

Aspects of Nyishi Folk Narratives of Arunachal Pradesh: A Critical Study

*(Dissertation submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Award of the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in English)*

By

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M.Phil Regd. No. 60/2020

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I, **Ratan Yater**, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Aspects of Nyishi Folk Narratives of Arunachal Pradesh: A Critical Study** is a bona fide record of research done by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Jano S. Liegise**, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during the period of my research (2019-2021), and the dissertation has not been submitted either in part or full, to any university for the award of any other degree, diploma or title at any university or institution. This dissertation is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of **Master of Philosophy in English**.

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SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is an important component of culture. It acts as a gateway to know about the social and cultural histories of the people. “Folklore is such an aspect of culture which explains people’s socio-cultural systems, beliefs, values and attitudes through folksongs, folk-dance, folk-tales, proverbs, riddles, legends, ballads, fables, charms, fairs, festivals, religion, superstitions, customs and traditions” (Punia, 11). Hence, it is an important medium to understand people, their social values, customs and way of life. “Folklore genres also carry with them explanations for social systems and norms, e.g.: kinship, regulation, taboos, beliefs etc. They are valid knowledge seen as traditional and dependable, taken as transmitted since the days of the ancestors” (Sen, 24).

Folklore as an academic discipline began in the early 19th century. With the publication of a collection of German folktales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812, people in various parts of the world started studying and recording various genres of oral narratives such as fairy tales, epics, fables, ballads, songs, jokes, riddles etc. The word ‘*folklore*’ was coined in 1846 by William John Thomas who was a British writer, thus replacing the earlier somewhat cumbersome term “popular antiquities”.

In the term ‘folklore’, ‘folk’ refers to the people and ‘lore’ means stories. Hence, it is stories of the people. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary describes ‘folk’ as “the great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions, and superstitions from generation to generation”.

Richard M. Dorson has grouped folklore into four large groups. They are Oral literature, Material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts. Oral literature is “spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances” (2) with various subdivisions such as folk narratives, folksongs, folk poetry, proverbs, riddles etc.

Material culture, the title gives away the meaning. They are exactly what they sound like- the material possessions that are used by people in their day to day lives. Unlike oral literature, it deals with the visual aspects of folk life. It deals with how a group of people live, what foods they eat, clothes they wear, their housing pattern, agricultural tools and implements, kitchenware, basketry, weaving, carving, painting etc.

The third sector of folklore is social folk customs which mainly focuses on “group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances” (3). Social folk customs are traditional beliefs, customs and practices which have been passed down from generations. They include “*rites de passage* as birth, initiation, marriage, and death”, festivals, recreational activities, taboos, customary laws and traditional knowledge, healing practices etc.

The fourth and last group is performing folk arts. Here the emphasis is on “traditional music, dance and drama” (4). These are intangible elements of folklore and they are “more casual in nature than the conscious presentation of these arts by individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance costumes, and scenario props” (4).

L. P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai in their joint book titled “The Tribal Culture of India” gave four functions of folklore. According to them, different folklore has different functions, and it is possible to “tell from the form alone what the associated contextual function is”.

The first function of folklore is to “educate” the younger generations and to “inculcate general attitudes and principles, such as diligence and filial piety, and to ridicule laziness, rebelliousness and snobbishness” (315). The second function is to give explanations as to why certain rituals are observed in a particular society. The third one which overlaps with the first two functions is “maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour” (317). The fourth function of folklore is “permitting actions” (317) that are considered as taboos or simply inappropriate.

Folk narratives are an integral part of cultural heritage and a valuable resource for historical and contemporary comparative folk narrative studies. They reflect moral values and beliefs, and identities of groups and individuals over time (Meder, 2010). In other words, Folk narratives are stories handed down from the remote past by words of mouth from generation to generation, peer to peer, reflecting people’s tradition, customs, beliefs, and values. Folk narratives cover a wide range of genres such as legends, myths, riddles, puzzles, jokes, folktales, children’s tales, folksongs, personal narratives etc. “Myths are traditional stories based on events, whether these events had occurred or not, often about super humans, that might had been imagined or perceived, that were told to explain local customs or natural phenomena such as rain, lightening, storm etc. Legends are different based on people that might had happened which had been changed and built up something bigger or in a more dramatic way over the years” (Mibang, iv). Folktales are stories from the distant past that have been orally transmitted from one recipient to another. “Proverbs are short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life” (Abrams and Harpham 10). In short, proverbs are traditional sayings which are used in everyday conversations to express something that is true or obvious.

Folksong is a vital element of folklore. “Folksongs denote unwritten and traditional song or ballad originating among the people and traditionally handed down by them” (Batem

et al. 5). Folksongs like other folk narratives have their own significance and “not only because the music, form and content of verse is itself part of a people’s life but even more because in songs, in charms, in actually fixed and established documents we have the most authentic and unshakable witnesses to ethnographic fact” (Elwin 193). Folksongs are also an important medium of enculturation. They provide “moral, philosophical and historical knowledge to the folk” (Punia 16).

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world in terms of culture, language, religion and other physical features. India has become a melting pot of unique cultures coming together that resulted in a beautiful concoction of culture that we know today. Folklore is one of the main attractions of India as it gives a glimpse into its past of rich cultural heritage. As Tamo Mibang correctly pointed out that although folklore as a field of study began in the west but India already had “a notable voluminous works like Pancathantra, the Kathasaritsagara, the Hitopadesa, the Vetalapancavimsate and the Buddhist Jatakas”¹ since the ancient times. However, these works were not brought to international limelight and hence, they are undervalued and did not receive the recognition that they deserve.

Arunachal Pradesh erstwhile NEFA is home to various ethnic communities, and each has their own distinct culture, language, tradition and custom. The Nyishi is one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh with the population size of around 87,656 (2001 census). They are scattered across various districts in the state. The Nyishis have their own body of oral knowledge. The folksongs, ballads, rhapsodies, folktales, myth, legends, proverbs, lullabies etc form their rich body oral literature. Until a few decades back, these oral knowledge were passed on from the parent to the succeeding generation. However, modernization has been a constant threat to the invaluable oral knowledge. The younger generations are failing to

¹Mibang, Tamo. *Folklore of North East India*. (Itanagar: Himalayan Publishers,2020) (ii).

absorb and retain the culture and traditions from their preceding generation. As a result, the culture and traditions are beginning to die out or on the verge of death. In the past, Nyishi folk narratives were recorded by Christian missionaries, anthropologists and scholars etc. However, only a handful of folk narratives were collected and recorded. A vast majority of these are yet to be touched.

The location of the study is Kamle district which alone has 75 villages under it. It came into being on October 18th, 2017, making it the 22nd district of Arunachal Pradesh. Raga is the district headquarters. The district has been named after the Kamle River which is one of the major tributaries of River Subansiri. The district has a total population of 22,256 and spread across an area of about 200,000 km² (80,000 sq mi). Boori Boot Yullo is the main festival. Donyi-Polo is the main religion.

The Nyishis residing in Kamle district have enormous wealth of oral literature. There is a wide range of folksongs which are sung during festive occasions, religious ceremonies, funeral, or simply during common gatherings, or while engaged in agrarian work. The community also possess a good number of folktales which have been handed down from generation to generation. Every folktale has its own charm to reveal the indigenous wisdom and the socio-cultural perspective of the people.

The main focus of this study will be to analyze and interpret the major aspects of Nyishi folk narratives, viz., folksongs, folktales, folk sayings, folk terms and concepts that exist in the community.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The present study is the first academic attempt on the study of aspects of Nyishi folk narratives. The Nyishi unlike other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh such as Adi, Galo, Apatani, Tagin have a very few research done on them.

With the advent of modern life and education, the Nyishi society is also going through a process of change and development. The people especially the youths are abandoning their villages to go to towns and cities in search of better living. They do not only abandon their ancestral homes but also their traditions, customs and ways of living. This results in “cultural continuity” coming to an abrupt stop. There are very few people left in the community who possess the oral knowledge. These people are either shamans or learned old people. It is high time that something should be done in order to preserve the traditional knowledge for the future generations.

1.3. Objectives

The present study is a pioneering attempt in this direction with the following objectives:

1. To textually document the folk narratives of the Nyishi community.
2. To document the oral narratives related to legends, myths, tales, mythology, proverbs, migration etc.
3. To highlight the traditional socio-cultural and religious life of the people.
4. To contribute to an existing body of folk literature.

1.4. Methodology

For the present study, both primary and secondary data have been taken into consideration. The primary data which includes folksongs, narratives and other relevant information have been achieved through field work by conducting intensive and extensive interviews with some of the prominent singers, *Nyib* (priests) and learned old people of the selected villages of Raga and Dollungmukh.

The field work was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the field work was conducted in the month of January 2020 in the town of Raga. The second phase was held in Dollungmukh in the same month of January 2020. Telephone interviews with some of the village elders of Raga and Dollungmukh have also been carried out. Personal interviews with the elders of the Nyishi community residing in the twin capital of Itanagar and Naharlagun have been conducted.

Zoom H1n Handy Recorder and Samsung Galaxy S8 plus have been used for recording the interviews, narratives and songs. Canon EOS 1200D was used to take photographs of the local consultants and other important materials. Some of the pictures which have been printed have been used with due permission from the rightful owners.

The secondary data has collected from relevant books on Nyishi community, articles and journals, web-based materials, published and unpublished dissertations, Directorate of Research by Government of Arunachal Pradesh, State library of Itanagar, Central library of Rajiv Gandhi University and Central library of Nagaland University etc. For citations, latest edition of MLA Handbook has been used.

1.5. Area of Study

The area of study for the present work was done mainly in the Dollungmukh and Raga area which comes under the Kamle district of Arunachal Pradesh. The field work was conducted into two phases; the first phase of the field work was done in the month of December 2020 in Itanagar and Dollungmukh. The second phase was conducted in Dollungmukh and Raga area in the months of January and February 2020.

1.6. Hypothesis

- The community has a vast repository of folk narratives.
- The folksongs, folktales, legends, myths, proverbs etc express people's socio-cultural values, religious beliefs and experiences.
- The folk narratives are relevant in understanding the socio-cultural history of the people and status of the folk artists in the community.
- The folksongs and folktales help in understanding the language of the people.

1.7. Chapterization

Chapter I: Introduction

The introductory chapter gives an insight into the theoretical aspects which acts as a base to study the research topic. It also deals with the objectives of the study, significance, review of literature, various methodologies that have been used.

Chapter II: Aspects of Nyishi Folksongs

The chapter explores, analyzes and documents the various types of folksongs that exist in the community. The community has a very rich tradition of Folk songs. The folksongs have been categorised into different thematic content. Creation songs, songs of origin and migration, marriage songs, expedition songs, orphan songs, bridge construction songs, house construction songs etc have been analysed and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter III: Aspects of Nyishi Folk Narratives

The Nyishis have preserved their folk narratives in various folktales, myths, legends, riddles which have been passed down from their ancestors. These folk narratives have been explored and studied in this chapter.

Chapter IV: Religious, Socio-Cultural Terms and Concepts in Nyishi Folk Narratives

This chapter gives a brief account of the Nyishi community. It studies and analyzes the origin and migration, the language, religion, economy, political system etc of the people which serve as a base to study the socio-cultural history of the people. It also shades lights on other aspects of life such as family structure, marriage systems, life cycle rituals, and rituals to appease the spirits, festivals, various taboos related to food and hunting and traditional healing practices.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The final chapter is a conclusion which summarizes the research findings in the preceding four chapters. It also highlights the emerging issues, the status of Nyishi language and folk artists in the community. It also suggests the areas which could be taken up in near future for research.

1.8. Limitation of the Study

The present research work was significantly stalled due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic. The field work was supposed to be conducted in four phases in the areas of Daporijo, Raga, Tamen and Dollungmukh in the months of January, February and April. However, due to the nationwide rapid shutdown, travelling restrictions were imposed and as a result field works had to be suspended. In order to give an overall view of the folk narratives with limited data collections, many important aspects may have been left out. Some other additional barriers which hindered the research work greatly were lack of local consultants or informants. Many of them reside in the remote villages having no access to proper roads and mobile phone services.

1.9. Review of Literature

Folk culture and Oral literature from North-East India, (2004), the joint edited book by Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri, is a compilation of seminar papers on “Oral literature of north-east India with special reference to Arunachal Pradesh” and gives an overview about the oral tradition of the tribal communities of North-East India.

B. B. Pandey in his book *Folk Songs of Arunachal Pradesh (ADI)* 1996 has tried to classify and explain the folksongs of the Adis. He also gives a brief account of their origin and migration, their economy, traditional political system, religion, family structure etc.

Folk Songs of Arunachal Pradesh (2018) by Batem Pertin, R. N. Koley and S. Chandra are mainly a compilation of folksongs of various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh contributed by different writers with brief meanings.

Folktales of Arunachal Pradesh, Vol- I, (2017) is a joint edited book by Batem Pertin, R. N. Koley and S. Chandra which makes an erudite attempt to document and interpret a wide range of folktales and myths of the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

The book, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, (1972) edited and introduction by Richard M. Dorson describes the characteristics of folk cultures and discusses the procedures used by social scientists to study folk life.

Tob Tarin Tara in his book, *Nyishi World*, (2008) throws light on the different aspects of traditional life of the Nyishi community. It provides a comprehensive picture of the people, their way of life, their rituals, beliefs and practices etc. It also comprises of Nyishi folktales, legends, myths and folksongs.

Grace Jolly in her work *Nyisi Poetic Devices*, (1970) gives an in-depth analysis of the literary devices used in poetry and lyrical compositions of the Nyishi language.

Archer Taylor in his paper, *Lists and Classifications of Folksongs* (1968) gives a critical survey of lists and classification of folksongs which was intended to suggest comparisons and thinking about methods.

Social Values in Folklore (1993) by Deep Punia analyzes the various Haryanvi folksongs related to birth, marriage, family relationships, festivals, devotion and death. He also gives an in-depth analysis on the conceptual perspective and nature and classification of the songs.

Abani Doley in his *Oral Literature of the Misings of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh* (2009) gives an exploratory study of the lives of Mising people and their oral tradition.

Tamo Mibang's *Folklore of North East India* (2019-20) is a collection of papers by various scholars who try to give scholarly and scientific analyses on the relevance of folklore in to-day's fast changing society. It covers the whole gamut of folklore such as myths, legends, folktales, traditions, customs, beliefs, pattern of life, folk medicine, festivals, song and Dance.

The Oxford India Elwin (2009) is a part of the prestigious Oxford India Collections series, forms a collection of Elwin's selected writings. It is a combination of autobiographical and scholarly writings with numerous photographs and illustrations which provides a glimpse into India's rich tribal culture.

Adi Folk Songs (1990) by Aduk Tayeng is a collection of various Adi folksongs which have been categorised as love songs, natural songs, war songs and cradle songs. It throws light on the unique oral traditions of the Adi tribe.

Indigenous Faith and Practices of the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (reprint 2004) by M. C. Behera and S. K. Chaudhuri is a collection of seminar papers and other papers related to the topic. The book does not cover the entire spectrum of tribal faith and religion but it does provide us an overall view of the indigenous faith and practices of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It broadly classifies the people in two major groups' viz. Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

Understanding Arunachal Pradesh (2017) by R. N. Koley has 25 papers published in different sources brought together for understanding Arunachal Pradesh in a better light. It deals in a wide variety of topics related to social, political, economic and religious aspects of life of people in Arunachal Pradesh.

Tribal Studies: Emerging Frontiers of Knowledge (2007) co-edited by Tamo Mibang and M. C. Behera brings forward a comprehensive study of the dynamics of tribal studies. The work is divided into four broad thematic categories namely culture and identity, Expanding frontiers in tribal studies, development perspectives and social process.

Oral Literature of Arunachal Pradesh: Creation of Universe (1999) by Editor B. B. Pandey and co-editor D. K. Duarah is a combination of 11 papers on myths and beliefs on creation of the universe by the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It gives us an idea about the people, their beliefs and how did they perceived the world around them.

The Nyishi Words and Proverbs (2013) by Nabam Nakha Hina mainly comprises of Nyishi words and proverbs. The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with formation of words. The second chapter is parts of speech. The third chapter deals with Nyishi words and their translation and the fourth chapter is Nyishi proverbs.

Ethnographic Notes on Subansiri Region (1946) compiled and edited by Takhe Kani is a collection of ethnographic notes on various tribes of the Subansiri area written by C.V.F. Haimendorf. These ethnographic notes are a reflection of the lives of the people as noted by Haimendorf during his visit to the region in the 1940s.

Tribal Religion: Change and Continuity (2018) by M. C. Behera is a collection of 22 papers contributed by various scholars, anthropologist, and activists etc. They try to take a

closer look at religions syncretism in various tribal communities across India which has emerged over time.

Uimok: Nyishi Lok kathayen (2020) by Jamuna Bini is a collection of fascinating Nyishi folktales in Hindi embellished with colourful illustrations by artist Jene Hai. Though it is a children's story book but it nevertheless gives an insight into the lives of the Nyishi community.

The Mythology of Boori Boot Yullo by Hui Tag was released on the occasion of 50th Golden Jubilee Boori Boot Yullo celebration 2017. It comprises of mythology related to the origins of the celestial objects and Abotani (the first human). It also gives a historical background and tries to trace the origin of Boori Boot Yullo festival mainly celebrated by the Nyishis of kamle district. Although the mythology is only of few pages but it covered important narratives related to the origin and creation of the world and its living creatures.

Heritage of Kamle district by Hui Tag was released on the inauguration function of the newly formed Kamle district at Raga on 15th December 2017. It aimed to serve as a guiding principal and to direct the affairs of the new district into a one that is more efficient and developed in every sphere.

Nocte Love Songs (1987) by Tapan Kumar M. Baruah and published by P. C. Dutta is a collection of beautiful love ballads and their English rendering from the Nocte community

of Arunachal Pradesh. The love songs of the Noctes contain deep imprint of their culture and has special significance in their society.

Varrier Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1987) mainly constitutes his broad philosophy, approach and specific proposals as how to preserve "the rich and varied tapestry of NEFA". The main highlights are the forewords written to the first and second edition of the book by Jawaharlal Nehru. Written by Elwin, this is one of the rare, authentic and authoritative anthropological contributions about India's North East.

In Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf's *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh, Anthropological Research in North-East India* (1892) gives a glimpse into the rich culture and tradition of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

CHAPTER II

ASPECTS OF NYISHI FOLKSONGS

“Folksong is a traditional or composed song typically characterized by stanzaic form, refrain and simplicity of melody” (“Folk Song”). Folk comes from the German word ‘*volk*’ meaning ‘the people’ and hence folk song can be referred to as the “music of the people”. Folksongs are of anonymous authorship and orally handed down between generations. They act as a vital element to understand social values, customs and norms of the people. They reflect people’s ideas, feelings and their consciousness about the world around them. “Folk songs form the bulk of folk literature, and like poetry in written literature, occupy a place of pride in oral literature” (Punia 12).

A great number of folksongs are there across India. Folksongs are very vast and have many forms because of the diversity in culture, language and regions in India. Folksong loosely translates to *lokgeet* in Hindi. However, most of the songs have either been lost or are on the verge of dying.

In Arunachal Pradesh, folksongs are one of the main attractions of the tribes. These songs occupy an important place in the lives of the people. “Different folklore exists for different occasions, festivals, ceremonies and it forms a huge bulk of knowledge which reflects the fact that their culture is a way of their life” (Schoemaker 1). There are songs for almost every occasion from birth, marriage, death to simple occasions like house construction, bridge construction, sowing, harvesting, jungle clearing or just women folk singing while being idle in the field.

2.1. Folksongs of the Nyishi

The Nyishis have a plethora of folksongs that exist in the community. The folksongs are records of their history, culture and language of the people. It gives a panoramic view of the various aspects of life of the Nyishi people. There are festivals songs, songs of origin and migration, marriage songs, hunting songs, expedition songs, war songs, harvesting songs, lullabies and funeral songs. The songs depict their day-to-day life. These folksongs are reflections of the glorious culture and tradition of the Nyishi people that was once there. They also act as emotional outlets for bursts of feelings and emotions. The people draw meaning from these songs which in turn give value and significance to their otherwise mundane life. In the olden days, people used to toil day and night in the field, hence, the songs although simple in rhythm and style helped to soothe the mind and body after a long and tiring day. The Nyishi folksongs are usually accompanied by folk dance. A good number of Nyishi folksongs are stories or advice given in the form of a song. Folksongs were mainly sung for entertainment purposes, but it also had some other important functions such as teaching basic life lessons, to pass on cultural and moral values, to bring a sense of unity etc. The Nyishi folksongs are often simple yet profound and those who understand the meaning of the lyrics listen to them with great delight.

The folksongs may vary from region to region, clan to clan and even peer to peer because they were usually learned by listening, memorising and performing. For that reason, each time a folksong is sung, it is unique. There was no formal training involved. It was usually the smart ones who retained the oral knowledge. Hence, there can be several versions of the same folksong even within a single clan. Numerous other influences must have also altered the songs in due course of time. It is just like a river having several names according to the places it enters. There might be slight differences in tune and rhythm, but they usually

convey the same story or meaning. Except the native speakers, a foreign listener may not be even able to catch the differences. How the songs were composed is not well understood. But as it has been said before, the folksongs were an important medium to express one's happiness, grief and sorrow. The songs are "the common inheritance of the entire tribe, every member of the community could be the performer, participant and audience" (Devy et al. 169). Accompaniment of musical instruments is rare still today. A musical instrument made from bamboo called *Pipa* was used by the people as a source of amusement. However, it was not used during a folk performance. Unfortunately, this instrument is no longer seen or used by the people. On some occasions like marriage ceremonies, festivals or as a part of ritual, large brass plates, large cymbals and swords are used to produce sounds. Large brass plates are beaten with bamboo sticks (vide photograph no. 8) to produce sounds. Also, swords (vide photograph no. 9) were used to make noises in war cries to intimidate the enemies.

The songs can be broadly divided into ritualistic and non-ritualistic songs. Ritualistic songs are associated with certain rituals and ceremonies. They are associated with important events like birth, illness, death etc. These songs are usually exceedingly long and intense and are followed by animal sacrifices and offerings to the spirits. It is usually considered as a taboo to perform ritualistic songs without any special occasion. Ritualistic songs consist of songs of lamentation, hunting songs, war songs, religious chants and prayers.

The non-ritualistic songs can be sung for recreational purposes such as during festivals, harvesting, house construction, or simply during leisure time. No animal sacrifices or offerings are required. The songs are light-hearted having a catchy rhythm so that anyone can participate in the merry making process. Such songs are usually followed by folk dance. Origin and creation songs, marriage songs, lullabies, harvesting songs, expedition songs, love ballads, rhapsodies, orphan songs etc can be categorised under non-ritualistic songs. These

songs are sung by a *Nyib* (the cantor or the leader of the group) which can be a male or a female and followed by a group singing in chorus.

The ritualistic songs require important occasions like rituals, festivals or in a funeral to be performed and hence could not be recorded. It is considered as a taboo to perform it other than in occasions mentioned above. This chapter consists of in depth analysis of the folksongs that are performed during non-ritualistic occasions.

