Oral Narratives of the Lotha Nagas: An Ecocritical and Structural Reading

(Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Ph.D. degree in English)

By

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I, Yanbeni Yanthan, hereby declare that the subject matter of my thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Lotha Nagas: An Ecocritical and Structural Reading* is the bonafide record of work done by me under the supervision of Prof. Nigamananda Das and that the content of the thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis or any part of it, has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Yanbeni Yanthan,
Research Scholar

CONTENTS

Abstract

Naga society and culture today is the product of the discursive cultural and historical processes that have defined, shaped and sustained the Naga experience. From the Naga tribes who call Myanmar their home, to the Naga tribes living in Arunachal, the Naga experience is not confined only to those Naga tribes that have their political boundaries limited to the state of Nagaland. The Lotha experience is one among the many experiences that constitute the Naga ethos, and in this thesis, an attempt has been made to understand and evaluate the world of the Lotha by studying the oral narratives. Just like the other Naga tribes, the Lothas do not have a script or any other aids which recorded and documented their cultural mores, historical movements and narratives, relying solely on the power of memory to retain their various historical and cultural engagements. Hence, language played and continues to play a big role in constructing and imagining the world of the Lotha, as experienced both historically and culturally. In this context, it becomes imperative for any scholar working on Lotha oral narratives to engage with the oral tradition encapsulating not only tales and practices but the often overlooked genres of proverbs and songs or in the context of Lotha, narrative folk poetry. Such an approach will ensure a wholistic engagement with the tribal corpus. With this in mind, this thesis attempts to engage with the ecocritical and structural paradigms present in the oral narratives, as these points of departure constitute a study of both structure and context. While a study limited to the structure massively decontextualizes the text, a study of only the theme also overlooks the ways in which narrative tropes, motifs, phrases etc change over time and space and how they reflect changing narrative techniques. Given these configurations, the thesis has attempted to broadly bring to light the different influences that Lotha folklore has undergone, the link between folklore and folklife, the intrinsic connection between man and nature and how all these are reflected in the genres in study.

The first chapter functions as an introductory chapter which provides a brief ethnographic overview of Nagaland and Nagas by looking at some of the first historical engagements of the Naga with the outside world. By employing such a lens, an attempt has been made to provide a portrait of the Nagas. Futhermore, this chapter also holds foregrounds the conceptual frameworks used in the interpretative paradigm of the essay. As such, the thesis begins with a journey into the world of Folkloristics, from delineating the evolution of the discipline, defining the “folk” and “lore”, the major methodological approaches and debates

pertaining to the issue of genre, and the major critiques of the various discourses in folkoristics. The major generic divisions as propounded by Richard M Dorson have also been enumerated so as to show how genres are interrelated. Certain specific Naga narratives from the Mao and Ao tribes echoing autochthonous myths of origin, namely, origin from stone and origin from underworld have been mentioned. Most significantly, the chapter also delves into the concepts of ecocritical and structuralist thought which have been used to interpret the oral narratives of the Lothas.

The second chapter is a comprehensive view of the world of the Lotha, as it is encapsulated in tradition and practice. While the previous chapter provided a portrait of the Naga world, this chapter shifts its lens closer to the world of the Lotha. Before delving headlong into the various beliefs and practices, the chapter discusses Naga folklore and its brand of Orality where "text", "texture" and "context" construct the Lotha Naga identity. It also looks at how the understanding of "Culture" in the Naga context points to inherited traditional practices that are identifiably either a) peasant and pre-modern or b) modern and transitioning (post Christian), illustrating how Naga identity is harnessed. Here, the work of Temsula Ao is invoked wherein she states that three factors: existential, locational and artefactual, to which the thesis adds another factor – "factional"- referencing societal groupings carved out of familial and marriage patterns, including adoption. This chapter furthermore looks at the social organisation of the Lothas, and in detail, looks at the Lotha belief, customs and religious practice. The work of J.P Mills, alongwith the data obtained from fieldwork interviews have formed the bulk of the information in this chapter. In order to study the religious practice of the pre-Christian Lothas, the work of Clifford Geertz has been invoked which looks at religion as a symbolic system. Besides enlisting the Lotha pantheon of deities and creatures of mythic importance, the crux of the chapter is the discussion of the life cycle rituals of the Lothas which has been studied through the lens of Arnold van Gennep's *rites de passage*, who identified three main phases in the process of rites and rituals, namely "Separation, Transition, Reassimilation/ Reincorporation". The chapter also looks at how the *genna* system of the Lothas stratified Lotha society, while dwelling on the Lotha notion of death.

The third chapter is an evaluative study of the ecocritical strands of thought as reflected in the oral narratives. The chapter begins by elucidating some of the key component aspects of ecocritical theory, its evolutionary paths and the discursive patterns of discourse that emerged from this school of thinking. The readings enlisted in the chapter encompass readings on

EcoFeminism, Ecocriticism and the Environment, Nature and Silence etc that look at the connection between the human world and the natural world. The chapter also problematizes the dichotomy of nature vs culture, debunking the western notion that posited these two realms as a duality. Conversely, the chapters also illustrate how metaphors engender feminization of the land or natural world, how the various tropes of a narratives imagine and awaken an ability to return or recover an imagined space, how (in the context of Lotha) the realm of the human and the realm of nature are reintegrated in the folktale which is done by rediscovering a connection between these two entities. The essay also situates and engages with the Lotha use of anthropomorphism, demonstrating how folktales and proverbs use anthropomorphism to effectively blur the division between nature and culture, identified as "other" and "self".

The thrust of the fourth chapter is to provide a structural analysis of the Lotha folktales by using Vladimir Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" as a template. The idea was to appropriating a Proppian methodology, and analyze the inherent structural components that make up the ubiquitous, quintessential Lotha folktale. To this end, the chapter first dwells on the nature of narratives and the concept of narrativising culture in an erstwhile primary oral society like the Lothas. It underscores the idea that the act of narration and the creation of narratives make these stories active agents of culture and experience, through which narrators and listeners ascribe meaning to their own lives and to their respective culture and environments. Further on, it contends that social functions are also subsumed in these narratives, where there is a transmission of tradition from one generation to another through a language based on a legacy of orality. This epistemic shift from the oral to the written world is reflected in the way the narration and structure of the tale is changed which in turn reflects a change in the order of thinking and reimagining the past. Unlike the literal word, which can be read and it's plethora of meanings realised in isolation from social interaction, oral narratives are performative, in that they necessitate a physical telling in the physical presence of another *self* or a collective. The chapter takes three major, recurrent folktale tropes – the tale of the trickster, the shapeshifting tales, and the Legend genre, and breaks them down into their respective motif index codes and combinations as reflected in the Motif Index of Folk Literature, developed by Stith Thompson which catalogues the various themes, motifs and other constituents that make up the content of folktales from across the world. This first layer is then imbricated by breaking down the folktale into its respective narratemes to show how

the units link up with each other, and how they construct the body of the folktale. A general anlaysis of each of the types of folktale has also been elucidated upon.

The fifth chapter provides a structural and thematic study of the Lotha proverbial sayings and narrative folk poetry (Ancient poems) that are in circulation among the Lothas. A structural analysis is important as it reflects the way a particular language and literature of a particular region is developing or devolving, and the influences that are impacting the development of the spoken word of that linguistic community while a thematic study underscores the dominant discourse and the psychological patterns prevalent within a particular community. To this end, the chapter first highlights the major works done in the field of paremiology, before delving into a structural study of the Lotha proverbs and sayings. Since the early history of the Lothas was not documented in the form of a script, the only avenue through which an engagement with history and traditional culture could be accessed was through the language and unlocking parts of language and folklore that carried these items. Hence, proverbs in the Lotha culture served as avenues through which one could understand and engage with the cultural mores of the society and became emblematic of a rich oral tradition where narrative was not only restricted to tales or songs but also reflected in proverbs, maxims, sayings, which were sometimes metafolkoric (folklore about folklore). Two semiotic categories were found in the Lotha proverbs – namely, metaphoric proverbs and hyperbolic proverbs. As far as subgenres are concerned, it was found that the Lotha proverbs were made up of descriptive comparisons (which were the most common ones), followed by proverbial anecdote (usually an anecdote accompanied the meaning of the proverb), proverbial phrases, proverbial exaggerations and those that used twin-formulas. A motif and metaphor based classification showed that themes such as plant and animal proverbs (ecological), eschatological proverbs, women & gender based proverbs, and those reflecting folk philosophy constituted a significant part of the corpus. Finally, the chapter also briefly looks at the genre of Narrative folk poetry (or ancient poems, in the Lotha context) to show the available tribal genres of folk poetry (poetry in song), and how they integrate nature, culture and various aspects of the human experience.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 FOLKLORISTICS AS A SITE OF INQUIRY:

The study of folklore as a discipline emerged during the mid 19th century, when ongoing interest in the phenomena of the field became highlighted in scholarly discourse and the study of folklore came to be seen as a legitimate way of studying the customs and traditions of people. The compound term of Anglo-Saxon heritage was popularized in 1846 by a British antiquarian named William John Thoms in a letter sent to the Athenaeum, an intellectual magazine of the time. His intention was to use the term in lieu of the Latinate phrase 'Popular Antiquities', which was then, used to refer to the study of the folk and their lore during that time. Although the term itself was not new, interest in the stories of the peasant world had surged during the time, which simultaneously laid the seeds for the growth of Romantic Nationalism in parts of Europe. The romantic temper that began in the late 18th and 19th century in Europe saw intellectuals and thinkers of the time insisting on the collection and documentation of their peasant traditions such as heroic songs and narratives of the remote past. William J Thoms was himself influenced by the work of the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who were, in their turn, inspired by the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder. Herder saw the folk, (*das Volk*) and their lore as a true reflection of the spirit of a people. McCormick and White states that the fact that folklore as a "priceless national or panhuman testimony from antiquity gained force" (531) during a time when industrialization was rapidly rising is remarkable. This is important to note because this denotes the way folklore can function discursively as an agent of subverting dominant trends in society and become a site of enquiry for reclaiming, and dehistoricizing established viewpoints. Even today, the study of traditional (mostly agriculture-based) folklore in its varied forms encapsulating narrative styles, techniques, rites and rituals and material culture have their foundational basis on this nostalgia for the past and its uneasy assimilation that folklore has with dominant discourses of modernity and in the case of Nagaland, with western modalities of modernity.

Throughout the 19th and 20th century, scholars and intellectuals were focused on unlocking the origin and distribution of narratives, songs, games and what later came to be understood as the "Ur-form" (original or basic form) of the folklore. This led to a framework that studied the trends of diffusion as reminiscent in a particular folk item. The Diffusionist

paradigm was primarily aimed at studying the presence of versions and variations of a folklore item, and was elaborated in the theory of monogenesis (single-point diffusion) and polygenesis (multiple points of diffusion). These schools of thought addressed for example, the question of why certain items such as the prototype of the "Cinderella" tale occurred cross-culturally and accounted as to the similarity of Swan motifs found in the Indo-European tales. They argued that while historical and cultural contact occur and spread either directly (through events like war) or indirectly (through trade, travel, pilgrimage or other passive bearers of tradition), the cultural convergences that take place over space and time result in similarities that arise from the diffusionist tendency of a folklore item that allows it to easily get coopted into another culture. This diffusionist paradigm can also be seen in the study of language such as the presence of dialects or creole-languages as well as other genres of the verbal arts. The diffusionist school identified three major roots from where worldwide folklore traditions emerged. Namely, they were the Egyptianist School of thought, the Indian School of thought, which was led by Theodor Benfey and the Historical-Geographic method. While the Egyptianists identified Egyptian culture as the root, the Indianists, placed their hypothesis by studying Sanskrit, which is seen as the mother of many Indo-European/ Aryan languages. However, it was the Historic-Geographic method that held considerable sway because of their comprehensive and in-depth analytical method that used a comparative approach to understand folklore diffusion and origin.

The Historical-Geographic Method is also known as the Finnish School of thought, because Kaarle Krohn, a Finnish folklorist, invented it. This method was developed to "reconstruct the history of a complex folktale, or occasionally a folksong or other folklore item" (Dorson 7). It rests on the presumption of the Diffusionist school that holds the view that "a tale that has been found in hundreds of oral variants must have originated in one time and one place by an act of conscious invention" (Dorson 7) which travels away from its place of origin. The Finnish method rejects polygenesis or "independent invention of complex tales, dream origins, ritual origins, origins based in observation of heavenly phenomena, savage mentality or expression of repressed infantile fantasies (Dorson 8). This implies that they did not accept the theories propounded by E.B. Taylor, Max Muller's Solar Mythology and the psychoanalytical views of Sigmund Freud. Similarly, they did not concur with anti-diffusionists who stated that narratives could not cross linguistic and cultural walls. Their attempt was to study and trace the routes of the diffusion of folktales. And in this attempt, C. W. von Sydow developed the idea of the Oikotype –to refer to the localized version of any tale. The term has its origins in the field of biology where the term *ecotype* refers to a variety of

species that exhibits characteristics that enable a particular plant to live and thrive in a particular habitat which ultimately becomes natural to it (McCormick and White 925). In Folkloristics, the term oikotype or oikotypication alludes to changes that occur in the structure and style of the text, whether it is a folktale or a song, even as it tries to adapt itself to the culture bound. Von Sydow was investigating the ways in which certain narrative styles performed by active bearers of tradition, who often moved beyond the confines of their community, were impacted when they encountered new cultural milieus. These hybridized texts, or oikotypes embodied local characteristics that reflected local phenomenology. With the view to find the precise time and place of origin of a story such as the Kind and Unkind Girls (AT 480), and to map the geographic and historical paths of their diffusions, the Historical-Geographic Method was adopted by scholars. (McCormick and Kennedy 396). Dorson explains the Historical-Geographic methodology thusly: "Having selected the Märchen, Sage, animal tale or ballad for his quest, necessarily choosing one for which hundreds of variants exist, he must assemble the texts of these variants from printed collections, folklore archives, and the versions in literature." (Dorson 8). Dorson goes on to explain how the basic plot of the story is broken down into specific traits, and then percentage tables indicating the frequencies of the occurrence of each traits is compiled according to the geographical location, which also evaluates the early literary recordings, and judges the oldest traits of the story. According to him (Dorson 8), traits such as "compression, elaboration, substitution" (8), helps the scholar to ascertain the tentative time and place of the origin" (8). He cites the example of the presence of a razor in the story of "The Magic Flight". In this particular story, the razor acts as a hindrance that grows to a great size ultimately saves the hero from the hands of the ogre who is chasing him, and the object (razor) here represents a substitution.

Dorson states that the historical-geographical method places importance on the earlier versions of the tale, the traits of which can be found in oral tradition and goes on to claim that in the quest for the Ur-form of the tale, what he succeeds is establishing instead the *Normalformen*, rerouting the attention from metaphysical and philosophical enquiry and viewing the storyline as "empirical questions of fact" (Dorson 11).

While the theoretical paradigms that delineated the evolution of folkloristics was birthed in the seeds of Romantic Nationalism in Europe (as illustrated above), it was only in the 1920s that folklore became a subject in the university space. Similarly, in Tsarist Russia, in the wake of the political rumblings of 1936, the communist party came to the realization that the

intelligentsia were espousing anti-Marxist ideas. In an effort to reverse this strand of belief, the communist party "laid down that folklore originated as the creative expression of the working class" (Dorson 15). This demonstrates that folklore material can be inter-generational, personal, and national and can even be calibrated to suit certain agendas.

2.0 DEFINING FOLKLORE AND THE FOLK

As illustrated/implied above, the term folklore is today in common parlance used to denote a fictitious or a quasi-fictitious story, one that is replete with inaccuracies, falsity, distortions, deviations and at times, incongruent. Simultaneously, it also conjures up an antiquarian view of life, an item lacking a certain modern or aesthetic sophistication in its textual material, a pre-modern ethos striving and seeking legitimacy in a modern world of technology, gadgets and post-truth constructions. As far as academic discourse in folkloristics is concerned, folklore is not only viewed as a site of cultural, philosophical, political and historical enquiry, but can be seen as a repertoire of a community's psychological canvas – one in which the influences of tradition, modernity, the conflicts and fears of the community are portrayed. Looking at folklore as a cultural produce that reflects the psychological landscape of a community entails understanding the complexity of a folklore item and studying it in-depth by absorbing the contexts in which the utterance or performance is enacted/ told. Due to the lucid nature of "folklore", it has been difficult for academics to concisely define what folklore is, and what it entails. However, certain predominant characteristics indicate the nature of traditional folklore. They are as follows:

a) the availability of versions and variations: This is perhaps one of the most
aspect of folklore that pays homage to its fluid nature. A folklore item, whether it is a performed narrative text such as a legend or a märchen, or a performed ritual act (in the case of Naga folklore, the naming ceremony of a child), the availability of versions and variations demonstrates that the folklore is moving, and hence, gaining versions and variations (each of which are called as oikotypes).

b) it is orally transmitted: While written textual documentation of folklore has become the norm for many, the study and collection of any folklore item has its roots in orality. Walter J Ong in his book, Orality and Literacy (1982) indicates that there are two different kinds of orality. The first being primary orality – which refers to the orality of a culture that is "completely

untouched by any knowledge of the written word" (10), while secondary orality as one which exists in our current technology-based culture, in which we have aids such as the written word, telephone, radio, TV, mobile phones etc that "depend for the existence and functioning on writing and print" (10). While it is not longer conceivable today to have a culture untouched by writing, Ong maintains that "to varying degrees, many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve the mindset of primary orality (11).

c) It is traditional: the traditionality of a folklore item implies that the folklore text is one that is passed on from generation to generation. Folklorists viewed tradition as a frame in which standardized structures and themes are set. However, with emerging postmodern deconstructivist tendencies, tradition is now often seen as more of a construct or a continuum in which the contemporary is understood and interpreted.

d) Anonymity: It is often understood that a folklore item can be classified a folklore if/ when versions and variations exist. However, this may be based on certain contextual factors. Usually, the lore is owned by the community or the folk, and not by an individual. This does not mean that all folklore originates in a community. Folksongs for example may have their origins in a particular written/ musical tradition or composed by a singer. However, the availability of the songs as versions and variations, its journey from one generation to the other through word-of-mouth determine its folkloric quality.

Taking these four characteristics as a point of departure for understanding what constitutes folklore, folklorists have defined folklore to encapsulate its workings taking contextual and generic conditions into play. Dan Ben Amos in his essay "Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context" in 1972 states that at its core, folklore is the "artistic communication in small groups" (11). For him,

> Folklore is very much an organic phenomenon in the sense that it is an integral part of culture… The social context, the cultural attitude, the rhetorical situation, and the individual aptitude are variables that produce distinct differences in the structure, text, and texture of the ultimate verbal, musical, or plastic product… it is possible to distinguish three basic conceptions of the subject underlying many definitions; accordingly, folklore is one of these: a body of knowledge, a mode of thought. or a kind of art…Folklore is the real "common property" of the community…"

For Dan Ben Amos, simply defining folklore as the lore of the folk is not enough to understand folklore phenomena because according to him, folklore is a "communicative process" that encompasses creativity and a sense of its own esthetics. In this sense, folklore becomes something that is birthed within a social setting and is organic to the human condition and not simply an analytical construct that picks and chooses what items can be excluded or included under its nomenclature. He says that "the locus of the conventions marking the boundaries between folklore and nonfolklore is in the text, texture and context of the forms (8, 10). This idea of folklore as a process – and communication at the center underpins Ben-Amos's definition of folklore.

A definition of folklore in its social context beehoves on the scholar to unlock the meaning of "folk" as interpreted in folkloristics. While the notion of "folk" implies a marginality usually that of a low socio-economic, or peasant status, as opposed to the elite or people from the higher-strata, the notion of folk has become synonymous with the concept of a group (Ben-Amos, "Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context", 12). This outdated notion of folk is redefined by Alan Dundes in one of his many, many seminal essays titled, "Who are the Folk?" where he maintains that a folk are any group of people "who share at least one common factor". The common factor could be anything from profession, language group or even similarity in the practice and observance of religious rituals, what is crucial for a group to be understood as a folk group is that the group should have traditions that defines the group and that which the group identifies as belonging to itself. This does not mean that members of the group must know each other or all of the other members but as long as the members of the group adhere to the traditions that situate the group in a particular line of tradition, the the group is known as a folk group.

Dundes critiques the narrow definition of folk as understood in common parlance where the notion of folk is pitted against 'urban', constructing folk and urban as polar opposites of the spectrum. This view of folk as being only counter-hegemonic by posing opposition to the upper strata of society and in opposition to an urban center, was part of the analytical paradigm fabricated by American anthropologists which Dundes is critical of. From the kind of exegesis as demonstrate in the previous paragrah, one can come to the conclusion that then, there are an infinite number of folk groups in any nation and within every community, with smaller sub-groups of folk present in these configurations. With this conceptualization, we also come to

understand and view the folk not simply as a standardized, monolithic entity – defined only by membership and numbers, or understood in opposition to elite (identified as non-folk) groups, but as a category that is much more fluid and borderless, where an individual can simultaneously be part of other folk groups at the same time. In these contemporary times, even as more new folkgroups are created more folklore is created, for instance, the folklore of Facebook/ Twitter, the folklore of truck drivers, or the folklore of Bible camps or Vacation Bible Schools in Nagaland (which qualifies as a part-time folkgroup because VBS groups only meet once a year), the antiquated, delimiting notion that folklore only refers to the old and preliterate culture is not only an oversimplification but also a very restrictive analytical paradigm to adopt.

3.0 INVESTIGATING FOLKLORE GENRES: CAN GENRES STAND ALONE?

The question of *Genre* in the study of folklore has for sometime been a crucial point of debate. A genre is usually understood as a classificatory category that is based on a number of traits or characteristics that distinguish it from another in terms of stylistics, content, structure or form. In his book, *Folklore Genres,* Ben-Amos states that during the initial days, the understanding of folklore genres did not move beyond their lexical interpretations as they were not embodied with a theoretical baggage, but were more or less "categories of tradition" (xiii). According to Ben-Amos, nomenclature such as myth, tale, legend etc have had their own interpretations and meanings in the English language reflecting a legacy long before these terms became assimilated with new connotations that emerged from much more recent evolutionary and functional theorems. It was only when folklore studies was endorsed as a discipline within academia and a methodology was being carved to collect, classify and analyse folklore data, that these terms became attributed with specific characteristics that delineated their qualities and the structures that they embodied. Academic discourse implied that these new meanings, (now removed from their natural environs) which attributed to the old words divulged the factual and true nature of the genres. However, in the same work, Ben Amos echoes Alan Dundes who maintained that a strict, monolithic interpretation and understanding of genre is an obstruction in folklore studies because it disallows a person from investigating the contextual ideas that germinate and circulate in the various forms of verbal art, and is thus, delimiting and problematic.

(Ben-Amos xiii, xiv)

The problem of the genrefication is problematic in folklore studies because, as Dundes has rightly noted, there exists a "wide domain in folklore that does *not* (italics mine) fit into the constraints of any existing categorization system and consequently has not been and will not be fully explored as long as the genre research paradigm prevails" (Ben-Amos, xiv). Indeed so, as folklore study is highly contextual with the folk material differing from context to context, the same classificatory model cannot be applied cross-culturally without gaps in the analytical process and explanatory principles. This is made more evident in the case of non-European and non-Aryan cultures where ethnocentric viewpoints have often be used to study and interpret these cultures. McCormick and Kennedy are of the view that culture-specific differences occur between different types of expressive forms, but at the same time, stylistic or structural constituents such as a framework for a tale or a proverbial structure, are seen to be repeatedly occurring. Among these recurrences, "symmetries, alliterations, parallelisms" (534) can be seen in most Western genres. These repetitive elements also work towards aiding the performer in the process of remembering the material which then accords to them a certain degree of control. Even in the case of proverbs and riddles, also known as "fixed" genres – (because it was often believed that their core narrative structure did not change as much as the unfixed, malleable forms like legends, myths and tales), it was found that their fixedness was an illusion because it was highly dependent on the social phenomena that brought a certain proverb into play. For example, a proverb may be stated in half, or used as an anti-proverb or used as a Wellerism or converted to a proverbial anecdote, in which case it changes its allegedly *fixed* avatar. This then proves that even fixed genres have a tendency and potential to be co-opted and changed with the result that hybrid versions of the various verbal arts are birthed.

