

***CULTURAL IDENTITY, CUSTOMARY LAWS AND VALUES IN THE FOLK MEDIA OF  
THE KHOIBU NAGA***

Dissertation submitted to Nagaland University, Kohima Campus in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement for the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English

By

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**CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION**

**I, MOTHEL**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled ***CULTURAL IDENTITY, CUSTOMARY LAWS AND VALUES IN THE FOLK MEDIA OF THE KHOIBU NAGA***, is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the supervision of **PROFESSOR N.D.R. CHANDRA**, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during the period of my research (2018-2020). The dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any degree, fellowship, diploma to any other universities or institution. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the Degree of **Master of Philosophy in English**.

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**SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ***CULTURAL IDENTITY, CUSTOMARY LAWS AND VALUES IN THE FOLK MEDIA OF THE KHOIBU NAGA*** is a bonified record of research work done by Mr. **Mothel**, Regd. No.: N.U./M.PHIL./ENG.46/2019, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2018-2020 submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. This dissertation has not previously formed the basis of award of any degree, diploma or other title and the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision.

Mr. Mothel has completed his research work within the stipulated time.

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## CHAPTER I

### NAGAS AND EMERGENCE OF KHOIBU NAGA

The Nagas are a group of people who belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race and trace their origin from it. They mainly occupy the hilly regions of the North Eastern parts of India. They are believed to have migrated from China. As Julian Jacobs points out in *The Nagas: Hills Peoples of Northeast India*, “The general expansion of the Mongoloid peoples throughout South East Asia, (including the North East India), may have begun as much as 10 or 12000 years ago, possibly from a region of North China.” (Jacobs 10). K.S. Singh says “whereas most communities in the Northeast either have their roots outside India or have migrated into the region from the Indian heartland.” (qtd. in Verghese, 2014: 2). However, as J. H. Hutton clearly says, “the history of how the Naga tribes came precisely to occupy their present position has, of course, passed into the dim obscurity of vague traditions” which has placed us with only “some indication of the course which the migrations took” which is none other than their legends. (*The Angami Nagas* 6). The Nagas took their journey from where they had been before, travelled and finally settled in their present locations. It is also believed that the Nagas actually replaced those who had once been settled on the hills before their arrival and also opined that not all the tribes came at once. Each tribe took their own different periods and migrated to their present places. As Kibangwar Jamir points out in *The Nagas With the Three Great Nations*, “Some tribes have their own distinctive cultures along with the common Naga cultures. This shows that the Naga migration did not take place in one wave. There might have been several waves through different routes of migration” (Jamir 1, 2). The Nagas are also divided into several different tribes with each tribe having their own cultures which are similar with one another in some areas and contradicts in several ways too. They speak more than thirty dialects belonging to the Tibeto-

Burman language. In *A History of Nagas and Nagaland: (Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation)*, 1996 Sanyu again mentions further while focusing on the language of the Nagas that it is as per Sir G. A. Grierson that their language rests upon the Tibeto-Burmans. (Sanyu 7). As M. Alemchiba notes in *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, “The Indo - Mongoloid people are all speakers of languages and dialects belonging to Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech-family...” (Alemchiba 2). The Sino-Tibetan languages can be separated into two branches namely (i) Tibeto-Burman and (ii) Siamese-Chinese wherein the languages spoken by the Nagas are clubbed in the former category. The spreading out of Han people towards southwards owing to population expansion in the valley of the Yellow River caused the movement, to which Buchanan asserts,

Over hundreds of years the pre-Chinese peoples of Central Asia were displaced into the upland areas of Indo-Chinese lands far to the South and their pressure in turn triggered tribal movements which affected the whole of mainland South East Asia and the adjoining island worlds. (qtd. in Sanyu, 1996: 11)

In view of such traces and indications, another Naga scholar, M. Alemchiba put forward his opinion as such,

We can conclude that the original stock, starting from the centre of dispersion in Sikiang province first moved westerly and upon reaching the head-waters of the Irawaddy and Chindwin rivers, bifurcated in several directions, ultimately leading to Tibet, to Assam, to the hill ranges between Assam and Burma. That branch which came to the hill ranges move further west and entered Naga Hills. Another wave came from the South East Islands taking a north-westerly direction and entered Naga Hills using Burma as a corridor. (Alemchiba 19)

Some intellectuals and Anthropologists even opine that the Nagas are connected or share similarities with the people as far as Southeast Asia, Middle East, America and Europe based on the existence of megaliths found in all these regions which is seen in the Naga culture. They are also believed to have come from the sea-faring culture lying down on how Nagas used beads in their attires and also traces are put forward in connection with the Philippines and Indonesians owing to the similarities of practices in cultivation. However, as mentioned it is very hard to wholly accept any particular theory and analysis to be considered the absolute truth by all the Nagas.

The origin of the word “Naga” incorporates a wide view and as such its actual single meaning and its emergence lie embedded in obscurity. Owing to the difficulty in understanding the Nagas and their origin Anriruddha Vithal Babar in his article *Brief Discourse on the Origin of Naga Tribes* says, “The ancient history of the Nagas is hidden somewhere in the unfathomable darkness of TIME.” ([www.countercurrents.org/2018/06/brief-discourse-on-the-origin-of-naga-tribes](http://www.countercurrents.org/2018/06/brief-discourse-on-the-origin-of-naga-tribes)). It is a generic term which has given rise to numerous explanations. Visier Sanyu indicating the Greek scholar in *A History of Nagas And Nagaland: (Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation)*, 1996 “the earliest specific reference to the Nagas was made by Claudius Ptolemy in 150 A.D. in his *Geographia* where he referred to the Naga country as “The Realm of the Naked” (Sanyu 7). However this view may not comply with the whole of the Nagas. With regard to this point, Panger Imchen in *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* says,

... these references do not apply to present day Nagas. Local tradition and research show that, though there have been migrations from south-west China since 2000 B.C. in this direction, present Naga tribes had either just arrived or were arriving in this location, in



wave after wave, about the time of Ptolemy writing, where as he referred to the epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata...(Imchen 15).

There are wide ranges of ideas propounded by numerous scholars, anthropologists and learned persons as to how this confounding word essentially came into being. The vast set of opinions may or may not be wholly accepted by the Nagas in general because it is believed that many theories do not have sufficient substantial amount of evidence to be fully regarded and acknowledged as the sole truth by every individual. Some are of the opinion that suggests that it is as old as the Vedic times and some groups of people are of the view that the word derived from the Bengali word “Nangta” which is to mean “naked”. But as mentioned by Charles Chasie in *The Naga Imbrolio: A Personal Perspective*, “Some say the word meant “naked” even if it is curious that many others, living contiguous to the Nagas who have been traditionally less clothed than the Nagas, have not been graced with the appellation!”(Chasie 17). Thus, as such we are left with the thought as to why the term had been applied only to them and not to any other people living adjacent to them or why did the other less clothed people never got the name “Naga” or is there any significant striking elements with the Nagas that the term had been addressed only to them leaving out the other less clothed people living close together, all of which still remains a question and are left unanswered. As such we cannot fully depend on any one particular idea of the origin as well as the derivation of its meaning.

Some of the other opinions on the origin is that it is believed to have been derived from the Sanskrit word “Nag” meaning “hill” and claim that it means “hillman” indicating the lifestyle of the Nagas who lives in the hilly areas, others say it means “a warrior”, “folks”, “snake worshippers”, “people”, etc. However, as Hokishe Sema asserts out in *Emergence of Nagaland: Socio Economic and Political Transformation and the Future*, “The two largely accepted

viewpoints are taken from the etymology of the word ‘Naga’ and its varying connotations in the Burmese and the Assamese languages.”(Sema 3). In Burmese, the word “Na-ka” is referred to the Naga people meaning people or men folk with pierced ear-lobes which could be seen as one evident tradition of the Naga people as they used to pierce their ears since the ancient time. In the Assamese language as recorded in the *Borunjis* dating from the thirteenth century, the word “Noga” refers to the primitive man living undisturbed in his natural surroundings. It is said that the word is used by those living in the plains and not by those living on the hills themselves and thus given by outsiders to the people settled on the hills and is put forward that it is the origin of the word Naga. Notwithstanding, there are views which opines that the word ‘Naga’ is of recent origin and it is something new even among themselves pointing out the fact that the Naga people were known previously by either their own village or tribe names. Again Charles Chasie states, “the word ‘Naga’ is itself of recent origin among the Nagas themselves, its meaning according to their individual tribe and village names” (qtd. in Sen, 2006: 253) and even B.B. Kumar in *Naga Identity* mentions as such “on the other hand, even Nagas did not know about the particular nomenclature, and even resented to be called Nagas. Every Naga tribe has its own name. Its neighbours also gave separate name to a tribe. Thus the composite Naga identity is of recent origin and it lacks claimed historical support.” (20). Some even opine that the Nagas did not migrate from anywhere else but that they are the original settlers of the land they now inhabit since time immemorial, which is to them their own original home and making it convoluted on how the word has been truly materialized. With no clear cut information to rely on, there are various issues and opinions indicating that not all of the various theories can be applied correctly to all the Nagas as each theory have its own drawbacks making it difficult and inconclusive to accept just one theory. Nevertheless, the fact that the Nagas are categorized under the Mongoloid

race have been generally received and accepted upon by all based on their physical features and the dialects which falls under the Tibeto-Burman language, which they speak. At present they commonly speak what is known as ‘nagamese’ or “Naga-Asamese” as put forward by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in *Return to the Naked Nagas*. (Fürer-Haimendorf 187). But the Nagas of other states does not speak ‘nagamese’. However, as per one tradition of the Nagas, it gives out the view that they had their own script written in animal skin but that was cooked by mistake and was consumed and thus lost their script. There is another Naga legend indicating that the skin was eaten by the dog when its master was not available.

The Nagas also maintain and preserve their own mythical origins found in the form of legends and folktales which cannot be left out while understanding their origin. Each tribe has their own version of their origin. Every individual tribe gives importance to their own folktales to establish their course of migration, their relationship with other tribes and how they essentially came into the world or in other words, make their settlements. They have their own folktales to talk about their beginning. With the fact that folktales form their main traditional source of knowledge in tracing their roots and emergence, it has also become part of their oral literature in educating the youngsters to know their roots. It helps the people trace and find out their genesis as the folktales gives an indication to their foundation or beginning by serving as their unwritten history and as such, owing to the lack of any unambiguous evidence, the Naga people rely mainly on their orally narrated folktales and legends to generate proofs regarding their emergence.

To name a few, the Ao Nagas are said to have emerged from the Earth from six stones named ‘Lungterok’ or sometimes also known as ‘Ungterok’ at Chungliyimti village on the right bank of Dikhu river of which it comprises of three males and three females which are found at

present in the Sangtam area in Tuensang district. As J. Lonkumer put forward in her essay entitled “The Ao Village Organisation: Origin to Present Day” found in the edited book by N. Venuh entitled *Naga Society: Continuity and Change* wherein she explains about Ao Nagas origin. As per their legend, the first male and female are Tongpok and Lendina respectively, the second male and female are namely Longpok and Yongmenala and finally the third male and female are Longjakrep and Elongshe. They constitute the three different clans who practice intermarriage among them. (Lonkumer 21). The Sangtam and Phom Nagas also share the same story of their origin from ‘Lungterok’. The Angamis are generally said to trace their origin from Kezakenoma but they also have other legends indicating their origin. J. H. Hutton in *The Angami Nagas* gives another origin of the Angamis in which we find that they come from two men who are sometimes also taken as brothers. They are believed to have come out of the earth though the exact place is now unknown. However, it is believed and considered by the people that the incident could have occurred at Maikel wherein a great stone lie there. (Hutton 110). Another legend says that the Nagas and the Indians were brothers and sons to one wise father who had very long moustache. Ukepenofü was believed to be the ancestress of all men. When she took her sons to see their father, the elder son who is supposedly to be the ancestor of the Nagas got frightened of his father’s appearance and ran away but the younger son remained with his father and thus gained instructions and wisdom from his father which further points out to the view as to why the Nagas could not come up to the knowledge of the Indians though they are of the same origin. Another legend goes on to say that three persons emerged from a lake of which the first is the ancestor of the Moas and the Marams who went southwards towards Manipur, the second was the ancestor of the Kacha Nagas who went westwards and the final did not go anywhere and became the ancestor of the Angamis. However, the Angamis have other several myths of origin

and emergence. The Wancho Nagas are said to have their origin from a red gourd known as *Melo-Maiko* and also another tale about their origin talks about the occurrence of a great flood in the past where only one male and one female who got away from the destruction by getting off to a high hill. It is believed that through them the Wancho people came into being. The Chang Nagas are said to have come out of the Earth at Changsang or Changsang Mongko village which is the homeland of the Changs. The Changsang legend is shared by three tribes namely Changs, Phoms and the Konyaks. The Konyaks also believe that they emerged from a pumpkin known as 'Maikokwemni-wem-ou-niu'. Again the Tangkhuls, also known as Hao among themselves, believe in their legend which says that they came out from a stone. One of the folksongs of the Tangkhul people tells us that they emerged from the cave known as Murrungphy. Another theory tells us that they came straight from the place called Meikhel or Maikhel, a village which they believe is their foremost place of settlement and from whence they took several journeys to the places they now inhabit and some even claim that they had a unified race with the Meities. However, they also have various other legends or theories regarding their origin. There are other several Naga tribes which claim that they emerged from the Earth or cave but they all are distinct in their own course of story line giving diverse sets and versions of the stories of origin. Thus, the folktale also provides several different views on the emergence of the Naga tribes. However, there is not only one myth exploring and sharing the tales of the origin of a particular tribe but there are some tribes which narrates different folktales as per their settlement though they belong to the same particular tribe and every tale is generally accepted. Each tale and legends are greatly valued and they constitute one of the significant forms of information about their genesis and these folktales subsequently constitute their oral literature.

Nagas are now said to be more than sixty six tribes distributed in the Northeastern parts of India and some in Myanmar. They are found in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar residing mainly on the hilly regions. The sixteenth major Naga tribes are located in Nagaland and the Nagas found in other states are lesser in number. They are known for their bravery and fun natured character but most importantly for their head hunting culture symbolizing their courage and also as their rewards or achievements as well as honor throughout their history. As Murkot Ramunny lays down in *The World of Nagas*, “They are a distinctive people, with rich tradition and ancient culture, and that they had reached a high state of civilized village society...” (1). They are also well known for their beautiful and diverse sets of cultural attires and the vibrant festivals each tribe practices at particular time of the year. It can be rightfully termed as the culture of diverse colours. Though they are divided in the name of tribe, they are united and stand as one single cluster of people as Nagas.

Now, looking at the Khoibu Naga, they are located at the South Eastern part of Manipur. Their first mention is told to be found in the royal chronicles of the Meitei kings known as *Cheitharol Kumbaba* which is expressed in the form of prose. It claims to have the historical records of the kingdom of Manipur as early as 33 C. E. starting from King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. However, there are no historical books clearly supporting with extensive facts to point out the original emergence of the Khoibu people. An elderly citizen and a member of the literary committee of the Khoibu people, Mr. Syelthlungphom Khaling says as such, “We do not have any historical books that clearly mentions about the origin of our tribe. The lack of documented historical books makes us depend on our oral narratives. Hence, to trace back and get information of our tribe, we rely only on our own folktales which are passed on from generation to generation through oral means.”(Personal Interview 29-30 Dec 2018, 28-30 Aug,

4-6 Oct 2019). The Khoibu Naga is one of the small Naga tribes having their own set of custom and tradition. Focusing on the origin of the term 'Khoibu', in the book *A Development Perspective of Khoibu: A Critical Study on Development Perspective* documented and edited by Angshem Tongtang and Deben Sharma documented, "The name 'Khoibu' has different variations and interpretations giving some clue to the community background and relation to other communities in their neighbourhood." (Tontang and Sharma 6) pointing that the term is used in various ways. The Khoibu people are commonly known by different names by other people but among themselves they call themselves as *Uipo* which they uphold that it is their indigenous name since time immemorial. To the Khama or Tankhul people, they are known as *Apo*, to the Maring people, they are called as *Uipowaa*, to the Chindwin river basin people, as *Upong* and finally to the Meitei people, they are labelled as *Khoipu* or *Khoibu*. The Khoibu Naga comprises of seven clans which has their own ancient tags for each clans. They are namely,

Charang clan: The clan of the chiefs or the *Ningthou*.

Tontang clan: The clan of the high priest or the Amung clan.

Thlaangsaa Bursom/Saka clan: People who are known for their skills and mastery in warfare, hunting and weaponry. They are known as the warrior clan.

Thlouyaang Ahai/Khaling clan: Those who take up the leadership responsibility in the war along with the Saka clan.

Hongsa clan: People who are endowed with the mastery in traditional arts and decorations.

Ronglo clan: They have visionary leaders and they make prophecies and are known for the rare talent for farsightedness and guide for the community.

Dangsa clan: They were known for heroic deeds at the time of inter-war feud. This clan group is however said to be extinct now.