The Nyishi is the most populous tribe with around 87,656 (2001 census) people scattered across various districts in Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, there are different songs and stories on origin, routes and migration of the Nyishi tribe which may vary from place to place and clan to clan. Since the data was collected mainly from people belonging to the Kamle district of Arunachal Pradesh, therefore, the following songs are exclusive to the Nyishi people or clans residing in Kamle district.

2.1.1. Creation Song

Title: *Giida-Giith Niimii-Niisii Rilen Tanam Hokke Nyim Kabnam*

Genre: Creation Song

Primary Folk Group: Men and Women Folk

Contextual information: The *Giida-Giith Niimi-Niisi Rilen Tanam Hokke Nyim Kabnam* was performed by Mrs. Nido Yeh of Dollungmukh village under Kamle district. It was uploaded on Nyishi Nyindung Mwingjwng Rallung facebook page on 7th September 2020 as an entry in the Online Nyishi Folklore Competition on “Nyim Kabnam” organised by Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Giida-Giith Niimii-Niisii Rilen Tanam Hokke Nyim Kabnam

Kurum lokke kol lo, chuthu nege tuik ne

Tul nemne riyu, tud nege tuid la

Chuthu nege tuik ne, dumum nemne rikyu

Kod guchin dukma, siin guchin dukma

Kurum nege kol lo, chuthu nege abo

Chuthu nege tuik ne, dumum kubo jagbe

Mokh guchin kama, kod guchin kama

Iss guchin kama, iim guchin kukma rimum ne kuyu

Chuthu nege tuik ne, dumum nege biijbe

Rib lokke nyenye, rib lokke nyenye ngo

Sipu nege hobu be, bucha geka nenpe

Rib nege nyenye, henge nemne riyu

Ngo rib nege nyenye, tappo nege nyim

Sipu nege hobu be, bucha nik buyu

Rib nege o nyame, nyem nemne rikyu

Sipu nege raghbe, rib nege onyame nyam le nemne kuname

Iss nege onyamem, nyange layo kula nyam le nemne rikyu

Rib lokke nyenye, iss nege onyamem nyange nemne kunamem

Sipu nege ragghe lo, iss nege geryu rilen ger kuyu

Yegji nege dilum hem, kod nege dilum go lumlen jigrik kuyu

Kod nege dilum hem, chit nege aan ner nege kunamem

Kod nege yippem, piilen kunameyu

Nisin-nege hojje, buglen kunameyu

Rib lokke nyenye, tappo lokke namnyi

Iss nege onyamem, sipu nege ragghe lo hublen jito kula

Sipu nege ragghe lo, sumne nege anne belen rikyu

Chen nege anne, bilen rikyu

Sipu nege ragghe lo, rib nege nyenye

Onyamem kunamem, nyange kunamem

Kod nege dilum mem, sipu nege ragghe lo rinjii nemne rikyu

Chuthu nege anne, neriik hemne sila

Kod nege yippem, pilen hemne gerku

Nisin nege gerku, buglin nemne riku

Hoj nemne riku, buglin nemne riku

Kol logge mor lo, kod guchin kama

Chuthu nege tuik ne, tood nege tood la dumum kunameyu

Summary: In the very beginning, there was nothing but vast emptiness all around. Amidst the nothingness, there lived a spirit named *Chuthu*. There was no earth, sky, water, fire, plants or any living creature. The spirit lived all alone with nothing much to do. Then there appeared a fish named *Rib*. She could not see the pitiable condition of the spirit, so she decided to go uphill to a place called *Sipu*. *Sipu* is believed to be the point of origin and migration of the *Nyishi* people residing in Kamle district of Arunachal Pradesh. The fish returned from *Sipu* and brought along the water with her. The water started flowing in the form of rivers. The rivers washed-up a ball of dirt and the spirit, *Chit Aan* (which loosely translates to ‘mother earth’) received it. *Chit Aan* took the ball of dirt and created it into earth. Then all sorts of plants and trees started sprouting on the surface of the earth. Living creatures were born.

Analysis: *Giida-Giith Niimii-Niisii Rilen Tanam Hokke Nyim Kabnam* is a creation story in the form of a song. It is about how earth, water, plants and other living creatures came into existence. This creation myth is one of the popular ones in the community. *Chuthu* is the father of Abotani (ancestor of the *Nyishi* people). He had three sons namely *Tuik*, *Ten* (Abotani) and *Diir*. *Tuik* was a spirit who lived in the spirit world. *Ten* and *Diir* were humans. However, *Ten* (Abotani) had supernatural powers as he had an eye on the back of his head. The fish, *Rib* which helped in bringing the water from *Sipu* and her husband *Tappo* are considered to be sacred spirits by the people. People who have committed incest or murders are forbidden from eating the fishes. People who perform rituals to appease the malevolent spirits or family members whose loved ones died of an unnatural death are also not allowed to take the fishes. The mention of *Rib* and *Tappo* could also be found in other popular myths, folktales and folksongs.

In the song, the word ‘*nyange*’ is used to describe the ‘action’ of ‘bringing the water’ from *Sipu* by the fish. The word is used in context of marriage. Hence, it implies that just like how people follow the bride in a marriage procession, similarly the water followed the fish. Also, instead of using layman’s terms like ‘*eeg pa*’ (to bring) to describe the action but a more poetic version ‘*nyange*’ is used to honour and express gratitude to ‘the water’ for coming down from *Sipu*. Without water, the whole process of creation wouldn’t have been possible.

There are many other creation stories which have been well recorded in the earlier anthropological works. There might be even different versions of the same story existing among the people. The song traces the origin of migration of the people from a place called *Sipu*. Some people believe that the place ‘*Sipu*’ lies somewhere in the Himalayas. The precise location of the place is still obscure. It is uncertain whether this place was real or imagined. The song appears to be rather short, incomplete and fragmented. It is said that such songs are usually long and take several hours to complete. The original version of the song might have been longer and more detailed. But it should also be taken into consideration that the song has been orally transmitted from one singer to another. Occasions and community gatherings where such songs could be performed are exceedingly rare and few. As a result, it fades from the memory of the performer. This type of song is usually sung on special occasions like in festivals, marriage ceremonies, and rituals or in other social gatherings.

2.1.2. Migration Song

Title: *Anyi-Biir Tupen Sinam Hokke Nyim Kabnam*

Genre: Migration song

Primary Folk Group: Men and women folk

Contextual information: The *Anyi-Biir Tupen Sinam Hokke Nyim Kabnam* was performed by Mrs. Yaniak Laa of Laa Village, Puchigecko circle under Kamle district. It was uploaded on Nyishi Nyindung Mwnjwng Rallung facebook page on 6th September 2020 as an entry in the Online Nyishi Folklore Competition on “Nyim Kabnam” organised by Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Anyi-Biir Tupen Sinam Hokke Nyim Kabnam

Mor nege ken lege, sipu nege rigu lo

Nya nege pobum be, kurum boge kol ge

Id nemne kelo, aach nenyi kerch nyi

Anyi bunyi kera nyi, sojo nemne deklo

Kerch nemne kera ne, dech nego pema go

Dame nego pema go, gung boge ningma

Mag bogo rongmai, ruku nemne sitla

Anyi nemne karchi, aach bunyi kera nyi

Dumpu nege puiye, siin chama nikbai

Yamyom nege puiye, liki ima donggo

Si bolke mirke, leke bettem telai

Moro bogo mirke, leke bettem tenamem

Achi nemne kera ne, anyi nemne kerch ne

Muj nogo yoma go, mopo nogo yoma go

Yook sika motkei, leke bettem birke

Aach nemne kera ne, muj boge soyorgo

Yoyor nemne jitlai, mopo bogo sonyorgo

Anyi nemne bunye, mujh nego motor go

Ber nege jitla, lekke tanem biyike

Si boge bettem, moro boge bettem tamlen neme

Tili nogo nima go, gimla nogo nima go

Nik nemne sitke, hemla mentela

Aach nege kera gei, tili bogo betrgo

Gimla bogo betrgo, ber nemne nemyu

Anyi nemne bunyi ge, tili nego soyorgo

Gimli bogo soyorgo, yurji nemne telai

Sii bona dukme, moro bonai dukme

Kerch nunyi kera nyi, anne nege giida hem

Mok nogo nama go, napen sit kuke

Iss nogo nama go, napen sito hem telai

Kerch nemne menname, anyi ngokke ma be

Kerch ngokke ma bei, achi ngokke kera gei

Gungo nege pele lo, iyya yeka hem telai

Kerch boge dimum me, mumrap tatkula

Liipu nege liin ne, der nemne tela

Liimam nege liin ne, dero min tatla

Yuduk moge miile, yaag moge miile

Dero ming tatlai, der nemne tola

Kerch bunyi kera nyi, tiigii sike sila

Chepen sike sillem, sii bokke dodume

Moro bokke dudume, dudum nemne telai

Anyi nemne kerchi no, bunyi lokke nara hem

Chiinii kunam no le, buggii nege mogh lo

Gungii nege mog loi, bunyi boge ogume

Gumya nemne nikke, nara nege occho

Choya nemne nika, sii boge gumin he

Tod nemne nenlai, moro boge gumin he tod nemne kuna mem

Anyi nemne kerch ne, kerch bode mendo

Ngo gungu duku demai, gungii nege pele lo

Anyi ngo na kerch ngo, gumra kud hempa

Achi boge kera ge, giida nege dulu

Loot tumum duklo, giit nege dele

Let nemne tumum loi, no bunyi nemne hem name

Bunyi nege nara hem, chine kunam sille

Gunggii nege pele lo, bunyi boge humum he mumya hemne yikke

Bunyi bole ngomne, humum nemne kubolo

Mumlen nemne kubolo, anyi ngom ne bunyi ngom

Yug bog lidee, dika kunpe lame

Yug boge sodok he, liikka lepe hemtela

Anyi lokke bunyi ngo, bunyi ngokke arre

Lakch gobre arre, laglab gobre arre

Bunyi ngokke mato, diilen kubolo

Sii bo ne mendoi, bunyi bo ne ogum hem

Bunyi boge yekkem, tado nole kuji no

Haail node koda no, bunyi boge yekkem

Kiika nemne tekai, humum nemne tola

Tado ge de kuji, bunyi boge yikkem

Kiith nemne taname, nara boge yikkem

Kiith nemne tanname, suthu nemne leglo

Hommen hemne digbo, sipo nege legloi

So nege deppo, kiitrem hemtela

Hoon nege rekpem, huma nege rekpe be

Piin nege sob hem, piima boge sob be

Kitre ba hemtela, tado bone kuji ne

Tago boge lepa, puthu nemne tellai

Sii bo ge miirke, moro boge miirke

Riigrep kuna mem, nikum nege aa hem

Urum lokke betla, beya dape nemlo

Sukum nemne aam ne, aar boge aa be beya dape namlo

Cha boge sijari, nyitte boge jado

Son boge jado, jaka nemne silaju

Jaka nemne motkai, hoon boge hummaam

Tado boge kugi ne, tago lepa papla e

Loob nege pol le, piine nogo sob go

Lakch nemne pele, piinii nege sob go

Dumtu nege dumyam, kiin bogo menkem

Sibin bogo menkem, molen hemne lai la

Tiimii lokke nomne, home boge yikkem

Loob piinyi kunyi no, ho nege lopam

Dob puku bolo, anne nege tolo

Nya nege duir hem, tiila hemne nela

Loma nege duir hem, tiila hemne nela

Bunyi lokke gurdii lo, tach nege suna hem

Dumtu gudin nabe, tado nege sudum hem dumpum nemne tabe

Sii bo ge miirke, riglen nemne telai

Moro boge miirke, riglen kunmem leka

Summary: Once there lived two siblings in a place called *Sipu*. *Kerch* was the eldest brother and *Kera* was his sister. In the course of time, they decided to part their ways in different directions in search of better settlements. But before the great departure from *Sipu*, they met *Aath Sii* and *Apa Moro*. *Aath Sii* and his spirit consort *Apa Moro* are regarded as the owners or guardians of the soil. In case of any disputes between the spirits and the living creatures, they also act as mediators. Usually, their names are taken together as *Sii-Moro* and the terms ‘*aath*’ and ‘*apa*’ translates to father and mother.

Sii-Moro divided the earth between the two siblings in equal parts. *Kerch* was given the mountains covered with dense forest where the wild animals were in abundance for hunting. *Kera* received the fertile valleys suitable for farming and rearing animals. *Kerch* was also presented with manly tools such as *dech-da*, *edh*, *gungge-maag*, *sigum-koma* etc to survive in the wilderness. In the past, these tools were traditionally used by the people to make weapons, snares and traps to kill animals. After receiving the gifts from *Sii-Moro*,

Kerch immediately set out on a hunt. However, he failed in his hunting expedition. Confused and disheartened, *Kerch* went to seek help from *Sii-Moro* on the matter. *Sii-Moro* advised him to find a shaman and asked his sister *Kera* to prepare meat and wine for offering. Then *Sii-Moro* asked the siblings to conduct a ritual giving offerings to the spirits of the forest. This appeased the spirits and *Kerch* succeeds in his hunting expedition. After the successful hunt, *Kerch* decided to marry off his sister *Kera*. On the day, the bride was proceeding to her husband's village, the ground beneath her started shaking. Stones were rocking and trees were swaying from side to side and fell behind her as she went. This frightened the bride and her family members. They saw it as omens of bad luck. The bride saddened over the occurrence of the unusual events asked her brother what they should do now. *Kerch* and her sister decided to see *Sii-Moro* once again.

After hearing the incident, *Sii-Moro* concluded that the land cannot be passed on to *Kera*. Because the land and the things that were on its surface such as rivers, trees, plants, stones etc were also following the bride to her new place. This could not be allowed as it will create misbalance in nature. *Kera* was asked to leave behind her land as she will have her husband's share of land to live on. She agreed to it because she saw that her brother's share of land was also getting swift away along with her. However, she asked *Sii-Moro* and her brother *Kerch* what they will give her in return or how much bride price will they pay for her marriage? The brother then invited *Tado* and *Haail* to find out how much bride price will be required in the marriage ceremony. *Tado* and *Haail* can be referred to as the middle mans who negotiates and settles demands between the two parties in a marriage. But *Tado* and *Haail* mishandled the situation and it made both the bride's and groom's side furious. As a punishment, they were forced to insert their foot in between wooden logs and sealed the sides with wooden pegs. Since the wooden logs were heavy, they could not move. *Sii-Moro* then said that in order to find out how much bride price should be paid, *Nikum* (bride) and *Sukum*

(mithun) should compete in a swimming race in *cha-sijari* (river). *Sukum* (mithun) represented the groom's side. The side winning the race would receive the bride price from the losing side. *Nikum* (bride) won the race. Hence, the bride's side received mithuns (*Bos frontalis*) and other valuable items from the groom's side. After the problem was settled, *Sii-Moro* asked the bride to do what was expected of her, that is, to leave her home and go to her husband's house. The bride complied with *Sii-Moro*'s words without any argument.

Analysis: The song narrates the story of migration of the ancestors of Nyishi people from *Sipu*. The story is about how they descended from *Sipu* in search of fertile valleys and good hunting grounds. In the creation story, it has been mentioned that *Rib Nyenye*, a spirit in the form of a fish went to *Sipu* and brought water. Then water started flowing from *Sipu* in the form of rivers. The people believe that their ancestors followed the path along the river downstream. They scattered and settled across different areas in Kamle district. The song also shows how the gender roles were set for man and woman in the society since time immemorial. Men were expected to do manly works hence were given tools for hunting. The women were expected to do household chores and eventually get married and move into her husband's place. It also throws light on certain important social norms such as the system of paying bride price in marriage and why daughters cannot inherit ancestral property. The song also expresses the importance of animals especially mithun and material culture in the community. Such songs help to impart education to the common people especially the younger generation about the customs, traditions and norms of the society. The song is sung on special occasions such as in rituals, marriage ceremony and other social gatherings.

2.1.3. Marriage Song

Title: *Nyijir Aa Hem Albe Siihim-Giihim Debe Nyim Kabnam*

Genre: Marriage song

Primary Folk Group: Men or Women

Contextual Information: The song *Nyijir Aa Hem Albe Siihim-Giihim Debe Nyim Kabnam* was performed by Mr. Taba Murtem of Kherbari village under Kamle district. It was uploaded on Nyishi Nyindung Mwnjwng Rallung facebook page on 13th September 2020 as an entry in the Online Nyishi Folklore Competition on “Nyim Kabnam” organised by Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh.

The song is in the form of a dialogue between the bride and her brothers. In the first part of the song, the bride expresses her grief of being born as a girl. She shares her bittersweet emotions on parting ways with her family. In the second part, the bride asks her brothers to come to her rescue as she does not want to get married. The brothers then try to convince her to accept her fate and advice her on how to live a good life.

Nyijir Aa Hem Albe Siihim-Giihim Debe Nyim Kabnam

Siro nege aal so, eji nege aan ge

Pider nege dunyi be, picha nemne reso

Sinyi nege iinyi so, diirii nege diigge

Goot nege gamre ge, piicha nemne reso

Ngok nege aan de, ngok nege aab de

Diirii nege diir lo, sichin nege hoom re

Joop nege bajbe, sichin nege hoomrii nem

Hiimii nege naag de, nago nege simum la

So nege heya ne, heya nege mama

Moog nege bajbe, so nege heyanem

Nakpak nege simum la, doomum nemne tem lo

Siinyi nege iinyi so

Ngok nege aab ge ngok nege aan ge

Sii nege tool si, moro nege baalsi

Tubi nemne kaat lo, tech nege doomtiik he

Riigliik mumdo naglo, tuko nemne katlo

Yaang nege paa le, bejak mumdo naag lo

Yog nege hukume, kumde nege nagre

Mimum nemne tagle, eyi lokke ngom ne

Tiimii lokke ngomne, diirii lokke nyinbo

Nyin nege toop he, ding nemne koklo

Toop nege dimma, ding mumdo kuyu hemum nemne koklo

Ngok aan tii ge, tiima nemne kuklo

Tiir namne nam dii, doma nemne kook lo diirnam dii

Diirii lokke ralobo, diirii nege touph pe ding gum tado kula ka

Diik nege tala ne, mugum tado kula ka

Ebe lokke lii le, biir lokke tii le

Anyi lokke tii le, sota nege sulu

Kai nege yaa ne, rigo nemne di lo

Rik kudi ma re, tigo kudi ma re

Sobo nege di lo, sob kudi ma re dirgo kudi ma re

Tiimii lokke ngom ne, diirii lokke ralobo

Bunyi nege nyigum, gumum gereku lo hela bettem goke

Ngok ebe lo tii lo, yakam bela lo

Lood nege ngom ne, lood nege siirii go

Serde nege golak go, pagla nemne kuma re hemlam imum rikke

Ngok ebe lo ngona, aab nege dol ge

Bunyi nege hemnam hem, bunyi nege soro

Ogjog na me, nara nege hemnam hem

Nara nege mokchu, chin liikna me

Bunyi nege hemnam he

Aan sito re la, aa sito re la

Ebe sito re la, biir sito re la

Chiinii nege chiitak ge, kape nege na me

Doone nege dotak ge, kape nege na me

Aak nege miilii ne, hem be nemne rikne

Tep nege aan ne, lilin be benikne

Tapop nege aan ne, daglen be benikne

Dumde nege aan ne, poglen be benikne

Hada nege aa ye, deelen be benikne

Eyi lokke tiimii no, aabo nege dol ge

Bunyi nege boonk lo, gungka make gula re

Kurum nege kol lo, eji nege bunyi

Eji lokke bunyi ne, heyi lokke bunyi ne

Anyi sito re la, biirme sito re la

Bunyi nege humum he, mumpen sibe nambo la

Nara nege humum he, mumpen sibe nambo la

Eyi lokke tiimii no, eji nege piik lo

Mukpe nege piig la, piima alo gebo ka

Heyi nege beek lo, sipik nege beeg la bima nemne bedenke

Eyi lokke tiimii lo, piider nege dunyi be piya alo neka

Chadar nege pol be, sider nege iss be biya alo neka

Aab nege dol hem, nyirjo nege sutu nyirji nege nyirke lo

Too nege sip be, poog nemne maab ka

Lanng nege daggh lo, lanng nege dorben be mengge maab ka

Eyi lokke tiimii no, lood nege piilo be hodo nemne ged la

Serdii nemne piilo be, hodo nemne ged la

Nokke ebe lokke tiige, biir lokke tiige

Anyi lokke tiige, makte lokke tiige

Tuter nege liin be, bembe sil be

Siya nemne neka, sire nege sit be

Sil nemne neka, leth nemne yeka

Jichir lokke tubii biite gedla, siigbii you yuliik kotka

Jaai tubii biith gedla, gaer you yuliik koi ka

Dir nege dith be, muid nege piit be

Seer sitte, iss nege hoot be siig nege neka

Temin nege di be, taam nege di be siya nemne neka

Jerii nege herii he, poob nege liin be sit nemne neka

Hoodii nege kai ne, dombe nege oyu ye

Yood nemne kok be, raglo nege kai be

Bep nege oyu he, yood nemne kok be

Let nege liinyik he, kai nemne tela

Rika nege jorne, kada nege jorne

Jorne nemne kok be, let nege liiru kai nemne tela

Koot nege jorne, kola nege jorne

Jorge nege kok be, sii nemne kula ka

Eyi nokke tiimii no, kokom lokke aa be

Sugyu nemne neka, toop hemne neka

Paat nege aa be, dilo hemne neka piipii hemne neka

Tong nege aa be, merii hemne neka chooppii hemne neka

Toglu nege aa be, haag be hemne neka pilen hemne neka

Aab nege dol ge, tughe nege liin be

Aath nege aab ge, liit nege boog be

Dire nege dite be, muid nege gog be

Piitte nege naag be, siirii nege sitte

Iss nege naag be, hoot nege naag be

Jeri nokke heri be, poob nege liin be sii nemne kula ka

Summary: On this beautiful day of the year, when the sun is out and *Goote-Gamre*² and *Diirii-diik*³ have arrived. Where did all these people come from? Why have they gathered

²They are migratory birds making seasonal visits during winter.

³ Name of birds.

here in my house today? Alas! I am being married off. They have come to discuss about my *nyida*⁴. I have been living comfortably under my parent's love and care without a worry in the world. Just like how a bamboo's skin is scrapped off to make it smooth, similarly my parents have protected me from any obstacles or danger coming my way. These people (groom's side) have come to take me to my in-laws's house. I am devastated and heartbroken beyond words. I do not know if my parents have promised my hand in marriage in return for food and drink during a crisis. The feelings of the soon bride-to-be peek at this point in the song and she desperately asks her brothers and sisters to help her escape her fate. Oh, my brothers and sisters! Where are you? This man (the groom) adorned with *bopa*⁵ (vide photograph no. 11) is here to take me with him as his wife. Oh, my brothers and sisters! You are wealthy with plentiful of *maaj*⁶, *taal*⁷ (vide photograph no. 10), *tessi*⁸ (vide photograph no. 12) and Mithuns. Would you compensate the groom's side by paying them twice the number of valuable gifts, mithuns, and pigs and wine they have given to set me free from this marriage? Or you would rather just sit back and allow this marriage to happen?

