos' from 'ethos' meaning 'habit'. It can be defined as "a set of concepts and principles that guide man in determining what behaviour helps or harms sentient creatures." ([wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics)). And the branch of philosophy called axiology comprises the sub-branches of ethics and aesthetics, each concerned with values. Ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime. As a field of intellectual enquiry, moral philosophy is also related to the fields of moral psychology, descriptive ethics, and value theory. Three major areas of study within ethics today are Meta-ethics, Normative Ethics, and Applied Ethics. Meta-Ethics is concerned with the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions and how their truth values can be determined. Normative Ethics is the practical means of determining a moral course of action. While Applied Ethics covers what a person is obligated to do in a specific situation or a particular domain of action. The present study lean towards Normative Ethics because it attempts to study ethical behaviour regarding how one ought to act in a moral sense. As Normative Ethics focuses on inherent character of a person rather than on specific actions, decisions are to be arrived by considering one's responsibilities, and

morality of an action is contingent on the action's outcome or result. In oral tradition, "traditional values are regarded as sacred. People behave in personal and familial ways, even toward inanimate objects". (Oring 12). They are important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behaviour and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. Hence, values are collective conception of what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable, proper or improper in a culture.

Sümi culture is a living culture which has gone through the natural process of change. Due to this, certain materials are either picked up or omitted because of changing conceptions. Conceptions are changed because "any conception of human values, if it is to be fruitful and fulfilling must be able to account for the enduring character of values as well as for their changing character" (Shikhu 181). Traditional values appear lost in the present time due to increasing adherence to alternative social and cultural values, as young Nagas grapple with the loss of identity. Nevertheless, as a "historical reservoir" ([wikipedia.org>wiki/Cultural identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_identity)), culture is an important factor in shaping one's identity. The Sümi word for *culture* is '*Mheshomheghi*' which is a compound of two words and can be translated as '*Mhesho*': culture, priceless tradition, or treasure and '*Mheghi*': heritage, birth right, or legacy. This cherished culture needs to be lived because according to the famous Japanese folklorist, Yanagita Kunio, "by participating in folklore we achieve a personal and deep experience with the ongoing social history of the culture to which we belong" (Toelken 169). However, oral traditions are not completely lost. It is not something which belongs to the remote past because we often hear folksongs sung during festivals and listen to people using a proverb to prove a point. This confirms that oral tradition is "a complex, common, and ongoing phenomena" (Toelken 149).

It is imperative that items in oral tradition needs to be collected, documented, and researched, for it would be too dear for the Sümi to allow it to fade away. Therefore, the scholar



will make an effort to locate Sümi traditional values and ethics in oral tradition. The study will attempt to find out the different terms and frameworks to study the subject selected so as to provide a deeper understanding of Sümi oral tradition in the light of the theoretical concepts applied to it. The study will also try to explore and interpret folk life to understand how the folks make meaning and will endeavour to investigate oral tradition that articulate and conform the philosophical tenets upon which the Sümi Nagas base their values and actions. In addition, the scholar will propose ways to ensure a way of life as practiced in the past that will help Sümi Nagas in the present because cultural values and principles shapes the way one sees the world. It thus has the capacity to bring about the change in attitudes needed to reassure harmony in the society. Therefore, the study will make an effort to find out how contemporary Sümi Nagas can negotiate their traditional ethos as the timeless lore reflects the role of past knowledge and the way of life as desired by the Sümi to live.

#### **1.4. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

While translating Sümi folklore items, particularly proverb expressions and folksongs, neither method; literal or metaphoric, could be used easily. It is because when it is translated literally, the original meaning and essence is lost and when it is translated metaphorically the root word tend to disappear. Such is the difficulty of translation. In translated items provided in the appendices, I have tried to use both methods flexibly so as to make it more effective.

There are different aspects of Sümi Naga Oral Tradition. Each aspect needs exhaustive study and research because written records of oral tradition is limited. Except for some, the ones available are either insignificant or lack academic standards. Hence, it would be futile to undertake an enormous research on the whole oral tradition of the Sümi Nagas which would be almost impossible due to time and other such constraints. As each item reflects the mind, character, history, beliefs, taboos, and customs of the Sümi Nagas. Therefore, the present study

has focussed only on Values and Ethics that is reflected in Sümi oral tradition and an attempt has been made to engage in analysing oral items to understand the relevance and continuity of oral tradition in Sümi society and also to suggest directions and ways for further research in this field.

## **1.5. METHODOLOGY**

A number of secondary sources and critical materials on the subject have been availed in the course of the study through libraries and internet. Since written records of oral tradition is limited, fieldwork has been carried out wherever necessary: collecting stories and songs from active-tradition bearers and elders, observing people by living with them, interviewing respected Sümi personalities who were willing to talk about what they heard/know. The thesis has followed the Eight Edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and is divided into six chapters.

The first chapter endeavours to present Sümi as a Naga tribe having its own practices and customs. It will also be an attempt in introducing the beliefs and way of life of the tribe. The next chapter will focus on some of the concepts and theories of the study of folklore in general. In the third chapter, a discussion on Sümi oral narratives like folktales, legends, and myths will establish how a culture's values and ethics echo in those narratives. Chapter 4 will deal on the manner in which memory, nostalgia, and performance play a role in the continuity of folksongs. Chapter 5 will attempt to show the role of proverb expressions in speech and the ways in which it reinforces traditional values and ethics on the folks. Chapter 6 will sum up the discussion on how oral tradition can be a reflection of a culture's traditional values and ethics.

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## **Chapter II**

### **CONCEPT, DEFINITION AND ASPECTS OF FOLKLORE**

#### **2.1. Concepts and Definitions of Folklore**

##### **2.1.1. Folklore Theories**

##### **2.1.2. Categories in Folklore Studies**

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### **2.1. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS OF FOLKLORE**

The term “folklore” is a recent derivation from the many terms that were used to describe the study of oral tradition earlier. Before the term “folklore” was coined, orally transmitted narratives and traditions were known as “popular antiquities”, “comparative mythology”, “annals and antiquities” and “primitive literature”. It was called “popular antiquities” because people believed that it belonged to the past and was believed to be a composition of common cultural elements that were popular in the olden days. In addition, people also considered it to be a culture of non-elite groups in European context.

Then again, folklore was referred as “comparative mythology” for the reason that it was concerned with comparison of myths from different cultures in an attempt to identify shared themes and characteristics. This enabled scholars to trace the development of different religions

and cultures by proposing common origins for myths from different cultures to support psychological theories.

It was also named as “annals and antiquities” as folklore was supposed to be a record or account of ancient people which gave faithful picture of the conditions under which the tribes formed and developed that correspond to historical facts.

Thus, “annals and antiquities” was viewed as the history of its people. Moreover, folklore was called “primitive literature” since it was transmitted by word of mouth by unlettered people who were not accustomed to reading and writing. However, these orally produced items were found valuable and hence considered ‘literature’.

Before the term “folklore” was coined in 1846 by William John Thoms, there were the German brothers known as the Grimms who contributed significantly to the growth and development of folklore studies. The Grimms, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, published significant volumes of oral folk narratives and interpretations of Germanic mythology in *Deutsche Mythologie*. Similarly, in Germany at the turn of the eighteenth century “the romantics collected *Volkslieder* (folksongs) in the belief that they were essential for invigorating national literatures and saving these literatures from sterile intellectualism” (Oring 5). Folk items were considered to be ‘pure’; free from outside elements, because it came from the heart of ordinary man.

The emphasis on written literature did not allow scholars to consider studying and understanding the meaning of literary tradition that survived in oral form. In those days, the “*folk*” was understood to be a group of people who constituted the lower stratum” (Dundes 2) of the society because the initial meaning of *folk* “referred to European peasants and to them alone” (Dundes 4). The *folk* were considered to be a group of people who were illiterate, unsophisticated, and simple and therefore defined in contrast with or in opposition to some other population group. In this way, “folklore was wrongly tied to illiteracy and it was wrongly

assumed that as literacy increased, folklore would decrease” (Dundes 17). However, as we know of it now, folklore is studied in a scientifically advanced and academically sophisticated manner.

At present, *folklore* is a collective term for items that exists in oral form and is traditionally spoken or sung over a long period of time by a group of people. Alan Dundes in his prefatory essay to *The Study of Folklore*, notes that ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor and attempts to define ‘lore’ as a catalogue of genres which include, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, etc. This implies that the term “folk” can be applied to “any” group and not just the folk of the past as is usually misunderstood. It supports the view that folklore is ever evolving and changing and not a bygone thing. It can flourish even in urban society but for something to be folklore in an urban society, it must be touched and transformed by common experience.

However, Elliott Oring defines the term “folklore” as a compound made up of “folk”, implying some group of people, who have something called “lore” (Oring 1). The addition of “some” to “group of people” indicates that it is definitely not ‘any’ group but a group of a special kind. Oring contends that Dundes’ definition was only an attempt “to simplify the issue for the introductory student” (1) because he maintains that Dundes’ definition of “the term “folk” does not contribute significantly to the definition of folklore as a whole” and the list was “meant only to provide examples of lore and not a definition of “lore”. According to Oring, folklore is “a mode of expression which emphasises the human and personal as opposed to the formal and institutional” (16) and therefore the addition of “folk” to a tale, song, dance, etc. distinguishes folklore from any other such things. The human and personal element becomes the essence of oral literature because it was about the everyday life of the people.

When William Wells Newell re-defined folklore as “oral tradition and belief handed down from generation to generation without the use of writing”, (Newell 134) it gave a clearer

picture about what folklore is; a broader view that includes traditions and beliefs of the folk which were handed down verbally. But anything that was handed down verbally cannot be called folklore because according to Newell; folklore means oral transmission that is 'traditional'. However, "many forms of folklore are not transmitted orally at all" (Dundes 20) and hence 'performance' like, gesture and dance cannot be included in oral tradition. Newell also elaborated further that an oral tradition could be dying out, but it could also be growing and thriving. So, folklore survival is specific to regions. For instance, in a particular region folklore may be endangered but the same cannot be generalised for other regions.

On the whole, as Oring concludes in his essay 'On the Concepts of Folklore', 'definition' is only a "regaining of equilibrium and composure from the stimulation and exhilaration of research and discovery" (18). Even as contemporary folklorists see in folklore the reflection of an intangible, ordinary man and pursue reflections of the *communal* (a group or collective), the *common* (the everyday rather than extraordinary), the *informal* (in relation to the formal and institutional), the *marginal* (in relation to the centers of power and privilege), the *personal* (communication face- to -face), the *traditional* (stable over time), the *aesthetic* (artistic expressions), and the *ideological* (expressions of belief and systems of knowledge/, the search for new meanings of folklore will go on because stability of definition will always be challenged by new ideas and insights and it will only be interesting to find out new definitions to folklore.

### **2.1.1. FOLKLORE THEORIES**

Some major theoretical advancements of various schools that guide the folklorist in the analysis of folklore materials are: The Early Philologists, The Solar Mythology Theory, The Diffusionists: Theory of Borrowing, The Anthropologicalists: Polygenesis, The



Psychoanalytical Interpretations, The Oral-Formulaic Theory, The Structuralists: Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Approach, Ideological, Functional, Folk-Cultural, and The Contextual Theory.

The early philologists concentrated on the mechanics of folklore transmission. Carl Wilhelm Von Sydow of Sweden is an important philologist who made conceptual contribution by distinguishing between active and passive bearers of tradition who helped in the continuity and dissemination of traditions. He also brought the notion of oicotype; a term borrowed from botany, to mean “local forms of a tale type, folksong, or proverb, with “local” defined in either geographic or cultural terms” (Sydow 220).

The Solar Mythology Theory “sought to project narratives about humans upon the movements of celestial bodies such as the sun” (Jones 88). However, psychoanalysts argued that folklore itself was a projection of the movements of humans and not celestial bodies. It was about mental processes that get expressed in the form of songs and stories since psychoanalysts believed that ideas, feelings, interests, and beliefs originate from the unconscious and not the conscious mind. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century when “mythological theory” was getting firmly established in Europe, scholars began to find out striking similarities in Sanskrit and European tales. This led to the theory of borrowing or “migrational theory” as borrowing was attributed to migration.

The Anthropologists believed that folklore was an important element of a people’s culture as “any ethnographic study which does not consider folklore can only be a partial and incomplete description of the culture as a whole” (Bascom 26). The notion was based on the existence of universal human psyche and human behaviour which could not be explained with the existing theories which stemmed from contemporary European thinking.

Folklore was also perceived to be a powerful force to promote specific ideology and was seen as a reflection and weapon of class conflict. Thus, Lenin “declared that folklore must

be considered from the “social-political point of view,” as an aid to understanding the “hopes and expectations” of the working masses in the past” (Dorson 18). In this way, folklorists began to pursue themes of social protest and class conflict.

Functional theory emphasised on how folklore operate in a given culture. It sought to find answers to the social use of a particular folklore item. For instance, folksongs function as a medium for people to communicate their innermost feelings or myth as a validation of belief.

The Structuralists shifted the idea of typology by content to typology by structure when Russian formalist Vladimir Propp’s English translation in nineteen fifty eight as *Morphology of Folktale* caught the attention of folklorists in America. Types and motifs were studied as a result. Another approach in structuralism proposed by French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss was the logical structure in the human mind; both savage and civilized mind, that reveal certain common ideas in folklore of different regions. These two structuralist approaches were termed as paradigmatic and syntagmatic by Alan Dundes since Levi-Strauss aimed at a paradigm or conceptual framework behind the myth while Propp considered the syntax.

The Oral-Formulaic Theory started with the work of Milman Parry who analysed the formulaic characteristics in *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and was completed by Albert B. Lord who worked on Slavic oral poetry. This theory focussed on the narrator and his performance for the key to the composition and structure of epic, ballad, romance, and folktale. Recognition of folk-singer and tale-teller was the hallmark and performer’s application of formulas and phrases from memory in order to improvise in oral transmission began to be viewed seriously.

Supporters of folklife studies is also called “folk-cultural” because the study encompasses the totality of folklife including the tangible products of folk and also the emotional and cultural aspects of its makers and users.

The most recent theory is the Contextual Theory although as yet they do not form a unified school. Contextual folklorists like Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes,

Robert Georges, et al., reject the older static typology of folklore texts and stress on the three-dimensional context as in 'texture, text, and content' where the preoccupation is also on the environment in which folklore text is set. Thus, the main focus is on the 'event' of story-telling or folksong 'performance'. The collector of folklore items now need to provide record of the whole performance or communicative act because these folklorists believe that each performance is a unique event and the verbatim text is only a part of it.

### **2.1.2. CATEGORIES IN FOLKLORE STUDIES**

In *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (1972), Dorson suggests that the field of folklore studies can be divided into four groups:

#### **Oral Literature**

Oral Literature is sometimes called verbal art or expressive literature because "under this rubric fall spoken, sung, and voiced forms of traditional utterance that show repetitive patterns" (Dorson 2). It is characterised by re-tellings and re-singings where the narrator or singer creates images and experiences in the mind and heart of the listeners or audience. It is created anew in every re-telling or re-singing. It includes the study of folk narratives, folksongs or folk poetry, proverbs and riddles, and folk speech.

#### **Material Culture**

Material Culture is defined as the physical objects which give evidence of the type of culture developed by a society or group. It is an interdisciplinary field that tells of the relationships between people and their things. It includes the study of tools and implements, food preparation, furniture and house designs, etc. Material culture is also known as physical folklife as it deals with the visible rather than the aural aspects of folklife.

#### **Social Folk Custom**

Social Folk Custom is the cultural practices that are preserved traditionally by oral communication. Here the emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skill and performance. It is comprised of the study of rites of passage, folk beliefs, rituals, observance of festivals, performances, games and sports, etc.

## **Performing Folk Arts**

“While the renditions of a folktale or a folksong are now usually referred to as performances, they are more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals with folk instruments, dance costumes, and scenario props” (Dorson 4). Thus, performing folk arts intersect with traditional music, dance and drama and often appear in conjunction with these items. It includes dance, music, spoken word, recitation, chants, etc.

Many concepts and theories discussed above relates to the study of Sümi oral tradition and hence applied to the present study. For instance, Sümi folktales and legends can be viewed as a reflection of the folks’ psyche, their dreams and ideals. Myth can be seen as a carrier of their beliefs and aspirations and as an instrument for meaning-making of the things that could not be easily explained. The act of story-telling can be viewed as a performance and an art in itself. Further, Sümi folksongs are reflections of their values and ethics. It is also a medium to express social themes like social protest as it reveals the angst of common man. Proverbs are used to instil social norms and to develop appropriate behaviour in children.

In Sümi language, ‘*Apu-Asü Xüghili*’ or ‘*Apu-Asü lo Küghakiche*’ is loosely used to refer to ‘folklore’. ‘*Apuh-Asü Xüghili*’ can be translated as the ‘history of the progenitors’ and ‘*Apu-Asü lo Küghakiche*’ means ‘Oral narratives of the progenitors’. ‘*Küghakiche tsa*’ can be used as a corresponding Sümi word for ‘oral tradition’. It includes myths, folktales, legends, folksongs, proverbs, similes and such other items. These items expressed their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, their religious beliefs and philosophy of life. It speaks of who they think

they are, why they act in a particular manner, their reverence and understanding of nature, and their closeness with the spiritual world.

Oral tradition is rooted on lived experience for the Sümi and hence each item enjoys the community's acceptance. However, it began to fade away after the arrival of American missionaries in the later part of the nineteenth century in Nagaland. The missionaries considered Naga traditions as 'uncivilized' or 'savage' or 'primitive' because it did not conform to the standards of their 'civilized' world, though it must be admitted that there are many positive aspects of the work done by the missionaries. Establishment of Christian schools which produced distinguished Naga personalities being one of the many positive legacies left behind by them. Yet, in their endeavour to convert Nagas into Christians, they considered people's traditional songs and rituals as unchristian so people were required to abandon the markers of their previous identity. Nevertheless, as understood today, oral tradition forms a significant part of a people's culture and tradition. The religious aspect may be divested of its relevance, however, the oral culture still persists and is instrumental in shaping people's identity and values. In it can be found humanity's most profound philosophies and ideas because it acts as a document of values they believe were and are essential for life, and also mirrors the character and attitudes of its people.

## **2.2. FOLK-ORAL NARRATIVES: FOLKTALE, MYTH AND LEGEND**

Folk-oral narratives are stories that are told and re-told in a particular society. It is re-told because either it has a message to convey or it has a meaning for the people in that society. These narratives exist in 'oral' form and therefore the addition of 'oral' in 'folk-oral narratives'. It consists of folktales, myths and legends that are "reflections of the societies and individuals which create and transmit them; consequently, they reflect a wide range of human ideas and emotions" (Oring 133.). Narrators do not tell a story for its own sake and the listeners too do

not listen only for amusement. There is a reason behind the 'creation' and 'transmission' of a particular narrative. In this way, these narratives are re-told and survive in the society.

Folk-oral narratives not only document the triumphs of good over evil but it also represent themes of ill-treatment, violence, hatred, jealousy, etc. It serves as a reflection of a people's mind, character, beliefs, taboos, traditions and culture and also shows both the individual and the society just as they are. It is through these narratives that one is able to understand folk's philosophy and their innermost feelings. And the knowledge and understanding of these folk narratives enables the appreciation of their worldview.

These folk oral narratives are "productions of individuals, produced during social interactions, and informed by surrounding cultural tradition" (Oring 134). A particular narrator tells a story to the listeners in an event. The narrator shapes the narratives he re-creates in accordance with his own dispositions and circumstances. Yet his creativity is not unlimited because his narrations depend upon a measure of community acceptance. Hence, the story lives or is narrated because it has a meaning for the community and is culturally acceptable.

With every re-telling, a story is modified or altered according to the context and also according to the talent and preference of the narrator because these narratives survive only in oral tradition. And therefore, we often hear about variations in storytelling. No single text can claim to be authoritative or a 'correct' one. Rather, different narrators perform narratives differently in different situations. A folk narrative, in other words, must be re-created with each telling. As a result of this re-creation, it reflects both the past as well as the present because narrators must draw upon past language, symbols, events, and forms which they share with their audience for their narrations to be both comprehensible and meaningful. Yet, because each narration is a creation of the moment, it crystallizes around contemporary situations and concerns, reflecting current values and attitudes.

Further, folk-oral narratives need to be told in a progressive manner because “maintaining the order of events in the verbal recapitulation is basic” (Oring 121). The order of events in a narrative cannot be told in a disorganized manner because the whole meaning would be lost by doing so. Likewise, “a narrative is conceptualized as a whole, not as a mere list of clauses or sentences” (Oring 121). It cannot be understood in parts as the meaning comes out clearly only when it is looked at in its entirety.

### **2.2.1. FOLKTALE**

Folktales are prose narratives which are fiction or one which is conceived through the power of imagination. They are stories that grow out of the lives and imaginations of the people. It survives only when it is constantly re-told because “folktales must appeal to the psyche of many, many individuals if they are to survive” (Dundes 34). Any story that is narrated in oral form cannot be a folktale. In order for folktale to survive, it must satisfy and please the listeners. Only then, listeners would want to re-tell the story. They are stories that elders pass on to the younger generation through narrations and one that forms a huge part of the oral tradition of the people. These kinds of stories are meant to give an explanation to things people do not understand, discipline children or to simply pass the time.

William Bascom believes that folktales “are not considered as dogma or history, they may or may not have happened, and they are not to be taken seriously” (8). The stories are invented by the narrator and it may reflect the cultural and social milieu of that particular time but it is not necessarily a document of a historical fact. They are almost ‘timeless’ and ‘placeless’ and may be set in any time and place because folktales, “unlike myths, are not sacred, nor do they challenge the world views of the audience in the same manner as the legend” (Oring 126). So then, folktale operates largely as an entertainment for the folks and is valued

for its artistic quality. Nonetheless, there are also folktales which are laden with meanings but the meaning may not come to the listeners at the moment atleast.

In folktales, narrators often try to draw some lesson to the listeners but the story line may not necessarily be true. The listeners know well that a particular story did not happen literally but the lesson conveyed through the story appeal to the listeners. Their popularity also springs from their imaginative characters, their supernatural elements, focus on action, and simple sense of justice, happy endings, and the fundamental wisdom they contain.

Folktales “embodies the highly polished, artistic story genres that have a relatively consistent, finished form” (Degh 60). It is through the skill of the narrator or the creator of that story which carries a particular narrative and is retold in that society. Since it is artistic in nature, it has a proper beginning and end.

According to motif or tale type, folktales are classified into different kinds like, Religious tales, Realistic tales, Trickster tales, Animal tales, Wonder tales, Cumulative tales, Pouquoi tales, Noodlehead tales, etc. These tales are centred on character types such as the fool, old woman, cunning animal and “little emphasis on character development” (Oring 127) is maintained where a single stranded plot is employed and the action is often stereotyped and repetitive.

### **2.2.2. MYTH**

Myth is a term used for “a narrative generally regarded by the community in which it is told as both sacred and true” (Oring 124). Unlike ‘folktale’, ‘myth’ is regarded as a real happening and hence held sacred in the society in which it is told. Then, myths are stories that belong to the past and considered sacred because the fundamental message of the story is significant to the people. Myths are unique because they deal primarily with supernatural entities acting as primary characters while secondary characters are often humans.



A myth is “often set outside of historical time” (Oring 124). This is to say, in a myth, time is not easy to measure. Often the story takes place outside of human chronology, although it may loosely entwine elements of history. It is a story about a distant past and its validity cannot be questioned. And since it is set remotely from known historical time, it commands immense reverence from the people because people believe that its value has been stable.

Myths are not merely stories that are told for entertainment but are “core narratives in larger ideological systems” (Oring 124). It outlines their views and beliefs in life and interprets meanings of different phenomena which otherwise would have remained in the dark as “myth intermediates a philosophic way of looking at things, serving as an interpretation of the surrounding reality or of things above us” (Hultkrantz 154). Anything that cannot be explained with reason like metaphysical and supernatural events is explained through myths to make people understand why things happen in a particular way because the predominant function of a myth is to provide an extraordinary explanation to inexplicable phenomena and events. In short, people use myths to explain what they do not know.

These narratives are “accepted on faith, they are taught to be believed, and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief” (Bascom 9). In the absence of written laws and scientific explanations, myths serve as a divine law that give meaning to certain behaviour or happening as the folks try to make sense of their existence. Myths somehow organise their confused existence as it brought harmony and cohesiveness in the society.

“Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived” (Malinowski 198) because myth is based on people’s lived experience. It originates from a long observation of man’s behaviour or natural phenomenon that has remained stable over time. While explaining modern theories of myth, Honko states that myth is “an integrating factor in man’s adaptation to life” (Honko 47). It

brings together experiences, knowledge, observation and understanding as the folk's attempts to make sense of their being. For instance, myth act as an answer to the missing links to the question of where the folks have come from or the purpose of their existence.

Myth is believed to be the real cause which has brought about the moral rule in the lives of the people; its "existence and influence not merely transcend the act of telling the narrative, not only do they draw their substance from life and its interests-they govern and control many cultural features, they form the dogmatic backbone of primitive civilization" (Malinowski 204). In order to lead meaningful life together in harmony, people rely on myth as a source that is fixed to guide and direct their action.

Myths also pass cultural values on people's morals by explaining the origins of a cultural practice. It seeks to explain why a particular tradition exists. Thus, it contributes to and expresses a culture's system of thoughts and values. In this way, myths also hold religious or spiritual significance for those who tell it as it tackle issues concerned with the human-supernatural-god-relationships.

When people face indecision or need to correct behaviour, they use myths to explain their choice or to decide next course of action. That is to say that myth give "support to accepted patterns of behaviour by placing present -day situations in a meaningful perspective with regard to the precedents of the past" (Honko 47).

Myths also "offer opportunities of selecting different elements which satisfy both individual tendencies and social necessities. From these elements it is possible to create an individual, but at the same time traditional, way of viewing the world" (Honko 47). Many things happen in life and to make sense of it all, man needs to interpret as he sees it. Now, this interpretation must fit in to not only the individual's psyche but the society as a whole. Thus, myth reveals folk's viewpoint on different issues. Although myths may not always be true in the literal sense, most carry a kernel of wisdom that functions as metaphorical truth. Much like

poetry, myths embody profound truths through illustrations of truth in action, which often means personifying or animating objects or forces usually thought of as inanimate.

Myths are of different types. They are, Creation Myths, Origin of Things Myths, Myths of Gods and Goddesses, Trickster Myths, Myths of Death, the Underworld and Resurrection, etc. However, common ones seek to not only explain, but give existential meaning to the basic circumstances of human life.

### **2.2.3. LEGEND**

A Legend is a story that is believed to have happened in the past that is not long ago and can be related by the listener. It is a larger-than-life story told and listened to in admiration. They are, like myths, “regarded as true by the narrator and his audience but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today” (Bascom 9). Legends differ from myths although both are regarded as true. Legends are not held sacred; they are stories of brave warriors, ideal woman, obedient children, etc. And it is set in a historical time which can be corroborated by the listener like the Naga legends of *Jina* and *Etiben* of the Ao Nagas and *Inakha* and *Ghonili* of the Sümi Nagas. They take place in the distant past in places that are either real or plausible. It tells of events in human past that justify the present state of man, containing a definite element of history.

It is a “popular narrative with an *objectively untrue* imaginary content. It is presented in the form of a simple account as if it would have really happened” (qtd. in Degh 94). There are legends about warriors that took hundred heads in a single raid. This kind of narrative proves that bravery and skill were highly regarded and encouraged then. They “are considered narratives which focus on a single episode, an episode which is presented as miraculous, uncanny, bizarre, or sometimes embarrassing” (Oring 125). Legends present extraordinary

events or actions and mysterious happenings. It is a record of only a particular incident and is not elaborate in nature.

Even when the story is unbelievable, “legend carriers-believers or nonbelievers-usually accept, pass on, and are fed back the verbal communication they themselves have launched” (Degh 96). These amazing stories thrive because people want to believe that such things exist or can happen or is possible. So, legends lead and encourage the listeners to emulate legendary characters or learn from their mistakes.

The “core of the legend is an evaluation of its truth status” because “in a legend, the question of truth must be entertained even if that truth is ultimately rejected” (Oring 125) at the end. Like Coleridge’s, ‘suspension of disbelief’, the listeners accept the legend as true even when it is about implausible action, strange events and about extraordinary human beings who could achieve unlikely feats.

It “depicts the improbable within the world of the possible” (Oring 125) and it often makes reference to real people and places. It is often an unbelievable story that is told in a believable manner. In a world of immense possibilities, even the seemingly improbable is entertained because of the belief that anything can be possible. It is the reason why “legend scholars have considered belief an indispensable ingredient of legend narration” (Degh 95). This “belief” is not only essential for both narrators and listeners but also the reason why it flourished in the society.

While describing myths and legends, John C. Messenger states that both “specify the supernatural entities believed to exist, describe the origin of things, explain the nature of reality, and assert the proper organisation of values” (216). In the absence of scientific explanations, myths and legends are used to describe the otherwise unexplainable. This was necessary because of man’s inherent quest for meaning as natural phenomena like the appearance of a rainbow or the sudden shaking of the earth can only be explained by building a perspective.

Legends, “in the form they have taken,...*cannot have happened*, rather they have been formed by the fabulating gift of the people” (qtd. in Degh 96). These stories though often implausible were told and passed on as it was a product of talented narrators who narrated the stories that appealed to many listeners. Further, legends feature human actions perceived both by teller and listeners to have taken place within human history and demonstrating human values. Reflecting on a psychological level, legends are a symbolic representation of folk beliefs and collective experiences and serves as an affirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs.

### **2.3. FOLKSONG**

A folksong is a popular song among the folks. It belongs to the community as a whole and therefore not attributed to any composer. It is taught by one generation to another generation. However, any song cannot be regarded as folksong because “a song becomes a folksong (only) when it begins to be passed along and rephrased or used by others for whom it also functions as a way of articulating shared attitudes or feelings” (Toelken 147). Hence, the fundamental quality of a folksong is its constant rephrasing. It is rephrased in order to suit the context of where and in what event the song is being sung. This is the reason why “in folklore, one does not have *the* folksong any more than *the* correct way of playing a traditional game or *the* right way of telling a joke. One has only *a* version of a folksong, game, or joke” (Herzog 169).

A folksong differs from other songs because it is a “music that is passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than by the written or printed musical score” (List 363). The addition of ‘folk’ to a ‘song’ has a special meaning. It means songs that survive in oral form as opposed to written music.

Folk poetry is “transmitted and recreated by popular virtuosi. Only where such virtuosi exist is folk poetry a living tradition” (Richmond 86). When it is not sung, folksong dies or perishes. Thus, the survival of any folksong is the continuous singing by skilful folk singers because “if a song is to continue, a generation must find something in it worth continuing while altering aspects which are no longer consonant with its values and beliefs” (Oring 10). Understandably, many songs are composed but only few survive. The songs that survive are the ones that have been rephrased by talented folksingers.

It is usually “the group’s values which account for the constant “polishing” of a folksong as it goes on its way” (Toelken 151). There are specific values or ‘shared attitudes and feelings’ attached to a group and therefore according to their value system, a song could be fashioned emphasising on a particular value. Thus, specific values that is honoured and understood in a particular society are incorporated in the songs they sang. The *Sümi Feast of Merit* songs is an example of how songs are rephrased according to the context of performing the song.

Folksongs are also expressions of a people’s desires, fears, longings, hopes and dreams. These feelings and the most delicate relationships are often unspoken and hence “lyric folksongs explore and give voice to the ambiguities of such subjects” (Toelken 153). What cannot be communicated in ordinary manner is generally sung because innermost feelings cannot be articulated in ordinary manner.

The singing of a folksong is “intimately a part of its meaning and its reason for being. By singing, we come closer to experiencing the possible emotional dimensions and cultural meanings of a song, and we continue to deepen our capacity to resonate to these important but often unexplained ingredients of our culture” (Richmond 86). The act of singing a folksong in itself is an important element of a culture and therefore transcends the mere act of singing. It not only answers the question of why the song is sung but also reflects shared beliefs and brings

out elements of nostalgia. Moreover, folksongs narrates the stories of the past consciously or unconsciously and mirrors the cultural history of its people. Thus, folksongs are not only meaningful but they are beautiful reflections of a people's culture.

According to its theme, Sümi folksongs can be classified into seven types. They are, *Alukümla Le* (Work Song), *Amülo Ghime Le* (Song of Anguish/Protest Song), *Kikimiye Le* (Love Song), *Ashi-Aghau Le* (Animal and Bird Song/Nature Song), *Lejo Le* (Recreational Song), and *Aghü Leku* (Warrior Song).

## **2.4. PROVERB EXPRESSIONS**

In folkloristics, proverb expressions can be referred to short and witty expressions that is used to communicate an idea. It is a part of everyday discourse and also used in serious discussions. In Sümi society, when two people engage in a conversation or debate, the one who uses proverbs is admired and could win over arguments. Each proverb is “a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring into play” (Abrahams 119). Since proverbs are used in speech, it is terse and on point. It is born out of a tradition that is understood through shared culture. Sometimes, citing a proverb is enough to settle differences when used appropriately for a particular situation. As the presentation of viewpoint becomes stronger, more forceful and immediate with the use of proverb than just ordinary words.

A proverb may be about something else which may not necessarily connect to the present context literally but they have metaphorical meaning that links to the present. This is so because “one of the functions of proverbs is to provide a secular precedent for present action” (Dundes 24). Similarly, proverbs are quoted to show a pattern of behaviour or action that have happened in the past or one that is mutually agreed by the community for the reason

that proverbs “conveys a culturally agreed-upon idea which can be used to make a point” (de Caro 185). Sümi proverbs that centres on taboo, shame and disgrace qualifies that the ideas are based on people’s belief which is embedded in its culture.

Proverbs not only ‘conveys a culturally agreed-upon idea’ but it is also “a traditional statement passed on in fixed form by oral transmission and assumed to convey some ethical or philosophical truth” (de Caro 184). The addition of “some ethical or philosophical truth” in this definition means that proverbs carry beliefs of a culture. It is a reflection of the values and principles they believed in. For instance, it is taboo to speak before elders for Sümi Naga. This simply suggests that the folks believe in the value of ‘respect for elders’.

Proverbs have a social function in a shared culture. People understand a specific phrase or a proverb because it originates from a culture that shares the meaning of that proverb or phrase which is socio-culturally accepted in the society. Similarly, proverbs are regarded as “short, traditional, “out –of context” statements used to further some social end” (Seitel 141). It means that some proverbs are used to serve social purpose. Thus, proverbs reflects the socio-cultural life of the people. For instance, there are Sümi proverbs which prohibits a socially poor man to speak before others who has higher social status and also Sümi proverbs that promotes gender bias against female and so on.

When a person needs to express in a more serious way, a proverb is chosen to give more weight to what one needs to communicate. It has “meaningful content and it may still be possible to draw conclusions about values and attitudes by analysing that content” (de Caro 185). It is not simply words that is spoken as one wishes but words laden with meanings that reflects a culture’s way of looking at things and principles that guide them.

Proverbs survives in a given culture because it is a “fixed-phrase genre” (Dundes 31) and it exists in ‘fixed form’ through ‘pre-formulated language’ (de Caro 184) where the wording and content remain fairly constant. It contains “wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional



views in a metaphorical, fixed, memorizable form..." (Meider 5). Proverb expressions may be comprised of proverbs, similes, pairs of word, and idioms.

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## **Chapter III**

### **VALUES AND ETHICS AS REFLECTED IN SÜMI ORAL**

#### **NARRATIVES**

- 1.1. Introducing Folk Oral Narratives and the Act of Story-telling in Sümi Oral Tradition
- 1.2. Sümi Values and Ethics in Select Folk Oral Narratives Pertaining to:
  - 1.2.1. Traditional belief: Of Humans and the Spirit World, Belief in Fate, Taboo, Community, and Origin stories
  - 1.2.2. Practice: Cultural Ornaments and Costumes, Bride Price, Privileging of Male Child, Inheritance

#### **1.1.1. INTRODUCING FOLK ORAL NARRATIVES AND THE ACT OF STORY-TELLING IN SÜMI ORAL TRADITION**

Oral Narratives forms a significant part of folk oral tradition because it mirrors a culture's system of thought and values as folks tell the stories that matter to them. These narratives are transmitted through continuous sharing by one generation or group to another. The 'continuous sharing' of stories being imperative to its survival. Some stories can be understood as narrative history or traditional narrative that represent the reality and social condition of the society. Some artistic stories are told essentially for entertainment but not wanting in meaning. While a significant number of stories reflects their worldview, beliefs and values that are expressed to instruct and guide man. These stories are a part of their everyday life as the folks often allude to a story in order to convey a particular message, when the same could not be said directly, or to make the message more effective. It is through these narratives that folk beliefs and values are passed on which forms their identity. Accordingly, folk attitudes

as reflected in its oral narratives can be re-considered in order to allow important traditional values to have meaning in the present.

Oral narratives contain “persistent and yet continually reinterpreted ideas” (Degh 53) according to the context in which it is narrated because when a story is re-told, it is enriched in order to suit the present situation. In this way, the influencing power and efficacy of oral narratives depend on the skill of the narrator. That is not to say oral narratives maybe altered according to the wish of the narrator. Rather, talented narrators tells a story by modifying parts that are thought to be necessary but without changing the basic structure and message of the story. So, with each re-telling, a story is presented or transformed anew and this appeals to the listeners. Oral Narratives are important because it portrays a given culture’s practices and traditions and gives meaning to the values they believe in, though it may not always be deliberate. Hence, stories are re-told and survive even when it is not written down.

For the Sümi Naga, these narratives were and is still a part of their everyday life. Phrases such as, ‘*Tishi picheghi*’ or ‘*Tishi küghacheghi*’ (‘It was told like that’), ‘*Apu-Asü tsa ke*’ (‘It is what the forefathers used to say’) or still ‘*Apu-Asü lo küghakiche shivea*’ (‘What ancestors recounted have come true’) are frequently used even today to confirm why a thing cannot be said or done or to cite an example from the past for present action and vice-versa. Narratives can be understood only in its complete form for the reason that it “links actions and events” (Oring 121) which suggests that an action in the story has meaning only in relation to some other action. In this way, stories are alluded as examples when mere words and sentences could not express a given idea

Story-telling is an intrinsic part of Sümi Naga oral tradition. It is through this medium that the folks; young and old, entertain one another while imparting wisdom to the listeners. These stories carry within itself specific meanings and messages to be understood, learnt and re-told. Even in the present time, the value of stories and story- telling is understood by the

folks; especially active tradition bearers. Interestingly, many of them who narrated the stories in the course of this research viewed story-telling as a serious and formal performance. They composed themselves in sublime persona and spoke in nostalgic tone, emphasising by repeating what they thought were important words or phrases and lowering or raising the voice as demanded by the action in the story. They also uttered “*She!*” or “*Oishe*”, (“Alas!”) pronounced with a stressed ‘e’ at the end of each expression, “*Amulo ghimepu!*” (“How sad!”) by clapping or clasping their hands or taking their hand to their chest as an emotional response to the story. It was not a monotonous telling of a story to be recorded or written down for academic purpose but a traditional act with cultural significance. Hence, oral narratives occupy an important position in the cultural life of the Sümi tribal community.

An attempt to define major oral narrative genres such as myth, legend, and folktale have not been carried out as yet in Sümi language. Therefore, an operative definition of each term can be used in this study. A ‘folktale’ may be called *Küghakiche* in relation to the English definition of a ‘folktale’. ‘*Küghakiche*’ can be literally translated as ‘narrative’. A story that is told and re-told many times over. It may or may not be true and what mattered was the message it conveyed and the artistic presentation of the story. ‘Myth’ can be called *Apu- Asü Tsa* (progenitor’s narratives). ‘Myth’ is regarded to be true in the society in which it is told and therefore held sacred. *Apu Asü Tsa* is also believed to be true and cannot be questioned because according to Rotokha, it is *chini* (taboo) to speak or act against it. ‘Legend’ can be called *Xülhe* or *Xüghili* (Life Story) as most Sümi legends are about warriors and popular chiefs and centres on the theme of love and bravery. These stories are celebrated life stories of people as experienced or preserved in memory and often supported by physical evidence. For example, *Inakha*’s (Of the legend ‘*Inakha* and *Ghonili*’) spear can be found till today at Shenaküsa Village (Achumi. interview).

These narrative forms find space in folk community life as they attempt to give meaning to their existence by setting standards that is acceptable in the society. In Sümi context, the stories or narratives are told and transmitted generally by gifted narrators and elders in the evening by the kitchen hearth. A more formal setting for story-telling took place in *Morung*; a Naga word for 'Dormitory', which was built separately in Sümi tradition; *Apuki* (Boys Dormitory) and *Illiki* (Girls Dormitory). Story-telling was not merely amusement and entertainment for the folks. It was in these dormitories that the "history and traditions of the tribe and the particular village were taught" (Ao 10). These *Apuki* and *Illiki* functioned in the same manner as the *Arju* and *Tsüki* of the Ao Nagas; the "*Arju* was the equivalent of an Academy where the youngsters were governed by strict rules" (Ao 10), the *Kichiki* of the Angamis or the *Chumpo* of the Lothas. Teaching and learning took place in these dormitories like, singing songs, storytelling, dancing, weaving, battle tactics, bamboo and cane works, etc.

The act of narration is held sacred by Sümi folks as certain taboos are attached to it. For example, it is believed that these stories must be narrated in true spirit. The whole story should not be narrated because the narrator must give due respect to his forefathers and therefore leave out some portions which would make the listeners believe that the narrator knows less than his predecessors who narrated before him. This taboo is called '*Pikha Chini, Pimo Chini*' ('Taboo to narrate completely, taboo not to narrate'). Moreover, it was regarded as legacy passed down from forefathers and hence obliged to be re-told. If it was not re-told, it was believed that the person who knew the story but did not share, would meet early death. Even today, active tradition bearers like, H.S. Rotokha, Hokishe Yephthomi, and many others finds it duty bound to narrate the stories to whoever wishes to listen and learn.

## **1.2. SÜMI VALUES AND ETHICS IN SELECT FOLK ORAL NARRATIVES PERTAINING TO:**

### **1.2.1. TRADITIONAL BELIEF: OF HUMANS AND THE SPIRIT WORLD, BELIEF IN FATE, TABOO, COMMUNITY, AND ORIGIN OF THINGS**

Folk-oral narratives selected here are mostly ‘popular’ or ‘common’ ones because they represent Sümi Naga ethos, convey fundamental message of Sümi values and embodies the true spirit of Sümi beliefs. The reason of its being re-told many times over and its survival point to the meaning it has for the folks. Some key values and ethics found in select Sümi oral narratives can be discussed below.

#### **OF HUMANS AND THE SPIRIT WORLD**

Belief in the supernatural forms an integral part of Sümi worldview; a belief founded in the “universal apprehension that the world is governed by unseen forces and steered by unknowable laws”. (Jane Garry 323). These “unseen forces” are believed to be carried out by *Alhou* (Creator/Supreme God), *Kungumi* (heavenly/sky beings), *Tüghami* (evil spirit), and *Aghaw* (spirits). The “unknowable laws” are inexplicable natural events like earthquakes, appearance of rainbow, flood, etc. that is believed to teach and ennoble man. It is held as sacred and divine sanction of gods and spirits for governing the lives of the folks. These beliefs are important because the relevance of folk beliefs is “to understand why a particular individual or group of people would find such a text meaningful, worthy of attention, and deserving of repetition” (Oring 134).

In the story, ‘The Tale of *Anishe (Rhipsalis baccifera)* Flower’. The unexpected heavy rain compelled *Pheo* and his friends to take refuge in the woods. In order to let *Pheo* know that

*Nisheli* was killed on that spot where he was taking shelter, a particular flower acted strangely by covering only *Pheo* and not his friends. Further, *Nisheli* told *Pheo* in his dream that night about how she tried to shelter him. She also complained to *Pheo* for his action of cutting the strange flower with his spear to adorn his ears. When *Pheo* woke up and found traces of blood in his ears, it not only confirmed the truth of his dream but it also demonstrates the fluidity between reality and imagination in Sümi beliefs. The dream imagery in the story was necessary because it functions as a “fulfilment of a wish” (Freud 118) for both *Pheo* and *Nisheli* as desired by the folks. Folklore is a product of vigorous mental processes and an “expression of various longings, fears, aversions, or desires” (Ernest Jones 90). The tragic death of *Nisheli* was agonising and therefore the story teller had to invent something to comfort. So, when the story ends, there is a sense of fulfilment because truth has been revealed.

This supernatural action was necessary because ‘truth’ had to be revealed or known somehow so justice is served to innocent *Nisheli* because no one knew how and where *Nisheli* died. Thus, the story-teller had to introduce supernatural elements in the story. This suggests that Sümi believed in the moral order in the universe where changes in the status or positions of the human being is possible through divine intervention. Hence, human actions and attitudes need to be conscious of this spiritual realm and be conscientious, morally, and ethically right. . This is to believe that truth cannot be wished away or kept hidden. It is bound to come out even through supernatural means which makes the text meaningful. It also reflects that the folks understood that something was true because they chose it to be so because belief is “an indispensable ingredient of legend narration” (Degh 94). Further, in the myth of ‘The Magical Stone’, the route for Sümi migration is validated through the supernatural white rooster that flew out of the magical stone. It is believed that Sümi migrated following the direction of the white rooster.



The concept of ‘divine intervention’ can also be found in the same story through co-incidents and deceptions. *Pheo* happened to come to the same woods where *Nisheli* was killed and discovered the truth about the nature of *Nisheli*’s death. It was also co-incident that *Kutupa* chanced to overhear the secret plan between the lovers. Since the man knew about the lovers plan, he quickly thought of disguising himself. *Kutupa* did this as he was also in love with *Nisheli*. So when he came as *Pheo* and took her, *Nisheli* did not know it was really *Kutupa*. She did not realise that she was following *Kutupa* instead of *Pheo* because they were running away under the cover of darkness. In this way, co-incidents and deception play a very important role in the lives of the characters. These ‘interventions’ are crucial in Sūmi ethos because Sūmi folks consider divine assistance or hindrance in man’s life as revealed in this story.

Beliefs concerning spirits in human and animal forms is another Sūmi philosophical belief. Sūmi believed in the existence of many spirits; both benevolent and malevolent. These supernatural beings “more than once formed unions with mortals” (Hutton 192) as these beings called *Kungumi* were not remote beings but believed to have participated in the lives of the folks like in the story of ‘The Myth of a Heavenly Husband’, where the daughter all of a sudden told her parents that her husband was coming to finalise the marriage. The parents were shocked to hear this because she was not courted by any suitor. However, the daughter replied that a heavenly being was asking for her hand and asking them to prepare rice-brew and await him. In, ‘The Fairy Wife’, *Khaulipu* is a supernatural being who married a human being by the name of *Tsüipu*. She was a supernatural being because after the marriage ceremony, her parents instructed *Tsüipu* to carry her in a basket and asked him not to open the basket or take rest on the way until he reached home. However, as he carried his new bride, strange sounds began to come out of the basket and it grew heavier. At last, the basket became unable to be carried. So, *Tsüipu* left the basket and went to the village to call his brother to help him carry the basket. When they returned, they found an ugly looking *Muchupili* inside. *Muchupili* is an evil being

who took the form of *Khaulipu*. So, these *Kungumi* were like ‘Fairies’, who were “material and active beings” (Hutton 195). These *Kungumi* were benevolent as evident in this story. We are told that when the widow went to the fields, the lemon would transform itself into *Khaulipu* and complete all the household chores for the widow. And finally when it was time for the widow to return from field, the fairy would go back to its lemon form and remain in the basket. Thus, *Kungumi* were believed to help human beings in need and hence welcomed. That is why, parents often tell the children to keep the house clean as an invitation to *Kungumi*.