According to the elders of the Khoibu people, their forefathers were known for their mastery in honey bee rearing and extraction of honey for the purpose of presents and exchange it with others. It is also believed that while under the rule of the Meitei kings, the Khoibu people presented honey as a form of tribute to them and as such the term has been given to them by the Meitei kings. The word 'Khoibu' is derived from the word 'khai' meaning 'bee' and 'pu' which means 'Akapu' or 'owner'. Thus, they are known as people who own bee or beehive carrier. However, they call themselves as 'Uipo' in their society in order to preserve their distinctive identity though they are officially and popularly known as Khoibu (*Historical Background of Khoibu Tribe* 1). Mr. Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling, a prominent linguist of Khoibu Naga opine and says that the word 'Khoibu' is a kind of "slavery tag" put forward by the Manipuri kings while the Khoibu people were under their rule or sovereign. He further says that "among the Khoibu people they never address themselves as 'Khoibu' in any of their social gatherings and occasions but regard themselves as 'Uipo' in order to safeguard and defend their indigenous identity so that it is not lost with due time." (Personal Interview 8-9 Nov 2018). Furthermore, in order to substantiate the word "Khoibu", the view of the people is again pointed out in the book labeled *Khoibu (Uipo) Tribe: A Profile*, compiled and published by Uipo (Khoibu) Marou Assembly, "though we called ourselves 'Uipo', we officially represent as Khoibu to avoid any confusion of our identity." (1)



Khoibu Naga people are found in Khoibu Khullen which is their ancestral home, a village in Manipur and is said to be their first proper settlement. They are also of the Mongoloid stock who are said to have migrated from Myanmar region owing to some conflicts among the people in the region. Through their migration, they came all along to Khoibu Khullen village and from this home various relocation and settlements took place by and by furthermore. They shifted out to other places like Biyang, Khangshim, Nungourok, Thawai-Ngarumphung which is mixed with Tankhul community and finally some of those who remained in Khoibu Khullen. The migrations of the people are either in few numbers or sometimes in a larger quantity. With the change in time and development they are now dispersed in various areas. At present, though the movement occurs, it is lesser in number and is mainly in search of jobs and occupational opportunities. These movements have become inevitable in regard to the demanding educational requirements and modern development of the people and various other issues they face in the lap of the changing world.

Like the rest of the ethnic Naga tribes, the Khoibu Naga people also uphold their own mythical emergence. Oral tradition thus takes its stand in pointing about their origin as well as their relationship with other communities through folktales. Mr. Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling also says “we do not have our written historical facts that recorded our emergence and we only rely on our folktales to trace back our origin and we cannot deny our traditional oral record” (Personal interview 8-9 Nov 2018), as such, with no printed facts to prove their beginning, the sole source of information to depend on springs us back on their folktales which are passed on to people by word of mouth from generation to generation. Angshem Tontang and Deben Sharma in *A Development Perspective of Khoibu: A Critical Study on Development Perspective* indicates as such, “Origin of Khoibu tribe like many other ethnic communities is shrouded in their

mythologies.” (Tontang and Sharma 6). In fact, it is only with the help of their folktales that their emergence is studied and examined.

The Khoibu folktale goes on to say that in the beginning all human beings lived in a cave and goes on explaining their numerous experiences and encounters, settlements, etc. There are several oral traditions but the most commonly accepted folktale regarding their emergence is the folktale also considered as lyrics or psalms which are sung by the people known as *Tlou Rachaanaad*. It is a very lengthy folktale consisting of seven hundred and seventy three verses or lines altogether and which is recited from time to time in the past by memory as it was never found in written form. This is their only source and their only historical evidence where they establish their origin. This extensive tale tells the story that the Khoibu people actually emerged from a cave or underneath the Earth. Mangsawr(king) and Khayir(queen) were the rulers. They had a hero name Masousaangpaana. They had difficulty pushing out the large stone covering the mouth of the cave. Many tried including some animals like pigs, boars, bulls, etc., but it was all in futile. After much deliberation and consultation, it was finally decided that the buffalo should prove its might. Proving worthy of the task, it was at last opened by a buffalo. However, the problem did not end there. Soon after coming out of the cave, they were attacked by a tiger and many people and animals were killed. This obstructed their way out beyond the cave. After several tiresome more attempts, Masousaangpaa threw his spear at the tiger being assisted by Khamaa thlouyaang Yaangkhosaangpaa (a Thangkhul), Harid (swallow) and Hasan (a bird of munia family), the tiger was finally killed and the people then took up several different directions forming small bands of which one of the bands took the direction towards Mongrenphai. Mongrenghai according to the folktale, is the first settlement of the Khoibu right after they came out of the cave which they claim is the place in the Chindwin river basin and with the

increase of people and cattles and animals and in search for a cooler and fertile habitat, they slowly moved and dispersed to other places such as Marpaaphai, Sanam, Lichik, Mangsaa, Lataa, Taap, etc., which are not known to exist now. Mongrengphai is considered as the valley of dreams owing to the beautiful and exquisite scenery of the valley. It is said that people were so amazed to see the beauty of the vast valley that they “visualized as if it could be seen in a sweet dream.” (*Khoibu (Uipo) Tribe: A Profile* 3). Such a divine experience of the past and their expression of it as a dream land is reflective of how human emotions were responsive to its surroundings way back before any sense of verbal expressions of beauties took any major stance in their nomadic life. *Tlou Rachaadnad* explains the step-by-step emergence, journey, encounters, incidents, etc. Taking a few of the lines or verses from *Tlou Rachaadnad*, the following is mentioned skipping some verses.

Verse 1: *Ahaatounetou - eyio? Hatou kheisinnietou,*

(Aye, was it said so? That, like this, so in ancient time,)

Verse 2: *Tlaipaang sanroukayousuotou,*

(That, the world so beginning was,)

Verse 3: *Tlaipaang pharipaagsangkheina sanroukayoutawietou,*

(So said that, from a bread's measure did the world begin,)

Verse 4: *Tlaipaang pharipaag-sangkheidonsinnietou,*

(That, when the world was so of a bread's measure,)

Verse 5: *Khayir na yirkaphumhoitawietou,*

(So said that Khayir(queen's name) then was still progeniting,)

Verse 11: *Thalungdaagraaghoitawietou,*

(So said that it was still beneath the stone,)

Verse 16: *Tlaipaang thawg-aapasetou,*

(That, let us so emerge onto the world,)

Verse 22: *Tlaipaang kathwag sanroukayoutawie,*

(So said that, emerging onto the world began,)

Verse 37: *Thawngnula laadmaniemangnetou,*

(That, neither could the she-door be (so) opened,)

Verse 53: *Raloinan tloukheirui sangdaan-aapasietou,*

(That, let us so beseech a word of request to buffalo,)

Verse 59: *Raloinaruoi tloukhei loukalaangtawietou,*

(So said that, in a word agreed by buffalo also,)

Verse 64: *Thawngpaaruoi yakalaadtawietou,*

(So said that he-gate also opened,)

Verse 67: *Thami sankoumasaantawietou,*

(So said that, then men so set out,)

Verse 68: *Thangaaruoi sankoumasaantawietou,*

(So said that, herds also so set out,)

Thus, it continues describing with a smooth narration on the emergence of the Khoibu people from a cave. This oral narrative is the only living source of the Khoibu people when their origin is to be analyzed. Owing to the fact that no other historical books talked of their origin so as to produce any concrete logical foundation, they become solely dependent on the information laid forth in the folktale, which sometimes may not provide unambiguous scientific and historical proofs, though not in all cases, and leading to unwanted debates. However, this does not mean that folktales are full of unreliable narratives but instead they play a major role in understanding alongside the scarcely available historical notes and statements recorded by various anthropologists and learned persons to draw upon a parallel comparison. For instance, the

recently found Naga historical sites at various districts like Senapati, Ukhrul, Noney, Cachar has added another level of significant evidences in connection with the ideas of origin based on the Naga folktales and legends. Pfokrelo Kapesa, in one of the local newspapers *The Morung Express* in an article titled *On World Heritage Day, A look at Some Naga Historical Sites* states, “Makhel, a Mao village in Senapati district, is replete with myths and legends. Many Naga communities believe Makhel to be their place of origin. Its legends have tangible remnants to this day.” (Kapesa 1). The very presence of such concrete and tangible facts backs up the oral narratives in understanding the origin of the people.

Despite of the fact that they are less known in the field of literary platform as compared to other advanced tribes, the Khoibu Naga people had been trying to safeguard and preserve their own their mythical emergence found in the form of folktales so that the future generations to come should not forget their own genesis. It reflects the distinctive cultural identity and traditional values. With the influence of modern education and advancement they are gradually and continuously taking its stand in the literary world. They are now scattered in various parts within and outside of Manipur state.

There prevail some few basic striking features of the Nagas that demarcates them as a family or a cluster of people. The Nagas are a simple people. They basically rely on agriculture for their economic as well as for domestic consumption. They practice both jhum and terrace cultivation. The gradual changes in development from external forces and the western influences in various fields in social, economic, education etc., has significantly transformed the lives of the Nagas in diverse aspects. The Nagas are a folk of people who are rich in their tradition and their culture is something unique making it interesting to lay down one’s attention. The most beautiful aspect of the Nagas in general is in regard to the numerous types of colourful festivals. They

remain loyal and faithful to their village community and adhere to their village regulations and contribute their service in maintaining good peaceful atmosphere. The festivals tell us how in the olden days any work as well as functions are being carried out. The festivals serve as a link in understanding the traditional norms of how particular thing or work is regulated. Also one of the striking features of some festivals is that they are performed in order to please, appease some certain spirits and perform some sacrifices asking for the spirit's blessings and for prosperity and protection because such association with supernatural entities had been part and parcel of the Nagas' traditional life. They are cheerful, friendly and honest and most basically they do not wish to harm anyone if they are not threatened by others and are known for their hospitality and generosity. They are very close to nature because they do not see themselves as detached from nature and they are dependent on nature in various aspects of their lives be it social, religious and economy. One of the most notable attributes of the Nagas is their headhunting culture. It has various meanings and purposes and also an indication of the process of change in a man's life from childhood to adulthood signifying maturity and courage. This practice was done not only against their enemies but in few cases, even within the same tribe. The headhunting tradition, as A. Wati Longchar asserts in *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India*, 1991, "One's social status was solely dependent upon the success in head-hunting. For the tribals, it was partly religious, partly to show social maturity and partly of fertility and agricultural prosperity. Hence, people took it seriously." (Longchar 71). There are also other several social and religious reasons as to why this is practiced besides the above mentioned causes. One traditional tale of the origin of the head-hunting tradition as per the Ao Nagas mentioned by Longchar,

In the beginning, there was only one tree on the Earth. This tree bore much fruits and all birds settled on the tree branches to eat the fruits. One day a bird dropped one of the fruits

on to the ground and it was eaten by a lizard. When the bird searched for the fallen fruit, it was reported by that lizard that the fruit was eaten up by an ant. Since both the lizard and the ant denied eating of the fruit, it was arranged that the case would be decided by taking an oath. After taking the oath it was clear that the lizard was guilty. At this all the ants chopped off the head of the lizard and it was taken out in a big procession as a sign of victory, which was seen by human beings. It was thus in imitation of this incident that the practice of headhunting originated in the world.” (ibid 71, 72)

Another source of the headhunting culture is established with the story of an orphan boy who once carved out a human figure on a piece of wood and which was then fastened with a cane tied on a bamboo post and placed it on the roadside. All the people who saw the carving was impressed with the work and they thought upon that it would even look better if a real human head was placed in that manner. Hence, they decided to kill one another and keep it dangling and thus the people adopted the headhunting practices. However, the headhunting tradition has been completely stopped and wiped out and it is now only a matter of the past. Murkot Ramunny asserts in his introductory note, “The new religion spread slowly but steadily and weaned them away from head-hunting.” (*The World of Nagas* xv). The mind of the Nagas was being transformed from such behaviour. The various efforts of Christian missionaries and the gradual fruits of modern life and development have completely replaced these brutal practices. Now, it would be inappropriate if one still define Nagas with headhunting practices and club them under the barbaric life. Contrary to it, they are now mostly Christians with no connection with the barbaric inhumane actions which is one of the most beautiful impact brought by the Christians missionaries.

The Nagas also believe in various rituals and practices. The belief in spirits also distinguishes them from other people. They believe that there is a Supreme Being or God and this Supreme God or Being has different names in every Naga tribes. The Supreme God has his own different functions ascribed by each tribe. They also believe in the existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits. In the olden times, they had close connection with spirits and often deem that mortals are under their constant protection, guidance, care, etc. They also attribute anything unusual to the operation and working of the spirits. M. Horam in *Nagas Old Ways and New Trends* observes,

But in the belief of the Nagas each member of the family supposed himself, or herself, under perpetual ghostly surveillance. Spirit eyes were watching every act; spirit ears were listening the every word. Thoughts too, not less than deeds, were visible to the gaze of the dead: the heart must be pure, the mind must be under control, within the presence of the spirits. (Horam 20)

Tattoo is also one of the striking features of the Nagas. It has various connotations. Almost all the Nagas wear tattoos in the olden days. One of the several reasons of tattooing as mentioned by J. P. Mills in *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, “The tattooing is a sort of *rite de passage*. Once a girl has undergone her first year’s tattoo she is regarded as a full-fledged member of the community.” (Mills 31). Also as Aglaja Stirn and Peter van Ham points out in *The Hidden World Of the Naga: Living Traditions in Northeast India and Burma*, 2003, “The rationale behind it is twofold---classification and status, the boundaries between the two aspects, however, being somewhat fluid.” (Stirn and Ham 160). J. H. Hutton in *The Angami Nagas* laid down,

It is agreed by all Angamis, as well as by other Nagas, that head-taking was essential to marriage in so far that a buck who had taken no head, and could not wear the warrior’s



dress at festivals, not only found it exceedingly difficult to get any girl with pretensions to good looks or to self-respect to marry him, but was held up to ridicule by all the girls of his clan. (Hutton 165)

Thus, Nagas as a whole and the Khoibu Naga, being one of it, in particular shares striking similarities in their cultural traits though they are found in different geographical regions and they have always enriched their own kinds of emergence both history, which is very scarce and is found mostly in the form of travelogues, and also their mythical information. Though there is a slight difference in the mythical narratives of every Naga tribes they cannot be denied or deemed to be of less significance as it is their vital source which provides a significant stand or view point in understanding the beginning of the Nagas and of each tribe besides the few travelogues penned down by foreigners indicating the geographical habitats of the Nagas. Though much of the information is gathered through the understanding of the folktales of the Nagas, the records penned down by learned foreigners is equally important in ventilating the few basic facts about the Naga people.

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## CHAPTER II

### NAGA LITERATURE AND EMERGENCE OF KHOIBU LITERATURE

The Nagas are an ethnic cluster of interesting people endowed with their own cultural identity. They speak their own dialects among themselves belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic category and live harmoniously with each other with the feeling of oneness. They strengthen their own distinctive identities through their customs and traditions even though they are found dispersed across the various parts of Northeast India. As a whole, Nagas did not maintain a strong stand in the world of written literature from an early time because they were living in isolation untouched and undisturbed by any external forces and westernization before the nineteenth century. Murkot Ramunmy in his introductory note says, “The world left them untouched and unnoticed. They valued their isolation and clung to it.” (*The World of Nagas* (xv)). With the encounter of the Christian missionaries, education has planted its seed among the Nagas and as such “the world of Nagas was changing rapidly” (ibid xv). It is only a recent development started by few indigenous Naga writers and carried on successfully. Oral tradition has been the sole and foremost form of literature and as such the oral tradition cannot be separated or neglected when we are to drive our attention on their literature. Prior to oral tradition, there existed no other forms of literature among the Nagas. Oral tradition thus constitutes the other side of the same coin, i.e., written literature.

The oral tradition of the Nagas serves as the pathway in the literary field helping to create their identity. Their literature is still in the process of growing though some prominent authors have already marked their place in it. Their oral literature constituting of their folktales, folk songs, proverbs, festivals, etc., helps us to understand their customs and traditions and which are

beautifully and skilfully reflected in their written literature too. The folklore of the Nagas has been preserved and passed down from generation to the next generation through orally and in practice or action as well. Sentinaro Tsuren has noted in her essay *An Appraisal of Ao Naga Literature* from the book written by her and Vizovono Elizabeth, *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland*, “The Nagas do not have a written script of their own. Their unwritten customs, laws and practices were treasured over the years by means of oral narration passed on from one generation to the next.” (Elizabeth and Tsuren 136) and Asono Yonuo also points in *Nagas Struggle Against British Rule Under Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu*, as “scriptless Naga Languages” (Yonuo 58) and as such if it ever existed, would have formed the foundation of their written literature. The oral narratives which are found in every Naga tribe irrefutably comprises and builds up their literature. It acts as the backbone, the foundation and the cornerstone that gave shape to the whole body of written literature of the later years. The most prominent authors who have marked their place in the literary world could be narrowed down to writers such as Easterine Kire, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalang and Temsula Ao whose works in the English language have greatly portrayed and reflected the various concerns and attributes of the Naga people with their own creative touches and talents.

One could say that the emergence of understanding one’s culture that gave the platform to the rise in the passing of oral tradition is the *Morung*, which was one of the most basic and important institution that generate the Naga youths in learning about their culture. Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf points it as “men’s house” in *Return to the Naked Nagas*. (Fürer-Haimendorf 33). It is a dormitory for the young people who will come and spend their time learning and accumulating their cultural traits and knowledge. Not only the boys have this dormitory for themselves but even young girls have their own separate dormitory where they are taught various

life skills and womanly duties and cultural ways of life. It is rightfully considered as the basis of their oral tradition and serves as thus, the foundation of their primary literary upliftment before the advent of Christianity which brought the modern education.

To understand the oral literature which is basically their folklore, we need to first understand what folklore is and what its basic components are. William John Thoms, a British writer coined the term “folklore” in 1846. W. Thoms explains Folk-Lore as “the lore of the people” and further says it is “the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, &c., of the olden time.” (qtd. in Emrich, 1946: 361). And further adds ‘legends’, ‘local traditions’ and ‘nursery rhymes’ as parts constituting folklore. The *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* gives the meaning as “the traditional beliefs and stories of a people”. (“Folklore” 312). The American Folklore Society also observes “Folklore is the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioral example” and which has included the definition of Jan Brunvand who says, “Folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples.” ([www.afsnet.org/page/WhatIsFolklore](http://www.afsnet.org/page/WhatIsFolklore).). The definition of folklore in Wikipedia notes as,

Folklore is the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people; it encompasses the traditions common to that culture, subculture or group. These include oral traditions such as tales, proverbs and jokes. They include material culture, ranging from traditional building styles to handmade toys common to the group. Folklore also includes customary lore, the forms and rituals of celebrations such as Christmas and weddings, folk dances and initiation rites. (<https://en.Wikipedia.Org/wiki/Folklore>.)