The brothers then reply to her saying that, "this marriage has already been fixed and we cannot do anything about it now". They say that "you have been born as a girl and as per our age-old custom; time has come for you to get married and go to your husband's place". It is the rightful thing for you to do. Every girl goes through this period in her life when she must get married and join her husband's family leaving her maternal home. Marriage is a part of life. It is normal to feel anxious about getting married. The bride's brothers' further gives advice on her new role as a wife and daughter-in-law. They tell her "Dear sister, you should never let anything cloud your opinions. You should have a clear conscience. Your heart

⁴ Traditional marriage ceremony.

⁵ Traditional headgear.

⁶ Brass bell.

⁷ Large brass plate.

⁸ Traditional beads.

should be as pure and transparent as a clear stream flowing in the forest. You should be like the moon shining brightly on a clear night sky. You should not carry any ill thoughts in your mind". They also compare her to the radiant sun. Whatever you choose to do, good or bad will eventually affect us too. If you act in a bad manner, you will become a laughing stock in front of others. If you behave disrespectfully with others, they will talk ill of you. Do not bring shame to our family by indulging in these activities. Do not indulge in indiscreet talks. You must be wise. You must be big hearted. We hope you turn out to be wealthy in your life. The brothers compare her to a rock and river saying that like a big stream or a stone, if you thrive and prosper, you will be able to look after everyone under you. Like *siirek siin* (peepal tree), may you grow and thrive. How the fruit and fragrance of the *siichiir* (phoebe cooperiana fruit) tree attracts hornbills, similarly, may you attract wealth and prosperity. May your house be filled with joy and laughter. May you become great like the mountains and flow like the mighty rivers. May you become the wisest and the wealthiest woman in your village. May you leave traces of your humility and goodwill wherever you go. Like how a *dombe* (deer) takes shelter on a mountain cliff, may your house become like that cliff where people could come and take shelter in times of need. Like how a *bep* (monkey) gather on a big tree to rest as the night falls, may your house become like that tree where people could come and take shelter. Like how *rika* and *kada* (names of fishes) swim freely under a large stone in the river without the fear of predators, may you have abundance of wealth and prosperity to become like that large stone to provide shelter to those who fear *ui-nyimak* (war) from other villages. May you become like the mountains where *Koot* and *kola* (rare species of squirrel) are found. May you venture into far distant lands like the *kokom* (eagle). Like how a *paat* (tiger) makes a successful journey across a difficult terrain, may you succeed in your future endeavours too. Like the birds *tong-toglu* makes loud hooting sounds which

gives indication of its presence, similarly, may you become an eloquent speaker and your voice reaches far and wide.

Analysis: The Nyishis have their traditional marriage system known as '*Nyida*'. There are three or four types of *Nyida* depending upon how much mithun is offered by the groom's side and how much *tessi-derekh*⁹ will be paid in return by the bride's family. The *Daat Nyida* is the biggest one where the highest number of traditional items and jewelleries and mithuns are exchanged. It is performed in a very grand manner. However, not everyone can perform or afford to perform '*Nyida*' especially *Daat Nyida* as it takes a lot of wealth, man power and family resources. Also, it is a very lengthy and complex process. In order to perform *Nyida*, a shaman will be called and asked to perform a ritual called '*Roh Kongnam*'. He will try to find out what type of *Nyida* would be favourable for the boy and girl or if *Nyida* should be performed at all. In some cases, people are advised not to do *Nyida* as it will bring them bad luck or even loss of life. Such people would perform a simple ritual called '*pennam*' for social recognition. Like most communities, marriage is one of the most important occasions in the Nyishi community. Marriages were arranged mostly between family friends or distant relatives. Marriage in a Nyishi society is a function where folksongs are in abound. The family of the bride and groom would especially invite or hire experts in folksongs. Parents, family members or other people from the community who have expertise in folksongs would also voluntarily come and take part. The bride also sings songs to express her emotions. *Nyim Kabnam* is the most common type of folksong sung during *Nyida* (traditional marriage ceremony). The bride's side perform *Nyim Kabnam* during the wedding preparation. It is also performed as a 'Bidaai song' or a wedding send off song by the family members when the bride is leaving the house. The groom's side also sing songs to receive and welcome the bride

⁹ Traditional items and jewelleries which are highly valued.

called ‘*Nyim Kibrik*’. In the songs, they would express the importance of marriage and how it is an age-old tradition which needs to be followed. Some songs are verbal instructions or pre-marital advice given to the bride in the form of a song. In the days of yore, marriage functions were a great opportunity to learn the folksongs as all the experts would gather in one place.

2.1.4. Harvest Song

Title: *Chiirm-Molo Jhulum Pumnam*

Genre: Harvest song

Primary Folk Group: Men and women folk

Contextual information: The *Chiirm-Molo Jhulum Pumnam* was performed by Mrs. Kabak Yanio of Dukhum village under Kamle district. It was uploaded on Nyishi Nyindung Mwnjwng Rallung facebook page on 14th September 2020 as an entry in the Online Nyishi Folklore Competition on “*Nyim Kabnam*” organised by Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Rice was one of the most valuable and important commodities. There are several varieties of rice, and we find their mention in the song. The Nyishi people were largely dependent on it for various purposes. One of the most important things is that it was used to make alcohol. Alcohol is a very important element in religious rituals and functions. One cannot host a feast or perform a religious ceremony or practices such as *nyin-asa*. *Nyin-asa* is a practise of visiting a close friends or relatives’s house or vice-versa with gifts of meat and wine and in return receiving invaluable traditional items such as *tessi* (beads), *maaj* (brass bells), *taal* (brass plates) etc. In order to perform *Nyida*, many traditional ornaments and jewelleryes were required. So, if there was a shortage of traditional items, people would

perform *nyin-asa* and receive the invaluable items and then conduct '*nyida*'. Hence, rice was not just a food source but important social functions such as marriage was dependent on it. Rice was considered so precious and dear that words such as "*yiiriinem*" or "*ranem*" which loosely translates to as "the one who is unforgettable" has been used to address the rice. In other words, these words are used when someone feels extremely grateful and indebted to a person. The people express their respect and gratitude towards the rice crop with these words. In the song, Rice crops are personified and given equal respect and importance as to that of a human. There were a lot of wishes and aspirations associated with it which could finally be fulfilled with the harvesting of the rice crops. People had "tender associations" with it and rice and harvesting of rice were "fits of poetry" (Elwin 190) for the people.

For better understanding, the song can be divided into four parts. In the first part, singer introduces herself as the *rinte bo aan* where *rinte bo* means 'lady of the house who oversees granary' and *aan* means 'mother'. The birds' *diirii* and *diik* arrive, thus, heralding the onset of harvesting season. *Rinte bo aan* prepares her granary for rice crops in a way someone would prepare for welcoming a loved one. In the second part, the singer addresses the crops as if addressing to a person. She compares the rice crop to a newlywed bride. The act of bringing rice inside the granary invokes a similar emotion of joy and excitement of welcoming a bride. The emotion can be felt when *rinte bo aan* (lady of the house) prepares and fixes any damaged part of the granary to store the rice. In the Nyishi society, a bride brings jewellery and other valuable things from her maternal home, similarly comparing the bride to a rice crop; the singer asks what have they brought in their respective arms? She asks various questions to the crops. In the third part, the singer sings in praise of the crops. She expresses her gratitude and respect. She sings in praise of the crops. In the last part, she welcomes the rice crops with joy and excitement.

Chiirm-Molo Jhulum Pumnam

Silo boho alle so, rinte bo ho aan go

Chirme bo ho jhulume he pummen bo tad ne

Molo boho jhulum go ho, pummen boho tad ne

Diirii bo ho aan de piyub bo ho tulka, diik bo aab de piyub bo ho tukla

Diirii bo ho lipin na pincha bo kuname, diik ho lipin na pincha bo ho kuname

Rinte bo ho aan ngo, aath bo ho sii ge gorte bo ho gorbe so

Apa bo ho moro ge, gorte bo ho gorbe so

Chiirme bo ho hepe go, molo bo ho hepe go piiliik kuname

Deji he hepe go, kobii ne he hepe go piliik he kuna me

Poru bo ho hepe go, taba ne he hepe go piiliik kuna me

Silo bo ho alle so chirmii bo ho tujur he, jirlen dukubo

Molo bo ho tujur he, jurlen he dukubo

Deji bo ho tujur he, kobii he tujur he jurlen ne he dukubo

Poru bo ho tujur he, taba ne he tujur he jurlen ne he dukubo

Rintee bo ho aan ngo, chiirmi bo ho yiiriinem

Molo gera nem, duir bo ho Laila timin bo ho laila

Deji bo ho yiiriinem, kobii bo ho ranem

Poru bo ho yiiriinem, taba bo ho ranem, duir bo ho laila timin bo ho laila

Rinte bo ho aan ngokke, surii bo ho tiidii lo parge bo ho tiidii lo,

Chiirme bo ho aanyam me, nyimlik boho rikbo

Molo boho aanyam me, nyimlik boho rikbo

Chiirme bo ho aanyam me, molo boho aanyam me

Nyimlik ne kikso, ngok bo ho aanyam me nyong bung bo kuname

Yog bo ho aanyam me, nyong bung puklo

Lakche ne pele lo, pui bo ho solo ne

Nyong gum pobo re, dumpum chog lo

Lech-lakche ne, nyong gum pobo re

Aab bo ho dol ge, nutu bo ho pulu ge poker bo ho kuname

Keme bo ho chuchak he, chakkar bo ho kuna mem

Hip bo ho tood nem, naab bo ho pela nem

Rele bo ho pipnem, liig bo ho tera nem

Nok bo ho aanyam ma, nyong bung ne pobo re

Laglab bo ho pele lo, eji bo yunamem siirii bo ho yunamem

Ngok bo ho aanya ma, nyung bung ne pobo re

Sobo bo ho yuna mem, rikbo ho yunamem

Dene boho chochnem, pang ne bo ho chochnem

Nok bo ho aanya ma, nyung bung ne pobo re

Tumpe bo ho hoem ne, nyung buk pobo re

Nok bo ho aanya ma, nyung ne he kubo lo

Rinte bo ho aan ngo, aan bo ho ngokke, surii tiidii so parge bo ho tiidii so

Chiirme bo ho jhuluma pumliik ne rikne, molo bo ho jhuluma, pumliik ne rikne

Deji bo ho jhuluma kobii bo ho jhuluma, puru bo ho jhuluma taba bo ho jhuluma

Pumliik he rikne, la bo rikne kiiliik he rikne

Chiirme boho yiirii no, chiirme bo ho jog lo jookar mabka

Molo bo ho rano, molo boho jook lo jookar mabka

Deji bo ho yiirii no, kobii bo ho rano

Puru bo ho yiirii no taba bo ho rano, iimsik juklo jookar mabka

Aab bo dol ge chiirme bo ho yuname, molo ne he yunamem

Aan bo ho ngokke, surii tiidii so parge bo ho tiidii so

Chiirme bo ho ajin be, chiirme bo ho jhuluma pumluk giya to

Molo bo ho ajin be, molo bo jhuluma pumliik giya to

Chiirme bo ho yij no molo bo ho yaal no, yeej bo ho joog lo jookar he rama be

Yaal bo ho ngok lo, moker he rama be

Aan bo ho ngokke, rinte bo ho aan ge

Surii bo tiidii so, parge bo ho tiidii so

Orum bo ho rumsi be, summen bo nyala ka

Aar bo ho rusi be, romen bo ho nyala ka

Yerii bo ho pegange geriik he gerku, pegange geriik he ger ku

Summary: On this day, I, *rinte bo aan*, am going to perform the *chiirme*¹⁰-*molo*¹¹*jhulum*¹². The birds' *diirii* and *diik* have come to wake us up from our slumber. Time has come to reap our harvest. On *aath Si and apa Moro*¹³'s soil, I had planted the rice seeds of *chiirme*, *molo*, *deji*, *hepii*, *poru* and *taba*¹⁴. Today the seeds that I had planted have grown and are ready to be harvested. I, *rinte bo aan*, have harvested the precious and cherished *chiirme*, *molo*, *deji*, *hepii*, *poru* and *taba*. I have fixed all the cracked and broken bamboo walls and floors of my *nusu* (granary). My *nusu* (granary) is ready to store all the harvest. I have also prepared *parge tiidii* (mortar and pestle) for pounding the rice crops. I am going to bring the precious and cherished *chiirme*, *molo*, *deji*, *hepii*, *poru* and *taba* to my *nusu* (granary).

The singer asks the crops- O precious crops, what have you brought on your left arm? Have you brought the head and jaw of *pui-solo* (deer's and boars)? Have you brought the *hip-tood* (wild boar's tusks)? Have you brought the meat of *naab-pela* (white-chested bear)? Have you brought *rele-peep* (deer's antlers)? After you come, will I be able to hunt down the wild animals that no one could? The singer asks again - O precious crops, what have you brought on your right arm? Have you brought *Aab Dol's*¹⁵ priceless *aji* and *siirii* (traditional

¹¹A type of crop which is sown along with the rice crop.

¹²Dance where people hold hands swinging their arms in a forward and backward motion and move in a circle.

¹³Si and Moro are considered as the guardians of the earth.

¹⁴Except *molo*, all are names of different varieties of rice.

¹⁵'*Aab*' means father and '*Dol*' is name of one of the ancestors. But it is used in different contexts. For instance, here, it is used to refer to traditional items such as beads, swords etc which are handed down from generations. Thus these items are considered rare and very precious.

beads and brass plates)? Have you brought the *soob* (mithuns) and *rik* (tibetian brass bells) to pay the brideprice? Will I be blessed with *tumpe* (male child) and *hoem* (female child)?

The singer addresses the crops saying- “I, *rinte bo aan*, have arranged *parge* and *tiidii* (mortar and pestle) for pounding. O precious crops, I am bringing you all inside my *nusu* (granary)”. I have prepared my *nusu* to accommodate you all. O precious crops, stay put to where you are. Do not get spilled out. Do not mix with *iimsik* (rice hulls) and get blown away. O precious crops do not let your spirit travel to other places where *nusu* (granaries) and *parge* and *tiidii* (traditional mortar and pestle) are better. O crops befriend *Aab Dol's*¹⁶ other precious *chiirme* and *molo* (names of rice crops) and bring them along with you. O crops do not get blown away by the wind. Night and day, stay put to where you are. I am bringing the precious *chiirme*, *molo*, *deji*, *hepii*, *poru* and *taba* inside my *nusu* (granary) in my *eghle* (traditional bamboo basket for carrying rice).

Analysis: Harvesting season was one of the important times of the year. It was the time when people could finally enjoy their fruits of intense hard work and labour in the field. It also was seen as another occasion for community gathering and merry making. Rice was and still is one of the main food sources. Being able to eat rice was a luxury given how tough the farming system was in the old days. A well-stocked granary was seen as signs of being a wealthy person. It also meant that *nyin-asa* could be performed. The people had turned this otherwise tedious task of cutting, stacking, threshing, cleaning and storing rice crops into a joyous occasion. It also gives an opportunity to the people to come together as a community and help out each other. This song is a celebration of good harvests and the spirit of togetherness. The importance and significance of rice crop is clearly reflected in the song.

¹⁶ Here it is used as noun to refer to something or someone who is

2.1.5. Bridge Construction Song

Title: *Som Homnam Bege Panam*

Genre: Bridge Construction Song

Primary Folk Group: Men and Women

Contextual Information: The *Som Homnam Bege Panam* was recorded on 11th February from Mrs. Kina Yisi at the residence of Mr. KomriMurtem, Town Itanagar, District Papum Pare, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Som Homnam Bege Panam

Kurum lokke kol lo, kol lokke mor lo

Silap nege leg lo, eyi nege taa de

Silap nege leg lo, ere nege taa de

Rul nege riknyi, rul nege kuname

Eyi la ere nyi yakkam motteh renne dii, mimum alo telanya

Silap nege leg lo eyi chidum he doiba, sirap nege leg lo ere chidum he doiba

Ere chidum ne eyi kable do, eyi chidum ne ere kable do

Eyi la ere nyi hopuk-piikken tela, aah-takken tela

Aan deth ne aan kerth ne

Eji litte siir litte teka neme, tail jema

Gidde liitte giyu liitte teka neme, tail jema

Eyi la ere nyi

Te torum nege guri ne, te tachak nege golak ge guri puktu temne kerii gedla

Tachak nege golak ge, golak nege poktu tem kerii alo gedla

Guri paag rep saglo, golak paagrep saglo humum riknyi

Eyi la ere nyi, hopuk-piikken rikbo aah-takken rikbo merap kuname

Ere nege bo ne, yog nege hura be

Yakka nege kara be, mim-mum alo tob nyi

Aath nege peyi ne, kelle nege dur hem ne

Sarde nege dur hemne, tiilen alo raad be tiilen alo lai la

Silap nege leg lo, sosan riknyi

Eyi la ere nyi, seko-sepek riknyi seko lo lai la

Giddi-giyu liirii dapo giilem ne, berep tukla

Ere alo naam lo, cha alo kuname

Hudu nege rii lo, tokh nege piiniik he niikcha nege riknyi

Nyode nege rii lo, kamte nege piiniik he niikcha nege riknyi

Aath nege pere de, aath lokke peyi ne

Chudum duliik riknyi, bege duliik riknyi

Cheek-gingki duliik he, liig rep riknyi

Aab nege dol ge, murtu pittenem

Kem taktenem, duliik riigrop riknyi

Aab nege dol ge, tago nege yuna mem taaj nege yunam ne

Duliik riigrop riknyi

Aab nege dol ge, en nege yunam ne gara nege yunam ne

Seep nege yunam ne, giilii nege yunam ne duliik aloriknyi

Eyi la ere nyi, chidum dol rikbo lopeh nege sirku

Choog nege dol le, bege nege dol le loppeh nege sirku

Summary: The speaker says that in the beginning of time, *eyi* (*peyi*) and *ere* (*pere*) clans migrated from *Sipu*. They settled on the opposite banks of the river *derth-kerth* (Kamle River). According to the song, they greatly admired each other and wanted to establish matrimonial relationships. However, the two clans were in a dilemma on how to cross the Kamle River. They went down to the river in order to cross it but the river was extremely deep with strong current. Therefore, they could not swim across it. They quickly thought of other methods to cross the river. First, they tried to put *aji* and *siir* (traditional jewellerys such as brass bells and plates) from both the sides into the river. They thought it would accumulate in the river and create a path to make it easy to cross. But this did not work out. Then, they cut down large *giide* and *giyu* trees and slid it down into the river but did not succeed this time too. After several unsuccessful attempts to build a path, they were disheartened. Meanwhile, they saw a *torum-tachak* (spider) building its web on a branch of a

tree. They looked it for a while and the idea suddenly struck their mind that they could build a similar structure. They decided to build a bridge over the river. They give it a lot of thought and decided to be united in thought and purpose. The two clans divide the works among them. *Pere* clan were given the work to prepare *yog* and *yakka* (food and wine) for everyone. *Peyi* clan were asked to collect raw materials such as *kelle* and *sarde* (types of ropes from trees) to use in building the bridge. After collecting the required materials, they erected wooden posts on either sides of the river. Then, they lay the main cable and started building the bridge. Thus, the bridge construction was successful and the two clans finally met each other. *Nyidas* (traditional marriages) were performed between the two clans and matrimonial relationships were established.

Analysis: *Som Homnam Bege Panam* is a song sung during bridge construction where *som* refers to bamboo Expansion Bridge, *homnam* means ‘to bind’, and *bege panam* is like a rhapsody. The song depicts how a spider spinning its web on a tree branch inspired the idea of constructing a bamboo bridge over the river. *Peyi* and *pere* are the two major Nyishi clans residing in Kamle district. The song tells the history of how these clans migrated from *Sipu* and settled in their present location i.e., areas surrounding the Kamle river. It also tells the history of how these two clans had established matrimonial relationships since time immemorial and is socially closer to each other compared to other clans. The song was sung to impart knowledge about the origin, migration and history of the community to the young people.

2.1.6. House Construction Song

Title: *Nam Monam Bege Panam*

Genre: House Construction Song

Primary Folk Group: Men and Women

Contextual Information: The *Nam Monam Bege Panam* was recorded on 11th February from Mrs. Kina Yisi at the residence of Mr. Komri Murtem, Town Itanagar, District Papum Pare, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Nam Monam Bege Panam

Loob nege pol lo, karlen alo rikkem ne

Piira nege pol lo, karlen alo rikkem ne

Aab teni aah nge, soot morop rikbo namte morop rikbo

As the *loob-piira pol* (onset of winter season) approaches, *Aab Ten's* (ancestor) children begin building their houses.

Goot tad de riknyi, rui alo riknyi

Rui alo kuname, loob nege pol lo piira nege pol lo

Soot te morop kuname, namte morop kuname

As the *loob-piira pol* (onset of winter season) approaches, the *Goot* (migratory bird) arrives and people begin building their houses.

Aath nege gootge, hada nemne hemne

Goot nege habram be, aath nege gootge

Piilo hemne, namlo alo giil be

Piilo allo hemne, goot namte riku ramen nalo riku

Ten alo aah de, soot nege modbe namte nege modbe

Goot's (migratory bird) *habram* (flanks or side of the bird) would be used to build the wall.
Goot's (migratory bird) *piilo allo* (spinal cord) would be used to build *giil* (the pillars) of the house.

Nyil nege mejo merep riku, nyim nege mejo merep riku

Nyil nege mejo merep lai la, nyim nege mejo merep lai la

Nyil and *nyim* (Man and woman) decided to build a new house as the old one is no longer suitable to live.

Giit-poth giida-yarth koklo, dugbii siit hem hagbe robom nem porla yikla

They venture into the forest where there is abundance of raw materials to build the house.

Deshi tungum manem paa rinsi manem, dur nego tila yikla

Kaid tungum sarde rinsi manem, dur nego tila yikla

They gather the finest quality of bamboo, timber and ropes.

Silo nege alo so, aath sii ge himb be giil he biichi be

Apa moro ge dechi giil hem biichi bi, bemen alo dukne

They carry the *himbe giil* and *dechi giil* (main wooden posts) and start building the house.

Baag giil hem begh rela, tumbe peir aab peige pacha kokbe

Bothu giil hem begh rela, nyin pei ge asa pei ge pacha kokbe

Techi pei ge tab pei ge pamen kokbe

They build the *baag per* (space near entrance) where *tumbe* (bear) and *raab* (boar) will be brought (in the future). Then they build the *bothu per* (space near back door) where *nyin* and *asa* (guests and relatives) will be seating (in the future).

Malo bo chin hinji giil hem beiba, palobo chin hinggar giil hem beiba

Tann ne bo chin buji giil hem boyom giil hem beiba

Malo and *palobo* (mainlanders) also took (earned) *giil* (post) of *hinji-hinggar* (gold and silver) to build their houses. *Tann ne* (Apatani tribe) have also carried *giil* (post) of *buji-boyom* (Japanese timber bamboo) to construct their houses.

Analysis: Most people referred to this song when asked about folksongs on or related to house construction. Hence, this song might be the only song available which is related to

house construction. There might be other versions of the same song with slight variation in lyrics and tune. House construction was a group activity where several villagers would voluntarily come forward and help in building a house. It called for a community gathering and folksongs were sung. The song reveals the difficult process that is involved in building a traditional house. It also unveils the innovative traditional ways and practices of the people in the community that have been passed on from their ancestors. There was a specific time to start the construction of houses which was during winter season. During that time, the raw materials were in abundance in nature and they were of the finest quality. The houses if built with good raw materials lasted for several years. A Nyishi dwelling is known for its unique structural techniques and design.