While generic classification has often proven to be difficult and problematic, Richard Dorson in his book, *Folklore and Folk life* has elaborately divided the various fields of folk experience that embody both narrative tropes and practice. Although he does not categorize these as genres in the strict sense of the term, his classification can be used as a framework for organizing folklore material. According to him, the various fields can be classified under the following heads:

1) Oral Folklore: Which encapsulates all forms of verbal expressive arts. More specifically he states, "In this rubric fall spoken, sung, and voiced forms of traditional utterance that show repetitive patterns" (2). While traditional tales and songs correspond to a written epistemology, other non-lexical expressions such as chants/ cries and lament have their own specific character

that defies this classification. As for the rest, they are Folk Narrative, Narrative Folk Poetry, Folk Epic, Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions, Riddles, Folk Speech.

2) Social Folk Custom: this type of folklore is one in which the "emphasis is on group interaction rather than on individual skills and performances" (3). Folk custom and practice is usually tied up with deeply ingrained folk belief, which are by themselves, a distinct and specific folklore category. General customs usually contain a) an act of physical action b) a shared notion/ belief, c) the presence of a material/ object/ thing (3). When customs gain a sacred quality to them, they become morphed and interpreted as rituals. Under this category fall Festivals and Celebrations, Recreation and Games, Folk Medicine and Folk Religion.

3) Material Culture: This category refers to the various aspects of physical folk life, with the tangible and visible forms of culture that echo with certain techniques, skills, recipes and formulas that have been passed down from one generation to the next. It encapsulates the tenchiques in tradition-oriented societies and the ways architecture is constructed, looms are woven, food is prepared/ processed/ preserved, the fashioning of furniture and the design of tools. Under this, various forms of Folk Crafts, Folk Art, Folk Architecture, Folk Costume and Folk cookery are studied.

4) Folk Arts: The fourth category reflects the performance-based aspects of folk life. It studies the various type of artistic conventions within the paradigm of folklore, looking particularly at renditions of narrative styles or folk song, and the presentation of these elements in a performative context by looking at costume, accompaniments, instruments etc. It looks at ascertaining ways of studying folk dance(s), in their first and second existences in order to situate their performative index using the above categories. Under this fall Folk Drama, Folk Dance and Folk Music.

From this division, one can see that each of these categories cannot stand alone, but are interconnected with each other. A folk dance cannot be understood in all its complexity without understanding the oral folklore in which the narrative/ story is based. Similarly, any social custom cannot be studied in isolation from the folk beliefs that permeate through the text. With such commingling, then, to argue for a pure genre within the realm of folklore studies would be erroneous and delimiting. It is what Clifford Geertz in his work, "Blurred Genres: The Reconfiguration of Social Thought" addressed this genre mixing that he felt was part of the

new trend in the social sciences and humanities during the 1980s that aided in the refiguration of social thought, claiming that indeed there was "enormous amount of genre mixing in intellectual life" (171). In the essay, he alludes to the drama analogy, the text analogy and the game analogy that are used in the analysis of culture, which have been infused into the study of sociological processes and human behavior, from the humanities to illustrate his point – the process of genre blurring. Rather significant to this study, Geertz eludicates on Victor Turner's concept of the social drama that studies ritualistic behavior into different stages – namely, breach, crisis, redress, and reintergration/ schism, which Turner himself uses to unlock the schemata of tribal rites and ritual, to illustrate the implications they have on social life (172, 173).

Geertz's analytical framework can be applied to the interpretation of folklore elements as well. In folklore and allied studies, generic conditions vary from one context to the next, and cannot be studied in isolation from one another. With such interdisciplinary paradigms being mapped, there is the possibility of infinitesimal number of sub-genres being birthed out of old folklore genres and new folklore groupings.

4.0 THE FUNCTIONALIST PARADIGM IN FOLKLORE STUDIES

The Functional School of thought in folklore studies stresses on the functionality of any folklore item. It is the belief that every art form – whether it is a folktale, a folk song, or a lament – functions in society in various ways, whether it is sociological, psychological, pedagogical etc. This notion is tied up with anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's stance that there is a function for every human life. According to McCormick and Kennedy, there are three types of functionalist theorems that play a dominant role in the interpretation of culture. They are a) psychobiological human entity that is center stage (595), b) that which emphasizes the roles and functions of social structures within a given group (595) and c) through the shared mental structure of the "conscience collective" (595). These three theoretical approaches are identified with the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (a), Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (b) and Emile Durkiem and Marcel Mauss (3). By alluding mostly to the work of Malnowski and combined with his own research findings, William Bascom's essay on the "Four Functions of Folklore" illustrates and discusses the pertinent uses of folklore and the functions they serve in society. He comes to the conclusion that folklore serves four definitive functions. To put it briefly,

a) Folklore reveals man's frustrations and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon him by society (343)

b) A second function of folklore is that which it plays in validating culture, in justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them (344)

c) A third function of folklore is that which it plays in education, particularly, but not exclusively, in non-literate societies (345)

d) In the fourth place, folklore fulfills the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behavior (346)

The first function that Bascom elucidates on, departs from a Freudian interpretation of psychoanalysis. Seen in this light, we can state the folklore is a means through which several repressed energies are channeled and this shows human being's attempt to escape into the world of fantasy and transcend his immediate geographical and biological limitations imposed on him by socio-cultural conditioning. The cultural context and environmental settings are imperative to the unfolding of this particular function of folklore. Bascom draws from Branislav Malinowski's study of the Oedipus complex which, according to him, was rooted in the cultural factors of family structure and parental authority and not simply in the biological factor of sex that Sigmund Freud had postulated in his analysis (343). Folklore helps in articulating the repressed energies and in this manner, allows for lapses in the normal fabric of cultural interaction.

The second function of folklore – its role in validating and justifying culture, rituals and rites – showcases the social role folklore plays within a community. To illustrate this point, he discusses the sociological function of myths as elucidated by Malinowski as "a warrant, a charter, and often even a practical guide (47) to magic, ceremony, ritual and social structure" (343). By especially studying the role of myths in preliterate and primitive cultures, Malinowski had come to the conclusion that they were imperative in formulating and codifying the belief system of a community and thus through its connection with morality, moral wisdom and faith, became an important ingredient of human civilization. The folk genre of myth is also responsible in acting as a buttress for tradition and traditional practices. Furthermore, it is endowed with a value and prestige that transcends intellectual explanation and traces it to a much larger-than-life supernatural reality[i].

The third function of folklore emphasizes the role it plays in pedagogy, especially in non-literate communities. Folktales, fables, lullabies and proverbs play an important role in disseminating information and discipline to children, and adults alike. Folktales with moral lessons are told to children so as to ridicule negative habits like sloth, pride and disobedience, to remedy bad attitudes and as a preemptive exercise so that the child does not inculcate bad habits. Similarly, proverbs and riddles offer lessons indirectly by using techniques of speech like metaphor, irony and synecdoche. While the role of folklore in child pedagogy cannot be undermined, it is also used not only in teaching but also in building good humour and environment for the child. Folktales can have identifiably good or bad characters and situations which the child can learn from and even folk songs in some communities embody a note of censure which ensures that mistakes are avoided. Lullabies, when sung to babies and toddlers, soothes them and puts them in a good spirit. By reinforcing values and morals through various ways, folklore also polishes the wit of children and makes them bold and courageous even as they learn to inculcate all the information embedded within the narratives whether directly or indirectly. Particularly in non-literate societies, this facet of folklore plays an important role in child up-bringing and psychology, given the fact that folklore is considered as a mirror of culture.

The fourth function emphasizes the role it plays in maintaining the accepted codes of individual and community behavior. In addition to validating and justifying belief and attitudes, certain forms of folklore also acts as a means through which social pressure and social control is exercised. This is done through the use of proverbs and tales which are relatable not only for children but for adults alike. By using indirect means of exercising social control, folklore becomes a means through which age-old institutions are preserved and kept safe from being directly questioned. In this way, folklore acts as a cushion for tradition. Additionally, when individuals try to contravene social codes and conventions, an allusion to a proverb or a folktale maybe evoked to signify disapproval. Bascom states that folklore is also used to express social approval towards those who conform to conventions. This is done by using songs of praise specifically constructed for the purpose (345). Furthermore, he adds that in some societies, folklore is “employed” so as to exercise “control” and “influence” people from childbirth, when lullabies are first sung. Through this systemic application(s), folklore gains the potential to become an “internalized check on behavior” (345).

Bascom's four functions of folklore can be applied to the study of a wide range of narrative tropes and folk beliefs as well. For example: Lotha-Naga folk narratives express the moral codes and principles by which Lotha identity and culture is crafted and realized in its socio-historical settings. They simultaneously stand as anecdotes of humour as well as warnings and many times, the themes and genres overlap each other. The proverbs or worldly wisdoms usually act as warnings, counsel or advice the listener to change his/her behavior or to criticize and ridicule someone who has been lacking foresight by using metaphors. Similarly, folksongs of the Lothas can be used to reconstruct a rudimentary and essential frame of Lotha history and provide an overall cultural panorama. Folktales, although fragmentary in their multiple existences (as they have come to be circulated today), on the other hand, embody not only historical behavior and cultural reflections but are sometimes overlapped with legends (example: the legend of *Ramphan*) that endorse, reinforce and reiterate traditional codes of behavior and collective ethos. In this way, the folk culture of a tribe functions as a way of maintaining the norms, beliefs and patterns that are an active ingredient in the life system of the tribe. By expressing the ethics of the Lotha tribe, Lotha folklore is used not only as a means of validating and justifying the cultural attributes of Lotha but also in harnessing history and historical events.

Although William Bascom speaks broadly on the functions of folklore, the function of each specific genre of folklore is complex and distinctive especially in the Lotha context. While the function of myth, folktale, proverb and song can be broadly categorized according to Bascom's classification, each of them in turn play a myriad of functions and a genre wise analysis is imperative to any study of folklore. However in the Lotha context, a genre wise analysis would rather be restricting as the lines between the genres are blurred and in its place exists, a mixed genre, where the genre boundaries are crossed. Nonetheless, folklore in the Lotha community works in such a way that it shapes the cultural and collective imagination of the tribe, ensuring and reinforcing age old values and validating cultural tropes. Through its pedagogical role, it also ensures that conformity to moral and socially accepted cultural norms is maintained. By acting as a mirror and a treasure cove of culture (349), folklore becomes a key ingredient in maintaining the stability of a community. Equipped with an oral tradition that hands down knowledge systems from one generation to the next through word of mouth, folklore is used to,

> inculcate the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him with ridicule or criticism when he deviates, to provide him with rationalizations when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with a compensatory escape from "the hardships, the inequalities, the injustice" of everyday life. Here, indeed, is the basic paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time it provides socially approved outlets for the repressions which these same institutions impose upon him (349).

5.0 THE NAGAS AND NAGALAND: BEYOND ETHNOGRAPHIC FRONTIERS

An in-depth portrayal of a community is not simply a matter of socio-scientifically documenting the bare geographical, economical and historical fact of things, but weaving them together to display and understand the ecosystem in which multiple historical and cultural processes co-exist to shape an individual and community identity. It necessitates a thorough mapping of the various factors that contribute to the creation and existence of community ethos. For a study on any aspect of Naga tribal life too, no ethnographic sketch is complete without a thorough outline of the people, the land, the environment and the discourses that have shaped the Nagas today.

5.1 Land and People

The documented political history of Nagaland, as we come to understand its political map today, has a legacy of violence and conflict that have left a bloody mark on the psychology of the people. From living in a state of quasi-perpetual war with each other, and then fighting against the British, the written and oral history testimony of the Nagas is witness to this conflict-laden narrative which is in turn, deeply tied to ideas of territory and ethnic identity. Geographically and geostragetically important as it is located in the fringes of North-East India and bordering the country of Burma, Nagaland is predominantly a hilly and mountainous region with rivers that cut across the ravines and meet each other in catchment areas. There is however no river route that empties itself into a larger water body such as the oceans.

Table 1.0 Detailed Basics of Nagaland's Geography:

Date of Statehood	**1.12.1963**
State Capital	Kohima
Total Area Cover	16,579 sq. km
Number of Districts	16
Population (2011)	19, 78, 502 (Males) 10, 24, 649 (Females)
Major Rivers	Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Milak, Zungki and Tizu
Major Wildlife Sanctuaries	Puliebadze, Rangapahar
Population Density (2011)	119 Km^2
Literacy Rate (2011)	79.55 % (Male: 82.75%; Female:76.11 %)
No of Recognised Tribes	17
Major Occupation	Agriculture
Official Language	English
Highest Peak	Saramati (3840 meters), located in Tuensang
Major Crops	Rice, Paddy, Maize, Potato, tea.

Source: Nagaland State Human Development Report, Department of Planning, Government of Nagaland, 2004; Envis Centre on Himalayan Ecology, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt of India.

5. 2 TRIBES AND FESTIVALS:

Festival	**Tribe**	**Month**	**Meaning or significance**
Thuni	Chakesang	January	Post-Harvest
Poang Lüm	Chang	January	Premiere Festival

Sükrünye	Chakesang	January	Main tribe festival, derived from the tradition where boys and girls are blessed and sanctified
Tsungkamneo	Yimchunger	January	Post-Harvest
Mimkut	Kuki	January	Post-Harvest
Khaozaosie-Hok-Ah	Khiamniungan	January	End of yearly agricultural activity
Bishu	Kachari	January	Post Harvest
Ngunye	Chakesang	February	Post-Harvest
Sekrenyi	Angami	February	Sanctification/ Purification
Hega	Zeliang	February	Festival for blessing
Nazu	Pochury	February	Pre-sowing season
Mileinyi	Zeliang	March	-
Tsohsu	Sangtam	March	-
Kundaglün	Chang	April	-
Holong Monglashi	Phom	April	-
Wangtsunuo	Yimchunger	April	-
Tsukhenyie	Chakesang	April	Post-sowing
Aoleang Monyu	Konyak	April	Post-sowing festival
Phom Monyu	Phom	April	Post-sowing festival
Moatsu	Ao	May	Post-sowing festival
Miu	Khiamniungan	May	-
Biam	Khiamniungan	August	-
Metemneo	Yimchunger		-
Tuluni	Sumi	July	Post-sowing
Khukhu	Chakesang	August	Post-sowing
Hunapongpi	Sangtam	August	-
Naknyulüm	Chang	July	-
Tsungrenmong	Ao	August	Pre-harvest

Mongmong	Sangtam	September	-
Yemshe	Pochury	October	-
Chaga Gadi	Zeliang	October	-
Tokhu Emong	Lotha	November	Post-harvest
Ahuna	Sumi	November	Post-Harvest
Ngada	Rengma	November	-
Terhüni	Angami	December	-
Hornbill	Combined	December	Popular festival initiated in 2000 by the Government to showcase Naga culture

Source: https://nagalandgk.com/list-of-festivals-naga-tribes-nagaland/

5.3 FRAGMENTED NARRATIVES: CULTURAL ROOTS

Contemporary scholarly work about and from the Nagas has in the recent years birthed a kind of academic renaissance in the field of Naga history and culture. It has paved the way for newer perspectives that are aimed at rereading, reimagining and interrogating established notions and ideas about the Nagas and Nagaland while expertly questioning information that we hold as given – regarding the origin, migration, cultural affinities and the other constituents of Naga communities. This new dimension especially in the scholarship of narrative research has brought about many newer insights that look beyond simply accepting nomenclature and other textual narratives.

5.3.1 Etymology, Nomenclature and Historical interactions

Even etymologically speaking, the word "Naga" has had different cultural connotations that carry with them their own exegesis. However, one thing is evident, in that, the term is an etic word, possibly attributed by non-Nagas to refer to the groups of people living in the Naga Hills as it does not have any etymological root in any Naga language. Today, there are many different theories in popular discourse that attest to the availability of versions and variations of the origin myths and migratory hypotheses. According to Asoso Yunou, the first mention of the nomenclature "Naga" can be traced to AD 150, in the work of Claudius Ptolemy titled "Geographia", where in he refers to the hill tribes as "Nagaloi" (35). According to Yhokha,

"the reference of "Nagalogoe" to specifically mean the 'would be' people called "Naga" and to further imply those people in the region which he or European travellers had not yet ventured into and simply called it by the name 'realm of the naked' appears presumptious and untenable" (33). The "Geographia" is a reconstruction of the map of the world that was previously worked on by the Byzantine monks. After this, it is believed that mention of the Nagas was made by Hieun Tsang, the Chinese traveller and scribe when he toured India between AD 629 - 645. His account, chronicled during his stay with the King of Kamrup, Bhaskar Varman, called *"Si-Yu-Ki"* describes the hills that line the Ahom kingdom as one that were inhabited by tribes that were similar to those in Southwest China (18). There on, mention of the Nagas have also been made in the Chietharol Kumbabu and Ningthourol Kumbabu, which are records dating from 663AD - 996 AD belonging to the Manipur kingdom. The Ahom Chronicles also describe the existence of the Naga tribes.

As far as the nomenclature "Naga" is concerned, some are of the view that it is derived from the Sanskrit word "Nag" which refers to snake or "Nanga" in Hindi and "noga" in Assamese meaning "naked". Yokha is of the view that similarity of words and names can also be found among the eastern asians particularly with Japanese and Filipina cultures. It is believed that the term was absorbed into nomenclature by the White man when he entered the Naga Hills, possibly as a derogatory term to refer to Nagas as savage, primitive and barbaric tribal entities. The arrival of the White Man saw the nomenclature being adopted as part of everyday life. The word also has resonance in Burmese language where the Burmese "Naka" refers to people with pierced ears, who inhabited the area between the Chin in the South and Kachin in the Northeast. Piercing of ears of both men and women is part of Naga tradition. More recently, in her book *Walking the Roadless Road*, Easterine Kire states that the term has resonances in Chinese as well. This theory holds the view that the Naga people were previously ascribed as "Natcharemi", which referred to people who ran away from the building of the Great Wall of China on account of unpaid labour. Her hypothesis echoes the work of General Mowu Gwizan and Captain Sakolie Yhokha who subscribe to this theory.

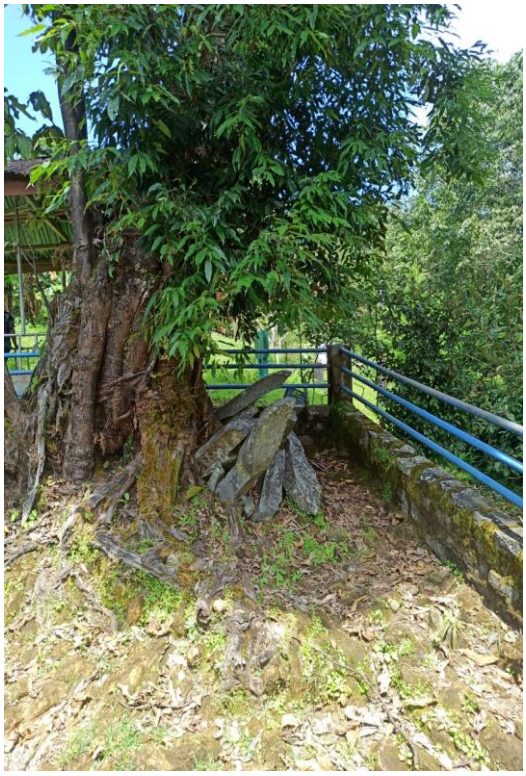
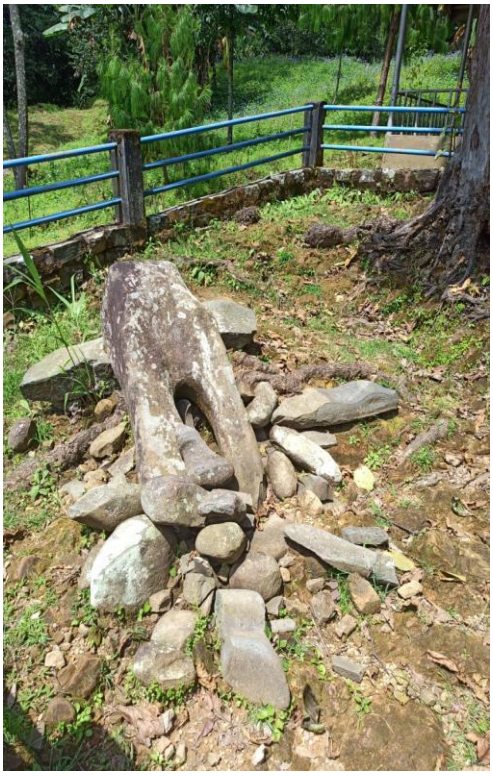
5.3.2. Origin Narratives: The Naga World

Origin myths derived from oral tradition are considered to have a sacred value to them and held in reverence by the community almost as unquestionable givens that are imbued with a timelessness transcending history itself. These narratives speak of grand beginnings or ends – that give meaning and answers to esoteric questions of existence and origin of the universe.

Sims and Stephens defines myth as those narratives that are "usually presented as existing outside time or before our own history, are usually believed to be true within the group they belong to, and may even be considered sacred. They typically present broad summaries of characters' actions within a set plot that defines a particular event" (182). It is stylistically different from a tale that usually focuses and is based on a single story that may not have grander or larger-than-life universal themes. A myth is created by the community in an effort to better understand and make sense of the world around them, and hence must be read as a psychological reflection of the folk.

As any primary oral community narrative, the oral tradition of the Nagas reflect a world that is untouched by any writing technology, memory aids such as radio, and other documenting or recording methods that act as complementing tools to the oralness of Naga culture. In this sense, Naga orality is unreservedly oral. Orality in the context of Naga exists today as a substructure to the dominant written and literary traditions, and reflects a historical and philosophical paradigm that is non-linear, fragmented, shared, which implies that there is a plethora of available versions and variations of the existing narratives. In contrast to the written traditions, Naga oral tradition encompass both oral tradition and performance (which in turn internalize the oral nature of narrative in literary texts). Ontologically then, Naga orality can be seen to be prior to the literal. The multiplicity of Naga oral narratives as already stated, is one that reflects a shared characteristic spirit that adds to the richness of folklore in Naga society. This quality is reflected not only in stories, legends and songs but also in the origin and migration narratives that are held in mythic regard in Naga society. As implied above, as far as the origin myth of the Nagas is concerned, there are many different versions and variations depending on tribe, range, village and sometimes, clan narrative. They are sometimes reflected in the ways kinship patterns are forged with some clans allowing inter-clan marriage (endogamous) based on the system of phratry endorsed by the tribe.

One of the most popular origin myths involves the Ao tribe who believed that the human race evolved out of stone stones in Longterok at Chungliyimti.

Pic 1 and 2: The sacred Longterok stones at Chungliyimti. According to Lore, the tree is believed to be a combination of six different trees.
(Pictures taken on 9.9.2022 by Dr Rongsenzulu Jamir and published here with consent)

The Ao narrative is also taken as a point of departure for understanding the origin of man by the Phoms who share linguistic and folkloric affinity with the Ao tribe. The Aos also have the story of *Lijaba*, who the Aos consider as their Creator.

> *One bright and sunny day as Lijaba was peacefully carving the mountainous terrains for the Aos, a panicked cockroach appeared from the distance and told him that some hostile forces were on their way to annihilate the earth of all its beauty. After that, the cockroach went on its way to keep itself in hiding. Meanwhile, Lijaba, struck with fear that a horde of hostile forces were indeed enroute to destroy the earth, started working with great speed to finish the Ao landscape. In his panicked haste, he could not ensure that the mountainous terrains were evenly carved and hence it is a belief among the Aos even today, that the creation and landscape of the Ao country was unduly interrupted and this is manifest in the uneven terrainous mountain ranges.*
>
> (Alemla, interview)

The Lothas, subject of this study, also have their own version of origin and migration. Although there is no mythic origin narrative that the Lothas hold as sacred, linguistic resonances has been found in some of the ancient narratives. T. Kikon, a native scholar who has done considerable amount of work pertaining to the Lotha tribe holds the view that the

migratory paths of the Lotha indicate the East trajectory as a plausible migratory trail that posits Mongolia, Manchuria, China, Burma and on to Makhel and Khezekheno. In her PhD thesis on the Lotha traditional religion, Mhabeni Ezung references an ancient prayer of the Lothas before conversion to Christianity. In the prayer which reads as a fragmentary remnant of a possibly longer narrative piece, a plea is announced to the God of the harvest (*Ronsyu*), invoking *Ronsyu* from the time the Lothas lived in Machuria, in Burma and subsequently in Manipur ..