Now if we focus on how folklore comes in connection alongside with humanities, Jawaharlal Handoo opines in his seminar paper *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* which appeared in Soumen Sen's edited work *Folklore in North-East India* points out,

the links which connect folklore on the one hand with humanities and on the other with social sciences are so strong that ignoring them might not put only folklore studies but even those subjects that represent humanities and social sciences into jeopardy. (qtd. in Sen 3).

It is important to study in such diverse areas and disciplines, making its own significant contribution in understanding the overall life, literature and culture of the people because “the fact remains that folklore still concerns many disciplines, and will certainly be studied across disciplines” (ibid 3,4). Folklore is as such the whole body of our tradition and culture that existed from the past and continues till today. It is the way of life of the people and by which one can find his or her own distinctiveness among other cultures and traditions. It is the identity with which one is able to create the sense of being different one from the other. Also one of the uniqueness of folklore is that it has no particular author to be accredited to. It is something that has evolved from the culture of the people itself and the people as a whole owns their folklore which is then continuously retold by people of any status either for preservation, duty, enjoyment or leisure through narration and some through action or performance. Coming to the oral literature, the Nagas have always carried their oral literary culture in the forms of folktales, legends, proverbs, jokes, beliefs, practices, etc., and all these are narrated primarily by word of mouth. Jawaharlal Handoo says, “Oral literature called verbal art or expressive literature are ‘spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances’. Traditionally this has been known as folk literature as well.” (ibid 7).



As mentioned, the oral literary forms include the folktales, legends, folksongs, myths, beliefs and stories. All these are the fundamental parts of the oral literature. The Nagas are rich in their folktales, legends, myths and other beliefs or stories. As Easterine Kire points in her book *Folk Elements In Achebe: A Comparative Study Of Ibo Culture And Tenyimia Culture*, “The role of tales in the oral tradition is to educate by way of providing moral lessons in stories that are easily received on young minds.” (Kire 9). We find that like the rest of the cultures around the world, they also carry all these elements which are the integral components of oral literature. At the foremost, taking their oral tradition, we see that every single Naga tribe always upholds and cherishes one’s own orally transmitted tradition besides those that are performed and practiced in action. Folktales of the Naga people are basically functional as well as informative in understanding and tracing one’s roots or origin just as folk songs, proverbs, festivals, etc. As a form of literature it has informed the younger generations to identify their own tribes amongst the Nagas. We see as Tamsula Ao points in her book *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*, that oral narration is “not a mere form of ‘story – telling’ as opposed to a written, recorded version.” But that they make up and establish “in many ways the source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history.” (Ao 174). This is very true indeed because in the absence of the oral tradition or precisely the oral narratives, the force or support to record any form of written books would have been almost nearly impossible with the fact that the threat of losing one’s own cultural identity had set up the boost to preserve it in written form for future references besides the other various causes of harsh experiences of the people noted of the disturbed times. Just like one of the roles of literature which is aimed to instigate the people towards moral values, the oral tradition has been to a great extent greatly functional in maintaining the values and behaviors of the people besides other significant attributes it

contributes. Also as Vizovono Elizabeth precisely points out in her essay *An Overview of the Development of Literature in Nagaland* in the book authored by her and Sentinaro Tsuren *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland* “Any discussion of Naga literature therefore, has to take recourse to the oral tradition as it is the primary source of their original literature.” (Elizabeth and Tsuren 12, 13).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Folktales about the origin of the various Naga tribes reflects the background of the people and their experiences. When we look at their folktales as oral literary pieces, we see how such narratives are endowed with literary elements as fictions which having certain concrete evidences in them. Without going into much detail, when we consider one of the folktales of the Nocte or Nokte people regarding their tale of origin. The legend says that in the beginning there was only one man in the whole world alone. The man was very handsome and strong. One day this man went into the wilderness or jungle in order to chop some trees and there a pretty girl saw him. The pretty girl was said to be the daughter of the God Yang. The girl fell in love with the man instantly and wished to be with him. As such, she came down to the earth and then they were married. They bore children who are said to be known as the Noctes. There are also other legends that have different legends of the origin of the Noctes depending on their villages. Taking the Ao tribe, they are believed to have emerged from ‘Lungterok’ or sometimes also known as ‘Ungterok’ which is known as the six stones or six *ungers* which is situated on the east of Tzula river found in the Sangtam tribe said to be at Chungliyimti village. Three stones were said to be male and the other three female. The oral tradition goes as such that the Aos were living in an advance or civilization and their tribe grew much in number with time. This led to shortage of place for them to live freely and to carry on their works for their survival. Faced with such a situation, they moved out to other place in

search of space and this led to a group of people start to take their journey from Chungliyimti and crossed the Tzula River. Once they reached the river they had to make arrangements to cross the river as the river was too large for them to cross by foot. The people then built a bridge made of rope and cane and started to cross the river but when a large number of them had passed over and reached the other side, one person cut the rope and thus stopped the migration of the people, though from which side of the group was the rope cut is not fully understood. The people was thus divided again and those who remained named those who crossed the other side as 'Aor' which is to mean 'go' or 'gone' which is said to be the origin of the word 'Ao' and thus the Ao Nagas. The Konyaks believe that they emerged from a pumpkin called "Maikokhwemniu" and as such, it goes on with the other tribes too with their own set of tales or myths that are taught orally. It is through all these we are made aware of their identity. The cultural identity of the Nagas is beautifully portrayed in their oral literature. It acts as a mirror through which they see who they really are and how others see them to be. The art of storytelling is thus seen from such narratives of their legends and we can say the seed of literature is sown and embedded in their folktales. All we need to grasp is to look such narratives from literary perspective to understand and get the beautiful oral art.

Again folktales and fables are also a major part of the oral literature. The tradition of narrating tales was also one of the important aspects of the people in the Naga culture since the ancient times. They contribute their own roles like that of the origin tales and serve their own purpose in the functioning of their cultural society. Like proverbs, it also gives an insight about human nature, values and it also entertains the people. Its worth comes with the fact that it also gives glimpses of moral ways of life and conduct. M. Alemchiba Ao again gives or points out one dominant fact of the folktales of the Nagas as a whole. In the foreword of the book titled

*Folktales From Nagaland*, he observed and note folklore as a “historical science” owing to the fact that it reflects the past events, incidents, practices, beliefs, etc., and its relation with science as it is not just a mere “speculation” and furthermore asserts that, “Naga folk-lore in general has much in common with that of other races of Mongolian affinities. Most of the stories of different tribes have similarity, except in minute details” because all tribes in general has some common traits in relation with one another (*Govt. of Nagaland* (i)). The very fact that the folktales have such similarities is due to the fact that the Nagas as a whole share the same cultural affinities in one or the other way. They are of the same stock of people and owing to this, their ways of life have always been attributed with common shared traditional and cultural elements which cannot be denied. The importance of folktales in creating such a sense of oneness reflects how the cultural elements of the old ways of life among the Nagas points out or directs us to understand more or less their common origin of the same stock of people. We shall see some of the folktales of the Nagas and observe how these tales had been greatly contributing the people in preserving their culture of oral tradition and also which reflects the ways of life. One of the folktales is about a family wherein the young wife died leaving behind a daughter and her husband. However, after sometime the father took a new wife. The stepmother did not treat the daughter as her own loving child in the absence of her father. The father did not know about this ill behavior of his new wife towards his daughter. Being a farmer, the father would go to the field everyday and his daughter would carry his food and return home in the evening with wild birds, pea-hens, peacocks, wild hens and other birds from the trap he had laid. However, the step-mother never gave any of these birds’ meat to her step-daughter in her food but instead; she only gave the young child some sour and bitter fruits. One day, the father, as usual went to the field and caught a pea-hen, gave it to her daughter but at the time of having her food, she never got any of the

flesh given by her father who usually come home late. It so happened that one day when the girl was taking the food for her father, she heard a pea-hen singing when she reached her father's place. She then said, "Oh pea-fowl! Your flesh is very sour and intestines are very bitter." The litter girl was overheard by her father who was working nearby and surprisingly asked her why she said so about the tasty meat of the bird. He then gave her a piece of pea-hen meat to her which he has cooked in the field. On tasting the real flesh, the girl was so excited by its taste. This aroused the sense of suspicion on her father. That evening, her father send her another pea-fowl he had captured in his trap and instructed her that he would reach home while she have her food and told her to open the door for him taking the dish with her so that he would see what is served for her by her step-mother. As planned, the father came home at the right time and knocked the door. The little girl opened the door and when her father saw what dish had been served to his daughter. He realized the wickedness of his wife and decided to chastise her. Thus, with the pretext of preparing her on how to run for safety in times of fire breakout, he told her to carry a basket, put her belongings and carry it and once she did it, he thrush her out of his house. This beautifully presents how evil deeds are punished eventually. It has great moral value and such tales are a way to educate and train up people in their community in directing them to the correct ways of life and character. It moulds the conduct and behavior of the people and also gives us the idea of what is expected of us by the people in the community for a better and conscious living. Furthermore it directs us to understand how one should take correct and responsible decisions so that it does not degrade anyone's life but which when neglected or avoided, brings only due consequences on oneself.

Now, as mentioned before, there are certain similarities in particular folktales of the Nagas with each other tribe. The story may have parallel or similar plot, events, incidents,

characters, etc., with only minute changes in details and descriptions. However this does not mean the distortion of the tales in any ways. One of the reasons of such changes in it might solely depend on the person who narrates the tale. He might more or less modify slightly with or without his knowledge without changing the whole plot. Taking the folktale of certain Naga tribes like that of the Maring, Zeliang and Khoibu Nagas, the folktale which tells us about how people break forth from beneath the earth or a cave wherein they had been living and how they were helped by animals in pushing away the huge covering rock, their encounter and incidents after they succeeded in their attempt to explore outside the cave, the importance given to the Mithun, a species of the Indian Bison, struggles, etc. The tale in short proceeds as such. In the beginning all the people lived in a cave or sometimes referred to as earth. With time the population increased and this led to space problem. Their cave was covered partially by a large slab of rock. The people tried their best to remove the rock but all their efforts slipped away in vain. They then asked the animals to remove the stone. The tiger, the bull, the elephant, the lion and several other animals contributed as per their turn. However, the rock was not able to be removed. At last the healthy and strong Mithun gave its full strength and succeeded in opening the covering rock. The Mithun was thus praised and given great honour and reputation. The Khoibu Nagas also follow such similar plot and storyline but the honourable place of the mighty Mithun is taken by the buffalo. As a result, the buffalo is considered mighty among them. It is believed that the people of the Maring and Zeliang Nagas among other tribes consider Mithun as a mighty animal and associated it with symbol of wealth and elation. Besides the similarities, such folktales are in a way, portrays the shared cultural traits the Naga people has since time immemorial and as Lucy Zehol says “the same folktales reflect the thought and, idea and socio-cultural life, including value systems of the people.” (*Ethnicity* 96)

Folktales are also rich in emotions and they are narrated so that it gives the listeners the characters' personality and this opens up the way to the listeners in unfolding the idea about how emotions, be it negative or positive, affects the lives of the characters and how much this is applicable in the world we are living in which is one of the dominant goals of literary works. As a result, folktales are never far away or detached completely from human sentiments. It has life in it with all the passions and emotions working in one or the other way. One of the famous folktales where we find human emotions beautifully captured is the story of Jena and Eteben (spellings of the names are as per the book *Fables from the Misty Mountains: Folklore of the Nagas*), which sometimes people parallel it with William Shakespeare's famous play *Romeo and Juliet*. Sentinaro Tsuren in one of her essays observes, "It is an immortal story of human love and sorrow for both young and old..." (Elizabeth and Tsuren 145). The tale gives us the idea that even in the past, in an age where modern civilization had hardly or no impact on a group of people called Nagas, human emotions not only constituted of the preconceived barbaric and cold-blooded nature where ruthless beheadings overtook or blanketed the whole of their sentiments. It shows us that besides the brutal behaviors of Nagas, there exist the same love, pain, struggle, tragedy, etc. the modern men feels. A version of the tale as mentioned in *Fables from the Misty Mountains: Folklore of the Nagas*, published by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland proceeds as such,

Eteben was the most beautiful girl in village Mopongchuket. She was the daughter of Kabir and Warola from the Ochi clan. Every young man wanted to marry Eteben. But her heart was placed for only one man – Jenaba, son of Kilangsang and Soina from the Lemtur clan. Jenaba, or Jena, was a learned man, but he belonged to a very poor family. Eteben's family did not approve of her closeness to Jena. So they decided to marry her

off to someone of equal or higher social status. One of Eteben's suitors was Wasapong. But Eteben put him off with her unladylike antics when he came to propose. Eteben also turned down the next best suitor – Tenyur, the son of a rich man from Sungratsu village. Her father then decreed: "Any young man who brings me seven cows will have my daughter's hand in marriage." Eteben knew this was beyond Jena's means. She quietly removed all her jewellery and told Jena to barter them for the cows in the valley yonder. Jena did fetch the cows, but Tenyur beat him to it. Reluctantly, Eteben married Tenyur. But she refused to eat or drink. Her health kept deteriorating so fast that Tenyur took her back to her parents' house. Jena tried nursing her back to health without the knowledge of her parents. Eteben did not recover. When she died, Jena began playing the flute. He kept on playing until he was heard of no more. But the lovers did not let the people forget them. They left their footprints on stones to be together eternally. (188-190)

Another striking feature of the oral literature comes in the form of proverbs found in the Naga culture. Proverbs have been always a part of every cultures around which tell the world. It is an inevitable part of any culture and is a universal phenomenon, the best example being *The Book of Proverbs* in The Old Testament of the Hebrew *Bible*. Proverbs are functional in transmitting instructions, truth, wisdom and correcting the people. Also, not only in the oral literature but even writers has made use of proverbs in their literary texts for various purposes and effects. It carries hidden meanings that play a didactic role. Proverbs are usually metaphorical in nature and the in-depth meaning of it does not typically occur when it is observed literally. This makes the audience or the readers more aware of its actual meaning lying beneath the phrase or the saying. However, all proverbs do not need to be all together found in its metaphorical state. There are some also a number of them found and written in a more clear-cut



manner and its meaning or meanings could be perceived straight away. Proverbs reflects the truth and wisdom and is meant to educate the people. They are also a significant part of everyday speech and communication when one wishes to advise or to instruct. Every proverb has its own functions and aims. Some may be used to give cautions, advises, jokes, praises or to criticize depending on the situation and subject of communication. As Easterine Kire points in her book *Folk Elements In Achebe: A Comparative Study Of Ibo Culture And Tenyimia Culture*, “Proverbs are an essential feature of native speech, they are not mere embellishments of speech but exist integrally in native speech because they are the essence of conversation” and that they are an inseparable parts of speech which gives “important lessons of life” to the people as a whole seeing that it “comment on situations in life by use of the proverb.” (Kire 113). The proverbs that exist in the Naga culture, like the rest of the cultures around the world, gives the insight of what the phrase is trying to ventilate and this creates or establishes the creative and critical faculty of the people too. Proverbs creates an impact of its own like any written books or ideologies.

Some proverbs of the Naga people as stated by Easterine Kire include the following.

- 1) In old fireplace, easier to make – used by way of commenting on people who return to old habits easily.
- 2) Hiding one’s goitre and talking to another’s goitre – has the same meaning as the biblical saying:- ‘And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?’ (Mathew 7:3)
- 3) Our foes are our whetting – stone - enjoins considering opposition in a positive and constructive light.

- 4) Pigs sees the sky only on its death – is a comment on people who do not participate in community affairs but are always homebound.
- 5) In the friendship of three, one is offended.
- 6) Hasty talk will not even catch a grasshopper. This proverb reflects the Tenyimia fear of *diehou*, premature talk. Its English equivalent is, “don’t count your chickens before they are hatched” and used to admonish hunters.
- 7) Thieves flee before they are pursued.
- 8) Afternoon shadow – is a reference to an ill-statured person because the noontime shadow is shortest.
- 9) Turning around you see only your shadow – refers to the lonely status of an only child.
- 10) As great as the full moon – refers to members of a household who are all equally great.
- 11) While his mother lay dead, he was pressing his lover’s head – a saying that points to a man who cannot differentiate his priorities.
- 12) If the wind does not blow, the trees cannot move – carries the same meaning as – There is no smoke without a fire. (ibid 113,114)

One of the features of proverbs is that the same proverb may have more than one definite meaning and interpretation because every culture in general and a person in particular may utilize it with their own specific contexts and circumstances. For instance the proverb “A rolling stone gathers no moss” may have dual interpretations by considering it from the negative and the positive viewpoints. It may thus vary based on its contexts and the manner of situation in which it is put to use. However, this does not mean that every single proverb bear multiple interpretations because there are also some proverbs which has a clear and direct meaning like for instance “Honesty is the best policy” which gives an unambiguous meaning even from its

first reading and can thus be considered literally without any further in-depth analysis for interpretations. Taking into account all of these aspects of proverbs, we see that proverbs makes its own contribution in every culture and is one of the significant parts of culture.

Not only are the legends and folktales comes under the oral literature but even the beliefs and ideas fall under this category. As a significant element of the oral tradition, the notion of God also comes in connection as this very body of idea is also narrated as well as practiced together and it gives the supernatural or gothic impact. The Nagas believe in the idea of the Supreme Being or God is also taught among their communities. The idea of God or Supreme Being which is taught through words by mouth to someone and it is widely believed and considered sacred by the people, though it is based on animism and also carried out practically. All such concepts are taught by the priests, elders and parents to the younger generations in order to preserve and strengthen their primitive beliefs. The Nagas always believed that there is a Supreme Being who has control over everything and all the creation are the handiwork of this Supreme Being. The name of this God or Supreme Being has various names among the Nagas. For instance, we find that the Sema Nagas name it as *Alhou*, the Angamis call it as *Ukepenuopfu*, the Lothas label it as *Potso*, the Aos call it as *Lijaba*, Phoms refer it as *Vangyoung Ongpa*, the Rengmas would call it either *Anyiza* or *Sunggigu*, Konyaks would name it as *Kahwang* or *Kahwang Youngan*, Khoibus name it as *Um*. As such there exist various different names of the Supreme Being or God in every Naga tribes. A. Wati Longchar notes in *The Tribal Religious Traditions: In North East India*, “The Supreme God is the Creator, The Sustainer and the Dispenser of the universe” (Longchar 10). There are also numerous other supplementary Gods, Goddesses or rather, spirits which have their own significance at various times and situations or events and people offer sacrifices, rites, rituals and appeasements to them. These traditional

beliefs are undoubtedly one of the eminent features of the Naga oral tradition which are performed as well as taught among the people in the past before the seed of Christianity was sown among them. It was observed with great care and loyalty so that no unfortunate events or evils fall upon the people.