Throughout the story, such kind of transformations can be found. Firstly, there is *Muchupili*; an evil being posing as *Khaulipu* (*Tsüipu*’s new wife) and from whose grave came out *Thumsü* (*Rhus semialata*). Then, we are told that *Mushuthi* (Lemon) transformed into *Khaulipu*. After the death of *Khaulipu*, again *Tsüipu* married *Aghüghalho* who requested *Tsüipu* not to touch her roughly as she was re-born and re-formed: “*Niye xükithe lhokithe kemike ighono ibu kevalo*” (Lozhevi 39). Again from *Khaulipu*’s grave came out a bamboo tree/plant. Although these transformations are implausible, the folks accept it as “both sacred and true” because myths are “core narratives in larger ideological systems” (Oring 124). These supernatural beings had roles to play in the life of the folks and it had cultural meaning and hence their existence. For instance, talkative nature was discouraged as seen in *Thumsü* (*Rhus semialata*) originating from *Muchupili*’s (evil and talkative being). This particular wood make bursting sound like firecrackers when it is burned. Besides this, *Khaulipu*’s transformation to *Mushuthi* can be inferred as a representation of her tragic life. Here, the comparison is made to the bitter-sour taste of the citrus fruit.

Sümi also believed that certain people could possess mystical powers and could perform feats which ordinary humans could not. According to the story, ‘*Nisapa* and *Nisala*’, *Nisapa* was not an ordinary man because he was blessed with good fortune. He could catch crabs in the same spot where others have been and his hand sometimes came out with paddy

between his fingers. However, *Nisala*'s parents realised his mystical powers only after the tragic death of *Nisala*. This goes to show that a poor orphan could possess mystical powers or may possess personal worth or talent. Thus, bringing out a moral lesson on why one should not look down or frown upon someone based on economic or social position. Further, *Nisala*'s mother also had mystical ability to communicate to the dead through her dream. She asked *Nisapa* if they have met and married after life. *Nisapa* said that they were still unable to meet because there was an obstacle between them. The next morning, *Nisala*'s mother checked their graves and found a stick inserted between the graves which she took it out. The next night too, *Nisala*'s mother was able to communicate to *Nisapa* who told her that they have finally met. The dream represents ultimate fulfilment for both *Nisapa* and the listeners because the goal has been achieved through someone who formerly acted as an obstacle to it. These kinds of mystical powers were not only granted to humans but it was also blessed in animals and birds. This is apparent in a story called, 'How a Woman Transformed into a Taro', where the parents of the baby birds brought a large *Tapu* (Doyang River) stone to the boy.

## **BELIEF IN FATE**

Another important idea is the belief in fate. There is an inexplicable event in the story called, 'The Myth of how a Woman Transformed into Taro', about how the elder brother wanted to get the bigger bird for himself but only the smaller one came into his grasp. This is contrasted by the younger brother who caught the bigger bird when he had only tried to grab the smaller bird. In another tale called, 'The Story of the Two Fairies', the same thing happened. The two brothers would be visited at night by two fairies who would climb down from the *Atsükuchō* (a large sculpted wooden post at the entrance of the house). The elder one told the younger brother to catch hold of the ugly fairy while he would catch the beautiful one. But when the fairies arrived and they did as planned, the opposite happened. Thus, the elder brother

had to marry the less beautiful fairy. On the surface level, it appears as a metaphor for “sibling rivalry” (Kluckhohn 163) but on a deeper level, it demonstrates folk’s belief in destiny. The younger brother was destined for good fortune and hence irrespective of the elder brother’s action, nothing could be changed for the reason that fate was something irreversible for the Sümi. People frequently say, ‘*Akische lo küha*’ (Not written on forehead/‘Ill-fated’) when one is unsuccessful or fail to do something even after repeated attempts although psychologically, people turn to a belief in fate to reduce the anxiety associated with not knowing which helps them cope with the uncertainties of life. Hutton observed that this “idea of fate and destiny is very often attached to aghau” and this *aghau* “appears almost as soul” (Hutton 193). While one’s fate and destiny could be associated with *Aghaw* (spirit) as understood in phrases like, ‘*Aghaw no kuphu*’ (‘helped by spirit’) or “*Aghaw sakemi* (‘those possessed by spirit’) yet, for the Sümi, *Aghaw* (Spirit) and *Aghungu* (Soul) are different. To distinguish it in a simplistic way, the *aghaw* is a wandering and restless spirit while the *Aghungu* is usually calm and at peace. The belief in fate is tied to the espousal or the acceptance of fate. The injunction to accept one’s fate in the midst of inequalities, would deal with different levels of social unrest. Therefore, such a social value inscribed in a story promotes social order.

## TABOOS

Related to beliefs is folks’ dependence on taboos. Sümi word for ‘taboo’ is ‘*Chini*’ or ‘*Tüghapu chini*’ or ‘*Achinepu*’, which controlled and maintained the lives of the folks. “For all actions that were unacceptable, harmful to the interest and wellbeing of fellow beings” (Nekha 57) were considered ‘*Chini*’. Whether it was taboo against moving out of the house by back door for women or speaking, touching and eating before elders (‘*Pi chini, bu chini, chu chini*’) or the taboo that even extends to the act of narration, ‘*Pikha chini, pimo chini*’ (‘Taboo to narrate completely, taboo not to narrate’), it was this word that maintained folk’s conduct and

speech and sustained the values they believed in. The very word acted as a law since it was the last word for the Sümi because it had a social function “that exhibited both the latent and manifest functions that benefitted the individual and the society” (Hibo 1). Moreover, taboos were important because it served as guides to ethical living which was based on what they thought was ‘right’ and ‘proper’ in the society. It adhered to culture sanctioned actions where the folks need to conform to communal expectations. Just as myth may be looked upon “as a projection of the human mind, as a symbolic structuring of the world” (Honko 47), taboos also projects the inner working of the folk mind.

In the legend of ‘Inakha and Ghonili’, *Ghonili* moved out of her husband’s house through the back door when *Chevili*, second wife of *Inakha*, was expected to be brought home. *Ghonili*’s husband *Inakha* could not bear to see *Ghonili* leaving the house and hence blocked her way when she was about to step out of the house. With no option left, *Ghonili* moved out from the back door. Later in life, we are told that *Ghonili* died in childbirth because it was believed that if a woman moved out of her husband or father’s house by back door, she was doomed to die in child birth. This belief is rooted in a practice in Sümi Naga culture where the casket of a woman who die in child birth is taken out of the house by back door (Sema. interview). It was pronounced taboo for woman to die in child birth as the folks considered it to be an unnatural death. This kind of death was believed to be unclean and contagious. Therefore, young people and unmarried women were forbidden from attending such funerals. The important idea behind this taboo is that, proper care and treatment during child birth is important in Sümi culture because of the taboo surrounding death in child birth. This kind of taboo can also be found in the proper use of ornaments and costumes too. A person could not wear *Avikiyiphi* (male body-cloth with white patterns) when he had not killed *Mithun* and given feast to the village. It was believed that people would laugh at such a person and that would make the wearer sick.

In 'The Fairy Wife', *Khaulipu* was forbidden from entering the granary in her husband's absence. Nevertheless, she was compelled to enter the granary when womenfolk in the village insisted that she should prepare rice-brew since her husband was returning victoriously from war. Unfortunately, when she climbed up the ladder to the granary, the ladder broke and caused her death. What is important here is that *Tsüipu* knew that it was *Chini* for *Khaulipu* to step on the ladder because the ladder was made from *Thumsü* (*Rhus semialata*) which was transformed from *Muchupili*. It was *Chini* or *Achinepu* for *Khaulipu* but she could not observe it and therefore had to die. In another instance, *Khaulipu* and *Muchupili* went together to collect firewood. *Khaulipu* came back earlier than *Muchupili*. In order to kill *Muchupili*, *Tsüipu* asked her to enter the house from her back. However, *Khaulipu* asked her to come from the front instead but *Muchupili* replied, "I will listen to a man and not to a woman" and came inside from her back. So, *Tsüipu* killed her with a dao.

Further, in another myth called 'How a Woman Transformed into Taro', the chief intended to kill the young man while on community fishing to make it appear as accident. The choice of 'drowning' him was important because 'to die in water' meant '*Ghüi Kithi*' (unnatural death) where the dead body was buried outside the village. That is the reason why it was taboo to take clothes and ornaments of such person. Further, the god *Litsapa* in 'The story *Litsapa*', was an important god and therefore worshipped and propitiated by performing rituals two times a year, "*Ghuthu kini pinni cheghi*" (Achumi 46). It was performed right after sowing and before harvest. While performing this ritual, it was taboo to make noise or create loud sounds. People abstained from work and the priest or the head of the family would keep aside a plate of food and meat for *Litsapa*. Besides this, the folks often blew off the froth of rice-brew before they drank, as an offering, and uttered, '*Opaghi otsü, opaghi oje*' (to give you first, to let you drink first) (Achumi. interview) because whether it was food or drink, *Litsapa* was offered first.

In Sümi tradition, *Atsüsa* (dog's share) need to be given as evident in the story, '*Atsusa*'. When *Timi* (man) avenged the death of the dog's mother, the dog began to live with man. During hunting, it was believed that the insistent barking was necessary for an animal to be hunted down. Due to this belief, a limb of the hunted was kept aside as the share of the hound while the head went to the hunter and the rest of the meat was distributed among the villagers. There have been times in recent history when *Atsüsa* had even led to serious dispute between people as it was regarded as traditional right sanctioned by custom. It was taboo not to allocate a portion as *Atsüsa* because in the event, the hunter would not be blessed and so hunting would be a futile exercise. It was believed that the hunter was blessed because of '*Atsü kükümügha*' ('dog's blessing'). This taboo reveals Sümi attitude towards those who helped them; whether it was human or animal. It indicates that service rendered in need should not be forgotten and the favour must be returned. Likewise, friendship is also reciprocal for the Sümi. For instance, if a friend offers feast (*Küpülhükile*) (Rotokha. interview) to a friend, the friend must also do the same if he wants to show that he values his friendship in the same manner as his friend. Traditionally, the reciprocated feast must be bigger and better which means that a bigger pig or *Mithun* is killed in the feast. The same idea can also be seen in the story, 'The Sambhar and the Fish' where they decided to help one another in times of need. The fish would wash away Sambhar's footprints and the Sambhar would destroy the poison vine because man used it for fishing. Their friendship was possible because each one was ready to do something for the other.

Related to these kinds of taboos is the custom of uttering '*Kükümgha tsa*' (blessing words) while holding a new born for the first time. "*Kichimi kighini*" (elder's prayer) like '*Hau, mughapeni*' (May you be blessed!), "*Axu pushu, alho pushu peni-u*" / May you live long! (SABAK 22) need to be uttered while receiving a new born. It is believed that the prayers would be answered and it would have an effect on the new-born. Likewise, it is taboo to let a

stubborn person hold a new-born: “*amulo kuthomi ye anga pephe pechemo*” (Achumi 215). It is believed that the stubborn nature of the person would get transmitted to the child. In this way, words spoken while holding new-borns is significant. In the story, ‘*Khumtsa*, The Orphan’, when *Itepu* heard that *Pitheli* had given birth to a baby boy, he took a rooster and went to *Usüto* village where *Pitheli* was living at that time. On seeing the baby, *Itepu* exclaimed, “*Hauu, hino Kapo küsa shiniana hiwo*” to mean that he was happy for the new born would be a companion to his son *Kapo*. The important word here is ‘*küsa*’ (doom \*low-tone) because actually *Itepu* wanted to say ‘*küsa*’ (companion \*high-tone). But the wrong word came out of his mouth which was understood as bad omen. Therefore, it was believed that *Kapo*’s lineage did not grow much (Rotokha 43). The rooster was killed and the baby was named *Khumtsa* (literally meaning ‘bitter’) to indicate that he would live a bitter life as an orphan. In the past, people believed in meaningful naming because otherwise the name would be too heavy for the child and it would lead to *qaqhi* (over-power). Each name signified a person’s status in life. It could be determined by lineage, social status or economic position, nature of the child, etc.

Interestingly, people also gave special names to new-borns, before actual naming was carried out, in the belief that it would thwart off *Tüghami* (evil spirit). A boy child would be named *Khumtsa* (bitter) or *Akhakhu* (bitter tomato/*Solanum aethiopicum*) and a girl child as *Akhüshi* (slippery gourd/*Cyclanthera pedata*). The folks believed that by calling bitter names, *Tüghami* would not devour them. This idea is embedded on a belief that *Tüghami* was responsible for children’s death. Expressions such as, “*Tüghami no chuva*” (evil spirit has consumed) or “*Tüghami no sawuva*” (evil spirit has taken away) were used frequently to simplify those events that could be explained only in a transcendental way. The sense of foreboding on the birth of a child could be due to frequent cases of early child deaths. The fragility and precious birth of a child is addressed by such a story and the need to socially affirm



life is seen in the stories. Thus, taboos were instrumental in helping man to cope with life as the folks observed taboos in the hope to improve their situation.

These beliefs and taboos were revered because of the inviolability of *Apu-Asü Tsa* (myths or ‘ancestors beliefs’). People conformed to *Apu-Asü Tsa* since non-conformity would have adverse effect on them as understood from the discussion. Not only that, but it was also a belief system that was based on experience and therefore not questioned. For instance, *Litsapa* Ritual or *Kichimiye* was necessary because the action brought prosperity to the ritual performer. In this way, myth and ritual are “single phenomena” (Gaster 114) because according to Gaster, myth is ‘used’ while story is ‘told’ like the myth of receiving rain when a singing ritual was performed during ‘community fishing’ as seen in the story ‘How a Woman Transformed into a Taro’. ‘Community fishing’ was practiced at least once a year. It was an event where almost all the villagers participated. The only difference in this tale is that the Chief had another plan where the purpose was to kill the young man. By tradition, community fishing would be announced by the chief when there was scarcity of rain. Thus, it was a ritual to invoke rain although it can also be viewed as an escape from work and also to have a good time. Songs were sung during this time asking god for rain. It is still practiced today in some parts, especially in the *Tapu* (Doyang) River where a spectacular sight of men in hundreds make use of fish poison vine to fish. The thrashing of the vine is done rhythmically in two groups with a song; one following the other. Or that *Thumsü* (*Rhus semialata*) originated from *Muchupili* and therefore leaves a tingling taste in the tongue because *Muchupili* was a talkative ‘being’. Such stories “tells explicitly or implicitly almost without exception that its message is or was believed *sometime*, by *someone*, *somewhere*” (Degh 119). In a past oriented Sümi society, “one acts and judges others in accordance with the presumed wishes of one’s ancestors, that is, according to the paradigm of the past” (Dundes 83). This explains why Sümi believes in

conforming to tradition and observing words of ancestors as an authority which everyone must submit to.

## **COMMUNITY**

Issue of conformity to community can be found in the tale of 'How a Woman Transformed into Taro' which unmistakably depicts how society views a person's individual action which is different from the larger community. The young man was stoned to death while fishing as he defied societal norms by leading girls to himself. This became a routine and the villagers, headed by the chief, could not put up with it any longer. Thus, the village chief announced that everyone should come for community fishing. During the fishing, when the young man was coaxed into the water, the chief ordered each one to throw stone in the spot where the young man went in. Since the chief's word was final and binding on the villagers, it resulted in the death of the young man as intended. This story can be viewed as commenting on the moral values of a person on one level. However, at a deeper level it shows how a person was expected to conform to community standards. The death of the young man indicates that one will have to suffer the consequences of one's individual action. It was socially and politically to cause disturbance to the values imposed by social authority. The offender was stigmatised and often punished severely. So, when a person comes in conflict with the values upheld by the society, such stories are cited. When a person did not behave according to societal norms, it was necessary to give exemplary punishment because the folks needed "to maintain conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour" (Bascom 294). 'Stoning' here becomes a symbol of social disapproval.

If the young man's moral behaviour was the only issue in question in the previous cited story, on the other hand, there was a practice of planting sticks equal to the number of women one had taken, in a man's grave. The question of why, then, should the young man die when it

was celebrated and considered glory for some? This explains that the seat of power resided in the hands of the chiefs who could choose what was right and wrong as they had different means to validate their actions. It brings out the issue of abuse of power by *Akükau* because “he who has power can exercise his will, right wrongs, become ennobled, amass money and land, win women as prizes and social prestige” (Jack zips 7). Sümi sense of justice and fairness can be re-examined here because had it been an *Akükau* and not a common man as the ‘young man’ in the story, the ‘stoning’ would not have taken place. Thus, the story can also be seen as a protest against such persecution or unfair treatment meted out to common or ‘powerless’ people.

Another important aspect of this story is community living. Community involvement was a culture during harvest and in times of natural calamities in the past. Like the community fishing in the story, important events were celebrated together by the community. The existence of *Aloji* (work group) is another instance of community living as evident in many stories and songs. A person was known by the *Aloji* s/he belongs to. During harvest time, the *Aloji* would help each other because harvesting was not the sole responsibility of the owner of the field but every villager or members of the *Aloji* felt a shared responsibility towards it. When a villager dies, no one was allowed to go to the fields because it was believed that the soil of the grave would damage the crops. Such kinds of prohibition deterred the folks to go against it as Sümi would not “compromise on social cohesion and community living” (Nekha 60). The idea of community living benefitted the folks because it was a small community bound by strict traditions and customs.

## ORIGIN STORIES

A large number of Sümi narratives displays how things and values originated. These stories reflect that the folks created these narratives in order to comprehend their condition and

explain things that may improve their lives. These narratives focus on why something exists, how things originated or why something happens in a particular way.

In an aetiological tale called, the ‘Origin of *Lapu Xamunu*’, explanation of the origin of Lily flower can be traced when the last wife of *Tsüipu* named *Aghüghalho* liquefied like wax the moment she came out in the sun. From the liquid form came out a beautiful flower. This flower is called *Lapu Xamunu*. Origin stories of this kind can be found abundant in many folktales. A flower signifies beauty so if the origin of ‘flower’ is traced to a ‘woman’ then the Sümi concept of woman is one that stands for ‘loveliness’ and ‘beauty’.

In a Trickster Tale, ‘*Iki* and Tiger’, the tiger is fooled many times by *Iki*, an impish character with extraordinary wit. *Iki* is a Sümi ocitope, a man with a tail and known for trickery common to many Naga tribes. In Angami, it is called *Mache*, Lothas call it *Apfuho*, and the Rengmas refer to it as *Che*. Similarly, for the Aos it was *Alokba* who was the “proverbial numbskull” (Ao 111). *Iki* tricked the tiger by suggesting that the tiger’s pig was perfect to be used in a trap. Thus, the tiger killed the pig and kept portions of meat in the trap. In this way, *Iki* did not even spare the portions secretly left behind by the tiger like *Aloshi* (liver) and *Amichi* (pig fat). He even tricked both the leopard cat and tiger to carry him. The story reflects the need for intelligence in man’s life and shows how it could save someone from unwanted but avoidable troubles. Thus, it demonstrates folk’s idea of intelligence and further proves that one must live with the consequences of one’s foolish action.

In another folktale called ‘Why Leopard Cat live in *Lavela* (a deserted path), the tiger asked the leopard cat to keep watch on *Iki* but it let *Iki* escape. So, the tiger punched the leopard cat in anger and it fell into *lavela* never to be seen again. This is how leopard cat began to live in the wayside. Stories of this kind are narrated to provoke laughter but “beneath a great deal of humor lies a deeper meaning” (Bascom 290). The Leopard cat is a traditional symbol of fear. It is used as a means to frighten crying children because children are made to believe that it

lived somewhere not far from human path. So, the chances of it hearing the cries of children were within the realm of possibility. This belief is based on experience where leopard cat was reported to frequently take away chicken from their dwellings.

Again, in the myth of '*Litsapa*', the importance and value of hospitality is emphasized to the listeners. *Litsapa*, god of prosperity, came to the village where the two sisters were living. *Litsapa* came in the guise of an old man; ragged with sores all over his body. No one in the village welcomed him because of his appearance. Only the two orphaned sisters who were poor welcomed him. That year, the sisters harvested pumpkins whereas other villagers harvested grains into their granaries. *Litsapa* came again and blessed them by transforming their granary of pumpkins into grains and as a result they became prosperous. This story about the sisters' hospitality clearly indicate that hospitality and generosity was encouraged in the society. It echoes the value of treating strangers in a good manner and to offer what one has. This value was founded on a belief that angels and spiritual beings usually come in the form of strangers. The name, *Litsapa*, can be traced to an Ao deity, *Lijaba* because the name does not have any meaning in Sümi language. In some Sümi areas it was called *Kichimiye* (ancestor's ritual) but it was not the name of god. Rather, it referred to the ritual that was performed in order to propitiate *Litsapa*. Generosity was considered a virtue and therefore encouraged in the society as seen in the story. In Sümi culture, any guest must be respected and welcomed and treated in the best possible manner. For example, a guest is entertained with what the host can offer, even when that meant the last piece of meat left. However, on the other hand, it symbolises 'excess of giving' but to evaluate Sümi generosity is beside the point. Hence, the virtue of generosity is only discussed here. Elders often allude to '*Litsapa*' story to instil generosity in young minds since "one of the functions of myth is to provide a sacred precedent for present action" (Dundes 14).

Further, the origin of the sound of *Thochiu* bird is explained in a popular tale called ‘*Thochiu*’ which is about a man who transformed himself into a bird after getting trapped inside a cave. Whenever *Thochiu* tried to escape from the cave, a large slab of stone mysteriously shut him inside while it opened for his dog. *Thochiu* knew that there was no way for him to come out. Hence, it was said that, before the transformation took place, *Thochiu* told his wife to remember him each time she heard a bird singing, “*I-thochiu, i-thochiu, heyi, heyi, heyi*”. This was how the sound of *Thochiu* bird originated. Thus, ‘*Thochiu*’ is the name of the hunter and the bird as well. The site where people believe *Thochiu* got locked in has now been levelled for a football ground in Satakha Town. The significance of every aspect of nature is evident in the insistent call of the bird which is imbued with meaning for man-nature speaking.

In the same story, the origin of *Aheo* (harp) can be found. The story outlines how *Aheo* became a Sümi musical instrument. After her husband’s death, *Tusholi* (Yepthomi 41), the wife of *Thochiu*, kept singing passionately about how her husband used to hunt with his dog by playing *Aheo* which she made from a piece of bamboo. This was how *Aheo* became a traditional instrument that accompanied Sümi folksongs. An *Aheo* is an important traditional instrument in Sümi culture. It is said that there are certain taboos attached to the making of *Aheo*. When an *Aheo* does not produce any sound, ‘*igha phemülave*’, after its making then the maker would bear a mad child.

The story of ‘The Wicked Step-mother’ deals with just treatment of children. The wicked step-mother used to ill-treat her step-son by feeding him only with “*Aghatsa yithi*” (sour wild fruit) (Achumi 214) saying that it was *Akhi*’s (local bird) breast-meat but the father was unaware of her action. One day, while the father was working in the field, he heard his son singing, “*Akhi-o akhi, no lejo no vi yeo. No müsü no qhimboi*” (Oh *Akhi*, you have a beautiful voice but your breast-meat taste sour). The father became suspicious and asked his son the meaning of his song and the boy narrated the story. In this way, the father came to know the

mischievous action of his second wife. This story has a variant in Ao Naga folktale re-told as ‘Another Story of a Wicked Step-Mother’ (Bendangangshi 82). So, the wickedness of step-mothers was a common Naga experience and ill-treatment of step-children a common practice. These kind of stories appealed to the folks because it functioned as a lesson on just treatment of children irrespective of whether it was one’s own children or step-children which reflects their empathy towards such defenceless children.

In the ‘Story of Three Brothers’ (*Tumumi*) (Sheyepu 47) a woman gave birth to three sons in a miraculous way. They were named *Timi* (man), *Tüghami* (evil spirit), and *Angushu-u* (tiger). After the death of their mother, they decided to divide family property and part ways. *Timi* decided to stay at home, *Tüghami* in the cliffs and beneath the earth and inside the caves while *Angushu-u* chose to live in the forest. Both *Timi* and *Tüghami* cultivated fields but *Tüghami*’s field harvested abundant crops while *Timi*’s field could not produce anything even when he had cultivated in the most fertile area. So, *Timi* became curious to know the reason behind his brother *Tüghami*’s blessings. *Tüghami* told *Timi* that certain rituals had to be performed in order to propitiate the spirits. This was how rituals originated. *Tüghami* taught *Timi* how to observe *Aki Chine* (house ritual), *Alu Chine* (field ritual), *Apine tsala* (ritual days). After teaching these rituals, *Tüghami* also gave his brother *Timi* the following *Aghas* (witchcraft/necromancy): *Atumu Gha*, *Müthü Gha*, and *Putupuno Gha* (Sheyepu 47). *Müthü Gha* is the ability to see things or to let someone die. *Putupuno Gha* is the ability to face *Tüghami* (evil Spirit), predict future, and heal the wounded afflicted by *Tüghami*. The folk believed that performing these rituals was necessary for prosperity in crops, acquiring valuable items, blessings in any activity they undertook. A variant of this story can also be found in the story ‘Spirit, Tiger and Man’ (Art and Culture 52) and another variant in transformation tale called ‘How Man, God and Tiger went their Separate Ways’ (Ao 103) but there is no mention of rituals in these stories.

‘The Origin of *Axone*’ discusses the story of *Axone* (fermented soya bean paste wrapped in *Aküghü* (plantain leaves) or *Tsüzüküghü* (*Phrynium marantaceae*). It talks about an orphan who was given just a handful of cooked soya bean for lunch in the field. Since it was too less, he thought of not eating it at all and left it on a hay stack. Days later, he found that the soya beans had fermented and he liked it that way. That was how *Axone* became a delicacy for the Sümi. There are several stories of orphans sleeping with pigs, eating only taro or pumpkin, drinking the last squeeze of rice-brew and so on. Thus, the plight of orphans were real. It also demonstrates the idea of good things originating through such people. Traditionally, preparation of *Axone* was a female role, “*Kipitimi ye axone xechemo*” (Kati 12) (preparation of *Axone* is prohibited for men) because a male who performed the task would be considered sissy. It is a traditional idiom that prohibits men from carrying out this work. Further, while *Axone* is being prepared, people are prohibited from eating sour fruits as the acidity in the fruits would get transferred into *Axone*. Firewood used in kitchen during this time is also important because the folks believe that it would have direct effect on *Axone*. Accordingly, good wood, which means wood that lasts longer, is used.

The idea of *Mighimi* (orphan) can also be established in ‘The Wicked Step-mother’ because step-children were also included in *Mighimi* group who belonged to the lowest status in Sümi society. Even in ‘*Khumtsa*, The Orphan’, *Khumtsa* was expected to be subservient and hard-working because he was an orphan. However, he turned out to be playful and mischievous. He did not listen to his parents and many a time he was punished by making him sleep on hay stack or compelled to seek shelter at others’ place. Sometimes when he could not find a place, he would sleep among cows and pigs, and braved the chilling night sleeping outdoors without wearing any clothes. One night, he also slept with a lion but it did not kill him because when the whiskers of the lion brushed his nose, *Khumtsa* started to sneeze loudly. The sound of his repeated sneeze frightened the lion and made it run away. Such stories give



voice to the powerless by enabling them to pose against the ill-treatment. '*Mighimi*' was an inclusive term to mean orphans, landless, children born out of wedlock, and the poor. Through these kinds of stories, the folks emphasized the need for just and not preferential treatment. The folks perceived it to be wrong to ill-treat step-children because of their orientation towards values that support just treatment. Animal stories like, '*Thochiu*' also confirm to this kind of benevolent attitude that extend even to animals, birds and nature.

Similarly, an origin story can also be found in the myth of 'How a Woman Transformed into Taro'. As the villagers dug the ground in search of the grandmother, they found the top of grandmother's head underneath. So, they took it out and sliced the top of it and left it on the *Ayiku* (terrace/slope in the field). When they returned the next day, they found that the grandmother's head had turned into a taro. That is why, it is believed that taro leaves and bulbs give ticklish sensation in the mouth because it was transformed by a human being.

These otherwise unbelievable stories enjoyed society's approval because "narrations depend upon a measure of community acceptance" (Oring 123). Without "community acceptance", the stories would not survive. It would not survive because when a story did not enjoy "community acceptance", it would not be re-told by the people and hence would not be transmitted.

### **1.2.2. PRACTICE: CULTURAL ORNAMENTS AND COSTUMES, BRIDE PRICE, PRIVILEGING OF MALE CHILD, INHERITANCE**

Survival of cultural identity is directly related to its preservation because when it is not practiced and upheld, it would result in the loss of one's identity. For the Sümi Naga, each traditional ornament and costume had meaning for the wearer/user and therefore need to be used according to appropriate or traditional way of usage. For instance, a particular pattern in

a shawl should always be at the bottom and therefore cannot be worn upside down. This is so because every pattern or design have specific meaning in Sümi culture.

In, 'The legend of Inakha and Ghonili', when *Ghonili* said that an armlet made of ivory could not be worn together, she meant 'ivory' to signify *Chevili* and her status since both of them were of '*aji lono ighikemi*' (of noble descent). She believed it was unthinkable for them to live together. This was so because *Chevili* was the daughter of the famed warrior, *Hoshepu*, and *Ghonili* was the daughter of *Nikhena Asumi* of Philimi village (Achumi. interview). Both their fathers were not only great chiefs but were also skilled warriors. This resulted in their inability to stay in the same house as wives of *Inakha*, the son of *Ghukhe* Achumi, even when polygamy was practiced. An ivory armlet was not worn double simply because the friction could result in breaking. However, on a cultural level, it could mean 'extravagance' because ivory was a symbol of wealth and also because *Ghonili* had to keep her noble status intact by not stooping down to being '*Anipu Atou*' (first wife).

Traditional ornaments for women like, *Achiku* (neck-piece), *Aküsa* (armlet), *Asapu* (bangles and bracelet), *Akütsü Kükha* (head-gear), *Tsökoli* (earring), etc. were worn not only to adorn oneself but as social markers, indicating the social status of the wearer. For instance, only rich women and wives of chiefs could wear ivory and *Achiku*. Female ornaments were also worn to protect or defend womenfolk from enemies. (Sumi Totimi Hoho 18). Since headhunting was a norm in the past, experience of life and death was more real and danger always imminent. Hence, ornaments were worn for protection against such life threatening situations. Moreover, *Akichhelochi*; an elaborate beadwork/cowrie sewn all over a hand woven knee length skirt was worn to protect women's chastity from ill meaning men so that women's purity is not violated. Besides, female ornaments were important in Sümi culture because these expensive items could be inherited by female; land and other property being taboo to be given away to women.

Likewise, in the same story, *Ghonili* refused *Sümixi*'s proposal when he came normally dressed. However, she agreed to marry *Sümixi* after he came the next day fully attired in an 'Aghünanu' (warrior garb). *Ghonili*'s acceptance of *Sümixi* only after seeing him in *Aghünanu* reflect Sümi ethos of re-marrying someone equal to previous husband or lover besides the cultural significance of *Aghünanu*. *Ghonili* believed *Sümixi* resembled *Inakha* in his *Aghünanu* and therefore found him fit to be her husband. The impact of *Aghünanu* on the mind of the folks was real in the past. *Aghünanu* was highly valued as it commanded respect and honour in Sümi culture. It was a sign of man's valour and skill in a society where bravery and talent was measured according to the number of heads one had taken. This is evident in the story, 'Khumtsa, The Orphan', where the warriors replied proudly that the enemies were killed by "the man who usually kills" on being asked the identity of the warrior by the villagers. Thus, *Khumtsa* was celebrated because of his prowess in headhunting. It is believed that there is a flat stone named after him where *Khumtsa* used to rest while coming back from raids. This stone is called 'Khumtsa Ghazü' and can be found at Nunumi village. In another story, 'Nisapa and Nisala', the villagers were disappointed when *Nisapa* came to the village without wearing *Aghünanu*. Nevertheless, when he came the next morning attired in *Aghünanu*, all the villagers stayed back from going to the field.

This *Aghünanu* include *Avabo* and *Aghachommhi* (a male head gear made of bear fur and hornbill feathers), *Amülaküxa* (a sash made of goat hair), beaded *Ashola* (a small loin patch of cloth), *Akühahu* (ivory armlet), *Ausükükha* (gauntlet), *Aminihu* (male neck piece made of bore tusk), etc. These ornaments were not only worn for beautification but had culture specific meaning. For instance, the use of three *Aghachommhi* (hornbill feather) in Sümi male head gear have meaning in relation to its usage; "akiqi ani" (Achumi 75). According to Hekhevi Achumi, the front feather signifies chieftainship or wealth. The right one signifies that the wearer had

given 'Feast of Merit' and the left one is a symbol of bravery. Thus, it was worn accordingly only by chiefs, the rich and the warriors.

*Aghūnanu* was a product of headhunting custom that was primarily practiced for defending village territory. The raids were necessitated as each village existed independently and the chiefs would often want to expand the boundary of their territory and hence the constant raids. Through this, it can be understood that the folks viewed people who go bravely after what they want as being more successful than people who try to live safely.

The use of ornaments and costumes also reveal a culture that specified who could wear what and not as "myths provide a valid justification for obligations and privileges" (Honko 47). Although there was no known *Chini* or prohibition from wearing a particular shawl yet when culture did not approve, it was considered ethically wrong to wear. For instance, it was believed that people would make fun at such people who did not wear or use traditional costumes and ornaments according to one's status. The laughter would then cause sickness to the wearer. Again, a male shawl called *Avikiyiphi* could be worn only by those who have killed *Mithun* or given *Feast of Merit* and this privilege could not be passed on to children. Except for *Aküka* (chieftainship), nothing is hereditary. The same goes for female wrap-around skirt, *Avikiyimini*. It was worn by a female whose father or husband was a chief because in the past, only the chiefs' daughters and wives could wear such valuable weaves. Thus, it can be inferred that dress and ornaments were used as symbols, a symbol of one's status so as to identify people according to one's social standing.

## **BRIDE PRICE**

The practice of bride-price in Sümi culture can be found in many stories but it is more elaborate in the story, 'The Fairy Wife'. When *Tsüipu* asked for re-formed *Khaulipu*'s hand in marriage, the woman who was keeping her asked him to bring "*Shohusü pikhi ngo shohusü*

*khumu*". (Lozhevi 40) as *Ame* (bride- price). *Shohusü pikhi* is a traditional mortar made of large *Shohusü* (rare wood). While *Shohusü Khumu* is a traditional pestle made from the same wood. It was used to pound rice, oilseed, corn, *Asü* (yellow millet), *Aghü* (Italian millet or *Chenopodium murale*), etc. This *Ame* was special because the wood, *Shohusü*, was not an ordinary wood but rare to find. *Tsüipu* was a hardworking and skilful person so he could manage to bring them to the woman and marry re-formed *Khaulipu*. Hence, the story articulate that *Ame* was asked to test a groom's physical ability, resourcefulness and such other skills that would prove valuable in life.

Bride-price is called *Ame* (low-tone) in Sümi language, which is understood as 'worth' or 'value' while 'price' is *Ame* (high-tone). *Ame* (bride price) primarily connotes woman's virtue, skills and purity and practised as a tool to test man's skills. The importance of *Ame* can be understood in Sümi value of woman. *Ame* cannot be asked indiscriminately but according to the value of the would-be bride. This 'value' was determined fundamentally by woman's purity, intelligence, grace, resourcefulness and skills and symbolises Sümi notion of why woman should be valued. To understand this tradition, it is important to identify Sümi concept of ideal woman which can be traced in the legendary character of *Ghonili*. She was beautiful, virtuous, intelligent, hard-working, and graceful.

In, 'The Legend of *Inakha* and *Ghonili*', *Ghonili*'s intelligence is reflected in the way she communicated with *Inakha* through her song which saved *Inakha*'s life in the story. This song is important because it is a song where *Ghonili* communicated to *Inakha* that he should take different route so that he may not be killed and it saved *Inakha*'s life. Although, *Inakha* and *Ghonili* were divorced, *Ghonili* had to let *Inakha* escape unharmed because she loved their child, *Visheli*, dearly and did not want her to become an orphan. Communication through songs were common and it was instrumental in bringing "peace, blessing or enmity and bloodshed to the individual or the community." (Jamir 4).

It can also be found in the scene where *Sümixi* stayed back while pretending to be off to the field in order to observe *Inakha* and *Ghonili*'s conduct in his absence or what might transpire out of the meet. *Inakha* and *Ghonili* were formerly husband and wife until *Inakha* fell for another woman called *Chevili*. So, even when *Ghonili* was his wife, *Sümixi* wanted to find out whether the two still had feelings for each other. *Sümixi* peeped in from the bamboo wall but *Ghonili* was an intelligent woman and she instinctively knew something was irregular. Not only was she intelligent but *Ghonili* was also a virtuous woman. Thus, she refused *Inakha*'s offer to drink from his brew-mug. Spying and pretence in the story reflect folk's search for truth. It was used mainly as a means of finding out the real nature of things. When one was not sure about something or desired to know the whole truth, they snooped on one another or disguised themselves.

Her intelligence is further displayed in her action of asking only *Azühukughubo* or *Azühukughupo* (broken bamboo water carrier). The 'bo' in the former word suggest a 'container' and the later could mean the sound 'po' while breaking bamboo. Some believe that *Ghonili* took "*api küsü*" (bamboo stick) (Achumi. interview) and not *Azühukughupo*, when *Inakha* asked her to take anything she wanted from the house. In addition to this, some narrators described *Ghonili* collecting every variety of grain by saying, "*Aza pape, aza pape*" (follow the mother, follow the mother), into the *Azühukughubo*. What is important here is the Sümi idea of taking away blessings. By taking the *Azühukughubo*, it was believed that she took away all the blessings or that the grains followed the mother. This appears implausible but "in a legend, the question of truth must be entertained even if that truth is ultimately rejected" (Oring 125). *Ghonili*'s rejection of material things and choosing something immaterial but more valuable like the *Azühukughubo*, here convey the importance of intellectual quality.

Another instance of *Ghonili*'s character can be found in the game of *Püxakuxu* (Naga jump; a female game to test endurance and grace). Her grace comes out clearly when she

emerged victorious in *Püxakuxu*. *Ghonili* and *Chevili* were made to compete with each other by *Inakha* in this game. As *Inakha* watched the two women compete, he realised his loss for marrying *Chevili* who lost the game to *Ghonili*. *Püxakuxu* is a female sport where the players must jump with both feet touching backsides and the one who jumps the last is declared winner. While playing the game, a girl need to loosen her hair bun and wear knee length wrap around skirt. This shows that for the Sümi, a woman's beauty was defined by long, lustrous hair and fine calves. This game is played primarily to test woman's gracefulness because the folks believe that a woman without grace would jump hurriedly and wear out soon in such a game. *Ghonili's* hardworking nature can be seen in the manner in which she worked day and night when *Chevili* was to be brought home. Further, her prosperous life while with *Inakha* and also with *Sümixi* indicate that she was a hard working person since prosperity was the result of physical labour in the past. This personal attribute of *Ghonili* was something to be admired and hence celebrated in the story. Hard work was emphasised because Nagas, in general, led a relatively hard life. Living in the cold hills required more physical labour to produce crops. Moreover, the practice of headhunting aggravated their situation. People worked hard all days except on days when rituals were to be performed. They worked from morning till evening but there are no stories that complain about their labour. Rather, they sang as they worked in *Aloji* (work group). The number of granaries signified hard work and so for the Sümi it has special connotation because hardworking household had abundant food. Hardworking nature is also highlighted in 'The Legend of *Nisapa* and *Nisala*'. The parents of *Nisala* regretted their disapproval of *Nisala* and *Nisapa's* marriage when they saw the way *Nisapa* chopped firewood for them and also in the manner in which he effortlessly carried *Laküthükisü* (large wood used in building house) and went ahead of them.

The practice of *Ame* is also relative to one's social and economic condition as seen in the story, 'The Legend of *Nisapa* and *Nisala*'. *Nisapa* thought it would be impossible for him

and *Nisala* to catch crabs together because he was an orphan while *Nisala* came from a prosperous family. In the past, it was not socially possible for orphans to talk to rich people let alone befriend or court them. Surely, *Nisala*'s parents despised *Nisapa* when he came to seek their daughter's hand in marriage. This is apparent in the story when her parents asked *Nisala* to feed him from *Sadakhu* or *Aukümtsübo* (bamboo hand washing bowl) which was seen as a symbol of contempt. Consequently, *Nisala* had to marry someone else much against her wishes which resulted in her death. Earlier an 'orphan' known as '*Mighimi*' was a term to define someone who do not have parents; usually a father or one who was landless. Without a father, an orphan was a 'nobody' until he finds an adoptive father and without land a man did not really belong. '*Mighimi*' like *Nisapa* had to face such situation because of his inability to pay *Ame* according to the wish of *Nisala*'s parents.

For the Sümi, the importance of *Ame* (bride-price) was paramount in marriage. Due to the importance accorded to this practice, many stories as discussed, have carried *Ame* as part of their narratives because one of the functions of folklore is "validating culture" (Bascom 292). Stories reveal the significance of existing culture and the need for its preservation. In order to live out or observe these practices that was sanctioned by tradition, it was essential to express them and therefore narratives often carry such messages. It was preserved in collective memory and re-enforced in the day-to-day lives of the folks because folklore is "an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture" (Bascom 298). Even a supernatural being provided 'goats' as bride-price to the bride's family in the story, 'The Heavenly Husband'.

As stated in the first chapter, there are four types of *Ame* and for each type there were specific items to be asked and given. It was determined mainly by one's lineage, social standing, skills, and purity. Lineage depended on whether one was from, '*Kükami lagha*' (royal bloodline) or not. And social standing was determined by wealth. 'Wealth' meant bountiful crops which also stood for hard work. A woman also needed to be skilful in weaving, pounding,



thrashing, etc. Beside these attributes, moral purity in personal life was crucial. A woman was expected to lead a clean life free from scandal and dishonour. Thus, *Ame* was asked accordingly. Yet, it is to be admitted that, this ethic of *Ame* (bride-price) in Sümi oral tradition has been misplaced in our day. While it was asked traditionally appropriate to woman's virtue, social status and wealth, skills and most importantly moral purity, *Ame* is now asked indiscriminately just as it has been voiced out in some stories and songs that outlines the disparity between the rich and poor. An instance of which can be poignantly understood in 'The Legend of *Nisapa* and *Nisala*'. *Nisala*'s parents disapproved *Nisapa*'s proposal because he was poor. This conflict was resolved at the end by the death of *Nisala*. The tragic end in the story show collective resolve to undo the 'wrong' and to do the 'right' thing as they perceive it. While it is important to uphold cultural practices yet *Ame* need to be understood in its true spirit because the implication of economic inequality can be disastrous. Marriages based on wealth or material prospect would only have negative outcome. In the past, 'wealth' could have been held important because it was the only determining factor of one's status. Today, there are more important factors that could determine *Ame* like, education, career, and professional skills, intellectual compatibility beside universal virtues expected of an honourable person.

## **PRIVILEGING MALE CHILD**

In a patriarchal Sümi society, a male child is of great value and therefore the absence of a male child in the family means infertility. A girl child is well received but 'she' is not 'counted'. For example, while counting the number of households in a village, the household of a widow who has no male children does not figure in the counting. Such household is 'added' at the end as '*Chimemi sü no*' (including widow's household) and not 'counted' along with the rest of the household. Due to this, male responsibility is more in the family and society. In the story, '*Khumtsa*, the Orphan', while *Pitheli* was still pregnant with *Khumtsa*, her husband

named “Kivigho” (Rotokha 43) met sudden death. As was the custom, *Itepu*, brother of *Kivigho*, had to marry his sister-in-law but he planned to marry her only if she gives birth to a baby boy. *Itepu* wanted *Pitheli* to give birth to a boy child not only to be a companion to his only son *Kapo* but also because a male child was valued more than the female.

A male child is preferred because Sümi, along with the rest of Naga tribes, follows patriarchal lineage and hence every father “wanted a boy to carry on his name” (Iralu 26). It was a common practice among Sümi Nagas to marry brother’s wife in the case of death of the brother. It was not considered incestuous but rather a responsibility. In addition, the practice could also be caused by economic reasons as the orphaned children would bring in extra workforce which meant extra harvest. However, the important aspect of this practice was the responsibility of the brother to look after the children left behind by his deceased brother. In the past, life of an orphan was hard, people looked down on them and they were neglected in the society and hence the uncle rescues, in most cases, the children from this misery. This was precisely the reason why *Itepu* had to marry *Pitheli* in the story. Most importantly, a male child was preferred because land was the only valuable item for the Sümi Nagas and this land was passed on through the male lineage alone. Therefore, if a man did not have a male child then his entire land would be passed on through his male relatives.

## **INHERITANCE**

In the story of ‘The Blessed Stone’, an old man who was on his dying bed told his youngest son that his other two brothers have been looked after in his life but not him. So, the worried father decided to give his youngest son everything that was in the house including the house itself. Thus, the blessed stone, ‘*Aküümügha Tu Lipha Ghili*’ (Zuheto 82), that could double the paddy dried on it, which the old man owned became the youngest son’s property. The story is important because it reflects Sümi idea on inheritance. For the Sümi, the youngest son

traditionally gets parents' house as similarly identified by Shikhu in his book, "the parents' house is generally owned by the youngest son" (32). It is understood that elder ones were believed to have been "*Apukhu-Awu shivetsua*" (had enabled them to stand on their feet). The youngest one was seen to be vulnerable and hence parents' home traditionally became the youngest son's share. In Sümi tradition, inheritance of parents' property takes place only after the death of both parents. Even in the event of the death of both parents, it was considered taboo to speak about dividing family property. Thus, the one who expresses first about dividing family property was given the most fertile land because it was believed that the person would have a short life (Rotokha interview). It was also taboo to choose or select according to one's choice or to make a claim. Besides, it was considered ethical to divide the property in such a way that the youngest male was given parents' house. It was based on the idea that the elder ones have already established themselves with the help of parents.

In the same story, the origin of migration of Naga tribes can also be established. After the death of the father, the two elder brothers took turns to dry their paddy on the magical stone while the youngest one was not given a chance. This saddened the youngest brother who began to devise plans to destroy the stone. One day, when he had collected enough dry leaves of *Akinibo* (*Perilla frutescens*), he smeared the leaves on the stone and finally burned it. When the stone burst, a piece of stone went towards *Tukah* (Japfu Mountain) which points to Angami and Chakesang Nagas. Another piece stayed on the same place. The last one came out in the form of a white rooster and flew towards *Tapu* (Doyang River). Believing this to be an omen, they decided to migrate according to the direction of the scattered stones. This was how the eldest brother migrated towards *Tukah*, the middle brother stayed back in the village and the youngest brother migrated towards *Tapu* River who were believed to be the Sümi Nagas. It was believed that earlier, Angami, Chakesang, Sümi, Lotha, and Rengma came from the same family. They were believed to have lived together in a village called Khezhakeno because

“legend has it that most of the Naga tribes once settled in this village before dispersing to other parts” (Lucy 2).

In this way, each major narrative genre, whether it is ‘Folktale’, ‘Myth’ or ‘Legend’, fits into folk belief and culture. It not only reflects their artistic talent but more importantly validates their worldview and attitudes. It not only influences the way they think about themselves and of others and things but is also effective in forming their values and ethics. Thus, oral narratives are embodiments of a culture’s value system that is based on timeless tradition, custom and experience.

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## Chapter IV

### VALUES AND ETHICS IN SÜMI FOLKSONGS

#### 1.1. Introducing the Sümi Folksong

##### 1.1.1. Origin and Transmission

##### 1.1.2. Types

#### 1.2. Folksongs Negotiating Values

#### 1.3. Sümi Values and Ethics in Select Songs

##### 1.3.1. Songs Reflecting Taboos and Beliefs

##### 1.3.2. Songs Revealing Attitude towards Nature

##### 1.3.3. Sümi Ideals in Songs

##### 1.3.4. Enforcing Work Ethic

#### 1.1.1. ORIGIN AND TRANSMISSION

‘Folksong’ is known in Sümi language as ‘*Apu-Asü Le*’. ‘*Apu-Asü Le*’ literally means songs of the ‘fathers’ and ‘grandfathers’. Hence, ‘folksong’ for the Sümi can be translated as ‘Ancestor’s Song’. ‘Folksong’ is called ‘*Apu-Asü Le*’ since it is a song that belong to the past, which has its place in the oral tradition of the people and remains only in oral form. It forms an important part in Sümi oral tradition because it represents the authentic expression of the folk. In a sense that, it is an expression without inhibitions, as the folks sang what they felt.