Oh Mansuri, vanathung Ronsyu

Oh Kutcha vanathung Ronsyu

Oh Thungpocheura vanathung Ronsyu (Murry, 51).

Although the Ur-Form or the complete form of the above prayer has not been traced and its scientific validity not proven, if one takes the orally handed tradition as a point of departure for articulating a 'historical' position, then this part of prayer maybe considered as a testimony of Naga migration.

Another origin myth of the Nagas point to Makhel in Manipur. This origin myth is tied up with the migration theory that holds the view that the Nagas arrived in the North East of India from China to Myanmar where they lived for a many generations until they were coerced to move to the hills from Irrawady, for unspecified reasons. This migration theory states that the Nagas arrived at present day Makhel, a Mao village in Senapati district in Manipur, from which point, the tribes or the groups dispersed in parts and reached the present day Nagaland. A Mao oral narrative demonstrates this connection with nature through the use of metaphoric elements in the tale of the Tiger, Man and Spirit world.

Okhe Ora Omai Tu (The Three Brothers Farewell Stone).

> *Dziiliamosiiro, considered as the first woman on earth in Mao tradition, was a very virtuous and pure woman. One fateful day, as she rested with parted legs under the shade of a tree at Makhel or Makhrai Rabu, a misty cloud that loomed over the area where she slept, dropped some liquid substance in the like of an elixir, which moved towards her genitals and that caused her pregnancy. At the end of this pregnancy, she birthed three children in the form of a Tiger(Okhe Kozhuro), a Human (Alechamaiwo) and a Spirit (Ora Aha). Together, they lived with their mother in sweet harmony until the mother became old. Once she was old, she developed various ailments so the three brothers took care of her. However, whenever it was the Tiger's turn to care for the mother, she would become panicked and worried as the Tiger would feel the parts of her body that were fleshy in the hopes that it would consume her after her death. Meanwhile, when the Spirit took care of the mother, her pain would aggravate and she would develop a feverish hue. It was only when the Human took care of her that she felt comforted. This was because the Human was able to wholistically care for the mother in the way that was needed. As the years wore on, the three brothers began to talk about*

their respective inheritances, and very often, this conversation would end in squabbles. So Dziiliamosiiro decided that she would end the hostility once and for all. To find out the most suitable successor to her land, she came up with a contest, whereby the son who could touch a ball of grass placed at a distance would inherit the land. Acutely aware that the Tiger and Spirit did not have the temper to touch the light ball of grass of that distance, she nudged her Human son to use a bow and arrow to reach the target, which he deftly did. With this, the issue of inheritance was finally settled and the Human son, who cared the most about her, became the inheritor of the land. As for the Tiger and the Spirit, they both conceded their defeat and while the Tiger went to live in the forest, the Spirit went southwards to Kashiipii.

(Anonymous, interview)

Pic 3: The sacred Tree at Makhel, Senapati District. Photographs taken on 11th April, 2022

Pic 4,5,6: Three stones indicating the departure of the man, spirit and animal brothers at Makhel. Photograph taken on 11th April, 2022.

This tale demonstrates that the territory of the earth and the heavens in Naga epistemology were not separate from each other but that an intrinsic quality united them. This story has spawned many different versions and variations among the tribes who adhere to the Irrawady-Chindwin-Makhel theory. This myth has been crystalized into material memory in the form of stone and banyan tree that are still preserved by the people of Makhel as symbols of Naga cultural identity. The stones and banyan tree, symbols from the myth have become a part of the cultural memory of the Maos. It is also interesting to note that the notion of **three brothers or brotherhood** is not limited only to this story but is also reflected in the kinship origin narrative of the Lotha folk life. Whether they could have been forms of each other, or completely different narrative tropes that accidentally use the same dramatis personae to perpetuate a narrative function is something that can be structurally reflected. For Longchar,

> The myth suggests that Nagas lived in a mythical world wherein the terrestrial (human beings and animals) and celestial beings (sky, clouds, spirits) live together sharing the same environment for their sustenance and continuity…. reveals the unusual union between the woman (earth) and clouds (symbolizes solidified waters, symbolizing semen) that yielded three atypical uterine siblings – man, tiger and spirit – who shared same environment. (82)

6.0 FOLKLORE INDICES: ATU, MOTIF-INDEX.

Since the study of folklore became an official academic discipline, it has been enriched by various scholars who continue to contribute to the methodological and emerging theoretical

perspectives in folklore studies. Since folkloristics entails a substantial amount of collection, documentation and archiving, cataloguing has become an important tool for folklorists to understand the thematic, motif-based resonances that are the building blocks crucial in the narrative structure.

ATU Index: The Aarne-Thompson-Uther index is a comprehensive catalogue of the different types of folktales found across the world. The index was first developed in 1910 by Aanti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist and then revised and expanded by Stith Thompson in 1928 and 1960, which was then further revised and expanded upon by Hans-Jörg- Uther in 2004. Because of its epic volume, the catalogue is an important and valuable guide to folklorists embarking on a study of folktale types. The catalogue works by dividing the tales into different sections that are pointed by the use of "AT" number for each type. The names accorded to the numbers reflect their central motif determined by the variant of the tales in that type. However, this does not mean that the names for every type are literal.

The ATU Index reflects:

1-299. Animal Tales
300-749. Tales of Magic
750-849. Religious Tales
850-999. Realistic Tales
1000-1199. Tales of the Stupid Ogre (Giant, Devil)
1200-1999. Anecdotes and Jokes
2000-2399. Formula Tales

Motif- Index of Folk Literature: The motif-index is a voluminous work developed by Stith Thompson cataloguing the various themes, motifs and other constituents that make up the content of the folklore of Europe and Asia. Today, it also contains information and content examples of indigenous North and South American narratives, African myths among other Oceanic and Eurasian cultures. Thompson worked on the 6 volume typological catalogue between 1932 - 1936, and further added on to it in 1955. For him, a motif referred to "those details out of which full-fledged narratives are composed" (18). In the catalogue, he mentions that "(a)nything that goes to make up a traditional narrative... When the term motif is employed, it is always in a very loose sense, and is made to include any of the elements of narrative structure" (19).

The Motif-Index reflects:

A. Mythological Motifs

B. Animal Motifs

C. Motifs of Tabu

D. Magic

E. The Dead

F. Marvels

G. Ogres

H. Tests

J. The Wise and the Foolish

K. Deceptions

L. Reversals of Fortune

M. Ordaining the Future

N. Chance and Fate

P. Society

Q. Rewards and Punishments

R. Captives and Fugitives

S. Unnatural Cruelty

T. Sex

U. The Nature of Life

V. Religion

W. Traits of Character

X. Humor

Z. Miscellaneous Groups of Motifs

The ATU and the Motif-Index of Folk Literature are valuable device that help unlock the ways in which narrative structures play. It helps to throw light not only on the structural skeleton that makes up the narrative but also demonstrates how the combined set of motifs constitute the building block of the whole narrative. According to McCormick and Kennedy, motif refers to

> a smaller narrative unit such as an episode, a sequence of several events, or a single event or action. Some of these "action motifs" can be linked to a variety of plots. An example of this kind of motif is "The obstacle flight", whereby the fleeing protagonist throws back a brush, a stone, and a bottle of water; the objects miraculously turn into a dense wood, a mountain, and a lake in order to ensure an escape from the pursuer (877).

As can be seen from these interpretations, the "motif" seems to have very broad connotations. It is at the same time, a descriptive element, an actor, a plot, theme, an object, and hence this broad exegesis has aptly received considerable criticism, despite the popularity of this typology in folklore studies.

7.0 UNCOVERING THE SYNTAGMA OF NARRATIVE: THE STRUCTURALISM OF VLADIMIR PROPP

For a greater part of the 20th century, the growth and prevalence of emerging trends in literary and cultural theory drastically influenced the development and paths of inquiry in the study of texts. Moving away from the romantic readings of the previous century, formalism emerged during the 1920s as a way of decontextualising texts and reading them by analysing the structures of narrative inherent in the texts themselves. As a literary movement, formalism laid the foundations from which other critical theories such as structuralism, deconstruction and post-structuralism emerged. Vladimir Propp was a seminal figure in the formalist school, which served as a precursor to the Structuralist movement in literary and cultural studies. While Structuralism proper is usually connected with the work done by Ferdinand D Sassure, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic approaches of Claude Levi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp became popular methods in the interpretation of narratives, in particular, looking at the genre of the myth and the fairytale. Propp's syntagmatic analysis of narrative structure unlocks the linear sequence of the tale and the paradigmatic structure which corresponds to a horizontal structure (which Claude Levi-Strauss is identified with) unlocks the thematic approach inherent in the narrative.

With regard to the structure of the tale and narrative, Propp has authored four books on the approach. They are Morphology of the Folktale (1928), The Historical Roots of the Fairy-Tale (1946), Russian Heroic Epics (1958) and Russian Agrarian Feast-Days (1963). His work deconstructing the structure of the Russian folktale is a seminal work that defined and changed the way folktale narrative was studied. He derived his approach by borrowing the idea of the morphology of plant and cell structure in the study of biology. For him, the morphemes of a narrative (a morpheme was understood to be the small analyzable unit of a story) combined to form a narrative structure. The morphology of a thing was for Propp, a reflection of the relationship between the parts of the narrative and how they corresponded and created the whole structural narrative doctrine. In order to achieve this structural skeleton, Propp disassembled the constant features or elements of a fairy-tale from the variables to demonstrate

the uniformity in the labyrinthine narrative structure. His modus operandi included options such as “prohibition” and “lack” to show narratives dealing with themes of transgression, sin or quest and adventure. By looking at the functions of the “dramatis personae” in his analyses, he has identified **31 Narratemes** that constitute the building blocks of tale. In the chapter “Method and Material”, Propp states that a “Function is understood as an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action” (21), further delineating the role of the **Function** as;

1. Functions of characters serve as constant stable elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to a fairytale is limited.
3. The sequence of functions is always identical
4. All fairytales are of one type in regard to their structure (21)

Additionally, he identifies 7 character types that were found to be recurrent in the Russian fairytale. They are: 1) Villain 2) The Donor 3) The Helper 4) The Princess and her father/ parent 5) The dispatcher 6) The Hero and 7) The False Hero. Although at a glance these character types can seem very limited, each of these characters play diverse functions, and each of the functions can be enacted by more than one character to help the plot move forward. In this way, Propp attributes a versatility to the dramatis personae and show how each of the functions act as ingredients in the making of the narrative.

7.0 THE DIALECTICS OF ECOCRITICISM:

Ecocriticism truly emerged as a critical interpretative paradigm in literary studies only in the late 1970s, flowering into the 1980s. It has its roots in the meetings held by the Western Literature Association, whose primary foci was the study of the literature of the American West. It was only in the 1990s that the ecocritical approach was ushered in to the United Kingdom where it was identified by a different nomenclature called, “Green Studies”. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), today known as ASLE-USA, an association that Cheryll Glotfelty co-founded was also significant in advocating, encouraging, nurturing and exploring the relationship between literature and the environment. Their focus was delineated in particular to the study of biodiversity, environmental justice, climate change etc. As a movement, ecocriticism found its literary foundation in the work of three major writers known also as the “Transcendentalists” whose works were seen as

exemplars in the portrayal, glorification and celebration of nature and the uncurated wildnerness of the American landscape. They were Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Henry David Thoureau (1817-1862) and Margaret Fuller (1810-1850).

The postmodern age (1980 and 1990s) in the realm of literary and cultural studies witnessed the rise of new theoretical and methodological approaches that pay homage to, and discursively, act as a response to the *human* experience and crises plaguing the world today. From modern environmentalism (Garrard, 2), to ecofeminism and post-apocalyptic literature, theoretical appropriations in literary studies emphasized on the nature, the natural and the ecological by drawing on reflections, biases, attitudes and conceptions reminiscent in literary texts as an attempt to revise and shed light on our own ecological conceptions. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Bloom's seminal work on Ecocriticism, entitled **The Ecocritism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology**, published in 1996 is often regarded as the foundational work that established Ecocriticism as an official theoretical approach in the study of literature. The book begins by reflecting on the concept of nature and culture as historically experienced. By looking at established western traditions (the occidental) that define modern civilization, the chapter by Lynn White Jr traces humanity's ecological groundings by alluding to the various socio-cultural-religious and spiritual movements that have impacted human civilization. Harold Fromm's essay titled, "From Transcendence to Obsolescence" (30) charts a route map beginning from antiquity, industrialization and subsequent modernization stating finally that,

> In the past, man's faustian aspirations were seen against the backdrop of his terrifying weakness in the face of Nature. Today, man's faustian posturings take place against a background of arrogant, shocking and suicidal disregard for his roots in the earth (39)

Further on, William Howarth (69) delineates some of the key principles of Ecocriticism that aids the reader in his engagement with the conceptual frameworks in which the school of thought is grounded. According to him, ecocriticism as a concept signifies a level of ecological literacy that cuts across ethics, criticism, language and social discourse. He reiterates some of the tenets of cultural criticism stating that cultural critics "share an attachment to ideology and a distrust of physical experience" (79). By drawing on Marxist tenets, he is of the opinion that Marxist theory has "influenced environmental history, often by ignoring natural science" (ibid). In Marxism, Capitalism is viewed as the wellspring of conflict, oppressive cultural and

economic systems that have borne environmental problems. He states that such bearings lays "emphasis on the interaction of place and work agrees with ecology, which charts how physical conditions may affect beliefs." (ibid). The post-structuralist tendency of discourse analysis that perceives at phenomena as cultural constructs, creating a discourse that is "void of physical content and subject to cryptic readings" (80). He states that structuralist critics who studied narrative tropes such as myth by decoding symbols that served as metaphors anticipated the ecocritical movement and believes that over time, ecocritical reading of texts will not only provide views on race and ethnicity and how they correlate to each other as social constructs, but will show how these configurations echo issues of land use and environmental degradation.

William Rueckert's essay on "Literature and Ecology" throws light on the correlation between literature and the biosphere, viewing "Poems as Green Plants" (111) and dissects some key literary works by W.S. Merwin, Adrianne Rich, Walt Whitman, Theodore Roethe and William Faulkner to extract the ecological reminiscent in their works such as analyzing entropy and negentropy, biocentric perspectives, and understanding energy/ies. He states that,

> Literature is a true cornucopia, thanks to the continuous generosity of the poets, who generate this energy out of themselves, requiring and usually receiving, very little in return over and above the feedback from the creative act itself (Glotfelty, 116)

As seen above, an ecocritical position in literary understanding views the work from an interdisciplinary perspective to analyze environmental ethics, solutions and issues that stem primarily from man's relation to nature. Its exegesis looks at how the environment and ecology in represented in the content of the narrative, and this is done by looking at how human beings (and in the context of this thesis, the community), posit and situate ecology and ecological understanding of the world. It is also sometimes referred to as ecopoetics, and in the current backdrop of environmental degradation and destruction, this school of thought has found many voices that petition for understanding and reassessing the link between ecology and human kind, in particularly looking and understanding how man perceives nature. The philosophy of "Deep Ecology" first propounded by Arne Naess, delineates 8 principles of eco ethics to expose the relationship between human and the natural world. Deep ecologists advocate a holistic approach instead of an anthropocentric universe, where the earth is used only as a tool for advancing the selfish and greedy desires of mankind. They argue that all life forms are

important for the survival of the world, and argues for a decentralized position and a breakdown of authoritarianism.

Above all, ecocriticism was birthed by the awakening of a new kind of consciousness among people even as widescale industrialization, rapacious globalization, population explosion, and the introduction of self-destructive habits of mankind such as fast fashion started draining the earth of its bountiful natural resources thereby creating ecological disasters. In a situation as grim and relevant as this in our pressing times, such addressing by literary and cultural theoretical paradigms effectively blur the gap between theory and practice. This can be seen in the way Green Movements have been created in many parts of the world. Other seminal works on Ecocritical/ Ecological thought are Donald Worster's Nature Economy, Tom Lynch et all's The Bioregional Imagination, Arnold Toynbee's Mankind and Mother Earth, and Ramachandra Guha's environmental history work Nature, Culture, Imperialism. Such variations of environmentalism further on engendered the birth of not only Deep Ecology but also ecofeminism. Ecofeminism further more interrogated the notion of 'development' that one often posits with the idea of 'modernity', stating that the western knowledge world encapsulating both the human and life sciences including philosophy has been led predominantly by an anthropocentric imperative, and particularly containing androcentric perspectives that have historically defined western discourse. In this way, ecocritics problematize notions that we hold as given.

Although ecocriticism began in the 1900s, the second wave of ecocriticism is believed to have been birthed in the 2000s. It began when ecocritical theorists began engaging with the complex issues of environmental justice and addressing concerns that arise as corollaries, such as the problem of ethics that have a socio-centered imperative, investigating not only the pastoral, rural or peasant motifs but also the more industrialized landscapes that defines urbanity.

An ecocritical approach especially in the interpretation of indigenous narratives of the Lotha Naga will look specifically at interpreting the Lotha concept of environment and ecology as perpetuated through motifs, plotlines and symbols. Some of the aspects of Ecological criticism addressed in this thesis include topical questions pertaining to understanding the Lotha concept of ecology, looking at how nature is presented in the narratives reflecting this relationship between the human and the ecology, the significance of the geographical-physical space within

the context of the narrative, investigating ecological metaphors, and understanding the pedagogic, socio-cultural and ethical negotiations embedded in the stories.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology in the partaking of a research project constitutes one of the most defining and important aspects of the research experience that not only provides a point of departure for the collection, classification and interpretation of acquired information but also determines the overall research process and goals of the project. Keeping these tenets in mind, the data comprising of traditional knowledge, know-how and lore, has been gathered using both primary and secondary sources, comprising qualitative research methodologies such as interviews, consultations, participant observation and postmodern ethnography. This has been supplemented by using secondary sources such as published books on the various conceptual frameworks, books on folklore and oral tradition, pivotal essays on folklore studies, literary and cultural theory as well as local publications on Lotha language, culture and literature. The age group of the people who were interviewed reflected various age groups from 20 – 90 years of age from both genders. The purpose of employing such a varied approach was to ensure as well as comparatively determine the aesthetic, stylistic and dialectical nuances of the various fields of folklore as internalized by the older generation, the middle generation as well as the younger generation and out of this, carve an approach unique to the study of folk literature and culture, particular to the Lothas.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter provides an outline of the key conceptual frameworks that mark the point of departure of the thesis. It dwells on the evolution of historical folkloristics, the various critical and definitive points in contemporary folkloristics and provides a descriptive summary of the analytical theorems such as the syntagmatic structuralist paradigm defined by Vladimir Propp in his work, “Morphology of the Folktale” and the Ecocritical movement that emerged in the 20th century as a response to ongoing environmental issues, both of which have been used to formulate an interpretative process of the verbal genres encapsulated in the thesis. Additionally, in order to provide an understanding of the people in focus, the thesis also sketches an ethnographic profile of the Nagas and Nagaland and situates the socio-political and

historical overtures in the broader context of cultural mapping. It employs a diachronic approach to show how historically and socially, Nagaland and the Nagas, and by that token, the land and the people, correlate with each other which can be seen reflected in the various types of folklore. Finally, it delineates the methodological approaches used in the study to show the how, why and who of the data collection process.

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[i] "When dissatisfaction with or skepticism of an accepted pattern is expressed or doubts about it arise, whether it be sacred or secular, there is usually a myth or legend to validate it; or a so-called "explanatory tale," a moral animal tale, or a proverb, to fulfill the same function. Malinowski's statement is so widely accepted today that it should not require further discussion, but it is interesting that as the founder of the "Functionalist school," this was the only function of folklore that he recognized, and that in his later works he devotes little attention to folklore" (Malinowski, 1926,pp. 91-92).

CHAPTER TWO

LOTHA FOLKLORE AND FOLKLIFE

1.0 FOLKLIFE AS PRACTICE AND TRADITION

The thrust of this chapter is aimed at providing a contextual study of the folk life of the Lotha tribe as reflected in the various folk practices and narratives. Folk narratives cannot be isolated from the grounds of their study as belief and practice are fundamental points of departure for understanding and analyzing the cultural produce of a community. The folk life of a community is generally understood as they lived and practiced traditions that have been handed down orally or through apprenticeship between one entity to another. Many times human beings are unaware that they are subconsciously absorbing tradition, belief, activities, games and customs and hence, folk life refers to those aspects of human experience that are part of the lived everyday of people. It is important to understand that folk traditions and practices that are no longer lived or practiced means that the specific tradition has either died out or has found continuity with another form of tradition. This does not imply that practices and observances should be considered as traditions only when they have an antiquarian value, or that they are old. There can be forms of newer traditions and invented traditions (practices that have a symbolic social practice that although do not have a long antiquity, have the appearance that they are connected with a remote cultural past, such as a national anthem). The Louisina Folklife Organization defines Folk life as the "living traditions currently practiced and passed along by word of mouth, imitation, or observation over time and space within groups, such as family, ethnic, social class, regional, and others. Everyone and every group has folklore" (https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/what_is_folklife.html). Folklore (narrative) and folk life (practices and custom) are concomitant factors that influence and need each other to exist, and this shared context allows for folklore to evolve, and without which any interpretation of narrative tropes, motifemes or cultural traits is inadequate. With this in mind, the succeeding pages engage with a contextual study of the Lotha tribe by drawing from both primary and secondary sources in order to deliver a holistic depiction of the life in which the narratives in study are circulated.

2.0 NAGA FOLKLORE AND ORALITY: TEXT, TEXTURE AND CONTEXT

The ancestral heritage that informs the bedrock of the cultural experience of the Nagas is drawn from a mosaic of folklore items and practices, official written records, translations of socio-religious texts and other such embodied practices. In pre-modern times when Naga culture was unreservedly 'oral', keeping in tandem with Walter J. Ong's conceptualization of "primary oral culture", lore was practiced (narrated or enacted) as part of a lived reality and its experience was palpable in the day-to-day life of the people; folktales and proverbs were narrated to highlight codes of ethics, pass judgment, instill moral values, commemorate memory or administer warnings. The communion with writing "tyrannically locked them into a visual field forever" (Ong, 11) even as oral discourse, "commonly thought of in oral milieus as weaving or stitching – *rhaps idein*, to 'rhapsodize'", became "text" which, "when the literates today use the term to refer to oral performance, they are thinking of it by analogy with writing" (13). By documenting oral narratives, the essential rhythm characteristic of Naga orality became condensed into the finality of the written word and the literal symbol (here, the roman script) replaced the corridors and fields of folklore. The hegemony of the written word over orality was however not a complete one, because idiomatic practices cannot be transmuted into lexical and grammar rules and they exist beyond the realm of vocabularies. These two items of folklore – narratives and practices – became cultural markers of Naga tribal identity, both as mixed culture (as elucidated by J. P. Hutton in his essay "A mixed culture of the Naga tribes") and as self-referential entities. Culture here, as in academic cognizance, is usually understood as the set of mores, discourses and phenomena that permeate through the fabric of a society rendering it with a definitive quality. Raymond Williams describes Culture as,

> Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings… A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested…We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life- the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning- the special processes of discovery and creative effort. …Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (Williams, 93)

In the Naga context, the construction of the term "Culture" in the popular imagination points to inherited traditional practices and narratives that are identifiably either a) peasant and pre-modern (pre- Christian) and b) modern and transitioning (post Christian). Culture pertains to that process of social experience based on an almost indubitable idea of collective memory

where the private is subsumed under the collective, and folklore – which is at its basic root, the produce of cultural configurations. The oral narratives inscribed in these folklore(s) are often viewed as mythical and fantastic narratives of a by-gone era with little or no resonance in the cultural workings of present times, but the oral traditions and practices, existing today each in their customized avatars, are viewed as essential cultural apparatuses that are evoked to enforce social, familial, cultural and political customs in the name of tradition.

By acting as a "mirror and a treasure cove of culture" (Bascom, 349), folklore becomes a key ingredient in maintaining the stability of a community. Equipped with an oral tradition that hands down knowledge systems from one generation to the next through word of mouth, folklore is used to imbibe into children the moral and ethical standards expected from them and as a way of rewarding adults with praise when they follow the precepts of the culture, or to ridicule, chastise or punish them when they do not conform to the set standards of normative practice. Folkore also works psychologically by use symbols and metaphors to enter the psychological realms of the mind and suggesting to people to content and a way of escaping from the drudgery of life. According to Bascom (349), such a working of folklore indicates its inherent paradox, that while it is responsible for perpetuating and legitimising the institutions present in a culture, it simultaneously provides an outlet for people to address their repressions which the existing institutions levy upon individuals.