The British Agent, David Scott had the mind to wipe away the belief in animism among the Nagas and to educate them after setting up of British Company Government in various parts of the North East regions. However, there were dedicated missionaries who truly wanted to Christianize the people. The Christian missionaries, Rev. Mills Bronson and his wife took their ever first step to proceed their work into the Naga area in the Konyak vicinity from Sadiya in 1839. The nineteenth century saw the advent of Christianity; education came along with it and slowly had its impact on the people. Before this, the *Morung* had been the main source of education. It is here that young people learn their customs, values, skills, etc. This informal education was one of the main sources where youngsters are trained in numerous aspects of their cultural ways of life. The coming of Christianity had a good turn in introducing the Roman script. B. B. Kumar notes in *Naga Identity* “Rev. M. Bronson, the first missionary among the Nagas” worked hard to get converts among the Nagas in Arunachal Pradesh but failed and says “It goes to the credit of Sibsagar Baptist Mission to get the first Naga convert.” (Kumar 129) under Dr. E.W Clark who came to the Ao territory in December 1872 and propagated Christianity and education. Christianity and education came together and took their course in uplifting the Nagas both religiously as well as educationally which in the far end resulted in the emergence of written literature. As Murkot Ramunny points in *The World of Nagas*, “Apart from spreading the teachings of Christ, which was their primary object, the missionary initiated the Naga into the

elements of education.” (Ramunny 10). With the coming of Roman alphabet, the gradual development in the education system and the literary field emerged.

Though education had taken its role, in the initial years it was very hard to produce any written works among the Nagas as they had to cope up with the various social and political issues and such unpreventable causes ultimately hindered the growth of any written books when they were in the midst of fear and threats of losing their own lives. Nagas writing in English is a recent development. However, with the passage of time, the gradual writing in English is seen growing step by step. With a few prominent indigenous writers like Easterine Kire, Nini Lungalang, Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, the Naga literature is seen taking its shape and form. Their writing ranging from short stories, poems, and novels incorporates themes such as the importance of oral tradition, the experiences of the conflicts and disturbances during the war time and the harsh realities of life. Though their works incorporate a great amount of truth in it, they bring in their own creative touches to say out their voices in a beautiful manner. Easterine Kire’s literary works like *Kelhoukevira* published in 1982 is a collection of poems dealing with the pain and agony of the people. Other such similar works penned by Kire includes *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Life On Hold* (2011), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011). These works focus on the various encounters and experiences of the war period. Kire’s collection of essays and articles, *Thoughts After Easter* (2014) also touches varied aspects and concerns ranging from personal life, truths, and other areas along with it. Such topics of concerns are also reflected in Temsula Ao’s writings like *These Hills Called Home: Stories From a War Zone*, having ten short stories. There are works of Temsula Ao which covers other themes and views such as *Once Upon A Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags: A Memoir* talking about hunger, loneliness, frustration and pain of the author, *Aosenla’s Story* dealing with

the struggle in marriage life of a woman. Also her poetic works include *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from The Other Life* (2007), *Songs That Try to Say* (1992), *Songs That Tell* (1988), *Songs From Here and there* (2003). Nini Lungalang's poetic works includes *Mirror*, *Greetings*, *Pain*, *Dot*, *Dust*, *Man and Whore* etc with diverse themes. Some few writings of Monalisa Changkija comprises *Weapons of Words on Pages of Pain* (1993), *Monsoon Mourning* (2007), *Cain's Shoes*, *May Be*, *Middles* and *Cogitating for a better Deal* (2014). All the works of these major literary figures touches the readers in their own unique ways. They are seen as significant figures in putting the Nagas in the literary world paving the way for young writers to find their own stand in the literary world.

There are also some young writers and poets who have found themselves worthy in the world of literature. One young upcoming writer, Lhutu Keyho has published *Avila's Lover and Other Stories* (2018), a contemporary book consisting of eight stories reflecting on the society and the young generation and their lifestyles where one can relate with the stories in one or the other way. It shows us the mindset of the younger generations and their behavior, their experiences in life. Renthunglo Shitiri with her works like *Of Life* (2015), *Wild Sunflowers* (2019) and *She: Love and Other Poems* (2019), Sotsula Janger and Mongshai Khamniungan, besides others, whose write ups contributed in their own powerful ways in their social media pages besides printed works. We see the immense outpouring of emotions in their writings displaying the skill they possess and thus capturing the hearts and minds of the people. M. Khamniungan has published *Book of Emotions* (2010), *Book of Emotions: Expressions* (2012) and *Book of Emotions: Unstained* (2017). She also has uploaded numerous instagram posts which are engulfed with intense emotions and sentiments. One such illustration of emotions could be taken

from an abstract of her poem titled *Of Love* which appeared in the collections of poems in *Book of Emotions: Unstained* published in 2017,

Cupid was generous, I see.  
 You are rain for my fields,  
 And rainbow after my storm.  
 What have I done?  
 You're like the East crimson sun  
 Blazing me every day with light.  
 You're like the West orange sky  
 Taking down with you my agony. (50)

Besides, there are good collections of poems and write-ups these writers and poets have uploaded in their social media pages touching a vast series of topics from everyday experiences, love, pains, struggles, happiness, etc., which are part and parcel of life. Ita Alley is another author who is originally from Nepal. She has garnered her name in the literary arena with her debut novel- *Love Struck* (2019). Some other writers who has contributed in the literary world of the Nagas are Sangmaikumba Chang with his work *One Day at a Time* (2019) , *I have a Dream: A Collection of Poems* (2018) by Vingunuo Talie, Emisenla Jamir and her collection of poems *Loneliness Is An Orange* (2018), Neikehienuo Mepfhu-o with her book *My Mother's Daughter* (2019), *Wings of Passion: A Collection of Dramas* (2015) by Arenla M. Subong, *A Narrative of Bokato* (2016) by Kheto Zhimomi, *Love , Lust And Loyalty* (2018) by Yuimi Vashum and many more great young writers. Of all the writers and poets that have marked their place in the field of literature, there are few very young writers who have displayed their writing capabilities. Among them the youngest is Suiyikai H. Nidang who has published her book titled *My Birthday*

*Adventure* (2017) followed by a 12 year old school girl Sochumlo Suki Ezung with her books *Suki's Magic Box* (2017) and *Suki's Spacecraft* (2019). These young writers have stamped their position in the literary world by producing such original and vibrant topics and interests blending with their creative sparkles. It reflects how the younger generation writers view the world not only confined to their old traditional beliefs but has gone beyond that in expressing their own views and in relation with the ongoing trends in diverse characteristics and interests. They are coping up with the modern trends and demonstrate their talents in writing. Focusing on the situation of the present Naga literature, Vizovono Elizabeth beautifully says in *Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland*, "Today, Naga writing is at an exciting stage, vibrant with fresh new ideas, and Nagas have come of age in learning how to script their own narratives instead of being defined by others." (Elizabeth and Tsuren 25).

The Khoibu Naga people, in particular are one of the minor tribes of Nagas predominantly confined in the state of Manipur. In spite of them being less in number and the populace still striving to meet their living, they did not let die their oral literature nor were their oral tradition completely forgotten. Settled in their ancestral home, Khoibu Khullen and other places like Khangshim, Nungourok, Biyang, Thawai-Ngarumphung, it is said that they knew how to read and write in English as well as in Bengali as early as the 1920's. In Manipur, the influence of Bengali in their culture and literature had a significant role in their history and it is most possible that due to its influence in Manipur culture, the Khoibus have learned the Bengali script along with the Roman script. The growth of Bhagavata and Vedic traditions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Manipuri literature and its popularity and acceptance by the local people as a whole could be said to be the source and cause of adopting this script by the Khoibu people. (*Fragments of Manipuri Culture* 144). However, the major improvement came



along with the introduction of Christianity that boosted their education similarly to those neighboring Naga tribes.

The Khoibu people also claim that they originally had their own script inscribed, which was preserved on the bark of the trees but then it gradually lost its usage as the popularity of the Roman script rose up among them with the passage of time and was thus replaced. They also claim that they are well versed in the Meitei script which was mainly used in writing down the chronicles of Meitei kings in the ancient time. This script was later unused with the adoption of Bengali script by the Meitei kings in the seventh century. At present they mostly rely on the Roman script for printed works and now the English language has taken a major role surpassing the Bengali script.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the oral tradition constitutes one of their major forms of literature. Another Khoibu elder Mr. Thellanphom Ronglo observes, “Folklore is our form of literature having its various impacts.” (Personal Interview, 29 Oct, 2019). Angshem Tontang and Deben Sharma asserts in *A Development Perspective of Khoibu: A Critical Study on Development Perspective*, “they claim to have distinctive cultural traits” which is in their “language, history of migration and origin, settlements, socio-cultural and religious beliefs and organizations” (Tontang and Sharma 7) and these cultural traits are introduced to the world in the form of oral literature. They have their own folktales, folk songs, riddles, proverbs and idioms, festivals, etc. All these are narrated orally from generation to generation. All these are taught at various times and occasions and some are performed and displayed too. One of the popular folktales is the *Tlou Rachaamad* which constitutes of seven hundred and seventy three verses. It is sung and recited by them to tell and educate the younger generations as to how they actually came into the world. According to the folktale, Khoibu people emerged from a cave or beneath

the Earth covered by a huge stone. They were ruled by Mangsawr and Khayir, the king and queen. One day Masousangpa, the king's general or hero saw a hole on the stone which was covering the mouth of the cave through which he saw the light and the beautiful world outside the cave. They tried to push open the cave and took turns both men and animals but in vain. The buffalo at last opened the mouth of the cave but was soon attacked by a tiger waiting outside. With careful efforts, they managed to kill the tiger and then took their own directions. Without much detail explanation here we see a few lines of it,

Verse 1: *Ahaatounetou - eiyo? Hatou kheisinnietou,*

(Aye, was it said so, that like this, so in ancient time,)

Verse 11: *Thalungdaagraaghoitawietou,*

(So said that it was still beneath the stone,)

Verse 16: *Tlaipaang thaw-aapasetou,*

(That, let us so emerge onto the world,)

Verse 22: *Tlaipaang kathwag sanroukayoutawie,*

(So said that, emerging onto the world began,)

Verse 37 : *Thawngnula laadmaniemangnetou,*

(That, neither could the she-door (so) opened,).

It thus goes on and shows their migration and settlement and their various encounters. The very concern why such tales cannot be avoided is because such tales always have the basic idea depicting one's own cultural traits and elements. When these tales are left out, the problem to understand the present becomes totally baseless and incomplete for the fact stated above.

The Khoibu Naga people as such try their best in passing their oral tradition. They are taught to the younger generations by elders. They have numerous folktales, folk songs, riddles,

proverbs, idioms, etc which constitutes their oral literature. One of the popular folktales, *Saraarug Charchaa* is about the orphans who are sibling. The tale as narrated by the village elders in their indigenous dialect proceeds as such. *Kheina, saraachaarugkhei loukaleikaaltirta, yawn kouru tungtang, ayai kapei tungtang, thlou kathawg tungtang arug charchaatiruoï ka-uongkaaltirta, kum mankayerkaaltir arug-ung atharusyelsyel, atharusyelsyel kapi-eita arug charchaaruoï, yongdonglaglag, hondonglaglag, toukaalaglag, toukaalaglag, tunei, maipawg Tuitheipukheiraang haankathertawe. yahaankather, yahaankatherkaaltirta, nyeng, arug, san....nagaaq-kartlang sangthawgminna, sanpaalmin sanluotlawgkhalaa-eita, "Eh, karug charchaaruoï yawntita kheipag....uhh...kapei tam'aase"minna, arug charchaaruoï kapei yakatamkaaltirta, yawnri yakourukaaltirta, ta'eita, yakourukaaltirta, chaag kachaa-kamang tod luoi-aanetoukaaltirta, "Yawnyaamaa achaaruoï O! Ngiruoï, karug charchaaruoï tloukhei kaphanghoiné, hu-haa tou lousaalmasaablo!"minna saiyerminna, ta'eita, koutlou-eipaa-om' iruoï, ring, ring leikaneitirta, "Khei-ei karug asaraadon-ei karug-ung nayai kum kapiyiaota, karug-eita toukaalaglag, toukaalaglag tod marongkatherne!"min yaiminna tuitheipui hongkhaangkathawdtawie. hongkhaangthawdmin, "Nayai karug asaraadon-ei Kum loukayeryiaota hatane!" minna, ayai maibangraang "Sarou!" yayaukathawdtawie. Yayukaal-eita, akadeita yonmakumkhor kawaa, yonyigkarai kawaamin, yigrairangmeimin a-ei, a-ei, a-ei, a-ei del-del maryelthawdchairaatawíe. The story talks about two orphans who are always invited by the villagers on every occasions and gatherings conducted in the village. However, both of them were not given due love and treatment by the people more or less for the sake of formality. In all of such occasions, they were given only bones in place of meat in their "kum" (chutney) which they preserved it in "Maipawng Thuithei" (a container made of bamboo) collected from various gatherings. They never complained despite the evil treatment. With time they grew up*

and settled and have now become rich. One day, these rich orphans organized a feast for the villagers. When all the villagers were called, gathered and had their fill, they took out the bones they had received and collected from them while they were poor orphans, and threw it on the floor before them saying these are the bones they had received from them. The villagers were ashamed and being morally guilty, slowly left their house by and by realizing their mistake. The message it gives the audience in understanding how this tale portrays the degraded human nature is effective.

There are also fables which are narrated with various motives. *Hompuille Khane* (*The Tiger and the Fox*) with several series, *Motlun* and his series, *Thumthurle Thiepaa* and series, *Dyengpaa Sawonkhum*, *Rungnule Thiepa* and series, etc. *Hompuille Khane* (*The Tiger and the Fox*) is also one of the famous fables. In one of its series, we find the cunningness of the fox. The tiger is tricked into parting with her cubs on the pretext that the fox would educate the cubs but which were eaten up by and by each day. The tiger asks for her cubs on the final day but eventually learns the truth and tries her best to catch the fox. However, the fox escapes and runs away. Again after several days, the tiger finds the fox but is tricked again by the fox saying that they do not do such things towards any other animals and also continues in various other instances wherein the tiger is fooled by the fox. Here we find the picture of a cunning fox manipulating a stupid and simple tiger. In such a manner, there are numerous other tales and stories with series which are orally passed on from word to mouth to the next generation.

Another form of literature of the Khoibu people is in the form of proverbs and idioms. The proverbs and idioms also constitute their basic literature showing their wisdom and intelligence. One of such proverbs is as mentioned here, *Yu-waana murunkarile koungaan*, *Thamina koukallong* which stands as “Birds and animals quarrel at (the) first sight, men

welcome each other”. This means that men pretend but the birds and animals show reality. Animals do not cover their true character even when they see each other for the first time but this is not so in the case of we humans where most people do not show their original side and fabricate oneself with all virtuous manners and characters. Another one of such is as, *Ahin nadkuong tlaanaaddag* translated as “Leaving footprints like snails do.” This indicates that thieves and liars think that nobody is aware of their behaviours. They do not know that they leave their footprints or marks behind so clear without their knowledge. There is always an indication of a bad deed done by them or anyone which is always traceable and there are always some ways to catch them. As such all bad deeds are not without trails. *Akhamin yongda-aalotouta akharing yongkadaa* which is translated as “Expected the ripen (fruits) to fall but the unexpected green (fruits) fall” this means that those thing that are contemplated and anticipated do not happen but rather those that are never expected happen which basically may signify death which is again paralleled with the English proverb “Man proposes, God disposes.”

Riddles constitute a significant genre of their oral literature and they are recited usually at the time of gatherings, events or even at leisure times or during conversations. So far as articulation and expression of preliterate wisdom, wit and entertainment is concerned, it occupies an important place in the body of folk literature. Aristotle in his *The Poetics* asserts “The very true nature indeed of a riddle is this, to describe a fact in an impossible combination of words (which cannot be done with the real names for things, but can be with their metaphorical substitutes)...” and in defining it in *The Rhetoric* Aristotle says “Good riddles do, in general, provide us with satisfactory metaphors: for metaphors imply riddles, and therefore a good riddle can furnish a good metaphor.” (qtd. in Georges and Dundes, 1963: 111,116). Riddles have also secured the cultural values of the people. Some of the few Khoibu riddles are, *Kou-aa, Kou-aa*:

*Anuti mathuikhoumagri himag* meaning “What it is, what it is: That does not die till (it) kicks its mother.” This refers to a match stick. *Kou-aa, kou-aa: Paarta paarchai nathramag paar* is interpreted as “What is it, what is it: A flower but not wearable.” signifying flame which when it comes up, it is beautiful to behold but it is something we cannot wear, *Kou-aa, kou-aa: Arawngna awuairang, akharinna ahourang* which stands for “What is it, what is it: The body inside, the intestine outside.” and this signifies spindle-yarn ball where the indigenous people covers spindle with fibres or thread for weaving. So also there are other types of riddles and lullabies as well as rhymes and folksongs. Of the folksongs, the most popular is the folksong known as *Haichingbawng* which is mainly for sung during the time when paddy starts flowering and the youth also take active part. *Pashanglaa, Dourielaa, Laa Thingnad, Louse, Rawol, Yuontlingnu*, etc, are other popular folksongs all of which are sung at particular times and for various objectives and reasons. All these form the oral literature of the Khoibu people and they still relish it till today. Some efforts to convert the oral literature is being taken up gradually by some few indigenous people so as to preserve it for the generations to come and to save their cultural identity in the fast changing modern world and its influences.