In the song, we find the mention of the migratory bird *Goot*. The scientific name of this bird couldn't be confirmed. But the community members have informed that it comes from somewhere in the Himalayan Mountains. The *Goot* along with another migratory bird named *Gamre* were the harbingers of the coming of harvest and house construction season. The people in those days who did not have the benefit of calendars or clocks, these winged creatures played a huge role in determining the change of season. They were accepted sign of the imminence of a colder weather that is the time to harvest the crops and also to start gathering raw materials to build houses. The arrival of these two migratory birds also indicated the conclusion to a year and the time to celebrate the Boori-Boot Yullo festival. In the song, it is mentioned that *Goot's* flanks or side of the bird inspired the weaving pattern of the bamboo walls and backbone was used as a reference for wooden posts of the house. That is why we find the mention of these two birds in many folksongs and folktales. Thus, the people mention the birds in folksongs and folktales with great honour and reverence. They do so by using terms such as '*aath*' which means 'father or fatherly figure' to refer to it. This folksong was performed after the house construction was complete and everybody

would gather around the hearth to enjoy food and drink. It can be performed by anyone irrespective of age and gender. The song was also performed to educate the youngsters about the traditional knowledge system and wisdom embedded in the community. However, these days traditional Nyishi houses are a rare sight to see except in villages and even rarer are the folksongs that are sung during construction of traditional houses.

2.1.7. Assam Expedition Song

Title: *Haag Meme Riko Ge*

Genre: Expedition Song

Primary Folk Group: Men and women folk

Contextual information: The song *Haag Meme Riko Ge* was performed by Mrs. Kina Yisi on 11th February at the residence of Mr. Komri Murtem, Town Itanagar, District Papum Pare, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Haag Meme Riko Ge

Haag meme riko ge, soth nege dene chin demen alo kokkeyu

The plains below are where the *soth* (elephants) roam around.

Gurr nege dene chin demen alo kokkeyu

The plains below are where the *gurr* (horses) roam around.

Haag meme riko ge, jis nege unu be jain nege unu be nulen kokkeyu

The plains below are where *jis-jain unu* (clothes) are made and found in abundance.

Luiir nege unu chegri nege unu nulen kokkeyu

The plains below are where *luiir* (salt) and *chegri* (yarn) are found in abundance.

Haag meme riko ge, komde nege siph pe ge ruksi nege rokdam hem pilen nege kokkeyu

The plains below are where *komde* (metals), *ruksi* (machetes) and *rokdam* (swords) are found in abundance.

Haag meme riko ge, motor nege jugne ge rail nege jug nege jugta nege kokkeyu

Jaaj nege dene ge deta nege kokkeyu

The plains below are where *motor* (vehicles), *rail* (train) and *jaaj* (aeroplanes) run.

Haag meme riko ge, jis unu hem nucha laila jain unu hem nucha laila

We bring the *jis-jainunu* (clothes) from the plains.

Komtu nege unu hem kammar nege unu hem nucha laila

We bring the *komtu* and *kammar* (machetes) from the plains.

Luir unu hem chegri unu hem nucha laila

We bring the *luiir* (salt) and *chegri* (yarn) from the plains.

Luir hemne petak lo chegri hemne agag lo gakka laila

We take the *luiir* (salt) in *petak* (bamboo tube) and *chegri* (yarn) in hanks.

Luir petak hem takka laila chegri agag hem gakka laila

After we take the *luiir* (salt) in *petak* (bamboo tube) and *chegri* (yarn) in hanks.

Aab dol ge, murtu piith nem murth takth nem, iijh yunamem siir yunamem

Dur laila, kurkh tumen do soja semmen do

We bring precious *iijh* and *siir* (traditional beads and ornaments) from the plains to give as brideprice in marriage and then perform the traditional marriage ceremony.

Aab lokke dol ge, bonn koth nem sonn rethnem dur tiimen do

Bunyi piitiik hem tiingmen do nyenye piitiik hem tiingmen do

We perform the marriage ceremony and bring the bride home.

Analysis: In the past, the Nyishi people used to make timely visits to the plains of Assam. The song is in the form of a recollection by the singer and tells how the Nyishi people used to go on expeditions to Assam to buy clothes, beads, dao (machete), yarn etc. which were considered invaluable. Without these items important rituals and marriage ceremonies were considered incomplete. Dogs, pigs, chickens etc were also bought to be domesticated. The arduous journey used to take several days and even weeks crossing numerous steep hills, valleys and rivers. Not all the clans residing in Kamle region went on expeditions to the plains of Assam. The *peyi* and *pere* clans were the ones who went to the plains. The people would carry with them bee wax, chilli, bhang (dried cannabis buds), teej-patta (bay leaf) etc to exchange with the plainsmen of Assam. The journey from the mountains to the plains of Assam was known as '*maan-pan-pudu-rudu*'. Another expedition or journey was carried out by the people to the northern parts of Arunachal Pradesh which are in close proximity with Tibet (China). It was known as '*bida-chada-pudu-rudu*'. *Nyim* is the local term to refer to Tibet (China) and the Nyishis of Kamle region never went to Tibet as it was practically impossible to make such a long journey. Instead they went to places like Koloriang, Huri etc in the northern side to get *tessi* (beads), *maaj* (brass bells), *taal* (brass plates) and *lakko* (traditional bangles) in exchange of *tupum ejh* (plain Eri silk), salt, Mithuns, pigs etc. Unlike expedition songs in other communities which are intense in nature, this song simply describes the journey and all the valuable materials and things that are found in Assam. The song is simple in language and meaning. Direct English and Assamese terms such as 'motor', 'rail' and 'jaaj' has been used as there are no equivalent terms for them in the local language. The people reminisce about the distinct and joyful experiences they had in the plains in the form of this song. Though the journey was strenuous but the materials gains and the first hand interactions with the plainsmen sufficed it. The song was sung in the evening as a form of

entertainment when everybody sits down after a long day in the field. These types of songs are usually not performed in festivals.

2.1.8. Orphan Song

Title: *Chilo Kocholo*

Genre: Orphan song (hopen nitin)

Primary Folk Group: Orphans

Contextual information: The *Chilo Kocholo* was recorded on 10th January from Mrs. Dakpe Yiyak at the residence of Mr. Tagam Murtem, Village Kherbari, District Kamle, and Arunachal Pradesh. Shri. Murtem Takar of Dollungmukh under Kamle District also assisted to set down the lyrics of the song.

Chilo Kocholo

Tacho ngunyi chiloko cholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Dogom jirem chilo kocholo dogom tuktak he chilo kocholo, sidda tukre chilo kocholo

Mirik herrem chilo kocholo mirik punye chilo kocholo, sidda tukre chilo kocholo

Opo jirrem chilo kocholo poka sasek hem chilo kocholo, jida tukre chilo kocholo

We, *Tacho* and *Tayo*, were hit with *dogom tuktak* (bamboo spatula) while we were given food. While preparing *mirik* (millet dish), we were hit with *mirik punye* (bamboo spatula). While serving *opo* (beer), we were given the *poka sasek*¹⁷.

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Nosu tukolo chilo kocholo, remen tena me chilo kocholo

Yagere richik go chilo kocholo, pada gere chilo kocholo

Yagere richik hem chilo kocholo beda laila chilo kocholo

Ed eph go chilo kocholo goda tena me chilo kocholo, ed eph he chilo kocholo

Kubu dingo chilo kocholo menda jigre chilo kocholo

We found an old, rusty and worn out *yagere richik* (machete) while we were playing near the granaries. We used it to set a snare trap and caught a mouse.

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Beda laila chilo kocholo, ayo Mimi ge chilo kocholo, giil lona chilo kocholo

Cha tena me chilo kocholo, ayo Mimi de chilo kocholo

We took the mouse to *Ayo Mimi*'s house and gifted it to her.

¹⁷After filtering the millet beer two to three times, the left-over beer which lacks in flavour, color, sweetness and has very low alcohol content.

Tacho ngunyi hem chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi hem chilo kocholo

Richik aso go chilo kocholo, jida name chilo kocholo

Tacho tiirtu go chilo kocholo Tayo tiirtu go chilo kocholo

Ayo Mimi gave us a new machete out of happiness. We broke the machete into two pieces and divided it between us.

Turtu sinne chilo kocholo nomtu nungo chilo kocholo, roon kun me chilo kocholo

Tem-aam hem chilo kocholo, lilik kun me chilo kocholo

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo, kodum kun me chilo kocholo

Miri dagne chilo kocholo, deglek yaya chilo kocholo

Emre dagne chilo kocholo demre yaya chilo kocholo, riji tukla chilo kocholo

We took our machetes and started farming. We planted rice and millet seeds in the field and looked after it day and night. The rice and millet crops grew but they didn't develop any seeds.

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Isi koro lo chilo kocholo pooglek tigbe chilo kocholo, Intekun me chilo kocholo

Takum kumur de chilo kocholo, menda name chilo kocholo

Tacho-Tayo nyi chilo kocholo yolo gidbe chilo kocholo, hengge rinyi chilo kocholo

We, *Tacho* and *Tayo* were grief-stricken as the crops didn't produce any seeds to eat. After the futile efforts and out of despair, we decided to end our lives by jumping into the river. On our way to the river, we met *takum kumur* (a grasshopper) who asked- '*Tacho* and *Tayo*, where are you heading off to?'

Tacho ngunyi ke chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi ke chilo kocholo

Mili emlem chilo kocholo, chilikkun me chilo kocholo

Ninji maklo chilo kocholo, heyi bolo chilo kocholo

Ago bolo chilo kocholo, rulik tukbe chilo kocholo,

Gitte tadne chilo kocholo, hemji kun me chilo kocholo

We told the grasshopper that the rice and millet crop we planted did not produce any seeds to eat. Disheartened, we decided to jump into the river and die.

Takum kumur de chilo kocholo, minji name chilo kocholo

Takum kumurge chilo kocholo, dumam simne chilo kocholo

Mangka toka chilo kocholo, takum kumurge chilo kocholo

Dumam sina chilo kocholo, attor bolo chilo kocholo

Tem-aam me chilo kocholo, nginrik kunpe chilo kocholo

Hemji koklo chilo kocholo, takum kumurge chilo kocholo

Dumam hem ne chilo kocholo, mangka kun me chilo kocholo, attor tukla chilo kocholo

Then the grasshopper asked us to touch his *dumam* (fontanelle) and said that if it is hard, the crops are ready to be harvested. We did accordingly and touched his fontanelle. As anticipated, it turned out to be hard. It was time to collect the crops.

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Chokur kunne chilo kocholo

Chiirme dur hem chilo kocholo, deji dur hem chilo kocholo

Pana dur hem chilo kocholo, tiipa kun me chilo kocholo

We, *Tacho* and *Tayo*, finally got to enjoy the *chiirme*, *deji*, and *pana* (varieties of rice).

Tacho ngunyi chilo kocholo, Tayo ngunyi chilo kocholo

Odhe bull be chilo kocholo, bumen duku chilo kocholo

Kob kutuk lo chilo kocholo, chimum kochar he chilo kocholo, charmen dukne chilo kocholo

We, *Tacho* and *Tayo*, finally got to drink a mouthful of *opo* (traditional beer). We enjoyed the food served on leaves.

Analysis: *Chilo Kocholo* is a *hopen nitin*. *Hopen nitin* translates to orphan song where ‘*hopen*’ means orphan and ‘*nitin*’ is a song followed by dance. The original composers of the orphan songs are believed to be the orphans. There are few Nyishi folksongs on the theme of orphan hood. In those days, the songs were sung by orphans mostly or by people who narrated the stories of orphan in the form of a song. The song is an expression of

unhappiness, sorrow and reveals the hardships of being an orphan. The orphans were treated very poorly and in some cases, people would take advantage of their situation and use them as house helpers. The repetition of the words ‘*chilo kocholo*’ is found in every line. It doesn’t seem to carry any meaning and used for the sole purpose of creating rhythm in the song. It can be seen as an example of epiphora where ‘a phrase or word is repeated at the end of consecutive lines or clauses’ (“25 Literary Techniques”). The use of another literary device called anthropomorphism which is ‘speaking animals or objects that talk, think, or behave like humans’ (“Anthropomorphism & Personification”) is evident. The grasshopper talks to the orphans and try to help them out. The song can be sung in family gatherings, festivals or in free time for recreation. It can be performed by anybody.

2.1.9. Lullaby

Title: *Yumi Teppe*

Genre: Lullaby

Primary Folk Group: Women, men and Children folk

Contextual information: The *Yumi Teppe* was performed by Mrs. Godak Yari and recorded on 31st October 2016 as a part of the Boori-Boot Niitin Folksong Project on the eve of Boori-Boot Yullo Golden Jubilee Celebration, 2017.

Yumi Teppe

Anyi ngokke gurbe so

Yumi teppe piyub raato

Yurdam tagam me piyub raato

O sweet child, lay quiet on my back. Let the sleep come to you.

Nokke aan sere kumchi

Nugho lo indekela

Menname sele ne

Sob lokke payek gedla

Your mother while leaving for the field in the morning has asked to sacrifice a mithun for you.

Sob ge hupuk hemne

Lipin be mola ka

Hemde kene

She has asked to make a whetstone out of *mithun*'s heart for you.

Sob ge esen hemne rippa be

Sob ge akek hemne

Richchak be mola ka

Hemde kene nokke aan

She has asked to make a mortar and a pestle out of *mithun*'s liver and kidney.

Sere kumchi nugho lo

Indekela menname

Sob ge aren hemne

Chuthu be tula ka hemde kene

Your mother while leaving for the field early in the morning has asked to make *mithun*'s spleen as a *chuthu* (traditional stove).

Sob ge inyik hemne

Chuchak be chukha be

Mola ka hemde kene nokke aan

She has asked to make a *chuchak* and a *chukha* (traditional corner baskets hung on a bamboo storage shelf above a traditional stove) out of *mithun*'s eyes.

Sere kumchi menname

Nugho lo indekela

Menname sob ge

Dumpom ne chipar be

Mola ka hemdekene

Your mother while leaving for the field early in the morning has asked to make a *chipar* (large wooden mortar) out of *mithun*'s head.

Sob ge arreh hem ne, dutub be petak be

Mola ka hem dekene

She has asked to make a *dutub* and a *petak* (bamboo containers) out of *mithun*'s horn.

Sob ge alle hem ne, sob ge alak hemne singhe be

Mola ka hem dekene

She has asked to make a *singhe* (large wooden pestle) out of *mithun*'s legs and arms.

Sob ge epen hemne ne, peche be peri be

Mola ka hem dekene

She has asked to make a *peche* and a *peri* (bamboo mat for drying the grains under the sun) out of *mithun*'s skin.

Sob ge nyiru hemne, oph be

Sob ge ayyir hemne, punyi be

Mola ka hem dekene

She has asked to make an *oph* (bamboo flat basket for de-husking rice) and a *punyi* (bamboo spatula) from *mithun*'s ears and tongue.

Sob ge nyibu hemne, sampak be

Mola ka hem dekene

She has also asked to make a *sampak* (broom) from *mithun*'s tail.

Nokke aan ne sere kumchi menname

Nugho allo indekela menname

Sob ge ekh hemne sitor be

Sob ge kiji hemne pebar be

Sob ge kiir hemne sitor be torpu be torka be

Mola ka hemde kene nokke aan

Your mother while leaving for the field early in the morning has asked to make *sitor*, *pebar*, *torpu* and *torka* (different types of traditional glass beads) out of *mithun*'s large and small intestines.

Sere kumchi nugho allo, indekela menname

Sob ge ayek hemne, uptak be

Mola ka hem dekene

Your mother while leaving for the field early in the morning has asked to make an *uptak* (traditional floor mat) out of *mithun*'s stomach.

Kam nem ne, alo lekke pebe go

Jila ka hem dekene

To those who cry, she has asked to give a big bone of *mithun*.

Kamma nemne, yuluk lekke aal lekke hiyub lekke

Hubtola ayak lekke yuluk lekke ullum go

Jila ka hem dekene

Nokke aan ne sere kumchi

Nugho allo indekela

To those who do not cry, she has asked to give a mixture of *yuluk* (chilly), *aal* (salt), *hiyub* (dry bamboo flakes) and *ayak* (a piece of *mithun*'s meat).

Sirum ne naam lo, chariku nugho alke

Nugho allo, gete numtu

Your mother will return home from the field in the evening.

Ruto be, sib nugho

Moto be, nokke aan ne

Inri kunne, surum ne

Naam so ye, chuku bolo

Muku lekke, amen lekke, meble lekke

Amen lekke, toph lekke, pugaab lekke

Amen lekke, geglappe hem dekene

Your mother while leaving for the field early in the morning has said that she will bring *muku* (cucumber), *meble* (cantaloupe) and *toph* (corn) for you to play.

Uyu...yu...ooh...

Hush, hush...

Aka...ka...ahh...

Sleep, sleep...

Aju...ju...ju...ohh...

Hush, hush...

Analysis: *Yumi Teppe* is a lullaby. Lullabies are usually sung by a mother to her child. However, in Nyishi society both the parents, at the break of dawn set out for the field and it is the people who are left behind like the older siblings or the grandparents who tend to the child. Babies are often very fussy and lullabies are sung to console and calm down the baby. Lullabies are also the ‘medium through which the parents or the baby sitters express their love and affection’ (Doley, 63) to the baby. In the song, the child is consoled that the parents will bring many gifts for him/her to play with. The idea of using various body parts of the mithun as a toy may come off as Aldous says “the essential horror” (qtd. in Elwin 191). However, Mithun is an integral part of the cultural life of the people. Festivals, sacred rituals and marriage ceremonies are not performed without Mithuns. The very thought of Mithun and the delicacies prepared from mithun’s meat is “a thing of excitement” and are hard to resist but as Elwin writes “we have no word for this in English and practically nothing in Western life to correspond with the idea” (190, 191). It was common to sing lullaby those days as there were not much source of amusement for the child. It wasn’t sung during festivals or social gatherings. It was sung to relax and put the child to sleep. It also helped to enhance the mother and child bonding.

CHAPTER III

ASPECTS OF NYISHI FOLK NARRATIVES

“A folk narrative encompasses all genres of oral literature in prose” (Dorson, 58). In other words, folk narrative is a general term for different varieties of traditional narratives or stories available within any socio-cultural group. “Narratives are expressions and representations of lived experiences” and they “derive their sustenance not because they essentially speak of something that is true or false but because they make their listeners feel a sense of shared meaning” (Bhattacharjee, 153).

Folk narratives are like the “fossilised remnant” (Syiem, 37) of the ‘collective consciousness’ of any community or group that they belong to. However, it is to be noted that “folk narratives contain persistent and yet continually reinterpreted ideas” and have “an unlimited number of variants around a limited number of plots” (Dorson, 53-59). Folk narratives are stories or accounts of events told and retold over a period of time which can be either fictional or non-fictional. People have been dependant on narratives which acts as an escape mechanism to seek comfort from crude realities of life. Legends, myths, folktales and proverbs form an important part of folk narratives. However, it is not possible to create clear cut distinctions between them. This has been an area of debate and discussions for many scholars, folklorists and researchers. Some of them have come up with certain distinctions to classify the narratives into legends, myths and tales.

3.1. Myth

A myth is “any story or plot . . . which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities

and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observations, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives” (Abrams and Harpham, 230). It is a form of narrative of unknown origin and usually involves supernatural beings, supernatural realms and events occurring in extraordinary circumstances. The etymology of the word ‘myth’ can be traced back to the Greek word “mythos” which meant “saying” or “story”. Myths are narratives which usually deal with the early history of people or culture such as the origin or creation myths.

According to Malinowski, “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. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have happened once in primeval times and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption” (qtd. in Elwin 216). Therefore, in many societies myths are held to be true accounts of people and events that actually happened sometime in the past. There is a very thin line between myth and religion as the characters involved are Gods, Demi-gods or supernatural beings. Myths are sacred in nature connecting real with the supernatural world.

Myths are not just mere stories but they explain how the world, living beings, plants and animals and celestial bodies were created. Some myths can be fictional while others carry some truth in them.

L.P. Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai classified the tribal myths as “those dealings with (i) periodic natural and seasonal changes, (ii) natural objects and extraordinary natural phenomenon, (iii) origin of the universe and gods, (iv) origin of animals and mankind, (v)

heroes, families, village and tribe, and (vi) belief in existence after death and places of the dead” (317).

3.2. Legend

The origin of the word ‘legend’ comes from old French “legende”, from Medieval Latin “legenda” meaning “things to be read” and from Latin “legere” i.e. “read”. Cambridge dictionary defines legend as “a very old story or set of stories from ancient times” (“legend”). In other words, a legend is a traditional story based on real people and real life events that occurred in not too distant past.

Legends are passed down through generations. They are linked to the history and also tells about “migration and settlement, war, victories and defeat” connected with a community (Mibang, 12). The people, events and locales occurring in legends can be real. Matthias Zender is of the view that “understanding of the legend is possible if one views it through the general living conditions, belief, and ideology of a culture” (qtd. in Dorson, 73). In short, legends are to be understood in the specific cultural setting it originated in.

Even though, legends are about people who really lived and events that really happened but it includes magic, imagination and supernatural elements to make it seem larger than life. Legends take facts and elaborate and exaggerate it to the point that it seems extraordinary and unreal. Legends differ from myths in the sense that legends are real whereas myths are not. In legends, facts are distorted and some mythical elements are added to make it more appealing. There might be some evidence to support the authenticity of the story.

Legends have not been crafted just for entertainment or leisure reading as Linda Dégh writes “it communicates traditional learning and knowledge to the young and the uninitiated, it advises people how to act in critical situations and warns them against doing the wrong thing” (qtd. in Dorson, 74).

Commonly accepted categories of legend do not seem to exist. However, in 1963 an international committee drew up four tentative categories of legend based on available data:¹⁸

1. Etiological and Eschatological Legends: This category includes narratives on creation of the world, the origin of things, striking natural phenomena, unusual geological formations, the nature of plants and animals.

2. Historical Legends and Legends of the History of Civilization: These are local historical accounts of national and social heroes such as righteous rulers or outlaws. It also includes stories about important events such as enemy attack, cruel lords, or the black plague that disrupted the life of the local people. There are other kinds of stories about the names of places, rivers, and hills etc.

3. Supernatural Beings and Forces or Mythical Legends: In this category, legends are concerned with people who have extraordinary power and knowledge, ancestors with magic and the protection and destruction of family and property.

4. Religious Legends or Myths of Gods and Heroes: This category was newly added which consists of stories of Christian saints, martyrs, and miracles. By the sixteenth century, legend recitals were banned by the catholic hierarchy thereby giving rise to such legends.

¹⁸ R. M. Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972) 76.

3.3. Folktale

Folktales are stories occurring in a specific culture that has been orally passed down over time. The stories are usually told by the elders of a community to pass it on to the younger generation. Folktales are found in almost all the communities around the world. However, folktales of one community are completely different from other because of the difference in culture, traditions and customs. All these play a great role in the composition of folktales. Folktales are not just for entertainment but they also carry some truth as “every folktale is somehow connected to reality” (Rohrich qtd. in Ao, 3). It also aids in imparting knowledge, moral and values of a culture.