‘*Le*’ or ‘*Ale*’ is generally a ‘song’. Poetry is called ‘*Leshe*’; a compound of two words ‘*Le*’ (shortened form of *Ale*) and ‘*She*’. ‘*Le*’ is, as mentioned earlier, a ‘song’ and ‘*She*’ can be translated as ‘praise’ or ‘honour’. However, it can also mean the act of speaking out the lyrics by a singer because folksongs were traditionally sung in groups with one of the member saying the words aloud.

*Hoho-u* is the one who knows the song and as such is the lyrics pronouncer. While other singers sustain the song with sounds such as, *o*, *ho yi*, *he yi*, etc., the *Hoho-u* pronounce the words for the singers. Typically, bass leads the song as well as pronounce the lyrics (Yeptho.



interview). Bass is known as *Hocho* or *Aho*, Tenor is called *Hezü* or *Sükiqhe*, Alto is *Vekütha* or *Süküda* and Soprano is known as *Vejo*. Some songs are sung using only three parts without Soprano.

Songs are “ordinarily referred to by their first line” (Hutton 362). So, the title of each song is usually the first line of a song or poem. Nonetheless, some song titles take major characters from the song itself like names of warriors, ‘*Ratshamu Ghü Tüngü*’ (‘The Song of Ratshamu’s Warrior Spirit’) or the theme of the song as in, ‘*Amu Kikini Losü Le*’ (The Song of a Brother’s Farewell’).

As with all folksongs, variations can be found in Sümi folksongs too. A particular Sümi folksong can have many variations because it is not only a genre that have opportunities for shifts and alterations. The variations are also possible because of variables like, dialect variations, change in the feast giver, or modification in the setting of the song. In Sümi language, there are two significant dialect variation; the one spoken in the Doyang Valley and another of the Tizü Valley. These dialect variations can be largely attributed to migration that was vigorously practiced by the Sümi. When majority of them moved upwards towards Tizü valley and there was increase in population and area, their dialect shifted while the folks in the Doyang valley retained the original language. Most folksongs were sung in the dialect spoken in the older settlement in Doyang Valley and therefore it is unintelligible for most Sümi, and may often result in misinterpretation. Moreover, variations occurred because folksongs belong to a ‘living culture’ where the songs are constantly re-shaped according to a change in folk values and context that makes up its character.

For the Sümi, folksongs can be composed by anyone and it belongs to the community as a whole and hence not credited to any individual composer in Sümi tradition. The singing of folksong is an indispensable part of Sümi life. It is sung with the accompaniment of *Aheo* (harp) and loud ululations for entertainment, for work in the fields or at home, on festivals,

during jungle clearing, to honour someone, to remember someone or some event and also during Feasts. In general, the songs are composed according to the context by talented composers. Musically, it can be understood that the rhythm and lyrics of work songs like, *Luxa Le* (Weeding Song) and *Thihe Le* (Threshing Song) are composed to be sung in the fields. While songs like *Lejo Le* (Recreational Song) have slow tempo and are to be sung at home and during festivals. In addition, some songs are an extension of folk narratives.

The origin of folksongs can be traced mostly to Feasts of Merit in Sümi oral tradition. The singing of folksongs was essential during Feasts of Merit like, *Aphiküsa and Shikusho* (Feast of Prosperity), *Inamiküsa* (Feast of Guest), *Küpülhükile* (Feast of Friendship) and *Agha-Alu Loji Küsa* (Feast of Birds), *Aghü Puqhi* (Warrior Feast) (Sema. interview).

In Sümi tradition, these feasts “signified friendship with one another and honour to the donor” (Shikhu 22), while providing the folks to socialise and maintain unity. It was also an opportunity to display one’s bravery, generosity and wealth. Economically, feasts are often viewed as “redistribution of wealth” (Smith 166). However, it can also be understood as events that provided social interaction and participation in the society. Everyone was either singing or dancing, partaking in traditional games, etc. It was an important element of a culture that accorded respect to a person according to the number of feasts one has given. Example of which is evident in a phrase, ‘*Ghuthu lakhi Aphisa keno kiu pi ani kea*’, meaning that one should not act or speak proudly when one has feasted only once. During these feasts, people abstained from work and enjoyed the feast eating and drinking while singing songs. Songs were intricate part of feasting and since some of the feasts stretched for days, new songs would have to be composed in order to sustain for long duration.

Songs were sung and learnt in the dormitories called *Apuki* (boys dormitory) and *Illiki* (girls dormitory) like the *Arju* and *Tsuki* of the Ao Nagas. The songs were mostly propagated and transmitted through continuous singing in these dormitories. Then the songs learnt in the

dormitories were dynamically sung in the fields, during festivities and at home. Teaching and learning process of which was through ‘participation’ that was carried out as a socio-cultural duty. It was the duty of the older generation to teach the younger generation different songs they could remember. The older group passed on their knowledge to the younger group because a “song becomes a folksong (only) when it begins to be passed along and rephrased or used by others for whom it also functions as a way of articulating shared attitudes or feelings” (Toelken 147). These “shared attitudes and feelings” is instrumental in what Elliot Oring calls, “cumulative modifications” (10) of the songs. When it was re-sung, the singers picked the relevant materials and modified whatever they found was necessary to suit the context. For instance, a song sung during the *Feast of Merit* of Mr A could be sung in the Feast of Merit of Mr B but naturally the names of the feast giver and the kind of honour would be changed. In this way, certain aspects of the songs gets transformed when it was re- sung. Some songs survived while some perished because “if a song is to continue, a generation must find something in it worth continuing while altering aspects which are no longer consonant with its values and beliefs” (Oring 10). In the process of singing these orally transmitted songs, some are forgotten while others get modified or changed.

According to a Sümi legend, *Holo*, believed to be the first progenitor of Sümi tribe, told his son *Igha* to use his parents’ name (*Holo* and *Illi*) in the songs as constant reminder. The inclusion of their names to songs was founded on an idea of ‘memory’ and ‘nostalgia’ that would set the mood and tone for many folksongs that would be sung later. This is the reason why we find many Sümi folksongs opening in this manner, “*Holo Holo no illi li*” or “*Ishe Lojilimi*”. So, the reference to progenitors like, *Holo*, *Illi*, *Ishe*, et al, should not be equated or misunderstood with the sounds, “iho, uno, u, etc.” They cannot be thought of as “meaningless syllables” like “tra la la la la” (Hutton 362) because this addition of ancestors’ names in songs demonstrate folk sensitivity to their past and origin.

In order to recognize and appreciate the deepest thoughts of any culture or people, it is essential to know the songs they sang because what could not be spoken can often be heard in a song. For the simple reason that, it is a medium of free expression. Likewise, Sümi used songs to communicate what could not be conveyed directly in speech form. In the past, certain sensitive subjects were either not allowed to be talked or were relegated to the realms of the mind. And still other taboo matters were prohibited from being spoken. It included issues like, prejudice, oppression, disparity between rich and poor, etc. Thus, the folks turned to songs to channel their inmost thoughts because “some of the deepest and most important human concerns, and the most delicate relationships, resist dramatization. Lyric folksongs explore and give voice to the ambiguities of such subjects” (Toelken 153).

The therapeutic power of songs uplifted their spirit and enabled them to accept their predicament as a way of life. The singers found in songs an outlet to pour out their fears, their hopes, their protests and their love. It is in the songs that their voice were heard and understood to some extent and even if they were not heard or understood, at least it provided them a needed relief as they found solace in the expressed songs. It is in songs that they were able to open their hearts and communicate their innermost feelings which otherwise would have remained only to be expressed in some other form.

The songs not only reflect their great love for music but also display their artistry as they use images, metaphors and similes in their songs. However, many of the folksongs are now lost since American missionaries could not understand the ‘uncivilized’ practices as they thought that “they had to stop tribal folk songs, dances, sacrifices and celebrations of various kinds” (Sema 57) and termed it as unchristian from an orientalist perspective. Thus, many songs perished because it was unsung.

### 1.1.2. TYPES

Sümi folksongs have diverse themes like love, death, hope, longing, fear, resistance, etc. Some of them are based on taboos, beliefs and traditional practices. Therefore, it can be classified according to the subject of the song because musical classification would be different and may run into many types. Similar to the Ao Nagas who have “seven important types of folk songs” that include, “Warrior Song, Love Song, Mourning Song, Feast of Merit or Mithun Sacrifice Song, Song of Peace and Reconciliation, Labour Song, Seasonal Song” (Jamir 6), a broad typology of Sümi folksongs can be thematically understood in the following manner:

#### 1. *Alukümla Le* (Work Song)

An *Alukümla Le* is an important type of song in Sümi culture. It is a song that accompanied all their works at home and fields in a time when machines were non-existent and people had to do all the work by themselves because without hard work and toil, life was not possible. This *Alukümla Le* helped them to pick up the pace of work and enabled them to work all day without feeling exhausted. The songs not only made their work easier but it also helped them forget their workload and drudgery of physical labour and allowed them to lead a vigorous and happy life. As observed by Hutton in his *The Sema Nagas*, there were no hard and fast rules that *Alukümla Le* could not be sung at home (Hutton 362). A work song can be sung even at home as *Lejo Le* (Recreational Song) because *Lejo Le* can be any song. The only difference may be the change of music or tempo. This can be understood because typically a *Lejo Le* has slow tempo as it is usually sung at one's leisure time or at Feast of Merit, during festivals, etc. Examples of *Alukümla Le* are, *Luxa Le* (Weeding Song), *Thihe Le* (Threshing Song), *Thisho Le* (Sowing Song), *Ayeküzü Le* (Spinning Song), etc. Some work songs are sung in the form of dialogue or question and answer method. Loud ululations and lyric pronouncing often accompanied work songs.

## **2. *Kikimiye Le* (Love Song)**

This type of song is based on love; a universal theme that can be related and understood by everyone. Hence, their popularity. It was sung mostly as a means of communication where the musical lyrics were used to express each other's feelings between lovers. It is effective as it empowered the lovers to convey their message. It is in these songs that lovers could articulate their feelings and emotions because in the olden days, people restrained from sharing one's feelings in normal conversations. As a result, these kind of songs were spontaneous emotional expressions needed to be understood by the person referred to. Love affairs mainly thrived among young people of the *Aloji* (work group) where these love songs flourished (Achumi. interview). It can be sung by a friend for his/her friend or by the lover or beloved. Sometimes, it was in the form of question and answer which means that a lover would pose a question to evoke answer from the beloved. It was also about meetings and partings and of betrayal and commitment. Examples of which includes songs like, *I Lo Keu no Isho lo Hu Ani* (My Love is Working Above Me), *Ashokighile Le* (Song of Parting), *Inakha ngo Ghonili* (Song of *Inakha* and *Ghonili*). (Appendix-II Song No. 1, 2, & 3)

## **3. *Ashi-Aghau Le* (Animal and Bird Song)**

In the past, folks lived in harmony with nature as there was constant interaction. The close relationship between them can be seen in the way they lived together, helping each other and animals serving as companions to man. People believed that animals and birds could speak and perform unimaginable tasks and hence revered them. For instance, service to man was rendered through bird sounds that could signal the time for sowing and reaping. Thus, the folks sang about animals and birds in their songs. Songs like, *Aghawu Chengu* (The Great Barbet Bird), *Aghau no Asübo lo Yeiku* (Birds Fly to the Tree), *Ashihami Le* (Hunter's song), *Ghoyi Shosho*

*Ghügha* (Cicada's Song), etc. are examples of *Ashi-Aghaw Le*. (Appendix-II Song No. 12, 13, 14 & 15)

#### 4. *Amülo Ghime Le* (Song of Anguish)

The folks sang sad songs when they were affected by unhappiness and grief. In this type of song, themes of economic disparity, discontentment, oppression and anguish, unjust treatment of poor and orphans were reiterated; an extension of the stories they told. The rhetoric of such songs served as lesson and warning for future actions and persisted as resistance tools as they tried to negotiate values by singing about their disillusionment. Other themes include, death, parting, loss, etc. Some examples of which are songs like, *Apu Kishe eno Anga Kishe* (The Song of Step-father and Step-daughter), *Inakha ngo Ghonili Küyixa* (The Song of Inakha and Ghonili's Separation), *Rathsamu Ghü Tüngü* (The Song of *Rathsamu's* War Spirit), *Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le* (*Visheli's* Song of her Mother), etc. (Appendix-II Song No. 16, 21, 10,24)

#### 5. *Lejo Le* (Recreational Song)

All the previous types of songs can be sung as *Lejo Le*. Interestingly, *Lejo Le* is a song type that has a versatile character. In this, any song can be changed according to occasion by changing the tune and by replacing names or attributes. Besides singing it for leisure, it was also sung in times of death, marriage, birth, and entertaining guests. Some songs were sung about themselves as a people or about unity. *Lejo Le* also accompanied dances like, '*He la la*' or '*Imu no pi sujo sujo*' (Sema. interview). The flexibility of this song is perhaps because "one does not have *the* folksong any more than *the* correct way of playing a traditional game or *the* right way of telling a joke. One only has only *a* version of a folksong, game, or joke" (Herzog 169). *Lejo le* was largely sung at the homes of the wealthy who were obliged to provide food and drinks. Sometimes, the singers were challenged to sing till dawn. Further, there were some

songs that were composed primarily to test their vocal strength or breath control of the singers. A song about a Hornbill bird is an instance where the singer has to sing it in a single breath: “*Aghawu aghacho/ nheko bo lo ku/nheko bo mili/ghitha sülo nheko bo qho lo/ kighishi-u ye alo she no lai*”. *Lejo Le* is sung without ululation and sung only separately as all-male or all-female group.

#### 6. *Aghü Leku* (Warrior Song)

This type of song can be classified as a song type that focus on bravery and courage. This bravery and courage could be displayed only in headhunting (Naga practice of taking heads) and hence it was usually about a warrior or warriors or of a heroic village that could defend its territory. However, it could also be about celebration of special events or achievement, tribute to its history, culture and people. It was mostly sung while returning from headhunting and during feasts to demonstrate their gratitude to the feast giver. “*Aghü kütsü Yemapho O Yemapho O Ye müsa le*” is an example of a warrior song. The song was chanted in two groups while returning from raids or headhunting. When the first group sings, “*Aghü kütsü Yemapho*” and followed by second group singing, “*O Yemapho*”, it indicated that warriors were returning victoriously (Chophy. interview). However, if the first group sings, “*Aghü kütsü Yemapho O Yemapho*” and was followed by the second group with, “*O Ye müsa le*”, then the villagers understood that the warriors were returning with enemy heads but they have also lost their men.

### 1.2. FOLKSONGS NEGOTIATING VALUES

An important way to appreciate any given culture is to find the values upon which they build their lives as they are nuances of a culture and may differ from one culture to another. Sümi folksongs reveal faithfully the values of right and wrong or what ‘ought to be’ by defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct and speech. It also displays



their understanding of what they thought was important in life which influenced their attitudes and behaviours.

Songs by orphans (*Mighimi*) or about orphans occupies a large portion of Sümi folksongs. This reveals folk attitude towards vulnerable children, as the singers provide a “living voice for the concerns of others” (Toelken 169), and articulate what they thought was ‘wrong’ action against orphans by different entities. *Apu-kishe Eno Anga-kishe* (Song of Step-Father and Step- daughter) is a protest song sung by the step-daughter. The lines below demonstrates her subjugation under her step-father:

*Aki kicheqho lo che aye*

*Ipu akishiu ijukumo no gho*

When I am at home

It is up to my step-father; the one who despises me

(Appendix-II Song No. 16)

The step-daughter is voicing out that as long as she lived under her step-father’s shelter, she was deprived of her individuality because all the decisions that concerned her life was taken without consultation. Due to which she calls him “*Ijukumo*” implying that he is the one who despises her and does not look after her well-being:

*Ayeghü lakhü lo alu chilu pe ayeuno*

*Alu chilu pemoyewo*

*Aluba lupe ani hoishe*

*O ilomka kulhoshi ghi*

He made me cultivate in unfertile part

Forbade me from cultivating otherwise

I am toiling at the end of the field

O I am tired of working

(Appendix-II Song No. 16)

Since the step-father was not concerned about her welfare he even selected a plot of land for her to cultivate a less fertile plot at the end of a field known as “*Aluba*”. Therefore, she sings this song in deep anguish. She also says-

*Süye lakhi iza no qe*

*Kighili ye külawuni che aye*

*Tsüngu mujupumi ishi ye khileno*

*Yehu kishi kumo sholu ye*

A year of toiling for my mother

A maiden waiting for marriage

But how am I married now

To a *Tsüngu-Mujuppumi*

(Appendix-II Song No. 16)

The above lines indicate that she was also deceived to work tirelessly in the hope of being married off to a Sümi man. However, her step-father marries her off to a non-Sümi, “*Tsüngu Mujuppumi*”, a reference to Angami and Rengma men. For the Sümi, marrying one’s own tribesman was considered more worthy than marrying a non-tribesman. In the past, parents were even sensitive to marry off daughters to another village. It was quite another thing to be married off to another tribe. However, this practice is not about alienation but more of self-preservation since it was an insular society they lived in. Further, it reveals parents’ concern as they felt that their daughters could be understood and cared better by her tribesmen. This was primarily due to diverse customs and practices observed by different Naga tribes and linguistic

differences. It was a society where slight variations in traditional practices and dialect variants exists even amongst one's own tribe.

This idea is evident in another poem called *Akikini Le* (Farewell Song). The speaker explains how his beloved should be sent-off with best ornaments and the need for others to please her as she awaited the day of her marriage-

*Ilomi hilau kutsumini mini*

*Kümzüpuno pashelo ghapu*

*Izülo alosakiniuye*

*Asho-ina-gha külauni che aye*

*Woniche aye aloji küzümi yewo*

*Ale kiphe pa mlo shiküpüsavilo*

*O chehu nolomi vilo alo*

Let my beloved wear *Tsüghümini*

Adorn her with neckpieces

The one who is sad

Time is approaching for her

To marry and go to another village

Time for her leaving is near

Dear *Aloji*, sing a song to cheer her

And let her be at her beloved's side

(Appendix-II Song No.7)

An example of unrequited love, the song portrays the lover's sad acceptance of his fate in love. He only wishes her well and hence advises her family to provide her with fine weaves and ornaments, "*Ilomi hilau kutsumini mini / Kümzüpuno pashelo ghapu*". It suggests that he

wants her to be welcomed and treated well in her new village. The beloved is also saddened by her impending marriage to a man from another village. Understandably, it is a 'sad' thing to be married off to a new village because the folks were far from modern transport and communication. Besides, marrying into another village meant being an '*Inalimi*' (outsider) and she would be required to begin a new life trying to uphold the traditions of her new village. There is a pair of words to describe such a person, '*Napu-Nali*' (to be a daughter-in-law in a new village) used in a sympathetic sense to mean the condition of such person as a stranger without any relatives in the village she was married to. The condition of *Inalimi* is also expressed in a line in *Lüxa Le* (Weeding Song):

*Inalimi ayeghi lo yeke tishi chelo*

Daughter-in-law, it's the way of the world

(Appendix-II Song No. 27)

The fourth line of the poem, "*Inalimi ayeghi lo yeke tishi chelo*" is an advice to *Inalimi* to accept her condition of helplessness as natural and so she must accept and adapt to her new life.

In another poem, *Khumtsa Amighiu Leshe* (Song of *Khumtsa*, the Orphan), an orphan child named *Khumtsa* speaks of how orphans were called by names which reflects society's attitude towards the marginalised and hence the protest in the tone of the song-

*O Ishe! Khaghiye I je Khumtsa ku*

*Ite ikuche ye I je mithiu ku*

O earlier I was called *Khumtsa*

But now I am called *Mithiu*

(Appendix II Song No. 22)

The orphan's real name was *Khumtsa* but his step-mother called him '*Mithiu*' which translates to 'the despised'. The Orphans such as *Khumtsa* were despised because it meant an extra mouth to feed. Moreover, the concept of mistreatment of orphans is internalised and the folks were conditioned into thinking that it was the norm. In the following lines, *Khumtsa* sings about the pressure he faced when his father brought in a new wife:

*O Hoishe! Ipu nono timi kithe salo*

*Izano züalo zü aye ghi niye*

*Ashou ipeni che aye*

O father you brought a new woman

To my mother's bed

I will be leaving the house soon

(Appendix-II Song No. 22)

He was compelled to move out of the house because life was hard for him to live with a new mother. As the father became intimate with his new wife, *Khumtsa* had to respect their privacy and move out of the house. This meant that he had to search for a new place to sleep which was often with pigs or outdoors in the case of such '*Mighimi*' (Orphans).

In another poem, *Hevishe Amighiu* (Hevishe, the Orphan), the singer bemoans the loss of his father, "*O Hoishe! Ipuh asughiu no hayewwo*" ("O I don't have a real father"). He mourns not only because it was natural for any child who had lost a parent to feel pained. The agony was more magnified in his case because we are told that the fields which belonged to his father was taken away by his paternal uncles:

*Alukichi pa ju kinheshu chewo*

*Tiye nilu kumoye ipu nono luye*

*Punu kishimi no ilu ghüza kivi*

*Lukha aye lukupuwo*

*Shoinapu tsüna yemoye*

Envious of me to cultivate

That is not my field, you took it my father

The undeserving/others are cultivating my fertile field

All of them have been taken

And given to others

(Appendix-II Song No. 20)

The fields were even given away or demarcated to new people, “*Shoinapu*”, which is a reference to late settlers or those who arrived later than him. He was offended by the act because traditionally late settlers were not privileged to receive such treatment.

Again in *Visheli no Li Za Shikipili Le* (*Visheli’s Song of her Mother*), Visheli sings-

*Ishe ni mighimi no qe ani*

*Iphi ghö, imini ghotsü ye*

*O hoishe achi akiviu no*

*Ikhu no tsü ye*

*Ikhü no mishi pime, ino avi pime*

O! I am an orphan slaving for you

Wove me body-cloth, wove me waist-cloth

O! But the best neckpiece

Was given to *Ikhu*

*Ikhu’s* bride-price was cow, mine, a Mithun

(Appendix-II Song No. 24)

She sings about how she was wronged by her step-mother, when she treats her differently from her half-sister, *Hokhuli*. In marriage, '*Ikhü*' (*Ikhü* is a shortened form of *Hokhuli*) was gifted with the choicest neck piece, "*achi akiviu*", even when her bride-price was just an ordinary cow, "*mishi pime*". While her (*Visheli*) neckpiece was a short one even when her bride-price was a *Mithun*, "*avi pime*". *Mithun* was expensive and rare and therefore more valuable. It was so because *Mithun* signified power and status in the society for many Naga tribes. *Visheli* was the daughter of *Inakha* and *Ghonili* (first wife of *Inakha*). Being the elder daughter, she should enjoy the same or better privilege as her half-sister *Hokhuli* but that was not to be. The difference of bride-price between *Hokhuli* and *Visheli* was significant because of the traditional meaning it had for the folks. When *Visheli* sings, "*Ikhü no mishi pime, ino avi pime*", we can identify the difference between a cow and a *Mithun* bride-price because bride-price was offered according to the worth and status of a woman. The higher the bride-price, the more and better gifts were sent-off with the bride by her parents. Clearly, this did not happen and as a result *Visheli* sings in protest.

Further, her sense of indignation can be understood in the lines where she narrates her humiliation in facing people as she was not well gifted:

*O hoishe timi shoinami no ghi*

*Kichezü shi ilo*

*Inakha Ghonili no nu*

*Visheli avi kipimemi huye*

*O nanu no kishi pucheni ila ye*

O! People from other villages

Are travelling here to watch

*Inakha and Ghonili's daughter*

*Visheli*, whose bride-price was mithun

To see how she was adorned

(Appendix-II Song No. 24)

The lines discuss about the admiration of her parents, *Inakha* and *Ghonili*, by the people. They were respected because *Inakha* was a brave warrior; in the past warriors were highly honoured, and *Ghonili* was considered a woman of virtuous character as is evident in a folktale called, '*Inakha and Ghonili*'. Due to her parents' fame, travellers had stopped by to have a glimpse of how the new bride (*Visheli*) must be adorned or might have brought which were mostly ornaments in most cases for the female. This great expectation, she sings, was also because of the payment of huge bride-price in the form of *Mithun*. As she neared the people who had gathered to see her, she was overcome with a sense of humiliation and embarrassment-

*Iza no chi kikishe ye ikholove ala*

*Iphi lhaqhi inami shosa ye*

My mother's double neck piece was too short for me

Too embarrassed to take out my body-cloth and face others"

(Appendix-II Song No. 24)

She felt mortified to take off her body-cloth and show her ornaments because her *Achiku* (neckpiece), the most significant female ornament for the Sümi, was too short. It was short because her father and step-mother did not provide her a new one and instead gifted her late mother's old neckpiece.

All the speakers in these poems speak against the ill-treatment they received under their step-fathers and step-mothers. Thus, it can be seen as a protest against society by the orphans who speak for all orphans. If we look into the corresponding tale in Sümi folklore, we find that



*Visheli* was the daughter of the famed *Inakha* and *Ghonili* and therefore of noble descent. So, if someone of that status could be ill- treated then the fate of other orphans could only be imagined. According to Hokishe Yepthomi, mistreatment of orphans was largely due to the practice of polygamy. Back in the day, chiefs and rich men had many wives because they could afford *Ame* (bride-price). Likewise, having many wives was a matter of pride as it was seen as a conquest. Generally, the head wife belonged to a noble family. While others (5-6 wives) were of humble origin. A chief or a rich man could offer a small gift in exchange of such wives. The head wife remained the actual wife in the real sense of the term ‘wife’ and her offspring the real ones. So, the status of the first wife was much higher than the rest. In addition to this, although all the male children enjoyed the same rights and privileges regarding inheritance, in everyday life the children were treated preferentially. Thus, the practice of polygamy can be viewed as an outcome of economic inequality. Clearly, only the ruling class would be able to afford many wives thereby enhancing the prestige to their already high position in the society.

This economic inequality is evident in the song, *Ashokighile* (Song of Parting):

*Oza no no mishi toku khu*

*Iza nno züpüzütsü aye*

*Azünheu ni Thochi no lagha*

*Kuwo thotsü aki lakhi*

*Mishi toku haki phe no haye*

Your mother asked for nine Mithuns

And it bored my mother

We who migrated southward from *Thochi*’s descent

Even then, there’s not a single household with nine Mithuns

(Appendix II Song No. 2)

The girl's family asked for nine cows, "*Oza no no mishi toku khu*" (Mithun is called *Avi* and Cow *Amishi*. However, in the northern part of Sümi area, *Amishi* is used to mean both). While lamenting his inability to pay nine cows, he made a frustrating remark by saying that there was no household in his lineage who owned nine cows. The demand for nine cows, he says, annoyed his mother as the family was in no position to offer the same. Later on, he went down with three cows and married a "*Khuzalimi*" (Non-Sümi girl):

*O! Mishi küthü saqi azü*

*Kichelimi saqho chenyewo*

*Aghuno ngu ino isalo juwo*

*Inatha limiye*

*Ishe! Ni Khuzalimi ghau ye*

O! Took three Mithuns down the water

And brought a girl

Watching you from the resting spot

Daughter-in-law of another village

Ah! Other's bird

(Appendix-II Song No. 2)

The singer concluded with a contrasting image of three cows as opposed to nine cows to suggest the vanity of asking extravagant bride-price. *Ame* is a traditional practice that signifies the worth of the would-be bride. Therefore, the lover could not go against it. Thus, the anger of the lover "is vent upon the often frighteningly unassailable individual or institution" (Wang 308) through his song.

In another song, *Küzivü Küpüha Le* (Song of Wasted Love), speaks about the futility of loving the daughter of a rich man:

*Ampino noqhem i kumo aye*

*Noju azükivümino*

*Ishe khipato lau hu aye*

An unequal to you

But the one who loves you

Which hill did you go?

*Shelo wolu wolono khokulhom iye*

*Alhi kütau ye idiwuniken o*

*Pichepighi avi lhi*

*Pipuye idiulusa*

The miserable one to bid thee farewell

Other trade can be returned

But *Mithun* trade cannot be

(Appendix-II Song No. 5)

The lover states that business which concerns *Mithun*, “*avi lhi*”, was difficult which suggests the difference in their status. He also sings of his desire to return home with his beloved. However, since they belonged to different *Aloji* (work group), he could only sing of his sadness. The lover had no idea about where her *Aloji* was working, “*Ishe khipato lau hu aye*”. The parents must have put her in a different *Aloji* so that the affair was not encouraged. Such cases have occurred frequently in the past. An example of which is evident in the song, ‘*Loji Kithelo*’ where the father chose a new *Aloji* for his daughter:

*She timino khashi asüye iku niki ghüngü ye amu niye*

*She ipu no ipulo loji kithelo hulo ipi ani ngu no*

*She niye loji kiye lo huni thono*

*She ipu piye, iza piye iza pulo niloji ju qa-a pelo*

*She ipu no niloji küsa ishino khalu aye*

People are clearing jungle nearby

My father is asking me to join new *Aloji*

But I want to remain in my old *Aloji*

Let my mother weep for my old *Aloji*

My father has stopped my *Aloji*

(Appendix-II Song No. 28)

This kind of song reveal the impossibility for economically poor man to marry rich man's daughter. Rich parents would often frown upon economically poor suitors which depicts the existence of economic disparity between the rich and the poor that affected other relationships. An example of such disparity can also be seen in a tradition that specified a particular shawl called "*Lisüphi*" (body-cloth without design) for *Kumülhomi* (the poor). This body-cloth allowed people to identify economic and social position of a person. In a culture, where one's position was determined by the number of feasts one has given as "each feast was connected with the attainment of social status" (Khala 39), it was a life far from getting equal opportunities.

Another form of protest can be found in the song *Inakha ngo Ghonili Küyixa* (Parting of *Inakha* and *Ghonili*), when *Ghonili* sings-

*Ishe! Ni ghi ashelhu kumoye*

*Ishe! Ni ghi avi abi kikhi*

*Hi sülo ashou tsa khe ala*

*Amipiu juno ilomucho aye*

*Kuo kükha juno ilomi shi*

*Asa losü tixe apushumo*

*Ni woni che ala*

Ah! I am not an *Ashelhu*

But a striped Mithun

Waited for outside news

Angry at the man

You loved only my neck piece

Cast a lot, you will not live long

I will be leaving soon

(Appendix-II Song No. 21)

*Ghonili* explains her value in the lines: “*Ishe! Ni ghi ashelhu kumoye/Ishe! Ni ghi avi abi kikkhi*”. That, she was not ‘*Ashelhu*’ (ordinary *Mithun*) but ‘*Avi abi kikkhi*’ (*Mithun* with white limbs). This means that her *Ame* was significant. She was not only a chief’s daughter but also a woman of virtuous character. Further, she also questioned her husband if he loved only her neck piece and not her, “*Kuo kükha juno ilomi shi*”. Her explanation can be seen as resistance to divorce. By citing her bride-price, she meant to convey that their divorce should not be easy as the way her husband, *Inakha* brought *Chevili*. The meaning of *Ame* also point to Sümi value of indissolubility of marriage. Their marriage was considered strong because of her great *Ame*.

In another song, *Mighimi no Anipu Lumla keu mlo Ghime* (An Orphan’s Sorrow in Finding a Wife) speaks about a man who could not marry because of his inability to pay bride-price:

*Ni mighimi no kiu*

*Kiniu no kilo*

*Ilolumo ye wo*

*Niye apu kühake*

*Mishi kuha wo*

*Niye aza kühake*

*Woli kuha ke*

How can an orphan like me

Go to rich man's house

And propose

I don't have a father

I don't have a Mithun

I don't have a mother

I don't have a pig

(Appendix-II Song No. 29)

The song resonates the helplessness of a *Mighimi* in securing a wife. He sings that he does not have a father and hence does not own a cow, "*Mishi kuha wo*". Since he does not have a mother he does not have a pig, "*Woli kuha ke*". These livestock items are necessary in the practice of *Ame*. Therefore, without the possession of such items, he is unable to meet his beloved's family. The oppressed individuals cannot express such deprivation in everyday life. Thus, they turned to songs as it "provides a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual, direct way" (Dundes 36).

The *Ideological* (Dorson 15) concept behind the songs related to the practice of bride-price brings out Marxist philosophy of how the dominant ideas in the society was conceived and propagated in the interest of the ruling class. The idea of *Ame* (bride-price) clearly defined the material division in the society. The practice benefitted only the ruling class as it gave them

wives, helped their daughters get married to noble men and warriors, and brought him respect, honour and wealth. Those who were unable to pay any of the three types of *Ame*, as discussed in the first chapter, sought refuge in their chiefs or the rich. When a man's *Ame* was paid by another, the man becomes an *Anukishiu* (slave) for life to the one who paid his *Ame*. This is called *Aqü-Axe* (bondage) and the person is called *Aqu-Axeu* or *Anukishiu* (Slave). *Aqü-Axe* is even passed on or extended to one's children. This was still prevalent during the nineties of the previous century. During the Jubilee celebration of Kelto village in 1984, the chief made an announcement to release his slaves (Hekhuvi's family) from bondage in the Christian spirit of love and freedom. This kind of verbal declaration of release has been done by nearly/all the Sümi chiefs. Nevertheless, the psychological implication still remains because of folks' attitude towards such descendants. Hutton referred '*Anukishimi*' as 'dependents' but it was rather 'slaves' because these 'slaves' owe the '*Apukishiu*' (foster father) a regular amount of work in the field, a head from any animal taken in a hunt or slaughtered at ceremonial feasts, and assistance during war time. So, the '*Apukishiu*' could use the '*Anikishiu*' according to his need. It is believed that there were two classes of people in Sümi society; the *Kükami* (Aristocrats) and the *Mighimi* (Commoners) (Yephthomi. interview) similar to the class system practiced by the Konyaks as evident in Konyak society at that time where "difference of class, a difference between the high and the low, between aristocrats or *Anghs* and commoners or Ben people" (Furer-Haimendorf 104) was existent.

These songs depict the angst of the common people while it reflects the socio-economic condition of the time. Besides, it exposes the "latent idea of protest against the power structure represented in folklore" (Datta 79) which has not been addressed enough or discussed openly in Naga discourse of its oral tradition. This is particularly because of the fact that Sümi folklore scholarship has been negligible. However, from the study of a small part of Sümi oral tradition, it is evident that there was a "power structure" that defined Sümi society. According to Karl

Marx, “The sum total of the forces of production accessible to men determines the condition of society” and forms a society’s economic base. In the absence of these forces everyone would be equal because each will work for himself. Nevertheless, since these “forces of production” were present, it can be understood that someone was working for someone else that resulted in exploitation and oppression. According to Marx, economic activity, particularly physical labour, if it is carried out by a group of people for someone else, reflects the condition of that society. In Sümi society, these “forces of production” were the orphans, the slaves, and the landless.

“Orphans” in Sümi language is “*Mighimi*”; those who do not have parents but it can also refer to the economically poor or common villagers. The “slaves” are those whose bride-price was paid by chiefs or others. The “landless” are the late settlers or those who migrated from another village. These groups toil and sweat to produce but the fruits were reaped by the ruling class which included the chief’s family, the rich and the warriors. Sümi follows hereditary chieftainship and therefore wealth was concentrated only in those families. A ‘chief’ is called ‘*Akükau*’ in Sümi language and “*Akükau*” means ‘King’ or ‘the one who reigns’. An *Akükau* is entitled to ‘free labour’ from the whole village households for twelve times a year. ‘Free labour’ because the workers are not paid.

The practice of headhunting also placed warriors in high position of Sümi social hierarchy. They commanded great respect and enjoyed superior status from other people in Sümi society. The rich were those that could give feasts.

Naga society, in general, was considered to be classless and therefore egalitarian. However, the oppression of the lower class by the ruling class is evident even in the Ao society, which is regarded relatively more democratic. In Ao society, it “was a common fate for a man who could not pay his debts and whose relations could not, or would not, pay them for him. He and, if he were married, his wife, became the absolute property of his master. A slave lost all



his rights and became in a vague sort of way a member of his master's clan" (Mills 211). Likewise, in Sümi society, there was clear distinction between rich and poor. It is believed that there were three distinct classes in Sümi society (Rotokha. interview). In the first class were the chiefs, below that were the warriors and priests, and the lowest class comprised of the orphans, the landless and the poor. This class division was determined by blood, possession, and bravery. While 'blood' was permanent and one could not assume that position whatsoever. It was possible for a person to gain social recognition through display of wealth. One such example was the Feast of Merit. The Feast could be of various types namely, *Inami Küsa* (Feast of Guest), *Aphisa* (Feast of Wealth), *Shikusho*, *Küpülhü Kile* (Feast of Friendship) in Sümi culture. This Feast of Merit could be given by anyone who could afford. People kill *Mithun* and offer feast to the whole village to gain social recognition because killing a *Mithun* was a mark of a man gaining status in the society. The social status of a man was also determined by the number of enemy heads taken in headhunting.

Another form of protest can be analysed in the poem *Rathsamu Ghü Tüngü* (*Rathsamu's Warrior Spirit*):

*Ishe aboxi thotssü aghü lakhi lo*

*Chighi xo moye, apu aza khiu nono*

*Punu izü no tsüilai?*

*Hengu kuxo shi ishi xo puwo chenilai*

*Küpü sheni lai!*

Ah! Even gourds do not bear ten gourds in one vine

Whose parents gave birth and gave away like that?

Like harvested pumpkins, do we carry these heads

O What a waste of life!

(Appendix-II Song No. 10)

A song of protest against headhunting, it depicts a disturbing image of *Rathsamu*, a great warrior, who was believed to have possessed supernatural powers, coming home with many enemy heads. The speaker here protests that even gourds do not bear ten gourds in one vine (*“Ishe aboxi thotssü aghü lakhi lo/Chighi xo moye,”*). If so, he wonders how senseless it was for *Rathsamu* to kill that many. The speaker further states how he felt for those parents who gave birth to such children only to be killed in that way. Headhunting was a practice that was seen as a symbol of pride and bravery. It was necessitated by the hostile environment they lived because each village was engaged in perpetual warfare against their neighbouring villages. An enemy head was looked upon as a trophy. However, the other side of this practice was the anguish of the relatives that the killed left behind; the parents, wife, husband, children, siblings and others. Thus, the song depicts that there were people who did not believe in the idea of killing even when headhunting was a traditional practice.

The song, ‘*Ayichiküvü Lono Pithive Keu Le*’ (Song of Killing during Community Fishing) expresses social conflict where an individual comes in conflict with societal norms. In a society that held moral values strongly, the young immoral man had to die:

*Alhouno ghi küsakushomi kumo ye azüzü ala*

*O Ishe! Olomi nuno saqusani shi xücheyewo*

*Azü ghaw wohaye ‘hasalive ala*

Even gods are uninterested in unnatural deaths

Ah! Your darling’s son lived a wild life

Taken away by the water spirit

Appendix-II Song No. 18)

The song expresses the view that even gods do not favour such deaths that resulted from one being a “*Saqhusani*” (immoral behaviour). For which, the “*Azü ghawu*” (water spirit) took the man away. By expressing death as divine action willed by the spirit, it made the case more powerful for people to believe that such action would result in punishment. The idea of ‘stoning’ might seem macabre in a modern context but such punishment has deep cultural roots. In keeping with traditional values, instances of chopping off hands of thieves or cutting liar’s tongue were culturally approved in the past to ensure others do not repeat the same offence. While the song makes a moving description about the execution of young man, it also brings to focus the question of whether the same treatment could be meted out to the *Kükami* (aristocrats or ruling class). Notwithstanding, the community was always above the individual and therefore whoever went against norms set by the society would have to face the consequences. Yet, the same yardstick could not be possible considering the immense power the *Kükami* (chiefs) exercised over the common man.

It can be understood that these protest voices were allowed in folksongs because “the blame for its composition usually cannot be fixed to any one person. It is a collective, not an individual, expression, and consequently the singer of a song of protest is not to be blamed for the content of his song. He is only reporting what the folk say” (Wang 308). Folksongs belong to the community in which it was found and not to individual singer or composer. As a result, the singers enjoyed freedom from society’s disapproval as they sing about collective feelings of discontentment. However, the idea of protest and social conflict in these songs may not have come through a conscious effort. These songs mattered because it could provide a voice to speak about issues that concerned them. The life of the folks revolved around traditions that were approved by society which sometimes appeared to be affirmed by supernatural coincidence. Thus, to go against societal norms or to speak against a certain practice was inconceivable and hence it could only be negotiated through indirect way as expressed in songs.

### 1.3. SÜMI VALUES AND ETHICS IN SELECT SONGS

#### 1.3.1. SONGS REFLECTING TABOOS AND BELIEFS

Sümi ethical codes are embedded in their concept of *Chine-Chini* which stands for ‘taboo’ and related rituals. It is a combination of two words, *Achine* (ritual) and *chini* (taboo). *Chine-chini* is a way of life for the folks as they understood and perceived the world and of things. Human action and speech has to be in accordance with this *Chine-Chini*. It acts as a rule of law that organised their otherwise disorderly life, guided their actions and preserved them. Action and speech that were considered ‘wrong’ according to them are *Chini* (Taboo). For instance, ‘*Pi chini, Shi chini*’ (‘Taboo of speaking or doing wrong’) or it can be put in a sentence as, “*chini ke tishi kelo momu chinni ke tishi pi kelo*” (one should not act or speak in a certain way because it was taboo to do or say so). Anything that is *chini* is dangerous and therefore to be avoided. This *Chine-chini*, like the *Sobaliba*; a set of “moral principles, regarded as the essence of humanity” (Nungshitula 54) of the *Aos*, had to be created in order to define themselves which is an existentialist idea to make meaning out of existence. In this way, whatever was considered as *Chini* was ‘wrong’ as they perceive it. The important quality of Sümi taboo is its association with the sacred that demonstrated their religious thought. Almost every *chini* has a corresponding narrative that was connected with the supernatural. Moreover, it protected societal values by placing *chini* at every crucial point or when action or speech contradicted with the values upheld by the society.

In the song, *Hekhüpu no Puthekuwo* (“How Hekhüpu Migrated”), migration norms can be established. The song records the details of dispute that arose due to the proposed migration of *Hekhüpu*. Traditionally, it was mandatory for an intended migrator to seek the approval of a village chief. Even when the chief accepted the proposal, the migrator needed to fulfil other criteria and perform all the rituals. For example, in Sümi tradition, a chief had to release a number of households that would follow the migrator. Then a water source had to be spotted

and cleared. A specific partner of the migrator was also chosen. After which, a follower/s could offer to donate a pig, dog or hen, to be carried to the new village which would be significant when a new village was founded. Such donor would enjoy certain privileges and may also be named 'Atsü pu, Awopu' (Assistant chief). The head chief was called 'Kükatou' while other chiefs were called *Kükami*). These animals were important because animal sacrifice was necessary. It was an act of seeking blessing where the spilled blood would appease the spirits. In this case, *Hekhüpu*'s proposal was not approved because the song states that an arbiter had to be brought in:

*I mu Juikhü, I mu Juikhü*

*Tsa küghani ye ipe ni atu*

*Atu khache lo ilhe 'kughilo*

*Asü khache lo ilhe 'kughilo*

*Atu khache xaveni ye küpü*

*Asü khache xaveni ye küpü*

Brother *Juikhü*! Brother *Juikhü*!

Mount our stone to take up a case

Jump up to the raised-stone

Jump up to the wooden platform

Ah! To undo the raised-stone so dear

Ah! To pull apart the wooden platform so dear

(Appendix-II Song No. 19)

*Juikhü* was called upon to settle the dispute of *Hekhüpu*'s migration. In the past, a traditional platform was built on the compound of the house to serve as meeting place, equivalent to present day drawing room. It was built with either stone or wood. "*Atu khache*

*xaveni ye küpü/Asü khache xaveni ye küpü*” talks about a custom where the platform had to be brought down or dismantled to represent that the person was migrating without the approval of the chief. In Sümi tradition, a person could not migrate at will. A formal permission had to be sought from the chief (who normally turned down the request because migration by one of his man/villager meant a decrease in the number of households in his village). On rare occasions when permission was given if one was not a son of *Akükau* or one who was not in *Akükau*’s favour, a villager or villagers who wished to migrate to other places were necessitated to break the tradition under compelling circumstances. In this song, *Hekhüpu* migrated without the chief’s consent and so a case was filed against him and *Juikhü* had to deliberate upon the case. The key element of the song lies in the last two lines:

*Awudu no awulaqo pu cheni*

*Atsüngu ye awulaqo pu chemo*

Only the rooster has tail-feathers

But quails do not have tail-feathers

(Appendix-II Song No. 19)

‘*Awudu*’ is a rooster and ‘*Atsüngu*’ is a quail. *Hekhüpu* is advised to be like a rooster with long tail feathers and not like ‘*Atsüngu*’ that does not own one. It suggests that *Hekhüpu* should be a gentleman and not turn back on what he had done or decided or that he should stand by his decision whatsoever. For the Sümi, it was taboo for the migrator to return to his original village. It was believed that such people would meet untimely death. This taboo is called *Aba lechu* (to consume one’s waste). If a person returns to his old village, he would be shunned by the society because he would be considered as a man who had turned back on his words and actions. Resistance to established customs was not permitted as exemplified in this taboo. Anyone who re-tracked his statement or action was considered undeserving of others’

respect. This idea can be illustrated in another pair of words used in a negative sense called '*Pisü-piphe*' ('to speak in and out'). It means the act of changing one's mind too quickly. This kind of expression along with the associated taboo discouraged people from being regressive. In another song called *Phuthe Wopisheve Keu Le* (Song of Incomplete/Unfinished Migration), a man migrated to another village but he did not feel at home as he found it hard to adapt to the ways of the new village. He could only sing about his predicament due to *Aba Lechu* taboo mentioned in the earlier poem. Thus, a form of resistance can be understood here although it is less pronounced. He expresses his longing in the lines-

*Ipu isü ilholo hi akumo ye*

*Timi shoinami ahu hawo che aye*

*Ile woghimo ye*

*Ghulo lakhi timi loji dolo kuwo thotsü*

*Dolo kuhu lono timi no ni vilo*

*Loji mpi shijule ye pinaimu nino*

*Chehu ashe lono ale pheju aye*

*Ale no akukho kumo aye kucho*

*Asütsuni ighüna lo a kumoye*

*Ile woche ala*

It is not a place of my father and grandfather

New people are populating here

Will not return

Even a day in another *Aloji*

Working among others, people told me

To try

Tried to sing at mid-day

But the song did not come out right

Trees and plants look different from my village

I am returning

(Appendix-II Song No. 23)

He sings that the new place has no trace of his forefathers. Without relatives, a person could not command respect and would have to live like '*mighimi shi*' (be similar to an orphan) with none to support or defend. He tried to work in *Aloji* and sang along but the songs did not feel right. Even the plants and trees looked different, "*Asütsuni ighüna lo a kumoye/Ile woche ala*". There is a deep sense of regret here because it was taboo to return once the migration has taken place. This taboo deterred people from thinking of migrating which demonstrate that culture did not encourage the migrator to return to his native village. While on the other hand, it reflects the strong values of the folk to stick to one's action which cannot be undone. This kind of song "functions as a way of articulating shared attitudes and feelings" (Toelken 147). People used such phrases as, '*Aba lechu veno thive*' (died because of consuming one's excrement) when the migrator comes back and dies. It means that one has met death because of dishonouring the taboo of looking back towards the old village. This taboo can be related to American 'futuristic orientation' in considering "bad luck for a person to retrace his steps once he has set out to do something" (Dundes 75) which indicate that one must always go forward and not backward. Thus, the positive effect of this taboo lies in its progressive attitude.

Another type of taboo relating to division of ancestral land can be found in *Amu Kikinni Losü Le* (A Farewell Song). The most valuable property that man possessed was land. Land was valued because it connected the members of the family together. It was a link that connected him to his story, clan, village, and lineage. Therefore, it is taboo for male members of the family to talk about dividing the same because it would mean losing all those that was held dear.