British Christian missionary, Rev. W. Pettigrew brought the first seed of Christianity in Manipur in the late nineteenth century and gaining his first impact among the Tangkhuls of Ukhrul district as early as 1894. Gradually, its acceptance reached out to other areas. Among the Khoibu Nagas, the coming of Christianity and education in 1945 sprouted a slow but effective change in their community. Though it was not very easy to convert the people right away, it slowly found its influence in them for a change and development amongst them. They saw that the new religion and Western education could in a way transform their lives for better prospects. E, N. Singh has mentioned that “it is evident that the core of primitive religion as reflected in the

life-style of the people of the hills of Manipur is the belief of magic and ancestor-cum-deities and other spirits pervading the villages.” (*Fragments of Manipuri Culture* 150). This is very much applicable in the light of the Khoibu people because the Khoibu Nagas did basically practiced forms magic, very few involved, in order to fulfill any motives and aims or for any other supernatural incidents before the impact of Christianity. In addition, they believed in the existence of spirits and gods and goddesses which they have attributed various names and distinct functions to it.

Now, coming to the form of books, the Khoibu people first published their hymn book translated from the English language but which was in their own dialect in 1975. With the gradual influence of Christianity and education in their community, they started taking the importance of these changes and with education; it slowly helped them to translate *The New Testament* in their own mother tongue in 1988 titled as *Kadou Tlou Kareap*. This is the root in the rise of their written books. However, due to several reasons and causes they could hardly produce any literary texts. There are only few books found and such books mostly focus their viewpoint on their history and origin alongside their culture and tradition. Some of the few books are *The Folk Tales, Rhymes & Folk Songs of the Uipo (Khoibu)* (2014) compiled by Hongsha Elizabeth and Tontang Rosy, *Historical Background of Khoibu Tribe* (2001) which was compiled and published by Khoibu Students and reprinted several times in the later years, the *Khoibu (Uipo) Tribe: A Profile* (1990) penned down by Uipo Khoibu Marou Assembly, *A Development Perspective of Khoibu (A critical study on Development Perspective)* (2004) documented and edited by Angshem Tontang and Deben Sharma. Thus far, these are the only existing literature and also which significantly serve as the original source of primary information. All these books lay their emphasis on the history, origin, culture, festival, etc of the

Khoibu Naga people. The common themes are on the culture, identity and development besides their religious books and hymnals which have been translated into their own dialect. However, with time they are slowly trying to set up their way to the literary world.

One of the significant facts regarding the Khoibu Nagas is that so far as memory and history is concerned, no one has penned down the harsh brutalities of their war experiences in the form of literary books for the public. Unlike the manner in which Kire, Ao and other indigenous writers who expressed the untold masked realities of the Nagas' struggles through literary touches, the Khoibu Nagas have a difficult time till date to pen down such experiences of the past. The cause behind the lack of such written or printed literary works could be directed to the disturbed political situations, low literacy and poverty alongside with it. They were initially too immersed to fight for their own daily survival and hence very less concern was given to produce written literature because it is almost impossible to produce any literary works when people are faced with constant struggle for daily living. A literary work is a product of undisturbed situation and peaceful mind free from cruelties of life.

Thus, Naga literature in general and Khoibu literature in particular produces a general idea that all the literature of the Nagas are basically grounded in their oral tradition. It is their foundation to their literary works and is their main source of education showing their rich, distinctive and vibrant cultural tradition. Without the help of the oral literature, it would be difficult to understand their culture and their concerns in their works of art. The modern situations of the Nagas are considerably stable and hence, a steady bunch of literary works are seen among them. The younger generations bring in a shift of their themes in their works from political turmoil and the difficulties they encountered to a more peaceful themes focused on modern lifestyles, emotions and manners.



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### CHAPTER III

#### CUSTOMARY LAW OF THE KHOIBU TRIBE

Life do not find stability, peace and coordination when people do not follow any form of agreed code of conduct such as laws, rules and regulations. It is a fact that no society can ever survive if there is no law to keep everything under proper maintenance. The very human nature is capable of committing unacceptable acts and behaviours when they are not restricted at certain levels of life under various circumstances. Human have the tendency to transgress or break away from the normal ways of moral behaviour to any extent when coming into contact with a given situation at some point in life. However, such an act and behaviour committed by a particular individual or group may be intentional or unintentional. In any of such disturbed situations, it is the role of the commonly agreed laws and regulations of the people to interfere and observe cautiously what means and measures needs to be undertaken. Such set mode of laws for the people in the community in particular and the nation or state in general contributes a vital role in establishing a better society.

We need to first understand in brief what a law is and its significance. According to Pospisil, “law is conceived as rules or modes of conduct made obligatory by some sanctions which is imposed or enforced for their isolation by a controlling authority from man’s feelings or sense of right.” (qtd. in Vitso, 2003: 1,2). It is a system which regulates and organizes the people of a given nation, state, society, community or territory so that they do not carry out their own will and action wrongfully over against anyone. No person of any land is above their law and as such it becomes obligatory to adhere to what has been laid down by the higher authority or organization. A nation, society or community without any set rules of principles has higher chances of plunging into chaos and disorder at any time. It is like a spider web that gives a

complete and beautiful shape to the whole structure of the net with all the connections perfectly joined with one another so that the web threads do not fall out of place hanging loose. Laws keep the people in a normal shape and without this code of conduct, all societies or communities from the largest to the smallest, simple or complex would gradually fall into trouble of various manners. This would further break the nation or the society or community into diverse and numerous sets of individualistic outlook towards anything without any proper concern for the general public and in particular the individual citizen. When people are left with everything to themselves, each individual might cross any barrier in meting out one's own desired wishes be it evil or good. Such disordered community then grapples down in all of its smooth functioning and effective cooperation, coordination and development. When individual or groups take law in their own hands and carry out their own actions, the consequences may be fatal and it would invite more harmful acts. This would lead to chaos after chaos bringing everything into total destruction. In order, to see the undisturbed and orderly progression of the community, society, etc., law becomes the means to tackle the situations and bring out the desired solutions. Adino Vitso observes, "Law contributes towards social order in human life by dealing with disputes that arise frequently before they lead to continuing social disorder by constant recriminations, the seeking of personal revenge, or lasting feuds between individuals." (Customary Law 2). Without law and order, the only philosophical and moral consciousness that demarcates humans from animals would totally disappear into mere barbaric individual's or groups' interest. The Nagas are a closely bounded community. They have their own cultural values and customary laws to regulate and maintain social order and control in their community and territory. However it may differ from tribe to tribe or from community to community in its application.

Customary law exists in every tribal community of the land. They are the means by which any social problems and disputes of any kinds are taken into matter for rightful and befitting awards and punishments. It is also needful to know that customary law is different from any law formulated by the sovereign government. One basic difference between these two is that while the former is found in a well revised and structured manner, written and legally laid down by the government, the latter is never found in a written format nor is it imposed and mandated by any legislative bodies or the state but it is based on the social custom and agreed consensus of the community which is then operated and meant to be followed by every individual of the community. Joseph S. Thong asserts in *Head-Hunters Culture (Historic Culture of Nagas)* that “Customary Law is an established thought and habit which has gained social recognition in uniform values, supported by common consent of the community.” (Thong 73). Thus customary laws are honoured and respected and never taken for granted by the people. Murkot Ramunny in *The World of Nagas* says in his introductory note, “In their remoteness and isolation, the villages developed their own code of behaviour and standard of administration. They were a closely knit society based on human equality a high sense of integrity and belief in a supreme being.” (xv). The emergence of customary law of a certain community or a society is not known strongly owing to the fact that customary laws or rules have never been written down or documented in a well organized and classified manner. As such the people of a community or village generally agree upon the truth that their customary laws are as old as their own tribe or even agree that such laws existed even before the establishment of their community or village given the fact that maintenance was carried out with proper moral and beliefs of the people. People have been gifted with the ability to morally identify any wrong actions and behaviours. Though the recompense of any improper and unacceptable conducts may not be naturally

endowed upon the people, the law of nature which drives men to understand that something is bad or good is embedded in every individual and it is here that the general consensus of the community steps in to deliberate on the matter and give befitting punishments. Thus, the community's final decision for such an act becomes binding to the culprit individually and to any other members of the community thereafter in case of any such possible transgressions in the coming future.

The Khoibu Nagas are without exception, a distinct community who has followed their own set of customary laws. As per the interviews carried out, it has been found that the existence of customary laws of the Khoibu Nagas has been since time immemorial. Such laws have been an inseparable and significant part of the community. Through discussions with elders of the Khoibu Nagas it points to the fact that the exact emergence of their customary law is unknown, yet they view and gives out the point that the emergence of such laws owed to the demand of justice by the community whenever any unacceptable things or actions have occurred amongst them. As such the need for the rightful judgement in the community for peace and coordination with honour and respect for every member has given the platform for the emergence of their own customary laws. Better regulations and an undisturbed atmosphere is the ideal community looked forward by the Khoibu Nagas and accordingly they are strongly against any injustice, deplorable acts, immorality, and treacherous means or any other socially disapproved activities. It binds the community and upholds the stable condition of the village as a whole. It does not spare any member of the community wherever they might have settled. All those who are outside the village scattered abroad in a far foreign land are still under the powerful hands of their customary law. The customary laws are formed with the general agreement of the people and thus meant for them no matter wherever they are. However, human nature is as such that we possess the

tendency to break the norms and conditions of the community either through well aware state of mind or through errors which has undeniably occurred amongst the Khoibu Nagas too. However, whatever reasons of the nature and condition of breaking the traditional codes of moral conduct, judgement is carried out based on the customary laws. It is very rare to see changes in pronouncing justice along the strong clutch of customary laws. All culprits would be examined without any partiality. In case any wrong was committed unintentionally, the general consensus is required to settle the dispute for rightful judgement with series of discussions. Thus, everyone is truthfully treated and rightfully punished or awarded. No one is considered above the customary law in their community. In order to identify with the customary laws of the Khoibu Nagas, we need to start it from the village administration which is the foundation of such laws.

### **Ancient Village Administration**

The Khoibu Nagas' traditional village system was run and headed by a village board of representatives known as *Yawnyaamaa*. This board implements and executes the customary law for the Khoibu people. It consists of the village king/head known as *Khulaagpaa* who enjoys his hereditary position. He is considered as the king as well as the religious/ceremonial head and also acts as the chairman. Under his leadership comes several heads particularly *Khulpu* as the secretary, *Chaangroi* as ministers and collectors and also to take care of any officials who visits them, *Phungroi*, the drummers, *Tlawngkhiroi* as ministers who look into the matter of manufacturing, supply and distribution of wine known as *yui* to others during rituals and occasions. These are the top heads that take care of their community in the village. However, under them there are various smaller heads entrusted to look after the village administration in various fields. All these leaders work together with cooperation and dedication. All the members of the board except for *Khulaagpaa*, the remaining leaders are elected by the people from within



the seven clans. There is no rule as such that a person from a particular clan cannot take part in the election for the board. The election of the leaders may be paralleled with the modern democratic election as they are elected by the people and for the people and these leaders could be terminated if the public does not favour any particular leader for valid reasons. The criteria for the election of these leaders are focused mainly on their moral standards, faithfulness, politeness, being respectful, mentally stable, ability to deal with difficulties during disturbed situations, upright, etc. The term of years they serve is lifetime if they are well favoured by the community. Once they are elected by the people and take up their duties and responsibilities, they are meant to be present in every disputes and problems to tackle and bring out rightful solutions regarding every village matters for peace and coordination. The decisions lay down by them after discussing with the village community becomes binding and final. One who breaks away from the general agreement of the board failing which would be dealt as per the customary law and order.

### **Customary Law Relating to Theft**

A thief is not easily left alone when he or she is caught. He or she would be made to pay the price for his/her theft with a cow or a pig, wine barrels, etc., in addition with some money. In case the stolen item is worth a heavy price, accordingly the payment would increase as per the matter and the recovery is made to the fullest. However, if the thief is too poor to repay, the decision would be dealt again by *Yawnyaamaa* and the judgment laid down by them would be final and binding. However, for theft, death and hanging on gallows is never rewarded but if it is agreed by the whole village, expulsion from the village is rewarded. However, expulsion for theft is a very rare judgment.

### **Customary Law Relating to Burning of Livestock and Properties of Others**

Those who are caught burning others' livestock and properties, heavy fine is imposed on the culprit. The culprit has to pay in cash as well as in item so that the befitting recovery is done for the victim. *Yawnyaamaa* does not spare such unacceptable acts and the culprit is sternly dealt. Whether the culprit has to pay in cash or property or both of it, it should wholly cover all the cost of lose he had inflicted. Such intentional acts are settled by the law in its strictest manner but if it was burnt fortuitously, decision would be taken again and the penalty may differ slightly. However, in no way the culprit would be wholly set free without paying any price for the lose.

### **Customary Law in Agricultural Activities**

Since time immemorial, the Khoibu Nagas has been practicing jhum cultivation known as *paam lou*. Agriculture has always been the main source of survival and economic activity. Khoibu Nagas has practiced certain customary laws in relation to agricultural practices. It is by law that the people cannot choose their own choice of land to cultivate. The final decision will be given by the board, *yawnyaamaa* as to where they should cultivate. The field is selected with the general agreement of the people and then permitted by the board to proceed thereon. It is to be strictly followed from the time of seed sowing till the harvest duration that all the cultivators must never displease the spirit. Though there is no specific name for this spirit, it is believed that it is a benevolent spirit who is responsible for the good harvest. The cultivators will do sacrifices and worships/atonement known as *kabawl* for two or three times in a year. The first fruit is eaten with thanksgiving to the spirit by inviting people according to the owner's ability. Also those who cultivate a vast area would be directed by *yawnyaama* as to how the field should be harvested and by observing which type of festival. *Yawnyaamaa* will let the owner choose a

certain type of festival such as *sarou kayer*, *ningsawn chaa kadaa*, *kartlangna katan*, *nangaagna katan*, *yaamaana katan* where all the abled members of the community should participate without fail. Though the names are different, the way by which the field is harvested is usually the same in all of these. The cultivators will also select a particular spot to rest for all and make some decorations with floral garlands and colourful clothes in celebration of the harvest and also as a form of enjoyment or a means to satisfy the tired eyes of the cultivators to relish its beauty.

### **Customary Law of Marriage**

The seven independent clans of the Khoibu Nagas have the freedom to give each other in marriage. It strictly prohibits the marriage of a person with another person belonging to the same clan. There are no restrictions laid down by law regarding the inter-marriage of any of these clans and the sacred bond is to be maintained till death or lawful divorce is formalised. Law comes in only to strengthen the bond and prevent divorce so that the concerned family and the community are not looked down by others outside the community as a loose community. The marriage bond is a sacred contract and thus held with great responsibility and honour. In no way will the law allow the divorce of the couples if there is no irreconcilable cause liable for their divorce. It follows certain procedures like *kathrum*, *kasem*, *kangai* and *kapha*.

### **Customary Law Regarding Delivery/Birth**

It is by their culture that when a young married girl is nearing the time to deliver a baby, she is not allowed to roam far away from home. In case the bride has to venture, she is never allowed to roam all alone but is always accompanied by someone. Great care and control of the mother is a must as determined by the law since the baby will be a new member in the community. They are also not meant to do any excessive heavy household chores so as not to

risk both of their lives and kept under special supervision of the family. When a baby is born, a bunch of fresh green leaves are hanged on the house indicating that a new baby is born in the family. At the time of delivery known as *kathlaai*, *naokal* are called. They are the midwives who are experts and who will take every measure for safe delivery and they consist mainly of women but there is no such law that these experts should consist only of the womenfolk. When the baby is born, the umbilical cord is cut by a sharp piece of a particular bamboo species known as *Rapui*. No strangers are allowed to enter the house at such at time.

### **Customary Law in Naming of a Child**

In naming of a child the beliefs and law merge together as customary law, beliefs and practices have a very close connection. Until and unless the baby has not reached five days, he/she is not given a name. It is considered that the baby is still not known to the benevolent god deemed as the Supreme God as considered by law. Before the completion of five days the baby is never allowed to be kept alone for any moment and is restricted by law to be taken outside of the house because the baby is considered as being under the watchful eye of numerous spirits waiting to take the baby away. In case the law is broken by bringing out the baby outside, it would all be upon the parent's responsibility for their mistake and they have to make the necessary appeasements to the spirits. All the relatives and neighbours are to work together and name the child and then the child is considered being acknowledged by the Supreme God who will take care of the child. The baby is named after the successful completion of five days. The process of naming the baby after five days is known as *chim kahyeng*. It is also a form of sanctification of the house and the members in it.

### **Customary Law Regarding Divorce**

Divorce is the last option permitted by law if any couple agrees to separate for a befitting cause. *Yawnyaamaa* will do the judgement according to the law. By law it is only the husband who has the right to leave his wife with a valid cause. Being a patriarchal society, the womenfolk are considered little lower than the men folk. However, this does not mean men can leave their wives as per their own desire. If the matter of divorce has a legitimate cause and either one of them is found guilty, the culprit has to give some penalty for their divorce. As far as memory is concerned, it is said that the penalty constitutes two pigs, nine wine barrels, one gong and some other items. After divorce, both partners are free to marry again of their own choice. However, the property is not shared between them but is kept by the husband.

### **Customary Law in Times of Death**

Since ancient times, the Khoibu Nagas never practiced burning of dead bodies. It was not just a mere practice of not burning but it was an accepted rule or norm that the dead bodies should be buried. Also the people will sing a folksong particularly for the dead known as *Doureilaa* before the burial. Few lines of this mourning song taken from *The Folk Tales, Rhymes & Folksongs of the Uipo (Khoibu)* compiled by Hongsha Elizabeth and Tontang Rosy.