The tales with animals that have human attributes, fairies, magical dragons or witches or people with supernatural powers and “the story is not part of a systematic mythology, it is usually classified as a *folktale*” (Abrams, 230). Folktales are not simple but contain several layers of meanings.

Folktales can be further categorised under various sub-types such as “human tales, animal tales, trickster tales, tall tales, dilemma tales, formulistic tales, moral tales or fables” (Baskom 2).

Some common themes are commonly evolved in the folktales of almost all communities. These are: (a) to teach moral values, (b) good gesture for the society, (c) generous behaviour, (d) love and affection

3.4. Nyishi Folk Narratives

“Among the Tani groups of tribes, sub tribes and clans, a rich store of oral literature explains every natural phenomenon in a series of narrative songs and folktales. A story

becomes a storehouse of many meanings, and the reasons for the rituals and ceremonies in the observance of traditional practice are contained in these stories” (Dai, 38). The Nyishi oral literature help in value transmission to “negotiate the cultural amnesia brought on by the community’s encounter with cultural, religious, demographic and other forces of change stronger than its own” (Aden, 17).

The Nyishis recognizes one broad term ‘*dui*’ which is used in general to refer to their oral narratives. The term does not only refer to ‘folktales’ alone as many tend to believe. It is not restricted and does not just comprise of one genre of folk narrative. Restricting the term ‘*dui*’ to just one area would be to limit its scope. *Dui* covers a considerably wide range of genres such legend, myths, folktales, children tales, orphan stories, accounts of origin and migration etc. There is no term in English which is equivalent in meaning to ‘*dui*’. Folktales in the west have heroes, fairies and witches and have a fixed story line. However, that is not case with Nyishi folktales. The common motifs of western or even Indian folktales are absent in Nyishi oral narratives. Moral tales seem to be very limited. Through the oral narratives, one can “trace the inter-relationship between their worldview and their behaviour patterns and familial and governing institutions” (Choudhary, 41). The oral narratives of the Nyishi people are the “autobiographical ethnography . . . a people’s own description of themselves” (Dundes qtd. in Aden, 17).

The Nyishi tales or stories are often hard to classify as simply legends, myths and folktales as they often overlap, and do not fit into one single category. Also, there is a debate on the difference between legends, myths and folktales. The meaning of the stories has a great power and holds a very significant place in the community that is survived for such a long period of time. The stories have been categorised according to their themes and functionality. The classification may not be entirely true and need more close examination and analysis.

The Nyishi oral narratives are predominantly centred on *Abotani*, their mythical ancestor. He was believed to be endowed with divine and supernatural power. In the term '*Abotani*', '*Abo*' means father and '*Tani*' was his name and hence it can be loosely translated to as 'father *Tani*'. The Tani group of tribes which also includes the Nyishi tribe trace their ancestry to *Abotani*. He is regarded as the first man and the Nyishis are his descendants.

3.5. Nyishi Myths

3.5.1. Origin Myth

In the very beginning, when there was no earth and sky, there lived a divine being named *Bir-Biyir*. He is regarded as the creator who created the earth, sky and all living creatures. *Bir-Biyir* started moving in its place and as a result of the continuous movement; dirt began to gradually accumulate into a rounded shape. After the formation of the ball of dirt, *Bir-Biyir* decided to split it up into *sichi* (the earth) and *nido* (the sky). However, there was a problem; *Bir-Biyir* thought that now that he has created *sichi* (earth), what or who would live on it? So *Bir-Biyir* created various insects, animals, plants, flowers, trees, to live and grow on *sichi*'s surface. After he created all sorts of plants and animals to live on *sichi* (earth), he now wondered what would live in the sky. Then he created *hinji dunyi* (sun) to shine in the day, *hinggar pol* (moon) to shine at night, *takar* (stars) and *kollum-kara* (north Star) to twinkle in the night sky and *chiinyak-donyak* (vibrant hues) to fill the sky. That is how *sichi* (earth) and *nido* (sky) came into existence. Then *nya* (humans) and *ui* (Spirits) came into being. But all of a sudden, *Sichi* (Earth) and *Nido* (sky) began to fall apart. This put *Bir-Biyir* in a dilemma as *nya* (humans) and *ui* (spirits) were already born, plants and trees were growing, fishes were swimming in the water, and insects were running on the surface of *sichi*. In the sky, *dunyi* (sun) and *pol* (moon) were rising, stars were twinkling, and birds were

flying. If *sichi* and *nido* fell apart, where would all the living creatures and celestial bodies go? Everything will cease to exist. *Bir-Biyir* realized that *sichi* and *nido* needed a guardian to look after them. For that matter, *Durii-Chijii* was created. *Durii-Chijii* was given the responsibility to protect and look after *sichi* and *nido*. Meanwhile, the humans and the creatures of the forest turned hostile and began to kill and eat the flesh of each other. This created a huge commotion in nature and *Bir-Biyir* was in a dilemma once again. *Ten* (Abotani), *Doje*¹⁹, *Nya* (humans), *Ui* (spirits) and *Burr* (crocodile) were fighting amongst each other that who will own *sichi* (earth)? The fight mainly arose because they were not assigned their roles and given their respective places in nature. However, after a while they realised that it's futile to indulge in such petty fights. First the *Burr* and *Doje* sorted out the matters between them. The *Burr* (crocodile) said that he will live in the river and *Doje*; the spirit said he'll make the mountains his abode. After *Burr* (crocodile) and *Doje* reconciled, *Ten* (Abotani) and *Doje* (spirit) who were brothers fought against each other for land again. While *Ten* (Abotani) and *Doje* (spirit) were arguing, the *Tador* (earthworm) came on the scene and claimed that he is the rightful owner of *sichi* (earth) as he lived under it. This made everyone furious that just because the *Tador* lives under the soil does not mean he will keep the land to himself. As a result, his bones were pulled out of his body. Meanwhile, the *Kopak Siin* (banana tree) also demanded that the land should belong to him. He was also met with similar fate as the *Tador*. His bones were also removed as a punishment. People believed that the earthworms and banana trees had bones prior to the incident. But after the fight, their bones were removed. That is the reason why earthworms do not have bones and banana trees are fragile and easy to cut down. The fight got more intense and humans, spirits, animals living in both land and water were at each other's throat. However, everyone realised that nothing will come out of fighting like this. Everyone gathered in one place and it was decided

¹⁹Abotani's brother who was a spirit.

that from this day onwards no one shall fight against each other. They performed the *Boori Ui* for the wellbeing of everyone. Everyone lived in harmony with one another and peace was restored. That is how *Boori Ui* ritual was first observed and it is continued till today.

Analysis: The Nyishi tribe like other community also have their own distinctive and interesting mythologies on the creation of universe and other things. The above myth tells the origin of the world and things on it in an order. At first, the *sichi* (earth) and the *nido* (sky) were created and then humans, spirits and other living creatures such as plants and animals came into being. The origin of the divine spirit, *Bir-Biyir* who is the creator of all is not known. People believe that he emerged on his own. There seems to be no myth, legend or folktale on the origin of the creator. He is believed to have existed even before the creation of the universe. Another fascinating myth on creation suggests the creation of earth, mountains and hills through a cosmic egg. Yet another Nyishi myth on creation of the world by B. B. Pandey tells that in the beginning there was water everywhere and a tree grew out of it. A worm was born in the tree and it started eating its wood. The dust from the worm eating the wood fell into the water, year after year, until slowly the world was formed (103).

There is also an interesting myth on how animals were born. According to the myth, there were two brothers who were given ‘*udung*’ (bamboo tubes) by their parents-in-law. They were asked not to open it till they reached home and not let it fall from their hands. However, as they were climbing a mountain, the *udung* fell and “from the broken *udung* different types of animals came out and ran away” (Tara, 226). Another myth on origin of man tells that the human beings descended from *Abotani* (the first man) and his wife *Jeet Anay*, who was the daughter of the sun (11). Apart from how the world and living beings and spirits were born, the above myth also explains some interesting facts on animals and plants. For instance, how and why the earthworms lack internal skeletons, why crocodiles live in the water, the banana tree is fragile and can be felled easily and why we call the forest, the abode

of the spirits. The origin myth does not only narrate the creation process but it also gives an insight in the vivid imagination and creative working of the minds of the people.

3.5.2. *Chirm Molo*

Long ago, there lived *dumpu* (deer), *kipu* (dog), *takum* (grasshopper), *ukchi* (firefly) and *onya* (grasshopper). One day, they decided to go to the river to build *sipu silu* to catch fishes. *Sipu silu* is a traditional fishing technique where bamboos, stones, twigs, leaves and grasses are used to build a dam like structure across a stream. The structure blocks and slows down the flow of the water. The fishes on the downstream side of the dam are thus easily caught. The group successfully built the *sipu silu*. They caught various types of fishes, big and small. After their successful fishing, they gathered to divide the catch among themselves. *Takum*, the grasshopper was offered the tail of the fish but he refused saying that he won't take anything that wag. Then, he was offered the head but he did not take it saying it moves. He was offered the neck this time but he refused again. As they were busy persuading *takum*, it was already dark and the *sipu silu* collapsed. The *takum* was the first one to see the *sipu silu* collapsing and tried to inform others. However, out of fear and nervousness, the *takum* blurted out "*tek-bek, tek-bek*". The people still believe today that this is how the grasshopper got his sound. The *ukchi* (firefly) sensing danger ran away with a *muttu* (burning log) and that is how it got its light. The *onya*, another grasshopper while escaping hit its head on trees and stones as it already got dark. Thus, the grasshopper *onya*'s head is flat and hard. Then, *dumpu* (deer) while trying to escape accidentally hit *kipu* (dog) and ran to the abode of the spirits where *Diiri Tiimi* (spirit) lived. *Diiri Tiimi* was preparing *ette* (rice paste) when *dumpu* suddenly jumped in front of her. She was astonished and asked him, "*dumpu*, what has brought you here?" and accidentally touched him with her palm smeared in rice paste. That is

how the deer's have white bellies. In the meantime, *kipu* followed *dumpu* to *Diiri Tiimi*'s house to seek revenge for hitting him earlier. *Diiri Timii* asked *kipu*, "Why are you here?" and also touched him with her palm. That is why the dogs have white spots on their body. *Kipu* confronted *dumpu* and the two started fighting. *Diiri Tiimi* came and settled things between them. Before the *dumpu* left, she prepared *hooj-hoblak* (mixture of leaves and grasses) gave it to him. That is how the deer's started eating grasses and leaves of plants. *Dumpu* ate the food and left. *Diiri Tiimi* asked *kipu*, who are your parents? Where are they? To which he replied that *Abotani* is his father and he does not have a mother. He was offered left over rice to eat. Thus, the people believe this is the reason why the dogs eat human food. *Kipu* finished his meal and was about to leave when *Diiri Tiimi* asked him to carry *chirm molo*, *amji*, *yaji*, *pana*, *pakek* (different varieties of rice) *tageg* (edible plant), and *tem* (millet) in his ears and give it to *Abotani*. *Kipu* carried everything and returned to the human world. *Abotani* seeing the seeds on *Kipu*'s ears asked what have you brought in your ears? What wild edibles are these? *Kipu* unable to articulate properly said "*pirikam*, *chirikam*" which annoyed *Abotani*. He took one of the burning logs and *masap* (bamboo tong) and hit *Kipu* with it. Out of pain *Kipu* cried, "*kage! Kage!*" *Abotani* took the seeds from *Kipu* but he did not know what to do with it. So he decided to follow *Kipu*'s footsteps to see where he brought the seeds from. He followed the footsteps which led him to the spirit world where *Diiri Tiimi* lived. He reached there and was instantly allured by *Diiri Tiimi*'s beauty. *Abotani* stayed a night at *Diiri Tiimi*'s house and eventually he grew fond of her. He made *Diiri Tiimi* his wife and they started living together. In the course of time, *Diiri Tiimi* gives birth to three children namely *Nicho chichik*, *Niki pupuk* and *Nip Yir*. However, they were neither humans nor spirits. They were birds and they did not know that *Abotani* was their father. Instead they pecked at him whenever they were hungry for food. *Abotani* did not consider them as his children. He got frightened thinking that these creatures would gradually eat him alive little

by little. He realised that if he did not escape, he will meet his death. If he died, the humanity will cease to exist. He came up with a plan to catch a *Te Tako* (wild mouse) which releases a foul odour and smear his body with it. *Diiri Tiimi* would not be able to endure the foul stench coming from his body and consequently chase him away. As planned, he caught a *Te Tako* and rubbed the animal on his armpits, between his finger tips and toe nails. *Diiri Tiimi* returned home in the evening and sensed the foul stench in the air. She realized that it came from *Abotani's* body. She could not resist the smell and asked him to go back to his place. *Abotani* was about to leave when *Diiri Tiimi* told him that as soon as you reach home, start clearing forests for cultivation. Your children will come and sow the seeds I gave you before. After you are done clearing, go back to your house and do not step out until your children are done sowing the seeds in the field. You will know of their arrival by the sounds they make- "*chip yiiri! chip Yiiri!*" and "*tapa pupuk! tapa pupuk!*" *Abotani* took note of what she said and left. As asked by *Diiri Tiimi*, he cleared a patch of forest and prepared the land for cultivation. After a while, the children came adorned with beautiful ornaments and jewellerys. They heralded their arrival by singing in their melodious voices. They brought with them all sorts of vegetables, millet, rice crops, etc to sow in the field. As they were happily singing and sowing the seeds, *Abotani* could not resist his temptation and suddenly appeared. As warned by *Diiri Tiimi*, the children all flew away even though they were not done sowing. The *aang* (yam) and *taph* (pumpkin) could not be planted. *Abotani* realised that he committed a blunder. To rectify his mistake, he performed the *Diiri Ui*, a ritual to appease the spirit '*Diiri Tiimi*'. In due course of time, the crops and vegetables grew and *Abotani* celebrated the good harvests with a feast. He offered the first meal of the harvest to *Kipu* as a gesture to show gratitude towards him for bringing the *chirm molo* (rice crop) and other things in his ears.

Analysis: The myth is about the origin of '*chirm molo*' which means rice. The importance and the role of the rice crop have already been discussed in the previous chapter under the harvest song. The significance of rice can be known from the fact that there's a whole myth and a folksong dedicated to it. The myth also reflects the traditional belief systems and way of life of the Nyishi community. The Nyishi community still follow the traditional ceremonies and rituals that they believe have been passed down from their ancestor '*Abotani*'. Towards the end of the story, *Abotani* performed the *Diiri Ui* to invoke and appease the spirit of *Diiri Tiimi*. The people still believe and follow this tradition of performing the *Diiri Ui*. It has become a religious ritual which is conducted before beginning the process of cultivation. They perform it to invoke the spirit of *Diiri Tiimi* to bless them with good harvests. The shaman chants hymns and retells the above myth to remind *Diiri Tiimi* that she was the one who bestowed the gift of rice to *Abotani's* children (mankind). It is also performed to express gratitude and appreciation to *Diiri Tiimi*. It is believed that all the crops and vegetables the community cultivate today were the gifts of *Diiri Tiimi*. Another ritual is performed where the first meal of the harvest is offered to a dog. The first meal is prepared by cooking a pot of rice. When the rice is half way cooked, a mouse, fish, crab and a prawn is added on top of it. The use of these animals and fish also has a symbolic meaning. The mouse is added so that it would lose its vision and would not be able to destroy the crops in the field. The fish, crab and prawn are used so that they can bring wriggle out water from the ground if there is a lack or insufficiency of water. After the ritual is performed, everyone gather around to have a feast. The birds that have been mentioned in the story are not mythical but real creatures. The scientific names of *Nicho chichik* and *Nip Yir* could not be confirmed. *Niki pupuk* or *Tako papok* is the Indian Cuckoo. The arrivals of these birds are accepted signs of the onset of sowing season. The myth also tend to draw meaning and try to

explain why certain things in nature are the way they are. For instance, how the fireflies got lights on their back or why the grasshopper's head is the way it is.

In Tamo Mibang's "Folklore of North East India", a myth titled "Nyishi myths on the origin of Artisan" by D. K. Bora narrates the origin of the artisan named *Nya loma*. The Nyishis use the term '*loma*' to refer to an artisan. The Nyishis believe that there were many *lomas* (artisans) and each was responsible for creating different things. The people believe that *Kolum loma* created the earth, the sky and the hills; *Doji loma* was responsible for creating moss and *Bur loma* created algae. *Nya loma* was born out of *Abotani* and his wife *Hiirr jenyir gimhuri* who was also from the *loma* community. The myth traces the origin of the traditional metal items such as the Tibetan brass bells. The traditional items are an integral part of the cultural life and identity of the Nyishi people. In the story, it is mentioned that in order to release *Abotani* from the captivity of the *lomas*, *Nya loma* created a bell. The bell released a sound which helped *Abotani* to escape. The bell was the last item that *Nya loma* produced. Thus, the Nyishis believe that this is the reason behind their limited number of traditional items. *Nya loma* had used up all his power to make that one bell to save his father *Abotani*. Also, the Nyishi people still believe that "whenever someone falls sick his soul is taken by the spirits and is kept in captivity . . . to get his soul back i.e. to get him cured the priest chants hymns and sounds the bell" (221-223).

Another interesting myth by D. K. Bora is "Nyishi myths on the origin of Dye" found in the same book by Tamo Mibang mentioned above recounts the story of how the red and yellow colours came into being. It also tells how the birds and animals got their respective colours (223). Such myths indicate their curious mindset, vivid imaginations and unique thought process about the world around them. The people through these myths tried to give meaning and explanation to the things occurring in nature.

3.6. Nyishi Legend

3.6.1. *Poop Chiqor*

After the world and everything on it was created, *Abotani* (ancestor of the *Nyishi* people) and *Ui* (spirits) decided to leave *Aan Pui* (place of origin) to venture into the world in their own separate ways. But they did not know which direction they should head towards. There was a banana tree. So in order to find their respective ways, they cut the banana tree in the middle into two halves. Inside the banana tree, there was a worm. *Abotani* and *Ui* decided that whichever way the worm moves first, *Abotani* will follow that path and *Ui* will have to go in the opposite direction. The worm wriggled towards the right side. Meanwhile, *Chiimuk Bunyi* (Earth's daughter) and *Dumuk Bunyi* (Sky's daughter) appeared when *Abotani* and *Ui* were choosing their paths. *Chiimuk Bunyi* and *Dumuk Bunyi* greatly admired and respected *Abotani*. Out of respect and fondness, *Chiimuk Bunyi* and *Dumuk Bunyi* gifted *Abotani* a third eye on the back of his head. The third eye gave him immense powers to communicate with both humans and spirits. He could even travel to the supernatural realm. This made the spirits jealous as *Abotani* was already very intelligent, sharp and witty. The added powers will only make him stronger and it will be hard to defeat him. The spirits feared that *Abotani* might pose a threat to their kind if his powers were not taken away. Therefore, the spirits secretly made plans to destroy *Abotani's* third eye which was the source of his unequalled power. They called *Abotani* to *Cha Hath* (a forest glade) and challenged him to compete against the spirits in various sports like *dug-diig* (running race) and *bo-bo* (rope swinging competition). *Abotani* took part in the competition and won in every single match. But the spirits did not give up and decided to give him a more challenging task. The spirits challenged *Abotani* for another competition. He was asked to come to *Nido-tuko* meaning the opposite side of the

earth. This time the challenge was to collect *hinji-hinggar* (valuable items). The one who collected the most number of *hinji-hinggar* will be the winner. *Abotani* was preparing to go when *Chitum ei* (elders of the village) advised him to hide his third eye before he leaves for *Nido-tuko*. They told *Abotani* that this might be a trap set by the spirits to destroy his third eye. They pleaded him to leave behind his third eye somewhere in a safe place. *Abotani* got worried and began to think of places to hide his precious third eye. He thought of digging a hole in the ground and hide it there but the worms will eat it. He thought of keeping it inside a bush or a grass in the forest but again discarded the idea thinking what if there's a storm or a flood? If there's a storm, the trees will fall on the bush and it will crush his eye. The flood will wash away the bush along with his eye. Then, finally, he realised that the safest place to keep his third eye will be in *Reth-Bakhte* (Vide Photograph no. 12). *Reth-Bakhte* is part of a bigger alter called *ui righii* which is erected inside the house. *Abotani* put his third eye in one of the bamboo tubes of *reth-bakhte* and left for the competition against the spirits in *NidoTuko*. *Abotani* easily completed the task of collecting *hinji-hinggar* and the victory was his once again. The spirits were enraged. They started to talk and discuss in indistinct voices. *Abotani* could no longer see the spirits or understand them as he removed his third eye. The spirits were extremely worried that if something is not done, *Abotani* is going to overpower them soon. They knew they had to find his third eye and destroy it for good. They assigned the task of finding *Abotani's* third eye to *Yapom Sikho* (mantis) and *Doje Babli* who were also spirits. *Yappom Sikho* and *Doje babli* immediately set out to find the eye. It was a cold rainy day and the fog was everywhere, when they finally got hold of *Abotani's* third eye. They found it inside the *reth-bakhte* where *Abotani* hid it and returned to the abode of the spirits. All the spirits gathered together to celebrate their victory. Some of the spirits cooked *Abotani's* third eye in a bamboo tube in the fire and feasted on it.

Abotani was extremely sad and devastated when he heard that the spirits have destroyed his third eye. He was fuming with anger and declared that he would cut down the *giil daal* (posts or pillars) of *sichi* (earth) and *nido* (sky) and also end his life. A typical Nyishi dwelling is built on stilts and supported by posts. The people believed that just like a house has post or pillar for support, *sichi* and *nido* were also supported by *giil daal* meaning post or pillar. To cut down the *giil daal* of *sichi* and *nido* meant that they will no longer be able to stand and fall apart. The world was divided into humans, plants and animals and spirits. *Abotani* represented all the living creatures. He knew that his absence would create a huge chaos in nature. To diffuse the situation and to calm down *Abotani's* rage, *Sii* and *Moro* appeared. They are considered as the guardians of the soil and also act as mediators in disputes between humans and spirits. *Sii* and *Moro* advised *Abotani* that even if his eye was destroyed, he shouldn't lose his precious life too. Instead they should try to find things that could replace and be used in place of his third eye. *Sii* and *Moro* asked *Abotani* to use his *aal-alak* (legs and hands), *taal* (brass plates) and *maaj* (brass bells) in place of his eyes but none seemed to work. As a last resort, *Sii* and *Moro* compensated him with 'poop *chiqor*' for the loss he faced at the hands of the spirits. It was the ability to communicate with the spirits. *Poop chiqor* is a ritual where a shaman uses eggs to interpret and give an indication of what might happen in the future. *Sii* and *Moro* told *Abotani* that just like you could see and negotiate with the spirits with your third eye, *poop chiqor* will help you regain that power again. They asked *Abotani* to go and find someone named *Yirii*. She lived up on a hill. They told him that her house is filled with chickens and eggs. *Abotani* will have plenty of chickens and eggs to perform the *poop chiqor* ritual. Hearing this, *Abotani* immediately left to find *Yirii's* house on the hill. The journey was quite difficult but he somehow managed to reach her place. *Abotani* met her and told that the spirits have destroyed his third eye. He further said that *Sii* and *Moro* had asked him to find her place. *Yirii* told *Abotani* that though the egg

does not have eyes but it can be used in place of the eye that he lost. It has the ability to tell him whether a work will be successful or not. *Abotani* performed the *poop chiqor* ritual to confirm *Yiiri*'s words. He boiled some eggs and cut them in half. He tried to check whether he will be able to hunt the deer he saw in the forest. The signs on the egg were good and he was successful. He again tried to confirm if his wife who ran away will return or not. As the signs were favourable, she did comeback. This way *Abotani* continued to perform *poop chiqor* and it was passed on to his descendants. The Nyishi people perform this ritual till this day.