However, a land purchased by a father can be distributed or divided among the sons. This taboo is serious in nature because it suggests that people were desisted from even contemplating about it. It is believed that the one who utters the idea first was doomed to die and therefore allowed to choose any part of land. The folks understood that by uttering *Chini* (taboo) words (of dividing the land), the man had chosen early death. This idea is expressed in the poem, *Amu Kikinni Losü Le* (Song of Farewell to Brother):

*Niye no khopuwumo naye*

*Ala chighi pesuno xalu naighi*

*Tüghamino kipishi ye shimula ni wono*

I did not want you to leave

I tried in ten ways to save you

But it was all a failure

At *Tüghami*'s bidding

(Appendix-II Song No. 8)

This moving song was sung by the brother of the one who spoke those ill-fated words of dividing the family land. He painfully recollects their childhood days growing up together in the same house as he bids him farewell. The brother sings that he never wanted his brother to die. So, he tried in 'ten ways' (*'ala chighi'* or 'ten ways' is a Sümi way of saying 'different methods'), "*Ala chighi pesuno xalu naighi*" to persuade his brother not to talk about that but he failed. He failed because it was decided or prompted by evil spirit, *tüghami*, "*Tüghamino kipishi ye shimula ni wono*". It was believed that death could not be snatched away from spirits. Life and death depended on the spirits' choosing. If the spirit chooses to take someone's life, it was irreversible because of the belief in destiny. Moreover, the belief is rooted in a culture

that consider wrong actions to be followed by ‘punishment’ which was ‘death’ in this instance. This punishment was a divine sanction (“*Tüghamino*”) and hence non-negotiable.

Further, divorce is also viewed as taboo because Sümi values marriage to be a permanent contract between two people. An example of this concept can be demonstrated by Sümi history where a man could marry more than one wife. However, the first wife is seldom divorced even when a husband had found new love. This taboo associated with divorce can be seen in *Inakha Ngo Ghonili Küyixa* (Parting of *Inakha* and *Ghonili*):

*Ishe! Iku kithialo*

*Xüsa kupu kuno*

*Timi kubu kumo hu niuno*

*Asalo sü tixe apushumo*

*Ni woniche ala*

Ah! To dead man’s hill

Misery aplenty

We did what people fear to touch

Cast a lot, will not live long

I will be leaving soon

(Appendix-II Song No. 21)

When she mentioned, “*Timi kubu kumo*” (what others did not touch), it suggest that she had encountered something that was culturally prohibited. This indicates that divorce was taboo in Sümi society.

Connected with the idea of taboo was a belief in spirits. Sümi folk belief system was essentially animistic as they believed that spirits dwelled in trees, caves, stones, hills, etc. They also believed that some human beings were possessed by spirits. Supernatural events and

actions that were beyond human understanding and reason were all attributed to the work of spirits. It gave them meaning and provided answers to their curious mind. This belief “influenced their thinking, attitudes, values and behaviour” (Yepthomi 19) as they orient themselves in such philosophy. In ‘*Rathsamu Ghü Tüngü*’ (Rathsamu’s Warrior Spirit), *Rathsamu* is described as a man who was helped by spirit as understood in the word ‘*Tüngü*’:

*Rathsamu no no tüngü saye wo*

*Cheleqho shole aye, sholeluve ala*

But *Ratshamu*, possessed by a spirit,

Went down again and succeeded

(Appendix-II Song No. 10)

Since he was assisted by spirit, he could bring enemy heads as though one was harvesting pumpkins. People believed that unless one was helped by a spirit, it was unbelievable for a single man to annihilate a village (similar to the destruction of Kivikhu Village by *Rathsamu*) as carried out by *Rathsamu*, in the song. Psychologically, an unconscious symbolism is presented here. *Rathsamu*, who was possessed by a war spirit, was guilty of performing an action that was considered wrong. The focus is on the spirit and not the individual. When culture celebrated man like *Rathsamu*, the spirit had to be blamed. The image of ‘pumpkins’ juxtaposed as ‘heads’ here signifies the speaker’s abhorrence to the senseless act of headhunting:

*Hengu kuxo shi ishi xo puwo chenilai*

*Küpü sheni lai!*

Like harvested pumpkins, do we carry these heads

O What a waste of life!

(Appendix-II Song No.10)

The singer was appalled by the act but could not express it in an ordinary way. Therefore, the spirit had to assume the responsibility of such senseless killings.

People also believed in omens that was explained through experience. For instance, in the same song, ‘*Rathsamu Ghü Tüngü*’, lightning in the evening was seen as an omen of warriors returning home with enemy heads:

*Atsala no anheu no atsütsü ilokighi*

*Tiye aghüthemí no akütsü pe*

*Ilokighi ngushi ghini mulai*

Thunder and lightning came in the evening

To show warriors are coming back with heads

May it be an omen

(Appendix-II Song No. 10)

In another song, *Shena nu Ghüshe*, the concept of the ‘good die young’ is emphasised. The speaker informs that a man had died too soon because he gained fame early:

*O! Hoishe pa no aghi tsükinhe dolo no*

*Pekighi ye ikholhove ala*

O he that was born between sun and moon

Such lives are short

(Appendix-II Song No. 11)

It was believed that those who gained social recognition ahead of one’s time were bound to die young. The lines suggest that since he came out between ‘moon’ and ‘sun’ (A common phrase to indicate a person’s prominence) he had to die earlier than most people. Sümi

believed that extraordinary individuals were taken away by *Alhou* (Creator) because the world was not good enough for such people.

In *Asholoku Kūsa Le* (Song of Marital Discord), the unexplainable fear of darkness overwhelmed the wife who slept in the field with her child. The song describes how the spirit took away her child's soul:

*I no qahni 'kheni no mūsa ye*

*I kimiye, she ni nga kimiye*

*I salulo, she ni nga salulo*

*Ayithu ki ni luba lo ani*

*Mūkakuki ni luphe lo ani*

*Ishe! Tile no ni nga saluye*

*Tsüzü küghü kuchou no asa*

*Asaqhili lo amüzü iko*

*Khimutsasa homutsasai iko*

*Iko kua no ni nga no toi*

*Kūsakusho kixi hi sholuye*

I am crying, scared of the darkness

Be kind to me, be kind to our child

Take me, Ah! Take our child

There's a python hole down our field

There's a devil cave by the side of our field

There, it took the spirit of our child

O The real *tsüzüküghü*

Open up its leaves among the thorny bush

Evenly and perfectly it grew

And up it grew like our child

The worst misery, I met thus

(Appendix-II Song No. 17)

Man's unfounded but real fear of darkness can be explained here. The wife longed for her husband to come to their rescue. Although they had quarrelled in the morning, she expected him to come and fetch her. She only slept in the field to show her resentment. However, the husband did not come and while waiting in anticipation, an evil spirit took away their child's soul, "*Ishe! Tile no ni nga saluye*". In the darkness, images of "*Ayithu ki*" (python hole) and "*Mükakuki*" (cave) conjure up in her mind as her fear makes her conscious of the simplest of things. These places were believed to be the abode of evil spirits where the child's soul was taken away. Particularly the last line, "*Küsakusho kixi hi sholuye*" suggests the death of the child. Apart from the belief of spirits dwelling in caves, holes and fields, the song also serves as a subtle reminder to women not to act in an impulsive manner. The spirit took away the child's soul in order to teach tolerance to the wife. The child's death could have been avoided had they not quarrelled. Thus, it can be associated to a Sümi tradition where a wife was expected to seek refuge in her husband's family when bad days befall on her because *Ame* has been gifted by the husband and therefore tradition did not allow her to go back to her family or seek shelter in stranger's house.

There were both benign and malignant spirits and the spirit world was all pervasive; at home, in the forests, in the caves, and in the fields. The folks understood the world and its happenings through the participation of these spirits. All the bad things that happened to man were attributed to evil spirits; *Tüghami* (evil spirit) or *Aghau Lhoküsa* (bad spirit), and the good things to benevolent spirits; *Litsapa* (god of prosperity) or *Kungümi* (sky beings). Major events in life were believed to have happened because of the participation of these spirits, for each

spirit was responsible for any happening good or otherwise. The ‘Genna’ (*Tüghami* ritual) was performed to prevent diseases (Hutton 227), sickness and death. Hence, spirits were not remote beings but they participated in the everyday life of the folks. For instance, the origin of dance as taught by spirits can be traced in a Sümi folktale. It says that *Rotokhi*’s son *Khumtsa* advised his father and his villagers to wait for the spirits to teach them dance on an appointed day. As told, the spirits came in colourful costumes and danced merrily. *Rotokhi* memorised the dance steps of the spirits and that was how Sümi learnt how to dance. (Department of Art and Culture 162). Moreover, when a man committed wrong and if he coincidentally got sick then it was viewed as a punishment from the spirits. This prevented people from misconduct because the fear of spirits was instilled in the folks’ mind. This fear of spirits was so great that, before a person drinks rice-brew or before eating food, a small portion was sprinkled or scattered on the floor to propitiate the spirits. This was practiced even as late as the early 1960s. People also believed “that the sky maidens (*‘Kungulimi’*) come down to earth early in the morning to collect water from springs” (Assumi 16). It was also believed that when a person dies, his soul goes to *Kithilato* or Mount of the Dead (*Kithilato*: Sümi of Tizü valley point it to Naruto near Saghemi Village but the majority of Sümi point to Mt. Tiya in Wokha District). Unlike the Christian concept of two places “heaven” and “hell” for the dead, the Sümi belief was that all dead men belong to the same place as the Ao Nagas who “believed in only one location for the dead, *Asuliyim* or the Land of the Dead” (Ao 61). Irrespective of whether one was rich or poor, chief or commoner, everyone belonged equally after death. This belief connotes that folks believed death as a leveller.

### **1.3.2. SONGS REVEALING ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE:**

Nature is revered in Sümi society. People believed that nature possessed spiritual power to heal, bring back the dead, bless man, etc. It could also communicate, help, and provide

comfort and companionship to man. There was harmony between man and nature as the folks were benevolent towards it. Nature was looked upon as source of knowledge. It was the birds and insects that announced to man the right time to sow and harvest. The sounds that the birds and insects make were not simply noises but understood as nature's way of informing man about his activities as nature played its role in disseminating information about the most important things in man's life. In the song, *Aghau Chengu* (The Great Barbet Bird), the idea of nurturing can be seen in the life of the bird *Chengu*:

*Ishe aghau no, ishe achengu no*

*Ishe asüke lo, ishe pa ki kuto*

*Ishe apusü lo, ishe ati kho ye*

*Ishe ayeghi lo, ishe 'tikha pesüwo*

*Ishe pa ti tsüye, ishe pa ti tsüye*

*Ishe ayeghi lo, ishe 'ninga pesüwo*

*Ishe pa ti kho ye, ishe pa ti kho ye*

*Ishe pa ti saphe, ishe sasu wuye*

*Ishe ave shelo, ishe ave shelo*

*Ishe achengu no, ishe igha ani*

(Appendix-II Song No. 12)

When the singer heard the sound of *Chengu* (Great Barbet/*Megalaima virens*), he was transported back in time when he witnessed mother *Chengu* nurturing its young ones. It talks about how the bird, *Chengu*, built its nest on top of a tree and laid eggs. As soon as the eggs were hatched, the bird flew down in search of food and gathered worms and fed its babies. When the babies became strong enough, it led them in their first flight. Through the song, people were reminded of the idea of nurturing and it also served as an instruction for children to learn about mother's love and care for her children. As a metaphor for mother's role in



child's life, it speaks of how mothers should sacrifice and work so that her children are not neglected. Thus, nature was seen as a model for man to learn the ideas of nurturing and loving. In, *Ashihami Le* (Hunter's Song), the close relationship between the hunter and his dog is revealed:

*Iki no showo tsükinhe lazü, she ikuwo*

*Tsükinhe inakukhu ki ye O pu no lhokha shi*

*Aküsa hi isala shi tsüye*

*Ino putho zühu gholumo ikujo vehu kishito*

*Lau no tcheju puwu aye inhezü iqighi anishi aye*

As I return home following the sun's path

Shortened your father's life

By bringing this misery to me

I could not sleep at night thinking about our hills

When I imagine our hunts, tears always fall

(Appendix-II Song No. 14)

The hunter lost his dog while hunting in the hills and he was deeply saddened by the loss. In the song, he fondly remembers the forest, hills and valleys where they hunted together. The loss was painful because the dog was not only a good companion but it was an animal that contributed immensely to his food gathering. Besides, the hunter addresses his concern towards his dog by identifying the dog as human; capable of speaking and expressing emotion as evident in the image of his dog crying:

*Ishe! Iku kithila lo, "Ipu he! Iza he!" kumlomi*

*Ni tsüli kimiye*

Ah! On the way to the dead

“My father!! My mother!” must my dog be weeping

Pity my dog

(Appendix-II Song No. 14)

He dreamt his hound wailing on his way up to ‘*Kithilato*’ (Mount of the Dead) because in the past, “nature, animals and humans could talk and interact in many ways” (Nungshitula 74). An example of this close relationship and identification between man and his dog can be illustrated in the practice of *Atsüsa* (Dog’s share in hunting) in Sümi culture. It not only demonstrates the idea of interdependence but also displays the close connection between animal and man. Another instance of which can be also be traced in the story about a widow who gave birth to a spirit, a man and a tiger (Ayemi 74).

In an ecological song, *Ghoyi Shosho Ghügha* (Cicada’s Song), the insect is seen as a symbol of harvest:

*“Ishe! Shosho! Ishe! Shosho”*

*Igha iqho ato be aye*

*Ghile huni che aye*

Shouting “*Shosho! Shosho!*”

If it sings up the hill

Harvest time is approaching

(Appendix II Song No.15)

*Ghoyi* is a sacred insect for the Sümi as it signals the time for harvest. When the sound of *Ghoyi* was heard, people knew that the time to harvest has arrived. The chief who traditionally makes the announcement for harvest awaits the first sound of *Ghoyi*. The song

tells us that when the sound of *Ghoyi* was heard in the hills, the folks knew that it was time to prepare for harvest as evident in the lines:

*Ishe! Ghoyio! Iqho ato be ayeni*

*O! Ghile huni, huniche aye*

*Ishe! Ghoyio! Tupumi ilimi no xisho*

*Shini keno cheqho ghi wola*

*Ishe! Ghoyio, O mlauno aghü yesülo*

*Ayiko ye shi, Ishe! Ghoyio! 'limi ghawu ye*

Ah! *Ghoyio*, if it sings up the hill

Harvest time is approaching

Ah! *Ghoyio*! Young people are eager

And ready for harvest

*Ghoyio*, make patterns in your breast

Like an orchid, *Ghoyio*, a girl's bird

(Appendix II Song No. 15)

Likewise, for the sowing season, it is the sound of *Khashopapu* (Cuckoo) as found in a folktale by the same name. The story relates to an event that happened long ago about how a man transformed into a Cuckoo. This story has a variant in Rengma folktale called *Khasho Kapfu* (Department of Art and Culture 90). For the Sümi, *Khashopapu* is a symbol of sowing. When the cuckoo come singing, people immediately know that it is time for sowing. Songs of birds were used as pedagogic device as bird names were taught to children through songs like *Aghau No Asübo lo Yeiku*:

*Ho o aghacho no nhekobo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o achita no juibo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o achengu no ghasübo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o ayichi no zunhebo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o amülü no khawbo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o akhalu no akitsüqo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

*Ho o tsüqhüti no aghibo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

(Appendix II Song No.13)

It is a song about seven birds namely, *Aghacho* (Hornbill/*Bucerotidae*), *Achita* (Silver-Eared Mesia/*Leiothrix argenteauris*), *Chengu* (Great Barbet/*Megalaima virens*), *Ayichi* (Grey Sibia/*Heterophasia gracilis*), *Amülü* (Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo/*Dicrurus paradiseus*) Black Drongo/*Dicrurus macrocercus*), *Akhalu* (Barn swallow/*Hirundo rustica*), *Tsüqhüti* (White-Rumped Munia/*Lonchura striata*) and their corresponding haunts. The Hornbill flew to “*nekobo*” (banyan tree), the Silver-Eared Mesia flew to “*juibo*”, The Great Barbet flies to “*ghasübo*” (forest tree), the Grey Sibia flew to “*zunhebo*” (Hairy White-Wand/*Leucosceptrum canum*), the Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo flew to “*Khawbo*” (bamboo plant), the Barn Swallow flew to “*akitsüqo*” (roof), and the White-Rumped Munia flew to “*aghibo*” (rice plant). The song not only impart knowledge to children about birds but it also taught them the names of native plants and trees.

These songs reveals folks’ idea of Deep Ecology, coined by Arne Naess, because for their nature-centred philosophy was based on a folkloric belief that spirits dwelled in nature. Hence, the songs serves as metaphor to show how identifying with animals and birds was essential to understanding humans as one with nature. They hunted animals, gathered food, collected firewood, not for profit but for nourishment. These kinds of songs taught man to be

compassionate towards nature and to look upon it as source of knowledge and therefore to be revered.

### 1.3.3. SUMI IDEALS IN SONGS

A guest or any visitor is valued and honoured in Sümi society because of a belief attached to it. The folks are made to understand that gods may come in the guise of guests and visitors as illustrated in the myth of *Litsapa* (god of prosperity) who blessed the two orphaned sisters. In the song, *Yenliba*, the ideal of offering or serving the best rice-brew to guests can be traced. Rice-brew was the only drink in the olden days. It was part of a tradition that expected every household to offer rice-brew to visitors and guests. However, the guests were offered rice-brew according to their status. There were two types of rice-brew; *Aküpütsü ji* and *Aküza ji* (the former is the distilled liquid formed after fermentation and the latter is the remaining rice at the bottom that needs to be pressed before serving). Generally, the former was served to special guests and the latter was meant for the poor, slaves and orphans. Hence, in the song, *Yenliba* sings about his sadness when he was offered *Aküza ji*. This song brings out the ethics of serving or entertaining guests. Interrelated to this culture is the ethics of gifting. Gifts are never returned, especially meat, because it is considered taboo and people believe that whoever returns the gift would be 'müghamo' (unblessed/unlucky). Similarly, in Sümi culture, a basket that brought gifts is never returned empty. It can be viewed as acknowledgement by the receiver. However, in another culture this may come as a surprise or embarrassment but values differ from one society to another.

Another ideal upheld by the Sümi is moral purity. Young unmarried people were expected to maintain *Akimithe* (moral purity) life in the society. This is evident in the song, *Ayichiküvü Lono Pithive Keu Le* (The Song of killing in community fishing) where an immoral young man was condemned by the society. As he led many girls into immoral ways, he earned the disapproval of the people as depicted in the song:

*O! Hoishe! No axüsapu, axüsalü ye*

*Ishe! No ghi kuchi ye amlo ihshi cheni ghomo ye*

*Alhouno ghi küsakushomi kumo ye aziüzü ala*

*O Ishe! Ollomi nuno saqusani shi xücheyewo*

*Azü ghawuh wohaye 'hasalive ala*

O you misery men and women

You too do not want to worry

Even gods are uninterested with unnatural deaths

Ah! Your darling's son lived a wild life

Taken away by the water spirit

(Appendix II Song No. 18)

The song is an allusion to a folktale about a young man who was tricked by the chief of the village with the support of his villagers to participate in 'community fishing' which resulted in his death. While fishing, the villagers insisted the young man to enter the water. At first he ignored but when he saw village girls winking at him, he at once dived into the water. Then the chief commanded everyone to throw stones into the water. A person's moral life was viewed seriously by the society. The stoning was necessary as it functioned as a way to maintain "conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour" (Bascom 294). Society's disapproval of immoral behaviour is validated in the third line when *Alhou* (Creator) did not favour such unnatural death. Without the favour of *Alhou*, the dead was not welcomed at *Kithilato* (Mount of the Dead). Unable to come back to the living, the dead exists as ghosts/spirits that sends out mournful tones at night. Moreover, in the first place, the "*Azü ghawu*" (water spirit) took away the immoral young man because those who do not conform to moral standards set by society were also believed to be disliked by the spirits. The speaker-friend in the song also informed the mother of the immoral young man about the character of

her child so as to let her accept her son's death. He clarified that the water spirit had taken away his friend because of his depraved character, "*O Ishe! Ollomi nuno saqusani shi xücheyewo/Azï ghawuh wohaye 'hasalive ala*" ('Ah! Your darling son lived a wild life/Taken away by the water spirit').

#### **1.3.4. ENFORCING WORK ETHIC**

Folksongs are, above all, a reflection of the everyday life of the folks. In the past, people remained busy working in the fields every day except during festivals, community events and while observing rituals. Singing was a way to synchronise with their work. Working in the fields in *Alojis* (work groups) was accompanied by *Alukümla Le* (Work Song) where working in groups was a part of tradition. Every adult was supposed to join a working group called *Aloji* (work group). The *Aloji* worked together in the fields, slept together in the dormitories, and celebrated festivals together. Field work were mostly carried out by *Aloji* where the members were referred as *Alojilimi* (female members) and *Alojipumi* (male members). Work was not boring since workgroups sang to one another or sang about lovers among the different *Alojis*. The singing of songs while working served a practical purpose as the songs helped them to "organise and pace the rhythm of the work being done" (Toelken 150). Whether one was old or young, male or female, and rich or poor, they worked hard and toiled in the fields every day as hard labour was the norm of the day. Hence, food was abundant and they had three meals called *Tulhu* (morning meal), *Lhuba* (noon meal) and *Phitsü* (afternoon meal) excluding the morning and evening meals at home and mugs of rice-brew that go with every meal.

There were certain standards that were ritually upheld during work. One such custom was the practice of making an announcement by a specific member of the *Aloji*, usually an elderly man, to stop work in the fields. It was necessary for the chosen man to make an announcement to cease work for the day. Although there was no known punishment involved in not following this practice yet it was a tradition and everyone conformed. This value

associated with work is evident in the song, *Ilokeu No Isho lo hu Ani* (My Love is Working Above My Field):

*O Ishe! Timi lojimi aki to ayea*

*O Ishe! Ni lojimi oyeo ashe lo aphi*

*O Ishe! Amuchou no ave gho mutha*

*O Ishe! Amuchou ju no ni losü ye*

Ah! Other groups are nearing home

My group, still working in the field

The man do not know when to stop

O unhappy at the man!

(Appendix II Song No. 1)

A love song about distance, separation, wish, and hope, the lover sings about his sorrow at the man for not making the announcement to stop work, “*Amuchou no ave gho mutha*”. The lover and his beloved worked in different *Alojis* for unknown reasons. It can be assumed that parents’ disapproval could be the reason as was the case in many stories. An example of which can be found in the song, ‘*Loji Kithelo*’ (With New Work Group) where the daughter complains to her father for putting her in another *Aloji*:

*She timino khashi asüye iku niki ghüngü ye amu niye*

*She ipu no ipulo loji kithelo hulo ipi ani ngu no*

*She niye loji kiye lo huni thono*

*She ipu piye, iza piye iza pulo niloji ju qa-a pelo*

*She ipu no niloji küsa ishino khalu aye*

People are clearing jungle nearby



My father is asking me to join new *Aloji*

But I want to remain in my old *Aloji*

Let my mother weep for my old *Aloji*

My father has stopped my *Aloji*

(Appendix II Song No. 9)

The lover wished to offer his plate of food and rice-brew mug to his beloved but he could not. He was incapable to do so because of the distance in their relationship which gets magnified in the geographical distance between them. They belonged to different *Alojis* which meant that they were working in different fields. The lover wanted to go home as his beloved's group had already left but he was left behind because the elderly man who, traditionally, was supposed to stop the work in the field remained unmindful that evening had come and the time to return homeward. Despite the fact that it may appear trivial to current understanding of such situation. The folks lived a life bound by traditions and customs. People upheld these traditions and did not deviate from it. Thus, the question for the lover to break the tradition did not arise. It was considered unethical to stop work mid-way or without this traditional announcement. This ethic is still practiced as seen in people's approach to employer's approval for either taking rest while working or to cease work. Without gestural or verbal indication from the employer, a worker cannot take rest or stop work as it would be regarded unethical.

Another important practice is the tradition of using newly-woven baskets and other such things; signifying anticipation of new harvest, during harvest to invoke abundant harvest as mentioned in the poem, *Khaghi Ni Lojipumi-Lojilimi* (Remembering Our Work Group):

*Ghile huni ye I kho ghotsülo*

*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*

*Ghoshe tsülo o ghoshelive tsülo*

*Ghile huni I shola ghotsülo*

*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*

*Ghoshe tsülo o ghoshelive tsülo*

*I sachikixi alo ghotsülo*

*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*

*I kini süpha alosi kashe*

*Kashe tsülo kashelive tsülo*

Make me a cone basket to harvest

Weave me with patterns

Weave it, O weave it with striking patterns

Weave me an *ashola* for harvest

Weave me with patterns

Weave it, O weave it with striking patterns

Weave me a nice strap for my dao

Weave me with patterns

Spin the cotton fine to adorn my ears

Spin it, O spin it fine for me

(Appendix II Song No.4)

This unique practice of using new things and wearing new clothes during harvest was a ritualistic act of propitiating the spirits for abundant harvest and to bring prosperity. Phrases like, '*Litsapa no Kümghatsu penike*' (seeking *Litsapa*'s blessing) or '*Tüghami müla ani*' (appeasing *Tüghami*) were used to validate such practice. Therefore, the singer here asks for

new baskets, patterned “*ashola*” (a patch of loin cloth), beautifully designed “*sachikixi*” (dao sling) and newly spun cotton to adorn his ears.

The preparation of harvest was elaborate because people were required to wear colourful costumes and in fact use only freshly made or unused things (cone baskets, winnower, large bamboo mats, etc.) during harvest. Moreover, a particular household could not harvest at will. A chief’s announcement was awaited for every agricultural activity a village engages in. Out of which, the most important being sowing and harvest. Like in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* where the Igbo people waited for Ezeulu to make announcement for harvest during the Yam festival, a village could not begin sowing or reaping before the announcement was made by *Akükau* (chief).

In the song, *Khaghi ni Lojipumi-Lojilimi*, the concept of nostalgia can be found. The song reflects the singer’s nostalgic feeling about his *Aloji* (work group). As the new season begins, he was overcome with feelings for his old *Aloji*:

*Ishe! Khaghi ni lojipumiye*

*Ishe! Khaghi ni lojilimiye*

*Tusho 'thuni ni Loji kümüsü*

Ah! Long ago our men work-group!

Ah! Long ago our women work-group!

Remember our group when the season begins

(Appendix II Song No. 4)

The singer, who can be understood as an elderly person not included in *Aloji* fondly remembers his *Aloji*. The function of nostalgia is important here because it depicts love, care and strong bond shared among members of *Aloji*:

*Cheilewo ni ghüino kümüsü*

*Cheilewo ni zütchu kümüsü*

*Pavi pavi no, ni loji pavi*

Recalling back, miss our resting spot

Recalling back, miss our bathing spot

‘Tis better! ‘Tis better! Our group is better

(Appendix II Song No. 4)

The singer fondly recollects their *Aloji*’s resting place and bathing spot. The image of these spots brought to the singer different memories of his *Aloji* because understandably many things must have happened in those spots like, helping one another to unload baskets or washing themselves and waiting for beloved from another *Aloji* to reach those spots. In the concluding lines, the speaker reiterates how his *Aloji* was the best. Community living was central to Sümi folk life and hence a feeling of connectedness to the community can be traced in this song. The individual was known by the *Aloji* (Work Group) s/he belonged and without this connection, a sense of alienation was felt by the singer.

Another important aspect of Sümi culture was the idea of work as a means to gaining status. This is illustrated in the song, *Inakha-Ghonili*:

*Khumütsa no ghami ishe athi*

*Athi no Apukito lo luküsü*

*Luküsümi ghami ishe akhü*

*Akhü no ni o ni sa no ghamiye*

*Aphichighi no apo hopuye*

Ah! *Khumutsa*’s villagers’ paddy!

Reaped from *Apukito* field

But the reapers are starving

They bind their waist with twisted cloth

(Appendix II Song No. 4)

Here, *Ghonili* brings the image of *Inakha* who could not harvest enough after their divorce. It was shame to go hungry particularly for people in high position such as *Inakha* because such household had to feed many people. ‘Hunger’ is here symbolised in the word, *Aphichighi* which means a ‘twisted body-cloth’ to bind an empty stomach. Without abundant food, people would desist from visiting such a house and in that way it would ruin one’s hard earned reputation. The folks took pride in their labour as they understood that one must labour to earn one’s bread. This reflects the spirit of self-reliance and not depending on others. Labour was a source of power and it commanded respect in the society. As much as the hardworking person was admired, poor people were often despised because it revealed their inability or unwillingness to work. Further, it depicts one in a poor light as it suggest laziness. The emphasis on hard work in the poem is a Sümi value because “folk poetry is transmitted and re-created by popular virtuosi” (Richmond 86). If the theme did not resonate with their collective feelings or values they believed in, it would not have survived.

Hard work was relative to gaining social respect and honour. Therefore, songs enforcing work ethic were sung to encourage hard work in a society where labour was essential for survival. Without hard work, food would not be enough and hence it was detrimental for its sustenance. Industrious households were defined by the number of granaries. Therefore, even when there were multiple granaries; that could last for years, stocked with food items like, rice, maize, beans, soya beans, millet, etc., it did not stop households from cultivating. Since hospitality forms the core of Sümi values, food was needed to welcome guests. Besides, social status could be gained by giving Feast of Merit and feasting of the whole village meant the need to have abundant food. A chief or chiefs could command respect and honour by

entertaining visitors and village folks on a daily basis. Those chiefs that could not harvest enough were looked down by their people. The chief in the song, *Apo Qelumo* (The Poor Chief) was unlike other chiefs and was unpopular. He did not have a voice because of his poverty. Such a chief had no real influence because he did not have enough food to entertain people. He also could not gift others and brought disgrace to his ancestors:

*Ishe Timi shoinami kükami no*

*Ishe shomhi puye, alaqho qi puye*

*Ishe aghakhu lo kükami no*

*Ishe atsano atu mülo peqhe kulho shiye*

*Ishe aghau ghi akuhu-ü ye kichimi tsüye*

*Ishe akuhu-ü pe timi tsümo, kujoshenila*

*Ishe opu oza le pikiche noye ogiji saye*

Ah other village chiefs

Have tails and tail feathers

But our village chief

Is unable to speak out

Even birds with red feathers are given to elders

But is not given to others, what shame!

You embarrass your parents' fame

(Appendix II Song No. 28)

Importance of hard work is further emphasised in the song, *Ashekhami no Kinimi Shive* (Those who came late became richer than others'). As he felt indignant, the singer sings of how a late settler called *Khumtsa* had surpassed him, who was an early settler, in life. The prosperity of *Khumtsa* was evident in his building "Müghüki" (large house). He could also wear

‘*Avikiyiphi*’ which means that *Khumtsa* had also killed Mithun. These “*Müghüki*”, ‘*Mithun*’ and ‘*Avikiyiphi*’ were symbols of wealth and wealth signified hard work:

*Ishe Khumtsa no nithiu wokighimi noye*

*Ishe Shoghi lakhilo chighi hu moye*

*Ishe nithiu wokighimi no Müghüki shiye, Viyiphi ulu ye*

*Ishe kücho niye moni ili chelaimo müku qhou lu aye*

Ah! *Khumtsa* came later than me

One basket could not harvest ten baskets

Those who came later have built a huge house, wear *Avikiyiphi*

How sad for me to harvest below twenty!

\**Avikiyiphi* (male body-cloth worn by those who have killed Mithun)

(Appendix II Song No. 30)

The stress on hard work can be elaborated by the expression, “*müku qhou lu aye*” which indicates that his field could yield less than twenty baskets. Their uncompromising work ethic can also be found in the way the folks would compete with each other in the fields by trying to wear out as many *Aküwas* (bamboo hoe) as possible. The number of worn out *Aküwa* indicating the extent of hard work (Rotokha. interview). Another indication of their value of hard work can be found in the practice of bringing all their harvest home on the day of harvest. Which means that any amount of harvest like grain or maize should be brought home on the day of harvest. It was believed that otherwise the *Aghashu* (blessing spirit) would abandon and they would not receive bountiful harvest next year.

Further, songs like, *Ayeküzü Le* (Spinning Song), sung during festivals enacts the history of its people to enforce work ethic to the listeners:

*Nipu asüino khaghino ishi*  
*Agha vaqhino alu chi ighi*  
*Ishi püzüino süpha xu ighi*  
*Süpha lu chino süpha xo cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino süpha le cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino süpha ka cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino ayezü cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Ayeküxa cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Ayete cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Aye puho cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Aphi gho cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Ashe pili cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Aphi tsüghü cheni*  
*Ishi püzüino Aphi wu cheni*

This is how our ancestors  
Felled trees and cleared the woods  
This is how they sowed cotton  
Nurtured cotton field and harvested it  
This is how cotton is picked  
This is how cotton is ginned  
This is how cotton is spun  
This is how thread is spooled  
This is how yarn is starched  
This is how yarn is made into balls  
This is how body-cloths are woven



This is how ends are made  
This is how you stitch cloth  
This is how body-cloths are worn  
(Appendix II Song No. 31)

The song explains the different processes that undergoes to make one body-cloth. This song is still popular today and sung during festivals like, *Tuluni* (Festival of bountiful crops and a time for betrothal) and *Ahuna* (Post-harvest festival; a ritual to cook new rice in bamboo and exchange it with one another) because of the nostalgic sentiment the song carries with it and as a way to enforce work ethic in the community.

In this way, it can be understood that folksongs are expressions of people's innermost feelings which reveals their viewpoint and attitude. People sing these songs to communicate delicate subjects that is important in the society and in doing so preserves its culture's values and ethics in memory. Moreover, the singing of folksong is important as it enables the continuity of a people's cultural life.

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## Chapter V

### VALUES AND ETHICS IN SÜMI IDIOMS AND PROVERB

#### EXPRESSIONS

#### 1. Values and Ethics in Sümi Proverb Expressions

- 1.1. Proverbs Inculcating Values and Ethics upon Learners
- 1.2. Proverbs Inculcating Social Norms
- 1.3. Sümi Ideals in Proverb Expressions
- 1.4. Taboo-centric Proverbs
- 1.5. Proverbs Reinforcing the Value of Respect
- 1.6. Impressions of Women in Sümi Proverb Expressions

One of the keys to understanding Sümi Naga cultural values and ethics is in the idiomatic and proverb expressions used in folk speech called *Sülekhutho*. It is an integral part of Sümi Naga oral traditions and “expressions of folklore”; deeply rooted in idioms, proverbs, similes, and pairs of words. As such, ‘*Sülekhutho*’ can be understood as a Sümi word for proverb expressions. “*Sü*” stands for “Sümi”, “*le*” is a “song” or “word” and “*kutho*” means “depth” or “profundity”. *Sülekhutho* is embedded in a speech that has become almost archaic for younger generation. However, back in the day, proverb expressions were frequently used whenever the speaker intended to communicate seriously or to correct behaviour because it has deep philosophical wisdom and therefore expected to be used suitably and meaningfully.

Generally, when *Sülekhutho* is used, the speaker would preface it with, “*Apu-Asü no piche ghi keu tsa*” (words spoken by forefathers) or “*Apu-Asü no pi*” (as told by forefathers) to indicate that it is not a personal voice. As a result, proverb expressions weigh more than just ordinary expressions to the listener or to whom it is directed. When a person need to express in a more serious way than normal, a proverb is chosen to give more weight to one’s speech. It

is not mere words that is spoken as one wish to but expressions that are laden with ‘*Ameküa*’ (values) and ‘*Xükipiviye*’ (ethics) that reflects Sümi culture’s way of looking at things and principles that guide its people.

These expressions, based on experience and practice, serves as oral law in Sümi culture. Through which, it shows the sophisticated manner of speaking with economy and precision. Culture, in the words of Edward .B. Tylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, "is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1). In the humanities, culture has also frequently been understood as an attribute of the individual, the degree to which they have cultivated a particular level of sophistication, in the arts, sciences, education, or manners. Sümi proverb expressions shows that the folks are highly artistic. They use literary devices such as, similes, metaphors, pair of words, idioms, proverbs, etc. not only in their songs but in speech as well where words are carefully chosen to express an idea or view.

It must be admitted that the number of active speakers has come down over the years yet it is still spoken and used, though mostly by the elderly in their folk speech. That is not to say that young people do not use it because the use of *Sülekutho* is not relative to one’s age because a fairly young person can be found using *Sülekutho* appropriately in speech. Most active speakers use these expressions with pride because they understand the core meaning and also because in Sümi society, great respect is accorded to such people. When two people engage in a conversation or debate, the one who uses *Sülekutho* would be admired and could win over arguments. For instance, during a verbal spat between two people as to whose field should be attended to first by the *Aloji* (work group), the elder one would say, “I’m the first to step on pig and dog’s waste”. This means that the field of the elder would be attended first by virtue of him being elder to the other person in conversation. In this case, there would be no further

argument because the expressed *Sülekutho* is enough for the other to understand that the matter is final.

Sümi Nagas use proverb expressions in their ‘folk speech’ when they know that they understand one another or to prove a point. ‘Folk speech’ is “words or phrases used by members of any group whatsoever who share an understanding of each other’s meanings” (Congdon 140) because this ‘folk speech’ can be functional only when the speaker and the listener understand the meaning of the expressed words. Without understanding the meaning of words and phrases used in *Sülekutho*, communication is not possible. This clearly suggests that there are ‘special’ words or phrases used in folk speech which can be understood only within the group. These words and phrases become meaningful because the users understand each other. Otherwise, it is just a word or a phrase in a speech which may seem ordinary for those who do not have understanding of the underlying meaning. *Sülekutho* is metaphorical and represent something other than the literal. They are often allusions that refer back to a tale, an event, a song, etc. Therefore, someone who is not familiar with its association to the past would not know the contextual implication. In addition, attitudes and values of the folks are reflected through it as the speech is composed of folk beliefs, taboos, morals, and traditions.

The difference between *Sülekutho* (Sümi proverb expressions) and *Sütsa* (Sümi everyday language) can be emphasized through how people use the two. In ordinary communication, *Sütsa* would be used while *Sülekutho* is used when the speaker have something specific to convey which cannot be communicated in ordinary language because proverb expressions are “terse and on point” which ordinary speech do not offer. It is born out of a tradition that is understood through shared culture. For example, a particular proverb expression may be about something else which may not necessarily connect to the present context literally but they have metaphorical meaning that links it to the present. Thus, it can be understood that Sümi proverb expressions operates in its folk speech and may be defined as a

speech embedded in metaphors that can be understood only if one has knowledge about its contextual meaning. It thrives in the oral tradition of the people where the folks express their thoughts concisely because it is more effective and forceful than what many words can do.

When ‘folk Speech’ is defined as a “popular language; the dialect spoken by the common people of a country or district, as distinguished from the speech of the educated people or from the literary language” ([wordnik.com/words/folk-speech](http://wordnik.com/words/folk-speech)), it misses out on something important. As we know today, the word ‘educated’ or ‘literary’ is also associated with the ‘folk’ because the addition of “folk” to a ‘tale’ or a ‘song’ only indicates the nature of its existing form which is ‘oral’ or ‘unwritten’. What is “oral” or “unwritten” can also be “educated” and “literary” as is evident in literary and artistic items found in oral literature or the recent surge of oral literature scholarship.

Likewise, Sümi Naga folk speech emanates from a rich culture of oral practice that promotes language learning through speaking and listening. Since it is neither written nor recorded, memory plays a crucial role in its survival. Although much have been lost, proverbs have survived because it is a “fixed-phrase genre” (Dundes 31) and it exists in ‘fixed form’ through ‘pre-formulated language’ (de Caro 184) where the wording and content remain fairly constant. It functions as a mode of explaining and reasoning actions and behaviour through a lived experience that originates from a selective memory of listening to words spoken by others. It is also used as a reconstruction of experiences, giving directions and warnings for the future, encouraging or amusing each other, etc. It contains “wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Meider 3) and therefore is relevant for the Sümi Naga who use proverbs in its folk speech for instruction; idioms for giving directions for the future and correcting wrong behaviour; pairs of words to show differences; and simile to educate and pass

on wisdom to the young and to convey message by way of comparing a past experience to the present one and vice versa.

For the fact that languages change, slight variations can be found in the dialects spoken in Atoizü region, Zünheboto region and a marked difference in Pughoboto region. However, the essence and core meaning being the same, the general *Sütsa* (Sümi language) has been used here. Some proverb expressions used here are taken from *Sümi Pimhe Tsa* (Sümi heritage expressions) by Shiwoto Kati and from *Sülekhuthoh* (Sümi proverb expressions) by Scato Swu. The rest is a collection from active speakers through observation and participation in the community life of the Sümi Nagas. Besides, being a native speaker having fair knowledge of Sümi proverbs and an ability to identify proverb expressions in speech used by others has helped some items be recollected through memory.

Proverbs analysed in the chapter have been picked according to the most important context in which it is spoken. Although, a given item could be spoken in another context or to another person. Further, similar proverbs have been brought together in groups for better understanding and meaningful discussion. The text of each proverb used in this chapter is presented in Sümi text, literal translation and free translation respectively in Appendix-III.

## **1.1. PROVERBS INCULCATING VALUES AND ETHICS UPON LEARNERS**

Proverb expressions in this category may be regarded as fundamentals to be learned in general. The expressions reflect Sümi core principles that structure their lives. It serves as a guide to their behaviour by helping them to understand the difference between right and wrong. By common practice, it is mostly used for training children behaviour because one of the functions of proverb is “educating the young” (Messenger 299). They are usually quoted by



parents/elders to reprimand children when they do not act in ways considered fit in the society. Parents/elders often use proverbs to correct children behaviour as the impersonal power of proverbs allow the speaker to remain non-authoritative since “it is a proverb from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms” (Arewa 50). Thus, immediately after a proverb is cited, the speaker would add, ‘*Apu-asü no tishi picheghi*’ or ‘*Apu-asü tsa ke nei*’ (‘It is how our ancestors use to say’ or ‘It is ancestors’ words’). In this way, the listener is made to understand that the words are not sourced from the speaker’s imagination but derived from time tested lore.

- (1) “To behave as one descended from nobility.”
- (2) “The lizard broke its waist while laughing proudly with hands akimbo.”
- (3) “Do not imitate like the *Migheu*.”
- (4) “To be as sharp as blade of hay.”

The above cited expressions are specimens of character-building proverbs aimed to strengthen and improve one’s character. The proverbial phrase, “to behave as one descended from nobility”, originates from the idea that the nobility or ‘*Aji lono ighikemi*’ (those who come from blood) are cultured and therefore their behaviour ought to be emulated. However, the underlying meaning suggest that it is the character of a person that counts, not the nobility of one’s descent. It is generally used when a child/person is found indulging in wrong behaviour such as, lying, stealing, screaming, fighting, defying rules, backtalk, use of abusive language, aggressive behaviour, bullying, manipulating, disruptive talking, etc. People whose descent is from ‘*aji*’ (blood); meaning from nobility or decent family, behave in appropriate ways.

Those who come from ‘*aji*’ do not lie, steal, fight, or argue. They are not rude to others and do not speak ill of others. They are respectful towards elders, listen to parents, speak politely, obedient, respect traditions and observe them. Such people are honoured and admired in the society. Therefore, people look up to them and assume their behaviour as a standard in

guiding children behaviour. In Sümi culture, this '*aji*' is significant. In matrimonial aspect, knowing the 'bloodline' of one's would-be husband or wife is important. The folks believe that one's character is permanent as it comes from 'blood' and hence those that possess '*aji lhokiisa*', which literally means 'bad blood', would remain as one and it could affect the whole bloodline. In this way, children are made to realize that by misbehaving they are not only doing harm to their own name but to their bloodline as well.

Instilling this kind of value can also be seen in another proverb called, "The lizard broke its waist while laughing proudly with hands akimbo" which tells a condensed story of a proud lizard. The story speaks about a lizard who broke its own waist by keeping its hands on the waist and laughing proudly at other's misfortune. This proverb is used in order to cause children/people to remember the consequences of being arrogant. It prompts them to remember that one should not laugh at other's misfortune because it may bring one's own ruin which clearly demonstrate that the folks believe in the value of humility.

Imitating is discouraged by using a comparison, "Do not imitate like the *Migheu*". The expression suggest the sound a *Migheu* bird makes. People are advised to desist from imitating by alluding to a story where a bird called *Migheu* got its hoarse sound while trying to imitate other bird's sound. The expression often suggest something slightly dishonest and recommends being true to one's nature and to be wise enough to remain content with what one is because imitating others may result in disaster.

Children and learners are directed "To be as sharp as blade of hay" mentally so as to meet the challenges of life and also to pay attention to what is important or be focussed on the goal. 'As sharp as blade of hay' suggest intelligence and wisdom in a person. It could also mean to be the best in whatever skills one choose to pursue and to refine the same by continuous practice. It can be used as a comparison to show how a person is as sharp as a blade of hay which indicates the quality of mind in a person.

- (5) “Seems tears forebode you.”
- (6) “To remain uncooked however long you boil or roast.”
- (7) “As foolish as a croaking frog.”
- (8) “As easily noticed as white dog or hen.”

These expressions are used in developing right behaviour in a person. Moderation while expressing oneself emotionally is important in Sümi culture. That is why there is an expression, “*Akithi kho pele keshi nu keu*” (“To laugh like the sound coming out from spilling Job’s tears (Coix lacryma-jobi) basket”) that is used in a negative sense. It speaks against loud and dramatic character. The phrase, “Seems tears forebode you” also suggests that being too joyful is a sign of future misery. Therefore, when a person indulges in excess joviality or is too playful, s/he is politely made to understand that present joy could be a sign of tears by using a rhetorical question, “Are you being tempted by tears?” It could also be used as a statement immediately after an action by saying, “*Anhezü no qo ake na*” (“S/he was tempted by tears and hence the sorrow”). It can be further used as a comparison, “*anhezü no qo akeshi*” (“seems tears forebode you”). Figuratively, it suggest that one should not be too happy for one’s success as bad days may befall any time. Through this, it teaches the appropriate way to express oneself while imparting the value of humility. This type of proverb expression allows the speaker “to express a threat which the speaker may not later wish to carry out, to direct another’s action where a blunt command might offend, or to incite a person to action through irony” (Bascom 293). By indicating future misery resulted by present action, the proverb can be understood as a ‘threat’ to what is yet to come. However, it does not say, “Don’t laugh so hard” because that would be a command not acceptable to the listener or for whom the expression is directed at. If a child is not productive and resourceful even after repeated training, a parent or an elder would say, “To remain uncooked however long you boil or roast” to mean that the child should

not be like a taro that is cooked and prepared but still inedible. A particular type of inedible wild taro (*Aiqu*) is compared here. Through this proverb, children are taught that they must fit in somewhere in a useful way. Legend had it that once a man boiled *Aiqu* thinking that it was a common taro but it did not get cooked. So, he put it inside hot ash in the fireplace to bake but it still would not cook. At last, it was thrown away. Any food that is inedible cannot be called food because it does not fulfil its function. Likewise, children are advised to be of value in the family and society. In the past, everyone worked hard and there was no place for the lazy, the unproductive, or the unimaginative. Therefore, such proverbs were used to instruct children so as to avoid potential future problems.

The proverb, “As foolish as a croaking frog” is directed to a person who knows what is coming but does not do anything about it. It can be used as a remark said in jest which can be, in many cases, true to some extent. It means suffering as a result of one’s foolishness which teaches the value of wisdom in one’s life. Just as the frog that croaks when it sees the light of its catchers, a foolish person knowingly face unfavourable condition even when it is possible for him to avoid or reverse the situation. When such situation happens, a person is reproached not to be “as foolish as a croaking frog”.

Those who lead immoral lives or indulge in discomfiting behaviour are often compared to a white dog or hen that is familiar to everyone. It must be understood that a white coloured dog or hen was not common in the past as it is now due to advancements in transport and communication. Just as a white dog or hen could easily be distinguished from others so also a person who has corrupt character. Therefore, young people are cautioned not to be “as easily noticed as white dog or hen”. This comparison is used as a warning so that people do not ruin their name. For example, a loud and boisterous child could be reprimanded with this proverb because for the Sūmi, speaking or laughing too loudly is considered vulgar and hence best avoided. Parents would advise children by saying, “*Timi pelo hu iqho cheni, hu iqhi cheni ipi*

*pipekelo*” (“Do not let others point at your comings and goings”). It can be used in a sentence in this manner, “*aghili-aye lhoküsami ye atsü kimiye, awu kimiye toi kiche cheni*” (“People talk about ill-character person as a white dog or hen is talked about”).