In the Naga context, as in other similar indigenous Naga cultures, folklore incorporates both personal and sociological experiences disseminated through a legacy of orality, bound by phenomenological underpinnings of the times they are set in and the eras they pass through, in the process acquiring versions and variations of the same and ensuring and codifying a continuity. The working of these two realms (sociological and personal) of folklore is responsible for the shaping of popular notions and to a lesser extent, stereotypes, and the idea of folklore as endorsed and understood in popular culture. When we study the idiomatic expressions of the Nagas viz a viz folklore, we notice that the popular canon of folklore is an amalgam of folktales, proverbs, myths, a few scattered riddles, a character and plot spectrum whose traits are sometimes shared with more than one tribe. In this, there is an element of continuity with the present, even though it has its points of origin in diverse epistemological foundations. As folklore moved from generation to generation via oral tradition, involving an operation of Hybridity, some characteristics were simultaneously disseminated to other cultural

groups. This is evident in the workings of cultural apparatuses like kinship patterns, hereditary rules, proverbs and figures in folktales, symbolizing and exonerating similar themes.

The representation of Lotha culture and orality as experienced in the Lotha imagination show how the Lothas, like the other Nagas communities, inherited a rich and varied traditional knowledge that encapsulated all forms of everyday experience. The transmission of this knowledge was effectuated through two basic models of "folklore". These two models were assimilated and reinstated in two ways: intra and inter- cultural.

A) The first model consists of the type of folklore that is mostly phenomenological, in the sense that it derives its expressiveness from the workings of the inner psyche, and finds denounement in rhetorical and poetic manifestation. The folklore in this category consists of proverbs, tales, riddles, songs and dance, contingent to every instance of telling and performance of the teller or performer, but following a more or less stable template. It also encapsulates the corpus of modern folk beliefs that are deeply rooted in the life of the Lotha *(*concepts of *Tsungrham (*beast*), Sityingo* (fate/destiny*),* dream interpretations and divinations, *Omon* (soul). This kind of folklore is mostly used among the Lothas in day-to-day interactions and is deeply integrated into the language, idiom, belief and gestures of everyday. Some of these types of folklore have been recast as part of the traditional material culture, and have been reproduced for consumption, commercial and otherwise.

B) The second model consists of the type of folklore that is sociologically realised. It is the folklore that provides the structure to the workings of societal frameworks and is deeply entrenched in historical, political and sociological machinery. This kind of folklore cannot be shared with other groups, although they can be influenced by them. This kind of folklore contains the kinship patterns, hereditary rules, marriages, rituals, etc. that are intrinsic to the life system of the tribe.

2.1 CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN THE NAGA CONTEXT

In the case of Naga culture, tradition plays a fundamental and important role in establishing a credo that is cardinal to social and familial exigencies, at the same time paving ways through which tribal and cultural identities are diffused – as *Angami/Ao/Lotha* etc, and as Christian, Indian etc. "Folklore" remains the nucleus through which such historical and geographical

identities are circumscribed and reinstated. This tribal identity, according to Frederik Barth in 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries' is actualized in two ways:

a) through internal cohesion, where social interaction is grounded on common cultural proficiency and aptitude (as for example, an implicit knowledge of the folklore, of the rules of behaviour, of the meaning of symbols within the tribe);
b) through cultural and geographic boundaries between groups where the interaction with "others" is bounded and limiting, due to the lack of shared knowledge and common experience. And by a process of differentiation to one tribe or another.

The process of differentiation of one tribe from another through the presentation(s) of folklore – by this, I mean all forms of narrative, material culture (*shawls*, *mekhalas*, ornaments and other paraphernalia) is central to the formation of a tribe's historical and geographical identity and affinities.

Temsula Ao (2006) writes that identity is a fluid entity, which is "evocative of multiple interpretations" and in the context of globalization, "changes significance over the time-space continuum and either accrue or shed meanings all the time." (Ao, 6) According to her, the Naga identity is harnessed through three factors. a) existential – which comprises of the mythical lore that largely addresses questions about man's origin and migration. The lore in this case maybe not contain concrete scientific evidence but nonetheless the grammar of the myth has been accepted by the tribe as the historical truth of their present reality and subsumed within the collective imagination of the tribe as fact. b) Locational – This aspect refers to the association and allegiance of an individual towards the village of his birth, from where tribal identity is fundamentally honed. Ao states, "A Naga who is banished from his ancestral village for political, social or criminal offenses is like a person without a country. There can be no greater humiliation for a Naga than this fate that strips him of this symbolic identity and he is thus disaffiliated from his origin and tradition" (Ao, 6). c) Artefactual – art forms imprinted on material structures like houses, shawls, tattoo, which, during the pre Christian era "evinced status difference within a given community." I would like to add to these three aspects, a fourth identity framer, which is Factional. d) Factional - refers to the structural and societal groupings carved out of familial and marriage patterns (inclusive of adoption). Nagas are both exogamous practitioners of marriage (marriage within the same clan was strictly prohibited) and endogamous in the greater scheme of things as they mostly married within the tribe. Kinship

patterns were thus constructed on these systemic configurations which were further accentuated and endorsed by elaborate rites and rit uals in the past, which are, even today, practised in their own modern avatars. The *Kyong/ Lotha* practice of *hanlam* is prevalent even within the paradigm of Christian conventions.

3. 0 THE LOTHAS OF NAGALAND: People, Geomyths and Social Organisation

3.1 **Of people and Geomyths**: As per the political and cultural map, Wokha district is known and identified officially as the head quarters of the Lotha country. With a population of 166,239 of which male and female were 84,429 and 81,810 respectively (2011 census). The district was established in the year 1973, prior to which, it was under Mokukchung district. The geographical location of the district is on the mid-east side of Nagaland. Previously, during the time of the colonizers, the Lothas were referred to as Northern Lothas and Southern Lothas although this demarcation is hardly used anymore except in the case of historical studies and are instead identified and differentiated from each other by ranges – upper, middle and lower. The district itself is intercepted at the middle by 26 °8' north latitude and 94°18' E longitude. The tribe is numbered at 1,48,210 (according to the 2001 census). The Lothas call themselves *Kyong*, which means "man" in translation. Geographically, the Lothas have always lived in close proximity with the Ahom Kings and folklore is testament to this interaction and engagement with the Ahoms, and lived in relative peace with their other neighbours. Some of the villages have an old history, with principal folkloric items easily locatable (myths, tales, material culture) while others have been formed later for effective administrative purposes. The rural landscape and urban landscape of the Lotha country are different and yet similar worlds inhabited by people who share the same oral history.

J.P Mills who wrote and published the monograph "The Lhota Nagas" in 1922 portrays an in-depth ethnographic canvas of the Lothas. This work has been used as a source of reference for understanding the Lothas, even till today and a starting point of entry into understanding the documented folklore and folk life of the Lothas. Mills (1922, 3) monograph documents the origin and migration of the Lothas in the following manner: According to his sources, the origin myth of the Lotha holds that a trio of brothers emerged out of a hole in the earth from Kezakhenoma where a mythical legend of a miraculous husking stone (in which paddy gets doubled) is found. This folklore of origin is shared by a number of Naga tribes such as Angami who claim this as their narrative as well. The names of the three brothers who formed the basis

of Lotha brotherhood are *Limhachan, Izumontse and Rankhandan* (Mills, 3). Some versions of this myth state that the three brothers came out of the hole with the help of a dog. A psychoanalytical interpretation of such a story would view this as a birth or the genesis of life, and the hole out of which the three brothers emerged from, as the symbolic natal journey.

As far as the social organization of the Lothas ae concerned, oral tradition opines that Lothas are constituted from a phratry division of three, which is a point of departure from the origin myth of the three brothers — the *Tompyaserre*, the *Izumontserre* and the *Mipongsandre*, "Forehead-clearing men," "Scattered men" and "Fire-smoke-conquering men" under which the several clans are organized. Some other oral tradition states that the ancestors of the Lothas arrived from Mongolia and there is also belief that Lothas arrived from a place called *Bable*. While it is difficult to ascertain the exact trajectory of the migratory routes, it is through the folklore that one can perceive how the Lothas operated as a group unit through the material reality and the various cultural expressions and narratives used by the Lothas. The first village of the Lothas was called *Tiyi Lungchum* where it is believed that the Lothas settled for many years. According to tradition, Tiyi Lungchum started growing as a village quite rapidly, and simultaneously as the population also increased in numbers, it became difficult for people to observe the feasts of merit. Probably owing to this and several associated factors, it is believed that further migration and creation of new villages ensued (Wondango, interview). However, the folk legend of Ramphan whose story is narrated and analyzed in the next chapter provides a plausible explanation as to why Tiyi was finally abandoned.

Back view of Tiyi Lungchum also believed to be Echu li (Resting place of the dead), taken from Yanthamo Village during fieldwork, on 18th March, 2020

Today, Tyui is perceived in the local imagination as the repository of the dead. During fieldwork in Yanthamo village, the researcher came across varied versions of folklore that view this mountain as a point of entry to the after-life, where the spirits of ancestors is believed to reside and all the souls of the Lothas/Nagas are transported there after their deaths. Village informants stated that the path to Echuli crossed over a small space inside a cave where a small space is located from where waterfalls onto the ground. Folklore stated that if one stretched their hand (palm) out on the path of the water droplet and the water gets contained in the palm, then that person would lead a long life. However, if the water drop passed through the palm of the hand, then, it is believed that the person was going to die soon. It is also believed that small shelters and farm homes like things could be seen sometimes and the rhododendron that grows around the hills surrounding this area does not blossom when it is taken and transplanted elsewhere.

3.2 Social Organization:

The basic premise of the Lotha society is based on the family unit of father, mother and their offsprings. The social norm follow and dictate a typical heteronormative patrilineal and patriarchal structure that posits the male (father or son) as the head, who undertakes political, social and religious roles that structure the family as part of Lotha society. Traditionally, in the absence of a male heir in the immediate family (as is the practice in other patriarchal cultures), the next male of kin became representative of the family within the clan structure in terms of land inheritance. Individual families are structured under clans that comprises of a group of consanguineous families descended from a common ancestor, usually named after the ancestor. The type of marriage practised is exogamous as marriage within the same clan is disallowed and considered a taboo in Lotha society. Marriage within the same phratry is allowed however marriage between some clans such as Yanthan and Ezung are still considered taboo. They refer to each other as "*ata" "aka" or "ango"* meaning elder, and younger siblings as if they share a common family title. So, by extension Yanthans and Ezungs are not allowed to form unions. However, a sub-group of the Ezung clans, called the Ezung Moraris are allowed to marry Yanthans, believing that they are not original Ezungs, but have adopted the name of Ezung as their population was meagre in number. Similarly, there are some who have split into two kindreds – *Ezung-tsuphoe* and *Ezung-teriwoe* for example, who intermarry.

The old oral tradition held the view that there were three distinct phratries which were divided into *'Jibo'* (clans), which were further divided into '*mhitso'* (closer clan unit, identified close in blood relation).

4.0 FOLKLIFE DETERMINANTS: LOTHA BELIEF, CUSTOMS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Societies all over the world, since time immemorial, have used the language of belief and religious practice as a means of expression and to make sense of the world around them. Religion is perceived and experienced as a way of negotiating with mortality, morality, with the unknown (death and after life), of engaging with a supernatural power greater than mankind, and a means of surrendering to that power. A study belief and custom lays emphasis on its workings from two perspectives: the individual and group experience. Religion shapes both individual and group experience and is a framework through which an understanding of the universe – its existence and its workings – are established and used as a guiding light by adherents. Besides transcending everyday life, religion is the bedrock and the pillar of everyday life. James Martineau defines religion as "the belief in an ever living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind"(qtd in BrainyQuote). In addition to this, a religion may possess a number of rituals or rites that it holds as part of its tradition. The exercise and observance of rites and rituals usually incorporates mythic narratives and values through the use of metaphors which in turn, evoke certain emotions and emotive reactions. Through this manner, belief and practice accords to the people a sense of assurance, peace, hope and perspective. While some features like fasting or a characteristic belief in a supernatural God are common elements found in many religions, there are idiosyncratic attributes in each religion that differentiates it from another.

Clifford Geertz in his essay, "Religion as a Cultural System" defines religion wherein he expresses that every social group and individual, irrespective of whether they are conscious followers of organized religion/ religious institution/ God, have a religion because of the framework that individuals of a community share with each other in an attempt to decipher the meaning of life or to instill behavioral norms. He states that religion must be studied as a symbolic system, in terms of which believers interpret the world and live their lives stating that it is,

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to
> (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
> (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
> (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
> (5) the moods and systems seem uniquely realistic. (16)

The first idea of religion as *a system of symbols* implies that the symbolic or gestural are all deeply rooted with meaning which provides a perspective and shapes the way we understand and process experience. Symbols act as metaphors, representations or images of the creative conscious of individuals and communities, and when religion is viewed as a system of symbols, it communicates ideals, values, and way of life to the followers while simultaneously performing the function of showing us the connection between the world (and worldviews) and the ways of our lives (the ethos of our existence). The combination of worldviews and ethos creates and sustains a community's customs and traditional norms etc. The second idea wherein Geertz states that *religion acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations* implies that the socio-psychological domains of experience, about reality and the way it is constructed shapes our motives (aspirations) and moods that ultimately define us. Moods and motivations correspond with ground realities while religious symbols and figures can evoke a certain message. The third premise holds the view that *religion formulates conceptions of a general order of existence*. This indicates that symbolic and metaphorical representation of religion shows the relation between the nature of reality, its workings and the way life is lived. It is in this sense, a way of establishing a sense of meaningful order in what may otherwise be perceived as a disorganized jumble. Human beings have introspective tendencies that addresses questions about life and the challenges of deriving and understanding meaning, especially during a time of crisis, becomes paramount in the life of an individual. The religious symbol becomes a representation of an underlying and permanent reality with cosmic affiliations.

The next idea that states that religion clothes *these conceptions with such an aura of factuality* implies that the religious symbol is used by society to reinforce their belief systems and develop rites and rituals associated with the nature of reality. Factuality is exercised through a participation in the ritual, which, (when looked at through the prism of performance), is an enactment of the symbol. The implied idea is that the symbol and the enactment of the symbol

(ritual) represent a spectre of life and a way of living a morally acceptable. The observance of a ritual is also important to endorse group behavior and establish norms, which Geertz calls the "ultimately true" reality for a systematic functioning of the group, and establish group dynamics. The fifth idea stipulates that *religion makes the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.* This is done through the performance and observation of rituals which convince us that our way of living and the beliefs that we hold regarding the universe which ultimately shapes our aspirations and moods are indeed legitimate, right and fulfilling. The symbols at play in the rituals endorse our beliefs, which is by extension, determined by society (as religion plays an important role in establishing society and societal norms). Religion shapes and adds meaning to everyday experience.

Clifford Geertz's extrapolation of religion also shows the indelible relationship between the Signifier (religious symbol) and the Signified (the set of abstract beliefs of the referenced religion). The relationship between the Signifier and the Signified is not a fixed one, as the signifier and the signified both are part of the interplay of image and idea.

4.1 LOTHA FOLKLIFE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Within a tribal context, folk religion works as an alternate set of beliefs, that exists externally to the set of beliefs and practices that are already in practice. The folk religion has an especially affinity towards the indigenous landscape – people, their ethnic and cultural identity, rooted in a particular place. Folk religion is responsible for establishing community ties especially outside of a larger religion. In its customization, there is a synthesis with popular customs and beliefs that help translate and give meaning to phenomena that may not sometimes, seem directly decipherable. They may be deemed pagan (in the absence of a sacred text) as far as their liturgical resonances are concerned and many times, do not even possess a theological basis. Folk religion has a tendency to lean towards what people perceive as animism, and through this, endorses a connection with the natural world, an element that is explored in chapter 5 of this thesis. There is an inherent belief in an overwhelming connection between the spirit and the physical world with each impacting the other. Everyday life experiences such as health, sickness, death or success and failure is determined and maintained by a range of taboos. There may be ritualistic sacrifices attached to these beliefs and the employment of tokens like talismans, stones, or relics to ward off evil eyes, spirits or bad omens; they often come with the belief that they impart blessings, protection, etc. The rituals and customs of a

community are intricately linked and work in intra and inter community manner to accord identity and meaning to a community.

4.2 LOTHA CUSTOM AND PRACTICE AS ACTS STEMMING FROM AN INDIGENOUS BELIEF SYSTEM

As mentioned earlier, the Lothas are a patriarchal and patrilineal society, where the structure of the society – its kinship patterns, its rituals and practices – embodies a patriarchal ethos, in the sense that most of the rites and rituals are performed by men and maintained by a strict adherence to taboos that have been traditionally male-centric. Although with the arrival of Christianity and subsequent modernization of society, the Lothas today do not practice the rites and rituals in their pre-modern existences (or first existence), they nevertheless underline and underpin many beliefs and superstitions that permeate through everyday life and narratives. The marriage ritual of giving *hanlam* from the bridegroom's side to the bride's clan is still in practice in Lotha society, and even a Christian-marriage is not traditionally recognised if the *hanlam* is not observed by the couple. Similarly, a lot of folk belief such as that of the *Nungkumvü* (dwarf-like creatures inhabiting the nether world) or *Sali Sapfü* (traditional taboos) or *Sitying* (all-pervading fate and personified destiny) remain strong even today. In this manner, beneath the veneer of Christianity, the belief in ancient religious beliefs, stigmas and superstition still runs strong in Lotha culture, validating that the traditional has found continuity in its modern avatar.

Similar to other Naga tribes, the folk religion of the Lothas is usually understood and defined as animistic owing to the quality of spiritualness or soul that is attributed to the natural world of rocks, plants, animals etc. While Lotha folk religion does attribute a sacredness to the natural world, it does not worship, glorify or deify plants and inanimate objects but rather, anthropomorphize them as we shall see in some of the tales in the next chapter. This is another facet of Naga and Lotha culture that eludes western definition and classificatory rubrics. Mills (113) himself hesitantly states that the Lotha folk religion can only be "vaguely" (113) termed as animism. And his interpretation of the religion has held much sway in determining and categorizing Lotha folk religion as animistic. The ancient folk religion did not believe in the presence of one Supreme God or entity, but in a pantheon of deities (113). According to folk belief, the "order of beings" (113) called "*Potso*" meaning "God" inhabit a world in which the earth is the sky and the sky is the earth. This is important to note because the fairy like creatures called *nungkumvu,* who are believed even today to be part of our life system and are part and

parcel of the local imagination, are believed to inhabit the world of the *potsos*. Owing to the arrival of Christianity, there is a possibility that these *nungkumvu* could be a transmogrification of the dieties called "*Potso"* in the community psychology as the folk religion of the Lothas was completely wiped out and people were discouraged to believe in them. These contestations with Christianity may have blurred the distinctions between *potsos* and *nungkumvu* and the other dieties, but they also inhabit a very dominant and defining position in the hierarchy of the folk religion. Similar to the *nungkumvu*, the *potsows* were believed to exhibit a variety of characteristics which included both benevolent and malevolent forces. Mills states that the *Potsos* (dieties) even spoke a different language, which was believed to have been known for some time by the *Tsopoe* clan and they interacted with the people through the *ratsens* (village seer/ medicine man/ middle man) who acted as middle men between the heavenly beings and the humans. While oral tradition states that the *Potsos* often paid visits to the earth and interacted with the humans, their interaction is interceded by the *ratsen*, who undergoes through an elaborate ritual of preparation with objects such as small fish, rice, plantain leaves that serve as cups and "*pita madhu"* (Mills, 114). Mills elaborately discusses this visitation with testimony from Niroyo village and the testimony of the *ratsen* called Nchemo from Illimyo village, who stated that during one particular visitation by a Potso, they brought him reeds which signified sunny weather, a piece of machinery from a railway carriage which symbolised incoming trouble by elephants, two loads of dark blue thread which symbolised an apotia death (which was one of the biggest taboos for an individual and village in Naga custom), and a broom indicating that a fierce wind would destroy the crops (Mills, 114). It is interesting to note that today the role of the *ratsen* is identified as one who has visions about occurences and events. During fieldwork in Wokha, Nagaland the researcher came across instances where people testified that they had gone to the *ratsen* to seek their counsel for lost/ stolen items which the *ratsen* would indicate after seeing visions in a prayer. When asked who the *ratsen* was and whether it was someone who believed in the old folk religion, they stated that it was a Christian woman who was gifted with the power of prophecy. Hence we can see that even today in Christianised Nagaland, folk religion has been able to sustain itself in a different guise, indicating a continuity of tradition.

4.3 THE LOTHA PANTHEON OF DIETIES

The Lothas believe in a number of gods and godlings in relation to the rites and rituals espoused by the tribe, who in turn play major roles in determining the folklife of the Lothas. They can

simultaneously be read as metaphors of community psychology that have been created by the Lotha world to understand the ways of the world and make sense of it. Hence, they must be seen as rationalisations of an old world order that today have their own manifestations, and not simply as finished products that have no real relevance today. We shall see how these rationalisations are effectuated in the Lotha context today which are simultaneously reflected in the folktales and proverbs as characterisations or parts of the tale formula. Some of the deities who feature as characters or whose characteristics have been mirrored in the tales include the following deities. Their roles in the Lotha imagination cannot be undermined and we shall see how although the physical traits change with time and space, the attributes remain and continue to hold a firm grip in the collective and shared imagination of Lotha cultural legacy, reflected in the various lores.

a) *Ronsyu* (spirit of the fields / spirit of the harvest): *Ronsyu* is the godling responsible for the success of the agricultural harvest. This godling is showered with praises and sacrifices (chicken sacrifice) so that his favour remains paramount on the yield of the harvest. It is believed that *ronsyu* can become tight-fisted if he is not pleased with the glorification due to him, and every individual and village is intricately tied with the favour of a particular *ronsyu*, showing how community and individual practices are subsumed under each other. Inorder to appeal for the blessings of this particular godling, pig and chicken sacrifice is undertaken during the time of seed sowing and harvest.

b) *Sityingo* and *Ngazo*: are spirits of the jungle but they are not demons. Instead, they are benevolent godlings and the keeper and watcher of all animals. When Lothas relied on hunting, *sityingo* and *ngazo* were invoked for their blessings so that the hunters would acquire a good game of meat with their blessings. Folklore holds that *ngazo'*s head is angled crooked because of a misalignment in his neck due to which he can only fix his gaze in one direction. Hence, it is believed that people on whom *ngazo's* gaze rests are much more blessed than others.
Sityingo, on the other hand, is also affiliated to the soul of all living beings, and is a shaper of destiny/fate. It is believed that every human and animal possesses his own *sityingo,* and to have a *sitying* that is not satisfied, is to have a bad and difficult life filled with trials and tribulations. This idea of *sityingo* is strongly observed among the Lothas even today, and when some bad luck perchance takes place in the family, it is attributed to a bad bout of *sityingo*. A folktale illustrates their story:

> *Sukyingo and Ngazo went to dig for a vole (rodent). Ngazo could not get any voles even after digging all day, but Sukhyingo got many. Ngazo told Sukyingo – "You could get so many, but I got only one." To this, sukyingo replied haughtily, "If it wasn't for my kindness, you wouldn't have even got that." He felt humiliated at this retort and responded, "I dug the whole day and got it, how can you say that even this was given by you?" Sukhyingo replied, "If you believe in your own ability to capture a vole, then why don't you release it and see whether you can dig it out again. If I have not given it to you, you will not be able to dig it out again." A hurt Ngazo immediately releases the vole into the ground. He began to dig and dig but sadly, could not get it back. Sukyingo laughed and said – You claim that I didn't give you, see if I don't give, you will never get it back." At these words, Ngazo jumped at Sukhyingo and took him by the neck and twisted it. People believe till today that people toward whom Sukyingo's face is turned are blessed in many ways. Vice versa, if Sukyingo turns his face the other way, even if that person toils endlessly, still he will not get his blessings. Sukyingo is also believed to be guardian of wild animals.*
>
> (Khonchamo, interview)

c) *Jüpvüo*: In the Lotha god pantheon, *Jüpvüo* is considered to be the ruler of the dominion of water. Folklore from the pre-Christian era holds that the figure of *jüpvüo,* characterised as possessing long hair, was often seen emerging from the deep trenches of water bodies. Local folklore of villages around Wokha also portray the godlings as ferocious creatures whose homes and kitchen hearth were decorated with the skulls of their victims. It was said that some villages paid annual offerings or homage to these godlings so that they allow fishermen to acquire a good fishing expedition. The *Jüpvüo* constitute the riverine folklore of the Lotha Nagas that situates the element of water as an integral component of the folk belief system.