*Chimpu oh karawng-paa ta oh,*

*Shudlai oh thyel ei rawng mansam,*

*Chaan koiraang oh ung ngei chai oh.*

*Shudlai oh thyel ei rawng mansam,*

*Hongsam oh trawgthui hongchab thui,*

*Lou ralaang oh thei mu-aa ne. (58)*

This song is sung mourning for the dead and also as a form of commiseration for the bereaved family. In case the dead has grandchildren, the eldest grandchild would have to pour some rice beer or wine in the mouth of the dead person and also be the first to step in the grave to receive and place the dead body inside thereof. It is said that people often worshipped the spirits of their grandparents after their death. All the children of the dead person would have to give one new cloth and an eatable item as the last mandatory gifts known as *maamaa phi* and *maamaa yui* respectively. Grave house are build for the departed souls. Again, the customary law also does not allow every single person who dies to be buried in the correct manner. It restricts the community that those who commit suicides, intentional self destructions leading to deaths or any unnatural deaths known as *agathina kouhong* to be buried normally. All such people would not be allowed to be buried with their face up like the normal burial but they will be buried face down on the earth indicating their wrong death and buried horizontally crossing and facing the range where burial is done. The normal deaths are buried vertically along the burial range.

### **Customary Law Regarding Fornication**

Though fornication is very rare among the Khoibu community, in case wherein such an incident occurs in the village, the customary law will take its necessary measures. The people involved in fornication would be judged by law and they would be made to pay fine accordingly. If both of them are in love and agree to marry, a statement is taken and no fine is imposed because the boy has to take care of the girl as her husband. If the boy refuses to marry the girl, judgment is put forward and the boy has to pay the price in cash or property to the girl's family as per the judgment. It is often paid with certain number of pigs, wine barrels or in cash.

### **Customary Law Regarding Adultery**

Adultery is one of the most abhorred crimes and those involved are regarded as disgrace to the whole community. Though it is a very rare experience amongst the Khoibu community, if there occurs such a case the penalty is that both of them would be separated and the man has to pay the price in the form of three pigs and nine wine barrels or some other items to the family of the woman. However, if the man does not pay the fine because of his poverty, the law will be taken up again for discussion and judgement would be laid down. He may even be excommunicated from the village but the law does not permit hanging or death of any kind. Nevertheless, such a crime does not easily pass away and the culprit is given stern punishment after careful hearing.

### **Customary Law Regarding Murder**

The victim is buried fulfilling all the mandatory rituals. The murderer would either face direct expulsion from the village or with the agreement of the people; he is handed over to any higher authority such as the government for justice. The culprit is usually not regarded worthy to be kept among them as he is considered a threat to the whole community. In case where the murderer is not thrown out of the community, his family has to pay a heavy fine to the public with certain number of cows as per their consensus known as *mathighal kasaat*. The judgement of this is also done in the jungle and the cow or cows are also hanged on the tree and eaten there in the jungle itself. The beef is not to be shared to children and before the elders eat the beef, the leader will pronounce *ham ham*, a mandatory sound while taking a piece of meat and throw over his head backward, and this piece is considered defiled, then the leader would give the remaining meat to the members. No child is allowed in the event.

### **Customary Law Regarding Inheritance**

The Khoibu Nagas follows the patrilineal form of inheritance. The family properties both moveable and non-moveable would be handed to the eldest son and descent is traced through the male lineage. In families where there is no single son, eventually, the properties would be handed over to the eldest daughter. Also those families with no child but has an adopted son or daughter would in so wise enjoy the inheritance as per the patrilineal system. If the eldest son dies before marriage, the heir would be the second son and thus it would continue. If the son is married and he passes away, the widow will inherit the property but if the widow remarries, the property would not go to her as she has to leave everything and go to her new husband where everything will change again. Then the property would be handed to the nearest kin of the deceased husband.

### **Customary law Regarding Elopement**

Elopement is not new amongst the Khoibu Nagas. It is often regarded as an informal form of union of a man and a woman without any prior information and invitation of their concerned parents. It does not involve any guests nor any leaders to pronounce their union. It is entirely the choice and consent of the lovers themselves. This is considered as a disrespectful act of the man towards the woman's family. When an elopement occurs, the man would bring back his wife to his house after some days to receive blessings from his parents and they are allowed to stay together as husband and wife. The man and his family have to pay a pig and a wine barrel as the bride price to the wife's family for taking their daughter. In addition to that, the man's family has to slaughter a cow and feed the whole community in the village. There is nothing as banishment of the couple despite not following the formal traditional marriage custom considering they might have problems initiating and organizing a marriage ceremony. All the expenses for the said activities solely depend on the hands of the man's family.



Hence, the customary laws of the Khoibu Nagas thus serve as the bodyguard against any misconducts and inappropriate actions of the people in their community. Aimed towards establishing a peaceful community, such old traditional customary laws contributes greatly in maintaining peace and order amongst them. Being a community guided by an outlook towards justice and cooperation for better living, Khoibu Nagas do their best to meet the ideal existence. Without social control in the community, numerous unacceptable actions could rise steadily as such social control is required to curb the harmful behaviours and actions of the people. However, it is also to be noted that not all harmful actions would have to be dealt with fines or punishments but some acts which violets their ritual beliefs would require to undergo ritualistic amendments by doing sacrifices and atonements solely because it is considered sacred. Such ritualistic atonements are still necessary to be performed that no unfortunate thing should befall upon the culprit or on the family of the culprit. Thus, the Khoibu Nagas traditional customary laws are executed by the officially elected leaders and they consider every matter consciously and pronounce the rightful and befitting judgements for the culprits that no victim should be left without getting due justice.

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## CHAPTER IV

### VALUES IN ORALITY OF THE KHOIBU NAGA

Values are all those fundamental and significant ideals, principles, virtues, beliefs or any such things that adds up to the degree or importance in our life or to the people as a whole in all walks of life. Values are the core principles that are regarded as of great importance to the people in general and one's own community in particular. It includes all such modes and conducts of life that are socially accepted and followed by the members of any particular culture. It guides and influences a person's attitude and behaviour in all situations of life. In a broad sense, it is the general conceptions, moral ideals or virtues that are considered good and thus followed, practised and propagated.

According to M. Haralambos, "A value is a belief that something is good and worthwhile. It defines what is worth having and worth striving for". H.M. Johnson asserts, "Values are general standards and may be regarded as higher order norms". ([www.studylecturenates.com](http://www.studylecturenates.com)). T.W. Hippie defines as, "Values are conscious or unconscious motivators and justifiers of the actions and judgements." (<https://iedunote.com/Values>). Values are very much bounded in social cultural life. As an inseparable part of culture, it gives the people the feeling of oneness in understanding and following those values. Having thus gained the basic idea about values, we shall drive our attention to orality and values in orality or the oral values which is the concern of this chapter. The lexicographers defined orality at the online *Oxford Dictionary* as "orality" is "the quality of being verbally communicated." (<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/orality>). Also the online *Collins Dictionary* gives the meaning as "the quality of being oral" and *Webster's New World College Dictionary* points it as "a reliance on spoken, rather than written language for communication." (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/orality>). It

is popularly considered as the oral tradition. Orality is as such the state in which anything is found in its oral form and not in some other state. It is something that is verbally passed on or orally communicated from someone to another person or group. It does not involve the modern letters or written words in the process of passing information, knowledge, etc. The mode of transfer of any message is done through spoken means wherein no written tradition has taken control. Values in oral forms or oral values are those significant virtues, beliefs, etc., that has been handed out from one person or group to the other.

The Khoibu Nagas traditional mode of transmitting any type of knowledge or information is basically through mouth or verbal communication. As this chapter focuses on what are the values found in oral forms among the Khoibu Nagas, we shall see those oral values that has been considered of great importance since time immemorial up to this day among them. The oral tradition becomes the sole oral values so far as Khoibu Nagas are concerned. The oral tradition is one of the oldest mode of transferring messages such as through songs, folktales, proverbs or sayings, lullabies, fables, riddles, etc., which are significant not only to children but adults as they reflect various aspects of one's culture as these oral messages boost up in understanding and making sense of the world around. Oral values plays a vital function in transmission of moral standards, guides the people in social life, teaches lessons and wisdom alongside the passing of knowledge and entertainment. These orally transmitted values have been always an inseparable part of the Khoibu Nagas. It defines them by making them a unique tribe just like all the other tribes with their own beautiful cultures. Since it is the responsibility of the community to keep alive the traditional values, the community plays a vital role in instilling the oral tradition to the people. The community as a whole is crucial to keeping and maintaining the oral tradition through all ages. Without the help of the oral tradition, it would be difficult to understand any

Naga culture and their values. Every single Naga tribe has their own version of their oral tradition unique to them. They act as their identity and make them different in one or the other way from other tribes. It is undeniably true that in the absence of the oral values or oral tradition each tribe will be difficult to study, comprehend and distinguish and would lead to confusions. The art of narration has been the major means through which the folktales, folksongs, fables, myths, legends, proverbs and any other such orally transmittable tradition are passed on from one generation to the succeeding generation.

The oral tradition functions as the bridge that links the past with the present. Not only does it link to the past but is much more functional in many aspects. It helps in digging up the history, culture, codes of conduct, folktales, proverbs, etc., and gives the picture of any group of people from the beginning. All sources of knowledge and wisdom would depend more or less on the oral tradition during the olden days. Those who pass on the mentioned traits of oral tradition are not only confined to one particular person but it is the esteemed responsibility of each and every elder and old aged people to infuse these traits to the younger generation for preservation as well as for their knowledge and enlightenment. When the oral tradition dies, it is as danger as the death of one a culture for without the oral tradition in the community where written letters were not familiar before, it has no other means to introduce itself and carry on their culture as a whole. When the English alphabets have no place in any particular community and the seed of education is not the major factor for progression of one's knowledge, such a community would rely completely on the oral means for the transmission of the culture besides those that are practiced and done by action. Though oral tradition has diminished with the set of modernity, yet it is an undeniable fact that it is still a living tradition in the Naga culture in general and the Khoibu Nagas in particular.

*Yakhaang* is the foremost institution for transmission of oral values. This ancient institution is understood to be the *morung*. *Yakhaang* of the Khoibu Nagas could be taken as a second house for the young people especially the youth who has attained a certain age, or probably in most cases, puberty. It is here the elders would spend their valuable time to infuse the traditional oral values and practices and acculturation. Apart from gaining the oral cultural values, *Yakhaang* is the platform where the young ones are taught to protect the village, acquiring skills to make various crafts, manners, sports and numerous other activities one need to obtain in life. In addition to what is learned from the above mentioned aspects of oral values, *Yakhaang* could be considered the heart and soul of ventilating the cultural values that are practiced in actions. Young boys and girls will have different dormitories for themselves when they reach a certain age. They would have elders who would impart all the customs and traditions through folksongs, music, folktales, proverbs, etc. It is the foundation wherein the youngsters are moulded and refined to be better people who are expected to contribute their duty as a responsible and sensible member of the community. However, *Yakhaang* is not the only platform for such activities; every single family is equally responsible to enlighten the young minds with all of these cultural aspects.

The oral values of the Khoibu Nagas could be first found in their folktales. This form of orally transmitted stories is not only aimed at entertaining the younger generation but it serves as the passage in letting them know the importance behind the surface meaning. M. H. Abrams in A glossary of literary terms lay down as, “The folktale, strictly defined, is a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form.” (Abrams 101). Most of the folktales have something to teach the people with moral lessons and life itself. They are narrated so that the community might have a sense of

oneness and unity propelled by the moral message, so that such stories envelop the entire people of the community. Such a great value of this oral culture cannot be neglected. One such tale with a great moral lesson is the story known as *Saraachaa Anunaana Kayawg*. The story in brief talks about the harsh treatment of a stepmother towards her step son. The step mother does not love her step son and continues blaming him to her husband for the wounds she bears on her back caused by sleeping overtime on rough wooden surface all day long. This creates doubt on his father too and to save him from his mother's ill treatment, the father takes his son to a far place unknown to him and leaves his son on a banyan tree. The child is fed by a crow that lives on the same tree but was asked to step down from the tree after some years. The child goes down, roam aimlessly for a long time. Finally he comes upon a young girl in a field and they work together. Several days went by without the knowledge of the girl's parents. It was finally known to the parents and they were allowed to live as couples. As the celebration was prepared, the son asks his parents to join in the event. The step mother could not wait to enjoy the feast but the father was reluctant knowing his son's harsh past meted by his step mother. Still then, they came and took part in the feast. The son then gave two mithuns for each of them as a gift along with two cans of honey for each. The son actually gave a fierce mithun and a can full of bees instead of honey to his step mother and a tamed mithun and real honey to his father and instructed that they should eat the honey on their way back only by tying the rope which was attached on the animal around her waist for the mother but the father, to tie around a tree that it should not wander away and that his father should have it first. As they continued walking, being tired, the wife asked her husband to eat his honey first that she could also eat her honey. After the father ate his honey, the mother hurriedly opened her can but all the bees burst out and stung her and her mithun. The beast jumping in pain entangled its horn on her leg and broke one of her legs. The mithun

returned to the son and on seeing the thigh of his step mother, he threw it into the cattle shed saying she was destined for it. The story goes as such. *Kheina saraachaakhei anunaana kayawg. Anunaata raabraang neilaglag anampum throg-throg, tasou louleikaneikaalra, apaana mangmin, "Neinu neinampumta kouyou-eiyo?" toukaalra, "Neichaa akatamraate." tou. Khei mangkangairuoi tasou loukarun. Ta'eikhei, nyengkheitouraangruoi khei, anampum throg-throg louleikaneikaaltirta, "Neinu, neinampumta kouyou-eiyou?" touta, "Neichaa akatamraate!" toulaglag, loukarunkaalra, achaata thlangaimaatlouneminna apaana, ram phangmagkheiraang heikapu, heikapu, "Mo, nang haram kaphanghoi'ko?" touta, "Kaphanghoine." Kheiruoi khei, heikapu, heikapu, heikapu, "Mo, nang haram kaphanghoi'ko?" touta, "Kaphanghoine." Khan'uoirita kaphanghoinem' karun. Khei heikapu, heikapu, heikaputa, "Mo, nang haram kaphanghoi'ko?" touta, "Phangmaane." Tasou lourunminna, aning, kabawngpui hing baa-be atangmagkheiraang hatharaagrabukhei loukaleita tasir achaaatita sangmakadhorkhourag. Sangkaamin sangkhou'rkhourag. hatharaagyiaona chaagkaang mankachawng loulawngkasai, khalungchaayiao mankachawng loulawngkasai. tasou sankalei, sankalei, sankaleita, santangraa. hatharaagyiaona, "Eh, nangta yongchumhorlo, keichaa i tangmaniemangaane." toukaalra, "Yaa, ngeita yongchumheimagne, nina keiti yongchumhorlokhalaata, alui thalungpuisa yong...yongkhaangthuilo." toukaaltir, hatharaagyiaona aag-eyg, aag-eyg, aning aleinadpag san...sanchawnrag. "Yonkhohor" touruoi aag-eyg, aag-eyg yonkhourag. Tasiruoi aag-eyg, aag-eyg yonchawnsalagmin aata, tasou yongchumraa. Yongchummin tasou, honkaraan, honkaraan, honkaraanta, nangaagkhei lou louhankanei hongchaaruraa. Ta'kaalra, thalung tib, tib heikahor. Tasu cheo, cheo heikamud. "Hu-eiyo nangt'o?" touta, "Ngeine-ne" tou. Hu-eiyo nangta, mangthawg-aalo!" toukaaltir, "Yaa, ngei keiphi, keirawl waamagne." tou yakaruntawie. Takaalra, tanangaagqna akhudteichaa*



limloumin heihorkasangkaalra, takhudteichaa yyelmin mangthawgraa. Mangthawgmin, tasou, arug lou sankahankaaltirta, anu i apaarugna chaag kathul kouyuta, “Nu O, paa O, ngeita chaagruoi katang, katangna kachaane, chaagruoi katang, katangna yug, taminna, louhinruoi keiwoy-keiyaa kasinne, louhinruoi khani yuglo.”min achaa loukayaikaalra, anu...anuna, apaana, “tatoukhalaata harisa louhanlo”minna hingkhei sunkhaarkakhouta katangna louhandoikather. Tasouding-dingta yokhei-uoiraa. Tasouding-dingna yokhei-uo koumangkaalra, anu ina... Aa kawaakaal-kaaltir ramruoirang threl-threl loutrugsangkhokhor. anu i apaa i kouyukaaltir ramruoirang threl-threl loutrugsangkhokhor. nawngmidkheitir, karuina kouyu-aaminna, aru...loutrugsangbang yamura. Chaaruminna arugtita tasou chim paalyerragtouyai. Anu-apaana honroiminna, chim paalyerminna, baa-bemagri sankouhomin a-ei leinad hingpua arug achim-ung syenmin haka-udtawie. Aata hatharaagtlouruoi phangraa, Achimpua (ahingpua) syenminna chim-ung kaa, kaa, kaa honka-udkaaltirta, “Keichimta thami.... thaa waaminna hachawng-aase, napaari hachawng-aase.”min kayai napaari waamin hakachawngkaaltir, yyed-yaadtoula sangmagtawie. aata hatharaag laiwa phangkhokhor-aamin, hatharaagtlou phangkhokhor-aamin, “Eh, tatoukhala ngei chimwuairang hongchang-aane,”minna, aana awuairang hongchangminna, sangkakhaata long sangria. A-ei paalnung chimraang, a-ei leinung yawnraang hongminna, “tuneitirta, ngei, hatou Kapei-ungne, nu, paa narugruoi sang’aalo”minna, anu i apaarugnan pao yakapikaaltirta, anuta nawng kawaar ngaaqkatagna, “Keichaana...nan kousang’ne”min, Daarmeiphusa taryeg, taryeg kamangna, chalkamangna, Nawng kawaar mangeithuikanei. Nawng ngaaqkatagna, tasou, yaleikaneikaaltir, nawng sankawaarkaaltirta, sangraa. Apaatinta tou hongyasem’ kakhaam, achaa-ei chalaagta, apaata heikhalkaphaa Mang..... sangminna, achaa-ei kapeiraang sangkawaakaaltirta, thami thaa-themagna kapeiraang waaminna, anu i apaarug-ungta, anu-ung halkhei, apaa-ung... Raloikhei.