Analysis: *Poop chiqor* is “the divining method of interpreting the signs or characteristics appearing on eggs” (“Egg Divination Omens”). *Abotani* is considered as the first human and the ancestor of the *Nyishi* people. The legend is about how *Abotani* got the ability to check omens from an egg and how he handed down this tradition to his descendants. The *poop chiqor* is either performed by a shaman or a person who can read the signs on the eggs and interpret them to help people find answers to their questions. For instance, before heading out on a journey, *poop chiqor* is performed to see whether it will be favourable to travel or not. A boiled egg is cut into half and then the shaman tries to interpret the signs on the egg. According to this belief, if the signs on the egg are good, it means that the work will be successful. If there are unfortunate or unfavourable marks on the egg, people refrain from doing that activity as it will be unsuccessful. It can be performed in person or at a distance, the choice is at the discretion of the client. *Poop chiqor* is one of the most important rituals followed by the people. They have adhered to this traditional belief for as long as they can remember. In the past, people were highly dependent on it to check the outcome and efficacy of a situation. There is another traditional belief related to this legend is that if the *Yappom sikho* (mantis) mentioned above is seen in the house, it is considered as a bad omen. People

believe that the spirits have sent it to fetch fire for them. So, they take a small ember from the fire and leave it outside the house for the *Yappom sikho* to take it.

3.7. Nyishi Folktales

3.7.1. *Nyikum* and *Sukum*

Chuthu aan gave birth to two daughters named *Nyikum* (human) and *Sukum* (mithun). *Nyikum* was born in the evening and *Sukhum* was born the following day. Therefore, *Nyikum* (human) was older to *Sukum* (mithun). Meanwhile, a question aroused that what should be used as a sacrifice to perform *ui*. *Ui* is a religious ritual conducted with animal sacrifices to appease the malevolent spirits. *Sii* and *Moro* (guardians of the soil) were consulted on this matter. They told *Nyikum* and *Sukhum* that although you both come from the same parent but you can choose your own paths or roles you want to take (in nature). Hearing this, *Nyikum* (human) said that she will go to the place where *yuduk* and *yaag* trees are found and *milom* and *yaglom* (rice and millet) are grown. Then, *Sii-Moro* asked *Sukum* to which she replied she will go to the place where *pinsir* and *peyak* grasses and *tekh* and *yami* trees are in abundance. After the sisters chose the places they want to live, *Sii-Moro* asked them to compete against each other. The one who loses in the competition will have to become the ‘sacrificial lamb’ to appease to the spirits. The winner will use *sua* (rope) and *hiigi* (axe) to sacrifice the other. For the competition, *Nyikum* and *Sukhum* were asked to bring firewood from the places they chose earlier and prepare *opo* (traditional beer). *Sii-Moro* said that the person whose firewood dries first and *opo* (beer) is ready to drink will be deemed as the winner. *Nyikum* brought firewood from *yuduk* and *yaag* trees and sat down to prepare *opo* from rice and millet. *Sukhum* collected firewood from *tekh* and *yani* trees and also started to prepare *opo* from *pinsir* and *peyak*. After five days, *Nyikum*’s firewood from *yuduk* and *yaag*

trees dried first and *opo* was also ready to drink while *Sukhum* was still waiting for her *opo* to ferment and firewood to dry out. *Sukhum* could not complete the task early so as a result she lost to her sister. *Sii-Moro* said to *Sukhum*, “make your heart as big as this world”. They consoled her that this was destined to happen. *Sukhum* was asked to accept her inevitable fate. *Sii-Moro* told her not to be disheartened or cry over her fate as it was decided from the beginning that whoever loses will be sacrificed. The competition was held in a fair manner but unfortunately she lost. They further consoled her by saying that her sacrifice will not go in vain. It will be for the good and wellbeing of all. She will be revered and honoured in years to come.

Analysis: “Mithun occupy an important position in the peoples’ religious and social life: they serve as bride-prices, symbols of wealth, gifts of reconciliation between families and clans, carriers of oaths and objects of highest sacrifices to the spirits” (Ham, 118). The folktale is about how mithun (*Bos frontalis*) became the object of sacrifice to the spirits. It is a traditional belief that human and mithun were once sisters. However, mithun chose to dwell in the forest. Mithun sacrifice constitutes a great proportion of the socio-cultural life of the Nyishi community. Religious rituals, ceremonies, festivals, marriages etc are deemed incomplete without mithun sacrifice. There is another version of this folktale with a slight variation in the plot but the ending is same. *Nyikum* (human) and *Sukhum* (mithun) took part in a swimming race and *Nyikum* was victorious. The reference to this version of the folktale can be found in the migration song in the preceding chapter.

3.7.2. Why *Abotani*’s children (Humans) die?

Long ago, there lived two birds. One of the birds was *poong pudur* (Great Barbet) and another was a small bird. The small bird built its nest on *teph-tapop* (wild sugarcane or kans

grass) and laid eggs on it. The *poong pudur* (Great Barbet) built her nest on a big tree to lay eggs. The birds then flew away in search of food. The birds did not realize that they have ventured so far away from their nests. They knew they had to fly back home before it gets dark. As soon as they were trying to head back, there was a thunderstorm. The small bird started to get really worried about her nest and eggs. She knew her eggs would not be able to survive in the storm. But *poong pudur* was relaxed thinking that the big tree will somehow withstand the storm and keep her eggs safe. After the storm passed, both the birds returned home. The small bird found her nest remained intact on the *teph-tapop* and her eggs were safe. But the tree where *poong pudur* built her nest was blown away in the storm. *Poong pudur* was grief-stricken. She started crying and mourning the loss of her children. Meanwhile, *Abotani* heard *poong pudur's* cry in the distant. He found the bird's crying sound so melodious and soothing. He decided to see the bird in person who had such a pleasant voice. He followed the voice and reached *poong pudur's* house. She was surprised to see *Abotani* and asked, 'what has brought you to my nest?' *Abotani* replied that he found her voice very melodious and wanted to meet her in person. The bird said to *Abotani* that since he came all the way to her nest, she cannot let him go empty handed. She asked, "Abotani, what do you want? Is there anything that you need?" I can give you the precious 'maaj' and 'taal' (Tibetan brass bell and plate). *Abotani* replied that he does not want those items. He wanted a few drops of her tears to feel the grief and sorrow that the bird felt so that he can also cry in a melodious voice like hers. She agreed and gave him three drops of her tears. One drop of the tear was for when someone dies a natural death (*yunu sinam*) like in old age or out of sickness. Another drop was for unnatural and untimely death (*giir sinam*) and the third was in case of murder or suicide (*talle sinam*). He received the tears and as soon as he reached home, his mother suddenly passed away dying a natural death. He was devastated. While he was trying to overcome the grief of his mother's death, his son who was playing on the

veranda suddenly fell and hit a rock. The son passed away too. He realized that he has committed a grave mistake. He apologized that had he not asked *poong pudur* for her tears, his mother and son would still be alive. He asked for their forgiveness. After mourning for several days, he finally gathered himself together. He performed the purification ritual called '*pai-hekak-nam*' which is done after burying the dead. In the end, *Abotani* also met his end.

Analysis: As the title suggests, the above Nyishi folktale revolves around the ultimate questions on the matters of life and death - What is death? Why do we die? Why do we suffer? Death is an inevitable part of a human's life. Man for centuries has wondered about the meaning of life and death. Every human being at some point in their lives is faced with the questions of mortality. The process of coming in terms with 'death' as the ultimate truth of life is a gruesome one. The current Nyishi folktale is one such example where people try to understand the complexities of life in order to seek meaning and comfort. It can be seen as an attempt to find answers on death and fear of the unknown. The people turned to such stories to reflect on life and escape from reality from time to time.

According to the folktale, humans were once immortal. But after the aforesaid incident, *Abotani's* family members died and eventually he himself died too. Therefore, the Nyishi people believe that this is the reason why humans die. From the folktale, we gather that *Abotani* started the purification ritual called '*pai-hekak-nam*' which has been passed on to his descendants. It is a cleansing ceremony done in three to five days after the dead is buried. Everyone who was present in the funeral gather around. The shaman then chants hymns and sprinkle water on everyone with a bundle of sacred leaves. People to this day perform the ritual to cleanse and purify themselves. No one is allowed to leave the house until the purification is done. The deaths are categorised as *yunu sinam* (death due to old age or sickness), *giir sinam* (death due to accident) and *talle sinam* (death by murder or suicide). The burial rituals are different for different type of deaths.

3.7.3. Why deer's do not have gall bladders?

In the beginning of time, when the creation of the world and all the living beings on it was complete, *Sii* and *Moro* convened a meeting. Everyone on earth and sky were invited. *Sii* and *Moro* being the guardians of the soil would assign everyone their respective roles or places in nature. Therefore, everyone was asked to be present without a fail lest they would have to face some dire consequences. On the day of the meeting, everyone came except *golle*, *tekchin*, *tago* and *dunyi siren* (names of trees), *piiriik* and *persin* (names of jungle fowls) and *sudum* (deer). *Sii* and *Moro* were displeased with those did not show up for the meeting. So in order to teach them a lesson for their misconduct, *Sii* and *Moro* decided to punish them. Accordingly, *golle*, *tago* and *dunyi siren* had their bones removed from their body. *Tekchin* tree's ears were cut off. The jungle fowls *persin* and *piiriik* had to lose their male organs. The *sudum*'s (deer) *eph* (gallbladder) was removed as a punishment.

Analysis: The folktale shows the curious mindset of the people and their assumptions about the things around them. For instance, why the leaf of a *tekchin* tree resembles a human face with double earlobe? Why *golle*, *tago* and *dunyi siren* trees have weak branches and their leaves very delicate and fragile? Why deer lack the gallbladder? The answers to all these can be found in the folktale. However, the traditional belief that the fowls do not have male organs is factually inaccurate. This confusion might have occurred because it is indeed quite hard to locate their male organs. Therefore, the people thought they had no male organs. Facts were presented in the form of stories as stories are interesting and persuasive than facts. The purpose of such folktales was also to teach the younger generation about the fascinating worlds of the plants and animals.

3.7.4. Two sisters and a Frog

A long time ago, there lived a husband and a wife. They were blessed with seven sons. Though the couple had so many sons but they yearned for a girl child. They decided to have a daughter. After a while, the wife got pregnant. The couple was delighted thinking they will have a daughter this time. However, to their utter shock, the wife gave birth to a frog. They were extremely sad and disappointed. The wife said to her husband that they should get rid of the frog. This might be the sign of an impending doom. When the couple was on their way to discard the frog, they suddenly heard a voice which said, "Please do not throw me away. I am also alive and breathing like you". They looked around to see where the voice was coming from and realised that it was the frog. The couple told the frog that he does not belong to the human world. They further said, "All your brothers got married and have wives and children. But who will want to marry and live with a frog like you? If you really want to be one of us, you should find a girl who will marry you". The frog agreed and hopped away. The frog reached a house where he saw a beautiful young girl. She seemed to be the only daughter as she was surrounded by her brothers. The girl saw the frog and shouted, "Frog!!!" Hearing her scream, the brothers gathered and tried to kill the frog. But the frog started to plead them to spare his life. He told them the whole story and revealed the condition that his parents had put forward. Therefore, he came to ask their sister's hand in marriage. The family members of the girl asked the frog to bring many mithuns and pigs if he wished to marry her. The frog complied and hopped back to his parents' house. He told his parents that he finally found a girl to marry but her family is demanding a heavy bride price. The parents were quite surprised at the news but pleased at the same time. The frog's family arranged mithuns and pigs and left for the girl's house. When they reached there, the girl's family refused to accept the marriage. They told them that it was just an excuse to send the frog away. They lied to the frog because who will want to marry off their daughter to a frog? However, after being

persuaded for quite some time, they finally accepted the marriage proposal. The marriage ceremony was performed. The frog sat on his parent's lap and happily sang songs. They took the bride to her new home. The frog and his wife lived happily. However, the frog's parents felt that they need to ensure that things remain good. In order to do that, they performed *ui* (sacred ritual) and made animal sacrifices to offer to the spirits. The next day, a young man wearing *bopa* (traditional head gear) and *orok* (sword) came to their house. The new daughter-in-law greeted the man and asked who he was. The man smiled and replied, "I am your husband. The *ui* was successful and the spirits have blessed me with this human body". The wife and the family members were extremely happy. From that day onwards people started performing *ui* which later came to be known as "*guph ui*".

Analysis: The folktale tells how a Nyishi traditional ritual called *guph ui* was started. It is performed for the wealth, prosperity and wellbeing of the family. *Guph ui* is one of the most important rituals. It is performed in a grand manner and some strict taboos are observed. There is another similar ritual named "*namra ui*" but unlike *guph ui*, it is not performed in a grand manner. The majority of the Nyishi population have chosen the Christian faith but the people who still follow their animistic religion perform the *guph ui* to this day.

3.7.5. Two Sisters and a Tiger

Once there lived two sisters who were orphans. One day, as the sisters were out working in the field, a handsome young man appeared. He approached the elder sister. The two began to meet often and gradually fell in love. The man asked the girl to marry and live with him in his village. The girl happily agreed since she also loved the man. She dropped her younger sister to their village safely and left with the man. The girl was ecstatic with joy thinking about her new life. As she followed her husband into the woods, she began to feel

uneasy. Her husband kept walking without even uttering a word to her. As they moved further into the forest, the girl felt more worried and scared. She decided to ask her husband where they were going. As she raised her head, she was bewildered to see her husband turned into a tiger. It took her a while to figure out what had just happened. The handsome young man she saw a while ago has now transformed into a beast. She thought of escaping but as she was in love with him she decided to follow him anyway. They finally reached the village. They began to live as a husband and wife. The man even though he turned into a tiger from time to time was a good husband. He would become a human when he was with his wife but as soon as he reached the forest, he would transform himself into a tiger to hunt. Soon the wife got pregnant and gave birth to three cubs on a *tem-pa* (bamboo mat for drying). Meanwhile, the younger sister was worried about her elder sister as she was her only family member. She decided to visit her elder sister. She followed the same route that the sister and her husband took. She arrived unannounced at her elder sister's place. The elder sister was very pleased to see her but she suddenly realised that her husband would be home anytime soon. The younger sister was unaware of the fact that her sister's husband was actually a tiger. The elder sister asked her younger sibling to leave for the village before it gets dark. But she did not agree and insisted to stay for few more days. Having no other option, the elder sister revealed that her husband is a tiger and not a human. He went for a hunt and it is time for him to return home. She also confessed that each time he failed to find a prey; he ate her flesh little by little. If he returns from an unsuccessful hunt, he will eat you. She asked her younger sister to hide in the attic. The tiger transformed back into his human form and returned home. As soon as he entered, he told his wife that he can smell a human flesh other than her. The wife told him that there is no one here apart from me. The husband informed her that he did not find any prey today and he is famished. The wife got worried that if he finds her younger sister he will kill her. So she told her husband that he can have a little bite

from her flesh to satiate his hunger. The husband ripped a piece of meat from her body and began eating. The younger sister was in utter disbelief as to what she saw. She was dumb struck with terror and felt really sad for her sister. She realised that this is the reason why her elder sister looked so thin and weak. The night passed and the following day, the husband left for the jungle again. The elder sister asked the younger sister to eat something and quickly leave before he comes back again. The younger sister before leaving asked to take one of the cubs with her. She told her elder sister that, “How can you possibly raise them all by yourself? Let me raise one of them for you”. The elder sister refused to give her children. She also told her sister that if she takes the cub, great misfortune and danger will befall her. Even after the warning, the younger sister secretly took one of the cubs. While she was on her way to return to her village, it suddenly became pitch dark. There were roars of thunder and lightning with a heavy downpour of rain. In the storm with low visibility, the younger sister couldn't find her way. The storm got worse and she was unable to move forward. She remembered her elder sister's words that something bad would happen to her. She left the cub there and ran for her life.

Analysis: The above folktale is evident of the fact that the Nyishis have always lived in close proximity with animals and nature. It reflects the traditional values and beliefs of the Nyishis. Nature is treated as a living entity and there is a “great sensitivity displayed to the balance that must be strictly maintained” (Syiem, 36). Therefore, one is advised not to indulge in activities that might disrupt the balance between man and nature. In the folktale, the tiger can be seen as being a part of nature. The younger sister even after receiving several warnings disobeyed her sister. As a result, she was being punished by the forces of nature. Had she not left the cub alone, she would have lost her life. Better sense prevailed in time.

There is another traditional belief that the tiger and *Abotani* were brothers. Therefore, hunting down a tiger is considered as a taboo and the people tried to avoid hunting it as much as

possible. Unfortunately, if someone killed a tiger, he was not allowed to enter the village. A shaman was called to perform a ritual to pacify the spirit of the tiger outside the village. The hunter had to observe some strict taboos.

3.7.6. Why do women have periods?

This is the story of a brother and a sister. The brother had period every once in a while. He felt dejected every time he had period as he faced so many difficulties. It was creating hindrances in his daily life. The brother was so annoyed and asked his sister to take the period from him. But the sister refused knowing the problems she will have to face. The brother could not take it any longer and he scraped off the period from his body and put it on a *Yudu Yaag* tree. The sister without knowing touched the period blood on the tree and consequently the period was passed on to her. From that day onwards, the sister began to have periods in place of her brother. She got married eventually and had many children.

Analysis: The folktale is on how the girls began to have period. There are several taboos related to menstruation. A woman or a girl in her period is considered dirty and impure. They are refrained from entering through the main door. In some cases, they are not even allowed to enter the kitchen area. Foods are given to them separately. Wild meat could not be consumed. The *Yudu Yaag* tree mentioned above has a red sap which looks like a period blood.

3.7.7. *Ache Ge Tapon Bo*

Once upon a time, there was an old man. He lived all alone and used to fend for himself. One day, he went to the jungle to make a snare trap. As he was alone, it took him

half the day to finally set up the trap. He was exhausted and decided to lie down for a while. He started counting the names of the mountains that he could in the distant for amusement. After sometime, the old man caught a small animal in his trap and returned home. To his surprise, he saw that someone had already cooked food for him. He tried to look for the person but he could not find anyone. Days went by and the same thing kept happening. He would return home to a warm pot of rice and cooked vegetables every time. This time, he was determined to find out who it was. He hid himself under his *nera* (cane haversack) and waited in silence. A beautiful and young maiden slowly descended from above using a rope. She was a *yappom* (spirit who lived in the forest). The old man caught the girl and asked her if she was the one who cooked for him. The girl said that her parents saw how lonely and sad he was. They felt bad for him and asked her to go and cook for him. The old man was happy and asked her to stay with him as his wife. The *yappom* agreed and they begun to live together. They were happy and she even gave birth to a son. However, their happiness was short-lived as the old man died only after few months of living together. The *yappom* mother decided to raise her son there and once he attained maturity, she will leave and return to the forest, the abode of the *yapoms*. When her son was mature enough, both the mother and son set out for the mountains. On the way, she showed her son the *paat poru* (tiger's lair) and *tumbe ge tumru* (bear's lair). She also showed him the *bembe sil* (water body), *kompou*, *soram*, *yangne* and *yagbe* (names of different leaves). She left trails of chicken feathers as they went so that her son would not lose his way back down. She also sowed seeds of *mel* and *emlem* (rice and millet) as they went further into the thick forest. The *mel* and *emlem* will grow and mature by the time her son returns and he will not go hungry. The *mel* and *emlem* will also help him to easily find his way back home. The *yappom* taught her son how to use bow and arrow. She taught him where to look for animals to hunt. The son was very excited and eagerly learned everything that his mother had taught him. He immediately set out to hunt. He hunted down

many animals and returned to show his mother. But alas! She was nowhere to be seen. She disappeared. The son did not feel sad as he knew that this was bound to happen someday as she was a *yapom* (spirit). He braced himself up and returned back home looking at the trails of chicken feathers and rice and millet crops his mother had sowed.

Analysis: The forest is believed to be the abode of the *Yapoms* (spirits). There are both benevolent and malevolent spirits dwelling in the forest. The *yapoms* are malevolent spirits cause harm to the humans and they need to be appeased from time to time. This folktale can also be categorized under orphan tales as both the parents either died or disappeared leaving the child all alone in the end. There is a lullaby with the same name '*Ache ge tapin bo*' with a minor variation in the story. The mother disappears leaving the father and the child all alone. So, the father sings to “addresses his motherless child and expresses his wish that the child grows up quickly and learns everything he wants him to learn and inherit” (Lomdak, 40).

3.7.8. *Amji La Yami*

Once there lived two sisters, *Amji* (rice) and *Yami* (Kans grass). *Amji* was older to *Yami*. Both the sisters reached their mature period (of seed germination). *Yami* told her elder sister *Amji* that she is going to come out (germinate) first. But *Amji* did not agree and hit *Yami* with her elbow. That is why the people believe that rice mature and germinate sooner than Kans grass. The Kans grass germinates when the rice reaches the stage of harvesting.

4.1. Nyishi Proverbs

The proverbs are an invaluable resource of knowledge, wisdom, and experience accumulated by people over time. The proverbs in Nyishi are called *toten sinam* or *niting*

harming or *doting salak*. The Nyishis like any other community have a rich collection of traditional knowledge in the form of proverbs. These proverbs provide insights into the rich imagination of the Nyishi people who have crafted them. “These age-old, time tested proverbs has deep rooted philosophical meaning which ultimately shape the ethical and moral foundation of the younger generation of the Nyishi society to date; proven as powerful communication tools and have far reaching impact on the minds of the people” (Hina, 211). From each proverb, several layers of meanings can be interpreted. Different people interpret differently by giving different examples.

Following are some of the Nyishi proverbs which have been collected during the field work and personal interviews:

1. *Chit kama be, holu bung ma dene.*

Doth kama be, karbe soma dene.

Meaning: Without *chit* (earth), *holu* (plants) won't be able to grow.

Without *doth* (sky), *karbe* (birds) won't be able to fly.

Interpretation: Here, *chit* and *doth* implies father and mother and *holu* and *karbe* are children. The proverb is used to convey the message that one should respect one's parents.

2. *Dida berta hem didii poka yoka, mikom dib hem pukto toka yoka.*

Meaning: Do not tease/poke *dida berta* (snake) with *didii* (stick) lest it will bite.

Do not point your arrows at *Mikom* (eagle) lest it will fly away.

Interpretation: One should not leap into a situation without thinking properly about the consequences.

3. *Dib kasa kapla, Nyil mejo mepla.*

Meaning: The Mountain appears close but in reality, it is hard to reach it.

Interpretation: It is easy to think or dream about something but difficult to carry it out as it takes hard work, dedication and perseverance. In short, to think it is easy but to act it is hard.

4. *Eji puko mabe, yub dobolo dunye korbo re.*

Dunye korbo bolo, dopa tipa mare.