Like in other societies, Sümi Naga society too pays great importance to moral values. People who upheld moral values are respected and admired. In the past, the villages were largely small in size and it was a close knit society where people knew each other. Accordingly, if a person happen to lead an immoral life, soon the word would spread and people would start talking about it. In this way, an individual could easily lose respect in the society. That is why the simile of ‘*Awu kimiye toi*’ (‘as familiar as white hen’), is used to describe and compare an immoral person. The significance of moral values in Sümi culture can be further illustrated in another expression, ‘*Aniküghü zü pekile*’ (‘spilling water from a taro leaf’) meaning ‘to lose everything’. Sümi believes that just as a taro leaf cannot hold water so is a person whose good name can be erased by just one bad deed or action. No matter how much good has been done by a person, if he commits an immoral act, then one’s good name is wiped away as people would just remember his wrong deed alone. The proverb is educationally useful in two ways - as a source of “wisdom to be learned by the young” and as a device “to be learned and used” (Abrahams 118). The expression suggest that it is wise to lead a sound moral life without which a person would be looked down in the society.

- (9) “To trade Mithun with a smoking pipe.”
- (10) “As lazy as the rat family.”
- (11) “The beautiful one who brews distasteful rice-brew.”
- (12) “To have holes between fingers.”
- (13) “If you toil today, you will relax and eat tomorrow.”

The above expressions are action based proverbs which is used to cultivate skill-learning in a person to perform a task with proficiency. An idiom, “To trade Mithun with a

smoking pipe”, alludes to an old story where a man went out with a Mithun to seek his fortune. However, when he returned to the village, he could only bring a smoking pipe in exchange of his Mithun. The juxtaposition of Mithun with a smoking pipe indicates the vast difference in the material value between a Mithun and a smoking pipe and the amount of loss the trader incurred. Mithun is not only a culturally sacred animal but it is also costly. While a smoking pipe is of insignificant value. Therefore, by referring to this story, it teaches children to be intelligent enough so that they do not participate in business or choose an occupation that is unprofitable to them. It is an example to show how an unproductive enterprise is as useless as man trading Mithun with a smoking pipe. This kind of allusion functions as a way to “provide a secular precedent for present action” (Dundes 24). Thus, when a child embarks upon unbeneficial activity, parents and elders would cite this idiom to help the child understand that the exercise would be futile.

Laziness is also discouraged in the society by citing the story of how all the members of the bamboo rat family were killed because of their laziness. The expression, “as lazy as the rat family”, is an imaginary story used to describe a lazy family. Earlier, Sümi families were large comprising of many siblings and hence the tendency of passing one’s work to another. The story speaks of a bamboo rat family that lived under the bamboo roots. Since there was only one entry, the father rat sensing of enemy asked the mother rat to close the door to avoid enemy but the mother delegated the task to her son and the son also did the same to his sister. While this was going on, the enemy came and killed all of them. Similarly, when children in the family are lethargic and rely on one another to perform the work assigned to him/her, parents would often discipline them with the saying.

An advice to tell a young girl to possess good qualities is conveyed through a proverb, “the beautiful one who brews distasteful rice-brew” suggesting that beauty without skills or good character is of no use. By using this proverb, the speaker takes “a personal circumstance

and embody it in impersonal and witty form” (Abrahams 119). The proverb operates in a situation when imparting the value of skills is important. Parents and elders would instruct that one should not be like the beautiful one who brews distasteful rice-brew. Rice-brew (*Akibeji*) was a staple food for the Nagas in the past and hence a woman’s worth was judged according to the taste of rice-brew prepared by her. The expression is used when a girl could not properly perform a certain task entrusted to her which demonstrate folks’ value of skills and good character over physical beauty. This idiom stems from the idea of hard work and skill as a prerequisite to character building.

Another idiom called, “To have holes between fingers” is meant for a person who is careless with things. The expression is usually cited to describe a wasteful person who use up things, particularly food, as though slipping from the holes between fingers. It present a view that one must not be spendthrift but be cautious and save for bad days. In the past, one harvest from either *Jhum* (slash and burn) or terrace cultivation or both was supposed to be managed judiciously so as to last a year. Thus, it was used as an advice against careless spilling (*phekiqhi*) particularly food grains while imbibing the value of carrying out work sensibly. A similar gender specific phrase for a girl child is, “*Au lasa*” (“bad/unprosperous hand”). Traditionally, this expression is used for a female who mismanage the year’s provision because household management was a female responsibility.

“If you toil today, you will relax and eat tomorrow” is usually cited to urge a person to labour and know the importance of hard work. It is a popular proverb used to instil the importance of hard work which was essential in the past as it is now. The obvious indication of the opposite image in the proverb where one cannot relax but labour and have nothing to eat is forceful enough for people to work hard.

(14) “Challenge your enemy from where his spear cannot be thrown at you.”

(15) “Stand far from where the tree may fall on you.”

- (16) “Observe your path before you walk.”
- (17) “Position yourself well before challenging others.”
- (18) “Never strike your *machete* in the water.”

These five proverb expressions are cautionary in nature and serve as guides to one's action. They are self-explanatory and educational generally cited to prepare children to think and assess real-life situations. “Challenge your enemy from where his spear cannot be thrown at you” and “Stand far from where the tree may fall on you” speaks about how one should be far from one's enemy, troubles or problems. Likewise, the proverb, “Observe your path before you walk” gives an instructive message of taking up a task or doing something after carefully understanding one's position, capability and ability. “Position yourself well before challenging others” expresses the idea of thinking twice before an action because once an action has been performed, it would be difficult to undo the same. Further, children are warned against testing the depth of water by using a machete through a proverb, “Never strike your machete in the water”. This could have been used as a precaution to avoid children falling into water but it can also be interpreted as an advice to desist from doing something without knowing the consequences.

All these expressions are in the form of instructions normally given to children. However, it can and is used as general guidelines to good behaviour and right conduct. It teaches one to be virtuous, wise, humble, skilful, and cautious. In this way, one is guided in the path considered ‘right’ in Sümi society. It helps one to internalize the created narratives and images in the expressions to be used in leading meaningful life. Since “each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring into play” (Abrahams 119). Active Speakers need only a situation for them to cite these proverb



expressions because the resources for teaching is already available and they only have to choose from the vast existing proverb items and use what is relevant.

## **1.2. PROVERBS INCULCATING SOCIAL NORMS**

In African societies, the ability to use proverbs “effectively is thought an important social and intellectual skill” (de Caro 189). This is true for the Sümi society as well. Proverbs are not only culturally significant and meaningful but it is also regarded as an art and commands respect and admiration. It functions as a guide to nurture appropriate social behaviour in the society. Moreover, its social uses come through certain proverbs where specific social attitudes are consciously formed for the reason that proverbs are “short, traditional, “out –of context” statements used to further some social end” (Seitel 127). A large number of Sümi proverb expressions can be found to be related to how one must fit in or know his standing in the society. Here, “out-of-context” means that proverbs are statements which violates the usual rules of conversation. It means that proverbs cannot always be taken at face value. There are hidden meanings to be assumed by listeners. This definition underscores the fact that at least some proverbs, if not all, provides an understanding of how proverbs could be used to serve a particular social purpose. Sümi proverbs relating to social status is a case in point because “although relatively simple in their application of metaphor, proverbs are one of the most complex genres in that they are most sensitive to social context” (Seitel 141).

The social status of a person is very significant in Sümi society- a society that is divided clearly on hereditary and merit lines as Chieftainship is hereditary and the rest of the villagers have to prove their merit in order to gain social status. This society is composed of a chief and other assistant chiefs, the warriors, the wealthy and the rich, common/ordinary villagers, dependents, and orphans. The term “dependents” here means the ‘*Anukishimi*’ who sought

material and physical help from others or those ‘landless’ who cultivate on others’ land. It could also refer to a person whose *Ame* (bride price) has been paid by others.

The importance of one’s social status in Sümi culture can be illustrated in the story *Inakha* and *Ghonili* where *Ghonili* asserted that, “*Aküsa asapu ye kishe pelu cheni ikemu akühaghi ye kishepe luchemo*” (“A bracelet and bangle can be worn double but an ivory armlet cannot be worn double”), to suggest her inability to remain at her husband’s home when he had already brought another wife. Through this, it can be understood that if her social standing was lower than the new wife, she could have remained as another wife of her husband. However, since both the new wife of her husband and her social status was high neither of them could play second fiddle as ‘first’ or ‘second’ wife. Thus, it is clear that social status of a person was detrimental in choosing one’s course of action in life.

A person’s social standing determined the extent of acceptance in the society. It was so because back in the headhunting days, a person was judged according to the number of heads one brought home or the number of livestock one possessed. There was clear division between the rich and poor, the chief and other common/ordinary villagers, warriors and landowners, etc. Even in terms of dress and ornaments, only those that have taken the heads of enemies could wear shawls and body-cloths decorated with cowries. ‘*Akühaghi*’ (an armlet made of elephant bone) was exclusively worn by chiefs, warriors and the rich to adorn themselves. For instance, “As Different as *Sheqhu* and *Chengu*” indicates the vast social status difference between two people. This simile indicates the contrast between things, people, situation, etc. ‘*Chengu*’ (The Great Barbet) is considered a better and bigger bird than ‘*Sheqhu*’ in every aspect. *Chengu* typically flies high up in the air and lives in towering trees. It also boasts of loud and clear sound while *Sheqhu* is the opposite. It can also be used as a pair of word like, “*Sheqhu-Chengu*”. Whenever a huge difference between two people is found, this pair of words is used

to show the disparity. The expression shows two different people/things that is incomparable in nature.

The expression, '*Aki wo lahme*' ('Price of freedom from bondage') is another instance of the significance of social status in Sümi society. It speaks about the price one pays to an adoptive father if he wanted to become independent. As mentioned earlier, in Sümi society there existed "dependents" who lived under the care of adoptive father's family. "Dependents" existed because there was inequality in the society. Landlessness and poor economic condition, inability to pay bride price, natural calamities were some of the reasons why "dependents" existed. When a "dependent" did not want to be with the family which can be caused by different reasons like, becoming self-sufficient, inability to have good relations, etc. the "dependent" needed to pay a price which could be anything or in any form; material or monetary. A man could literally become independent only after paying this 'price'. After which, he would be free to use his own clan name and not the clan name of his adoptive father.

The idea of community living which is central to Sümi way of life is another important aspect of social values. For the Sümi, the village represent everything and mean so much for the individual because it is a society where the interest of the community is upheld over the individual. Every individual is expected to contribute positively in the society. Thus, we find several proverb expressions that warns against selfishness, greed, and stupidity or gives instructions about what is right or what is the best way to live.

*'Angupa no apulukho kichhe'* ("To hit paddy bag with spearhead") is used in reference to a situation when a person face misfortune one after another. This simile refers back to a folktale about a man who lost his paddy bag in the water while trying to cross a river. In order to save the bag, he threw his spear but the spear got stuck and the river current took away both. It was a tragedy because both the paddy bag and the spear were precious for the man. It was

precious because those things were hard earned. There is also another pair of words called '*sheshe-bebe*' which means exactly the same.

- (19) "To hit paddy bag with spearhead."
- (20) "Take away your cone- basket, I will rest mine."
- (21) "To swallow if it is fish and spit out if it is crabs."
- (22) "Will take if it is burrowed but give you if it is not."
- (23) "As irritable as flea inside blanket."
- (24) "To be an unground grain among people."
- (25) "Umbilical cord is still attached."

The expression, "Take away your cone-basket, I will rest mine" is usually used while describing people who thought only for themselves. It speaks against selfishness and encourages empathy. Before the harvest season, it is customary to clear three to four small areas on the way to the field. It is also necessary to make '*Kiliphapha*' (A traditional water tap made by splitting the bamboo into two and using the half part as a water pipe) to enable reapers to take rest from heavy load, wash themselves and quench their thirst as they carry the harvest home. Since after the harvest, the produce is collected in cone baskets and carried home on head. The proverb here refers to a person in society who comes late but attempts to occupy others' settled position thinking only of his load. Such people are frowned upon and avoided because their action brings discord in the society. Likewise, people who are selective and accept only what is good for them are called as people who 'swallow fish and spit out crabs'. This idea can be seen in another proverb, "Will take if it is burrowed but give you if it is not". Such kind of people are considered "as irritable as flea inside blanket" because of their selfishness and crookedness and they do not belong to the society.

In the same way, "To be an unground grain among people" is spoken to people who are socially odd or do not fit into societal norms. Like an unground grain that would be thrown

away or separated from the rice, the ‘black sheep’ would not be accepted in the community. “Your umbilical cord is still attached” is an idiom addressed to landless people who becomes others’ ‘*Anukishimi*’ (‘dependents’ or slaves) or to a person who become a ‘dependent’ because of his inability to pay bride-price. However, later on in life when the slave or ‘dependent’ do not want to remain as one and therefore finds ways to come out of that bondage, he is reminded of his status through this idiom because in Sümi tradition it is not possible unless one pays a heavy fine.

- (26) “As proud as poor man finding deer carcass.”
- (27) “I am small built but leave a large patch of hair on my head.”
- (28) “The water in your footprints have not dried yet.”
- (29) “Only by holding an *Ayilo* can you utter his name.”
- (30) “To claim pangolin’s head.”

“As proud as a poor man finding deer carcass” expresses the Sümi idea of staying grounded while enjoying short-lived happiness. A proud person is regarded as someone out of one’s mind or to some extent crazy. This expression is used in a light-hearted humorous sense to advice someone from displaying pride in short-term happiness. In the past, food was scarce for the poor and therefore it would be a joy to find deer carcass because meat and rice were restricted to the rich only. The poor had to remain satisfied with taro, yam, millet, etc. However, the expression here warns against pride in sudden elevation of one’s social or economic position because such people would find themselves friendless on bad days.

Another expression, “I am small built but leave a large patch of hair on my head” talks about a person who wishes to be what he is not. Here, ‘small built’ metaphorically indicates that someone is a ‘nobody’. Traditionally, Sümi men could not fashion their hair according to their wish but it was decided by his social status. Thus, it was a social marker and could not be passed on to one’s children. Only rich and respected Sümi men in the society could shave an

inch above the ears in a circle pattern which was considered handsome. By tradition, other ordinary villagers needed to shave almost all of their hair except a small portion on top which is called *Turpi* (Kati 30). Hence, more hair on the head suggest one's higher status in Sümi culture. This social status was judged according to one's skills in head hunting, feast giving, or possession of livestock and it could not be passed on to one's children. Those men who could not fulfil the expectations of the society were compelled to keep just a small patch of hair on top of their head. 'Small built' does not mean one's physique but possessions, exploits, valour, and other such qualities that determine his status. It can be used in a situation when a person's action do not suit his position. The proverb serves as a reminder to stay true to one's economic and social position in life. In the present context, it could be used to mean maintaining a lifestyle that is in consonance with one's economic position.

The proverb, "The water in your footprints have not dried yet" is a polite way of asking someone to 'shut up'. It was spoken traditionally to late settlers who did not cooperate with others or argue about property or land. Sümi Nagas are believed to have migrated to the present place after crossing the Doyang River. The use of the word 'footprints' indicate the prominence of one's track because of the water. Latecomers of the village do not get their share of land and therefore become landless and live at the mercy of the *Akükau* (village chief). In Sümi culture, the '*Akükau*' is the founder of the village and hence enjoys great authority. Besides respect and honour, he also receives free labour twelve times a year from each household in his village or he could ask for any number of free labour according to his need. Hutton also notes that "the basis of Sema society is the village, or part of a village, which is under the control of a chief" (Hutton 121). This idiom prohibits free expression from those who came late to the village. In the present context, it can be re-interpreted to mean not speaking before elders or before those who have better experience. It may also be told to an economically poor fellow. Or to someone who had a recent experience of the matter that is being talked about.

As stated earlier, expressions like, *Onepa lo azü thomphi* ('your footprints have not dried yet'), *Apola küthsüpe aphi* ('umbilical cord is still attached'), *Akiwo lahme* ('price of freedom from bondage'), is a clear indication of the existence of class division in the society. It speaks of a 'class' of people who were called "*Anukishimi*" or "dependents" who formed the lowest section of the society. These people had no voice because even if they tried, no one would give weight to their idea or worse still, there would not be any listener. As long as they were an "*Anukishimi*" of someone, they remained a follower. Their duty was to serve their adoptive father's interest. In this way, people who stand out or deviate from societal norm because they are different or because they raise voice or question were quickly pressured into conforming to the rest of the group by citing such phrases.

Further, "Only by holding an *Ayilo* can you utter his name" suggest that there was a considerable difference between people in the society. The proverb is normally used in anger during quarrels or disputes. It may be directed to a person who is sassy or arrogant, or who act or speak disrespectfully or inappropriately for one's age or position. To hold an "*Ayilo*" just to utter the name of someone whose social status was higher, even if it was metaphorical, speaks about the enormous gap in the social order. *Ayilo* (*Hyssopus officinalis*), from mint family, is a sacred herb for the Sümi because it is a traditionally important plant used in many rituals. *Ayilo* is believed to possess the power to keep evil at bay. It is also assumed that if a person holds the *Ayilo* in his hand, it would terrify *Tüghami* (evil spirit) and hence the *Tüghami* would not come close to a person. Thus, saving the person from sickness or death. It is also used to ward off epidemics and other illnesses. For example, parents would leave their child in their field hut by placing *Ayilo* around the child. It was believed that the child would be saved from *Tüghami* that way. (Sema. interview). When someone challenges another person who had better experience or use someone's name irrelevant to the subject at hand, or call a respectable and elderly by name, this proverb is cited to convey that the speaker has no authority to utter

that person's name. Or when a person tries to act smart by challenging or arguing with someone not equal to his status or someone he must treat with respect; he is gently corrected by elders who use this proverb to convey that if he does not humble himself he will have to pay the price. Thus, absence of equality can be inferred through these expressions. In 1984, the chief of Kelto village announced that he was releasing his *Anukishimi* (slaves) during the Jubilee celebration of the village. It was simply a symbolic gesture in the Christian spirit of brotherhood because the term *Anukishimi* has not been strictly followed after Sümi gradual conversion to Christianity except in some villages like Shena Old and Satami Village. Yet, it was important on a psychological level. To be called an '*Anukishimi*' meant 'nobody'; one who did not have a say in the society. Therefore, it meant freedom from stigma one has to carry through life. However, while there was absence of 'equality' as we understand it now, it was more of a way of life for the folks. It was a tradition and custom built upon lived experience which was meaningful for them and hence practiced. Nevertheless, this class division, regarded at that time as a way to keep the unity of the village and to have an ordered system though it meant subjugation to the dominance of some people need not be practiced further because traditional values cannot remain static but must be dynamic in order to meet the challenges of changing times.

"To claim Pangolin's head" is used to refer to a person who speaks without knowing a thing. It could also be referred to an enterprise that may result in loss. It alludes to a story where a group of youngsters decided to dig out pangolin for meat. Before digging started, a particular young man among them informed the group that if they could get pangolin, he would like to have its head as his share. After spending time digging, they could dig out pangolin but to the young man's surprise, the head of the pangolin turned out to be tiny and not what he had expected. He thought that he was claiming for the choicest part but realised his folly in the end. And while he was sulking about the size of the pangolin's head with his face towards the



opposite side from where the meat share was distributed, he found that everyone had left with their share of meat and there was nothing for him. This expression can be used as a warning against such behaviour to mean that if one keep on grumbling it would result in one's own loss.

(31) "Even a tiny mouse rattles before dying."

(32) "To fight either by spearhead or *dao* blade."

(33) "Like the swaying of a burning firewood."

(34) "A bangle and bracelet made of iron can be worn double but ivory armlet is not worn double."

When a person mocks at the weak or poor, he is gently warned by a proverb, "Even a tiny mouse rattles before dying" to mean that one should not be egoistic and underestimate others' physical or economic position because one might discover unknown talent possessed by that person. The value inherent in this proverb is that one should empower others to fulfil their potential instead of belittling them.

"To fight either by spearhead or *dao* blade" implies forthrightness in action and speech. In the past, it was meant to be an advice to fight fiercely. The spear has two ends, called "*Anguthi*" ('upper end') and "*Anguchighi*" ('lower end') and the *dao* (machete) has two sides, called "*Ayiu*" ('front') and "*Anou*" ('back'). Here, it suggests fighting by the upper end of the spear and the front side of the *dao* which demonstrate Sūmi value of fighting from the front and in a straightforward manner without manipulation and treachery. This proverb clearly put forward the value of doing and speaking in the face and not from the back. However, while it is good to be forthright, it could also result in tactless action when situation demands cautiousness and restraint.

A wise and smart person is compared to a burning wood that dispels darkness in the expression, "Like the swaying of a burning firewood". In the absence of modern torch lights,

a burning wood was swayed rapidly in the dark to light one's way. Just as a lighted firewood is used to guide man, a wise and resourceful person is also needed in the society to guide others. Such person is valued and respected in the society.

All these proverbs serves as statements to inculcate social values as “each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring into play” (Abrahams 119). Since community is at the centre of Sümi folk life, it is understandable that these expressions are needed to teach and instruct about good living or how to live together as a society. Good living here means a society that lives in harmony and enjoys peaceful co-existence. This is possible only when the people, as a whole, and the individuals aspire for higher things and work unitedly for common good and not in the interest of one's own benefit.

### **1.3. SÜMI IDEALS IN PROVERB EXPRESSIONS**

This classification has been made because a large number of Sümi proverb expressions centres on ideal behaviour and attitude, thinking about or planning the future with wisdom which seem like idealistic but attainable at the same time. It is so because the expressions are envisioned as advice for future and therefore if the advice is taken, one can achieve what is desirable in the society.

- (35) “Do not speak in and out.”
- (36) “Dry your food grains while the sun shines.”
- (37) “Legendary yam cooking of the past.”
- (38) “Your kitchen smoke do not even reach the roof.”
- (39) “As tangled as crabs biting one another.”
- (40) “Like an owl waiting for berry to ripen.”

(41) “As pure as rice bean and soya bean seed.”

(42) “As proud as fools during festivities.”

“To speak in and out” expresses the virtue of firmness in speech because none would believe a person who speaks one thing and tells the opposite another time. Those who “speak in and out” are laughed at and their words are not taken seriously. This quality is important because malicious words cannot be taken back and it could cost even one’s life. It also expresses the idea of speaking out only after thinking carefully and functions as an instruction against speaking in haste. Further, it can also be related to decision-making process. When a particular decision is made, it is expected for one to remain steadfast no matter what the circumstance. For example, in extreme case, a Sümi would stand his ground even when he had realised that what he said was incorrect because Sümi culture do not permit a person “to speak in and out”. In this way, flexibility in speech and decision making is discouraged.

The proverb, “Dry your food grains while the sun shines”, functions in the same way as the English proverb, “Make hay while the sun shines”. It shows how instead of complaining on rainy days, one must prepare oneself when good days befall on him. Since proverbs serves “a rhetorical function, to be used to convince someone of some point” (de Caro 185), it can be understood that the rationale behind this expression convey the fact that the sun was the only energy that could dry their paddy. Thus, they had to equip themselves at the right time. This idea can be found in other common phrases like, *‘Ahe-gho lono shilu velo’* (‘Do it while you are young’) because *‘Kite-küsü loye shimulake’* (‘you cannot do it when you are old’) to suggest that it is wise to do things when the time is right.

Sümi believes in the spirit of hospitality as evident in the expression, “Legendary yam cooking of the past”. Hospitality is a virtue common to many Naga tribes. As mentioned by Hutton, the Sümi are “generous, hospitable, and frequently improvident” (Hutton 26). The expression refers to a story about a miser who did not want to share boiled purple yam

(*Dioscorea alata*). Since the man was miserly, he did not want to share the yam to the visitor who came to his house. The yam was kept boiling even when it was cooked because taking it off the fire would mean that the yam was cooked and ready to be eaten. However, when it was opened after the visitor had left, the yam was found burnt and inedible. In this way, this proverb serves as a warning against miserly action. Through this allusion, miserly or mean action is warned with disastrous consequences while encouraging generosity and kindness. In the same manner, “Your kitchen smoke do not even reach the roof” suggests that respect is accorded to those who feed others generously. Someone whose kitchen smoke does not reach the roof implies less fire due to less cooking which clearly indicates few generous action. Such people and households are looked down in the society.

The expression, “As tangled as crabs biting one another” demonstrates an image of entangled crabs unable to release themselves. Crabs biting one another is considered an unprofitable activity. The proverb is used when two people argue about something which none would get or receive. It is also used as an advice to avoid jealousy or pulling down one another when someone is successful. Similarly, when a person waited on something for a long time but in the end realises it was of no value, the person would be told that s/he was “like an owl waiting for berry to ripen”. This is so because *Michiyithi* (wild berry) is an inedible berry that remains raw till the end. The owl did not know that *Michiyithi* was an inedible berry that was hard and raw in nature. It could mean expecting what is not or waiting on for something or someone that is not rationally possible. Both proverbs are used as an advice to desist from activity that is unprofitable to any party involved. Such expressions “contain wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views” (Meider 3) and encouraged ethical living to the folks.

“As pure as rice bean and soya bean seed” is a simile that compares a morally upright person to the flawless seeds of rice bean and soya bean. *Akixi* or rice bean (*Vigna umbellate*) and soya bean seeds are flawless in nature. In Sümi society, moral purity is regarded highly.

Someone who had not stained his/her name with bad deed or has not been corrupted is honoured in the society. Generally, rice bean and soya bean seeds do not bear marks on them. In the same way, the phrase “As pure as plantain bud/flower or banana heart” (*‘Awucho awolo kukho toi’*) compares a morally pure person to a plantain flower without any blemish. It is a reference to someone who is honest, truthful, and morally pure. It can be used as a comparison and as an advice to live a life without *‘tuku-tiye’* (marks/corrupt). For the young unmarried boys and girls, it means getting good wife or husband. For the rest, it means receiving respect in the society. Polygamy was practiced by menfolk; as a sign of prosperity and also for political alliances. However, it was limited only to the rich and chiefs. Other villagers led a relatively sound moral life as suggested in these expressions.

Sümi moral values can be further illustrated in another common phrase, “*Aniküghü zü pekile*” (“As spilling water from a taro leaf”) where good deeds is compared to water that does not stay on the leaf. Truthful and honest person is compared to “*Aniküghü*” (taro leaf) and a person without blemish is compared to “*Azü*” (water). If the water on the taro leaf is spilled, not even a single drop of water will remain on the leaf. So even when one had led a life without blemish, with a single wrong deed all his virtues are forgotten and counted no more. Likewise, it takes a long time to build up a good reputation which can be easily destroyed by a single misconduct. This is a lesson to lead one’s life consistently sound. When someone has done some wrong in the eyes of the society, the person is considered to have signed up his right to speak in the society as found in a common idiom, “*Atsa mpi mloqhi xü*” (“To live without a voice”).

Likewise, “*Akimi thia kelaye alojipu-u kümsü qa*” (“Like a woman crying for her lover on her husband’s death”) is used while referring to unfaithful men or women. It speaks about the story of an unfaithful wife. *Shoghu*’s wife had an extra-marital relationship with another man called *Tsüipu*. Unfortunately, *Shoghu* passed away. It was believed that during his funeral,

his unfaithful and clever wife was heard wailing loudly, “*O Shoghu*” to show her love for her husband to others. However, it was immediately followed by, “My darling *Tsüipu!*” (“*O Shoghu! Lomi Tsüipu nohe*”). Such action and character is condemned by the society that upholds the sanctity of marriage.

The expression, “As proud as fools during festivities” shows that Sümi discourages conceit and snobbery. According to this proverb, only fools act proud during *Ani* festival whereas a sound person remains the same at all times. *Ani* or *Tuluni* is a popular Sümi festival celebrated in the month of July. It is a time when crops produce enough foodstuff for everyone. Food is abundant and everyone- the poor, the fools and the rich indulges in merry making by enjoying rice-brew, meat and rice. Hence, the proverb can be regarded as an advice to remain humble while one revel in prosperity.

(43) “Baking in ash being taboo, ate roasted.”

(44) “Greed for riches as well as bravery.”

(45) “To thrust deeper when pled to pull out.”

When a person engages in twisted schemes to suit selfish interest, the person is considered as a crook by using an expression, “Baking in ash being taboo, ate roasted”. It speaks against manipulations and treacherous schemes. Sümi observed many taboos and rituals earlier. One of them was abstaining from eating food items that were baked in hot ash or it could also mean something that was not meant to be baked. For example, when a person was forbidden from eating anything that was baked in ash but could not resist the temptation and ate by roasting it. Offenders of this taboo would later claim that they were still observing the taboo because they have not eaten anything that was baked in ash. Prohibition of eating anything baked in ash simply connotes that it was a ritual to keep fast. However, there were people who would twist the idea and take it at literal level. This idiom talks about practicing rituals and prohibitions according to one’s convenience without following customs and rules.

It is often used in reference to fickle minds who twist rules to suit their selfish interest and “serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication” (Arewa 50).

The proverb, “Greed for riches as well as bravery”, expresses Sümi value of moderation, fairness, and rationality in life. It displays how a person may either be rich or brave but not both. Traditionally, during headhunting days, a person could not be both. Someone was rich because he refrained from joining the raids and therefore could rear livestock or cultivate huge areas for food. On the other hand, the brave could not become materially rich for the same reason that he would be constantly out taking enemy heads as trophies. Speaking about selfishness, it expresses the idea of how one cannot have the best of both worlds. It can be used to say that one should be rational and not try to have two incompatible things at the same time. The Sümi text reads, “*Ashi gha ghi mine, aghü gha ghi mine*” which can be literally translated as “greed for meat charm, greed for war charm”. “*Ashi gha*” means ‘the skill/gift of becoming economically rich’. “*Aghü gha*” means ‘the ability to take enemy’s head’. Warriors and the rich were believed to have possessed charms where even *Tüghami* (evil spirit) assisted in their success and growth. However, a person was discouraged from desiring both because it implies greed and selfish attitude which was not culturally acceptable. For example, these *aghas* could be had when one met giant/supernatural being (*‘timi ala’*). There is a story about a man who met *‘timi ala’*. Since it was believed that blessings should be sought when one met such giant, the man decided to seek both *‘ashi gha’* and *‘aghü gha’*. However, while he was about to ask for the second blessing, his tongue filled his mouth and he was unable to utter a word. Thus, the idea of greed is based upon this belief.

An expression similar to ‘rubbing salt to injury’ is a Sümi phrase, “To thrust deeper when pled to pull out”. It speaks of days when machetes and spears were used regularly. The wounded person requested that the spear pinned on him be removed but the helper happened to be a false sympathiser and therefore shoved the spear deeper while acting to help. It can be

used to mean deceitful action that bring harm. It could also be used as a warning against false friendship thereby encouraging one to keep good company and friends and to be wary of dishonest people. It also teaches one to be smart enough not to be fooled by the disguise of a person to mislead and to understand the true nature of something or someone.

- (46) “Inability to differentiate inside and outside.”
- (47) “Even the moon and the sun comes out from us.”
- (48) “As forceful as driving out *Chengu* from its nest.”
- (49) “To weave child sling before birth.”

The phrase, “Inability to differentiate inside and outside” speaks about loss of value and grandeur in society when things become disorderly. Sümi Nagas use bamboo ropes made by using the ‘*ayi*’ (outer) and ‘*aba*’ (inner) part of a tender bamboo. One for using in important works while the other serving common purpose. The phrase demonstrates the idea of a chaotic state in the society when people could not differentiate between high and low, rich and poor, truth and falsehood, etc.

The expression, “Even the moon and the sun comes out from us” is an exaggeration usually used to mean that proud people could even claim that the sun and moon comes out from their direction or land. This kind of people talk as though they could control and determine natural phenomena because of their superiority complex. This proverb proves that arrogance is discouraged in the society and speaks against proud people whose speech and conduct undermines others.

“As forceful as driving out *Chengu* from its nest” is a negative phrase indicating the use of force to take others’ place. *Chengu* (The Great Barbet) is an admired bird for the Sümi because of its beauty and its sound. It speaks about knowing one’s position or limitation because when a person tries to assume another’s position it may produce terrible results. For



example, it can be used in the present situation of how the increasing population of Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrants (IBIs) in Nagaland is a threat to native survival. This proverb is used in an instance when a poor man drives out a rich man from his own home. It alludes to a tale where a '*Tüghashoqhe*' (sparrow) used force in driving out '*Chengu*' (Great Barbet) from its home so as to make its own. *Chengu* is a large bird while the sparrow is small. This contrast helps us to understand the difference between two entities where the relatively weaker or poorer or an outsider try to capture another's position by using force.

An equivalent of 'to count one's chickens before they're hatched' is a Sümi proverb, "To weave child sling before birth". It is used as a negative statement to mean that one should not rely on something wished for until one knows for certain that it will happen. It warns against doing or planning something in anticipation of a thing that has not happened yet.

In this way, Sümi ideals in proverb expressions instructs against haughtiness, greed, false friendship, and miserly action. While recommending mindfulness, foresight, generosity, humility, and orderliness. Besides, it also explains one to be honourable, ethical, honest, and hospitable at all times. These proverb expressions demonstrates the idea of how one can translate ideals to action in one's life.

#### **1.4. TABOO-CENTRIC PROVERBS**

Taboo-centric proverbs are those expressions that are centred on or connected to taboo. It is often an expression which indicate or convey that a certain act, speech, or behaviour is forbidden. Thus, they are strict 'prohibitions' that must be followed comprehensively. We know that proverbs are used "to convey some ethical or philosophical truth" (de Caro 184). Here, the addition of "some ethical or philosophical truth" in de Caro's definition means that proverbs carry beliefs of a culture. Taboos exist in a given culture because of a culture's belief system. A belief may contain 'ethical or philosophical truth' in a culture. For the Sümi Naga,

“absolute authority rested with the word ‘Taboo’. For all actions that were unacceptable, harmful to the interest and wellbeing” (Nekha 57) to others was considered ‘Taboo’. As discussed in the previous chapters, ‘taboo’ called ‘*chini*’ is a significant instrument in the lives of the Sümi Nagas. It instructs, guides, and warns people from engaging in a particular manner or speech. Hence, it is used extensively in folk speech.

‘*Chini*’ is a Sümi word for ‘taboo’. It is a prohibition that must be observed strictly and is associated to an action, speech, or conduct of a person. In order to understand the gravity of the word ‘taboo’ or ‘*chini*’ in Sümi culture, the very word need to be understood. ‘*Chini*’ is associated with anything that is traditionally prohibited or forbidden and it may be further extended to any act, conduct or speech that is perceived ‘wrong’. It exerts immense authority on people’s behaviour as people believe in these taboos and their belief cannot be questioned because it is simply taboo to do so. Thus, we have a very common phrase called ‘*Tüghapu chini*’ (spirit taboo) that is used as a touchstone to anything that is traditionally prohibited.

Just as Christians talk about the “wrath of God”, in the olden days the phrase, ‘*Tüghapu chini*’ was used whenever a wrong was about to be committed or had been committed. Parents often tell children, ‘*Tüghapu chini*’ so you must not do this or that. People believed in ‘*Alhou*’, the Creator but since the ‘*Alhou*’ was a benign God whose justice came slowly, it was ‘*Tügha*’ or “evil spirit” which people feared. This “*Tügha*” was feared because “*Tügha*” served immediate justice as required by the people. So, there was constant fear of “*Tügha*” or evil spirit. For instance, people still believe that it is taboo to receive limbs and heads of cows, pigs and *Mithuns* when an elder is still alive. It is this *chini* that prohibits someone from speaking before elders. The folks believed in *chini* because they had witnessed or heard someone administered justice by “*Tügha*”. Thus, ‘*Tüghapu chini*’ is the ‘be-all and end-all’ for the Sümi Naga.

The existence of various rituals in Sümi culture is also due to the existence of taboos. The belief in *Tüghami* compelled the folks to use its name as a means to stop someone from speaking or doing what they thought was wrong. By using this phrase, “*Tüghapu chini*”, it suggest that it was not the will of *Tüghami* and therefore forbidden. If this *Tüghami* taboo was broken then the person would be accursed. That is the reason why *Tüghami* needed to be propitiated. Likewise, there was a practice of keeping aside a portion of meat that would be used during rituals called ‘*Ashi kimithe*’ (sacred meat); basically a pig’s fat. This pig’s fat was burnt during rituals to seek blessings, to thwart off evil, for good harvest, etc. It was also used as hair and body oil during festivities, smeared on granary door and the main door of the house to protect the family from evil as it was regarded sacred and believed to have possessed supernatural powers. In addition, a righteous or an upright person or a pure woman is also referred to as “*Ashi kimithe*”.

- (50) “A portion for all.”
- (51) “To exchange *Alu*.”
- (52) “The curse of the multitude’s voice.”
- (53) “To die vomiting blood.”
- (54) “The curse of cutting iron.”

The expression, “A portion for all” indicate that if a person suffered from prolonged illness where the cause was unknown, it was necessary to carry out a particular ritual called ‘*Mishikichi kighe*’ (“A portion for all”). A pig or cow was slaughtered and the meat cut into many pieces. A piece of which was given to every household in the village. This was practiced with a belief that a sick person must have been suffering because of some foul mouth. So, when that person consumes the meat, it was believed that the sick person would get well. In the present context, the action can be compared to offering prayers and donations to religious institutions in bad times.

An expression that originates from a ritual, “To exchange *Alu*” is a custom that must be performed between two people who were enemies in the past before they could become friends. Unless this ritual was performed, they could not become friends. ‘*Alu*’ is a plantain leaf folded in the shape of a cup or plate (Sema. interview). In this ritual, each ritual performing person must sip from his/her *Alu* and then offer the same *Alu* to the other from whom forgiveness or peace was sought. This *Alu* was filled with rice-brew and food/meat and rice. Once this was done, forgiveness and peace would entail. So when someone says, ‘*Noye pasasü Alu pekilive masa*’ (‘you must exchange *Alu* with him/her’), it suggest that one would have to make peace or there was a need to make peace between two people or two entities and therefore “used in an interactional context to serve certain purposes” (Seitel 125).

It can be understood as a forgiveness ritual because in Sümi culture it was believed that until this ritual was performed, there could be no real forgiveness. Without performing this ritual a person could not eat anything offered by his onetime enemy or receive any present from the same person. Otherwise, curse of falling off teeth or becoming blind would befall on the family. There is a phrase called, ‘*Anhethi ahu müsa*’ (‘Fear of losing eyes and teeth’) to suggest that one should perform this ritual or forgive an enemy because the folks have seen young person becoming blind or losing teeth when this ritual was not followed. For instance, if my friend’s grandfather had taken my grandfather’s head, then my friend and I cannot eat together because of the belief that in doing so we would be cursed. Today, this ritual is performed in Christian context by religious feasting of church leaders, offering prayers to God, symbolic handshake and praying together.

“The curse of the multitude’s voice” is a curse that befalls a person when people talk ill about him/her. This curse manifest in the form of sores and boils in the body. Hence, when a person was infected with it, it was believed that the person must have done something bad to cause others to talk about him/her. The person with sores or boils was referred to as one who

had people's foul mouth upon his/her body, '*Mishitsa ipeghi ani*' or '*Timi tsa ikuva*'. In Sümi culture, people believed that when many people talk about someone then the person would get sores and boils. In this way, getting sores and boils was taboo as people believed that foul mouth causes those ailments. '*Mishitsa*' literally means 'many words' and this '*Mishitsa*' is metaphorically the other name of 'sores'. It suggests that one must not do anything to cause others to speak ill of.

"To die vomiting blood" can be understood in two ways. First, it could mean 'to die after vomiting blood' but it could also mean the 'inability to swallow food or liquid before death'. As understood in the present time, it could be a disease related to blood. However, back in the day it was considered taboo to die in that manner because people believed that the corrupt would meet such death. The vomited blood was believed to have been different in colour from the normal blood, resembling soil. During land dispute, if a person says that a particular plot of land belonged to him, he was made to swear by biting tiger's tooth or elephant's tusk. The dispute was cleared after this. However, people would wait and observe how the swearer dies. If he dies after vomiting blood, then people would assume that it was a sign of his falsehood. Hypothetically, in the present context, an official who misused public fund and dies vomiting blood would be viewed as corrupt who had misused public fund. It can be understood that if we take what is not ours, eventually it would have to come out in the form of blood. While it is true that a person who is noble and upright could also meet such fate, this kind of proverb helped people to be conscientious in carrying out one's duty and helped people to refrain from wrong action and speech.

A comparative phrase known as, "Like the curse of cutting iron" is applied in a situation when a decision is necessary. It implies a person to take or has taken a course of action that makes it impossible to go back ('*Ayikighe*'). Generally, the curse was related to serious cases like, property or land dispute and other such civil cases. The comparison of a decision to a cut

iron displays that the folks thought that after cutting a thing made of iron, there was no way to put it back together. They knew that when a thing made of iron was cut, there would be no slivers/splinters attached as in organic material like wood. Thus, it implies permanence; something that cannot be undone. The actual action of cutting the iron was not carried out instead it was spoken as “*Niye ayikighe shi piva, alu ye iw*” (“I am saying as cutting iron/for the final time that the field is mine”) or “*Ayikighe shiva, niye püka moe*” (“I have said like the cut iron, I have not stolen”) or “*Ino ayi kighe shi pi ani, khilemu tishi mla*” (“I am saying like cut iron, that can never happen”). When these kind of expressions were spoken, people would understand that something final has arrived and no one would go further from that. After the speaker had uttered these kind of phrases, the property and land in question becomes accursed and no one was able to have it. If a person takes the disputed land or material or go against what the speaker had said, then his/her bloodline was also cursed. Thus, it goes both ways. It was believed that every male member in the family of the speaker of such words if s/he has spoken falsely would meet early death. Thus, it is a phrase used as a warning against wrong doing or greed because it was feared that the curse would befall on the whole family and the curse would be passed on to his bloodline. It helped people to refrain from telling lies or indulging in dishonesty. Further, it also goes to indicate that Sümi culture does not permit people to say something when one is not cent percent certain.

- (55) “Fear of retribution.”
- (56) “Taboo to narrate ancestor’s story completely and taboo not to narrate.”
- (57) “Marriages are held only after the harvest.”
- (58) “One must not answer the call of one’s name in the woods.”
- (59) “It is taboo to look backwards while migrating.”
- (60) “It is taboo to return meat gifted by others.”

Like 'Karma' in Hindu mythology and an English proverb 'As you sow, so shall you reap', Sümi also believe in the philosophy of retribution; a reckoning that will come to all. Thus, the phrase, "Fear of retribution" ("*Shekichile msa*"). The fear of retribution is real for the Sümi. One can hear people talking about how suffering is a result of one's depraved past. When someone is sick or down on luck, people would assume that the person must have done something bad to invite unfavourable condition in life. While, it is unfair to judge every misfortune as a result of one's bad action; it is also true to believe that one must face the consequences of one's own bad action because "an evil deed returns to the doer" (Okada 17). Therefore, if parents have done good deeds then it would bear fruit in their children. For instance, in recent years, a family faced unlucky accidents where all the male children in that family met accidents that involved injury to their limb. Although the accidents happened at different time, the injured part in the children were all identical which could not be assumed as co-incidence. Thus, people concluded that their forefathers must have injured their enemies during headhunting days and thus it had manifested in the suffering. In this way, people have real fear about retribution and thus avoid wrong action.

Another expression, "It is taboo to narrate ancestor's story completely and taboo not to narrate" is about the act of narration, particularly of folk narratives. It is taboo to narrate ancestor's story completely because by doing so the narrator had assumed that he knew everything more than his ancestors which is considered as disrespect. Not narrating it is also a taboo because ancestor's stories must be told lest it is forgotten. In this way, the act of narration is also not free from taboo. Through this expression, Sümi idea about history can also be understood. The folks knew the importance of history and therefore wanted it to be transmitted or re-told. Thereby, imposing on the younger generation to keep on the traditional way of oral narration alive by not undermining the knowledge of one's predecessors. Hence, the survival of Sümi oral tradition owes much to this expression.

In Sümi culture, marriages could take place only when the harvest was brought home. This was practised because earlier each household would gift a basket of grain/millet/corn to the bride's compound marked by *Ayephu* (large bamboo or cane mat) which is the reason for the existence of the proverb, "Marriages are held only after the harvest". When it was not observed, it was believed that the newly married household would live in poverty. It was a way to invoke blessings of good fortune and prosperity for the newly marrieds. It can be understood that this prohibition was observed because the folks lived a life full of physical labour. It was only when the harvest season was over, all work ceased until the sowing season. Therefore, this interval was considered the best time for marriage ceremonies to take place. Even today, Sümi observes this tradition by allowing marriages to take place from October to March only as enforced by Sümi GBs Association. However, this tradition can be altered to provide individual convenience and preference particularly for those people who are not engaged in physical labour.

The expression, "One must not answer the call of one's name in the woods" is a reminder to hunters that spirits dwell in the woods and hence the prohibition. It is believed that when evil spirit willed to take away a person's soul then it would call out a person's name in the woods. During such time, the person would become sick and delirious and sometimes this could even lead to death. It could be used to mean that one should be careful and alert when out in the woods. It is learned that in the past it was traditional for a person to wait for the third time to respond to other's call. This was practised not only in the woods or fields but even at home. This shows that the folks had real fear of *Tüghami* (evil spirit). It is logical to think that this belief was necessary in the headhunting days where answering to enemy's call could lose one's head. *Tüghami* usually calls only once and imitates a friend, sibling, parents or an uncle's voice.



“It is taboo to look backwards while migrating” as culture demands that one must move forward and not regress. It is a migration ritual to psychologically prohibit migrators from looking backwards. If one looked backwards then one would face the consequence of his action by death as in *‘Aba lechu veno thive nani’* (‘one would die for consuming one’s own waste’). ‘Looking backwards’ here metaphorically means the act of returning back to the old village. It can be re-interpreted to mean firmness in thought and action. It teaches people to realise that when a decision is made, one should not look back but instead move forward. Those that did not observe this taboo are regarded *‘kiche-kupo’* (refugees).

Moreover, in Sümi culture, “it is taboo to return meat gifted by others” even when one is upset at the giver or have bad-feelings towards the giver. When the meat is returned, the giver or any member of his family would fall ill suddenly and the sickness can be cured only after seeking forgiveness from the receiver of his meat (Sema. interview).

These divine sanctioned proverbs can be graded as more serious than other proverb categories in this chapter. They are mostly used in speech to guide social behaviour within members of the Sümi society. It is serious in nature because when it is not followed there are adverse consequences: blindness, teeth falling out, sores, vomiting blood, and early death. While on the other hand, it encourages giving/offering, forgiveness, and honesty.

## **1.5. PROVERBS REINFORCING THE VALUE OF RESPECT**

For the Sümi, ‘respect for/to elders’ is an oral law sanctioned by traditional belief that is absolute. Respectful behaviour towards elders includes not only being polite, offering them seats, carrying their loads, or regarding them as having better knowledge and experience but it is also a way to remember traditional practices, honour one’s heritage, and to carry one’s own beliefs forward.

(61) “Taboo to speak, touch or eat before elders.”

(62) “I look up to my elder brother while he sleeps on pig’s waste.”

(63) “Did not receive even rump or snout.”

(64) “To be the first to step on pig and dog’s waste.”

“Taboo to speak, touch or eat before elders” means taboo to speak, touch, or eat first while an elder is present. It is a Sümi way of being respectful towards elders. It means that the eldest one present at a certain time is traditionally the first to speak, touch, and eat. In a society where utmost respect is given to elders, it is taboo for someone to even speak, touch or eat before an elder. Every activity begins with the blessings of elders. It is believed that if a person speaks before an elder spoke, it would shorten his life since he had taken the role of an elder. Thus, respect for elders is crucial in Sümi culture. Basically, a young person is not allowed to do anything first before an elder and if one is compelled by circumstance then one ought to apologise or seek permission for doing or saying before an elder. It was the elder who is privileged, he is the one who speaks first especially when discussing serious matters or even while tasting food. Before an elder, a person is not even allowed to touch something that is of traditional importance. It is also the role of the elder to narrate history as in, “*Apu-asü tsa kichimi zünathaghi pi chemo*” (“It is taboo to narrate oral stories before elders.”). Such respect is shown to elders in Sümi culture.