*anu-ung Khoipui tongkekhei, apaa-ung khoitawn tongkekheitou marsyegtherragtawie. Peiminna, peiloitlawgkhalaa, “Nu, n’ying halkhei, paa, n’ying halkhei,” tou marsyegpathungminna, Anu-eita baa-be araangmagtawie. “Nu, n’yita katene, neisienraang heimasimlo, paa n’yita kathagne, hingraang heimasim, taminna, khoitawnruoi paa n’yi heichari, nu, n’yina hin’naana heichalo,”min kayaikaalra, Tu, lamraang halsa masimthermin, anu-eita sienraang koumasim. “Nu, n’yita katene, neisienraang heimasim”lom’. -eita, hingraang masimmin khoitawnta thrawb, thrawb, thrawb..... khoitawnta teg yoragtouyai haltiruoi. Apaana thrawb, thrawb, thrawb khoitawnta marawbkaneitawie. Apaana thrawb, thrawb, thrawb khoitawnta marawbkaneitawie. “Yaa, niruoi phyed yach’orchailo, k’yi...ngeiruoi changuiraane,” Anunaana heikayaikaalra, apaa-ei chaminna, anu-ei, apaa-ei chaloitlawgkhalaa, anu-ei yakalaata mol Khoipuina you, you, you sangthawgraa. Sangthawgmin, takhoita anunan hongkachig, ahalnan hongkachig, hongchigmin sansukhalingkachaakaaltirta anu apheipaangkheita achiraang baang..... achiraang baangminnane, sukhalinkachaakaaltirta, tahalna nyedthadrag. Anu apheipaangkheita amaiphaangraang baangminna achaa achimraang hongraa. achaana, “Nu thlung’aatir!” louyaimin halsangraang tub hongkatedkathertawie.*

This tale explores and put forward the view that wicked treatments are never forgotten and due punishments would definitely fall upon all such wicked people sooner or later. Wrong actions will not go unpunished but time will come when such person would be taken vengeance. Also it teaches the people and the family that each child deserves mutual love and affection no matter if they are one’s biological child or not. There are other folktales with great messages for the community. All these folktales may seem as a casual narrative but it’s worth lie in the fact that such tales have always moulded the community in improving and understanding the ways of life, love, peace and justice. Those who narrate folktales would focus in ventilating the moral

lessons to the audience. It acts as a guide in helping the people know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable and thus binds the whole community with one feeling. Some few other folktales includes Dyengpaa Sawonkhum, *Rungnule Thiepaa*, *Motun* or *Motlun*, *Thamthurle Thringthraa*, *Mothyel Thlouyaang*, etc.

Fables are another significant component of culture that essentially adds to the oral value of the Khoibus. Fables are also aimed at instilling moral truths, convey life's lessons, display human faults, to entertain as well as to provide cautionary steps or measures, etc. Though fables are typically short and precise in nature, some fables are lengthy with regard to the plot especially those having series. It has the nature of utilising animals and birds as the main characters though there are humans in some instances. Fables do not have any complex plots and twists but is clear and understandable. *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* provides the meaning as, "usually a short and fairly simple story designed to illustrate a moral lesson. The characters are often animals who exhibit human frailties." (Morner and Rausch 79). Importance of wits is one major feature that is seen in the fables so far as Khoibu fables are concerned. One such is *Hompuile Ngachir* translated as *The Tiger and the frog*. In a more simplified manner it proceeds as follows. The tiger, considered king of the jungle, was walking in the jungle in a carefree manner. Suddenly he heard a voice shouting at him for being so careless with his steps and not giving heed to his surrounding which could have hurt some small creatures unawares. Turning around, the tiger was amused to see a little frog who spoke in such a brave manner. The tiger shouted back asking what the frog thinks of himself and to behave himself. The little frog reiterated how the tiger dare to walk in the jungle so carelessly, being so boastful as if the jungle belongs to his forefather. Then, he challenged the tiger that he cannot do anything to harm him and warned him not to land himself into trouble with him, pointing his finger at his face. Amused

by the frog's courage, his anger subsided and he felt like laughing. The tiger ask the frog in what area the frog can overpower him to prove himself of his strength and ability. The frog replied he can defeat him in any field and on being proposed to take a race by the tiger, they got ready to run. As soon as the race started, the frog clung onto the tiger's tail. Covering some dusty distance, the tiger looked back but could not see the frog. The frog was already in front of him shouting why he had stopped. The tiger could not believe his eyes but he did not know that while he stopped to look for his opponent, his tail swung forward making the frog land in front of him, who had been holding on to its tail all the while. This happened several time and the tiger finally admitted his defeat. The frog asks for another competition to give a chance for the tiger and the frog suggested on removing prized items from their mouth. The tiger removed bone pieces one by one saying this one is of deer, stag and so on. The frog pulled out the tiger's tail hair which he pulled out during the race, claiming this one belong to the tiger's great grandfather, next as his great grandmother and continued claiming till it belong to his father, mother and finally said that now it's his turn. Frightened of the frog, the tiger ran off deep in the jungle where he met a group of monkeys who ask the tiger what had happened. On being told of the incident, the monkeys ask to lead them to the frog. They all tied a rope around their loins on being told by the tiger that they should not leave him alone when they are attacked by the frog. When they were about to reach, the frog congratulated the monkeys for bringing the tiger thanking them for bringing the annual sacrifice thus fooling them all together. The tiger, being taken aback thinking the monkeys has brought him to the frog to be eaten up, ran off deep into the forest and since they were all tied on their loins, all the monkeys suffered as the tiger ran for his life. On reaching the jungle, the tiger killed all the monkeys for conspiring against him.

The message this fable portrays is that sizes or stature do not necessarily possess wit. No matter one's outward stature is, one will stand no chance over a tiny one who possesses wit. Wit is important at dangerous or risky situations. A clever person could find a way out when he is threatened at some point in his life. It is not always the physical strength, height, structure and weight that would outdo during difficult circumstances but no matter the size of the person, if he is witty, he can always create a way for himself to jump out of unwanted or problematic situations. Such is the motive of narrating fables by the community as a whole in order to highlight how a tiny witty person can always overcome a foolish or a simpleton regardless of his size. Similarly, every fable carries their own motive to educate the people blending it with entertainment. Such is the significance and utility of fables taking the Khoibus in consideration.

The next oral value is found in proverbs or sayings or idioms. Lord John Russell defines proverbs as, "proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many." And Wolfgang Mieder defines it as, "a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proverb>) Every culture has their own proverbs, sayings and idioms and they are valued by everyone. Not only are they used for entertainment but they are used for teaching or giving indirect messages and lessons to someone. Though its usage has been prevalent since time immemorial, it has never come to an end. It is eternal and lives through all ages. It gives us an insight to what is said. The surface meaning usually differs from what is really meant because the intended meaning is deeper. Sometimes the surface meaning may totally divert from the inner meaning which is one of the significant natures of proverbs. A seemingly simple proverb may in fact bear profound meaning diverting from its surface message or information. Proverbs and sayings contribute a major role

in shaping one's outlook towards life. It functions as a teacher in helping the people understand in a deeper manner. The wisdom embedded in it passes beyond time or age. It does not get old nor does it become useless. Focusing on the Khoibu proverbs and sayings, we see that knowledge and wisdom had significantly being inherent in it. It greatly helps us connect with the wisdom of the past and gain its utility. People have used proverbs not only for pleasure but even during important situations as it gives the sense of its significance and formality. However, proverbs and sayings are not confined to important affairs only but could be widely utilised in many other leisure and informal talks and events.

Some of the few proverbs and sayings and idiomatic phrases of the Khoibu Nagas displaying wisdom, knowledge, morality, etc., and have been in use since time immemorial among them are as follows. '*Akhamin yongda-aalotouta akharing yongkadaa*' bearing the meaning as 'expected the ripened (fruits) to fall but the unexpected green (fruits) fall'. This is further understandable when it is simplified wherein we can say that anything that is anticipated might not happen but the unexpected thing may happen. It is in parallel to the proverb, 'man proposes, God disposes.' This particular proverb is utilised in situations when something that was most likely believed to happen but turns out the other way out unpredictably. '*Alam akongmagta charem*' carries the meaning as 'accidents happen when treaded the wrong paths'. This is to signify that people should not involve in anything they are not expert at as their lack of knowledge will only result in destruction. '*Waanampum-ei yuiding kayudag*' is to mean 'like water poured on the chicken back' indicating that some people do not change at all even with much advice or corrections. It is useless to convince the invincible just like water that does not wet the back of the chicken and flows down because of its feathers which cannot be soaked. '*Yu-waana murunkarile koungaan thamina koukallong*' which is to mean 'birds and animals

quarrel at the first sight, men welcome each other'. This implies that the human nature is as such that at first people tend to be good to each other but later fights with each other but animals quarrel the first time they come into contact but later they become friendly with each other. This ventilates the pretentious nature of humans which is hidden but is slowly revealed with the passage of time. On the flip of it, animals and birds show their true nature right away. '*Yawnyapawghagkil akhamei thumtum chigrunrun akapurkheiraang hongkachang*' which means 'even the rats fight to the extent of losing their tails and enter into the same hole' implying that life is full of ups and downs; there should not be a serious enmity for small quarrels. This proverb holds the notion that no matter what life presents us with various kinds of treatments from others, we should always be able to reconcile with each other leaving behind the grudges. In short it also points to the idea of forgiving one another and forgetting the past which will create a better future. '*Sapawl darangaita yawnyapawghagkil anoo chibkhei kaphaa*', this means 'when there is straw, even a rat marries ten wives' indicating the fact that people tend to become immoral when there is plenty. This could be simplified by taking the example of a person who has a large amount of money and is drawn away to do immoral activities destroying his own life at the end. It points to the lesson of how to be consciously able to be in control of one's own life in any situations without harming their own life and reputation because of the abundance of wealth. The next proverb with wisdom is '*thlou halchaag kawaidag*' bearing the connotation as 'working like a cow grazing'. Here it implies that working without a definite objective leads to nowhere and also working without any diligence or norms would never lead you to your destination. It highlights the importance of how a person should work with a purpose and dedication and following a set procedure without which it would only result in complete worthlessness. Finally, a proverb with a great practical message is '*neiwaataang thuumagna hing*

*tasangkhei kasyem*’ conveying the meaning as ‘cutting that big tree without checking the handle of your axe’. This is to imply that one should not do anything without checking one’s own ability. It also means cutting the cloth according to the size. This draws its significance in that one should know one’s own strength and weakness and work accordingly that no misfortune should happen. It is a message informing the people not to do anything beyond their ability that troubles should not destroy the whole work.

Though proverbs, sayings or idioms are used at any time anywhere without any definite and particular situation, its usage is barely seen in everyday casual talks but they are used more frequently in order to express one’s ideas in a more effective and striking manner. They hold truths in them though it may not be universally true but sagacity has mostly been inherent in all the proverbs of the Khoibu Nagas. The symbolic meaning it carries has didactic role and helps people understand how it functions and shapes the community as a whole towards life. Some proverbs are metaphorical, allegorical and deeply alluded whereas some are straight forward and concise but their utility never diminishes at any level. Given at a particular moment, event or situation, each proverb carefully utilised would effectively make its impact.

Religion has always been a contributing aspect of oral value. In every culture, religion stems out as one of the significant aspects that portrays one’s cultural values. Since religious instructions were never recorded in any written form among the Khoibus, their ancient religious practices were either propagated through sayings or teaching or by performing it so that it is not forgotten by the younger generation. The ancient Khoibu religion was never strictly animism but they had profound respect for the various spirits in every situation. The elders confirmed that there were particular spirits confined only for a specific activity, event, worship or circumstance, for which they followed the concept that these spirits needs to be offered appeasements and



sacrifices. When these spirits are offered prayers, the usual three mantras or words first pronounced are '*hey Um, hey Um, hey Um*', which is then followed by one's own words in a form of honour and obeisance for the spirits. However, further analysis carried out by Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling, a prominent linguist opines that though ancient Khoibus have worshipped these numerous spirits, they might actually have been offering their prayers to one and all powerful spirit in order to protect them from the various minor spirits of that particular place, event, situation or circumstance stating that *Um*, referred to the Almighty spirit. This oral value of religion has organised the community in the ancient time as it was a common platform where all the people were more or less bound to keep, as one, the observances strictly confined to their cultural beliefs. This religion was deeply associated in every walk of life anywhere and everywhere. In fact, every incident of their life's activities was deeply connected, interpreted, enveloped and associated with the spirits' working in it.

Khoibu Nagas also relish their cultural values through the usage of riddles. Riddles are aimed at arousing amusement usually during leisure time. Riddles do have hidden meaning but they are different with proverbs or idioms. Riddles are basically a description or a question or a statement which is required to give an appropriate answer that matches the said demand. It is asked at various events and leisure times and does not specifically confined to a definite event and situation. They are usually put forward by someone in order to know how clever the other one is and as such it is a simple type competition of wits. Riddles are said with some image or object implied and the respondent has to unearth the hidden image or object based on the description of the riddle put forward. Though riddles are explicable and answerable by anyone when it is put forward, sometimes the Khoibu riddles may acquire its own value when they are interpreted in the context of Khoibu culture or their ways of life. Though the Khoibu riddles may

not follow strict rhythm or have poetic effect, they are significant in that they are used as one of the orally transmitted knowledge by the fact that it enables the people to think more deeply and cleverly and above all, riddles helps build their cultural identity.

Some of the Khoibu riddles that are fond of being asked are as such. '*Kou-aa, kou-aa: Nasandonna kharaang san-apaale raangmag*' which is translated as 'What is it, what is it: Valiant during childhood, non valiant when grown up.' This implies the thatch shoot known as *Chichang*. Thatch shoot is sharp, stiff and strong when it is young but slowly becomes more soft and flexible with time. It is a common thing for the Khoibus as thatch shoots are frequently used for various purposes in their day-to-day life. Next is '*Kou-aa, kou-aa: Arawngna awuairang, akharinna ahouraang*' which is 'What is it, what is it: The body inside, the intestine outside.' The implied object is the spindle-yarn-ball, a small object which is covered by the yarn in order to make it into a ball shape especially for weaving purpose. Like most Nagas, the Khoibus too use a spindle-yarn-ball when they weave instead of the help of machines. '*Kou-aa, kou-aa: Napaakhei amidlung syerchaimaniemag*', translated as 'What is it, what is it: One's eye-balls that cannot be counted.' The allusion here is the sieve identified as *Bawngkaa* which has numerous holes for sieving out large particles. Another alluded riddle is '*Kou-aa, kou-aa: Chaanapaa khayum thleng meiliraang kabom*', which is meant as 'What is it, what is it: Three sons always seated at the fireplace.' Here the image or thing alluded is the tripod known as *Yuonphu*. The Khoibu Nagas have a particular style of making a tripod which is much more stable than a four pod stand for cooking or other kitchen purposes. Finally, a riddle bearing an image of pain is '*Kou-aa, kou-aa: Mumag-ei kouman*' which is interpreted as 'What is it, what is it: Taken as it was invisible.' The alluded image of pain here is stepping on thorn known as *tharu nyedkalou*. It is an action and not directed at a particular thing or object unlike the others

mentioned earlier. Thus, analysing the riddles, one finds the various types of riddles and each one is equally skilful and portrays the distinctness of it. These are another source for helping the people understand how one's cultural elements has always been infused and reflected in them.

Folksongs are the cherished oral values among the Khoibu Nagas. Folksongs are also one of the major oral modes of transferring one's cultural traits. Its value lies in the fact that it helps people recognise their background, history, conducts, bravery and every aspects of ancient life. Some of the folksongs are sung in praise of gods and heroes and immortalise them thus holds them in with great reverence. Some folksongs are sung at particular occasions like death, harvest or in celebrated events and festivals whereas others are sung for leisure, to instil lessons and manners, courting, love and marriage, etc. It is part and parcel of their life and they give meaning to the community as a whole in its own distinct utility. Without these folksongs, people consider any particular event to be incomplete or sometime as unsatisfactory and evidently most of the time folksongs are accompanied by folkdances and music. One indubitable value of the ancient folksongs is that they establish the unity and oneness among them by connecting one another with the sense of a strong traditional bond. Toshinaro Imchen highlights how folksongs are inseparable during the olden days with a realistic instance,

Wood sculptors or any artisan who wished to cut wood from the forest would first perform a ritual before the forest and sing a song, requesting Mother Nature to allow them to cut the wood for their work. They would request Mother Nature to allow the woodcutter to have the wood so that he could sculpt the wood and beautify the village or town. Such was the impact of folksongs in the ancient lives of the Nagas.  
([www.sahapedia.org/the-significance-of-the-libuh...](http://www.sahapedia.org/the-significance-of-the-libuh...))

The Khoibu folksongs are no exception with regards to how highly it was considered among them in the olden days. They are a type of force that makes the cultural activities meaningful and complete. Focusing on one of the folksongs of the Khoibu Nagas, i.e, *Raawol*, where we see instances of people searching for loving spouses, the praise and beauty of animals and birds and their utility, the beauty of various landscapes, the beauty of fields, etc., all which are deeply connected with the cultural traits of the Khoibu Nagas. A portion of it has been given below.

*Khoiwaa kalousawg-eikhoi* – We are on our way to take beehive

*Laamtrei kalaa heiramei, hai!* – Still difficult to have a spouse!

*Ningsi trei dawnmagne khoi* – We have no loving spouse

*Waa O kanyelmagrilo, hai!* – O please do not disturb (us)!

*Mangalpaa-ei atrawnsam* – The beautiful hair of male hog,

*Thiemrei hangkhuikanaane, hai!* – Used for combing handicrafts, yea!

*Serkhupaa-ei atrawnsam*, – The beautiful hair of porcupine

*Thiemrei hangthraikanaane hai!* – Used for distribution of handicraft, yea!