Meaning: If you do not wake up early, the sun will cross you.

If the sun crosses, you will die of starvation.

Interpretation: One who rises with the sun and works hard consistently will achieve success in life. The proverb is used by elders to instil into the minds of the younger generation the value and importance of hard work and diligence.

5. *Eji minnam hem tama tela, Tekchin he rujag dene*

Heyi minnam hem tama tela, tago he nappo dene

Meaning: *Tekchin* ignored *Eji's* word, so he suffered a double earlobe.

Tago ignored *Heyi's* word, so he suffered a slit mouth.

Interpretation: One should always respect and listen to their parents lest they will get into a trouble. This saying is used to teach children about discipline and good behaviour. *Tekchin* and *Tago* are different varieties of trees. The reason why *Tekchin* tree's leaves look like a human face with double earlobe or why *Tago* tree's leaves resemble a human face with a slit mouth has been discussed above in the folktale 'Why deer's do not have gall bladders?'

6. *Gidam bom libi tukpik mado, mendam bom ne nipti kippur mado.*

Meaning: He who can walk carefully never get his knees injured.

He who can articulate well never gets his mouth shut.

Interpretation: A skilled and knowledgeable person will survive wherever he/she goes.

7. *Gakka nam hem, gikchik debe.*

Gangka nam hem, hikhum debe.

Meaning: If you hold onto something, hold it firmly.

If you bite something, bite it till your teeth feel sour.

Interpretation: If you put your mind to something, you should do it with full attention, determination and effort.

8. *Giini-giini liibi tupuk dene, kini-kinii itte kappa dene.*

Meaning: If you keep walking without a rest, you are bound to injure your knee.

If you keep watching, you are bound to see *itte* (woman's private part).

Interpretation: One should try not to overindulge in things. The women private part here implies unpleasant things.

9. *Gumchu siri toob jakam, mopuk siri tuma dene.*

Meaning: Even if you fall apart from your loved ones out of anger, but you cannot take them out of your heart.

Interpretation: The proverb is to teach the value of family members in one's life.

10. *Iim parma bolo, miik Yuma re.*

Meaning: If you don't make fire, there won't be any smoke coming.

Interpretation: This saying is same as the proverb 'there is no smoke without fire' which implies that behind any rumour or gossip, there is a bit of truth behind it.

11. *Jidam alak hem papak siyo, mendam nipti hem kippur siyo.*

Meaning: Do not cut off the hands that give you.

Do not shut the mouths that talk good of you.

Interpretation: One should never disrespect or insult someone who helped them out in times of need.

12. *Jigne kama be, jiri pila ma.*

Gomne kama be, gora dagla ma.

Meaning: Without *jigne* (shaman), *jiri* (village) cannot be established.

Without *gomne* (wise and knowledgeable person), *gora* (village) cannot progress.

Interpretation: This proverb conveys the meaning that without shamans and knowledgeable persons, a village cannot be established. In the absence of healthcare facilities and a political institution, the *jigne* (shaman) and *gomne* (wise individual) played very important roles in the Nyishi society. The *jigne* acts both as a priest and a healer and *gomne* is required in order to settle social and political disputes in the village.

13. *Koche kole iss pubum laila, iss hoth denla.*

Diche dele muid dogbum laila, mood pitte dene.

Meaning: Many small streams make a big river.

A chain of mountains that are close together make a great mountain.

Interpretation: The proverb conveys the meaning that one should never forget where he/she came from. Even after achieving fame and success, one should remain humble and grounded. This saying is used to remind a person who has turned ungrateful and snobbish after achieving success with the help of others.

14. *Kubu nyiba ne, daso bapak sila.*

Petta nyiba ne, chorso bapak sila.

Meaning: A smart mouse easily escapes a *daso* (snare trap).

A smart bird easily gets rid of *chorso* (bird glue trap).

Interpretation: The one who is smart, quick-witted and has a presence of mind can overcome any obstacles or danger.

15. *Lekken mennam hem liiri gonge la.*

Linyi mennam hem, sodok gonge la.

Meaning: If you speak once, it should be like a *liiri* (rock fixed firmly on the ground).

If you speak twice, it should be like a *sodok* (plant used as a field fence).

Interpretation: *Liiri* and *sodok* are like a solemn promise or a pledge. In the past, people took pledge as a group using this saying which implied that they make a promise and would not go back on their words.

16. *Mikom ah hem, pitin-poop be*

Paat ah hem, so leh tass be.

Meaning: A *mikom*'s (eagle) child may not end up as a *mikom* but *pitin-poop* (small bird)

A *paat*'s (tiger) child may not end up as a *paat* but *soleh-tass* (wild cat)

Interpretation: The reference of an eagle and a tiger here are a reference to people who are wealthy and powerful. This saying is used to encourage young people that the children of

wealthy and powerful people won't necessarily also end up the same way. Everyone gets equal opportunity in life. One can achieve anything with determination and hard work.

17. *Nyil yunam me, nutu suru go.*

Hikom yunam me ne, kembe suru go.

Meaning: It takes ten spears to bring down a powerful person.

It takes ten arrows to take down a wild boar.

Interpretation: It takes great strength, unity and power to bring down a powerful person or an enemy.

18. *Nyim rette hiiri buth giri, sob rette piri buth giri.*

Meaning: To marry a girl is like digging out *hiiri buth* (bamboo grove).

To own or buy a mithun is like cutting *piri buth* (grasses).

Interpretation: The proverb conveys the meaning that it is easier to own a mithun than marrying a girl. This saying is no longer applicable as people hardly have arranged marriages now. In the olden days, it took a lot of effort and family resources to ask a girl's hand in marriage. To own or buy a mithun was also a tedious task but not as much as persuading a girl to marry.

19. *Nyike rede gora nyag la, soke rede lood nyag la.*

Meaning: A *nyike rede* (intelligent person) would build a village while a *soke rede* (fool) would destroy it.

Interpretation: A clever and smart person would lead a society towards progress while a dim-witted person would lead it astray.

20. *Nyijir aa si kudum-kopo dene*

Nyiga aa siki-sirek dene.

Meaning: A girl child is like a *kudum* and *kopo* (varieties of wild bananas).

A boy child is like a *siki* (banyan tree) and *sirek* (peepal tree).

Interpretation: A girl child is like a banana tree which can be easily felled and taken away. A boy child is strong and well built like banyan and peepal trees. This saying has an underlying meaning that women are physically weak and fragile compared to men.

21. *Nimri gilik rem, buik lelam pichik lelam.*

Dol gilen rem, soth lelam paat lelam.

Meaning: When one is inside the house, he behaves like a *buik-pichik* (mouse).

When one is outside the house, he behaves like a *soth* (elephant) and *paat* (tiger).

Interpretation: This proverb conveys the meaning that a husband acts timid and is afraid of his wife in the house but outside the house, he behaves like an elephant and roars like a tiger.

22. *Ngo lurum iss be bima denla, deyo biim be guma denla.*

Meaning: I am not like the water flowing below the earth's surface.

I am not like a fire burning inside somewhere.

Interpretation: The proverb indicates that one should not be secretive, lie and confide their emotions inside as it will only destroy them. One should have a pure and sincere heart like clear running water.

23. *Nyin lith hem telik lith be, asa lith hem tapek lith be moyo juka*

Nyin oba hem tunyum putum la, asa oba hem tachor payik la.

Meaning: Never let *nyin lith* (resting place) be overgrown with *telik* and *tapek* (grasses and weeds).

Never let *nyin oba* (ladder) is overgrown with *tunyum* and *tachor* (thorny weeds and grasses).

Interpretation: The proverb signifies the importance of having good relations with close friends and relatives.

24. *Nyil boken he, bokte pela ma*

Nyim naken he, sumne kula ma

Meaning: One man cannot build *bokte* (traditional fishing system) alone.

One woman cannot catch *sumne* (shrimps) alone.

Interpretation: The main theme of this saying is ‘unity is strength’. One cannot exist and prosper in isolation. We are stronger together than we are alone.

25. *Sil le budur, budur he sil le.*

Meaning: A small stream can turn into a river; a river can turn into a small stream.

Interpretation: The proverb warns people that nothing is permanent. One who is wealthy and successful today may become poor and impoverished tomorrow. Everyone will eventually get success at some point in their lives.

26. *Sudum nemma didi, ikh nencho.*

Meaning: The dog came even before the deer was sighted.

Interpretation: The dog was supposed to alert the hunter when the deer comes but it jumped on the scene even before the deer was sighted. In other words, one should not act in a reckless manner.

27. *Te bar he sunyi denla, nyith ar he soken dene.*

Meaning: A snake has two tongues while a man has one.

Interpretation: One should be lucid, straightforward and get directly to the point while speaking. One should not lie or try to manipulate and renege upon their words.

28. *Ujuk paage nemne, garden/tirden lama.*

Ikh annoy hemne pooden lama.

Meaning: It is hard to strengthen the bent neck of *ujuk* (bottle gourd).

A dog's tail can never be stretched.

Interpretation: No matter how hard you try; a person's innate character cannot be changed.

In short, old habits die hard.

29. *Yapa miiriik he ta ngam ma, himbe ala he tingam ma.*

Meaning: The rhetoric of a young man is not impressive.

A bamboo shoot broth is bland and tasteless.

Interpretation: These days, with modern education system, many young men are also good orators but in the past, this was not the case. Young man who could talk were rare and few.

Hence, people did not appreciate young speakers as they lacked experience and knowledge.

A comparison is made here between a young man and bamboo shoot broth. Just like how a bamboo shoot broth does not taste good without any seasoning, similarly a young man's speech is not impressive as it lacks wisdom and experience.

30. *Yuyu menla, toku amen hem paad ne*

Mama menla, jagbe amen hem paad ne

Meaning: If you speak slowly, you will receive *toku* (a species of bird) as a gift.

If you speak well, you will get *Jagbe* (a species of animal) as a gift.

Interpretation: This saying is mainly used in context of marriage. The proverb is given as an advice to a person who wants to ask a girl's hand in marriage to be patient but persistent in persuasion.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS, SOCIO-CULTURAL TERMS AND CONCEPTS IN NYISHI FOLK NARRATIVES

Arunachal Pradesh has a myriad of tribal people of various ethnic groups. The Nyishi is one of the main tribes. They have their own distinct culture, tradition, art, food habits, dress and ornaments. They are settled in different districts of the state such as Kurung Kumey, Upper Subansiri, Lower Subansiri, Kra Dadi, Kamle, East Kameng, Pakke Kessang, Papum Pare and even in some parts of Assam.

The term 'Nyishi' comprises of two words where 'Nyi' refers to 'human' and 'shi' is 'a being' which collectively means a human being. The term '*Dafla*' was an exonym given by the outsiders. However, the term was considered pejorative and it was discarded and they started to refer to themselves as Nyishi. By the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2008, "Nyishi" was inserted replacing the earlier term "*Dafla*" in the Scheduled Tribes list.

The Nyishi follow the clan-based system of family relations. The members of a clan consider themselves brothers and sisters. The Nyishi is divided into three major clans- *dodum*, *dopum* and *dolo*. These clans are further divided into various sub-groups. They belong to the mongoloid racial stock.

Slavery was prevalent in the Nyishi community in the past. Those people who were very poor and could not feed or cloth their children usually sold them to a well to do family. The sulung tribe in the east kameng has been slave for other tribes in the same region such as Bangnis. How the "indebtedness and the slavery" begun is unknown. The Solungs believe

that in the past, the Bangnis entered their territory with gifts of mithun, salt, skin and beads and since the Bangnis could not repay them back, they became their slaves (“Gupta”).

In the Kamle region, a male slave was called *nyira* and female was known as *pangne*. The child of a *nyira* or a *pangne* was called a *guimbe*. In some cases, *pangne* was taken as a wife by the man of the household. In such cases, the child born would not be called a *guimbe*.

There is no reference or reflection of bachelor’s dormitory system in Nyishi folk narratives, so one can say that like many other Arunachal Tribal communities, the dormitory system did not exist in Nyishi society.

4.1. Origin and Migration

Through the various folk narratives, it is evident that the Nyishi believe that they are not native to the place but have come from ‘somewhere’. This is the case with most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The history and migration of the tribes in Arunachal especially the central tribes have been a topic of discussion. The tribes speak Tibeto-Burman language which Nyishi is also a part of suggests that their “origin lie either north of the Himalayas, or east, beyond the Patkai Hills which separate Arunachal from Burma”. Many scholars writing on the history are divided into two groups. They argue that there are two possible routes of migration that the tribes took to arrive at their present location. One group believe that “the homeland is to the north, in Tibet”, while a second argues that “it lies east, where northern Burma, touches southwest China” (Blackburn 19-20).

Stuart Blackburn wrote about migration legends of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh that “memories of migration there are not recited or otherwise expressed in song, dance or festival . . . the long, complex chants which accompany the ritual sacrifices and feasts and healing

ceremonies will speak of ancestors and origins but do not narrate the story of migration” (17). So is the case with Nyishi as there are hardly any mentions of routes of migration. Even if there are migration stories, the details are very vague and unreliable. In the stories, there are names of place of origin and migration, mountain and rivers that they crossed and routes that they took and but no one really knows the exact location of these places or if they are even real in the first place.

The origin and migration of the Nyishi tribe like most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is shrouded in mystery and obscurity. Unlike many tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, the Nyishi community has a very few works and researches done on them. Therefore, to construct a proper history of the Nyishi people would be a strenuous task as there is lack of materials available.

Tana Showren writes that, the Nyishi was a “semi-migratory community” (22). The first reference to Nyishi can be found in the Ahom Buranjis of the thirteenth century. In the Buranjis, there are elaborate descriptions on the political and administrative problems between the Ahoms and the Nyishi. The mention of Nyishi way of life can be found in Fathiyya-I-Ibriya by the chronicler Shyhabuddin Talish. Two other notable works on Nyishi worth mentioning are William Robinson’s - *A Descriptive Accounts of Assam* (1841) and *Notes on the Dophlas and the Peculiarities of Their Language* [JARSB, Vol. XX 1851].

Tob Tarin Tara in his book “*Nyishi World*” has written on migration of Nyishi people. According to him, the Nyishi believe that they are the descendants of *Abotani* or *Abb Tani*. He had a son named *Niya Tani*. *Niya Tani* gave birth to *Harin* who had four sons namely *Dodum*, *Dopum*, *Dolu* and *Hari*. The present Nyishi people are divided into the four clans i.e. *Dodum*, *Dopum*, *Dolu* and *Hari*. They believe to have migrated from a place called *Sopung* or *Supu Geko*. *Supu* means a narrow pass or mountain where they believed to have

stayed for centuries. Tara gives two hypotheses or ‘theories’ in his words regarding the migration of the Nyishi people based on the stories and information he gathered. According to the first hypothesis, Nyishi have migrated through *Kera Dadi* (High Mountain), *Bambu Selle* (Vast Sea) and *Takte Langney* (Big Rocks). Tara indicates that Nyishi might have migrated from Burma side in the east or “most probably made a U turn within Arunachal from East/West Siang distt”. The second hypothesis is *Supung Saam Namching or Siir Kiir Ise* (Mountain, Lake and River). Going by this hypothesis, he suggests that Nyishi are of mongoloid race and came to their present settlement crossing China and Tibet from far Eastern Himalaya.

Tara in his book also mentioned about a popular belief on why the Tani group of tribes lack a written script of their history. According to the belief, *Pane Radhe* (Maybe be referring to plainsmen of Assam) and *Mane radhe* (Abotani’s descendants) were two groups of people who had written scrolls of their history. The *Pane Radhe* group preserved their scroll it and therefore, they have written records of their origin and history. However, *Mane Radhe* group ate their scroll which was written on a deer’s skin out of hunger. As a result, the *Mane Radhe* group i.e. the Tani group (descendants of Abotani) including Nyishi do not have a written record of their history (12). The Nyishi believe that they “discovered Assam valley by following flights of birds, and found it to their advantage to settle on its border” (Choudhury, 97).

4.2. Language

The term ‘Nyishi’ refers to both the people as well as the language. Their language comes under the Tibeto-Burman group of the Sino-Tibetan language family and more specifically under the “Tani Group” of languages with other tribes such as Adi, Galo,

Apatani, Tagin and Mising. These tribes including Nyishis are grouped under “Tani Group” as they all trace their ancestry to the one common ancestor “Abotani” who is their mythical ancestor.

According to 2001 census, the total speakers of Nyishi language is 2, 08,337. The Nyishi language still lacks a standard writing system. Some community people and linguists are working on to develop and introduce a language writing system. In the absence of a script of their own, the Nyishi use Assamese, English, and Devanagiri for convenience. The two most prominent vowels occurring in the Nyishi language are ‘ɨ’ and ‘ə’ which cannot be found in the Modern English Alphabets. As a result, it creates great difficulties in keeping the actual pronunciation of the words.

Being the most populous tribe and settled across different districts of the state, the Nyishi language has several regional variations and they are mutually understandable. The Nyishi also uses “a colloquial variety of Hindi called *Arunachali Hindi*” (“Language Endangerment”) and Assamese to communicate with other communities of the state.

4.3. Religion

The Nyishi have been practising animism in which they worshipped *Donyi* (Sun) and *Polo* (Moon). The Sun is a female and the Moon is a male deity. They refer to Sun as “*Ane Donyi*” which loosely translates to “mother or motherly Sun” and moon as “*Aath Polo*” which is “father or fatherly moon”. The traditional beliefs and practices are passed on orally to the succeeding generation. They believe that every living and non-living objects possesses “*Ui*” meaning “spirits” or “souls”. The Nyishi believe that there are a number of spirits dwelling in the forests, rivers, streams, hills, mountains, in big rocks and trees. These are

mainly malevolent spirits who causes various diseases and illness and they need to be appeased from time to time with animal sacrifices. The spirits are identified with different names such as *Nipo* and *Nit Pol Kera la* that are water spirits and *Yapom* and *Doje* are forest spirits etc.

The Nyishi believe in a separate world of the dead which is referred to as "*Ui mok*". After a person dies, he sets upon a journey on "*Ui namte*" where "*Ui*" is "spirit" and "*namte*" is "road" to reach the spiritual home called "*Ui nam*". They bury the personal possessions of the dead person with a belief that they would use it in the next world. The dead are offered food for a period of one year.

Animal sacrifice is one of the most important facets of their religious practices. Any religious practise or ritual is considered incomplete without it. It is believed that different spirits demand different animals and these animals need to be sacrificed in order to pacify and minimize the wrath of an angry spirit. Animals such as mithuns, pigs, chickens and goats are sacrificed to offer to the spirits. In the Nyishi society, the *Nyib* or *Nyibu*, the shaman is the tradition bearer and the maintain custodian of their faith. They are like the power houses of traditional knowledge and practices. Not everyone can be a *Nyib*. He is believed to be "the chosen one". He has the power to communicate with the spirits, heal sicknesses and safely guide the souls of the dead in the after world. A *Nyib* is assisted by an apprentice called *Bo*. The *Nyib* act as the mediator between the human and the spirits. He performs various rituals to communicate and negotiate with the spirits. Once the spirit is down for a settlement, the *Nyib* chants hymns and performs the ritual sacrifice.

The Nyishi do not have a shrine or temple of worship. During a religious ceremony, they build a temporary altar made of bamboos near their house or in the forest where the

animals are sacrificed. Once the ceremony is over, the altars are left untouched for years to break down on their own. The altars are never burnt down or cleared.

Women do not seem to part in religious ceremony apart from preparing food and wine. The *Nyib* (shaman) is always a man. There are very few to no cases heard of a woman being a *Nyib*. One reason can be that the women go through menstruation which is considered impure and there are many taboos and restrictions related to it. However, it is believed that there were few women in the past that could perform certain religious rituals but they are never referred to as *Nyib*.

In the recent times, there has been a tremendous shift towards Christianity. More than half of the Nyishi population have accepted the Christian faith.

4.4. Economy

Jhum Cultivation is the most common type of agricultural practice followed by the Nyishi people. In some areas, wet rice cultivation and terrace farming are also done. Rice, Millet, maize, chillies, yam, pumpkin, black sesame and cucumber are mostly cultivated by them. Bamboo also occupies an important place as it is used both for consumption and building houses.

Land is a very valuable asset and it is considered as an ancestral property. The land is mainly divided into- (i) Private land owned by the members of a family and (ii) Public land owned by the community members. According to the seasons, the land cultivation is classified as - *Docho Nugo* and *Rikht Nugo*.

In *Docho Nugo*, seeds are sown in the months of February and March. The crops such as maize, pumpkin, cucumber etc are grown and harvested in the months of August and

September. In *Rikht Nugo*, the main crops such as rice, wheat, millet, sesame, sugarcane etc are sown in the months of June and July. These crops are then harvested in the months of October and November. Some of the main varieties of rice are *Pana, Pidi, Misa, Pala* etc.

There is another term known as *Riga Nugo*. When the same plot of land is cultivated twice or thrice, it is known as *Riga Nugo*. The workload lessens as the whole process of slash and burn has been already done. The people only return to do weeding and the patch of land is ready to be cultivated again.

Some important terms associated with Jhum Cultivation have been discussed below:

- *Pubum*: It is a device to chase away the birds in the field. It is a bamboo pole of about half to one meter tall. The bamboo is split halfway and a rope is tied at the tip of the split half of the bamboo. Whenever the rope is pulled, it produces a sound.
- *Seb-Mulu*: *Seb-Mulu* is a humanoid scarecrow dressed in old clothes and made to hold a bow and arrow in the hands. It is placed in open fields to discourage the monkeys from disturbing the crops.
- *Soob-Sulu*: The term '*soob*' stands for mithun and '*sulu*' is a fence. So, *Soob-Sulu* is a field fence to keep the mithuns away from entering the field.
- *Neko-Sulu*: It is also a fence to keep away the livestock from damaging the crops.
- *Moien-Hennam*: It is a ritual performed for good harvest and protection of crops from diseases etc. It is performed right after the seeds have been sowed.
- *Tunnyum-Bennam*: It is also a ritual which is performed only when there's a bad harvest.

The hunting is mainly done individually which is called '*sommen sot innam*'. Group hunting expeditions known as '*sommen hodo*' are also carried out where women and children

also take part. It is only done for deer hunting. The hunters know how to make various sounds to call the animals. In case of a deer, the hunters mimic the cry of a deer's calf which is called '*bep-gognam*' to attract the mother. The bow and arrow is the main weapon used for hunting. The hunting of certain animals such as '*Ebe apa*' (Tiger) is considered as a taboo and the people try to avoid hunting it as much as possible. The people believe that *Abotani* and Tiger were once brothers. Fishing, foraging and bee hunting are also practiced by the community especially those living in remote villages.

4.5. Village Council

The traditional village council of the Nyishis are known as '*Nyel*'. There is no chieftainship or clan leader system. The society is egalitarian in the sense that all members of the community have equal rights and opportunities. Those who have the knowledge of the traditions and customary laws of the community can take part in solving social and political matters in the village council '*Nyel*'.