d) *Lungkümvü/ Nüngkumvü*: the *lüngkümvü* or *Nüngkumvü* are a significant feature in Lotha folk belief, even today in contemporary times. They are believed to be creatures that are part dwarf-like and part fairy-like (and are often described as "fairies" by Lothas, although this could also reflect a misconstrued understanding of the the English word 'fairy'), who cohabit the world of men, and haunt them. There are a significant number of references to these creatures and have often been depicted in the folklore as representing the antithesis of the human world. For the Lotha, the netherworld where the *lüngkümvü* reside, is a potentially powerful alternate universe that is mediated through belief and practices. As inhabitants of another world order, any indication of their presence in the human world is unwelcome and they are looked upon as intruders of this world. Lotha folklore states that these creatures live in the deep woods, and have at times been seen and heard by people as they pass by dense forests. Even during the birth of the child, it used to be believed by many that the name of the child must be whispered when first announced to the world so that the *lüngkümvü* do not get to

know the name of the child, as people believed that later on in life, the *lüngkümvü* would call out the name of the child and take him/her away as *lüngkümvü* have a way of enchanting people. Some others state that the *lüngkümvü* are fluent in many languages and can even speak in tongues. According to JP Mills, a famous stamping ground of the lungkumvu lies near the village of Akuk on the northern slope of the range (Mills, 1922). A famous story is that of a woman named Yaniyo Ngullie of Okotso village who was taken by the *lüngkümvü*. In an interview with Mrs. Mhalo Murry of Okotso village, she narrated the story of Yaniyo Ngullie who had gone missing for about 21 days. She was found in a shambles and unkempt hair and semi-consciously walking down the road. It is believed that once the *lüngkümvü* comes in contact with a person, that person gets affected by a lunacy and they feel that the world has literally gone topsy-turvy. On return back home, the people vomit out all the food fed by the *lüngkümvü*, like insects, snails, earthworms and other animals that mostly are dug up. It is also believed that the *lüngkümvü* do not take captive people who are normal, but those who exhibit abnormal tendencies or children. They believe the ground to be the sky and the sky to be the ground and chant, "*hayile lanthuile"* (a phrase used to call and gather people in the hills) while taking their victims away. Folklore states that because of their feet (which are turned in the opposite direction to normal feet), they find it difficult to walk through plain areas but are quick on their feet when they walk up-hill. These beings are capable of carrying people away from their homes to strange destinations and they are given snails and earthworms to eat (which is also believed to be the food of the *lüngkümvü*). Some people state that they carry the person without food and water for days together, but do not allow the victim to perish in their presence but sends them back to their homes. The *lüngkümvü* carry with them a magical bag which is their source of power, and if taken away from them, they become inefficacious in their ways. These creatures are believed to capture people at nights, or on gloomy rainy days or when seen alone. From this we can see how the *lüngkümvü,* whether a figment of imagination or a fact of life, become a way of rationalising a community's fears, anxieties and unexplainable phenomena illustrating in this way how folklore is birthed as a way of making sense of the world around the folk.

e) *Tsünghram*: is a horror-inducing demon and evil spirit and the cause of sickness and paranoia. It is mostly referred to as a male. The *Tsunghram* exercises its demonic application by taking into custody the souls of people through the invasion of foreign objects into the bodies of people, which usually requires a *ratsen*'s intervention for extracting the enchanted stone/ hair/wood/ small stones. It is believed that the *tsunghram* also possess people out of

malice and they cannot be placated like other gods and godlings of the Lotha god pantheon. The Tsunghram are believed to live in far-flung areas that are unhabitable (in dense forest areas) by human standards, and can sometimes distract a person by appearing to him in the form of objects. These evil spirits are believed to have dwelled a remote unhabitable places like spring, empty and hollow places and appears to man in different forms of animal and bird shapes, and disappear. If proper sacrifice with chicken, egg, ginger and charcoal is not presented for the redemption of the attacked person's soul, then it will be dangerous for the life of that person.

4.4 SYMBOLS FROM THE EARTH: DIVINATIONS, OMENS

As previously implied, the pre-modern Lotha observed and interpreted the world through rites and rituals that are bound by folk beliefs. They relied on omens and divinations to validate and determine their folklife which meant that they acquired a series of practices. One of the most popular ways of reading a divination or an omen was by strangling a chicken. A good or bad omen was determined by the manner in which the legs of a chicken twisted around itself (if it turned to the left or right, or which leg crosses over which leg) on its death, as well as the position of the entrails of the chicken. Perhaps one of the most sacred ways in which omens ere interpreted was by looking at the health of the village tree *menkidung*. It was believed that the health of the tree served as a symbol of the fruitfulness and virility of the village. A withering *menkidung* was seen as disastrous and a symbol of death and decay. In this way, the early Lothas found meaning and validation in their folk beliefs.

Menkidung at Longsachung village. Picture taken by researcher in Sept, 2017

4.4.1 THE REALM OF DREAMS

Dream interpretations of the Lothas are significant in that they carry widespread meaning about one's *sityingo* and the currency of his life. There is an underlying belief that the souls of dead people can communicate with the living through dreams, and in dreams, even one's own soul departs from the body and goes wandering about. A lot is uncovered and interpreted through dreams. During the fieldwork undertaken, it was told that many people often wake up in the morning to discuss their dreams with some nodding that "it must have been *sityingo* trying to tell you something." Lothas believe that *sitying* can appear in the dream to warn or foretell some event that is going to happen. Dreams of the dead are the most unfavoured among all types of dreams as it means that the dead have come to take the dreamer into the world of the dead. If someone dreams of walking along the Road of the Dead, then it means that they dreamer may be on the road to death. Inorder to avoid such situations, chicken sacrifice is done to ward off the spirits of the Dead. Another significant interpretation of a dream is one where the dreamer is having a dream where he is having a successful hunt. In such cases, the dream interprets it as unsuccessful in real life because it means that the spirit of the dreamer had been

roaming in the jungle the previous night hunting and hence, has chased all the animals away. The dream of tilling the earth means that death for a family member or a relative is at close hand. Certain elemental objects also have certain meanings like water – which symbolizes a plentiful harvest, fire symbolizes fair weather, dreams of red such as red cloth or red spear symbolizes conflict and bloodshed.

4.4.2 SOULS: OMON AND MUNGYI

It is the belief of the Lothas that a human being has two parts of souls, which are known as *Omon* and *Mungyi.* Today, the terms resonate with renewed meanings as the folk beliefs have coopted themselves into a continuity with modernity. Mills writes that the *omon* is "visible in the form of the man's shadow and shows its good sense by disappearing into him when the sky is cloudy and rain threatens, leaves the man some time before death in case of serious illness" (118). He goes on to state that the *omon* has a tendency to wander about and in case the *omon* goes to *Echuli* (land of the dead), then the man meets untimely and sudden death (118). In this sense, the fate of a person is interlocked with that of the *omon.* There is also belief that the *omon* can exist outside of the human and the person may be able to see his *omon* as a premonition of his own death (since the *omoni* has wandered away from the human). The *Mungyi* however, remains attached to the human and only leaves them at the moment of death. During an interview with the relatives of late Mr. Eliathung Yanthan of Wokha, it was brought to notice that for several weeks prior to his death in the month of May 2005, Mr. Eliathung saw spirits that were dressed and looked exactly like him even on the night before his death, he claimed to see his *omon* (separated from his body) and testified to his companion. Similarly, late Mr. Tsanso Yanthan of Longsachung village testified to his family and relatives that he had seen his *omon* separated from his body and often saw it on his way to his fields, wearing exactly his same garments.

5.0 THE CYCLE OF LIFE: RITES OF PASSAGE AND RITUAL

Life cycle rituals, often referred to as rites of passage are markers of social change of the individual who is undertaking the rite of passage. There are different kinds of rites of passage such as the events of birth, puberty (reproduction), marriage and death, and certain milestones like the social *gennas* in the case of Nagas which foster in change in social relations and dynamics. The practice of rites of passage is a universal experience whether it is done

consciously or unconsciously by individuals who belong to society. In this sense, a rite of passage can be seen as a way of circumscribing and adhering to prescribed notions of a community or religious group. Besides being a way of endorsing certain cultural norms, rites of passage reflect the creative ways in which a community participates and creates the structure of society.

The first interpretation of rites of passage was demonstrated by Arnold van Gennep in 1909. He coined the terminology of the experience we study as "*rites de passage*", and stated that rites were performances through which individuals transitioned from one social role to another, with little to no social disruption or fracas. He saw life as a "series" of passages that culminated in one stage and went on to the next (Gennep, 3). He observed that in so-called "semi-civilized" communities, such rites of passages were ensconced in the ritual of ceremony, going on to state that changes in the social order/ role of an individual were perceived by members of the community as a very important fact of life that needed to be marked; as such, events like birth, "social" puberty, marriage, death etc enabled the individual to find validation in the ritual act and help him to move from one defined social position to another "equally defined" social position (3). For Gennep, there is a "degree of similarity" among the rites of passages whether it is the "ceremony of birth, childhood, social puberty, bethrotal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies and funerals" (3) In this light, man's life experiences can be said to be akin to nature which itself is governed by "periodicity", with different "stages and transitions, movements forward and periods of relative inactivity" (3) Gennep classifies rites as those that act directly, and then those that are indirect. Spells and curses are classified as direct rites, and "automatic" that do not require another person or outside intervention to enable and produce effect on the individual (8). However, indirect rites are those practices such as vows, prayers which require the intervention of an outside authority that provides "a kind of initial blow which sets into motion some autonomous or personified power, such as a demon… who intervenes on behalf of the performer of the rite." (8). He states that there are both positive and negative rites. Positive rites are "volitions translated into actions" (8) while negative rites are taboos or prohibitions that carry with them strict commands of not undertaking a certain volition and are counterparts to positive rites.

Gennep views rites of passage as a genuinely special category because of its characterization. He states that a *rite of passage* can be further subdivided into *rites of separation, transition rites* and *rites of incorporation.* These subdivisions are not symptomatic, similar or prominent in all patterns of rites of passages.

Transition rites play a more important part in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group. Thus, although a complete scheme of rites or passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (transition rites), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated." (11) The process involves the person who is undergoing the rite to be symbolically removed from his old status or his pre-rite state of being, and then go through the motions of the rites during which period he is seen as being in a transitional phase. After the rite is observed and all the steps have been covered, the person or persons (in case of marriage) are reincorporated into the social order with their new social status or titles. Most of the rites that are commonly observed are in relation to decisive and turning points in the life cycle of an individual, which Gennep saw as socio-cultural, rather than biologically brought about.

It was during the later half of the 20th century, that the terms "liminal" and "liminality" gained prominence in academic parlance through the work of Victor Witter Turner (1920-1983). Turner concept of liminality was an expansion of Van Gennep's idea of *rites de passage* which as demonstrated above, included the three main phases in the process of rites and rituals:

a) SEPARATION
b) TRANISITION (**liminal** space)
c) REASSIMILATION

Turner states that "the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (72). By this he means that within the structure of the rite that is being carried out, the individual who is in the liminal stage of the undertaking remains in a *structurally ambiguous state* of being neither here neither there.

In his book, "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure" Turner writes with much thought about the way the ritual process is contemplated on as a discipline writing that,

> In "Liminality and Communitas," a chapter crucial in mapping out the understanding of liminality, Victor Turner begins by expanding on Van Gennep's rites of passage by stating, that Gennep has shown the three phases – separation, margin (or *limen*,

> signifying “threshold” in Latin) and aggregation. Gennep’s contention is clearly elucidated upon by Turner in the beginning of the chapter where he states that the “symbolic behavior of signifying the detachment of the individual or group” from the socio-cultural conditions makes the individual enter the “ambiguous” liminal state where, “he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.” (Turner, 94).

According to him, the liminality that is manifest in a society based on rituals is, “institutionalized and preordained” while *communitas* based of modern movements “spontaneously generated in a situation of radical structural change” (95). According to Turner, when individuals are existing in the liminal state, they are removed of their codes of identification with any particular structure, and are between social structures – neither here nor there, so to speak. This is a place of being where they are most conscious and aware of themselves even as they are stripped off their structural and societal groupings, a temporary state of being until being reincorporated into the social structure in their changed status.

5.1. THE LOTHA LIFE CYCLE SYTEM

The traditional Lotha life cycle system is extremely intricate and behoves the individuals and the community to participate in it, at any cost. From the time a child is born till his death, there are rituals and ceremonies that are done to ensure that all aspects of life is covered, whether minor or major. There are rituals for birth, social gennas that can be perceived as part of life cycle ceremonies, marriage and death. Marriage is also seen as one of the social ceremonies. These ceremonies also correspond to the structure of the *rites de passage* as illustrated in the previous section.

PRENATAL: There are a number of taboos for a Lotha household to observe in order to ensure a healthy child and avoid an apotia death. A woman, during the prenatal phase of her life is not allowed to consume any game meat, and there is a strict taboo for men from sleeping with their wives when they kill any animal. Futhermore, both the husband and wife are not allowed to kill snakes, or chop her hair at any given time during this phase. Such taboos linking the consumption of certain meats as well as holding certain wildlife resonate in the Naga world, whereby also demonstrating the intricate kinship that Nagas shared with the ecological world. The elements of wildlife here become a symbol of transgressive fertility that is viewed with

caution and unwelcome into the sphere of domestic normalcy. This period can be read as part of the pre-liminal stage or the "Separation" stage as espoused by Turner, during which the wife and husband abstains from consuming certain foods and prepare themselves ritually for the main process of delivery.

DELIVERY: The delivery of a baby in the Lotha household also beehoves on the parents to adhere to certain taboos and beliefs. Although these practices as indicated below are not observed religiously today, certain beliefs continue to exert a significant role in ascribing cultural codes in daily life practice. Today although viewed by the folk as superstitious beliefs, some of the practices such as the ones mentioned below are still observed. During the delivery of the baby, the woman is usually attended to by the mid-wife, referred to as *Oshangessi* (giver away of after birth) accompanied with other females of the clan and the husband. In case of an abnormally painful birth, the father assembles a fire with a firestick and disinfects the woman, and in very rare cases, applies his saliva using his fingers on the woman's stomach. This phase coorelates to liminal space of *neither here nor there* The moment the child is born, the child is given a fake safe name as it is believed that evil spirits like *Nungkumvu* wait in the doorsteps of the house to learn the name of the child and use it to call and entrap them at a later time in life. The official name is accorded to the child after five days for a female and six days for a male child. After the false name is attributed to the child, the mid-wife takes care of the baby by giving it a bath and putting some tokenistic boiled rice into its mouth. The umbilical cord is kept in the house and it is believed that if it is consumed by an animal, then the child will die, hence the afterbirth rags and cloths are kept hanging outside the *khel* (locality), so that dogs and pigs do not reach them. This phase of the birth ritual corresponds to Turner's liminal phase where the identity of the members of the family – male, female, child – is in the process of transition into mother, father and son/daughter. In the case of Lotha Nagas, we can see that the liminal stage of the ritual is where the new identities of the members undergoing the ritual is created. For Turner, this place of being "betwixt" and "between"/ threshold places the subject of the passage ritual in the liminal period, "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner, 96). By this he means that within the structure of the rite that is being carried out, the individual who is in the liminal stage of the undertaking remains in an ambiguous state. The attributes of these entities in the liminal stage are "expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (95)

POSTNATAL: In a Lotha household, once a child is born, a *genna* ceremony is observed by the members of the family for five days in case of a female and six days for a male child. JP Mills writes that during the five or six days for limbo, the child is considered to be still in the process of being born (Mills, 146). During this time, the parents must not entertain any strangers in the house nor talk to any stranger, neither should they bring inside the house any fresh meat. Only smoked meat is allowed. The mother of the child is not supposed to venture out of the house during this duration of time, or walk with people other than close family members thereby ensuring that her vulnerability will not be compromised. After the birth of the child, the mother is given rice and chicken soup for the purposes of refurbishing her health. During this time, at the end of the fifth day, in case of a girl, and on the sixth day in case of a boy, the ears are pierced with a sharp bamboo needle and names are allotted to them and a formal dress and head-gear is presented to the child. This ceremony of child-naming is called the *Ngaro-Mvüchuk* ceremony.

This stage of the ritual corresponds to Turner's stage of rites of incorporation where the individual entities are incorporated back into society with their changed statuses as mother, father, child and family. For the Lotha Naga, this stage is marked by the piercing of the ear of the child which signifies that she/he has become part of the community. The fact that the child is given a fake/ symbolic name in the liminal stage to camouflage his/her identity paves the way for the creation of the real identity of the child in the incorporation stage of the ritual. The Lotha birth rituals as illustrated above show how practice and belief defined and carved the way for the creation of personal identity. Through this commingling, the tradition of the Lothas is assured a continuity and patriarchy as a system is reinstated. Unlike some other Naga tribes who disallow the presence of men in the delivery, for the Lothas, the man remains an important presence in the entire birthing experience.

Although in contemporary modern world these rites are not observed with the strictness that they were followed during the premodern times, it is interesting to note that the text of narrative and belief still play a dominant role in assuaging and rationalizing group behaviour. The Lotha belief in the giving of a fake name is still observed till today, as well as the taboos on the consumption and resistance of certain food habits.

5.1 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION THROUGH "GENNA"

Although there are no specific religious puberty rituals among the Lothas, they, like the other Naga tribes, observe social *genna*. The *gennas* are referred to the public feasts which an

individual gives to the entire village. In Lotha language, it is termed as "*Osho*" – meaning feast of merit. The *gennas* were built as social activities and played a significant role in the carving of social status and determining the social life of a Lotha village. It was also practiced in other Naga tribes. Unlike other Indian cultures where caste configurations created and defined the cultural identity of the person by placing them in a hierarchal position, tribal cultures from the Northeast had a different way of creating and endorsing hierarchy. In Lotha society, the *genna* created and defined the hierarchal position of the male in a society. Unlike Indian cultures where the social stratification was sanctioned through religious dogma, in Naga, it was done purely on the feast of merit which indicated the status of a man in society. Those who had performed the different *gennas* were identified by the use of certain types of shawls, such as the *longpensu* shawl in Lotha, which was the marker of the highest order. The idea of sharing that is fundamental in Lotha society can also been seen in the rationale of the feast of merit which requires the holder of the *osho* to share his good fortune with the entire village. Traditionally, the *gennas* were also a marker of the person's status in social life and hence it dictated a tremendous amount of trends and kinship patterns in the lotha fraternity, especially in the morungs. Beginning from the first small *gennas*, the intensity and enormity of importance of the *gennas* increase till the fourth *genna* where two stones are dragged. Every genna ensures that the individual performing the *gennas* wears a distinct cloth that is woven especially for that specific *genna*. Not every person could afford to complete all the social *gennas* because it was costly. Hence, it became the goal of every man to undertake the full series if he could, in his lifetime. In his monograph, JP Mills describes the process "At the first stone-dragging ceremony one stone is dragged, and at the second, third and so on two stones are dragged. There is a limit to the number of times the stone-dragging ceremony may be done, which varies in different villages, but is so rarely reached that it practically exists only in theory" (136, 137).

The *longpensu* garment of the Lotha

Picture by Yanrenthung J Humtsoe

The four *gennas* are as follows:

1. The first social *genna* is performed during a man's youth and before he is married. It is usually observed when work in the fields is not too heavy and there is substantial free time for everyone in the village. It is during this time that the first garment called the *phangrup* (a garment woven with motifs in black and white over a bed of red wool) is accorded to the individual. Much feasting with a bull and madhu take place during this time. The head of the bull is then kept in the house to signify that the *Wozütana* (the first *genna*) has taken place. In some villages, it is also known as the *Ozhüyua.*

The *Phangrup* garment that is worn by young men who have completed the first *genna*

Picture by Nzanmongi Z Ezung

2. The second *genna* is called the *Shisang*. Unlike the *Wozütana*, this *genna* is mediated upon by a priest specific to this ritual called the *Wokjung.* J P Mills surmises this in his monograph on the Lothas by including intricate details from his experience in the Lotha country. He observes that the person undertaking the ritual of transition of identity abstains himself from consuming "meat from the kill of a tiger or leopard or other animal" from the time the "*madhu*" is made until the closing of the *genna* (138). In this second *genna*, more community participation in terms of clan dynamics was involved, wherein the husbands of the women of his clan go to the fields to collect plantain leaves and kill the pig and bull. The consumption of the meat during this partaking of this *genna* is only done by those members of the clan who are married as only those who are married can participate in this stage. The religious officials also get a portion of the meat and the rest is kept for the community feast. This *genna* is held over two days and on the second day, two small pigs are speared by the religious officials outside the house of the performer (Mills, 139). The meat is eaten by those who have already performed this *genna*. The religious priests hold a cock and churns out songs desiring the good fortune of the *genna* performer. The cocks are finally killed and meat is distributed among the guests.

3. The third social *genna,* the *Ethayua* in the Lotha culture was sometimes observed along with the fourth *genna*. The activities that are observed in this stage echo those of the second stage, with similar sacrificial attributes of killing pig and fowl. After this *genna* has been successfully observed, the performer becomes entitled to wear a shawl called *Etha-sü.* Once the performer has done this *genna,* a symbolic sign of fowl feather tied to bamboos is kept outside his granary indicating that the particular *genna* has been performed by the owner of the granary (Mills, 140).

4. The fourth social *genna* is specifically announced before its commencement and can be seen as the culmination of all the *gennas* before it, as elements from the other *gennas* are incorporated. On the proposed day, a decorated mithun is fastened to the house. This stage requires the presence of the two *Wokjung* who oversee and ensure that all customary requirements are met. Once the *Wokjung* recites prayers for the wellbeing and upkeep of the performer, the mithun is speared and the meat is divided among members of the clan. According to Mill's ethnography, this stage of the *genna* also contains an elaborate element of performance even as "the performer takes his dao in his left hand and draws it across the flanks and neck of the animal as if he was cutting up the meat" (140). Specific parts of the mithun are handed to specific members of the family such as those of the wife's clan and those who helped in procuring the mithun. In this *genna,* the performer is not allowed to consume the meat of the

sacrificial *mithun* and the skulls and horn of the animal is kept in the *Chumpo* (village dormitory) until the stone dragging ceremony has been observed.

J. P Mill's monograph on "The Lhota (*sic*) Naga" gives a detailed account of the stone-dragging ceremony. The stone-dragging ceremony was considered as the highest *genna* that an individual could afford in his lifetime. On the first day of the *genna*, Mills writes that rice is pounded on the front of the performer's house along with rice beer "*madhu/soko"* and allowed to ferment. According to Mill's observations, on the fourth day, the *Wokchungs* are fed in return for their blessings on the village and the family in particular. Mills records in intricate detail the process of the most important *genna*. This genna is observed over a span of a few days with a lot more participation from the village. It is to be noted here that the intricate details of the various *gennas* and the beliefs and practices associated with it differ from village to village and sometimes, from clan to clan. The sacredness of the stone dragging ceremony can be seen in the way the performer is expected to strictly abstain himself from indulging himself in his physical desires. Similarly, members of his household do not sleep in the house until the rituals have seen completion. The performer is also not allowed to entertain any strangers from another village.

On the day after the announcement, a path is made for the stone to be dragged. The next day, a chicken is sacrificed for the well-being of the stone. This is followed by the killing of a pig by the married male members of his wife's clan, which is consumed only by male members who are past their prime. The younger men do not eat it but make a gesture of touching it and then refrain from consuming it. This is done because of the belief that this particular meat would weaken their body. After this, a bamboo frame is constructed which is consecrated with *madhu* by the priest called *Wothang* after which the stone is carried by the males on the carved path. At this half way point, they are met by male members of the dragger's clan who have themselves performed the stone-dragging, and clad in their dancing paraphernalia. In this way, the stone is dragged and carried up to the performer's house, with intervals for the consumption of food and ritualistic killing of the chicken and egg, the latter which is kept in front of the stone. After this, a bull is killed and the meat of the bull is distributed to everyone in the village with the entrails cooked and consumed by the stone carries. Even during this time, members of the dragger's household refrain from eating this meat. Folk songs about enemies and headhunting accompany them.