However, the value attached to heeding old instruction like the ‘respect for elders’ has been diminishing over the years due to misplaced understanding of modern ideas on equality. That is not to say that someone who is young cannot have profound wisdom or that a young person will not be allowed to speak about what is considered ‘right’. Rather, it is to say that elders deserve respect and therefore it is necessary for the younger ones to be polite, at all times. Traditional wisdom found in such expression about respect giving stand tested because it has “meaningful content and it may still be possible to draw conclusions about values and attitudes by analysing that content” (de Caro185). However, for the Sümi Naga, ‘respect for

elders' cannot be fully understood without realising the implication of 'responsibility of elders'. Respect comes when one shoulders responsibility towards whom respect is gained. Thus, 'respect', in Sümi context, is central to dignity and duty. It is the duty of an elder sibling to look after the younger ones and in such case where this 'duty' is not fulfilled, the elder sibling loses 'dignity' in life.

The duty and responsibility of an elder is expressed in, "I look up to my elder brother while he sleeps on pig's waste" which speaks about a younger sibling's displeasure over the elder sibling's irresponsibility. In Sümi culture, it is the duty of the elder brother to look after his younger brother(s) and when needed, guide and protect them in life. Although the same culture can be applicable to sisters, yet it was more particular with brothers because it is a patrilineal society. This expression is hence a lamentation of a young brother over the negligence of his elder brother; who instead of doing what was expected of him, live a worthless life. It can be understood that it is the duty of a young person to show respect to elders; at both levels of family and society. In turn, the elders are duty bound to look after or guide the young. Thus, there is a kind of 'check and balance' where honour and respect come with responsibility and the idea of an 'elder' become meaningless if it is not viewed both ways. A phrase, "Did not receive rump nor snout" sums up "a situation, pass judgement, recommend a course of action" (Arewa 52). The expression demonstrate that respect is measured according to the portion of meat one gift others. If a man gifts a limb or head of the killed animal to another, it means great respect. Even in the family, if a son kills a pig, the head of the pig would go to the father. If the father is not alive then it would go to the eldest male child and so on. "*Sübo*" means "rump" and "*nheghu*" is "snout". These portions are traditionally gifted to the eldest male in the family or in the clan. So, if a man complained of not receiving even rump or snout, it is to be understood that he had been deeply insulted. For instance, a man may say, "I did not receive 'rump nor snout' in his daughter's marriage so there is no need for me to gift

him” or a man could complain that he did not receive ‘rump’ or ‘snout’ during Feast of Merit and therefore he would not shoulder the responsibility of the eldest. Thus, the man would really return the favour in his own daughter’s marriage or Feast of Merit.

Another important aspect of respect in Sümi culture is the traditional view of acknowledging someone according to his/her age and giving authority to the one who was elder. The expression, “To be the first to step on pig and dog’s waste” imply that elders are the first to experience both good and bad experiences by virtue of being born first and therefore ought to have authority to speak about something. It is a way to say ‘been there, done that’ which is a reference to better experience, knowledge, and awareness. Since so much respect is given to an elder, a person would claim to be older even when it was by a minute. For example, when two friends have different ideas about a certain decision then they would find out the year, month, date and time of their birth to determine whose decision must be accepted. After which the older one would use the expression in this manner, “*Ino atsüba-awoba netughu-u ke itsa lu masa*” (“My idea or decision must be taken because I am older”). The privilege and status which one enjoys because of being older to someone is the reason why there are cases where people claim to be older to someone even when the reality says the opposite.

(65) “It is taboo for young person to plant boundary stone.”

(66) “It is taboo to go to field when a villager dies.”

(67) “There is confusion in the absence of an axe-handle.”

(68) “The first domestic animal born to newly married couple is gifted to parents.”

(69) “One would suffer from piles if paternal aunt or uncle is made unhappy.”

Sümi society, like any other Naga tribes, is an agrarian society practising Jhum and terraced cultivation for their livelihood. As such, land holding play an important role in the society. Ownership of land could be through inheritance, purchase through barter system or as bride-price. Usually, natural barriers like streams demarcated boundaries but where such was

absent, a sizeable stone(s) is planted by an elder in the presence of both the parties. It is believed that curse would befall a person who shift the boundary stone arbitrarily. This is to prevent any mischief. Since land significantly played a part in social standings of an individual, curse, taboos and blessings are associated with land dealings. Furthermore, elders are accorded highest respect and so it is customary for an elder(s) to carry out serious tasks. Hence, it is taboo for a “young person to plant boundary stone”.

Even in other areas of life like death, as a sign of respect to the deceased, it is regarded “taboo to go to field when a villager dies”. This taboo is attached to a belief that the field would be polluted by the newly dug out soil. It is believed that the soil would ruin food crops and the family would starve. In this way, everyone abstained from going to the field.

A person who is elderly, wise, and experienced is compared to an ‘axe-handle’ and is respected and honoured by all. When things go wrong in the society the folks would often say, “There is confusion in the absence of an axe handle”. Traditionally, Sümi calls such person as ‘*Amghüsü*’ (axe-handle). Alluding to a folktale called ‘*Swu Pishena*’, the ‘*Amghüsü*’ is a guide or confidant who leads the community with his wisdom for common good; without whom there would be confusion in the society. It is believed that when a society is not led or guided by the wise, it would result in a disordered society. The expression is also used in a situation when a decision cannot be arrived or when chaos abound in the society.

“The first domestic animal born to newly married couple is gifted to parents” in Sümi culture and it is considered taboo not to do so. It is an act to show respect and honour to one’s parents while seeking their blessing. Further, it is believed that “one would suffer from piles if paternal aunt and maternal uncle is made unhappy”. When one hurts a paternal aunt or maternal uncle by way of slighting them during festivities, it is believed that one would be unlucky in life. For instance, it would be considered discourteous if a good portion of meat is not gifted to them during *Ani* festival.

Although these proverb expressions that reinforce the value of respect may not be as serious as the taboo proverbs discussed earlier yet it forms a crucial part of Sümi tradition and culture. The ‘elder’, who is a male, is not only respected because of age. In essence, the ‘elder’ is also the ‘founder’, the ‘first’ which is a guarded position in Sümi society because it is closely connected to land, inheritance, and lineage.

## **1.6. IMPRESSIONS OF WOMEN IN SÜMI PROVERB EXPRESSIONS**

Both men and women face gender issues in life. However, it is more amplified for women because of a culture that privileges male over female in all important matters of life like, inheritance, village administration, and polity in Sümi society. For the fact that women in the past could not inherit landed property and had no role in the day to day administration of the village. Decisions with regard to maintenance of peace in the village or relations with neighbouring villages were taken by the menfolk without the participation of women nor were their opinion considered.

In Sümi culture, there are certain qualities projected of a woman through patriarchal assumptions about women being ‘lesser’, ‘inferior’ or ‘weak’ which can be traced in Sümi proverb expressions used in everyday life. These narratives in proverb expressions were internalised in the psyche of both genders over the years and it became a way of life. The roles for both men and women were different and clearly defined in Sümi culture which may seem absurd from the twentieth century vantage point. However, it was a tradition and culture which had meaning then.

Sümi follows patrilineal lineage and hence patriarchy is sanctioned by culture. Thus, patriarchal ideas about women behaviour to be silent, docile, meek, coy, etc. pave way for

women to position herself subordinate to men. These ideas are used in daily communication in the form of similes, proverbs, metaphors, etc. and are accepted and enforced in the society because “a proverb conveys a culturally agreed-upon idea which can be used to make a point” (de Caro 185). Following expressions are reflections of how these proverbs are “culturally agreed-upon” ideas accepted by both men and women:

- (70) “Do not listen to what women say.”
- (71) “That is elderly women talk.”
- (72) “Taboo for women to speak about landed properties.”
- (73) “As effeminate or weak as woman”
- (74) “Termed a female because of her incompleteness.”

It is easy to notice from the above expressions that patriarchal ideas are used to belittle women’s voice such as, “Do not listen to what women say” or “That’s an elderly woman talk” or “That’s an old woman’s tale”. Any speech or words that have no meaning or is useless are regarded as women’s. These two phrases display that the words spoken by women or her point of view is of no value because they are considered to be devoid of quality and substance. It is a common phrase used among Sümi Nagas; both male and female. It means not listening to women because women’s words could either be meaningless or tricky.

In this way, women’s voice is predetermined to approve nothingness. A female, young or old, had no voice in the society in the past. ‘They’ were excluded from village meetings, discussions on disputes, negotiation of bride price, settling marriage proposals, etc. ‘Their’ participation was only through serving ‘them’ with best rice-brew and delicious food. These exclusions were arbitrary ‘male constructs’ that allow men to exercise authority in decision making. An example of which can be found in Sümi folktale, *‘Tsüipu ngo Khaulipu’* (Lozhevi 38). Where *Muchupili*, a stereotypical wicked or ‘other’ woman, rejected woman’s advice, “*Totimi tsaye ini moe*” which can be translated as ‘will not listen to a woman’, while trying to

move into the house. *Khaulipu*, in order to save *Muchupili*'s life, suggested her to move in from the front but she did not listen because *Khaulipu* was a woman. The story reveals that *Muchupili* believe woman's words to be either meaningless or tricky. Ironically, her decision to listen to a 'male' *Tsüipu*'s words caused her death.

Since female voice meant nothing, they are prohibited from speaking about property; 'aki' (house) and 'alu' (field) as it is "taboo for women to speak about landed properties". Female voice is stifled and assertion of the same is irrelevant because tradition does not allow it. The importance of an idea, opinion or a suggestion put forward by a woman is taken with a pinch of salt since female opinion is regarded trivial in nature. People believe in the taboo because of the belief that in doing so the family would be accursed or because it is simply taboo as decided by culture. When women's voice is not heard even at the family level, it is unimaginable for women to speak about property or matters that involve serious discussions. This tradition exists even today in Sümi tribal society because although education has helped people come out of patriarchal shackles yet tradition is embedded which cannot be changed drastically. Hence, one may find Naga women serving food and tea in every household while men enjoy being served without being consciously aware of his action that is detrimental to subjugating women. To find men performing similar task is limited to few enlightened families whose male members serve tea at gatherings or meetings to underscore the fact that the task should not be expected of women alone.

A derogatory phrase, "As effeminate or weak as woman", is used to suggest femininity as weakness. It belittles women to mean an action that is done in a feminine manner; a manner that did not possess any merit or skill. For instance, when a male child stumble and fall, parents would ask the child not to be "as effeminate or weak as woman". In another circumstance, people would laugh at a male child if he was sissy or acted like a girl. Femininity is laughed at



but masculinity is never a butt of joke. This kind of proverb is used “to sanction institutionalized behaviour” (Messenger 299) and accepted as truth.

“Termed female because of her incompleteness” is a powerful expression that goes into the term ‘*Totimi*’. ‘*Totimi*’ is a female/women while ‘*Kipitimi*’ is male/men in Sümi language. ‘*Tomo*’ means ‘incomplete’ whereas ‘*to*’ means ‘victory’ or ‘success’ and ‘*timi*’ means ‘human being’. So, if we bring these two words ‘*to*’ and ‘*timi*’ together, the words can be interpreted as ‘victorious human being’ if literal translation is used. (Rotokha. interview). Hence, there is no indication in the term ‘*Totimi*’ to be concluded as ‘incomplete’. However, the term ‘*Totimi*’ itself implies incompleteness from a patriarchal worldview. The phrase is used whenever something negative is done by a female to generalise a particular behaviour for the whole gender. However, to say that women are incomplete is to suggest that men are complete. Such a phrase is constructed and used in everyday life to assume male authority over the female. This kind of phrase is used either subconsciously or otherwise to degrade women which damages her self-image. It puts forward an idea of a female being ‘imperfect’ as used similarly in Ethiopian proverb “Woman without man is like a field without seed” ([inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/t/ethiopian-on-woman](http://inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/t/ethiopian-on-woman)). In Sümi culture too, this is evident in the way unmarried woman/spinster is treated in the society. Traditionally, the dead body of an unmarried woman/spinster is buried far away from the village in the belief that when it is buried inside or within the village it would affect others. Besides, young girls and boys are prohibited from attending such funerals for the same reason that in doing so they may suffer such fate. The equivalent treatment to unmarried man is not practiced. Hence, it clearly demonstrate patriarchal attitude and value of how a female needed a male to complete her.

(75) “Woman without prosperous hand.”

(76) “A female is like minced meat stuck on someone’s chopping stand.”

(77) “It is taboo for man to eat the hunt brought by woman.”

One of the qualities expected of a woman is to be a good manager of available resources at home. Hence, when a woman could not fulfil household management duty as expected by culture, she is referred as “woman without prosperous hand”. In the same way, “To have holes between fingers” is another phrase used in reference to inefficient women who are found being wasteful especially with food grains or for reckless women who make irresponsible use of resources. When food grains is not enough for the family, a woman is held responsible because it is believed that she had mismanaged household means. This is so because traditionally men do not belong in the kitchen. Accordingly, ‘she’ is blamed by default. A year’s produce from the field should be managed to last till the next harvest. If that did not happen then people would look down upon such household.

Nonetheless, outside of her home she is not regarded fit as understood in woman’s lack of voice in decision making discussed earlier. A man is not referred with such phrases even when he is careless or spendthrift because such phrases are meant only for a specific gender. This kind of prejudice can be further illustrated through a Sümi ritual related to child birth. Tradition allows different ritual to be observed for the birth of boy child and a different one for girl child. For instance, six days *genna* or abstaining from field work is performed for a boy child while five days *genna* is granted for a girl child (Sema. interview). Simone de Beauvoir’s famous line in her book, *The Second Sex*, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1); about how gender is an aspect of identity that is gradually acquired, is relevant here. There are societal expectations from a female different from male. Assignment of specific roles such as cooking, weaving, knitting, managing the house, etc. to women is what Beauvoir meant by “becomes”.

Another instance of gendering can be located in Sümi culture that uses a proverb called, “A woman is like minced meat stuck on someone’s chopping stand” to prove women’s worthlessness. This proverb suggests women’s nothingness and worthlessness. Just as a small

piece of meat stuck in meat mallet is insignificant and useless, it suggests women's worthlessness and dependence on men. By tradition, when the number of households in a village is counted, a widow's household do not figure in the number of households counted. Rather, the house of widow is added as '*Chimemi sü no*' (Sema. interview), which can be translated as 'including widow's household'. So, basically, a widow's household is not counted. A widow is a widow whether poor or rich, powerful or weak because of the mere absence of a male figure to head the house.

"Taboo for men to eat the hunt brought by women" is a prohibition that must be followed strictly in Sümi culture. An extension of this taboo can be found in another taboo that prohibits women from touching men's *dao* (machete) or spear before going for hunting or raids. It suggests that women were either viewed as harbingers of ill luck or it was used as a means to cover 'his' weakness in hunting skills. Hunting was a male role and women were excluded from it because the folks were used to hardship and trials where headhunting was a norm as villages were in perpetual war with each other. However, it also exemplifies male ego that would not accept women's prowess or skill. It was often a rare occasion for woman to hunt which should be celebrated but it was not so because tradition allowed 'hunting' to be a male role. And therefore the act was unacceptable to male ego. Interestingly, the reason for prohibiting women to touch men's *dao* and spear is founded on a belief. It was believed that there would not be any blessing if the taboo was broken or if women touched men's *dao* and spear, '*Ashi aghü yi mo no sa kehu*' ('To avoid misadventure in headhunting'), according to H. S. Rotokha, which means that the act may result in loss. Besides, a woman was regarded unclean and hence not fit to touch anything that was 'his' for her biological condition. A woman who has given birth was "prohibited from entertaining guests by displaying an '*Ayilo*' (*Hyssopus officinalis*) or '*Zünhebo*' (*Leucosceptrum canum*) at the main door" (Achumi 9).

While it was a relief for woman from extra trouble it also suggest woman as unclean and hence unfit to serve or entertain guests.

(78) “To respect father’s parents and sisters.”

(79) “Child of a poor character mother.”

(80) “May you die in childbirth.”

(81) “It is alright for men to do so.”

A prejudiced phrase, “To respect father’s parents and sisters” (“*Apu zali- apu cheli gihu masa*”) is a special respect reserved for one’s paternal grandparents and paternal aunts. When children go to the field half way to help, as was a custom, they were advised to offer help to the relatives on father’s side. A corresponding proverb cannot be found for mother’s parents or siblings. In the same manner, a father is never blamed for a bad child because the mother is traditionally responsible for child upbringing. Thus, a bad child is called “child of a poor character mother” (*‘Aza küsa ti’*) to mean that a poor character mother begets an immoral child. Such mothers are looked down and severely criticized by womenfolk themselves as echoed in Easterine Iralu’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), which is a reflection of Naga society where the matriarch, the grandmother, keep on reinforcing patriarchal ideas on young Dielieno.

Accountability of parents; particularly of mothers, to child’s behaviour is significant in Sümi culture. Although both could be held responsible as in ‘*Apu aza no kütsümo keu nga*’ (‘a child untrained by parents’) applied in situations when a child displays extreme misbehaviour. Nonetheless, a large part of responsibility is shouldered by the mother. When a child grows up and become unruly or show signs of immorality, the mother is held responsible for the child’s character. This was applicable in the past because most of the time, the father was out headhunting and hence children’s upbringing came to be the role of the mother. For instance, “you will be called a child of a poor character mother by people”, is used when children do not conform to societal norms. Here, the mother is held guilty because of the fact that children

spent more time with their mothers than the fathers. This shows that when a child misbehaves, it puts a mother's reputation at risk. A Mother is revered in the family and hence no child in this way would desire to bring disgrace to one's mother. On the other hand, it also speaks about how children imbibe values set by parents.

A common curse or swear word or exclamation, "May you die in child birth" suggest that it was uncommon to die due to complications during child birth. Therefore, it was believed that the woman must have incurred some curse. This phrase is used as an expletive to curse a woman. '*Nhapithi*' is a verb which means 'to die in child birth'. It was considered as 'shame' because of the stigma that surrounds death in child birth. Anything that belonged to that woman was 'regarded unclean' (Kati 8). And the dead body was buried away from the village because traditionally Sümi bury their dead within the village or if space permitted, around the surrounding area of the deceased house. A social stigma was attached to it as it was regarded a disgrace for the family and as such she was condemned. This kind of phrase forms the basis of patriarchal attitude to regard death in childbirth as curse in Sümi culture.

The proverb, "It is alright for a man to do so" operates in a situation where a man's wrong action is condoned off as something regular and not out of place. This proverb is particularly used in assessing man's moral values. In the past, a man could have as many wives as he could afford due to the practice of *Ame* (bride-price) and the same was glorified by planting walking sticks equal to the number of lovers in his grave. It was seen as a symbol of men's conquest and therefore glorified. However, the same society condemned a woman for the same action. A man's repeated misconduct was considered a 'man thing' and therefore it was "alright for a man to do so".

When a man had stolen something or fathered a child out of wedlock, the society use such phrase to pardon man's action. However, the same is not reserved for women. In other words, the concept of second chance is unavailable to women. A man's wrong action is

forgiven but a single misconduct by a woman is condemned and shamed by the same society who call her, 'female adulteress' (*'Toti Kūsalhami'*) to mean someone who is immoral or careless in action and speech. Therefore, the question of why a 'right' conduct for men could be 'wrong' for women.

Existence of patriarchy in Naga society can be evident even today. One glaring example of it is that, Nagaland is a state that has never seen a woman legislator in Nagaland Legislative Assembly. Just as women were denied voice in village meetings due to biased customary laws, women are still deprived of political leadership role in patriarchal Naga society. This is a result of cultural conditioning that regards 'male' as a traditional icon or archetypal father-figure who is the head of the family. Nevertheless, an encouraging example of how Naga women are slowly asserting their right by assuming leadership role can be seen, even if it is limited to few, in the present time. An example of which is evident in Shesuli village, under Pughoboto Area. A village bearing the name of a female founder and hence the chief of the village.

It must be understood that any analysis about gender issues need to be inclusive for the reason that otherwise it would be incomplete and even dangerous. In the past, women were not allowed in decision making processes because understandably meetings were about taking heads or deciding which village to attack, and such other dreadful decisions and plans. Since men were regarded as 'protector', the prohibition of women to such meetings can be seen as a means to 'protect' them and not viewed as an 'exclusion' as understood today. Moreover, women had no inheritance rights because it is a patrilineal society. And they were not involved in rituals because with the lack of modern facilities of comfort for her biological condition like menstruation and childbirth, it would be only logical to exclude them from performing long and arduous rituals.

Gendering in Sümi proverb expressions is not a threat in itself because, as of today, many Sümi Nagas have availed higher education to understand that culture is dynamic and

must undergo change. However, the problem of overcoming gender norms in Naga context goes a lot deeper because Nagas are mostly Christians and live in a Christian majority state in India. For example, according to Christian beliefs, a woman (Eve) was formed through the rib of man (Adam) which gives a dismal picture of how creation of woman was an afterthought. Both (Naga and Christian) these cultures are patriarchal and tend to judge a woman's worth in terms of her relationship with men; with the role of wife and mother being seen as the ultimate crown of womanhood to the point of overshadowing whatever other things she may have achieved beforehand or even go on to do afterwards. As a result, many female role models either forfeit their dreams, stay in abusive relationships, or operate from a place of low self-esteem due to these religious, cultural, and social constructs.

From the discussion, it is clear that proverb expressions forms a substantial part of Sümi oral tradition. There are considerable number of proverbs found in its lore and is the most frequently used item expressed in everyday speech. Most proverb expressions are based on beliefs and taboos and as a result enjoys society's approval. It is used to instruct, counsel, warn, and is helpful in shaping one's behaviour, action, speech, and conduct. Hence, it can be an instrument in understanding how a particular attitude or behaviour originate and why such attitudes continue in a given culture.

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## **Chapter VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

Oral traditions of any tribal society is a vast topic and to attempt at its interpretation and understanding of that given societal life and their beliefs in general is an arduous task. More so because of the fact that there are only few active tradition bearers who can be relied upon as authoritative. Nevertheless, it is enriching to delve deeper into the rich culture and try to re-establish the inherent and core beliefs of the tribal life and weave a fine thread of connection between the past and the present not only to preserve them but also use them as guide down the generations. It is hoped that the research may contribute, however small it may be, in maintaining continuity of these traditions.

Keeping these in mind, the study seeks to locate the values and ethics in Sümi oral tradition. The discussions that continues from chapters three through five demonstrates that Sümi oral tradition is replete with traditional practices that convey values distinct to the tribe, showing their relevance even in the modern times. The overall worldview of the Sümi is found to have been shaped by their traditional belief in spirits, fate, taboo, and community. While articles of cultural ornaments and costumes are used as social markers to identify a person's standing in the society, privileges enjoyed by a male offspring clearly indicates the system of patriarchal lineage whereby inheritance of landed property is passed on through the male line only. Also, their high standard of ethics can be established from such practices as the system of bride-price and in the inheritance of parental land with the standing crops.

In the folksongs are found embedded sensitive issues of discrimination, injustice, and disparity. Social and personal issues are negotiated through folksongs. The different sub-genres of folksongs reveal Sümi attitude towards nature, and reinforce ideas of Sümi work ethic and others that present Sümi ideals. Likewise, there are proverbs that aims to inculcate social

norms, strengthen taboos, support the value of respect, and proverbs that are gender-specific. These 'traditional cultural expressions' reinforces values such as; selflessness, integrity, responsibility, forthrightness, dignity, moral purity, etc. Mention may be made here that the data (translated Sümi oral narratives, folksongs, and proverbs) on which the thesis was carried out is provided in the appendices. The data collected is a proof that eager informants, active-tradition bearers, tale-tellers, and folksingers are available in Sümi oral society.

The study of oral narratives, folksongs, and proverbs show that Sümi values and ethics is conditioned and expressed through its oral tradition. For instance, the concept of 'taboo' and 'shame' regulate and discipline their life as it is rooted in traditional beliefs. Myths describe the origin of things and explain supernatural events which give meaning to their existence. Several folktales provide educational instruction to the young and old. Proverbs are cited to explain a situation, to correct behaviour, and used whenever the speaker intend to communicate seriously.

The study reveals the idea that 'meaning' is what one makes of it which can be traced to an existential idea about creating 'meaning' out of experiences. Jean-Paul Sartre, the 20th century philosopher, believes that 'existence precedes essence' which means that meaning is not given but must be achieved. In other words, it suggests that human beings must construct their own values and determine a meaning for their lives. Just as it is for the existentialists, Sümi Nagas believe that 'meaning' can be created through a lived experience that is based on a pursuit to find one's values, beliefs, and resolve in a meaningless world. In this way, the collective consciousness evidenced through its lore is considered standard and unquestioned in Sümi culture. It is an accepted way of behaving and doing something that is specific to Sümi society. For instance, the Sümi believe that "greed for riches as well as bravery" is flawed because one can only be either or that "it is taboo to look backwards while migrating" because the act will shorten one's life. These kinds of belief is an important element of Sümi culture.

The strict observance of *chini* (taboo) forms the basis of Sümi traditional beliefs. It is with great reverence that they believe in taboos such as, “taboo to speak, touch, or eat before elders”, unless called upon to do so, prior to any elder present in a given situation fearing for misfortune that may befall on the one who goes against the practise. “Taboo to return meat gifted by others”, even when one is upset at the giver or have bad-feelings towards the giver. The person who returns the meat to the giver would fall ill suddenly and the sickness can be cured only after seeking forgiveness from the giver of the meat. This curse is believed to extend even to the members of his immediate family. The important aspect of this taboo is to discourage any disrespect not only to the gifted item but also to the very act of gifting. While, the most significant part lies in their belief in the ability of brokering peace through the act of gifting however sour the relation may be. Non-acceptance of a gift would mean an end to any possibility of reconciliation and therefore is accursed. “Taboo to go to field when a villager dies” illustrates the idea of community living where all members share both joys and sorrows. This taboo comes with a curse for poor harvest and germ infested soil. Hence, one is deterred from going against it which in turn strengthens community spirit. The acceptance of taboos as unquestionable, conclusive, and an absolute truth reflects Sümi Nagas’ conviction that taboos are sacred, with social sanctions and dictate the spiritual world.

As a natural expression of its culture’s values and beliefs, Sümi oral tradition shows how values are drawn and re-iterated through lived-experiences and therefore authoritative when it recommends ‘good’ and ‘best’ actions that must be followed as in the story of ‘The story of *Atsüsa*’ where it recommends that it is ethical to keep dog’s share in hunting or the ‘The Story of *Litsapa*’ which encourages generosity. On the other hand, it is equally firm when it condemns a particular action as ‘bad’ and ‘wrong’ as shown in the ‘stoning’ of a young man for going against societal norms in ‘The Story of how a Woman Transformed into a Taro’ or

‘The Myth of a Blessed Stone’ which speaks against jealousy. In this way, it reflects the principles upon which the Sümi way of life is established.

In Sümi tradition, *Ame* (bride-price) is a wide term that encompasses several concepts related to Sümi marriage. The practice of *Ame* in Sümi culture is a symbol of a bride’s worth. It is given as a ‘gift’ and the bride’s parents and relatives traditionally gifts back the daughter with things worth double her *Ame*. In essence, *Ame* indicates the value of the bride providing security and protection to a daughter in her marital life. However, it is found that there is a cultural shift in the practice of *Ame* ethic which needs to be understood because it is important to limit the negative expression of one’s culture. Hence, it is relevant for the Sümi community to re-examine the underlying ethical values in the concept of *Ame* and “decide how much change will be allowed” (Easterine Kire) in a culture to avoid any misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the practise.

Moreover, expressions of sorrow and unhappiness in Sümi folksong can be viewed as a site of conflict between the socially marginalised and the ruling class. This social stratification is a result of traditional Chieftainship which influences economic imbalance in the society as privileges enjoyed by the chiefs are immense. The existence of classes of people like, *Akükau* (chief) and his royal family, his assistants and their families, and the *Mighimi* (orphans/poor/landless/slaves) can be juxtaposed with the existence of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in modern society. “Orphans” in Sümi language is “*Mighimi*”; those who do not have parents but it also refers to the economically poor or common villagers. The “landless” are the late settlers or those who migrated from another village. The “slaves” are those whose bride-price was paid by chiefs or others. These groups, collectively called *Mighimi*, toil and sweat to produce but the fruits were often reaped by the ruling class which included the chief’s family, the materially rich, and the warriors.

In the song, *Küzivü Küpüha Le* (Song of Wasted Love), the singer expresses the futility of loving the daughter of a rich man:

*Ampino noqhemí kumo aye*

*Noju azükivümino*

*Ishe khipato lau hu aye*

An unequal to you

But the one who loves you

Which hill did you go?

*Shelo wolu wolono khokulhomiye*

*Alhi küttau ye idiwunikeno*

*Pichepighi avi lhi*

*Pipuye idiulusa*

The miserable one to bid thee farewell

Other trade can be returned

But *Mithun* trade cannot be

(Appendix-II Song No. 5)

The lover states that business which concerns *Mithun*, “*avi lhi*”, was difficult which suggests the difference in their status. He also sings of his desire to return home with his beloved. However, since they belonged to different *Aloji* (work group), he could only sing of his sadness. The lover had no idea about where her *Aloji* was working, “*Ishe khipato lau hu aye*”. The parents must have put her in a different *Aloji* so that the affair was not encouraged.

Such cases have occurred frequently in the past. An example of which is evident in another song, ‘*Loji Kithelo*’ where the father chose a new *Aloji* for his daughter:

*She timino khashi asüye iku niki ghüngü ye amu niye*

*She ipu no ipulo loji kithelo hulo ipi ani ngu no*

*She niye loji kiye lo huni thono*

*She ipu piye, iza piye iza pulo niloji ju qa-a pelo*

*She ipu no niloji küsa ishino khalu aye*

People are clearing jungle nearby

My father is asking me to join new *Aloji*

But I want to remain in my old *Aloji*

Let my mother weep for my old *Aloji*

My father has stopped my *Aloji*

(Appendix-II Song No. 28)

This kind of song reveal the impossibility for economically poor man to marry rich man's daughter. Rich parents would often frown upon economically poor suitors which depicts the existence of economic disparity between the rich and the poor that affected other relationships. An example of such disparity can also be seen in a tradition that specified a particular shawl called "*Lisüphi*" (body-cloth without design) for *Kumülhomi* (the poor). This body-cloth allowed people to identify economic and social position of a person.

Voiced or oral expressions has the ability to make quick connection to the listener as the manner in which the message is conveyed is based on the immediate need at hand. In Sümi oral society, information, announcement, and instruction is mostly given verbally and it is most effective. Today, there are less story-tellers but given opportunity and support, it would still find eager listeners as represented in the story-telling events and folktale performances at various cultural occasions where these events are focal interest points for audience-listeners attending such programmes. For instance, Youth Conference held triennially by SBAK (Sümi Baptist Churches Association) normally include cultural day as part of its programme and

Conferences held by SKK (Sümi Students' Union) always contain a day of celebrating culture and tradition. These events are important to Sümi because story-telling is regarded as a performance and an art as much as the use of proverb expressions in speech is an oral art. Hence, story-tellers and active-speakers are admired and respected in Sümi society.

Although, translating and interpreting oral items truthfully into and in another language is a challenge because accurate interpretations, let alone the nuances of language and speech, are often lost through the process of translation. Nevertheless, Sümi folksongs and proverbs reveal the role of memory and nostalgia in the transmission and preservation as *Apu-Asü Tsa* (oral tradition) is indissoluble and sacred. These items are also carriers of its language since it retains root words because it is generally sung and spoken as received. Moreover, items in oral tradition reflects its culture and forms the basis of a people's identity.

The concept of 'community' of the past is a poignant reminder of the importance of community. It is found that the work of constructing houses, harvesting crops, clearing the jungle, etc. is shared by the community and not by the individual family alone. This applies equally to times of grief and joy. A feeling of community that respects difference but also celebrates shared values for greater good. This 'community' feeling is important because individual interest is subsumed for common interest where individuals learn to understand community living through experiences of struggle, positions of responsibility, and the blessings and difficulties of lasting commitments.

The relevance and continuity of Sümi oral tradition can be evidenced through the usage of expressions like, "As lazy as the rat family" in everyday life, to describe a family that pass work to one another without completion. Imitating is discouraged by using a comparison, "Do not imitate like the *Migheu*". People are advised to desist from imitating by alluding to a story where a bird called *Migheu* got its hoarse sound while trying to imitate other bird's sound. It suggests something slightly dishonest and recommends being true to one's nature. People also



often hear others citing how to be as graceful as *Ghonili* of the story, '*Inakha* and *Ghonili*' and not to be as talkative as *Muchupili* of 'The Fairy Wife'. To give someone their due is also emphasised by referring to the story of '*Atsusa*' (dog's share).

This continuity can further be negotiated by modifying and updating certain aspects of its culture that is not in consonance with the changing times in the spirit of guardianship and cultural ownership. While at the same time rekindling oral tradition that represents universal values. This can be possible by embracing timeless values and applying it to new situations and current realities. For instance, *Apuki* and *Illiki* (Morungs) can be re-created to allow socio-cultural interaction by re-telling, re-singing, and re-citing timeless lore while taboos can be reiterated to help people inculcate and develop a higher standard of integrity and honesty, by which the common efforts would lead to achieve harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Nonetheless, the study carried out is neither intended to be the ultimate reading of Sümi oral tradition nor final in its research. Therefore, any corrections, modifications, and suggestions for improvement is anticipated and will be humbly acknowledged. It is, in fact, a modest analysis from an insider's perspective of select texts and accepts that it is only a small effort leaving a huge room for further research, in the knowledge that there are various areas to explore in oral tradition as many stimulating texts can be found. Trickster tales, Aetiological tales, Work Songs, and Social Proverbs are open to a wealth of interpretation and of reflection. Hence, other scholars can be safely urged to consider the study of oral tradition which will greatly contribute not only in the field of academics but also to the society.

**APPENDIX-I**  
**TRANSLATED SÜMI NAGA FOLK-ORAL NARRATIVES**  
**(Translated by the scholar)**

There are many stories in Sümi oral tradition because Sümi Nagas are also great story-tellers. However, the scholar has picked only few popular stories that is relevant for the present study. Some tales have been translated elaborately as it contained many elements of Sümi tradition. While others that have a simple or single theme have been given in shortened form. Story No. 6 was narrated by Hutoli N. Sema, Story No. 7 by Hekhevi Achumi, and Story No. 13 has been partly taken from J.H Hutton's book, *The Sema Nagas*. Story No.4 & 9 has been translated from a booklet, *Kichitssathoh* (Sümi Literature Board Publication, 2005). Story 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, & 16 from another booklet, *Küghakiche Eno Leshele* (Folklore and Poems), compiled by I. Lozhevi and approved by Sema Literature Board, 1977. However, there are additions and omissions as the stories were translated after listening to Sümi narrators such as, H. S. Rotokha (Natha Village), Hokishe Yephthomi (Sukhai Village), Vuxuto Achumi (Shena Village), Qhukiye Achumi (Shena Village), Hutoli N. Sema (Kitahu Village), and Kahuto P. Achumi (Lukikhe-Shevishe Village). Story 17, 18, & 19 are recollections from memory.

### **1. THE TALE OF *ANISHE* FLOWER**

Long ago there was a Sümi woman whose name was *Nisheli*. She came from a rich family. In her village, there lived a young man named *Pheo*. He came from a poor family. They knew each other from childhood because they grew up together in the same play group. When they grew up, they fell in love and their relationship blossomed. However, *Pheo* in his silence knew that their relationship will be in vain because he came from a poor family and there was no way for her parents to accept his proposal. He knew that whatever he thought in his heart will come true one day and so lived in perpetual fear. One evening *Pheo* called *Nisheli* and they had a talk in the dark. But unluckily, a man overheard their talk. The man's name was *Kutupa*.

*Pheo* said, "*Anisheo (Nisheli)* I will come to you tomorrow in the evening and knock at your door. Will you get ready and follow me wherever I lead?" *Nisheli* agreed to the plan. So, *Pheo* instructed *Nisheli* to set her clothes and things by that night itself before she went to bed. He told her that he will come at midnight so she must take her things and follow him. Then *Pheo* left.

The man *Kutupa* heard everything that was planned by the two lovers. So he disguised himself as *Pheo* and ran to the maiden's chamber and knocked. *Nisheli* thought it was really *Pheo* who was knocking the door and so she took her bundle of clothes and happily moved out of her chamber. *Kutupa* cleverly did not utter any word but only gestured her to follow him quickly. He also elbowed her and walked on. They walked and walked for long and *Nisheli* became exhausted. So, she suggested they make a little fire and rest but *Kutupa* only said, "hold on" ("*qhele*") and disagreed because he wanted to cross the village fields before taking rest. When *Nisheli* heard him speak it did not sound like her *Pheo* and that made her nervous. Nevertheless, she continued to follow him.

Finally, dawn broke when they crossed their village fields and was into a thick forest. And she was able to recognise the man. Quickly, *Kutupa* took her hand and requested her to come away with him. The sight of *Kutupa* startled and frightened *Nisheli* and she started to cry loudly. *Kutupa* tried to console her but she remained inconsolable. This angered *Kutupa* so much so that he took *Nisheli* and tied her to a tree and killed her. Then he went back to the village. *Nisheli's* blood began to flow around the tree and her blood transformed into a flower called *Anishe (Rhipsalis baccifera)*.

Long after that, one day, *Pheo* went along with his villagers for hunting. As they hunted and hunted, they came into the woods where *Nisheli* was killed. As soon as they reached the spot, suddenly it began to rain heavily. So *Pheo* took shelter under a tree. The tree happened to be the same tree where *Nisheli* was killed. The flower which was transformed by *Nisheli's* blood acted as an umbrella for *Pheo*. When others were drenched in rain; *Pheo* was sheltered by the flower. So his villagers came to the tree where *Pheo* was taking shelter and chased him away. But wherever *Pheo* went the flower too went and sheltered him. The strange manner of the flower amazed all of them. When the rain stopped and they were about to leave *Pheo* took his spear and sliced one flower from the tree and went home. That night *Pheo* had a dream. He dreamed of his darling *Nisheli*. *Nisheli* told him in his dream that it was only because of *Kutupa* that they could not marry each other. And she scolded him, "Even in the midst of others I tried to shelter you but why did you hurt me? Look at your ears and your spear?"

Following morning, *Pheo* woke up and saw his ears and spear smeared in blood. His heart filled with anguish as he thought, "My darling *Nisheli* even in death still remembers me!" He lived in great sorrow from that day

onwards. Later on he died a heart broken man. The flower which was transformed by *Nisheli's* blood is known as "*Anishe*" (*Rhipsalis baccifera*) flower. Till today, the flower can be found in the warmer parts of Sümi areas.

## 2. THE STORY OF HOW A WOMAN TRANSFORMED INTO A TARO

Once there lived a mother with two sons. One day, the two sons/brothers went to the forest. As they were wandering in the forest, they saw a bird's nest with young ones chirping on the top of a tree. And they wanted to have it. So the brothers brought a long bamboo and cut the longer part of the bamboo and bound it to the tree. They also split and smoothened the remaining end of the bamboo to be used as steps to reach the nest. After that they climbed up the tree to steal the birdies. When they reached the top, the elder brother tried to get hold of the biggest birdie but the smaller one came surprisingly into his hand instead. When the younger brother tried to get hold of the smaller birdie, the bigger birdie came into his hands instead. The elder brother was deeply hurt by that. So he left his brother on top of the tree and climbed down. Angry at what happened up the tree, the elder brother took out the bamboo steps one by one on his way down and left the younger brother alone.

With his brother gone and no way to come down, the younger brother lived on top of the tree alone. Finally, one day, the parents of the birdie came to the tree to feed their young ones. When the young bird's parents saw the boy, they started to scratch him. In his protest the boy said, "Some men tried to take away your young ones so I defended them. And now I am waiting upon them. So, you must not bite me". So the bird parents quickly went to a nearby field- hut and brought food for the boy and fed him. The birds continued to feed him and so the boy could survive on in this way.

As time went by, the two chicks began to grow and feathers began to show. The boy did not want them to grow as he would be left behind. So he pulled out feathers from their wings. The parents became aware of the boy's action. So they began to insist, "We will lift you and take you down to the ground". But the boy told the birds, "If you really want to take me down to the ground then you must first go and bring a large *Tapu* (*Doyang*) stone to me". Truly, the parents brought the *Tapu* stone to him. This made the boy believe in their ability. Satisfied that he would be safe, he asked them to take him down to the ground. So they took him down to the ground.

By now, the boy had grown into a man. And he went back to his mother's house in the middle of the night. On reaching the house, he called out, "Mother, open the door for me". But the mother did not respond. So the son called out again. At last, the mother replied, "Who comes here with the voice of my son?". It was the third attempt. The son explained to her that he was the son who went to the forest long ago with his brother but who never returned. So, the mother opened the door and saw her son with his hair grown till his shoulders. That very night, the mother searched for a bamboo blade and shaved his head since she was embarrassed to let others see his unkempt long hair.

The son lived with his mother happily after that. He grew into a good looking and handsome man. But he flirted with many girls in the village. His wild ways annoyed the villagers. And they started to hatch plans to kill him. Thus, one day, the villagers decided to go for a traditional fishing. This was planned on the pretext to kill him. It was made binding for every villager to participate in the fishing that day. The villagers then pretended that there was a big fish in one area and tried to fish out. Then, one of the villagers persuaded him to join them. He agreed to it. And then prepared himself to dive into the water when his lover send a signal by winking at him so as to stop him from diving. However, he thought his lover was asking him to dive and so went into the river.

As soon as he dived into the river, the chief of the village made a loud war cry, "Au!" and announced that whoever did not throw a stone into the river was breaking a rule. All the villagers at once threw a stone into the river. In that way, he was stoned and killed. But on the other side, his best friend was waiting for him with *akhasho* without knowing that his friend had been killed. At last, his dear friend's smallest toe came into his *akhasho*. He cried, "Alas! What has become of you, my dear friend!" and collected the toe in his body-cloth.

When the villagers returned to the village, the mother enquired, "Is my son coming?" But the villagers replied, "Your son is at the back because of heavy load of the fish". As the mother waited for her son, his friend came at last and so she enquired the same. Her son's friend replied, "My friend has become like this" and he gave the toe to her.

Soon, the mother learnt about the deed of the villagers and decided to avenge her son's death. She started to rear a pig and told the villagers that when the pig was big enough it would be killed and portions of meat will be given to all the villagers. The news spread and everyone became excited. Even when the children cried, the parents would comfort their children by saying that they will be given meat when the grandmother finally kill the pig.

The children took great care of the pig's sty by bringing twigs and blocking every hole in that grandmother's house so that the pig may not escape.

Then, one day, the grandmother took all the children inside and came out. She locked the house from outside and set fire to the house. All the children inside the house were burnt. When the villagers came and searched the house, they found a partially burnt child who was saved because the pig's trough that came upon him. They asked the child, "Whose work is this?". The child replied, "It is the work of *Apüye* (apüza). It is the work of *apüye*". So the villagers knew that it was the grandmother who did that. Meanwhile, the grandmother fled into the woods because she was scared of the villagers. It is believed that she changed herself into a small insect and went inside the ant hole.

Not long after that, when the villagers were on their way to the fields, the grandmother raised her neck from the ant hole and uttered, "O! It's an enemy" and went inside the hole. Later on too it happened like that. The villagers did not know that it was the grandmother. They thought that it was a warning from the spirits. So, they went after the enemy but could not find any. This went on for a while. In this way, she wasted many working days for the villagers. One day, the villagers secretly watched the area from where the voice usually come and they saw the grandmother.

The villagers decided to dig the hole and began to dig. As they were about to reach the bottom, her son's friend suggested that it would be better for them to have their mid-day meal. The villagers agreed and had their meal. After that, they started to dig again but soon darkness came upon them. As they dug in darkness, at last they found the top of grandmother's head. They took out their *dao* and sliced the top of the taro and brought it to *Ayikku* (terrace/slopes) in the field and left it there and went home. When they returned the day after, they found that it had turned into a taro. That is why, till today it is believed that the some taro leaves and bulbs give ticklish feeling in the mouth because it was transformed by a human being.

### 3. THE FAIRY WIFE

Once upon a time, there lived two young lovers in the Sümi Naga hills. The boy's name was *Tsüipu* and the girl's name was *Khaulipu*. *Tsüipu* was a healthy and handsome young man and *Khaulipu* was one of the most beautiful woman in the world. But they lived in different villages. *Tsüipu* wanted to marry *Khaulipu* and so he used to visit her parents' house often to propose. After many attempts, his proposal was agreed upon by her parents.

Before the marriage took place, there was a very important day; the day to discuss about the bride-price. The day came and when they were discussing about the bride-price, the parents of *Khaulipu* asked *Tsüipu* to weave a bamboo basket to take her after the bride-price and marriage rituals were over. He was also forbidden neither to take rest on the way nor to open the basket till he reached his village. After the bride price was settled and the marriage rituals completed, *Tsüipu* obediently took her away the way her parents had instructed.

As *Tsüipu* carried his new wife in the basket to his village, he became tired and took rest. Then he opened the basket to have a glimpse of his bride. In his weariness he completely forgot about the warnings given to him by his in laws. After taking rest for some time, he tried to lift the basket but it became too heavy for him. And since he was alone and helpless he thought of leaving the basket there so he can go to the village to call his brother. Thus, he went to the village.

Meanwhile, in the absence of *Tsüipu*, *Muchupili*, a mischievous evil spirit found the basket unattended and killed *Khaulipu* and took her place in the basket. *Muchupili* then changed herself into *Khaulipu*'s clothes and waited for *Tsüipu* to arrive. Finally, *Tsüipu* returned with his brother. When they reached the basket, the brother of *Tsüipu* opened the basket to see how beautiful his brother's new wife would be. To his surprise, he found an ugly looking woman inside the basket. He could not believe his brother had married to the ugly thing and in disgust he scolded *Tsüipu*, "You truly need to marry this type!" And went back without helping. Confused with his brother's reaction, *Tsüipu* looked into the basket and found his *Khaulipu* looking very strange and different. He could not understand what might have gone wrong and was stunned. *Muchupili* sensed his feeling and so cleverly protested, "when I tried to open my eyes to see you; my eyes became large, when I tried to speak to you; my mouth became sharp, and when I tried to sit; my leg broke". *Tsüipu* was blinded by his love for *Khaulipu* so he believed her. He carried the basket with great difficulty without any complaints and reached his village. Thereafter, they led a happy married life.

As time went by, from the spot where *Khaulipu* was killed, a bamboo plant came out. And it was blessed with many shoots. One day, *Tsüipu* went to the woods to collect bamboo shoots. It so happened that *Tsüipu* collected

the shoots from that same spot. He brought it home and gave his wife to cook. As they were cooking, the bamboo shoots began to speak, "May *Muchupili* die in child birth! Chop *Muchupili*!" *Muchupili* heard it and told *Tsüipu*. *Tsüipu* could not understand the message. So he told his wife to throw away the curry if it really was talking. *Muchupili* then threw the curry into a pot of husk.

From the spot where *Muchupili* threw the curry, a lemon/orange tree came out of the spot. And the lemon tree bore many fruits. *Tsüipu* generously shared the lemon with his villagers. Almost every village household was gifted with that lemon but *Tsüipu* missed a widow. So the widow asked *Tsüipu*, "give the lemon to me too". *Tsüipu* told her that there was just one left on top of the tree and he took it down and gave it to her. The widow took the lemon to her house and kept it in a small traditional hanging basket. As time went on, when the widow went to the fields, the lemon would transform itself into *Khaulipu* and jumped down murmuring to herself, "my father, my mother are shortly arriving" and does all the household chores. And finally when it was time for the widow to arrive she used to go back to its lemon form and remain in the basket.

When the widow saw her house clean she informed her villagers that whoever does her work would be given food "even if do not eat I will give food to whoever does this for me". No one came forward. So one day, she pretended to go to the field but stayed back behind the house and waited for the person who might come to her house to clean. As she was peeping secretly, *Khaulipu*, as usual, jumped down from the basket murmuring "my father, my mother are arriving" and started to quickly do the chores. The widow swiftly went inside the house and got hold of *Khaulipu*. But *Khaulipu* pleaded to the widow, "I am re-born, re-formed. Please do not touch me that/ too hard".