4.6. Social Organisation

4.6.1. Family

The Nyishi family system is patriarchal where the father is the head of the family and exercise control over woman and children. The line of succession is patrilineal where land, property and other valuable are passed on to the male heir. Women do not inherit ancestral property. It is always the sons who inherit it. It is also patronymic tracing descent through the male line. The family system is patrilocal in residence. The joint family system was prevalent in the past but it is not so common anymore. A joint family consisted of many members

including father, mother, children, grand parents, house helpers etc. The family lived together in a long house called '*namda*'. Aged parents usually lived with their youngest son. The son was allowed to lead a separate family after marriage. These days due to education and modern ways of life, the traditional joint family system is no longer popular. The people prefer to live in a nuclear family system. However, the line of descent and succession is still traced through the male lineage.

4.6.2. Marriage System

Marriage is an important social institution which is found in all the societies. The Nyishi community practise "tribe endogamous but clan exogamous" (Mite 89). Clan exogamy was observed and marriage between any close bloods relative is restricted. It is considered as a taboo. Polygyny was common among the Nyishi in the past and the number of wives depend upon the individual and his social and economic status. The wealthier the person was, the more wives he could take. With the advent of modern education and awareness, more and more people are practising monogamy.

The traditional Nyishi marriage is known as '*nyida*'. The boy's side make a marriage proposal with gifts of meat and wine to the girl's family. A shaman is called to check the suitability of the match through chicken liver and egg divination. If the omens are good and the girl's family accepts the gifts, then the preparation of '*nyida*' begins. A typical Nyishi marriage required a lot of traditional items and family resources to be performed. Therefore, those who could perform it were highly revered.

Bride price is one of the main features of a Nyishi marriage system. The groom's family give the requested number of mithuns to the bride's side and in exchange, the bride's

family give equal number of traditional ornaments and jewelleryes. If the family was very wealthy, the bride was given *nyira-pangne* (slaves) as gifts who accompany her to help her in new household.

Widows are called '*hem*'. In the past, widows were taken as wives by the brothers of the deceased person. Widow re-marriage was allowed only when the deceased husband's family agreed to it. With the content of the deceased husband's family, re-marrying into same clan was permissible. However, re-marrying into other clan was not allowed and in some cases, fines were imposed.

4.7. Social Folk Customs

4.7.1. Birth Rituals

The birth of a child is welcomed into the community with some rituals. The baby is given a name on the same day of birth. Otherwise, the people believe that the spirits would claim the soul of the new born. Till the umbilical cord stump falls off, the baby and the mother have to eat, stay and sleep separately in the house. Even the father of the child is not allowed to stay with them. Once it falls off, both the mother and the child joins the rest of the family members. After one month, a ceremony called '*Namra Chanam*' is performed and the close relatives and community members are invited for feast and celebration to welcome the baby.

4.7.2. Puberty Rituals

There are no particular rituals for boys after entering puberty. However, a girl child after attaining puberty and during her menstruation, she has to face many restrictions. When a girl has her first period, she has to take her meal on a plantain leaf. She is then asked to hide the leaf. It is believed that if she doesn't hide or fails to hide the leaf, she will experience abnormally heavy menstrual bleeding.

The girls were isolated in another room or corner of the house during their period. Some were not even allowed to enter the kitchen or cook food. They were also not allowed to take meats of wild animals. The girls did not go to big rivers to wash themselves. They would usually go to a small stream.

A Nyishi bamboo stilt house has two doors, a front and a back door. A fireplace is built in the centre of the house. During the entire period of their menstrual cycle, the girl's were not allowed to go beyond the fireplace to use the front door. She would use the back door until her menstruation is over. A married woman also had to sleep in a separate corner of the house and could not use the front door too while in her periods.

4.7.3. Death Rituals

Yunu Sinam (Death by Natural Cause):

The rituals for death were different for those who died a natural death and those who died unnaturally. *Yunu sinam* is the death caused by natural causes like prolong illness or die of old age. A shaman chants hymns and prayers to safely guide the soul of deceased person to *Ui nam* (abode of the spirits) in the next world. After burying the dead, the bereaved family members and the people of the village observe some strict taboos for three to five days. During this period, the family is forbidden from eating certain foods items such as green

vegetables, fermented soya bean, any food item that is round in shape such a pumpkin etc. The children were not allowed to consume black sesame seeds, banana, sugarcane, fermented soya beans. It is believed that consuming black sesame seeds would make them go deaf and eating banana or sugarcane will result in premature greying of hair. Furthermore, the family members and the villagers do not go to the field or even touch the soil. Except the shaman who was called to chants prayers and perform death and purification rituals, other shamans never visit a household where someone died. The shaman would do a purification ritual called *pai-hekak-nam* for the family members and people who attended the funeral. For the purification ritual, a baby chicken's blood is added to water and sprinkled on everyone with the help of a leaf. *Pai-hekak-nam* is done either on the third day or the fifth day after the burial. On the third day, the kitchen wares of the household of the deceased person are properly cleaned and *pai-hekak-nam* is done to purify them.

Giir-Taal Sinam (Death by unnatural cause):

Giir- Taal sinam is death by unnatural causes such as an accident, suicide, murders etc. The dead person is buried on the same day of his or her death. Like *yunu sinam*, food restrictions are observed here too. The village people and the family members do not go to their fields as they think it will bring them bad luck. These restrictions were to be followed by family member of the dead person for a period of one year.

4.7.4. Burial System

Lail Gudu and Rayep

Lail gudu is a complex and elaborate burial structure erected for shamans, important people and the woman who performed 'nyida' (traditional marriage ceremony) during her lifetime. These people have different burial structures compared to the common people. The design of the burial structure is important as it signified the social status of the person who died.

Rayep is a simple burial structure made for commoners. It is smaller in height and structure in comparison to *lail gudu*.

In the past, monkey and dog were also sacrificed along with mithun and buried with the dead. Burying monkey and dog had different symbolic meanings. The people believed that the monkey would help the dead carry his belongings and the dog would show him the path in the afterlife. The personal belongings of the deceased person are also buried. However, if a man dies his *bopa* (traditional headgear), *orok* (sword), *meyap* (shaman's fan) and *paat hipa* (tiger's lower jaw) used as an embellishment on swords are not buried with him. If the deceased person is a woman, her ornaments and traditional jewellery are not buried along with her. The *bopa*, *orok*, *meyap* and *paat hipa* are passed on to the male child of the house and the girl child receives the ornaments and jewellery. In case, if a childless married woman died, her ornaments and jewellery are damaged and then buried along with her.

There is no common burial ground for the community unlike the Apatani tribe. The Nyishi bury the dead in the surrounding of the house. Except for those died of a snake bite. They are buried secretly somewhere in the forest. The dead are buried afternoon.

4.7.5. Taboos related to Food

“A prohibition in some cultures against touching, saying, or doing something for fear of immediate harm from a mysterious superhuman force” (“Taboo”). In Nyishi, there are various taboos which regulate the daily lives of the people. The term used for taboo are ‘*Arr*’ or ‘*Arrnam*’ which can be loosely translated to ‘observing a taboo or restriction’.

When a woman gives birth, until the umbilical cord stump falls off, the mother had to go through some food restrictions. The mother was restricted from taking green vegetables, pumpkin, yams etc as the baby might get an upset stomach. She can consume chicken, pork or even meats of wild animals. However, while consuming meats of wild animals, a pregnant woman has to share it with her husband; otherwise, they believe that it will affect the baby.

When a shaman performs his first religious ritual or ceremony, he refrains from consuming the meat of mithun that has been sacrificed. If consumed, he will lose his powers of divination. He also refrains from consuming eagle and tiger’s meat.

Both male and female child were not allowed to consume the heart of the chicken as people believe that the male child will not be able to perform a ritual called “*Ruksin kanam*” and the girl child will not be smart. The ritual is performed by a shaman or someone who can read and interpret the signs appearing on a chicken’s heart. A girl child is also restricted from eating unlaidd chicken eggs as it might cause infertility. A newly married couple also had to follow certain food restrictions for over a period of one year.

4.7.6. Taboos to be followed before child birth (*Arrnam*)²⁰

The Nyishi community has some traditional beliefs and taboos related to pregnancy. When a woman is pregnant, the family members especially the husband is restricted from

²⁰ Tob Tarin Tara, *Nyishi World* (Lakhimpur: D. B. Printers, 2008) 44.

doing certain activities or eating certain foods. The husband has to refrain from doing such activities lest it will have some effect on the appearance and behaviour of the baby. For instance, if one cuts a “*khokham okh*” (plantain leaf), the baby will have a bulge near the navel area and in some cases, bleeding might occur too. If one cuts a *Tasser* and *Takey* ropes, the baby will suffer from watery eyes (epiphora). If one uses a rope to make a knot, the baby will face speech difficulty. If one consumes monkey or tiger meat while the woman is pregnant, the baby will develop a habit of stealing and snatching meat from others. If the young boys or girls of the household where there’s a pregnant woman eats *Khodo* (a type of grain), the baby will suffer from goitre. Killing rats and mouse is also restricted as it will make the baby cry at night.

4.7.7. Taboos related to hunting

“Hunting is surrounded by a great array of taboos” (Ham, 16). The hunter in Nyishi is called “*Nyimen*”. They were highly respected and given importance by the community members. Before the hunter heads out into the wild, a shaman performs the purification ritual- ‘*pai-hekak-nam*’ to purify soul of the hunter. When the hunter is out in the forest hunting, his family members would not make *opo* (traditional millet or rice beer) until he returns. It is considered inauspicious and the hunter would fail in his hunting expedition and return home without any animals. If a female of the household is on her menstruation, she has to step out of the house first using the back door. Then, the hunter would leave the house. While in the jungle, the hunters would abstain from making any loud noises as it would scare away the prey. It will also disturb the spirits inhabiting the forest.

4.7.8. Festivals

The Nyishis did not have a common festival until few decades back. *Nyokum Yullo*, *Boori-Boote Yullo* and *Longte Yullo* are the main festivals celebrated now. The festivals are mainly celebrated to invoke the spirits to ensure good health and wellbeing of all. They also celebrate good harvests. *Boori-Boote Yullo* is celebrated on 6th February followed by *Nyokum* celebration on 26th in the same month. *Longte Yullo* is celebrated in the month of April and the date keeps changing depending on the monsoon. A bamboo altar is erected and mithuns are sacrificed. These festivals are an extension of their tradition, custom and their belief system.

4.7.9. Traditional Healing Practices

Nyib or *Nyibu* - Diviners

The *Nyib* or *Nyibu* act both as a shaman and a healer. The Nyishi did not have a separate healer or a medicine man. He has powers to communicate with the spirits and cure illnesses through divination. The people believe that the sicknesses are caused by the displeased spirits. The soul of the sick person is trapped by the spirits and is kept in captivity. A shaman is called to perform egg divination or interpret signs on chicken's liver and heart in order to find out the spirit behind it. The shaman then performs various rituals and sacrifices to free the soul of the sick person from the grasp of the spirits.

Aa hudu tura ne/bo - Birth Attendants

In every Nyishi village, there were women who were summoned during childbirth. These women were not trained professionally but had acquired knowledge and wisdom through experience. They were referred to as “*Aa hudu tura ne/bo*”.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Folklore includes the whole gamut of cultural ethos of the mankind. It serves as an identity marker of a community or race, a repository of our experience, wisdom and knowledge and our memory of the past related to history” (Mibang, 2). The Nyishi community has embedded their age old traditional wisdom, knowledge, experience, stories of their origin, evolution, and migration in their oral narratives that has been carried forward from generation to generation. Folk narratives are like the community memories received from ancestors.

The Nyishi like many communities of Arunachal Pradesh did not have a writing system. Therefore, they were greatly dependent on their oral narratives to pass on their tradition and customs. In the absence of written records, their traditional oral narratives are the only source to study and trace the origin, migration and history of the people. The people have adhered to their traditional narratives, customs and beliefs for a long time. It helps to reflect their values and views and help to pass on their “cultural identity” down to the next generation.

5.1. Nyishi Folksongs and their function

Like folk narratives, folksongs also play a crucial role in understanding the cultural ethos of a community. Folksongs are the “spontaneous outburst of a folk community inspired by the beauty and charm of their natural surrounding” (Doley, 25). Every community have their own unique treasures of folksongs. The folksongs act a medium through which people can express own feelings and sentiments.

The Nyishi community has manifested their identities through the numerous folksongs. The community is abound with a wide range of folksongs which are replete with motifs dealing with mithun, animals, birds, plants, trees, sun, moon, rivers, hills etc. One can say that the Nyishi folksongs have a “Miltonic grandeur of conception” (Elwin, 339).

Their folksongs do not only serve to provide amusement but they often contain short history of the people and help in passing valuable information to the young ones. People have faced great difficulties over the years to trace the routes of origin and migration of the Nyishi community. The Nyishi people mainly retained the “ritual texts” which they felt was valuable and significant. The ritual texts talk of their ancestors and provide the roots of their origin and history but “do not tell a history of migration” (Blackburn, 15). In such cases, the creation song and migration songs although contain limited number of details plays a vital role. In both the songs, there is a mention of a place named ‘*Sipu*’ or ‘*Sipu Geko*’ or ‘*Sopu*’. The *Sipu* is believed to be point of origin and migration. It is also mentioned in the songs that the water was created by a spirit in *Sipu* and it started flowing in the form of rivers. Many people and community members speculate that the “water” is a reference to the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet (China). Hence, Tob Tarin Tara made the hypothesis of Tibet being the homeland of the Nyishi. Marriage song is another important folksong which brings to light one of the main feature of the Nyishi marriage system i.e. bride price. People may view bride price in an unfavourable light but it was a way of giving back and compensating the bride’s parents for their daughter. In the olden days, the Nyishi community was mainly dependant on farming. It required a lot of manpower so every person in the household was important. The more people a household had the more hands they could put to work. The folksongs like the Bridge construction song show that the *peyi* and *pere* clans were culturally more close to each other. Such songs help to bring a sense of togetherness among the community members. The techniques, ideas and names of various materials such as trees, plants and ropes used in

building a Nyishi dwelling is recorded in the House construction song. Although a traditional Nyishi house is a rare sight but the future generations can always turn to such songs to gain knowledge and information about their people and way of life. The Assam expedition song reflects the relations between the plainsmen of Assam and the Nyishi which existed before. It also gives a reference to the “Posa System” introduced by the Ahom ruler Pratap Singha where the Nyishi people were given payments in the form of salt, cloth and other valuable items.

Due to accelerated urbanisation, fast-paced life and an attractive wide variety of other modern songs available on the internet, folksongs over the years have lost their significance to a great deal. The younger generation have more fascination for modern songs than their traditional ballads. As a result, it has become quite rare to find anyone singing or even just humming a tune other than in festivals. Nevertheless, some festive songs like *Punu*, *Jajin*, *Mojh* and *keth* when performed during festivals help to bring back people together as everyone rejoices to it irrespective of age.

5.2. Nyishi Folk Narratives

Nyishi folk narratives still act as a guiding factor for the people in the community. Oral culture has been the primary tradition followed by the Nyishi folk group since the time of their ancestors. The Nyishi oral narratives are the backbone of their society and help to pass on the “facts” so that the tradition of the community does not die out. The oral narratives evolved from the need to express their emotions and to hold on to their traditions in the absence of written literature.

The Nyishis have a wide range of impressive stories right from the accounts of origin and migration, stories about how the world was formed? How human being came into existence? Who created the celestial bodies? Or, why rice crops mature before kans grass? Why dogs have spots on their bodies? How the fireflies did their light? The answers to all these questions can be found in the rich and varied stories. They are not just stories but an account of their living history and culture. The people took inspiration from everyday life, plants and animals that surrounded them.

“The function of myths and related rituals are the markers of ethnic identity. The secret of the relationship between human beings and nature resides in the oral creation myths and in the associated rituals” (Abbi, ix). The Nyishi oral narratives tend to explain how and why certain rituals came into being such as “*Poop chiqor*” and “*Guph ui*”. If someone falls sick or gets into an accident, the people believe that the person might have over indulged in activities which caused a misbalance in nature, thus, making the spirits (or nature) displeased. Both the rituals are performed to communicate with the spirits and help in bringing back peace and harmony to both humans and nature. Hence, one can conclude that nature plays a significant role. The people show gratefulness and great respect to nature. The setting in the stories also reveals the land form, climate and various types of wild life found in the region. There are references of hills, mountains, rivers, different varieties of rice crops, animals such as mithun, tiger, deer, plants and trees that are native to the region. Stories help to entertain and at the same time educate the younger generations about their world.

Animals are prominent in Nyishi folktales. “In folktales, if you come across a stories on man-monkey relations, a frog marrying a human, a woman marrying a tiger, a bird talking to human, which certainly creates amusement in artistic presentations but behind this there lies values, morals, essence, wits and humour with human touch” (Mibang, 1). The animals in Nyishi folktales often have human characteristics so it is not uncommon for a grasshopper to

give advice to the brothers in the "Chilo Kocholo" or a tiger marrying a human in the tales of "Two Sisters and A Tiger", or the birds singing and sowing seed in the myth "Chirm Molo" etc. The animals are highly valued and people pay great respect to them. This is evident from the custom of offering the dog the first meal of the harvest as people believe that the dog brought rice to the humans from the spirit world.

The various folk narratives continue to form an integral part of their culture as they give an idea of where everything came from, what happened or what might happen in the future. They have become so intertwined with reality that they seem to have formed a life of their own. The stories are still relevant and help to prepare the young ones for life since each story is a moral or lesson on life.

5.3. Status of Nyishi Language

“Language is the key to the hearts and minds of a people, losing it could mean obliterating the culture and civilisation fostered by that language” (Devy et al. 42). Thus, language is crucial in expressing one’s thoughts, feelings, emotions and imaginations.

Language is another field where the Nyishi people are suffering huge losses. According to UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s Language in Danger* (2009), Nyishi language has been identified as ‘Unsafe’ despite being a numerically dominant tribe with more than 10,000 speakers. The present generation of the Nyishi community are failing to retain their language and as a result, the language is dying a slow death. Most children including adults prefer to speak *Arunachali* Hindi, English or Assamese. Thus, the speakers of the language are losing competency in their mother tongue which is a serious factor in endangerment of language. One who speaks in their mother tongue is often looked at as being backward and

uncivilised. Thus, the younger generation are more inclined towards learning Hindi or English or even Korean language for that matter. The adults are often busy trying to make ends meet to address the issues of language loss and endangerment. Even for the adults, it is convenient to speak in languages other than their own language. For a language to be used and spoken, it needs a “cultural setting”. More than half of the Nyishi population have left their native places and have relocated to towns and cities for better livelihood and job opportunities. As a result, they no longer get the opportunity to speak in their language.

Another serious concern is the use of “borrowed terms” terms from the Assamese language. The Plainsmen of Assam and the Nyishi have lived in close proximity for a very long time. Consequently, the Nyishis have replaced so many native terms with the borrowed Assamese terms. The borrowed terms have been so frequently used that it is difficult to tell if a term is really a native term or a borrowed one. For instance, when a Nyishi person is asked to give the local term for butterfly, he will instantly say “pokila” which is an Assamese word. For many this might not look like a threat to the language but it will surely add to the problem of language endangerment in the long run.

5.4. Status of Folk artistes in the Community

There are very few folk artistes remaining in the community. The folk artistes are mainly shamans or the aged people of the community. They are the keepers of traditional knowledge and wisdom. They had a significant role to play in the society, thus, they were highly regarded by the people in their community. But sadly, they no longer receive the significance and value they once had in the community.

In the past, important occasions and rituals were incomplete without the rendering of folksongs by the folk artistes. They received gifts of meat and wine. They were also given rare and valuable traditional items depending upon how grand the occasion was. However, that is not the case anymore, even during festivals, marriage ceremonies and other important functions, people are most interested in modern songs or local songs that have been composed for commercial purposes. Unfortunately, till date there are no formal institutions to teach and learn the oral knowledge.

A majority of folk artistes and their work haven't been exposed to digital recording yet. Until and unless someone does not come up with effective measures, the future generations would be deprived of this vast and rich oral knowledge which is slowly fading from the memory of the people.

5.5. Emerging Issues

Modernization has been a constant threat to the oral knowledge. The youths are failing to absorb and retain the culture and traditions from their parent generation. As a result, the culture and traditions are beginning to die out. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of awareness in the society. In this fast-paced life, people hardly put interest in preserving their culture and tradition. The youths are still ignorant about the socio-cultural importance and significance of the oral knowledge. Sadly a lot of the verbal knowledge is being lost with the death of a shaman or a knowledgeable community member.

The Nyishi like most ethnic communities of Arunachal Pradesh do not have a script of their own. As a result, it creates hindrances in the process of documentation and preservation

of the oral knowledge. In recent years, Tani Lipi script was developed to preserve and introduce a writing system. However, it has some limitations, and its use is limited.

Lack of informants was one of the main problems faced during the present research work. As very few people possess the oral knowledge and a majority of them reside in the remote villages having no access to proper roads and mobile phone services.

Sadly some of the songs such as house construction song, bridge construction song, expedition song, war song etc are no longer sung. The community gatherings or occasions where such songs could be performed are very rare and few. It is high time, that someone does something in order to document and preserve the traditional knowledge for the future generations.

Therefore, the community members with the help of the state government can take necessary steps and preventive measures to promote and maintain their rich cultural heritage. Some steps which can be taken in order to document and preserve the oral traditions have been discussed below:

- Develop a script in order to establish a writing system.
- Oral literature in the form of legends, myths, folktales, proverbs, sayings etc can be written down in order to document and preserve it for the next generations.
- Textbooks can be introduced in schools to teach the younger members of the community about their tradition and culture.
- Children and youths should be encouraged to use their native language especially at home.
- Dictionaries can be developed to help the language survive.
- To create awareness about the significance of the culture and tradition among the community members.

- Financial help and support can be extended to indigenous people who interested in learning and preserving their culture.

The present work has its limitations and may be lacking in many areas. However, being among the first few attempts to record, analyse and preserve the oral knowledge, this work shall help people to understand the social and cultural history of the Nyishi people. This work shall also help those who take up similar interests in oral traditions both in academic pursuits and for leisure reading.

APPENDIX



1. Shri Gocham Telle, a Nyishi Shaman and one of the few surviving people who possess the oral knowledge



2. Photograph taken during recording sessions with informants Smt. Ratan Yak, Shri Gocham Telle and Gocham Tacha



3. Shri Gocham Telle performing a ritual called *Tijir Kanam*



4. Informants Shri Gocham Tacha, Smt. Ratan Yak, Shri Gocham Telle and Bini Tegi



5. Photograph of Informant Smt. Ratan Yak



6. Photograph of Informant Smt. Udu Magra



7. Photographs of Informants Shri Komri Murtem and Smt. Sarada Murtem. This picture was taken during their marriage ceremony called 'Nyida'.



8. Photograph of *Taal* (Large Brass Plate), *Rayo* (Cymbal) and a bamboo stick



9. Photograph of *Orok* (Traditional Sword) and *Buktak* (Scabbard)



10. Photograph of Traditional items such as *Taal* (Large Brass Plate), *Maaj* (Brass Bell), *Mokh* (Brass Bell), *Ju* (Cone-Shaped Brass Bell) and *Lakko* (Traditional Brass Bangles)



11. *Sutum Bopa* (Traditional Headgear worn by men)



12. *Reth- Bakhte*, a Part of *Ui-Riighü* (Altar)



13. Men performing ceremonial dance during *Boori Boot Yullo* festival



14. Men moving in a procession during *Boori Boot Yullo* festival



Map of Arunachal Pradesh showing Kamle District

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