On the third day, the priest *Wokchung* indicates the location where the stone will be placed. This is followed by prayer and the killing of two boars that are cooked and eaten. In this part of the *genna*, two old women enter the presence of the procession from the dragger's

house followed by the performer's wife wearing the garment known as *charaksü*, along with another old woman. These four women circle the hole made for the stone, waving their foot over the hole. After this ritual is over, the stone is cast onto the hole with protective mats around it which are removed the next day. The closing of this ceremony is celebrated with much feasting (Mills, 144-145)

Although the tradition of observing the *genna* is no more practiced among the Lothas, there is a clear indication in this act that the Lothas are concerned with till now in the manner of social custom, customary laws, and kinship patterns which are endorsed and reinforced through systems like the *gennas*. The demarcation between public and private is minimal and any private event witnesses the participation of the entire village. The symbolic meats of local chicken, mithun (wild boar) and pig lies close to the villagescape and these three are almost compulsorily served during any village festivities whether it is birth, death or marriage. As analyzed in the birth rituals, this kind of abstinence practice corresponds to the preliminal stage of Gennep's *rites de passage* where the person who is going to undertake an identity transition removes himself from the lived reality of his everyday. Food in the context of identity creation among the Nagas, is as much about refraining and abstinence than about consumption. Refraining from consuming *genna* meat for the person enabled him to transition into the next phase of his life.

5.2 THE FORGING OF KINSHIP: MARRIAGE AND UNISON

Pre-Marriage: Within the Lotha paradigm, marriage between a man and a woman is considered a sacred and serious matter where the norms are clearly defined and it is in turn, influenced by many factors and considerations such as the *hanlam* which is the gift of equilibrium between the clans of the bride and the groom. The concept of marriage among the Lotha is both exogamous and endogamous, in the broader landscape of the tribe. Traditionally, the Lothas practiced polygamy in situations when a wife is not able to bear a child. In such cases, the Lotha tradition allowed a man to keep more than one wife. While marriage between two adults of the same clan is prohibited and considered taboo (in today's world, it can even lead to social ostracization and boycott of the couple from the community and the church), marriage between different clans within the same phratry is allowed. Besides this, there are a number of other influencing factors that add to the choice of mates, like family history or reputation, and families who have a history of madness or diseases are consciously avoided. In

the early days, it was considered a great honour to marry into the family and clan of a warrior. However these

According to oral tradition, during the pre-christian era, once the choice of mate is done, the would-be groom's family sends a female relative of theirs to enquire after the girl. Once the parents agree, the she visits them with *madhu* and gifts the bride-to-be with a rain-shield, a basket and a dao handle. (Mills, 148). It is maintained that by this ceremony, the couple are somewhat informally engaged and await the *Pikuchak* day where they observe the drinking and eating called *tsoyuta* in the name of the newly engaged couple. During the pre-Christian era, oral tradition was strictly observed and tradition entailed that the man take a cock alongwith him which he has killed and cooked by himself, and *madhu*/ *soko* "rice beer" alongwith his male relatives and an old man of his clan called *Hantsen,* who is the first to enter inside the bride's house who hands over the *madhu* rice to the father of the bride. The rice of both the families is mixed together symbolizing unison of both clans by the bride and rice beer is produced from it, which is consumed by everyone other than the bride and the groom. Similar to the social *gennas* where abstinence from consumption of ritual food was practiced, here too we see that this same practice is strictly observed. The underlying idea of abstinence in the Lotha context endorses the belief that undergoing a ritual process of identity transition was possible only when the individuals were cleansed from the indulgences of everyday life. This is echoed not only in Lotha but also other tribes like Ao where there are taboos against consumption of certain foods and abstinence from indulging in worldly desires. After this is observed, the bridegroom is required to work in the father-in-law's house for about a year till the next *Tokhu Emong (*harvest festival). This system of working for about one year at the father-in-law's house is part of the marriage price that the groom owes to the latter and it is known as *Lomyaka*. Once this period of servitude towards the bride's family comes to an end, the groom gifts stacks of firewood which the girl's family keeps infront of his house symbolising that the premarital rites have been observed. Today, even though this aspect is not strictly observed, it was noted that during a wedding held in Longsachung village, female members of the groom's clan gathered firewood and brought them to the bride's house before the marriage ceremony. Firewood is seen as life preserving and a symbol of fertility due to its ability to provide warmth to the home. This echoes the road-making ceremony in Pre-Christian era called the *Lantsoa* ceremony during which time the husbands of women born in the bridegroom's clan (called the *ejanphyaeden*) bring firewood from the jungle and collects them in a heap in front of the brides house. As mentioned, this is still being observed in the villages today.

Yanpiyanthan (Marriage): The marriage ceremony begins five days after the engagement have lapsed and the road-making ceremony resumes its operation. It is during this time that the *hanlam* which is a gift of equilibrium is given to all members of the bride's clan. The *hanlam* is not given to anyone else except members of the bride's clan.

Even in 21st century Lotha custom, the *hanlam* is strictly observed by the Lothas. Today, when 99.9% of the Lothas observe Christianity *hanlam* is still considered a vital ingredient in the marriage process. Infact before the killing of the pig, the pastor says a prayer for the wellbeing of the couple and the pig is killed and distributed. In contemporary times, *Hanlam* is the third and most important step of the marriage process (the first being proposal or "*eloe engata*" followed by tea-engagement called "*chaha-yuta*") and entails the 'killing of a pig'. In this stage, the bride is presented with the pig. The number of pigs that are given as bridal price is determined by the status of the father-in-law and the clan. In order to prove to the bride's family that the groom is a suitable boy for her upkeep etc, this tradition has become a symbol of the groom's status as well. This ceremony of the "*Hanlam*" or the meat cutting is observed 2-3 days prior to the Christian marriage ceremony and feast, and the portions of meat are divided and sent to the families of the clan, who in return give symbolic gifts of money or grain to the bride so that she can take these gifts (from her clan) with her to her husband's house. Important persons within the clan and people of repute are given the 'head of the pig' as a symbolic representation and acknowledgment of the father-in-law's status in society. In case of a deceased father, the proceedings are taken over by the next male of kin, preferably the brother of a father (i.e. the bride's uncle). Social relations are major forces in the institution of marriage in a cultural perspective and it is through marriage that social relations get expressed. Even till today in 2022, a lotha marriage is not considered acknowledged by the clan unless the *hanlam* has been observed and this clearly shows how traditional ways of living attribute tribal identity to an individual and how these practices have attained continuity even with the arrival of Christianity.

The Lotha marriage in the pre-Christian era was an elaborate one, from the construction of the newly wed's home and the collection of cotton from the women of the bride's clan, which is exchanged with the meat that is given to the groom's clan. The marital wedding procession/march constitutes one of the most important experiences in the Lotha marriage ceremony, where the bride wearing her marriage garment called *Loroe-su (*young woman's

garment) accompanied by women from her clan go to the newly wed's home called the *kithanro*.

Women of Longsachung village sit in a circle to sing a song about the collection of cotton. In the middle of the circle, a symbolic cotton plant is placed to invoke the meaning of the song. Picture taken by researcher in November, 2019.

Their arrival there is marked by the drinking of the *madhu*. It is considered taboo to engage in physical intercourse on the first and second day. After the two days have lapsed, they return to the bride's house for the final marriage rites, which is overseen by the *poniro-ratsen* (priest for husband and wife, described by Mills as "man and wife magicians" (151) who sanctifies the marriage with rituals in their new home. A number of rituals entail this process depending from village to village, or from range to range. Among the villages around Niriyo, tradition states that the couple embarks on a journey to the forest from where they bring back symbolic leaves to bless the wedding. Mills writes, that the ceremony undertaken by the *poniratsen* was taken to be an initiation into married life and performed for a male only once in his lifetime (152). The couple then go to the jungle and return with a load of leaves which are then made into four bundles of leaves containing eight pieces of four each and two containing thirty (152). Then, the *poniratsen* who are usually two old women, or wives or widows of men whom the bridegroom calls *aporamo* (the elder brother of the father). Usually these are men who have completed the stone dragging *genna*. J P Mills writes that the

poniratsen used to be given a drink which is then followed by making parcels. Once the parcels are assembled together, they are put in a basket along with *zütsü* (the best and most unadulterated form of rice beer). After this, the *poniratsen* throttles a cock each, and the manner of its death is observed for omens and divinations. It is believed that if the right leg is lower than the left, then the husband will see death before the wife. On the other hand, if the right leg is higher than the left, the wife will see death before the husband. Similarly, if the legs of the cock are crossed in death, it means that the couple will have frequent squabbles and problems. After the omens and divinations have been ascertained, the groom cuts the cocks in two halves, with the head and upper torso in one part and the legs and bottom torso in another half. He then puts both halves of the two different cocks on leaves and wraps them up and places it with the pork and *madhu.* Then the *poniratsen* places eight narrow strips of banana leaves over each ear of the husband and wife who are seated before them. Then, the elder of the two *ratsen* takes a basket and places a pair of bracelets and waves it infront of the couple while invoking blessings to them. From there, the two *poniratsen* go to the *poniratsentsung* (the tree of marriage) taking along with them, the small container containing the parcels of meat and *madhu*, eight yutso leaves, an egg and two pieces of clothing used by the husband and wife. This is done so as to ward off impending evil and doom away from the newly wedded couple.

On the next day, the *poniratsen* return to the *kithandro* (the home of the newlyweds), to read omens and divinations similar to the previous day. The younger *poniratsen* then swings the basket while the elder one places a bamboo rug on the floor on which the garments of the newlyweds are placed away from the Road of the Dead (*echuili)*. Divinations are read through the pointed ends of an egg and once the reading of the omen has been deciphered, the marriage process is deemed complete. The closing of the omen is marked by shaking of the cloth in a ritualistic manner to fend off any evil spirits that may linger there, and the egg is passed to the opposite direction from the land of the dead. This last act can be seen as the transitional act of entering married life. The reading of divinations and omens through the entrails and manner of death was an important aspect of Lotha traditional life. It was through these interpretations that taboos could be formulated or plans discussed. Although Christianity is the normative discourse of society, the folk beliefs pertaining to the reading of entrails and manner of death of a cock/hen still held an important sway in the collective imagination of the people and this was believed well until about the 1980s. The figure of the *ratsen* (magic man), for example, is widely popular even today, and many people in Wokha district of Nagaland still go to the *ratsen* in case they have lost something and wants to find out if someone has stolen it, or

misplaced. The *ratsen* is looked upon as a soothsayer and a visionary, someone who has a closer tie with *potsow* (God).

5.3: THE LOTHA NOTION OF DEATH:

The death rituals of the traditional folk religion of the Lothas is made up of a number of intricate and detailed folk beliefs whose diffused forms still form an active ingredient in present orthodoxies. The death ritual begins with the washing of the face of the corpse by the nearest relation with his eyes closed. In ancient times, when the deceased was a prominent member of society or had taken heads, or killed a tiger, a dog was attached to the deceased's body for a few minutes and after the burial, the dog was also sacrificed so that it may go as a harbinger of the dead man and announce his arrival through its barking. It was believed that the bark of the dog could signal and intimidate the spirits of enemies and tigers who were killed by the person during his lifetime. In some villages, a chicken was also sacrificed with the belief that it could carve a path for the soul of the man as he travelled to *echuli.* There are anecdotes circulating even today about the faithfulness of a dog to his master, and during fieldwork in Yanthamo village, it was pointed out to the researcher that many times when owners died, their dogs would look towards *echuli* and bark the night away, some even indicating that dogs of deceased owners were found on the path to *echuli.*

The Lotha burial takes place in front of the man's house where a grave of about 6 feet is dug and the deceased is made to wear any ornamental garments that he may have earned during his life time such as the *longpensu* for men who have done the stone dragging or *loroesu* for married women. Mills states that "a cornelian bead is tied to the dead man's wrist to give to a spirit called *echuilivanthamo*" (157), meaning the one who stays at *echuli,* in exchange for *etsoyii* (food and drink). This indicates that the Lothas believed in a continued journey in an afterlife where the individual enters into another world. Mill's monograph describes the paraphernalia of post-death rituals:

> His wooden dao-holder, and bear's hair wig, cloth, cowrie lengta, ivory armlets, etc.. are hung on the cross-bar, and his spears are stuck upright on the grave. In the case of a woman's grave, only the basket is hung at the head, containing five instead of six pieces of meat… For six days after the death of a man and five days after the death of a woman no member of the household must speak to a stranger or kill any living (158).

The belief in the number of five for female and six for male mirrors the birth ritual where female babies are given their names after five days and males after six. Similarly, it is considered taboo for any member of the family to engage in conversation with an unknown

person or kill any living being for six days in case of a male death and five for a female death. The Lotha's deep respect for the deceased can be seen in the way that the post-death rituals are observed especially in the way continuity of after-life is acknowledged through the ritual acts of offerings to the soul of the dead. Finally, after six (male) or five (female) days of *genna,* a bamboo structure is constructed indicating the number of heads taken or *gennas* observed. It is only during the *tokhu emong* (harvest festival) that the final rites are completed, when the family relations offer meat and rice/ favourite delicacies of the deceased on a small bamboo platform, which signals that the life of the deceased has been acknowledged by those who are still living.

Although with the coming of Christianity the Lothas do not observe such elaborate funeral rites anymore, belief in certain ways of looking and understanding death and after-life still permeate through the lived reality of everyday life. The Lothas still regard for example, death by drowning as being taken by river spirit, and death caused as an after effect of a hunt as that caused by a *nungkumvu*. In early 2021, a boy from Longsachung village who had gone hunting with his friends had suddenly disappeared from the vicinity of his friends and he was never found alive again. During the time of his search which went on for a few weeks, the villagers stated that he was possibly taken by the *nungkumvu* as it was impossible for him to get lost in such a familiar terrain where they had hunted many times before.

Remnants of ancient graves in Longla village, Wokha district, January 2020. Pictures taken by researcher

A folksong about the road to *echuili* talks about an orphan entering the world of after-life and the interaction with the King of *Echuli.*

<u>Otsoe Okharo Chucho</u>

(The Death of the Youngest)

Etsüopen mayangro to bükchei khi,
Kiyo opo na ashavo to ejümkae so,
Kiyo opvü na ashavo to ejumkae so,
Onoyanben na asahvo to ejumkae so,
Ochiyanben openro ato to yantaro na epi,
Ochiyanpen obenro sayitole echüi woro asyi.

Etsüoben mayangro ashavo na,
Yantaro limha ün chanjamü tsaila,
Echü li vandamvü, Apisanglao
Senthan opong khi okhe rümicho kila,
Müktsü opvü na okhe rümchio kila,

Inna khisi mongjemojü lonrojü yutok le.

Ochi obenro echü lilan tongsa tsa,
Rantsüngotsi shae enia pila mo,
Zükhitajo chani enia pila mo,
Mongjemo jü vokae pia ejila mo,
Kiyo opo jo ocho la to engala e ün zo,
Kiyo opvu jo ocho la to engala e ün zo.

Nte mayangro obenro ashavo na,
Echüi tsi ün tso hanila,
Echü soko ün yuhanila,
Echüli mongjemojü ün yuhanila,
Ochiyanben obenro sanatokha,
Ashavo to joro soto yenjania.

<u>Free Translation</u>

I had kept a beautiful baby/ youngest one
Even its father took it in his arms and raised it up
Even the mother, took it in her arms and raised it up
Its aunty too, took it in its arms and raised it up
All the villagers said what a good child it is
Whose child is this, we wondered, it was a baby of the dead.

The youngest child – maybe it will live –
But the child is dead, the King (named Episangla) of the land of the Dead has taken it
Its parents put beautiful (red) ornaments on it
Its parents have asked the King to feed it
Fresh flowing water from the rock

Whose okharo (youngest child) is this coming this way?
I ground the rice and fed it, but it is not eating.
I gave it rice beer but it is not eating.

It does not eat even the water from the rock
Even if I ask it, who is your father/mother? It does not reply.

Whose beautiful child is this?
It does not consume the food of the Dead
It does not consume the rice beer of the Dead
It does not consume the water of the Dead
Whose beloved okharo is this, the most loved child?
Come and take her back.
(Folk song collected by researcher from Longsachung village, 2019)

6.0 AGRICULTURE RELATED OBSERVANCES

6.1 The Tokhü Emong:

The Lothas observe a number of agricultural ceremonies keeping in tandem with the agricultural seasons. The agricultural year begins with *Pvikuchak,* when the forest area is cleared for sowing the seeds for the season. Traditionally, the Lothas practiced jhum cultivation and this trend is manifest among all the other Naga tribes as well. According to oral tradition, once the *pvuthi* (priest) announced the day of *Pvikuchak,* each *chumpo* (dormitory) cooked sacrificial meat for the special day of *Pvikuchak.* During this time, it was considered a taboo to engage in physical intercourse. On the appointed day, the *Pvuthi* reads divinations and omens by sacrificing a cock and watching the manner of its death and the way the entrails are placed after death. This ritual is followed by community feasting, and the next day is considered as a day of rest in the village. With this act of solemnization, the agriculture season is said to have begun.

The agricultural year comes to an end with the *Tokhü Emong* festival. It is the most important agricultural festival of the Lothas which is still observed with glorious merriment and sharing. The *Tokhü* is traditionally celebrated over a period of nine days once the granaries of the village are full.

Granaries outside Longsachung village, 2019. Picture taken by researcher.

The festival begins when the priest/ *pvuthi* goes around the village alongwith his younger counterparts collecting unhusked rice from each household. After this, the priest would recite a prayer in the manner of a blessing and keep the rice offering in a basket. It was believed that every household must contribute out of their own free will with the underlying belief that the greater the offering, the more the blessing. After every household contributes to the priest, the collected rice is divided into portions for making the *soko* (rice beer) and buying pig for the village feast. The pig is then portioned out to the households who contributed the unhusked rice in the offering. This is done as a way of symbolically sharing in the community spirit and invoking the blessings and gratitude to the gods for a good harvest. Before the onset of *tokhü*, if an outsider happens to be in the village, then he is asked either to leave the village beyond the gates before sun set, or, stay on in the village until the *tokhü* comes to a close. The *tokhü emong* is a time for offering the last rites for the souls of the deceased friends and families, and acts as No person is allowed to venture out of the village during this auspicious time, or until the last rites are performed. It is also a time for marriage, and couples are wed after the celebrations of the *tokhü* are over. During this time, the entire village wears the traditional Lotha garments according to their social standings. Above all, the *tokhü emong* signifies rebirth and rejuvenation as friendships and relationships are forged and a way of celebrating the God given life.

A popular folk song sung during *tokhü emong* goes as follows.

HO----- HO----- HO-------

HAYILE HO------- HOLA YILE HO---- HOLEHO-----

Emungyanthe Oh---------- tssuphoedeno….

Charming oh….. great people

Evontero na nte kilo ruma tssayila….

Our voice is visiting your house

Esothe na thumkum liki pyingtokvula…

Receive us, and fill up our field-huts

Sukhying tsoso sukhying mmhomo soa tsayila

We are bringing a real blessing

Ngazo tsosi ngazo mmhomo soa tsayila

We are carrying the blessing of a good Ngazo (spirit)

Evondenro na meta cham to rumatsayila…

Our voice may be passing through in view of some place

Evondenro na zukhi/ü cham to rumatsayila…

Our voice may be passing through the river

Evondenro na maru elum un-rola…

Our voice may not be good to get a reward

Evondenro na zukhi elum un-rola…

Our voice may not be good to get a wine

Maru tsosi motsunga na nzotaro nyantavla

If we reward one, will 100 people cooperate/getting together?

Zukhi tsosi motsunga na nzotaro chantavula

If you offer one cup of wine, will it serve 100 people?…

Nte chanla O.. Rhujung-hampongdento nte chanchela

We are pouring for you o.. you the cock hornbills…

Nte chanla O.. yizum-hapongden to nte chanchela

We are pouring for you o…. you cock yizum…

(Longsachung Village, collected in November 2019 by researcher)

The singing and grunting of "ho-ho" is very significant as it is also seen and reflected in folk songs that carry them. Till today, the "ho ho" adorns certain types of folk songs that resonate over their lyrical components.

This folk song is an example of the type of song sung today during the *tokhü emong* festival of the Lothas. During fieldwork in Longsachung village, it was told to the researcher that this song was one of the songs sung during the stone-dragging ceremony. Additionally, a type of song called the *osho elangta khen* (road making song) was also sung during the time the road was being prepared for the stone to be dragged. In this way, although the Lotha Nagas did not have documented and chronicled history in the written or recorded form, songs such as this one become a way for understanding and reading the oral history of the Lothas. In this way, folk literature behaves in a counter hegemonic way to other dominant narratives characterised by the written word.

6.2: **Ronsyukhüm**: this ceremony is performed for the blessing of a good crop and held in the thick of the agricultural season. The practice of this event entails the sacrifice of a hen. On the day appointed for this, the farmer goes with his family to his field hut (*liki)* and takes the live hen by the wings and circles with it around the *liki* calling out different the varieties of rice and vegetables he may have planted. This was a way of invoking the deity *Ronsyu* for a good harvest. The hen is then sacrificed and killed and omens and divinations are read from the position of the entrails, which are then placed inside a pot and buried behind the *liki*. The hen is then cooked and returned to the village to be consumed by an old man of the clan.

7.0 LOTHA FOLKLIFE AT PRESENT:

Although today most of the above practices are not observed today, they have evolved and many times, have become co-opted into the culture bound that is Christianity in this context. Given these configurations of tradition in modernity, it becomes imperative for researchers to view traditional, agricultural folklore in the modern context as an act of customization, in that folklore –passed down through generations – gets standardized even as certain aspects of cultural practice get accommodated easily within the new context such as the *hanlam* ceremony within the culture of Lotha marriage, or in the case of songs, get textualised through the exercise of the written word and that ultimately, invariably customise the folklore which is in turn identified as tradition. In this sense, the customisation of folklore is predestined and part of the

evolutionary process of the lore. In the case of oral traditions, this is more pronounced and reactionary because an uneasy assimilation often communicates and carries its own expositions. Tradition, via folklore, informs the collective and creative consciousness of society, which in turn leads to the shaping of worldviews we hold, thereby shaping the fundamental core of culture. This is evident in the way Lotha Naga folklore in the form of beliefs, superstitions, dream interpretations etc, run beneath the mainstream culture streamlined by Christian beliefs and morals. The hold of folklore in the social imagination of the *Kyong Lothas* for example, is manifest in their belief in the vision of the *ratsen* (a man believed to see visions directly from God, who was in pre-Christian times, referred to as the medicine man/shaman), *omon* (soul), *nüngkumvu* etc as part of a lived reality. These examples indicate how folkore is thriving under a subterranean network of folk beliefs and practices and endorsing a continuity to tradition, even though the Christianity is practised as the mainstream religion. In this, there exists an uneasy nexus when one explores the dichotomous nature of contemporary Naga culture: the indigenous practices and the Christian doctrinal ethos.

CONCLUSION:

This chapter attempts to provide an in-depth ethnographic overview of the Lotha tribe. The lens of focus here has been primarily one that looks at the socio-cultural mosaic of the Lotha world by looking at the rites and rituals, practices, the ceremonial courses and the belief systems that validate and endorse the Lotha worldview and psychology which creates the folk narratives that one holds as the folklore of the tribe. An attempt has also been made to show how certain rites and rituals correspond to the ritual theories espoused by anthropologists Van Gennep and Victor Turner, whose works have defined the study of so many other tribes across the non-western world, in order to show how life cycle rituals and identity transition from one phase of life to another carries and communicates an order of existence.

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CHAPTER THREE

"THE FOREST OF SYMBOLS": AN ECO CENTERED READING OF LOTHA ORAL NARRATIVES

This chapter throws light on one of the major themes that resonate through the oral narratives. Already in the previous chapter, we have seen how the Lotha folklore and folklikfe culminates from and uses aspects of the animal and plant world which intersects in myriad ways with the world of the human. This is manifest in the world of traditional story-telling, and other verbal genres such as proverbs and songs. As such, this chapter must be read as the thematic interpretative paradigm with their structural counterparts defined in the preceding chapters. An eco-centered reading of the oral narratives has been attempted here to demonstrate how nature, the natural and the human are embodied and internalized in each other and at times, negotiated through the trope of the anthropomorphic entity. This chapter also illustrates how all pervading and overarching the theme of ecology, environment and the natural world is in the Naga creative conscious, and the findings from this chapter can be carried forward to the next chapter where an attempt at a structural study has been done.