After that *Khaulipu* remained a woman and did not transform back to lemon. And she lived with the widow. The widow did not allow *Khaulipu* to go outside after knowing her condition. Except for the household works, the widow did not ask her to do any other work. So *Khaulipu* did the house work and weaved leisurely inside the house.

One day, *Tsüipu* came with the village children near the hut of the widow. He was playing and spinning top with the village children. He did not know *Khaulipu* was weaving inside the hut. He kept playing with the children, competing in spinning top. *Khaulipu* was aware of his presence because she could recognise his voice. But she did not want to let *Tsüipu* see her. So, whenever the children's top came spinning inside *Khaulipu*'s house, she would let the children come and fetch it. But whenever *Tsüipu*'s top came spinning inside she would quickly throw it out. But there was one such time when *Khaulipu* was busy tying the broken thread, *Tsüipu*'s top came spinning inside her hut. When *Tsüipu* came inside the hut to take his top he saw *Khaulipu*. So he told the widow, "The woman looks like my old wife. I am going to marry her. What would you ask?" The widow replied, "You must make *shohusü pikhi* and *shohusü khumu* and bring it to me. Only then you can marry her". *Tsüipu* gave what the widow asked and married *Khaulipu* and he lived with two wives.

Since he had two wives, *Tsüipu* cleared different paths for collecting firewood. One for *Khaulipu* and the other for *Muchupili*. One day, both of them went to collect firewood. *Khaulipu* came back earlier than *Muchupili*. In order to kill *Muchupili*, *Tsüipu* asked her to enter the house from her back. But *Khaulipu* asked her to come from front instead. But *Muchupili* replied, "I will not listen to a woman. I will only listen to a man" and came inside from her back. Then *Tsüipu* killed her with a dao.

A fine *Thumsü* tree grew from the grave of *Muchupili*. So, *Tsüipu* chopped the tree and made a ladder out of it to be used as steps for their granary. But he forbade *Khaulipu* from entering the granary in his absence.

But one day, when *Tsüipu* was returning from head-hunting, all the villagers insisted *Khaulipu* his wife to go into the granary. They told her that *Tsüipu* was returning with a head which calls for celebration. The rice was needed to be brought from the granary to brew rice- beer. So *Khaulipu* listened to her villagers. She went to the granary and climbed up that ladder which broke suddenly and killed her. When *Tsüipu* returned and learnt about his wife's death, he told his mother, "I asked you not to allow *Khaulipu* inside the granary in my absence but why did you allow?" His mother replied that this happened because all the villagers insisted her to do so.

Later on, *Tsüipu* went to *Khaulipu*'s parental house. *Khaulipu* was found there again. *Tsüipu* saw her and said he wanted to marry her. But her mother disagreed to marry her off. And told him, "If you want to marry, take *Aghüghalho*. But you must not allow her to go outside when the sun is shining". *Tsüipu* agreed and they got married.

One day while *Tsüipu* was working outside, his wife *Aghüghalho* also came out to see how the sun looked like. But when the sun shone on her she melted into water. While *Tsüipu* was watching it, from the water came out a flower. This flower that was transformed from woman is called "*Lapu*" flower. It is found till today.

#### 4. THE STORY OF KHUMTSA, THE ORPHAN

Long, long ago there lived a man called *Khumtsa*. His father's name was *Kivigho* and his mother's name was *Pitheli*. *Kivigho* was from *Tukunasami* village and *Pitheli* was from *Ustomi* village. *Kivigho*, *Chisahu* and *Itepu* were brothers. Their father's name was *Tüghakhe*. Among them, *Itepu* was the eldest and *Kivigho* was the youngest.

When *Khumtsa* was still in his mother's womb, his father *Kivigho* and uncle *Chisahu* were killed by enemy. Due to this, *Pitheli* went back to her parents' house at *Usuto* village carrying *Khumtsa* in her womb. All this while, *Itepu* was mindful of *Pitheli's* pregnancy and remained restless thinking about whether his sister-in-law *Pitheli* was pregnant with a boy child or girl child. His anxiety was because *Itepu* had only one beloved son called *Kapo*. And so he thought of a plan to take the child as his own if it turns out to be a boy but if it happened to be a girl he thought of leaving her with her mother. With this plan in mind, whenever he met people from *Usuto* village he would enquire about *Pitheli's* condition.

Eventually, *Pitheli* gave birth to a baby boy and the news reached *Itepu*. Hearing the good news, he took a rooster to visit *Pitheli*. On seeing the child, he exclaimed, "Hurrah! Let him be a curse for *Kapo*!" while trying to actually say, "Hurrah! Let him be a partner for *Kapo*!" (In *Sümi* language, tone is of utmost importance. High-tone *Küsa*=companion and low-tone *Küsa*=curse). This was considered as an ill-omen. It is believed that by uttering the wrong word he made the evil spirit happy. (It is believed that because of this, *Kapo* clan could not have an illustrious lineage). A rooster was killed and the baby was named *Khumtsa*. The baby was named *Khumtsa* (bitter) because his father was no more and traditionally he would be considered as an orphan. However, when *Khumtsa* was still a child *Itepu* decided to take *Pitheli* as his wife. And *Khumtsa* was also taken to *Itepu's* house.

As an orphan, *Khumtsa* was expected to be subservient and hard-working but he turned out to be playful and mischievous. He did not listen to his parents and so many a time he was punished by making him sleep on hay stack. Many a times he was compelled to seek shelter at other's place. Sometimes when he could not find a place, he would sleep among cows and pigs. And braved the chilling night sleeping outdoors without wearing any clothes.

It so happened that one night when he went to sleep under a neighbour's house, a lion happened to sleep in the same place. Smelling of a human being, the lion came towards him. It came so close to him that the whiskers of the lion brushed his nose. *Khumtsa* started to sneeze loudly. And the sound of his repeated sneeze frightened the lion and made it run away.

*Khumtsa* did not obey his mother and because of which she remained ashamed in front of her new husband and others. She was even more hurt and sad because *Itepu* was not his real father and she wished *Khumtsa* to behave well to earn *Itepu's* love. She lived in shame and agony because of his misconduct. Therefore one particular year, towards reaping time she sent him to the paddy field to scare away birds. After that she told her husband *Itepu*, "Go to the field today and beat up *Khumtsa*". Truly, *Itepu* also arranged himself with *apikügha* (bamboo stick) and slowly and silently went to the field to see what *Khumtsa* was up to. As he neared the field he could see *Khumtsa* running to and fro the field saying, "My mother *Pitheli*"

Hearing this, *Itepu* became sad and it changed his attitude towards the boy. Then he began to fondly love him. So he took out his *dao* and sliced a branch of *michisübo*. Then he took out the *apikügha* and whipped the bark repeatedly. The juice from the bark of the *michisübo* made red marks on *apikügha*. Then he hid it from *Khumtsa*. After that, he went to the field hut and called out to *Khumtsa*, "Oh orphan! I have brought food for you, you must come and have". *Khumtsa* came and had his food and went back into the field to continue his task of chasing the birds. In the evening they went back home.

After reaching his house, *Itepu* told his wife, "As you wished, I have lashed *Khumtsa* black and blue. He said, "Look at this *apikügha*!" and showed her the red marks on the stick. When she saw the *apikügha*, she felt so much pain inside because she thought that the red marks bore the blood of her son from beatings.

As time went by, *Khumtsa* began to grow into a man. So his parents allowed him to join an *Aloji* (work group) to work in the fields. He happened to join a group where a girl named *Tüghünakha* was also among them. *Tüghünakha* was a prophetic girl. Even when people look down upon *Khumtsa*, because he was an orphan, and treated him badly, but *Tüghünakha* did not do the same. Because she could see through *Khumtsa* who possessed many blessings.

One day, *Khumtsa* and *Tüghünakha* went to catch crabs. To her surprise, whenever *Khumtsa* put his hand inside the hole to catch a crab, his hand came out covered in grain. Another time when *Tüghünakha* was scrubbing his back while bathing, she could scrub out grains. Then on, she began to be enamoured by him.

*Tüghünakha* thought of a plan and asked *Khumtsa* to come with her so they went to catch crabs again. They could catch a lot that day too. She divided the crabs into two parts. The larger ones in one group and smaller ones in another. And she gave the part which had the smaller ones to *Khumtsa* and she carried the part with the bigger ones. Both of them took this and went to her parents' house. And she told her parents, "Father-mother, today the orphan and I went to catch crabs. Look what we've got!" And opened the bundle of crabs that had the larger ones in it. However, *Tüghünakha's* parents gave her a cold reply, "So, feed him food from the dog's plate and let him drink from the hand washing bowl". *Tüghünakha's* parents were rich and so they considered *Khumtsa* unworthy for their daughter. *Tüghünakha* replied in disbelief, "Father, mother, isn't he a human being, why would we do that? I will give him food from my plate and I will let him drink from my cup". This puzzled her parents because they could not understand why their daughter was in love with an orphan.

Meanwhile, the men in their group who worked in the fields became jealous of *Khumtsa*. The affection and love between them began to grow and it was becoming evident to others. *Tüghünakha* would only carry firewood chopped by *Khumtsa*. So, one day, a young man among their group took out *Khumtsa's* relatively smaller *dao* to the group and laughed saying, "How could this *dao* chop firewood. Isn't it so small?" In contempt, he took that *dao* and tried to put it between his toes just to show how blunt and useless it was. But to everyone's surprise, the *dao* sliced deep into his toe. He tried to act as though nothing had happened but the blood could not be stopped. As the man was struggling, *Tüghünakha* shouted to the group, "Hey, our friend is drowning in blood. What are you trying to hide?" So, the group took the man away to the village.

Long after that, whenever the villagers prepared for warfare, *Khumtsa* too would insist on joining the warriors. But the elders told him to stay away as he was too young. But one day, he could finally persuade an elder to make him a spear. He carried the spear and went only after the warriors had gone so that no one could see him. He followed them from a distance, as his villagers charged towards the enemy village. It was a long day and he did not carry any food. And he became hungry and so he stopped at a place where the villagers who went before him had their meal. He took out the plantain leaves left by them and began to lick the leftovers. Then he proceeded. As the enemy drew nearer he overtook his villagers by a short cut and took the enemy's head before his villagers could even reach.

As the villagers returned home, *Khumtsa's* anxious parents enquired, "Is the orphan returning?" The villagers replied, "Yes, he is at the back returning with an enemy's head". The parents could not believe what the villagers had told them. And thought to themselves that it could mean that his head had gone to the enemy. Because everyone, including his parents, did not know he possessed such skills. But at last, the news of his valour turned to be true.

After that, whenever the villagers went on warfare, it was *Khumtsa* alone who could bring the enemy's head to the village. So when the villagers that stayed home ask, "Who killed the enemy this time?" The warriors would reply, "The man who usually kills". (It is believed that there is a flat stone where *Khumtsa* used to rest while coming back from war. This stone can be seen even today at Nunumi village. It is called '*Khumtsa Ghazü*'. The stone was believed to be covered by thick *akipihi/bush* which served as a perfect blanket for sleeping.

After realising the many skills and blessings of *Khumtsa*, *Tüghünakha's* parents agreed to give her hand in marriage. They lived in prosperity and owned house, fields, cows, Mithuns, pigs, rich granaries, ornaments, etc. They were blessed with seven sons and seven daughters. It is believed that among the Jimomi clan, the lineage from *Khumtsa* is more illustrious.

## 5. THE MYTH OF THE BLESSED STONE

Before his death, the father told his youngest son that his other two brothers have been looked after in his life but the youngest is vulnerable because the father is nearing death and he feels he has not looked for his welfare. So on his dying bed, he told his youngest son to take whatever was in his parents' house which became the share for the youngest one. In this way, the blessed stone of his parents in the house also became his. The blessed stone was believed to double the amount paddy it was dried upon. After the death of the father, the two elder brothers took turns to dry their paddy on the blessed stone and did not let the youngest one dry his. It saddened the youngest brother who began to devise plans on how to destroy the stone. After collecting enough dry leaves on top of the

stone, he burned the stone to pieces. The stone burst and a rooster came out of the stone and flew towards *Tapu* (Doyang). So the youngest brother migrated towards *Tapu*. The ones who migrated towards *Tapu* are considered the Sümi Nagas.

## 6. ORIGIN OF *AXONE*

Long ago, an orphan was fed with a handful of boiled soya beans by his step-mother instead of feeding him with proper meal. This made him unhappy as it would not satisfy his hunger but he was compelled to accept it. So he took it and since it was too less, he left it between the thatch roof. After a few days, he discovered that the soya beans had fermented. He tasted it and liked the fermented soya bean instantly. This is how *Axone* (fermented soya bean paste) became a delicacy for Sümi Nagas.

## 7. THE STORY OF THREE BROTHERS

A woman gave birth to three sons in a miraculous way. The first one was named *Timi* (man), the second was named *Tüghami* (evil spirit), and third was *Angushu-u* (tiger). After the death of their mother, each one of them decided to divide their inheritance and part ways. The man decided to stay at home, *Tüghami* in the cliffs and beneath the earth and caves, and the tiger in the forest. Both *Timi* and *Tüghami* cultivated fields but *Tüghami*'s field yield abundant crops while *Timi*'s field could not produce anything even when he had cultivated in the most fertile areas. So *Timi* asked the reason to *Tüghami* and *Tüghami* taught him how to observe field and house rituals. Then *Tüghami* gave his brother *Timi* the following *Aghas* (powers): *Atumu gha: Awukhukipe gha, Axashe gha, Kithikupu gha. Müthü gha: Ithukulu gha, Bukulu gha, Thipekulu gha, Asakiqhi gha. Putupuno gha: Tüghami sasti kinhethekulu gha, Kichekütsu gha, Tügha zaku shikipivi gha*. This is how *Timi* (man) gained power of prophecy, ability to see things, healing power, etc.

## 8. THE STORY OF *ATSÜSA*

When *Timi* (man) avenged the dog's mother who was killed by a stag, the dog began to live with man. The dog live with man and accompanies him in hunting. So whenever, a hunt is brought home, it is customary for the people to prepare a share called *Atsüsa* (dog's share). Generally, a leg of the hunted is given to the hunting dog, the chief hunter takes the head, and the rest of the meat is distributed among the villagers.

## 9. THE TALE OF *THOCHIU*

There was once a man who led a prosperous life. His name was *Thochiu*. He was a skilled hunter and had a dog named *Shihato*. When they went for hunt, they never came back empty handed.

One day, they went to hunt porcupine. They ran and chased the porcupine for a long time. During the hunt, *Thochiu* and *Shihato* lost each other among the many hills. *Thochiu* could not find his dog even as he called for it because the dog has gone into a cave while chasing the porcupine. And since the dog was inside the cave, it did not hear his master. Finally, after a long time *Thochiu* could find *Shihato*.

*Thochiu* asked his dog to come out of the cave but the dog did not. So *Thochiu* went inside. Suddenly a large stone blocked their way out. *Thochiu* asked the stone to open and release his dog. The stone slowly moved away to make way for the dog. But *Thochiu* tried to go out instead of letting his dog out. Just then the stone shut the way. This happened again and again.

*Thochiu* realised that the stone was not willing to let him out. So he told his dog, "*Shihato*, I cannot go home. Take this neckpiece to your mother. And if you happen to meet people on the way, move aside and hide from them. And tell your mother to come here".

*Shihato* could go out because the stone opened the way for the dog. *Shihato* reached home with the ornaments and gave to its mother and reported what his father told him. So *Shihato* along with his mother went back to the cave where *Thochiu* was trapped in.

On reaching the cave, *Thochiu* narrated the whole story to his wife. Since there was no way out for *Thochiu* to come out of that cave, his wife would bring him home cooked food for him. This went on for nine days.



One day, his wife asked the villagers to come and rescue *Thochiu*. The villagers came and tried but failed. And *Thochiu* could not bear the stench of his own waste any longer. So, he transformed himself into a bird and flew from the hole which was used for feeding him.

That evening *Thochiu*'s wife met him in her dream. And he told her, "Whenever it is time for hunting, I will shout *I-Thochiu I-Thochiu*" and also sound "He-he-he... calling for my dog". That is why till today, *Thochiu* bird calls its own name. After her husband's death *Tusholi* kept singing about her husband by playing *Aheo* (*harp*) which became a traditional instrument that accompanied folksongs.

## 10. THE STORY OF *LITSAPA*

Once there lived two orphaned sisters in the corner of a small village. They lived a life unknown to others because of their poverty. One day, *Litsapa* (god of prosperity) came to the village in the guise of a poor man with sores all over his body. He went from one house to another seeking shelter but no one welcomed him because of his appearance. At last, he came to the house where the two sisters lived. They welcomed him by saying, "Grandpa, we have nothing to offer you but you may sleep atleast". So, *Litsapa* agreed and stayed by the fireside. After some time, *Litsapa* asked the girls to boil water for cooking rice. This embarrassed the girls because they had no rice. So, the younger sister shyly responded that they had no rice to cook. "Don't worry, I've brought rich with me", said *Litsapa* and rubbed his elbow and rice began to fall from his elbow. Again after some time, *Litsapa* asked the sisters to prepare meat broth. But they told him that they had nothing. So *Litsapa*, rubbed his knee and pieces of meat came down from his knees. They cooked the rice and meat and had a hearty dinner. This is how *Litsapa* blessed the two sisters because of their hospitality and generosity.

## 11. THE STORY OF *IKI* AND TIGER

There was once a tiger who was rearing a pig. *Iki* came to the tiger and told, "It is time to kill the pig and use in a trap". So, the tiger asked *Iki* how to lay a trap. *Iki* replied, "Kill the pig and cut its limbs and hang it with a rope on a trap". The tiger did as was told. *Iki* cleverly went and brought the pig's limbs and cooked and ate it. When the tiger came to the spot where it had laid the trap, he found nothing and its meat was found missing. The tiger asked *Iki*, "Why did it not trap any animal?" *Iki* replied, "You have kept some part of meat at home. That is the reason why an animal was not trapped". The tiger confessed that it had kept a portion of live and a little part of pig fat. The tiger went home and brought these portions and left it on a trap. *Iki* went and ate it too. So nothing was trapped.

Again the tiger asked, "Why does it not trap any animal?" *Iki* told the tiger to bring rice beer and axone and leave it near the trap. The tiger did as was instructed.

Next day, *Iki* went and took the rice beer and *axone* and smeared it all over its body and lay dead on the trap.

Next morning, the tiger along with the leopard cat and saw an animal trapped with its mouth open. The tiger felt very delighted and told the leopard cat that an animal has been trapped finally. So they opened the animal from the trap to carry it home. *Iki* told the leopard cat, "do not carry my body, it might reach home". So the leopard cat did not carry *Iki*'s body. The tiger could not carry it by itself. The tiger asked the leopard cat to help carry it. While the leopard cat was carrying it, *Iki* took out bamboo blade and cut the leopard cat. Then *Iki* told the leopard cat that he was bitten by termites. So, the tiger asked the leopard cat to bring plantain leaves to carry the dressed meat.

The leopard cat went as asked and came back with torn plantain leaves. The tiger again told the leopard cat to bring chopped wood to make *apikhi* (mortar). The leopard cat brought the wood but the wood was chopped both on the top and bottom. Since it was unusable, the tiger told the leopard cat to watch over the animal while he goes out to find the right wood. While the tiger was away, *Iki* told the leopard cat, "If you want to eat my meat, pee on my tail". The leopard cat did as was instructed. Just then *Iki* swished his tail and smashed the leopard cat's face and ran away.

Later, when the tiger came back, he did not find the animal. So, the tiger asked leopard cat, "where is the animal?" the wild cat replied, "*Iqhora-iqhira*"

The tiger got angry on hearing the words and gave a heavy blow to leopard cat. The leopard cat fell into wayside (*lavela*). That is why it is believed that leopard cat live in *lavela*.

For *Iki*, he went home and started making bamboo mats as though nothing had happened. When the tiger returned home, it saw *Iki* weaving. The tiger told *Iki* that the animal trapped looked exactly like *Iki* with hands and feet. While weaving, *Iki* just said, "My child is suffering from dysentery". And wove the tiger's tail into the mat. All

this while, the tiger was ignorant of his tail being woven secretly into the mat. Then *Iki* told the tiger that if the tiger want to eat its meat he should try to run and catch him with the mat on his body. The tiger ran after *Iki* with the bamboo mat. As the tiger was about to catch *Iki* suddenly *Shefu* (water crane?) came hovering above them. *Iki* saw it and suddenly started to pray to *Shefu*, “oh my creation”.

The tiger was surprised on hearing this and asked if *Iki* really created *Shefu*. “Yes”, replied *Iki*. So the tiger again requested *Iki* to create him in the likeness of *Shefu*. *Iki* agreed to it. But *Iki* told the tiger to collect woods of different kinds. To collect cane from colder regions and *shohusü* from warmer regions. The tiger did it as was told. Finally when the woods were collected, *Iki* and the tiger went to the forest. *Iki* bound the tiger to the wood. After that, *Iki* asked the tiger to move. But the tiger could not move. Then *Iki* took *Thumsü* stick and put it into its mouth by saying, “this will make your teeth, this will make your tail, wings” After this, *Iki* went home. *Iki* and the wild cat came back on the third day. As they neared, they heard the tiger saying, “Is this for the better or worse?” they heard it and so went back home.

On the ninth day, the body was filled with dragonflies. They brought some leaves and fanned the tiger’s body. Just then, a dragon fly (*ayela*) came out flying. So *Iki* scolded the tiger, “I created you to become *Shefu* (crane), why did you transform into a fly?”

*Iki* caught the fly and put it into the *Asüpuhu*. He oiled *Asüpuhu* with pig fat and often told the people that he owns a charm inside the *Asüpuhu*. During that time, a widow lived with her daughter and they were rearing a pig. *Iki* often went to the widow’s house with the *asüpuhu*. One day, the daughter asked *Iki* what was inside *Asüpuhu*. *Iki* told that there was a charm inside and therefore cannot be shown to anyone.

One day, the daughter told *Iki* to let her atleast peep inside. *Iki* did not agree. So the daughter forcibly tried to peep in. While doing this, the fly escaped from the *asüpuhu*. *Iki* told, “See, I will not agree nor listen even if you offer me you and your mother’s pig”. So the daughter requested *Iki* to kindly accept the pig. *Iki* agreed at last and took the pig away happily by whispering, “*Iki subomikenhe*”. The daughter asked *Iki*, “What are you singing about?” *Iki* replied, “This is a song of burden”.

## 12. THE LEGEND OF NISAPA AND NISALA

Long ago, *Nisapa* and *Nisala* worked together in the same *Aloji*, work group. One day, they went to work in one of the *Aloji*’s field. They could finish the work early. So they went to catch crabs. He used to catch crabs behind others. When *Nisala* turned back to *Nisapa*, she saw him catching many crabs from the spot where others have caught already. She also saw him pulling out his hand with grains between his fingers. Seeing that *Nisala* told *Nisapa*, “Let’s join our catch together” but *Nisapa* declined saying, “I am an orphan. So I cannot join you”. But *Nisala* insisted and he agreed to it. Before leaving for home, all the members of *Aloji* were bathing in the stream. When *Nisala* was rubbing *Nisapa*’s back, she could rub out grains. Seeing this, *Nisala* decided to get married to *Nisapa*. In the evening they sat down and shared their catch. *Nisala* told *Nisapa*, “Take the larger share. And she told him, “Take it and come to our house”

Later, *Nisapa* came with the crabs to *Nisala*’s house. *Nisala*’s parents were rich so they despised *Nisapa*. They told her, “Feed him rice from dog’s plate and let him drink from the hand washing bowl”. *Nisala* did not have the heart to do that. But she was too frightened to disobey her parents. So she fed him that way. After that, *Nisapa* used to frequent *Nisala*’s house for her hand in marriage. However, her parents did not agree because he was poor.

One day, *Nisala* told *Nisapa* to sell her neckpiece (*Achiku*) and bring it as her bride price. So he went away to sell it. While he was away, other suitors came for *Nisala*’s hand. Not long after, a suitor told her parents that he would soon come to negotiate bride price.

When the day came, *Nisala* pretended to have stomach ache and turned down and the negotiation could not take place. But later on, the suitor came again. And a bride price was finalised. Even that day, *Nisala* pretended to have heart burns. But the man prepared a basket to carry her away. So *Nisala* was compelled to marry off to that man. While on their way, *Nisala* asked her husband that she wanted to speak to her friends. She told her friends, “tell him that I waited but could not wait any longer. So I have married”.

The news of her marriage reached *Nisapa*. He heard it when he had just bartered the neckpiece with cows and returning homeward. Hearing the news, he twisted each cow’s tail to find out the strongest one among them. On finding one, he mounted a bull and returned. While returning he saw *Nisala* going away to her new home. *Nisala* told him, “I waited long enough for you” and went away.

One day, *Nisala*'s husband called *Nisapa* in order to kill him. So, *Nisapa* came to the village after dark. He hid his warrior garb and came in common body-cloth. The villagers were waiting to see *Nisapa* and did not go to the field. But since he did not look handsome, they all went to the fields. Next morning, when *Nisapa* came to the village in a warrior dress, they villagers stayed back. The villagers told him to do a warrior dance on *Kuluchoha Bo* (trunk/stem of a large plant \*the leaves of which are used as broom). While *Nisapa* was dancing on *Kuluchuha Bo*, they were secretly trying to kill him. They wanted *Nisapa* to slip and fall while dancing on the *Kuluchuha Bo*. And while he lay there fallen, *Nisala*'s husband would kill him. Everyone was watching him dance in his warrior dress.

While *Nisapa* was dancing towards *Nisala*, she pretended to shift the baby she was carrying and dropped a *Chophi* (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) flower. *Nisapa* picked up the flower and put it on his ears. After wearing it on his ears, *Nisapa* became more handsome. He danced further and further away and reached the village gate. After dancing away till the ninth gate, he escaped. The dance was over and the villagers went to the fields.

*Nisala* and her husband cultivated near the road side. One day, as *Nisapa* was returning back from fields with his friends, *Nisala*'s husband asked her about the identity of each one of them. She identified each one except *Nisapa*. Her husband asked her again for the second time. But she did not answer until a butterfly came inside their field hut. She pointed to the butterflies and told him, "That's how we did". Her husband told her that he would go and cut some cane and went away. Her husband came back shortly and tied *Nisala* to the post of the field hut and went home. He stripped her and left her.

*Nisala* gnawed on the cane rope and freed herself. She ran after *Nisapa*. When *Nisala* called out for *Nisapa*, he thought that it was an enemy's call and so he went made a fire on the hill and left quickly. This went on for a while, *Nisala* reached *Nisapa*'s village at night.

She heard someone playing harp in the *Apuki* and instantly knew it was *Nisapa*. So she called him out. He too knew *Nisala*'s sound and so came to the *Aliwo* (village gate). He found her naked so she clothe her with his clothes and took her to the village. *Nisala* returned to her parents' house and lived there after that.

Not long after, *Nisala* fell ill because she wanted to be with *Nisapa*. Her parents did their best but she did not get well. One day, *Nisala* told her mother to make a hole in her chamber as she was feeling too hot. At night, *Nisapa* used to come to her chamber and slipped his hand from the hole and touched her heart. She felt comforted and so she made less painful sounds. When they did not hear her painful sounds, her parents would lit torches to check on her. *Nisapa* would take out his hand again. When the parents were out looking he would hold her again.

*Nisala* died from this pain. After her death, *Nisapa* took her parents to collect firewood. He cleared the way and her parents followed him. He chopped firewood for them. He also carried wood, *Laküthükisü* (long log used for building house), and went ahead of them. Seeing his skill, the parents wondered as they followed him. In the evening, as they were about to sleep, the parents quarrelled for not letting *Nisala* get married to *Nisapa*. *Nisapa* heard their feud as he was spying on them. Next morning, *Nisapa* came to the parents place and requested to bury him next to her grave when he die. So that they may marry in after life.

Later on, *Nisapa* died. And as was requested he was buried next to *Nisala*'s grave. *Nisala*'s mother was a sorcerer. And so she could speak to the dead in her dreams. In her dream, she asked *Nisapa* if he had met *Nisala*. *Nisapa* said that there was a stick planted between their graves which is making them unable to meet each other. Next morning, *Nisala*'s mother woke up and went to their graves. She saw an *Ayeghü* (bamboo stick) stuck between the graves by some wicked person. She took it out. The following night she asked again the same question to *Nisapa*. And he replied that they have met and married.

### 13. THE STORY OF SAMBHAR AND FISH POISON TREE

*Aqhu* and fish were friends. *Aqhu* told fish, "My friend, if men came with dogs to hunt me, I will run to the river. You sprinkle the water over my footsteps so that they will not find me". So, the fish agreed. Then the fish also told his friend to save him when men came to the river and try to fish him by using its horns to destroy the fish poison tree. Thus, according to their wishes, it was done. That is why till today *Aqhu* and fish helps each other.

### 14. THE MYTH OF A HEAVENLY HUSBAND

Once upon a time, there lived a father who had nine sons and a daughter. Since she was the only daughter she was loved by all. One day the daughter all of a sudden told her parents, "My husband is coming to finalise the

marriage”. Bewildered the parents asked her why she was saying so when she was not courted by any suitor. But the daughter replied, “A heavenly being is asking for my hand. He is asking us to prepare rice-brew and await him”. The daughter persistently talked about a heavenly lover coming to marry her. This puzzled the parents and the whole family. One day, the daughter brought up the issue again and informed her parents and brothers that she would be leaving that evening and insisted they had the last meal together. So they had the meal happily and slept. Truly that night the heavenly being came and took the daughter away. Next morning when the parents and brothers woke up they found many goats tied under their house. This was a bride price from the husband. When they could not find the daughter they became sad.

After a month, the daughter returned to her parents’ home with a new born. Everyone was excited and happy. The brothers carried the new baby one by one. When it reached the youngest brother, the baby died.

After that a large burning star came out in the sky. The daughter said that it was a sign that her husband and father in law was coming to take her away. She requested her parents to make large fire so that she could go along with the flames. Then, she breathed into the nose of the dead new born child and the child became alive. As she was about to leave she told her mother not to look at her while she was going up because the action would result in not seeing her daughter any more. So the mother went inside the house but she looked out by parting the hay roof to see her daughter. So, as the daughter said, the mother could not see her daughter any more after this.

## 15. THE MYTH OF TWO FAIRIES

Once a couple had two sons. The parents did not live long. After their death the two brothers lived on their own. In their house, at night two fairies would come and bathe in *Atsükuchophi* (a large wooden post at the entrance of the house). They used to hide and watch. One day they made a plan to catch the fairies. The elder one told the younger brother to catch hold of the ugly fairy while he would catch the beautiful one. So one night as they were waiting for the fairies they came as usual. The elder brother tried to catch hold of the beautiful one but the ugly one came into his grasp instead. So the elder brother married the ugly one and the younger married the beautiful one.

The elder brother lived in great distress arising out of jealousy. He decided to kill his brother. So he took the younger brother to the woods on the pretext of gathering wild fruits. When they came to the fruit tree on the bank of a river, the elder brother asked the younger one to climb the tree first. The younger brother did not know his brother’s plan so he did as was told. When he reached the top of a tree, the elder brother chopped down the tree into the river.

The wife of the younger brother came and tried to retrieve her husband but the elder brother threatened her. So she told the elder brother if he really wanted to marry her then he should make a fire on the compound of the house. To which, the elder brother did. But the younger brother’s wife went up towards heaven in the flames.

She gave birth to a baby boy in heaven and lived happily. The son would often tell his mother that he wanted to visit his father’s place. When he kept on insisting, the mother took a thread and tied it to her son’s belly and send him to earth. However, as the son was flying down to earth, the crow bit the thread and the son fell down to the earth and his liver got shattered in the fall. The crow ate the son’s liver. That is why till today, it is believed that crows feed on man’s liver.

## 16. THE LEGEND OF INAKHA AND GHONILI

Long, long ago, in a Sümi village called Shena, there lived a great warrior named *Inakha Achumi* and a beautiful and intelligent woman called *Ghonili Asümi*. Inakha was the son of *Ghüqhe* and *Ghonili* was the daughter of *Nikhena Asumi* of Philimi village. *Ghonili* was considered to be the most beautiful, virtuous and hard working woman in the whole village. They fell deeply in love with each other. *Inakha* married *Ghonili* and they lived a happy and prosperous life. Soon, they were blessed with a daughter and she was named *Visheli*. *Visheli* was loved and adored by her doting parents.

In a nearby village called *Süko*, *Inakha* had a friend named *Hoshepu*. *Hoshepu* had a daughter named *Chevili*. In times of raiding and headhunting, *Inakha* used to lead the villagers. In one of such raids, he happened to pass through a field where *Chevili* used to work. *Chevili* was a clever woman and she trapped *Inakha* into loving her. *Inakha* could not resist the temptation and the affair between them started to grow.

One day, *Chevili* confided to her brothers about her relationship with *Inakha*. In order to protect their sister from social stigma, *Kivikhü* and *Kiyexe* decided to go and wait for *Inakha* in the field. As decided, they went to the field where *Chevili* used to work and waited for *Inakha* from a distance. As usual, when *Inakha* was on his way to raid; he stopped by her field. As the two were spending time together inside the field-hut, her brothers, who had been observing them secretly from a distance, marched forward and surrounded the field-hut. *Inakha*, being a skilled warrior, quickly sensed what was happening. So, in order to save his skin he blurted out, "My brothers-in-law, what brings you here?" Upon hearing the sweet words of *Inakha*, referring to them as 'brothers-in-law' meant *Inakha* intended to marry *Chevili*, they set aside their earlier plan to take his head and instead sat down to talk with him in good spirit. As the talk went on, *Inakha* was compelled to marry *Chevili* because if it was otherwise it meant he would be beheaded then and there. Finally, *Inakha* gave his consent to come to *Chevili's* house after nine days to discuss about the bride-price.

With a heavy and sinking heart, *Inakha* went back home and told his beloved wife, "*Ghonili*, I have uttered wrongly in order to save my life". To this *Ghonili* replied, "Oh! *Inakha* do not worry, man make mistakes. That is the way of the world". Then *Inakha* comforted *Ghonili* by saying that he proposes to keep her as an elder and *Chevili* as younger wife. But *Ghonili* replied, "A bangle and an armband made of iron and lead can be worn together but an armband made of ivory cannot be worn double. That is why, I shall leave". (This suggests that she was no ordinary woman and therefore could not play second fiddle as she was the proud daughter of *Shena*, the Chief of *Shena* village. By saying this, she also made herself clear that if *Chevili* is to come as a wife to their house she would move out).

*Ghonili* then started heavy preparation for the arrival of her husband's new wife. She took out *Ayephu* (large bamboo mats) and dried the paddy in the sun. And when it was dry enough, she began to pound it. Then the rice was cooked to make rice-brew so as to serve the guests. She continued the tasks day and night without even proper sleep. *Ghonili* was a virtuous, hard-working, dignified woman and so she wanted every expected work to be completed before the day *Chevili* would be brought home.

As decided earlier, on the ninth day *Inakha* left for *Süko* village to discuss about the traditional bride-price. Meanwhile, during those nine days, *Ghonili* also collected ornaments and things she held dear into an *Azühukughubo* (broken water carrier made of bamboo) and sealed it with a cotton ball. She used to lock the house with the *Azühukughubo* and left for the field. The day *Chevili* was to be brought home, *Ghonili* swept the whole house clean and kept the front door, back door and side door open and waited for the marriage party to arrive. As she waited, *Inakha* shouted, "O *Ghonili* I have brought her, take whatever you like and move out of the house". But *Ghonili* protested, "*Inakha*, why would I take anything when there is a child *Visheli* between us?" She told him that she only wished to take the *Azühukughubo* to lock her lonely hut. Saying this she took her *Azühukughubo* and tried to move out from the front door but *Inakha*, who truly loved her, could not bear to see her go and so he blocked the front door. Then, *Ghonili* tried to move out from the side door but *Inakha* blocked this door too. At last, *Ghonili* managed to move out from the back door.

Then after, *Ghonili* led a widowed life. However, one day, a great warrior called *Sümixi* from *Phili* village came to seek *Ghonili's* hand in marriage. However that day, *Sümixi* did not come attired in a warrior garb; so *Ghonili* refused him saying that since he did not match *Inakha's* grandeur she could not accept the proposal. *Sümixi* then went back to his village and adorned himself in a warrior's dress and returned again to *Ghonili*. This time *Ghonili* agreed to the proposal because she thought he looked like *Inakha*. Soon, they married each other and led a prosperous life while *Inakha* and *Chevili* lived in misery.

During that time, *Ghonili* and *Sümixi* cultivated a field in the hills of *Ahochoto* (name of a hill) and *Chevili* and *Inakha* cultivated in the hills of *Aholibato* (name of a hill). Their fields faced each other. On some days, each one of them worked in the fields alone and they could communicate with one another. Usually, at noon, when *Ghonili* and *Sümixi* had their mid-day meal; *Chevili* and *Inakha* too would pretend to have theirs even though they had nothing to eat as they were poor. So, one day when *Inakha* and *Chevili* had finished their supposed meals and went into the fields to work, *Ghonili* went to *Inakha* and *Chevili's* hut to check whether they actually have had their meals. She found their food bundle empty and dry and their drinking mugs filled with water and not rice-brew. This saddened *Ghonili* because she still loved *Inakha*. So one day, *Ghonili* prepared extra food, extra meat and extra rice-brew and took it to the field and left it at *Inakha* and *Chevili's* field hut without their knowledge. She then went back to her field and started to work. When *Inakha* and *Chevili* returned to their hut after work, they found rice-brew in their gourd-jar and food and meat in their plantain bundle. *Chevili* could not understand how the food came there but *Inakha* on the other hand instinctively knew because both *Inakha* and *Ghonili* still shared the bond. He told *Chevili* that it was the work of *Ghonili*. Satisfied that it was *Ghonili* who kept the food for them, they both relished it.

That evening when they returned home from the field, *Inakha* instructed *Chevili* to go to the field the next day and compete with *Ghonili* in the *Sümi Naga* game called *Püxakuxu* (a game of jumping with both feet's hitting backsides). Next morning, *Inakha* went to the fields before *Chevili* and *Ghonili* and hid himself at a distance to watch the game. When *Chevili* reached the field, she told *Ghonili* what *Inakha* had told her. But *Ghonili* refused the competition saying that she would be too embarrassed to compete in front of *Inakha*. However, *Chevili* persisted that *Inakha* would not be coming to the field that day and therefore *Ghonili* too agreed to it.

Before the game began, both of them loosened their hair buns, took out their body-cloths and started to jump. As *Inakha* watched them in hiding, *Chevili* jumped with great speed but *Ghonili* elegantly jumped slowly and steadily but rhythmically. *Chevili* wore out soon and *Ghonili* won the game. Watching them, *Inakha* murmured to himself in regret, "In what way did I leave my darling *Ghonili*?" and began to weep bitterly and left the field.

That year, during harvest time both *Inakha* and *Sümixi* happen to harvest their paddy on the same day. Each one of them brought a large group of villagers to help in the reaping. *Sümixi* harvested abundantly and so did not cover the threshing floor and took the paddy home. But *Inakha*, who was supposedly expected to harvest nine *Ayephu* (large bamboo mats); could not manage to harvest enough paddy. The *Ayephu* remained empty and he could not afford to lose his face and so *Inakha's* group covered the threshing floor with tree branches. When evening came, *Sümixi* and his group went home in line carrying paddy on their heads in cone bamboo baskets. While, *Inakha* and his group went home one by one in secret carrying empty baskets. That is why there is a song that goes, "*Athi apukito luküsu ghami aphichighino apokhapu*". ("The villagers that harvested in *Apukito* bind the stomach with twisted cloth")

Not long after that, there was a conflict between *Phili* village and *Shenaküsa* village. One day, *Inakha* decided to lead his village warriors and go for a raid to *Phili* village. They went towards *Thevikhayi* route and came out at *Aphiboto*. *Ghonili* came to learn about it as she was intelligent and so she started to sing loudly while pounding the rice. She also kept a broken gourd-jar on top of the *Aboshu* (pounding stand) so that the movement of the gourd while pounding may add more noise to her song. *Inakha* heard and recognised immediately the sound of his beloved *Ghonili*. He stood still and began to fondly listen to his beloved *Ghonili's* song. Lost in her song, he went back home without raiding the village.

So, another time, when *Inakha* asked his villagers to come along with him to go for raid; no one came forward because they did not believe him for what he did the last time. But he persuaded them that he would not do it again. They believed him and together they went again to raid *Phili*. As they were on the way, *Phili* villagers came to know about their plan and went to waylaid *Inakha*. *Ghonili* too learnt about her villagers, *Philimi*, plan. So, she took out an *Athighalu* (a club used for threshing soil while working in the field) and hopped into the middle of the group working in the field and told them, "Let us raise the pitch of our song!" and started to shout/spell out the lyrics of the song: "So if you want to leave, leave towards our long time cotton-field hills". This time too, *Inakha* heard the sound of *Ghonili's* pitching of the song and understood what she wanted to convey and so he went back from their cotton -field hills. In this way *Ghonili* directed the way for *Inakha* and saved his life.

Later on, peace prevailed between the two villages and there were no more raids. During such peace time, *Inakha* took an *Amghüchi* (a small used-axe) and went to *Sümixi's* house to barter it with paddy. But *Ghonili* said, "Let this rice be our child's (*Visheli*) food" And gave enough paddy and also returned the *Amghüchi* which *Inakha* brought.

Again, one day, *Inakha* came to *Sümixi's* house pretending to trade with him. The following morning *Inakha* woke up early and went to the village and came back late. Meanwhile, when *Inakha* returned *Sümixi* was found to have left early for field. But actually, *Sümixi* did not go to the field but hid himself near their house to see what *Inakha* and *Ghonili* would act in his absence. As he peeped and listened to the old lovers, he heard *Inakha* saying, "Ah! *Ghonili*, drink a little from your bamboo mug and give it to me, take a mouthful of rice and feed me the remaining". But *Ghonili* replied, "If you are striped, others are striped too. If you have male organ, others have it too ". And added with a song, "Ah! If you are hungry, have your share. If you are thirsty, drink it to the full". She said those words and sang the lines because she sensed *Sümixi* spying on them.

She further told *Inakha*, "Since my darling *Sümixi* had already left for field, I must go on my way" and left the house to *Inakha*. *Inakha* could neither drink nor eat what was left for him. He only reprimanded himself, "In what way did I found fault with *Ghonili* that I had to leave her" and went back home a sad man.

As time went by, *Inakha* and *Chevili* did not prosper in life as compared to when he was with *Ghonili*. But *Sümixi* and *Ghonili* led a prosperous life. Later on, *Ghonili* died in child birth. (It is believed that she died in that manner because when she moved out of *Inakha's* house she took the back door. In Sümi culture, it is taboo to move out from the back door for women because the body of women who die in child birth is taken out from the back door).

### **17. Origin of *Lapu Xamunu***

*Tsüipu* married the re-formed *Aghüghalho* and lived together with her. They lived happily but *Aghüghalho* lived a life longing to go out of the house. It was so because her adoptive mother instructed *Tsüipu* that if he really wanted to marry *Aghüghalho* he must promise that he will never let her out of the house. *Tsüipu* kept his promise and never allowed her to go out. However, one day *Aghüghalho* could not overcome her curiosity and went out in the sun. As soon as she came out in the sun, *Aghüghalho* liquefied like wax due to the heat of the sun. From the liquid form came out a beautiful flower. This flower is called *Lapu Xamunu* (lily flower).

### **18. Why Leopard Cat live in *Lavela***

The tiger asked the leopard cat to keep watch on *Iki* but it let *Iki* escape. So, the tiger punched the leopard fox in anger and it fell into *lavela* (woods) never to be seen again. This was how leopard cat began to live in the woods near people's dwellings.

### **19. The Wicked Step-mother**

The wicked step-mother used to ill-treat her step-son by feeding him only with *Aghatsa yithi* (sour wild fruit) saying that it was *Akhi's* (local bird) breast-meat. But the father was unaware of her action. One day, while the father was working in the field, he heard his son singing, "*Akhi-o akhi, no lejo no vi yeo. No müsü no qhimboi*" ("Oh *Akhi*, you have a beautiful voice but your breast-meat taste sour!"). The father became suspicious and asked his son the meaning of his song and the boy narrated the story. In this way, the father came to know the mischievous action of his second wife.

**APPENDIX-II**  
**SÜMI FOLKSONGS (ORIGINAL TEXT AND FREE TRANSLATION)**  
**(Free Translation by the Scholar)**

Song No. 1, 4, 6, 8, 12, 13, 17, and 19 were personally collected from H.S. Rotokha (Sümi folksinger), Song No. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, & 26 are taken from the booklet, *Apuh-Assü Leshe* published by Sümi Literature Board. However, it must be mentioned here that the spellings have been modified according to current usage. The use of double letters for high- tone words and the addition of the letter 'h' at the end for low-tone words is found unnecessary and hence omitted. Song No.9, 27, & 31 were collected from Khezhele Achumi (Lukikhe-Shevishe Village). Song No. 28, 29, & 30 were collected from Khetoshe Yephtho (Shena Village). It must also be point out that free translation of Song No. 11, 12, & 25 was a challenge due to the use of old expressions. Hence, only a simplistic summary for each song has been provided.

**1. I lo Keu no Isho lo Hu Ani**

*O Ishe! I lokeu no isho lo hu ani*  
*O Ishe! Puchopuju no I kuo pilepe*  
*O Ishe! I lokeu o ju anishi saye*  
*O Ishe! I khuna hi ta pe iqho*  
*O Ishe! I lokeu o tsü mla*  
*O Ishe! I jikhu hi ta pe iqho*  
*O Ishe! I lokeu o je mla*  
*O Ishe! Timi lojimi aki to ayea*  
*O Ishe! Ni lojimi oyeo ashe lo aphi*  
*O Ishe! Amuchou no ave gho mütha*  
*O Ishe! Amuchou ju no ni losü ye*  
*O Ishe! I lokeu haluni kichelo*  
*O Ishe! Asa thaghi o ikhe aghimala*  
*O Ishe! Tsüzüküghü ke aye papejunike*  
*O Ishe! Khauküghü ke aye, tilau no wolo*

**Free-Translation- My Love is Working Above My Field**

My love is working above my field  
All day long, I raised my neck  
My love, 'tis yearning to gaze at you  
This, my plate be taken up to you  
But I cannot offer you, my love  
This, my brew-mug be taken up to you  
But I cannot let you drink, my love

Ah! Other groups are nearing home  
My group, still working in the field  
The man do not know when to stop  
O unhappy at the man!

Just when nearing my love  
Stumbled upon a stone  
How I wish, with loosened locks she would wait for me!  
If you were a *tsüzüküghü*, I would follow  
But if it is *khauküghü*, then go your way

*\*tsüzüküghü (Phrynium marantaceae) \*Khauküghü (bamboo leaves)*

**2. Ashokighile**

*Lojiliu ikujono ala kütauye*  
*Kiminemouno, mishi kikhe lono*  
*Kiminelu oju iloluye*  
*O chi kinino o phe küpü aye*



*O za ghi iza sütsa kighini lo  
O za no no mishi toku khu  
I za no züpzütsü aye  
Aziünheu ni Thochi no laga  
Kuwo thotsü aki lakhi  
Mishi toku hakiphe no haye*

*O! Mishi küthü saqi azü  
Kichelimi saqho chenyewo  
Aghuno ngu ino isalo juwo  
Inatha limiye  
Ishe! Ni Khuzalimi ghau ye*

### **Calling-off Marriage**

Beloved, we could not meet any other way  
But while shepherding the cattle  
Did we meet, and I fell in love with you  
Your beauty in gorgeous neck piece, makes it harder to leave you  
Your mother should listen to what my mother would say  
But your mother asked for nine Mithuns  
And it bored my mother  
We who migrated southward from *Thochi's* descent  
Even then, there's not a single household with nine Mithuns

O! Took three Mithuns down the river  
And brought another girl  
Watching from the resting spot  
Daughter-in-law of another village  
Ah! *Khuzalimi's* bird

*\*Thochi* (name of ancestry/lineage) *\*Khuzalimi* (Non-Sümi)

### **3. Inakha-Ghonili**

*Inakha no ye Achupumi ye  
Ghonili no ye Asülimi ye  
Inakha no kito Apukito  
Ghonili no kito Illikito  
Inakha no ye ashi papu ye  
Ghonili no ye ana paza ye  
Khumtsa no ghami ishe athi  
Athi no Apukito lo luküsü  
Luküsümi ghami ishe akhü  
Akhü no ni o ni sa no ghamiye  
Aphichighi no apo hopuye  
Saye saye no Ashe no saye  
Saye saye no Akhü no saye  
No no woni aye ishe asü  
Asüphalito lau no wolo*

### **Song of Inakha and Ghonili**

*Inakha* was from *Achumi* clan  
*Ghonili* was from *Asümi* clan  
*Inakha's* house was *Apuki*  
*Ghonili's* house was *Illiki*  
*Inakha* was the lord of meat  
*Ghonili* was the mother of rice  
Ah! *Khumtsa's* villagers' paddy!