*Khoisu khoiwaa athouser*, – The oily bee wax,

*Thiemrei hangnaalkanaane hai!* – Used for smoothening the handicrafts, yea!

Such a praise of the beauty of every creature are displayed and nature is regarded highly which also portrays the deep connection of the people with nature. *Dourielaa*, ia another folksong sung in mourning of the departed soul. The spirit of the dead person is considered sacred as all the spirits are believed to be so. There are other several folksongs having its own purpose and efficacy and are highly regarded by the community. Some of the few folksongs of

the Khoibu Nagas are *Markamri, Triem, Yuontlingnu, Raawol, Louse, Antrampaa, Laa Thingnad*, etc. In view of the Khoibu Nagas their folksongs are very much necessary during important events. It is their heritage and they are very much inclined to it and make use of it in their daily lives as well. Just as music binds the people together, the Khoibu folksongs also acts as a binding cord of the community and strengthens them together producing the sentiments of harmony and unity.

Thus, the Khoibu people enjoy the age old values that are transmitted orally besides other numerous values. All these values are not something introduced by outsiders or foreigners but it has been inherent in their culture. It is their honoured cultural element and they stand firm to preserve, protect and share it to the younger generations. All these oral values are never misused in order not to tarnish their cultural identity and put to confusion and jeopardy. These highly valued oral values are the features that make the Khoibu Nagas a distinct Naga tribe amongst the rest of the Nagas living nearby who uphold their own set of values too. If ever these oral values are taken out from them while understanding their culture, it would be incomplete to grasp meaning of their culture. The rich oral values serve as an invisible book of the community which functions as a guide for them in understanding the cultural components. This unwritten oral tradition is the backbone that supports the culture of any tribal community.

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## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

Everything is bound to undergo change with time. Changes are necessary to happen in every aspects of life whether it results in a positive or negative way. This does not altogether mean that everything should be categorized as black and white or good and bad but the transformation is a must as long the social life has to continue. Adaptation comes with changes and it is the very essence of life. However, adapting to changes and transformations may not be easily met and the process might consume a good amount of period. The social lifestyle in almost every community keeps upgrading with the impact of foreign influences. Though such changes may not basically deem right for each and every individual due to personal views and motives, it may considerably be accepted by the majority who has the will to adopt the benefits of outside influences. Nothing remains static but dynamism takes its role and is necessary for survival. Still, regardless the pace of change may differ in time taken. The force with which the foreign pressure has on the society or the community in particular may not be readily accepted but might happen gradually and thus a complete and drastic wholesome change may not be expected at once. However, when any change is adopted by the community, the fruit of the impact is apparent sooner or later. Khoibu Nagas are not exempted from such influences from outside its community which has resulted in the change in their community and lifestyles. Some of the most evident changes owing to foreign influences among the Khoibu Nagas follow below.

Taking it from a wide view, the religious belief of the past faced a dire challenge with the inception of Christianity among the Nagas. The drastic differences between these two types of beliefs created a form of separation between those who stepped forward to accept the new religion and the ones who remained firm in their traditional beliefs in the initial years. The



peaceful atmosphere of the ancient life was on the brink of disappearing and this led to disturbances and conflicts within the community who strongly opposed the Christian beliefs and its way of life. Nevertheless, the impact escalated steadily and more or less set aside the ancient beliefs and furthermore, the younger generations showed more interest in the new religion and its doctrines. However, though the new religion dominates the community, it is also seen that some few ancient beliefs and practices are still knitted alongside the Christian beliefs and the older folks who had been ardent believer of their traditional beliefs would never completely put away such traits though they are said to be Christians.

Khoibu Nagas has undergone changes at various levels. The transformation of the ancient social life was brought about with the introduction of Christianity by foreigners. Like all the Naga tribes, the change of religion from animism to Christianity was the cornerstone that introduced the new era of life for the Khoibus. Social change is a must with all the developments taking place in the modern world. From eating habits to all the other ways of life, changes are inevitable in some or the other way to keep in pace with the developmental process. A.K Ray in his essay *Change: The Law of Life* in the book *Naga Society: Continuity and Change* edited by N. Venuh, states, “Change is the law of life, a cliché but not a meaningless one. All human societies have, since the beginning, functioned on two planes, that of the way of life, and that of the way of thought, and throughout, one has influenced the other.” (Ray 13, 14) The Khoibu Nagas experienced their major change through the initiation of Christianity amongst them. Though no specific date could be traced out, it is ascertained that the first person who converted was in 1945 and as such this is the only fact that establishes the coming of Christianity. It was in the nineteenth century when Christianity first came in Manipur and thus spread to the other parts of it. The early years of Christianity was much resisted and those new converts had to face severe

consequences as the new doctrines and values were so much in contradiction with the old traditional beliefs. With the coming of Christianity and modern education the ancient ways and thoughts of life has improved gradually with time. The Khoibus has gone through different levels of changes over the past few decades in almost every aspects of their life. With the introduction of Christianity, the belief system and the thoughts have been upgraded to a better standard. The impact of Christianity has a profound result in the sense that the Khoibus who were once too rigid following the worship of spirits has completely left the practice today. As per the interviews done, elders opine that Christianity is the seed that has helped them peel off the traditional ways of life for the better though it has not completely disappeared till today. It has drastically made them realize how to view the world from a new perspective and to accept the new religion. Though in the initial years it was hard to convince them to change their manner of worship and the newly converts were thrown out of their village, the efforts of various evangelists and preachers did not prove futile. Some few strong and dedicated Khoibus made their best efforts to ventilate the truths of the Christian values and gradually with time the converts increased by and by. As of now, all of them are Christians. This major transformation has led to changes in their social ways of life. They now completely left worshipping diverse spirits and has driven their focus to the one Christian God who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. The values of Christian impact have helped them understand the truths of life and death and the ultimate place of eternal rest and damnation. Also it has instilled in their minds to adopt and follow its doctrines and teachings. The modern Khoibus have a strong stand to take hold of this religion and is ever willing to move forward in the same faith. They now focus on only one God of the Christian religion who is known as *Um* in their dialect.

Another change and adjustment that could be seen is in their behaviour particularly the act of forgiveness which proved to have a greater influence on them and is seen as one positive change in their behaviour. However, this does not imply that the act of forgiving fellow members was completely absent in the past. It was only seen less, less practiced and barely taught. Hence, in the modern life of the Khoibus, though the customary laws still exist in their community, when any person commits any wrong against another person, if the victim agrees to forgive the culprit and settle the case between them before the community steps in to take judgement and pronounce befitting punishment, the matter is silenced and the community respects the decision of the victim or his family who has the upper hand in closing the matter. Though customary laws are still prevalent and in function, in few cases it does not interfere in the decision making of the victim if he or she is willing to hush the case and forgive the culprit before it is declared and handed over to the authority. However, this does not mean the culprit has the right or opportunity to victimise the same person or in that matter, anyone else in the future and disturb the peaceful atmosphere of the community. In case the victim move forward to the authority for justice, the community will never back down and pronounce rightful judgements with rewards and punishments as per their customary laws so that everything should be under control and peace.

With the coming of Christianity, education also set in among them. Education was another significant factor that helped uplift and advance their life. Modern education has changed the primitive thinking and practices of the Khoibu Nagas and encouraged them to adopt and conform to the modern ways of life for development in all aspects of life especially in the field of economy. In the ancient times, Khoibus were considerably depended on agriculture and handicrafts for their daily living and thus they did not adopt any diverse modes of activities to sustain their families. Their expertises in such fields were passed on from generation to

generation for quite a long duration. Though such skills are still valued till date and practiced yet with the gradual changes and modern influences and the demand for a better lifestyle escalated, such traditional practices and economic activities have decreased perceptibly. Most of the economic activities adopted by the modern Khoibus have replaced the old economic activities and they are now more focused on innovative and new ways of life with better economic activities. One important factor of change in such activities can be attributed to the movement from isolated villages to towns and cities which have given them the opportunity to inculcate new skills required for better jobs and activities for survival. Thus the shift from the agricultural practices and handicrafts to modern jobs is another major change that is seen among them brought about by education. This further resulted in the establishment of schools and other learning institutions in the village. The level of poverty has since then slowly diminished though not wholly levelled up as a wealthy community.

Change in the manner of marriage contract is another transformation among the Khoibu Nagas. Traditional marriage rituals are strictly performed by the community to be accepted by the community and only then the couples' bond is legitimised in the eyes of the public. They had to follow certain practices such as *Kathrum*, referring to the service provided by the male or groom's family for the bride's family in their agriculture activities, *Kasem*, which is a kind of formal proposal by the groom's family to the bride's family where the groom has to offer some presents such as wine or tea on a special day and followed by slaughtering a mithun to formally make the sacred event or their engagement i.e., *Kangai* complete. Thus it is followed up by *Kapha*, referring to the ceremony wherein the man and the lady are legitimately united and considered as husband and wife by the community. This was something of great importance and honour practiced by the Khoibus and they passed on these rituals to their children in order to

carry on the practices correctly that the traditional rituals are not lost entirely. However, with the coming of Christianity, there are changes and modifications in various manners in the marriage ceremonies. The strict traditional procedures mentioned above are now more or less lightened. Though there is no complete neglecting of the rituals, people now prefer the Christian way of marriage which is less complicated as compared to the traditional rituals. This is primarily due to the adoption of the Christian teachings which has transformed many traditional practices and brought in the new set of Christian practices. The Christian ritual practiced during holy matrimony is now considered sacred by them and the community as a whole does favour it. In spite of this change, still the community does not prevent anyone who wishes to follow the strict old rituals. Everyone is free to choose the type of rituals they favour for their marriage contract. There is no authority among them that would punish anyone adopting the old mode of rituals and ceremonies.

Another significant change observable among them is the impact of modern rationality and flexibility in the mindset of the people. The Khoibus are now more open and ready to accept any positive changes coming from within and outside the community. The rigidity of the old ways of life and how they observe situations and perceive things have greatly altered. The extreme superstitious way of perceiving the world has been replaced by a more rational and intellectual perspective to bring about a logical result. They are not easily driven away by superstitious beliefs but are ever eager to analyse any given situations from a practical and logical perspective. In the olden times, the Khoibus associated every incident and events with various supernatural phenomena and interpreted it accordingly. Taking an instance, in the olden days the Khoibus believed that it is a bad luck or bad omen when a squirrel crosses the path of someone and something unfortunate is expected sooner or later and also when there is a

rapid movement of the eyebrow it is considered that the person would shed tears for something fateful and all these are beyond one's control but as progression kept increasing in understanding the world from a more intellectual point of view, all of such attitude vanished and hence there is a shift of one's outlook and attitude from sacred to something that is more rational. Also this impact of rational thinking has assisted the community to be prone to dynamism and ever focused towards development and betterment. This has opened the passage to understand the social and cultural ways of life and in helping the people come out of social and cultural barriers in order to approach the world in a more logical, scientific and practical outlook. The shift from rigidity and superstitious approach to an intellectual and practical perspective is also another change that gave a boost to the overall upliftment of the people in the community in various aspects. It has propelled their mind in viewing events or incidents from one level to another standard which provides a clearer understanding of the causes and effects of different situations and not blindly associate and conclude it with supernatural interventions.

Some other few changes that came up owing to modern influences are seen firstly in the transformation of traditional dresses to modern attires. In the olden days the Khoibu boys and girls wore clothes like shawls, robes, girdles, mekkelas, etc., which has their own traditional names. For the male they had clothes like, *tapei* (dhoti), *pharig* (a white colour top), *tasien* (a tight broad copper), *khoingaanlu* (consecrated men's shawl), etc., which are specifically meant for the men folk though the clothes are weaved by the women. *Khoingaanlu* is one such shawl which is not allowed to wear or touch by the women and is considered a taboo. Womenfolk too have such exclusive clothes and ornaments namely *moirieng* (ivory earring of 0.50 size), *shamkin* (crown), *khaditsaa* (a earring glittering violet wing of an insect), *karkhop* (mekhela), *kharawnsamrui* (ivory necklace), *ratai* (red colour strips of seasoned cane), *phanyiel* (multi-coil

copper bangle), *haisang* (black colour rings made from extracted from a wild plant), *daarbaan* (black colour scarf), etc., which were worn perfectly. These attires were the coverings and ornaments of the Khoibu Nagas and they did not have any threats of losing their traditional manner of dressing. However, when the modern influence came to take its dominance over their closely knitted community and mode of dressing, those attires were slowly replaced by the modern clothes which were more comfortable, accessible, fine and tailored. As such the pace of accessing and wearing of modern clothes rose up rather steadily which later on were completely left out wearing it on their daily basis and now they wear such traditional attires only during festivals, celebrations and rituals. Also the men folk in the olden days had long hair like the womenfolk and they keep their hair coiled up as turban around their head. It was their culture and they maintain it to identify themselves as a member of their community. This tradition of long hair for men was completely changed with the impact of Christianity which was focused towards decency and cleanliness towards the Almighty God.

Khoibu Nagas also had a lasting tradition of headhunting in the past. It was not a mere form of practice for leisure but such acts were carried out for defense, attacking the enemy, for social status and recognition, bravery, etc. Men who possess the most number of heads were honoured and given great treatment and he is considered a hero. This is the most drastic transformation amongst them which was completely wiped out when Christianity landed in their land. Such a turn from harsh practice to a completely contrary practice of loving and embracing others is a major positive impact directed towards betterment, solidarity and civilization. Though this old traditional practice is no more seen in them, they do not hold any grudge in leaving such barbaric cultural ways of life as the change bear a more meaningful outlook towards peaceful life with one another.

In the ancient times, it is said that the khoibu Nagas usually construct their normal houses in the same pattern or design. Their houses looked simple and do not include complicated designs. The inner rooms are said to have intricate patterns in some cases but most of them were constructed in a simple design with couple of rooms in a straight line having just a door and an exit on another corner. It was built with no windows or ventilation for sunlight or fresh air. This is also another way of identification. However, they have a festival known as *Inlam*, a festival wherein all the community buckles up together to build houses in a similar pattern with complicated designs for various purposes. Such houses were constructed with thatch grass, wood, bamboo, cane and other items upon a raised platform. They have different compartments for sleeping, eating, meetings, room for gathering of various age groups for any kind of discussions and numerous other activities. This festival is different from the normal construction of houses. The modern influence on the different exquisite designs of houses boosted the imagination of the people and with the explosion of population and demand for better lifestyles, they now focused more on the modern patterns of designing houses without any fear of covering up their ancient identification through their house patterns. The modern designs are more favored and also one's own designs are materialized. However, it is to be noted that when it is the time for *Inlam*, they would follow the cherished old ways and methods to build the house as it is their festival which cannot be forgotten.

Such are the few changes and transformations noticeable in the community of the Khoibu Nagas. Modern influence brought about its impact in almost every corner of their life. The change is a massive force in the journey of progression from ancient old ways of life to a better and comfortable modern lifestyle. The fruit of modern life is indeed a necessary requirement for development in various aspects of life and this change has truly proved its worth amongst them.



Though the modern contemporary impact have pushed aside some traditional beliefs and practices, yet one cannot deny and neglect the fact that it has help the people see the world beyond their community. The old barbaric behaviours, beliefs and practices has been filtered and improved to be a civilised community and it would be incorrect to say that modern impact has destroyed the culture of the Khoibu Nagas.

From the very beginning of the Khoibus based on their origin story, *Tlou Rachaanad*, which depicts their life starting from the cave and their breakthrough from it, their struggles and battles, journeys from place to place in search for food and shelter, various settlements, relationships with neighbouring people, etc., up to the modern time displays how their life's journey came into progress. Though they are known as *Uipo* among them, they are known to others commonly as Khoibu. They survived through the ages as a distinct community.

Hence, understanding the Nagas as a whole and the Khoibu Nagas in particular, we see the richness of Naga culture. The Khoibu Nagas as such has their own identity and their culture has been cherished since time immemorial. They started as cave dwellers based on their oral literature with so many traditional manner of survival. The struggle they encountered in the early stages of development from primitive to modern life made them undergo through difficult procedures. At some point, their cultural identity faced complex events because of wars and other various factors but their struggle and sacrifices pushed them forward in a more stable platform. Their rich oral tradition in the form of legends, folktales, oral values, festivals, etc., which is the basis of their literature, has been treasured and they seek every effective measure to retain their cultural traits and it is through these that they stand firm in their origin and gradual establishments throughout the place. Though Christianity has altered their culture and practices at different levels, it has changed mainly in the field of religious beliefs and practices. The other

cultural values and behaviours which are deemed as elements for identification of their culture are still under practice. It is their unique recognition like the other Naga tribes and they are proud of their own identity. Their customary laws and oral values mentioned in the previous chapters envelop and protect them and establish their cultural integrity, and strengthen them in pursuing a peaceful atmosphere within their villages and incorporating those outside the villages as well.

The oral values are a significant element of the Khoibu Nagas. Any values that are passed on from one generation orally through folktales, legends, folksongs or any other forms of orally transmitted values builds up the bond and oneness as a distinct community. The lessons and morals behind the oral tradition are very much held up with great honour for it unveils the emotions of love, pain, betrayal, anger, etc., with a message in it for the hearers. They serve as a teacher of life as it portrays the positive and negative experiences that a person encounters in the story. As a whole, it is the reflection of life. The proverbs, riddles, idioms, rhymes that are prevalent among them are a source of wisdom and knowledge. Besides these oral values some other cultural elements such as traditional games and sports are also prevalent among them which they were indulged in since ages. All these oral values as well as those that are practiced and performed are vital to their recognition to the outside world and thus elevate their distinct cultural identity. Though Christianity has taken a major role in transforming the people from primitive to modern being, yet they are still a strong intact community upholding and defending their cultural values and elements. Their belief system and behaviours have been revolutionized for better as those changes were welcomed with the passage of time for their good coupled with education and its importance which was followed up by developments and enhancement among them. The modern development has altered them and pushed them to accept the fruits of modern lifestyle and manners but its impact was not at the expense of destroying their cultural identity.

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