It can be argued that the Lothas use anthropomorphism to effectively blur the division between man and nature. At the same time important ecological elements such as environmental order and harmony, human interaction with the environment, the creation of an environmental ethic and their response resonate as themes in the narratives which form an integral part of the Lotha philosophy of life. The plethora of ecologically-related elements reveals the presence of innate environmental wisdom derived from and surrounding nature and specifically, the wilderness and the pastoral. As folklore is not individually owned, but a reflection of the "folk" who use, believe, validate and justify the lore, it can also be read as a reflection of the community and the ecological psychology of the community.

1.0 Understanding Ecocriticism:

As a philosophical and literary movement, ecocriticism emerged as an analytical paradigm to study the linkage between literature, culture and the environment. Since the 1970's scholars of literature and culture had been working on critical perspectives that were tinged with ecological substance. However, these scholars did not organize themselves into a school of thought until the 1980s and the 1990s when more collaborative work was initiated. In the

year 1985, we witness one of the first works on environmental literary studies which was titled "Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources" by Frederick O. Waage which brought together the voices of nineteen academicians who wanted to bring to focus the concerns of the environment and create an ecological awareness in the disciplines of study associated with literature and culture. Most significantly in the 1990s, two sessions on environmental criticism, namely Harold Fromm's "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies" and the American Literature Association's "American Nature Writing: New Contexts, New Approaches" had a big impact that created the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in 1992, headed by Scott Slovic. There on from 1992 onwards, ecological literary studies developed into a critical school of thought that brought the correlated literature with the physical environment. The questions asked by the ecocritics looked at the various aspects of ecological thought embodied in the text such as physical settings (sense of place), the inherent ecological value systems, uncovering the ways metaphors and motifs reflect the land, how different genders construe and present nature, examining the ways in which literature impacts the natural world, unlocking the concept of nature and wilderness, exploring the ways that the environmental crisis is dealt with in literature, and most significantly looking at how other related disciplines such as psychology, history, art etc commingle with literary and environmental criticism. In this sense, the scope of Ecocriticism is a broad one that connects and seeps into different aspects of the study of human language, culture and literature. But the foundational premise of this school of thought is to study the various negotiations and contestations pertaining to the "questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language" (Glotfelty, xxii), by adopting an interdisciplinary approach.

While there are plenty of works done on Ecocriticism and related areas such as ecopoetics, ecoethics etc Christopher Mane's essay "Nature and Silence" is of particular resonance in this thesis as it references the natural world and states that Modernism has "compressed" (15) the biosphere and transmuted it into a "societal category" (15). Animistic cultures according to him, "animals, plants and even 'inert' entities such as stones and rivers are perceived as being articular and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans" (15). Such cultures have a language that is not limited only to human beings but also extends to birds and animals and even bodies of water. This regard for nature as a living entity is further more pronounced in the way the social practices of the culture is ordained. Societies that practice animism appear to circumvent rapacious environmental destruction which is again reflected in the way environmental ethics becomes an explicit theme.

He states that many premodern groups do not divorce the wilderness and domestic life because nature and culture do not exist with the kind of tension that it does in post-modern societies.

Debashree Dattaray and Sarita Sharma's edited collection of essays, "Ecocriticism and environment: Rethinking Literature and Culture" offers to the reader current perspectives of Ecocriticism and the role that Literature and Culture have in battling the grave environmental issues. From Rabindranath Tagore to Amitav Ghosh and Mahasweta Devi, the essays are an attempt to "elicit a notion to mend the mind of mankind for a greener and ecologically balanced earth for posterity" (15). Stefanio Beggoria's chapter on the Adivasis of Odisha alludes to the culture of the indigenous tribes where hunting and shifting cultivation define and sustain the ways of life in the absence of other ways to make a living. According to Beggoria (176), the indigenous system is sustained on a foundation and basis of knowledge that reflects the relationship between nature and man and this self-same rapport is testified in the rituals, taboos and knowledge of the tribe. Further on, the author states that environmental conscious behavior is embedded even in habits such as not allowing certain trees to be touched because of their sacred nature, the collection of only certain types of wood and how some forest produce can only be collected during the time that the religious festivals are held. Resonances of this essay can also be seen in the Lotha world where the forest represents

> the quintessence of the relationship/ continuity between man and nature (understood as the surrounding multiplicity of agents) and embodies the ontological approach to alterity among human/non-human animals (or other-than- human)… The different features of vegetation, trees and foliage assume vernacular names that in the oral epic, which translates the traditional knowledge on forests are sublimated through their function. (179, 180)

Similar to the Lotha tribe, the adivasis have an intricate system of pharmacopoeia that comprises the Lotha medicinal world. In this sense, the forest of the adivasi (similar to the Lotha) becomes a "true synthesis of the indigenous cosmos", with the narrative corpus symbolizing certain ideas that the community holds. The author goes on to state that the Kondh tribe construct tall vegetation as a symbol which "hold up the sky" (181). Meanwhile, the author also looks at the way in which words construct the indigenous world of the adivasi and how, many legends and belief are birthed, endorsing the fact of the "close emotional relationship between Adivasi culture and forest" (182).

Douglas A. Vakoch's Feminist Ecocriticism delves into the feminist manifestations of Ecocriticism and looks at this "cross-fertilization of perspectives" (5). The collection is a way of understanding and evaluating the relationship between women and nature and states that;

> By positing an inherent tendency of women to be attuned to nature – to care for it, to recognize their interrelationship with it – cultural ecofeminists recognize the value of actions and characteristics typically devalued by the dominant (patriarchal) culture (4)

As stated by the editor, the aim of ecofeminism is to show the "connection between environmental degradation and the subordination of women with the goal of identifying and fostering liberatory alternatives" (12).

Conversely, all these works on ecocritical perspectives imbue the reader with the analytical paradigms to illustrate how metaphors engender feminization of the land, how the various tropes of a narrative imagine and awaken an ability to return or recover an imagined space, how (in the context of Lotha) the realm of the human and the realm of nature are reintegrated in the folktale which is done by rediscovering a connection between these two entities.

2.0 THE LOTHA ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY:

An important facet of the Naga folktales is the recurrence and interrelation between the Animal, Man and Spirit worlds, and this aspect is not limited only to the Lotha experience. Each of these worlds intersect and connect with one another, and we have already seen how this kind of negotiation takes place in the preceding chapters. We have seen how the motifs and tropes existing in the Lotha Naga narratives encapsulating both folktales, proverbial sayings and songs construe nature, often emphasising the deep sense of affiliation between the human world and the natural world out there. Each of the genres analysed are layered to illustrate how the Lotha's conceptualised the environment and how the distinction between the "Us" (human) and "Them" (natural world) is negotiated through the trope of the animal. The anthropomorphised identities in the folktales for instance are the animals, there are no talking trees or water bodies that reinforce human traits. In the community imagination, the world of nature is seen as something that is extrinsic to the human experience and must be mediated through the ritual of custom, or through anthropomorphised entities such as tigers or spirits, who themselves stand as cultural symbols. The tales below illustrate how the Lotha uses anthropomorphism as a way of bringing nature close to the human world that ultimately serves as a point departure for understanding the environment and animal worlds. The tales reflect the pre-Christian corpus, which is an important aspect for one to remember, as it implies that the arrival of Christianity and subsequent conversion into Christianity massively changed the way stories were created, even as the human experience became much more isolated and separated

from the animal world. This is indicative of the Christian ethos of positing humans as being the superior species, one that was put on earth to care for the animals and hence not existing on an equal status. Contrastively, by looking at the rites and rituals (as elucidated in detail in chapter two of this thesis), it becomes increasingly apparent that the beliefs and culture of the Lothas display the close kinship between the physical and non-physical aspects of creation. This is acknowledged in the way the narrative imagination of the Lothas reflect the blurred boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, which deviates from the Christian/ Western tradition of creating a hierarchy among the entities. Through this we are witness to how colonialism and postcolonial thought has reconfigured the way we traditionally viewed the environment, and the inclusive nature of our traditional mainstream thought. What emerges out of the narratives analysed below is although the environmental view of the human is anthropocentric, the Lotha use anthropomorphism as a way of negotiating an environment based philosophy or ethic. This is significant because colonialism as a discourse had consistently distinguished the primitive world from the colonised world. The narratives below demonstrate how the supposedly "primitive" Lotha conceptualised the environment and animal worlds by showing the proximity of the human to the natural world of forests, fauna and other living entities.

Narrative 1:

> *Once there was a cricket who lived in an oak tree along the edges of a great lake. It had very strong legs that helped him hop from leaf to leaf, and from one branch to another with great strides. Because of this ability, he was filled with vanity believing that there was no other creature who had such strong and beautiful legs like his. He would even show off to the other creatures. Overtime, it became inundated with pride. One day, a locust came by as the cricket was making some sounds and at first praising him, asked him if he could lend his hind legs for a few days as his was not strong enough. Feeling generous after the flattery, it took off its hind legs and gave it to the locust. The delighted locust thanked him and went his way. Another locust, on hearing that the cricket gave its hind legs away went to the cricket, pleading and flattering. The cricket gave the second locust another pair of legs. A brown locust also heard about this, and went to the cricket saying, "Oh gentle and most beautiful legged cricket, we heard of your noble deeds. I am very weak, would you be kind to a poor creature, and lend me your remaining pair of legs?" The cricket was flattered, and gave them to the locust saying, "here, take them. Return it when you grow strong." The cricket then realised that without its legs it couldn't fly as it wings needed the thrust.*
>
> *A magpie, living by the lake, saw the entire episode and said, "Surely one day my young ones will have a tale to tell", as it swooped down and flow home with the cricket on its beak.*
>
> (Khonchamo, interview)

Narrative 2:

A mother goat was grazing in the meadows. A wolf who had not had a good meal in a long time saw the mother goat and cautiously approached her. As the grass was short, the wolf was seen by the goat and the goat immediately fled from the scene. The hungry dog was determined to have the goat the next time, and headed for the bushes near the meadows for the night. When morning came, the goat went to the meadows again and began to graze. The wolf approached her from behind, and stated – Oh mother goat, what you doing here? Struck with fear, the mother goat replied, " I came to graze. Don't you feel hungry after a long nights rest?" The wolf replied, "Yes, that is why I came to eat you." The mother goat, afraid of the wolf, wittily answered, "That is not a problem, you can eat me when you want to. But first you must sing a song for me as I was told that you are a great singer." Flattered by the compliment, the wolf started howling repeatedly. A hunter with two dogs passing by heard the howling and rushed to the spot and chased the wolf away from the goat. After being saved, the mother goat said, "it certainly was a beautiful song" and went on grazing in peace.

(Khonchamo, interview)

Narrative 3:

Long ago, when animals could talk, there lived a dog and a pig in one house. One day, the master of the house asked both the animals to work in the fields. The obedient pig worked hard throughout the day, while the dog slept. As evening crept in, the dog awoke from his slumber and saw the pig returning home. The dog asked, "have you finished working on the field or is there still more to do?" The pig, annoyed at the dog, did not answer him and went straight home. The dog, in the meantime stomped all over the field effacing the footprint of the pig. When the master asked if they had done the work, the pig said that he ploughed the field all day, to which the dog said that it was actually him who did it while the pig slept. They got into a fight. When morning came, the master went to check the field and he saw only the footprints of the dog. Upon his return, when the pig asked if the master was satisfied with his job, he said, "Not at all. From this day on, you shall not be allowed to stay inside the house, but outside and live on what is being served. As for the dog, because of his hardwork and obedience, he shall remain by my side and get a share of the food I eat."

(Y Yanthan, interview)

Narrative 4:

On the foothills, a large python had once exerted its claim over a river and came to be regarded as the king of that river. The fox knowing that it has to drink from the stream came to befriend the python and frequently flattered it to which the python often reciprocated. Slowly, they became good friends. The python realised the brilliant mind of the fox and requested him, "Oh wise fox, why don't you teach my children to be wise and cunning too?". The fox started teaching the children of the python, but instead of teaching them it began eating them one after another. The python came to the fox's den to see its children but the fox told the python that they children needed to stay for some more time. This behaviour went on for many moons with the fox stating that the python's children were in training and were almost as good to be teachers themselves. One day the python hid inside the den when the fox was away. When the fox returned it sensed

something unusual, so he started saying, "What's wrong with my den today, why is it not responding?" Deceived by the fox, the python replied, "Yes master". On hearing the response the fox ran away. The Python devised another plan. The next day the python took the form of a deer and laid on the river bank. The fox realised that it was the python again with its magic tricks. The fox mumbled- "I do not wish to eat at all" and left the place. The next day, the python (in the form of a dead stag) floated down the river where the fox could see. When the fox went to quench his thirst, it saw the stag and said, "If only the dead stag could come floating near me, I would be happy." The dead stag started coming close to the fox. At this, the fox jumped back in shock and cried that the dead stag was responding.

All the python's attempts to capture the fox failed.

The anecdotes illustrated above are often used for pedagogical purposes to teach children and young ones lessons on human behaviour. As models of narrative, they read as simple anecdotes that use implied and direct metaphors. In all of them, the embodied anthropomorphism can be seen in the way self-experience and emotion is channelled in the characters. One recurring and commonly observed facet of the animal narrative is the absence of the human as a character who is given a voice. This can be seen in many of the animal tales where the animal extoll and exonerate human themes. Even where the human character is present (or whose presence is indicated), the representation of the human with the animal world is portrayed in a positive light, suggesting to the listener that the Lotha relationship with the animal is one which is coloured by harmony, hinting at a kind of idealism not found among human to human relationships. The Naga story of origin or the myth of *Makhel* can perhaps be considered as the perfect epitome of this trope.

Narrative 5: *Okhe Ora Omai Tu* (The Three Brothers Farewell Stone).

Dziiliamosiiro, considered as the first woman on earth in Mao tradition, was a very virtuous and pure woman. One fateful day, as she rested with parted legs under the shade of a tree at Makhel or Makhrai Rabu, a misty cloud that loomed over the area where she slept, dropped some liquid substance in the like of an elixir, which moved towards her genitals and that caused her pregnancy. At the end of this pregnancy, she birthed three children in the form of a Tiger(Okhe Kozhuro), a Human (Alechamaiwo) and a Spirit (Ora Aha). Together, they lived with their mother in sweet harmony until the mother became old. Once she was old, she developed various ailments so the three brothers took care of her. However, whenever it was the Tiger's turn to care for the mother, she would become panicked and worried as the Tiger would feel the parts of her body that were fleshy in the hopes that it would consume her after her death. Meanwhile, when the Spirit took care of the mother, her pain would aggravate and she would develop a feverish hue. It was only when the Human took care of her that she felt comforted. This was because the Human was able to wholistically care for the mother in the way that was needed. As the years wore on, the three brothers began to talk about their respective inheritances, and very often, this conversation would end in squabbles. So Dziiliamosiiro decided that she would end the hostility once and for all. To find out

> *the most suitable successor to her land, she came up with a contest, whereby the son who could touch a ball of grass placed at a distance would inherit the land. Acutely aware that the Tiger and Spirit did not have the temper to touch the light ball of grass of that distance, she nudged her Human son to use a bow and arrow to reach the target, which he deftly did. With this, the issue of inheritance was finally settled and the Human son, who cared the most about her, became the inheritor of the land. As for the Tiger and the Spirit, they both conceded their defeat and while the Tiger went to live in the forest, the Spirit went southwards to Kashiipii.*
>
> (Anonymous, interview)

One version of the folktale holds the view that it was the Tiger who decided to have a race for which they erected a bamboo pole and decided that the person who would reach the pole first would stay in the village while the loser would go and live in the jungle. Once they started the race, the man used a bow and arrow and pummeled the bamboo pole to the ground. On reaching the bamboo pole, the tiger saw that it was already fallen and sadly, conceded defeat thinking that man had reached the pole before him, and went to live in the jungle. The Spirit saw the cunningness of the Man and decided to punish him. So he removed his eyes and replaced them with the goat's eyes so that he could not see the spirit again. This oral tradition has it that Man became lonely without his brothers and invented rituals to earn their trust back and this is how Naga culture was born. As shown in this story, the birth of a ritual is attributed to the symbios between man and animal and spirit worlds, signifying that the structure of Naga society even till today has been formulated out of this kinship with the natural world. It also exemplified what we have already established – that the world of the animate (here represented by man, animal and spirit) and the non-animate (stones) are concomitant forces, and each is a manifestation of the other. Ultimately as in the narrative, the spirit world is subsumed under the power of the human. As the narrative progresses, we witness that the boundaries between nature (as represented by man), the natural (here, the tiger representing the forest) and the environment as represented by the spirit world are effectively eroded denoting the oneness of creation, a motif that underruns traditional knowledge of the Lotha.

Some proverbial anecdotes are also reflexive of this trope. The proverbs on animal and plant ecology especially echo the ways in which traditional Lotha knowledge encapsulated wisdom and philosophy. Proverbs carry the potential to guide behaviour and even perpetuate biocultural indigenous knowledge across generations through its use seen in the ways certain characteristics are attributed to plants and animals. If proverbs behave as expressions of worldviews and presents accumulated wisdom of the people, then the dichotomy of nature and culture in the context of Lotha becomes muted.

Ono (Mother-in-law) *jo raraküm (*medicinal) *tvü (*like) *ka.*

Translation: A mother-in-law is like *raraküm* (medicinal plant/ holy basil).

Contrastingly with other mainstream cultures, where the mother-in-law is usually portrayed as a commandeering and controlling person, the indigenous proverb of the Lotha portrays the mother-in-law as a healing force in the household. It was said that this proverb was used to invoke respect towards the mother-in-law figure, as she controlled the affairs of the domestic sphere of the household. This proverb underscores the enriching and pleasant presence of the mother-in-law in the household. The *raraküm* plant (holy basil) formed an important part of indigenous pharmacopeia and was usually prescribed for a number of illnesses. Here, we can see how plant ecology becomes an integral part of the Lotha consciousness. Indigenous communities like the Lotha acquire their ecological identity through the employment of ecological metaphors that carry ethnic identity and references. Similarly, metaphors derived from ecology are also reminiscent in proverbial phrases such as;

Yoothi (banana) *choka* (sprouts) *to choka* (sprouting) *je.*

Translation: The bananas are sprouting.

This proverb is uttered when a prediction/ premonition about the future comes true, and it is also used to refer to a hidden situation/secret when it finally comes out into the open. This proverb is said in both a positive and negative light.

Sangalia (sangalia) *ka* (is).

Translation: Like a *Sangalia* plant.

Sangalia (a native term that refers to the undergrowth of weeds that propagates in almost any kind of environment, even inside toilets). Its leaves are slippery and hence, considered very unadjustable and unsuitable for any kind of use. When this plant dies, worms are quick to consume it. This proverb is used to refer to a person who is unable to make a concrete decision/ is indecisive, or in a position of neither yes or no, reflecting some kind of cognitive dissonance from the situation that he/she is under. This old proverbial phrase is also derived from nature, which again reflects the Lotha eco-consciousness and here we can see how the plant embodies characteristics and subjectivity imbuing it with agency. The same proverbial phrase can be traced in a popular anecdote found among the Lothas that goes like this:

Narrative 6:

During the time when plants could communicate with each other, a plant called Sangalia (which regarded itself neither a tree nor a creeper) tried to evade diseases of both trees and creepers. When trees started getting infected by diseases that spread widely, it cried

> *to gods saying it was not a tree but a rope. And so, taking that into consideration, the disease spared Sangalia. Similarly, when disease of creepers appeared among the landscape, the Sangalia said that it must be spared as it was not a creeper. When all the seasons of the various diseases had gone by, the trees and creepers started to recover and grow out in abundance, enriched and strengthened by their healings, but the Sangila could not compete with the rest of the plants. She could grow neither tall or big, but in shame, grew under the shadows of trees and didn't dare to overgrow other plants.*
>
> *A proverb from this incident states that even today this plant always remains in the undergrowth of shadows. Its veins and nervous system is weak so it has a tendency to get infected with moss and fungi and withers away.*
>
> (Nyanbeni Yanthan, interview)

The above narrative is an instance of metafolklore, or what Alan Dundes calls, "oral literary criticism" where an item of folklore spawns another item of folklore. In this narrative, we are witness to a personification of the *Sangalia* plant. As mentioned, the *Sangalia* is a kind of weed that erupts in shadowy corners of houses or in the undergrowth of things. Here, the plant is given agency to decide its own fate even as disease spreads through the landscape. While being didactic in nature, the story depicts the condition and sensibility of the life of plants. The story reflects how the ecological and landscape changes are part of the evolutionary process of the environment. At the same time, by conjuring a diseased landscape, the story functions as a commentary on the destruction and decay (that is also part of the natural order) of the environment and echo Vera L Norwood when they say, "… but only through increased knowledge (a product of civilisation) can destruction be stopped" (338). Although Norwood points to the paradoxical situation (especially in western cultures) where more information and increased knowledge about the ecology would ensure the kind of destructive imperative that is present in the actions of humans and all things manmade, the Lotha imperative is to let nature have its own course as it is bound to bring healing to the ecosphere. There is an implicit trust in the hand of Mother Nature, that she will eventually bring healing to the land without the intervention of human beings. The power thrust on nature as reflected in the story is indeed also a reflection of the folk philosophy of life where the demarcation between what we understand today as 'nature' and 'culture', where culture is privileged over nature.

Through these engagements, one is made privy to the ecological identity of the Lotha, which is deeply rooted in the past where ecological consciousness was encoded by and manifest in the traditions, customs, narratives and myths of the Lothas.

One of the tenets of ecocriticism holds the view that the human cannot exist without nature. In turn, it is the human who gives a voice to nature through the creation of narratives. In the Lotha narratives, the human interacts with nature through their preferred language – whether it is a song or a tale or proverb. In these, a deep respect for nature can be discerned and the division between nature and culture is not defined but rather mediated through figures like the "weretiger" or other anthropomorphised entities in folklore. Lotha folklore was not only a cerebral sieve through which ecological thought and worldviews were harnessed but it was also a way of establishing the connection between nature and culture and dismantle the established polarity of the "nature" vs "culture" debate. Because the Lothas lived in close proximity to the forest, the animal world becomes a repository of symbols and representative of the natural world. Unlike other cultures where the human figure is associated with progress and culture, for the Lotha Naga, the human is not isolated from the animal and plant universes but remains an integral aspect of the cosmos. Dwijen Sharma in his ecocritical analysis of writing from the North East speaks of this unique aspect.

> The ethnic communities depend on nature for everything, including their food and pleasure. They lead a fulfilling life. Therefore, it can be argued that they lead an ecosophical life, which Naess (1989) defines as "simple in means, rich in ends. It is not to be confounded with appeals to be Spartan, austere, and self-denying" (Naess 88). Further, it can be argued that since nature is an integral and sacred part of their lives, it should not be exploited. In this context, Leopold (1949) observes: "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, beauty and stability of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise (262)" (Sharma, Negotiating Ecological Crisis in North-East India : An Ecocritical Reading of Select Literary Texts, https://www.drishtithesight.com/)

Although Sharma's study is based on the literary works of the region and locates ecocriticism in the broader context of "a tradition that cares for the landscape with respect and reciprocity" (Dreese 7), his interpretations can also be used to evaluate the oral narratives which is the point of departure from which the Naga literary tradition has spawned. Similar to their literary counterparts, the oral narratives also engage with and disseminate ecological and traditional knowledge through the trope of storytelling. Additionally, through the employment of the animal and environmental characteristics, the narrative is able to carve out a rather unique way of engaging with environment. This is done by dedicating and representing the ecological universe and even the cosmos as part of everyday lived reality. In this sense, the ecological and the environmental is not something out there removed from our daily experience, but a very

integral and illuminating fact of life. It is not extricated from the human experience, instead it enhances and makes the human experience much more real. The story below illustrates this nature-human interaction, and the curative impact that nature can have on human beings.

Riverine folklore from the Doyang valley is also testimony to this leitmotif of storytelling.