Reaped from *Apukito* field  
But the reapers are starving  
They bind their waist with twisted cloth  
'Tis pity! Pity for *Ashe*  
'Tis pity! Pity for *Akhü*  
Must you leave, then go  
Take the old cotton-field route

*\*Apukito* (name of a hill) *\*Ashe* (*Visheli*) *\*Akhü* (*Hokhuli*) *\*Apuki* (Boys' Dormitory) *\*Illiki* (Girls' Dormitory)

#### **4. *Khaghi ni Lojipumi-Lojilimi***

*Ishe! Khaghi ni lojipumiye*  
*Ishe! Khaghi ni lojilimiye*  
*Tusho 'thuni ni Loji kümüsü*  
*Ghile huni ye Ikho ghotsülo*  
*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*  
*Ghoshe tsülo o ghoshelive tsülo*  
*Ghile huni Ishola ghotsülo*  
*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*  
*Ghoshe tsülo o ghoshelive tsülo*  
*Isachi kixi alo ghotsülo*  
*Aye kishi vekütha ghotsülo*  
*Ikini süpha alo shi kashe*  
*Kashe tsülo kashelive tsülo*  
*Cheilewo ni ghuno kümüsü*  
*Cheilewo ni zütchu kümüsü*  
*Pavi pavi no, ni loji pavi*

#### **Remembering Our Work-Group**

Ah! Long ago our men work-group!  
Ah! Long ago our women work-group!  
Remember our group when the season begins  
Make me a cone basket to harvest  
Weave me with patterns  
Weave it, O weave it with striking patterns  
Weave me an *Ashola* for harvest  
Weave me with patterns  
Weave it, O weave it with striking patterns  
Weave me a nice strap for my dao  
Weave me with patterns  
Spin the cotton fine to adorn my ears  
Spin it, O spin it fine for me

Recalling back, miss our resting spot  
Recalling back, miss our bathing spot  
'Tis better! 'Tis better! Our group is better

*\*Ashola* (loin patch of cloth)

#### **5. *Kuzuvu Kupuha Le***

*Ampino noqhemis kumo aye*  
*Noju azüküvümino*  
*Ishe khipato lau huaye*  
*Nono chehu ato amta kuhu lono*  
*Itsa ighasü atolo 'pekiche humo*  
*Alu kütsu lono noju aye*

*Thohu avelau ikujo kũmtsa  
Woniye chewoghi ye  
Lojino misami loji ashelo aye*

*Ipu ikujo ile gho lhokiālo  
Shoinapu kilo wonike aghūzano vimoyewo  
Ivilino ni kipilo gholu kupu  
Shelo wolu wolono khokulhomiye  
Alhi kutaue idiwunikenō  
Pichepighi avi lhi  
Papuye idiulusa*

### **Song of Wasted Love**

An unequal to you physically  
But the one who loves you  
Which hill did you go?  
When you reach half-way  
The one who sings and shouts  
Looks down from the top of the field  
Yearning to return home this evening  
You and I together  
But your *Aloji* being small  
Is still working in the field

I intend to go to your house with my father  
To seek your hand in marriage  
But it's difficult for a poor man to propose  
Will you listen to what I say?  
Will you accept my proposal?  
The miserable one to bid thee farewell  
Other trade can be returned  
But *Mithun* trade cannot be

### **6. Lhokishe-Kiyeli**

*I pu Lhokishe no, kiu lato lo litcheh shiwu ye?  
Awunato lo litche shiwu ye  
Litche shi ye kiu ghau o melu ye?  
Litche shi ye o Kiyeli melu ye  
Iza Kiyeli, Iza o Kiyeli  
I phitsüzü kivi thono  
I qheküza ye süiku bemoye*

### **Lhokishe and Kiyeli**

Uncle *Lhokishe*, which way did you go for trapping?  
Went to *Awunato* for trapping  
Which bird did you trap?  
Could get *Kiyeli* while trapping  
An able body is what I have  
But pride do I have less

### **7. Akikini Le**

*Tsa'sa kũta kumoyewo  
Lojilimi ni vekumomino saye  
I poshu-u aloküsi-u vilo  
Ni timi tulhu ghulouno  
Putojuye ophi yepu chighiboqa*

*Inoloye khile sütsa lukuthumo  
Ileghimoye*

*I lomi hilau kütsümini mini  
Kümzüpuno pashelo ghapu  
Izülo alosakiniuye  
Asho-ina-gha külauni che aye*

*Woniche aye aloji küzümi yewo  
Ale kiphe pamlo shiküpusavilo  
O chehu nolomi vilo alo*

### **Farewell Song**

It's not about any other thing  
But about the girl who did not return my love  
Tell the one who is sad  
That in the morning at *Tulhu*  
I could know that you were at *Chighiboqa*  
But you did not listen carefully  
And the time is not coming back

Let my beloved wear *Tsüghümini*  
Adorn her with ornaments  
The one who is sad  
Time is approaching for her  
To marry and go to another village

Time for her leaving is near  
Dear *Aloji*, sing a song to cheer her  
And let her be at her beloved's side

\**Tulhu* (morning meal in the field) \* *Tsüghümini* (Sümi traditional body-cloth)

\**Chighiboqa*- name of a field area

### **8. *Amu Kikini Losü Le***

*O küsakusho alokümkami hu ni  
Küsakusho mulo kinimiye  
Niye no khopuwumo niye  
Ala chighi pesüno xalu ne ighi  
Tüghamino kipishi ye shimüla ni wono*

*Nighi nizukighimino ayewo  
Aki lakhilo kipeshi  
Asa kiphe vabo kino  
Aghacho mhi shopu kümtsalu  
Ighünolo aqheshiye  
Timino tomoye*

*Ale shiye timino shikipiyeni  
Alokütsümi ye zuhu amou ghi atsa kuto chenaighi  
No kithipumi shiuye*

*O noghi woye kucho  
Chelo ilewo kithimi  
Ghuno kivilono  
Ale phewo alosüqhiyi wono*

### **Song for a Brother's Death**

O! I'm the one who is miserable and distressed  
The one who is weeping for you  
I did not want you to leave  
I tried in ten ways to save you  
But it was all a failure  
At *Tüghami*'s bidding

We were brothers, you were my elder brother  
We grew up in the same house  
We had two head-gears of bear's fur  
Adorned with fine Hornbill feathers  
And when we jump with spears and shields  
People could not defeat us

Let others sing a song  
The wise can speak through dreams  
But you belong to the dead now  
And there's no way

O! Go your way  
To the place of the dead  
Singing sadly till you reach

\* *Tüghami* (evil spirit)

### **9. *Loji Kithelo***

*She timino khashi asüye iku niki ghüngü ye amu niye*  
*She ipu no ipulo loji kithelo hulo ipi ani ngu no*  
*She niye loji kiye lo huni thono*  
*She ipu piye, iza piye iza pulo niloji ju qa-a pelo*  
*She ipu no ni loji küsa ishino khalu aye*

### **In New *Aloji***

People are clearing jungle in nearby areas  
My father is asking me to join new *Aloji*  
But I want to remain in my old *Aloji*  
Let my mother weep for my old *Aloji*  
My father has stopped my *Aloji*

### **10. *Ratshamu Ghü Tüngü***

*Ishe Shotomi payina no iqi*  
*Kivikhu no ghami ghutu shole aye*  
*Shole mla aye, cheileqho kichelo*  
*Rathsamu nono tüngü saye wo*  
*Cheileqho shole aye, sholeluve ala*

*Ishe aboxi thotsü aghü lakhi lo*  
*Chighi xo moye, apu aza khiu nono*  
*Punu izü no tsuilai?*  
*Hengu kuxo shi ishi xo puwo chenilai*  
*Küpü sheni lai!*

*O apu aza no peqheni ghasa ju*  
*Mulo küa kimiye shenilai!*  
*Atsala no anheu no atsütsü ilokighi*  
*Tiye aghüthemí no akütsü pe*  
*Ilokighi ngushi ghini mülai*

### ***Ratshamu's War Spirit***

All the villagers of *Shoto* went down  
And tried to break *Kivikhu* village's fence  
Returned after failing to break it  
But *Ratshamu*, possessed by a spirit,  
Went down again and succeeded

Ah! Even gourds do not bear ten gourds in one vine  
Whose parents gave birth and gave away like that?  
Like harvested pumpkins, do we carry these heads  
O What a waste of life!

The parents of the dead look out to the hills  
Pity their mourning and wailing  
Thunder and lightning came in the evening  
To show warriors are coming back with heads

### **11. *Shena nu Ghüshe***

*Ishe! Ni Asüpumi ye, pa ju inheshulu ye*  
*Ishe! Ye hu Shena no nu Ghüshe*  
*O! Aphi aküzü phi no khisapu lapu potilaqa*  
*Aqa iloni kiche avimihi*  
*O! Hoishe timi athekishimi no*  
*Ghoküzu tsa aye pi ayeghi kucho*  
*Atsa kucho ghashi ti inisüilo*  
*Azüghi lo küsa-kusho Khakhuli ghau ye*

*O! Hoishe pa no aghi tsükinhe dolo no*  
*Pekighi ye ikholhove ala*  
*O! Hoishe pa no ampiu aphitsüzu mihi aye*  
*Onanu kivino noghü-u*  
*Ghakiqi shitsü puwu ala*

*Ilewo Inakha no ghami vilo*  
*Amivimi vilo küghaküsühi*  
*Lakhi süchilesü wo pa xeu*  
*Lokughuno tsüilo, O alomüka*

*O Hoishe pa no asü akelo no*  
*Atsala kini küthü*  
*Phi woche aye pa küzü-u ala*

### **Song of *Shena's Son Ghüshe***

Summary: *Ghüshe*, a skilled warrior who could proudly wear the warrior's garb, was killed through the treachery and jealousy of another warrior called *Khumtsa*. He believed the traitor's sweet-talk and went to the riverside for raid and was eventually killed. First stanza talks about the jealousy of *Ghüshe's* killer and how *Ghüshe* covered in black body-cloth lay dead as great as a Mithun. Stanza two revolves around the manner in which *Ghüshe* was betrayed that ultimately led to his death. Third stanza explains his striking physique and greatness as a warrior. He was a great man, born out of sun and moon, and so lived a short life. The fourth and fifth stanza is a prayer of comfort for his wife.

### **12. *Aghau Chengu***

*Ishe aghau no, ishe achengu no*  
*Ishe asüke lo, ishe pa ki kuto*  
*Ishe apusü lo, ishe ati kho ye*

*Ishe ayeghi lo, ishe 'tikha pesüwo*  
*Ishe pa ti tsüye, ishe pa ti tsüye*  
*Ishe ayeghi lo, ishe 'ninga pesüwo*  
*Ishe pa ti kho ye, ishe pa ti kho ye*  
*Ishe pa ti saphe, ishe sasü wuye*  
*Ishe ave shelo, ishe ave shelo*  
*Ishe achengu no, ishe igha ani*

### **The Great Barbet Bird**

Summary: The speaker of the poem recalls the memory of Great Barbet nurturing her young one when he heard the sound of the Great Barbet (*Chengu*). *Chengu* builds its nest to hatch her eggs. When the eggs are hatched, the mother bird brings worm and insects from the ground to feed its young ones. And when the young ones are big enough, she takes them on a flight.

#### **13. Aghau No Asubo lo Yeiku**

*Ho o aghacho no nhekobo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o achita no juibo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o achengu no ghasübo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o ayichi no zünhebo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o amülü no khawbo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o akhalu no akitsüqo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*  
*Ho o tsüqhüti no aghibo lo yeiku, lo iku yewo cheni*

### **Birds Fly to Trees**

Hornbill flies to banyan tree  
Silver-Eared Mesia flies to *Juibo*  
Great Barbet flies to forest tree  
Grey Sibia flies to Hairy white-wand  
Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo flies to bamboo  
Barn Swallow flies to roof-top  
White-Rumped Munia flies to rice plant

#### **14. Ashihami Le**

*Iki no showo tsükinhe lazü, she ikuwo*  
*Tsükinhe inakukhhu ki ye opu no lhokha shi*  
*Aküsa hi isala shi tsüye*  
*Ino putho zühu gholumo ikujo vehu kishito*  
*Lau no tcheju puwu aye inhezü iqighi anishi aye*

*O Itsü no hakiye ino kihi ato ino kugho lono*  
*Ashithami no ilo pa thalu lhoye hakiye wo*  
*Wonizü yewo paza no kupujuno ala julho ala*  
*O! Hoishe! Itsü wokulho no amükü lo ani*  
*Itsüli sailewo ghilo, sailewo ni ghasa lo*  
*Ghulo lakhi kivehu juana*

*O! Timi küsakusho thotsü vesülu aye*  
*Itsüli hi hakuwuna kighi qhalo aye*  
*Pe mlo lho ala*  
*Ishe! Iku kithila lo, "Ipu he! Iza he!" kumlomi*  
*Ni tsüli kimiye*

### **Hunter's Song**

As I return home following the sun's path  
The sun sets on the whole village, shortened your father's life

By bringing this misery to me  
I could not sleep at night thinking about the hills where we hunted  
When I look back and imagine our hunts, tears always fall

O! When my dog hunted far, I would call out from a distant hill  
But hunters could not reach where he was  
And his mother waited for him the whole day  
O! My dog must be tired and resting on the river bank  
Bring back my dog, bring it back to our woods  
Watching and waiting the whole day

O! Even man's death cannot be forgotten  
How do I forget my dog?  
Tired from mourning over my dog  
Ah! On the way to the dead  
"My father!! My mother!" must my dog be weeping  
Pity my dog

### **15. Ghoyi Shosho Ghügha**

*"Ishe! Shosho! Ishe! Shosho"*  
*Igha iqho ato be aye*  
*Ghile huni che aye*  
*Acho yekuhumi no sacheni ghola?*  
*Aghache lo kuhumi no sacheniyila*  
*Acho lo kuwomi ye sheho ailewo*  
*Akhakhu lewo akhakhu xochu*

*Ophi tchejulino aghami kithi*  
*Aphi aküzü phi no oshomhi qhipu*  
*Aghacho no azüghiba qhokiche shiju*  
*Kivili no kiye*  
*Ishe! Ghoyio! Iqho ato be ayeni*  
*O! Ghile huni, huniche aye*  
*Ishe! Ghoyio! Tupumi ilimi no xisho*  
*Shini keno cheqho ghi wola*  
*Ishe! Ghoyio, omlauno aghü yesülo*  
*Ayiko ye shi, Ishe! Ghoyio! 'limi ghau ye*

### **Cicada's Song**

Shouting "*Shosho! Shosho!*"  
If it sings up the hill  
Harvest time is approaching  
Is it brought by those who cultivate near?  
Or by those who went far?  
Those who went near  
Pluck the *Akhakhu* and ate the *Akhakhu*

O! Villagers know how you look like  
A black body-cloth for your tail  
Hornbill tried to reverse the river flow  
The river where *Kivili* use to drink

Ah! *Ghoyio*, if it sings up the hill  
Harvest time is approaching  
Ah! *Ghoyio!* Young people are eager  
And ready for harvest  
*Ghoyio*, make patterns in your breast  
Like an orchid, *Ghoyio*, a girl's bird



\*Shosho (sound of cicada) \*Akhakhu (bitter tomato/*Solanum aethiopicum*) \*Ghoyi (cicada)

#### 16. *Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe*

*Ampiu ju no azüküzü kumo yewo*  
*Aki kicheqho lo che aye*  
*Ipu akishiu ijukumo no gho*  
*Khalami asümi atsapi*  
*Pinizü amüzümla,*  
*Ishe! Howo niki avi*  
*Ipüzü ashe inulo ani*  
*Ayizü lo amoyewo,*  
*Axüsa lo ilhucheno wono*

*Ayeghü lakhü lo alu chilu pe ayewo*  
*Alu chilu pemoyewo*  
*Aluba lupe ani hoishe*  
*O ilomüka kulhoshi ghi*  
*Süye lakhi iza no qe*  
*Kighili ye kulawuni che aye*  
*Tsüngu mujupumi ishi ye khileno*  
*Yehu kishi kumo sholuye*

#### Song of Step-Father and Step- Daughter

It's not about his physical appearance that bores me  
But when I am at home  
It is upto my step-father; the one who despises me  
When others come for proposal  
I cannot be starved  
It's too sudden  
It is not in the river  
But on the banks that I live

He made me cultivate in barren land  
Forbade me from cultivating otherwise  
I am toiling at the *Aluba*  
O I am tired of working  
A year of toiling for my mother  
A maiden waiting for marriage  
But how am I married to a *Tsüngu-Mujuppumi*

Summary: The step-daughter sings that it is not about the physical appearance of her step-father but his ways that she is protesting. It is her step-father who decides everything for her. She is not properly fed and spent days hungry. She compares her life at home to a life living on the banks of the river (which means that she is poor) and not in the river (rich). Which suggests that she does not feel at home in his house or as long as he was in the house. She also complains that she was made to cultivate field at the foot of the hill which was unfertile. She is tired working endlessly for them in the hope that she would be married off properly. But finally married to a non-*Sümi* (*Tsüngü Mujupumi*- Angami/Rengma man). \* *Aluba* (end of the field/unfertile area)

#### 17. *Asholoku Küsa le*

*Ino ishina akilo asho*  
*Asholoku küsa ji no aki*  
*Ki lo womo no agha lo züye*  
*Ino qa ye she ni nga ghi qa ye*  
*Ino qani 'kheni no musa ye*  
*Ikimiye, she ni nga kimiye*  
*Isalulo, she ni nga salulo*

*Ayithu ki ni luba lo ani  
Mükakuki ni luphe lo ani  
Ishe! Tile no ni nga saluye  
Tsüzü küghü kuchou no asa  
Asaqhilli lo amüzü iko  
Khimutsasa homutsasai iko  
Iko kua no ni nga no toi  
Küsakusho kixi hi shohuye*

### **Song of Marital Discord**

I had a family discord this morning  
In the evening because of family discord  
Did not return home but slept in the field  
I cried, Ah! Our child cried too  
I am crying, scared of the darkness  
Be kind to me, be kind to our child  
Take me, Ah! Take our child  
There's a python hole down our field  
There's a devil cave by the side of our field  
There, it took the spirit of our child

O The real *tsüzüküghü*  
Open up its leaves among the thorny bush  
Evenly and perfectly it grew  
And up it grew like our child  
The worst misery, I met thus

### **18. Ayichiküvü Lono Pithive Keu Le**

*O! Hoishe! No axüsapu, axüsalu ye  
Ishe! No ghi kucho ye amlo ihshi cheni ghomo ye  
Alhouno ghi küsakushomi kumo ye azüzü ala  
O Ishe! Olomi nuno saqusani shi xücheyewo  
Azü ghaw wohaye 'hasalive ala*

*O! Hoishe! Iza nono kiqa vilo ilewo no sakuphu  
Kumoyewo kighishilo no lomi kithi no hu  
Sacheni mala amlo nike yehu pe sholu ye  
Pikiche huno achelimi sakuhuno O züvü ghomo ye*

*O! Hoishe! Thohu opu no wochea mala  
Alojimi injulo ilohé jeshe kishi mulo  
Kiye lhoýe atsü-u ye ni nu gho ju puhayewo  
Iza ye lokighi kumo aghalimi wuno  
'khu tsüthoni che aye*

*O! Hoishe! Nonu kümkhükulu shiyewo  
Aghapeliu shenu muttu ghaliveyewo  
No thisü-lhache ilhoju aye*

### **Song of Killing During Community Fishing**

O you miserable men and women  
You didn't wish to be sad and melancholic  
Even gods are uninterested with unnatural deaths  
Ah! Your darling son lived a wild life  
Taken away by the water spirit

O mother is crying at home, asking for help

To rescue her loving son  
Expecting others would bring him alive  
The sisters were sent too but it made her unhappy

You wait for your son's arrival in the evening  
Ask his *Aloji*, they are wailing too  
Spend sleepless night and woke up to find no fish-bundle from him  
Mother and village women-folk keep wailing through the night  
But the dawn will soon break

O to avenge your son's death  
Village brothers went, but he is dead  
And has become ants and termites

### **19. Hekhüpu no Phuthekuwo**

*I pu Hekhüpu, I pu Hekhüpu  
Kiu shiwuni ye ghili shi ania?  
Phuthe woni ye ghili shi ani  
Khile woni ye ghili shi ania?  
Azü mükü lo woni shi saye  
I mu Juikhü, I mu Juikhü  
Tsa küghani ye ipe ni atu  
Atu khache lo ilhe 'kughilo  
Asü khache lo ilhe 'kughilo  
Atu khache xaveni ye küpü  
Asü khache xaveni ye küpü*

*Awudu no awulaqo pu cheni  
Atsüngu ye awulaqo pu chemo*

### **How Hekhüpu Migrated**

Uncle Hekhüpu! Uncle Hekhüpu!  
For what purpose are you preparing?  
To migrate, I am preparing  
Where are you migrating to?  
To the banks of the river, I long to go

Brother Juikhü! Brother Juikhü!  
Mount our stone to take up a case  
Jump up to the raised-stone  
Jump up to the wooden platform  
Ah! To undo the raised-stone so dear  
Ah! To pull apart the wooden platform so dear

Only the rooster has tail-feathers  
But quails do not have tail-feathers

### **20. Hevishe Amighiu**

*O hoishe ipu asughiu no hayewo  
Ana chule icheli pe  
Asughiu shitsu yewo  
Ithiu ghi noye asheshu qho ato  
Ghukhe kivi lono Hokhuli no lau  
Juküsü vilo ye Hevishe papu  
Ikujo apu asü kümtsa ghi  
Thukighimi kumo gho shiwoni*

*Alu kichi paju kinheshu chewo  
Tiye nilu kumoye ipu nono luye  
Punu kishimino ilu ghüza kivi  
Lukha aye luküpuwo  
Shoinapu tsüna yemoye*

*O hoishe timi shoinamino  
Tushono noyi aghutu inolo  
Noye aghüpu chukha mphi lono  
Ala shini ipi  
Timi küzü inakhiumi ye*

### **Hevishe, the Orphan**

O I don't have a real father  
My younger sister is treated  
As an elder now  
Behind my back you shout till the hill  
From a nice spot, tell *Hokhüli*  
*Hevishe's* father and *Hevishe's* step-father  
Did not come  
From the same lineage

Jealous of my fertile land  
That is not my field, you took it, my uncle  
You have taken away all my fertile fields, my uncles  
All of them have been taken away  
And what is left has been given to others

O other villagers  
Start the season and raid  
Before you finish up the produce  
You want to make peace  
With others

### **21. Inakha ngo Ghonili Küyixa**

*Ishe! Khaghi ye ni vilo  
A-a kivi lo aleye  
Agho sülo ni tcheyewo  
Ito timi kivi sholuyewo  
Asholiu ipeleye moye  
No ghi süliu salo I-a lo  
Pualo, I losulho ye*

*Ishe! Ni ghi ashelhu kumoye  
Ishe! Ni ghi avi abi kikhi  
Hi sülo ashou tsa khe ala  
Amipiu junu ilomucho aye  
Kuo kükha junu ilomi shi  
Asa losü tixe apushumo  
Ni woni che ala*

*Ishe! Ile anga qa küauye  
Amlo küsami nuli  
Qa ani gho kucho  
Apu aza anu küghüvümi nu  
Qa ani ila agho shilulo  
Ilomucho chi joo tsüni  
Süwo amulo küsami nu pinilo*

*Ishe! Iku kithialo  
Xüsa kupu kuno  
Timi kubu kumo hu niuno  
Asalo sü tixe apushumo  
Ni woniche ala*

### **Parting of Inakha and Ghonili**

Earlier you used to tell me  
That you will let me live in a good place  
You brought gifts to me  
But now when you meet another  
O asking me to leave  
I am leaving  
You bring that *Süliu* in my place,  
And it grieves me

Ah! I am not an *Ashelhu*  
But a striped mithun  
Waited for outside news  
Angry at the man  
You loved only my neck-piece  
Cast a lot, you will not live long  
I will be leaving soon

Ah! The child who is crying  
Child of the grieving parent  
The child is crying, tend the crying child  
Child of the loving parents  
She is crying, tend the crying child  
It saddens me, I will take out my beads  
Take it to the child of the grieving parent

Ah! To dead man's hill  
The flowers bloom  
We did what people fear to touch  
Cast a lot, will not live long  
I will be leaving soon

### **22. Khumtsa Amighiu Leshe**

*O ishe khaghiye I je khumtsa ku  
Ite ikuche ye I je mithiu ku  
O ipu nono izano musulive ala  
Akichimi ghi izano musulive ala  
O hoishe ipu nono timi kithe salo  
Izano zülo zü aye ghi niye  
Ashou ipeni che aye*

*Aqhi anga lono iki kuwo kumo hino  
Aqhi mta kije kiji ala  
Ino ipe apuki ghüza ki qha kivilo  
Timino hijejehi shi  
Sheghi aye ni amighiuye*

*O ipu kithiye ivuwu ala  
O itsa suloye, itsa suwo iza totsülo  
Itsa hi aghile wochea malaye  
Itsa kipi ini kuto ana*

### **Song of *Khumtsa*, the Orphan**

O earlier I was called *Khumtsa*  
But now I am called *Mithiu*  
O my father courted my step-mother  
Family elders too courted my step-mother  
O father you brought a new woman  
To my mother's bed  
I will be leaving soon

In the first week of the month I left  
It's been half a month since I left and suffered  
To live in a beautiful *Apuki*  
Where many people live  
But I'm an orphan there

O How I long for my father's death  
O take my words to my mother  
Hoping it will reach her soon  
I will wait

### **23. *Phuthe Wopisheve Keu Le***

*Ipu isü ilholo hi akumo ye*  
*Timi shoinami ahu hawo che aye*  
*Ile woghimo ye*  
*Ghulo lakhi timi loji dolo kuwo thotsü*  
*Dolo kuhu lono timi no ni vilo*  
*Loji mpi shijule ye pinaimu nino*  
*Chehu ashe lono ale pheju aye*  
*Ale no akukho kumo aye kucho*  
*Asütsuni ighüna lo a kumoye*  
*Ile woche ala*

*O timi paza no ghi alhe pelo*  
*Ahuno lo ishe he ninu ye*  
*Anupami khile kumulo che ala*  
*Ishe hewo ni cheli amlo küsa*  
*Küha manila*

*Süye kivi tüzüqau yekuhu lono*  
*Lojilimi no ni vilo tiqheli*  
*Ghili shijule ye pinaimu nino*  
*Kujoveye shimoni hu ala*

### **Song of Failed Migration**

It's not my ancestor's place  
Other people are migrating towards north  
They did not return  
Even a day in another *Aloji*  
Working among others, people told me  
To lead the *Aloji* but when I  
Tried to sing at mid-day  
The song did not come out right  
Trees and plants here look different from my village  
I am returning

O other's mother carry food  
And wait at a resting spot, worried for the son  
The youngest one, worried where he is  
It worried the sisters too  
But I don't have such mother and sisters

In the fertile lands in *Tüzü* valley  
*Aloji* maidens asked me  
To display contemporary skills  
But I was ashamed to do it

\**Aloji* (work-group)

#### **24. *Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le***

*Ishe ni mighimi no qe ani*  
*I phi gho, imini ghotsü ye*  
*O hoishe achi akiviu no*  
*Ikhüno tsu ye*  
*Ikhü no mishi pime, ino avi pime*  
*Iza Ghohali ino avi lache*  
*Shi opiyeni ye iphesülo*  
*Ithiu chelo*

*O hoishe timi shoinami no ghi*  
*Kichezü shi ilo*  
*Inakha Ghonili no nu*  
*Visheli avi kipimemi huye*  
*O nanu no kishi pucheni ila ye*  
*Ipu no no qhüchemo ye*  
*Iza no chi kikishe ye ikhollove ala*

*Iphi lhaqhi inami shosa ye*  
*O hoishe ipu ojekipi huno*  
*Pilo ilo wo ni Khabumi to aye*  
*Pichilepe ayekiminimi to*  
*Mujulimi to*

#### **Visheli's Song of Her Mother**

O! I am an orphan slaving for you  
Wove me body-cloth, wove me waist-cloth  
O! But the best neck-piece  
Was given to *Ikhu*  
*Ikhu's* bride-price was cow, mine, a *Mithun*  
Aunt *Ghohali*, "Let me show you how a *Mithun* walks  
Make way for me  
Walk behind me"

O! People from other villages  
Are travelling here to watch  
*Inakha* and *Ghonili's* daughter  
*Visheli*, whose bride-price was *Mithun*  
To see how she was adorned  
My father does not love me so  
My mother's double neck piece was too short for me  
Too embarrassed to take out my body-cloth and face others  
O Father, Woe to your fame!  
The fame that reached *Khabu*  
And returned back to people who wear white waist-cloth

And to the *Mujulimi*

\**Ikhu* (*Hokhuli*, *Visheli*'s half-sister)

\**Khabu* (*Kohima*)

\**Mujulimi* (*Rengma* maidens)

## 25. *Xekinima*

*O hoishe! Ingu asalo losü*  
*Ixe kinima ghi ixemanila*  
*Timi loji avi kipighimi achi tüna kuami ilo xelu chekha amu*  
*Aghoshi xekulumi ye, atsa küha ala*

*Ikinhilo kichimino atsa küghamo*  
*Itimi tsa kishi ghola kighisü*  
*Kichile tsano jiheli pighi wola*  
*Ile Sümi nu*

*O hoishe! ipu alhoküsauno*  
*Aghüzano vimoyewo timi ghüza mine*  
*Cheniuno, o iza Süliuno tshalu mtha aye*  
*Agho nimo tino alhaghüla*  
*Nikiyeno haye*

*O hoishe! timi alhoghüla kipemino*  
*Axeu no sa alo shicheaye*  
*Chechelo ikujoye amulo*  
*Pekidini chemoye*

## *Xekinima*

The father-in-law allowed his daughter-in-law to get married unwilling and therefore she was married off in an inappropriate way. She sings that those who reared *Mithun* could receive valuable neck pieces in double as *Ame*. But those who practice *Ame* forcefully, they had no voice. During her *Amekükügha*, elders did not participate. It went according to what young people said. And the father-in-law spread the rumour through the whole village. So, she began to develop ill-feeling towards her own father and mother for being poor. She came from a poor family and so she was ill-treated by her father-in-law. She is envious of others because she had to cultivate in unfertile lands. Because of her poverty and her poor *Ame*, her husband also started to mistreat her. Thus, she sings in anguish against her father-in-law for marrying her off in the first place.

## 26. *Yenliba*

*Ishe loi no ighaqho che aye wo*  
*Igha qho ato be aye ghiwo*  
*Ni ghami ghile huniche ayewo*  
*Omhi kivi lono aghü yesüwo*  
*Omula nguno aghühu yepu*

*O topumi-ilimi no qhesho juni aye*  
*Khalau ghau no alapa nguno*  
*Ayina kinipuwu wola*  
*Asümini akidi lo yeshi*  
*Anitsü nguno nasapumi ye*  
*Kikighi nono nasapumi ye*

*O alaphelo tüghau kichi kivi yila*  
*Lojilimi ni zükuwomi salawo isala yenila*  
*Lojilimi kholebo lo küzümi kimiye chela*  
*O hoishe thohu avelau aye*  
*Tishi küvü lono akha lakhi kügha süwo*



*Anuli gho küzümi shiwo  
Kinimi ghozü züni aye*

*Aji kithe ijeni gho?  
Akitheu ijeni ghomo ye  
O hoishe sülo amipho ngu ilo müqa püha ilo mütshü süye  
Ni woni che ala*

### **Yenliba**

Ah! The cicadas are singing northward  
As it sings and soars up the hill  
Our village will soon be harvesting  
Your beautiful feathers are designed  
And your breast is patterned

O women folk and young girls come out to watch warrior dance  
Other birds bid farewell to village from the crossroads  
The bushes are lovely  
Wild flowers are blooming  
In a small hamlet

O lovely birds at the wayside  
It's for the *Aloji* maidens who go before me  
Remembering the maidens who slept in *Kholebo*  
O It has become evening  
Caught a fish from community fishing at *Tishi*  
But gave it to a rich man instead of children

Would you offer me new rice-brew?  
But I was denied new rice-brew  
O kept my gift behind the fireplace  
Sipped the brew in vain, it pains me  
I will be leaving shortly

*\*Aloji (work-group) \*Kholebo (at a place where a berry tree stood) \* Tishi (name of a river in Akuluto area)*

### **27. Luxa Le**

*Ho inalimi asholoku küsa ji no aki  
Akilo womo, agha lo züye  
Agha lo zü ye khingu müsa ye  
Inalimi ayeghi lo yeke tishi chelo  
Iqheküza kumo, ikülaki kumo  
Züta laghi no zübo chopu ye  
Alo alo no illi li alo  
Zülo zülo no illi li zülo*

### **Weeding Song**

Ho Daughter-in-law, due to marital discord  
Did not go home, slept in the field  
To sleep in the field, scared of spirits  
Daughter-in-law, it's the way of the world  
It's not my pride, it's not my arrogance  
Support my back with dao handle  
*Alo alo no illi li alo  
Zülo zülo no illi li zülo*

### **28. Apo Qe Lumo**

*Ishe Timi shoinami kükami no*  
*Ishe shomhi puye, alaqho qhi puye*  
*Ishe aghakhu lo kükami no*  
*Ishe atsano atu mülo peqhe küllho shiye*  
*Ishe aghau ghi akuhu-ü ye kichimi tsüye*  
*Ishe akuhu ü pe timi tsümo, kujoshenila*  
*Ishe opu oza le pikiche noye ogiji saye*

### **The Poor chief**

Ah other village chiefs  
Have tails and and extra long tails  
But our village chief  
Is unable to speak out, words are as heavy as a stone  
Birds with red feathers are given to elders  
But you could not give the red one to others, what shame!  
Dishonoured your parents' fame and embarrassed yourself

### **29. Mighimi no Anipu Lumla keu mlo Ghime**

*Ni mighimi no kiu*  
*Kiniu no kilo*  
*Ilolumoe wo*  
*Niye apu kuhake*  
*Mishi kuha wo*  
*Niye aza kuhake*  
*Woli kuha ke*

### **An Orphan's Sorrow in Finding a Wife**

How can an orphan like me  
Go to rich man's house  
And propose  
I don't have a father  
I don't have a Mithun  
I don't have a mother  
I don't have a pig

### **30. Ashekhami no Kinimi Shive**

*Ishe Khumtsa no nithiu wokighimi noye*  
*Ishe Shoghi lakhilo chighi hu moye*  
*Ishe nithiu wokighimi no Müghüki shiye, Viyiphi ulu ye*  
*Ishe kücho niye moni ili chelaimo müku qhou lu aye*

### **Latecomers Became Richer**

Ah! *Khumtsa* came later than me  
One basket could not harvest ten baskets  
Those who came later than me have built a huge house, wear *Avikiyiphi*  
How sad for me to harvest below twenty!

\**Avikiyiphi* (a male body-cloth worn only by those who have killed Mithun)

### **31. Ayeküzü Le**

*Nipu asüno khaghino ishi*  
*Agha vaqhino alu chi ighi*

*Ishi püzüno süpha xu ighi  
Supha lu chino süpha xo cheni  
Ishi püzüno süpha le cheni  
Ishi püzüno süpha ka cheni  
Ishi püzüno ayezü cheni  
Ishi püzüno Ayeküxa cheni  
Ishi püzüno Ayete cheni  
Ishi püzüno Aye puho cheni  
Ishi püzüno Aphi gho cheni  
Ishi püzüno Aphi tsüghü cheni  
Ishi püzüno Aphi wu cheni  
Khumtsa Xüshepu nonu awu  
Awu kukho ghulo kino khepu  
Wolo wolo no o ishe asü  
Asü Yekhito yetolo iku  
Yekühulo niju nishi saye*

### **Spinning Song**

This is how our ancestors  
Fell trees and cleared woods  
This is how they sow cotton  
Cultivate cotton field and harvest it  
This is how cotton is picked  
This is how cotton is spun  
This is how cotton is made into yarn  
This is how yarn is spindled  
This is how yarn is starched  
This is how yarn is made into yarn balls  
This is how body-cloths are woven  
This is how you stich the cloth  
This is how body-cloths are worn  
*Khumtsa, Xüshepu's son*  
Get ready to go to filed at dawn  
Wolo wolo no  
Went to clear the jungle in *Yekhito* hills  
Wanted to see me there

### APPENDIX-III

#### PROVERB TEXTS

(Literal and Free Translation by the Scholar)

Sümi proverb texts along with literal translation and free translation by the scholar is provided here. In the following texts, standard *Sütsa* (Sümi language) as used by Sümi Literature Board, is employed as far as possible. Some proverbs have been taken from the booklet, *Sümi Pimhe Tsa* (Sümi heritage phrases) by Shiwoto Kati and some from, *Sülekuthoh* (Sümi proverb expressions), by Scato Swu. While the rest are recollections from memory and collected from common usage.

aji lono ighi kemi toilo  
blood from come those be

(1) “To behave as one descended from nobility.”

uhe no pa chita inape aqheküzashi nu ake lono pa chita inathave  
lizard was its waist hold proudly laugh when from its waist broke

(2) “The lizard broke its waist while laughing proudly with hands akimbo.”

migheu ghügha shi kelo  
mockingbird sound imitate not

(3) “Do not imitate like the *Migheu*.”

aghiyi mili kütsügha toi  
hay/thatch grass tongue sharpness like

(4) “To be as sharp as blade of hay.”

anhezü no o qoani  
tears is you forbode/tempting

(5) “Seems tears forebode you.”

be nimo ghu nimo  
cook raw bake raw

(6) “To remain uncooked however long one boil or bake.”

achuyi mloha  
frog heartless

(7) “As foolish as a croaking frog.”

atsü kimiye awu kimiye toi  
dog white hen white like

(8) “As easily noticed as white dog or hen.”

avi kimije süwo axütuhu-tsüngüküba kimjelu  
mithun trade brought smoking-pipe traded  
(9) **“To trade Mithun with a smoking pipe.”**

ajichu no bolomi toi kelo  
bamboo rat their family like not  
(10) **“As lazy as the rat family.”**

ajukivi-u aji shokūsau  
beautiful one rice-brew distasteful  
(11) **“The beautiful one who brews distasteful beer.”**

auloba küixü  
between fingers crack  
(12) **“To have holes between fingers.”**

nono ishino imepe püaghi nguno thoghiu no ngopu chunani  
you today toil keep then tomorrow will sit eat  
(13) **“If you toil today, you will relax and eat tomorrow.”**

aghümi no angu chepuo o tomulakepu lono aghümi khülo  
enemy is spear throw you unreachable from enemy dare  
(14) **“Challenge your enemy from where his spear cannot be thrown at you.”**

asübono ila iqhi o vemülakepu lo puthugholo  
tree fall down you could not hit on stand  
(15) **“Stand far away from where the tree may fall on you.”**

nono püka wu mphi lono onepa chejuve paghilo  
you walk go before from footprint observe first  
(16) **“Observe your path before you walk.”**

o nepa paghi kutoluve no timi khülo  
your footprint first prepare is man dare  
(17) **“Position yourself well before challenging others.”**

khilehimu azü lo azüta ghisü kelo  
never water in dao strike not  
(18) **“Never strike your machete in the water.”**

apulukho kichhe

paddy-bag hit

**(19) “To hit paddy bag with spearhead.”**

i kho ghoni O kho pelulo

my cone-basket keep your cone-basket lift

**(20) “Take away your cone- basket, I will rest mine.”**

akha tsalu aye munove achuwa tsaluaye qhileve

fish chew if swallow crab chew spit-out

**(21) “To swallow if it fish and spit out if it is crabs.”**

chhulu aye I no luni chhumla aye O tsüni

burrowed if I will take unburrowed if you give

**(22) “Will take if it is burrowed but give you if it is not.”**

aphikho lo ahi iloghi akeshi

blanket in flea come inside like

**(23) “As irritable as flea inside blanket.”**

timi dolo ahu atükü

man among husk/unground grain

**(24) “To be an unground grain among people.”**

apola küthsüpe aphi

umbilical cord connected still

**(25) “Umbilical cord is still attached.”**

kumlhomi no ashe kumo ithulu aketoi

poor people is deer carcass saw like

**(26) “As proud as poor man finding deer carcass.”**

i mpi kitila kemu ikütsüqa kije ghütsülo

my body small but head top big keep

**(27) “I am small built but leave a large patch of hair on my head.”**

o nepa lo azü tho mphi

your footprint in water dry yet

**(28) “The water in your footprints have not dried yet.”**

no ye ayilo peno pa je kulunani  
you ought hyssop hold his name utter

**(29) “Only by holding an *Ayilo* can you utter his name.”**

ashiphi kütsü küpükha  
pangolin head claim

**(30) “To claim pangolin’s head.”**

aji ti ghi thinikeloye aghacho shicheni  
rat tiny also while dying rattles does

**(31) “Even a tiny mouse rattles before dying.”**

angu athiu momu azüta ayiu no shini  
spear spearhead or dao front by fight

**(32) “To fight either by spearhead or sharp edged dao.”**

amsü küküzü toi  
firewood swing like

**(33) “Like the swaying of a burning firewood.”**

aküsa-asapuye kishe pelucheni ikemu akühahu ye kishe peluchemo  
bracelet-bangle double worn but ivory is double unworn

**(34) “A bangle and bracelet made of iron can be worn double but ivory armlet is not worn double.”**

pisü-piphe kelo  
speak in-out not

**(35) “Do not speak in and out.”**

tsüni akelono ao phuluvelo  
sunshine while grain dry

**(36) “Dry your food grains while the sun shines.”**

khaghilomi chuchu kibe  
forefathers purple yam boil

**(37) “Legendary yam cooking of the past.”**

amichi mu pho iku amqha tomo  
smoke even burn ascend chimney mat unreachable

**(38) “Your kitchen smoke do not even reach the roof.”**

achuwa no kimikipe ngokile aketoi  
crab is bit eachother stay like

**(39) “As tangled as crabs biting one another.”**

aqhaqhono michiyithi khe akeshi  
owl is berry wait as

**(40) “Like an owl waiting for berry to ripen.”**

akixi ayikhu lothi toi  
rice Bean soya Bean seed like

**(41) “As pure as rice bean and soya bean seed.”**

küghüzümi no ani lo qheza  
fools is festival in proud

**(42) “As proud as fools during festivities.”**

ghuchu chini ye pügha chu  
bake taboo so roast eat

**(43) “Baking in ash being taboo, ate roasted.”**

ashi gha ghi mine aghü gha ghi mine  
meat charm also want war charm also want

**(44) “Greed for riches as well as bravery.”**

süjovetsüle piye chuxuvetsü  
pull out said thrust deeper

**(45) “To thrust deeper when pled to pull out.”**

aba-ayi michi mo  
back front differentiate not

**(46) “Inability to differentiate inside and outside.”**

aqhi khetsünhe nilau no ipeghe  
moon sun us from come

**(47) “Even the moon and the sun comes out from us.”**

chengu ki haki phe  
great barbet nest drive out

**(48) “As forceful as driving out the Great Barbet from its nest.”**



anga punu miphi lono akihe gho  
child born before when sling weave  
(49) “To weave child sling before birth.”

mishi kichi ghe  
many mouth portion  
(50) “A portion for all.”

alu pekikili  
plate/cup exchange  
(51) “To exchange *Alu*.”

mishi tsa ikuva  
many words upon  
(52) “The curse of multitude’s voice.”

puqu-pile  
vomit-out  
(53) “To die vomiting blood.”

ayi kighe ngüsü  
iron cut curse  
(54) “The curse of cutting iron.”

shekichile müsa  
reckoning afraid  
(55) “Fear of retribution.”

kichimi tsa ye pikha chini pimo chini  
ancestors stories/words is say completely taboo not narrate taboo  
(56) “Taboo to narrate ancestor’s story completely and taboo not to narrate.”

ghilehuve kethiu no kûlakupu shicheni  
harvested after is marriage held  
(57) “Marriages are held only after the harvest.”

agha lono oje chilu aye khochile chemo  
woods in your name hear answer not  
(58) “One must not answer the call of one’s name in the woods.”

puthewoche kelo athiu jupuwo chemo  
migrating when backward look not  
(59) “It is taboo to look backwards while migrating.”

ashi ye süchile chemo  
meat is return not

**(60) “It is taboo to return meat gifted by others.”**

kichimi zü-u ye Pi chini bu chini chu chini  
elders before is speak taboo touch taboo eat taboo

**(61) “Taboo to speak, touch or eat before elders.”**

ino imu pülü imu no awoba qhazü  
i my brother rely my brother is pig waste slept

**(62) “I look up to my elder brother while he sleeps on hog’s shit.”**

sübo nheghu mu ithumüla  
rump snout even unreceived

**(63) “Did not receive even rump or snout.”**

atsüba awoba netughu-u  
dog waste pig waste step

**(64) “To be the first to step on pig and dog’s waste.”**

itimi ye aghuthu shope chemo  
children are boundary plant not

**(65) “It is taboo for young person to plant boundary stone.”**

timi thive aye khumu alulo huche mo  
person die if none field go not

**(66) “It is taboo to go to field when a villager dies.”**

amüghüsü küha kehu aveizüani  
axe-handle absent because confused

**(67) “There is confusion in the absence of an axe handle.”**

akibo shitughulo lhoxü piti tughu-u ye apuno-azano tsücheni  
family early animals born first is parents given

**(68) “The first domestic animal born to a newly married couple is gifted to parents.”**

angu ani losü ye ashepu ijove cheni  
uncle aunt upset is anus out is

**(69) “One would suffer from piles if paternal aunt or uncle is made unhappy.”**

totimi tsaye ini kelo  
women words hear not

(70) **“Do not listen to what women say.”**

tiye topu-toghu tsa  
that is elderly women word

(71) **“That is elderly women talk.”**

totimi ye aki alu tsa pi chini  
women is house field talk speak taboo

(72) **“Taboo for women to speak about landed properties.”**

totimi toi künhachi ani

women like weak is

(73) **“As effeminate or weak as woman”**

tomoke ghenguno totimi ipi

incomplete because women say

(74) **“Termed a female because of her incompleteness.”**

aulaküsa totimi

unprosperous hand women

(75) **“Woman without prosperous hand.”**

totimi ye timi shisholo küda  
women are man/other’s chopping stand stuck

(76) **“A female is like minced meat stuck on someone’s chopping stand.”**

kipitimi ye totimi no ashi yikeu chu chini  
men are women by meat hunt eat taboo

(77) **“It is taboo for man to eat the hunt brought by woman.”**

apu-zali apu-cheli ye gihu masa  
father’s parents father’s sisters is respect must

(78) **“To respect father’s parents and sisters.”**

aza küsa ti

mother bad child

**(79) “Child of a characterless mother.”**

nhapithi peni

death in child birth be

**(80) “May you die in child birth.”**

kipitimi ke pathepaye

men is alright

**(81) “It is alright for men to do so.”**

sheqhu-Chengu shiani

name of different birds are

**(82) “As different as *Sheqhu* and *Chengu*.”**

akiwo lame

migration price

**(83) “Price of freedom from bondage.”**

awucho awolokukho toi

plantain flower/bud like

**(84) “As flawless as plantain bud/flower”**

aphikho lo ahi iloghi akeshi

blanket in flea enter like

**(85) “As irritable as flea inside blanket.”**

akimi thia kelaye alojipu-u kümsü qa

husband death when lover think cry

**(86) “Like a woman crying for her lover on her husband’s death.”**

atsa    mpi    mloqhi    xü  
words   body   swallow   live  
**(87)    “To live without a voice.”**

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