Narrative 7:

A boy went to the Doyang river to catch fishes. However, since he did not return till evening, the next day before sunrise, his father gathered people and went to look for him. Downstream, he saw a bunch of hairs on the ground and picked it up thinking it to be his son's. As he walked along the stream, he came across a spirit sitting on the bank. The hair was his. He had forgotten to wind it around his head. The spirit cried out in panic, "Please let me go, and give me back my hair!" The man protested, "Give me back my son that you have taken, then only I will give you back your hair." The spirit agreed, but the man could not believe him and remained in doubt. The spirit pleaded, "Please let me go. I swear the most solemn oath that man can ever swear." Stating this, the spirit also gave the man a fresh fishes as a token of their oath. He added, "tomorrow I will bring your son in this river bend and leave him here so please come and collect him at a time when people have gone to their fields."
The next day the father went to the spot as indicated by the spirit and found his son at the bend of the river. He called out to him and both father and son reunited in a joyous moment. The son narrated his story, and how he dove into the river but the current caught him and took him under a rock where the earth was dry. There, he saw a hearth made of human skulls but the spirit did not kill him and neither did he ill-treat him.

(Zanbeni, interview)

This story also exemplifies the relationship of the man, spirit and animal worlds (here represented by the fish). The Doyang river is the largest river in Nagaland, emerging from the Nagaland-Manipur border and then finally draining into Wokha district, from where on it turns into the Dhansiri as a tributary of the magnificient Brahmaputra. The villages around the Doyang valley have a number of riverine folklore that fuse the elements of nature and human, while also showing how folk belief was also an intricate part of this ecological configuration. The Lotha diety of river was called *Jüpvüo* and as mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, (pg 49) is often portrayed in popular lore as an entity possessing long hair, inhabiting the banks of rivers and other water bodies. Here, the story embodies the belief in the *Jüpvüo*, and the portrayal of this entity believed to be from the netherworld is shown to have Samaritan characteristics, even though the elements and entities of the netherworld is usually perceived as demonic "Others" – illustrated in this story by the father of the boy who immediately holds

the *Jüpvüo* into account, assuming that it had taken the boy. Usually such stories were narrated to children to discourage them from venturing into the deep depths of water bodies. However, the gift of fresh fish as a token of oath and the testimony of the child shows that cooperative relationships between humans and the other worlds can be beneficial to both the parties. The fact that the child was taken under a rock "where the earth was dry" also indicates the curative nature of healing that the earth is attributed with. Both the fish and the earth have curative properties, in the face of danger and death (*hearth made of human skulls*). The curative property of plants is also illustrated in this story of the Chilli, and illustrates what Alia Afzal states about healing, "Healing in most native cultures is a process to unify the physical with the spiritual. The combination of the sacred and an ordinary body is a door to the after world" (68-69). The Lotha folk medicine derived their *materia medica* from herbs, plants and parts of the animal entity and during the pre-Christian era these items commingled with prayers and rituals symbolizing the spirit world. Even till today, the practitioners of folk medicine feel the obligation to pass on their traditional knowledge as a way of ensuring continuity and survival of their culture. In this story, the consumption of chilli becomes a way of being part of the natural world which in turn stabilizes the mentally challenged Yimben.

Narrative 8:

A family once lived in a fertile patch of land. As they had recently migrated to the area, resources were limited and they had to put in additional effort for their farms and forest land leaving their homes, courtyards and home surroundings unattended. One day the father noticed thick weeds around the house, and as he was clearing them, noticed a small plant that looked different from the rest. He preserved the plant instead of removing it. Now the man had three children by the names of Richum (eldest boy), Yimben (second boy) and Zentilo (girl). Yimben was mentally challenged and spoke with a stammer. After a few days, the father saw that the strange plant had grown much healthier, and saw fruit like flowers sprouting on all its branches. The man said to his wife, "Surely this fruit looks edible so let us make Yimben taste and see." Yimben took a bite of the fruit and suddenly his appearance changed and he was huffing and puffing because he had never tasted anything like that. As he started yelling from the torture he felt from the spicyness, his tongue came lose and his stammer mysteriously went away. The father also took a bite and found it hot but tasty. Since that day when they saw Yimben cured, they decided to make chillies a part of everyday life.

(Khonchamo, interview)

The Lotha worldview of ecology also articulates a form of environmental ethics which is encrypted into stories such as the story of the caterpillar (Narrative 18) where we witness traditional story motifs and elements such as shapeshifting being used to advocate ethical behavior towards the treatment of other species, here represented by the caterpillar. The woman

is punished for not acknowledging and honouring the love and respect that the caterpillar (her husband) has towards her and for that, she has to pay the price with her life as she is slowly poisoned by the caterpillar hairs that fall on her food mysteriously every day. Here too, a proverb invoking an ethical treatment of caterpillars surfaces out of this story.

Narrative 9:

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful woman who married a handsome man. During the day time, the man turned into a caterpillar, and returned to the form of a man by night. His wife was oblivious to this fact and thought that he used to go to the field to work by day. One night she told her husband, "Tomorrow I will go and collect leaves from the forest for a special dish." The husband stayed silent for a while, and asked, "Where will you go and what leaves?" In excitement, she told him where and what kind of leaves she would be collecting. The husband wanted to help her so the next day as a caterpillar, he nipped off the leaves his wife was going to collect and collected them in one place. When the woman came to the location, she found it strange that the specified leaves were kept in place by a caterpillar. She then gathered the leaves and took them home. That night she told her husband the episode that took place in the forest with the leaves and how a caterpillar had nipped off the leaves etc. To this, her husband said that it was him who went early in the morning, nipped and stacked up the leaves to gather. At this, the wife was horrified and she became repulsed towards him. That night, when he was asleep, she gentled nudged him to the edge of the bed until he fell into the fire. Instantly, he died. From that day onwards, whenever the woman cooked, the hairs of caterpillars would fall into her food, and she would eat them without knowing until she was poisoned by them.

Out of this story emerged the Lotha saying that, "One must not burn caterpillars lest harm would come upon one who does so."

(Y. Yanthan, interview)

Similarly, in the story of the *Era Loroe Motsu* or The Wax Girl (pg 115), the relation between the human and the natural world is further illustrated. In the story, a very fragile woman who has been warned never to step into direct sunlight, disobeys the interdiction issued to her and finds herself melted into wax. But her re-transformation into a human being can occur only when her melted state is covered with leaves, where bees congregate and reform her to her previous physical human state. This story is a reflection of the disruptive ways of human traits that can often lead one to a state of disrepair and death (symbolized here by the melted wax). However, it is the healing that nature provides, that comes to the aid of the woman. The story also reflects how traditional Lotha lore mirrored in the natural ecosystems was used as ingredients in the making of tales. Bees and ants use the same chemical signals to induce a clean-up when one of them dies, and covers a dead bee in petals or flowers. This is also a way of covering up the scent of dead bees as bees produce a pheromone that alerts other

bees that there is danger in the vicinity, and in some sense, one can say that it is funeral of the bee. In the story, the woman is also covered with petals and leaves and bees congregate there to awaken and crystallise the woman into the physical form, indicating that the natural world was a source of creative imagination for the storytellers of the Lothas. In these ways, folklore that is filled with environmental information immensely contributes to the formation of environmentally responsible behaviour through the value and knowledge system embedded in the story.

Echoing Tilittoma Misra, while discussing the land degradation being brought about by a rapaciously urbanizing and consumerist society emerging in the North-East, Rituparna Mukherjee in their essay (2018) states that "the poets and fiction writers of North-East Indian states therefore try to hold on to their native myths, legends, oral stories that speak of their communion with nature, with its landscape and its flora and fauna, that seems to remedy a "Xenophobic fear" of an outside intrusion" (Misra, xiv). Misra is right in pointing out this overwhelming fear of "an outside intrusion" because tribal and indigenous societies by virtue of their legacy of land alienation, isolation, and a violent history of colonialism have remained possessive of their land and apprehensive about the "Other". It is perhaps this undercurrent that informs the way ecological metaphors are embedded into the stories, defining and shaping story tropes that require us to introspect and relook at the world around us from the lens of the Other. The fertile forest, booming with spirits, animals and plants breathes with the memory and legacy of its becoming and unbecoming even as nature destroys and heals in order to bring ecological balance to the universe.

The traditional narratives of the Lotha behave like repositories of cultural and community thought processes that embody the non-human aspects of nature. They reveal how society places value on the environment and the correlation that exists between humans and their surroundings in the universal scheme of things. Indigenous societies like the Lothas have developed and infused their oral corpus with artistic expressions that showcase the easy and dynamic interrelation of humans with nature. Seen from this perspective, the Lothas can be said to have been guided by an indigenous tradition that address individual and community activities. As Adugna (2014) states

> A society's imaginations about nature can be influenced by natural phenomena or the belief/attitudes of the people which guide their individual and communal activities. The

> way the people define their selves in relation to the non-human part of their world can be understood from the folk ideas encoded in their proverbial lore. The beliefs held in them, the feelings they evoke, and the image they engrave in the human mind can influence the self-definition. By and large, these regulate the model of relationship to be established, and the way people treat the cubicle of nature. (25)

Conclusion:

This chapter has attempted to provide an ecocritical reading to the oral narratives of the Lotha by analyzing select stories and proverbs to illustrate the way the human world, the animal/ plant and spirit worlds are interwoven with each other. Each of these categories imbue to the story an ecological identity that is birthed from a consciousness where nature is not separated from culture and where the duality of nature and culture is deemed unstable. From the examples it can be said that the Lothas use anthropomorphism as a way of understanding and mediating the gap between the “culture” and “nature”, identified as “self” and other”. Significantly, the chapter also shows how nature, while it is mostly curative, also has an angry side, even as we see how water bodies have the power to subsume the human and avenging the wrongs done to them.

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CHAPTER FOUR

STRUCTURAL STUDY OF THE LOTHA FOLKTALE: A PROPPIAN METHODOLOGY

Introduction: This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the narrative tropes available in the Lotha corpus and provides a structural study of the Lotha oral narratives by exploring three main prototypes/ themes around which popular discourse of Lotha culture is primarily centered, the Trickster Tale, the transfiguration/ shapeshifting tales (which thematically also correspond to the Romantic Novella tale type in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther typology) and the Legend genre. By appropriating a Proppian methodology, this chapter attempts at analyzing the inherent structural components that make up the ubiquitous, quintessential Lotha folktale. The study of narrative structure truly emerged as a methodology during the 20th century when structuralist discourse became a popular way of interpreting textual material. As mentioned in chapter 1, the work of Vladimir Propp paved the way for employing a novel way of studying the Russian folktale (in his case, the heroic tale) that later on inspired to work of folklorist such as Alan Dundes.

As far as the selection of the folktale in study is concerned, the researcher collected around 40 folktales, many of which were versions and variations of the same folktale told by different people across different villages. Admittedly, there are countless numbers of traditional tales found in the Lotha country with each area usually possessing their own distinct version of the narrative. However, upon examining the contents of the tales and breaking them down into their motifs, it was discovered that the tales resonated with more similarities than differences, especially in the tales of *Apvuho* which are popularly narrated across Lotha households. Given the gargantuan task of filtering the different type of folktales to be used in the analytical scheme of the thesis, the most thematically popular of the Lotha tales were selected to undergo the lens of study. The versions of the folktales gathered here echoed similarities in the narrative structure with only their contextual material showing any substantial differences. Note must be made here that the thematic division in the selection has been made by taking the most common theme/motif of a story, as each tale intersects and connects with other themes and motifs as well. At the end of the chapter, a general thematic overview of the folktales has been deliberated upon, thereby showing the multifaceted nature of the Lotha folktales.

1.0 NARRATIVISING CULTURE IN ORAL SOCIETY

The act of telling and listening to stories and narratives is a facet of experience that transcends the collective ethos of a culture, expressing latent behaviour patterns among people and cultures of the everyday lived reality of communities and individuals. In the case of oral societies, where the dissemination of cultural knowledge and historical consciousness is based on an effective mnemonics, narratives were a means of articulating a cultural ethos that was passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. The act of narration and the creation of these narratives become active agents of culture and experience, through which narrators and listeners ascribe meaning to their own lives and to their respective culture and environments. Admittedly, these experiences and events of human lives as depicted in these fluid narratives do not have a rigid narrative structure in contrast to the formalism of the written work where by divisions of chapters and sections herald carry their own vision. The multiplicity of oral narratives brings to play a framework of interpretations as the narrators organize and render their experiences into the framework of the narrative with each telling. In the process of telling, narrators of oral 'texts' inevitably develop a narrative identity through which the "personal" and "social" identities are constructed and legitimized. Because of the absence of a fixed and rigid rule of lexical jurisprudence that is a part and parcel of the written word, any pattern of narrative remain intricately identical with the mind of the narrators – themselves attuned to respective social codes. For example, in the Lotha context, the telling of a story is highly influenced by the person who is narrating it. A pastor using a folktale in a sermon to demonstrate a lesson will impact the telling of the story as much as an unmarried woman narrating a story of married life. All these tellings are further shaped by memory, whether appropriated sentence by sentence through an oral-formulaic working or through a structural reproduction and plot variation, and they become active ingredients in the construction of an effective and vibrant cultural identity (and in the case of Lotha, a tribal identity). By that same token, social functions are also subsumed in these narratives, where there is a transmission of tradition from one generation to another through a language based on a legacy of orality. Furthermore, a semblance of a continuity of tradition is ensured when these folktales are narrated even though the cultural context has waned or changed. As such, the structure, function and interpretation of the folk narratives converge to construct the identity of the tellers both from their personal and community perspectives.

In the case of the Lotha, the telling of these stories evokes a universe that is both familiar and strange at the same time. Even as more and more folktales are becoming textualised in collections and anthologies, they are moving away from the oral world which birthed these stories. This epistemic shift from the oral to the written world is reflected in the way the narration and structure of the tale is changed which in turn reflects a change in the order of thinking. Unlike the literal word, which can be read and it's plethora of meanings realised in isolation from social interaction, oral narratives are performative, in that they necessitate a physical telling in the physical presence of another *self* or a collective. Ultimately, folk narratives carry within themselves historical, sociological and personal phenomenologies that are realized and grasped by their listeners. Because of this aspect of folk narratives, they are diversely functional in nature and most often than not, serve as educative anecdotes, warnings and lessons that people can learn from and effect in their personal lives. Today, when the narration of traditional oral folktales is dying, and more and more people are *writing* these stories their oral essence is becoming slowly lost. Hence, it becomes pertinent to study the internal structure of narratives in order to understand how cultural transitions impact the telling of a story because the shift from oral to the literal world is not simply a matter of narration but the inculcation of a new consciousness of thinking.

William Bascom's four functions of folklore as elucidated in the 1st chapter, can be applied to the study of Lotha narratives as well. Lotha folk narratives express the moral codes and principles by which Lotha identity and culture is crafted and realized in its socio-historical settings. The stories simultaneously act as anecdotes of humour as well as warnings and many times, the themes and genres overlap each other. The proverbs or worldly wisdoms usually act as warnings, counsel or advice the listener to change his/her behavior or to criticize and ridicule someone who has been lacking foresight by using metaphors. Similarly, folksongs of the Lothas can be used to reconstruct a version of Lotha history and provide a cultural panorama. Although the Lotha folktales seem fragmentary because of their seemingly shortened style of narration and in the sense that the plots seem incomplete or are deliberately left to the discretion of the listener, on the other hand, they embody not only historical behavior and cultural reflections but are sometimes overlapped with other genres of telling such as a legend or proverb (example: legend of *Ramphan*) that endorse, reinforce and reiterate traditional codes of behavior and collective ethos. By expressing the ethics of the Lotha tribe, Lotha folklore is used not only as a means of validating and justifying the cultural attributes of Lotha but also in harnessing history and historical events.

Although William Bascom speaks broadly on the functions of folklore, the function of each specific genre of folklore is complex and distinctive especially in the Lotha context. While the function of myth, folktale, proverb and song can be broadly categorized according to Bascom's classification, each of them in turn play a myriad of functions cutting across stylistics and content. However in the Lotha context, a genre wise analysis would rather be restricting as the lines between the genres are blurred and in its place exists, a mixed genre that defies western typological custom. Nonetheless, folktales in the Lotha community works in such a way that it shapes the cultural and collective imagination of the tribe, ensuring and reinforcing age old values and validating cultural tropes. Through its pedagogical role, it also ensures that conformity to moral and socially accepted cultural norms is maintained.

2.0 THE GRAMMAR OF THE FOLKTALE: IDENTIFIABLE CATEGORIES

In academic parlance, a folktale is usually understood as a traditional narrative that is told in the language of prose. A folktale does not belong to a single author and its point of origin is usually not specific. Hence, the folktale belongs to the "folk" – in most cases, identified as the community within which the folktale is being circulated. Folktales are usually narrated and operate somewhere between the emotive and the narrative and can be distinguished from genres like myths which provide information about the origin of the universe / man. These narratives play an important role in pedagogy because they help in developing empathy, model character traits, acquire lessons on decision making, appreciate tradition, study new ways of seeing a world different to theirs and discover a love of stories and inculcate the art of storytelling. Folktales, especially in preliterate communities help both children and adults differentiate characters, and aids in enhancing memory. While they may not contain a labyrinthine plot structure or contain sub-plots which is a deterministic quality of a written literary tradition, folktales, owing to their overt simple, fluid, oral and conversatory tone are crucial in helping to inculcate and pass on core moral values and character traits. In this sense, Lotha and Naga folktales serves to establish a credo that is truly local. The versions and variations of oral narratives reflect the oikotypification of a dominant framework of story structure that begins, ends and interjects in similar ways. Culturally, they also have the responsibility to carry history and tradition forward, and to reinforce cultural values. This quality of indigenous folktales beehoves on the scholar to ensure that a multifaceted study is

undertaken in order to better understand and interpret the oral tradition in the context of its plurality.

In preliterate communities, folktales were often use to mirror situations or events that occurred within the community. Disputes were retold through folk narratives and it was hoped that the erring person would recognize the situation and the parallels drawn with his own situation with that of the story. As folktales passed down from generation to generation via word of mouth, they also helped in modeling behavioural traits such as trust, care, empathy, resourcefulness etc and imbibe qualities of effective decision-making. Very often in folktales, we encounter conflicts that require a person to make crucial decisions in order to reach a resolution. The decision making dilemma shows that it is important to make responsible decisions otherwise it will result in negative consequences.

Folktales are mostly fictional or quasi-fictional. They are crucial in transmitting specific cultural ideas and most importantly administering caution against wrongful behavior. The most common type of folktales as listed in the 1910 Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson index encapsulate humourous anecdotes which deal with wit, stupidity or cleverness, among other types. “Humorous anecdotes often use stereotypes to ridicule broad classes of people: numskulls, con artists and their dupes, unfaithful and otherwise disagreeable spouses, or ungodly parsons” (McCormick, 558). Simon J Bronner states that joking was a serious matter. By applying a Freudian analysis, he studies Alan Dundes’s work in “The Meaning of Folklore” where he is of the opinion that jokes can be studied as a veil through which sexual or scatological anxieties are channeled. By looking at jokes contextually, folklore bestows a “veil” (4) for social concerns and allows people to behave and speak out in ways that would otherwise be deemed inappropriate in everyday life.

> Animal tales are much like anecdotes in that they tell of tricksters and their victims. These tales, which are generally satirical, are popular throughout the world, but in different cultures, they tend to follow different patterns. The animals talk and act like humans, and some of the tales correspond exactly to anecdotes with human agents… Animal tales make use of stock characters, and different animals assume some of the same roles: the fox, the jackal, the monkey, or the coyote is clever, as are the rabbit and the hare; the bear, the wolf, or even the human is stupid. Other objects, even inanimate ones, occasionally appear as folktale characters (McCormick, 559).

Tall tales is another category that was widely found in Europe, Middle-East and India. Tall tales are defined as, “anecdotes that begin realistically but culminate in the incredible. When

they are performed, the narrator takes the role of the con artist, and the audience becomes the dupe" (McCormick 559). Another category is formula tales which rely on a set oral formulaic structure, and honed taking young adults into consideration and the subject matter can contain anything between the profoundly sacred or the silly. Legends and myths are often attached or categorized as and with the study of folktales. However, typically, legends are stories that have resonance with a recent past, and have a degree of truth or social reality in them. Legends talk about real-life figures while myths are mostly based on the ancient past carrying etiological and sacred reasoning. Myths are also coupled with folk beliefs which use these narrative expressions to legitimize their symbolic content.

According to Linda Degh,

> The folktale embodies the highly polished, artistic story genres that have a relatively consistent, finished form. Their origin, goals and themes on the other hand, are diverse. Like novels and short stories, their sophisticated counterparts, folktales are told primarily for entertainment although they may have secondary purposes… The tale, whether composed of one or many episodes, is always a well proportioned whole (Dorson, 64)

Linda Degh's essay, Folk Narratives, as elucidated in Richard Dorson's edited volume, "Folklore and Folk life " enumerates in detail the various types of folktales and their generic components. Before delving into a classification, Degh discusses the stable formulas which she identifies as "building blocks of the tale" (Dorson 60), which ultimately have a bearing on the composition and structure of the folktale. They are:

a) Types and motifs – motifs are defined as "the smallest unit within the narrative, out of which full fledged narratives are born" (Dorson, 60). Stith Thompson's motif-index points to the various ways in which the tale varies – especially the *incident, episode* and *motif sequence* (60).
b) Framework – the framework of the tale is inclusive of the introduction and the conclusion as well as the formulaic interjections used by the narrator during the process of narration (Dorson, 60). The framework details the elements that affect the telling of the tale, which includes personal intrusions by the teller which breaks the narrative, between the reality of the performance scene and the fantasy of the told narrative (Dorson, 61)
c) Figures of speech – refers to those words or phrases which are commonly employed "in the schematic description of heroes and anti-heroes, scenes of beauty and horror,

climaxes and turning points of the narrative" (Dorson, 61). The use of colours to indicate binaries like good/ bad or rich/ poor is one such instance.

d) Formulaic verbal sequences – which may be comprised of recurrent monologues by archetypal characters. Heroes turning into villains by using the appropriate verbal sequence while characters like numskulls are identified by their stupidity which is again, reflected in verbal sequences.

e) Repetition- Since some folktales are complex structures within themselves, the repetition of certain phrases, sequences or passages provides the narrator with a thread through which he can weave the fabric of his tale. This is reminiscent even in simple folktales.

These five features, ensure that the tale is a "well-balanced, perfectly tailored, and logical construction" (Dorson, 62). Degh maintains that essentially actors as well as actions are "represented symbolically", they have their "proper place", and the "tale events follow smoothly in their assigned sequence" (Dorson, 62). She further states that tales are "symbiotic", in that "they make sense only when they are juxtaposed." (Dorson, 62). Finally, she stresses on the importance of the audience, claiming that the "audience's familiarity with the tale and its desire to hear it repeatedly, are factors contributing both to the formulaic structure of the folktale and to its entertainment value." (Dorson, 62). As far as the purpose of the tale is concerned, McCormick and White states that its purpose "seems to be to permit the expression of a particular, interesting episode or motif" (562). They contend that, "traditional tales and episodes are combined in various ways. Many complex tale types are composed of a string of episodes that relate to a particular theme, such as persecution, separation and heroism" (561).

Linda Degh classifies oral folklore/ tales into two main categories:

a) COMPLEX TALES:

1) The most important among them being the *Marchen* (from the *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* written by Wilhelm and Jacob Grim in 1812), or the Magic Tale, which we understand today as the fairy tale/ the hero tale. The Aarne-Thompson index illustrates this typology in the following manner:

> Supernatural adversaries – Supernatural or Enchanted Husband (wife) or other relative – Supernatural Tasks – Supernatural Helpers – Magic Objects – Supernatural Power and Knowledge (Dorson, 62).

As seen from the above typology, the element of the supernatural plays an important role in such narratives, where an ordinary mortal has an encounter with the supernatural world directly or indirectly which renders him with supernatural qualities. Magic tales can be seen as a fantastical reflection of reality, a world to escape into, through which hidden desires and aggression are channelled out without the fear of social censure. Simultaneously, it can also be seen as a means of redressal for social injustice, and a treasurecove of history and historical processes. Degh maintains that the magic tale is also important in absorbing local folk beliefs. By imbibing them, the strange and fantastical world of the *Marchen* is brought close to the human world.

2) Religious Tales – The Religious Tale has its roots in Christian virtues and legends. The characters are either vicious, virtuous or supernatural beings and the demarcation between good and bad is clearly marked even as they act as opposing entities symbolised by Heaven and Hell. The Aarne-Thompson typology catalogs the religious tales into four groups.

> God Repays and Punishes- Truth Comes to Light- The Man in Heaven-The Man Promised to the Devil (Dorson, 66)

As seen from the above, the religious figures of God, Heaven, Truth as opposed to the Devil, Darkness and Hell is a recurrent motif in these kind of tales. The origin of Religious Tales can be traced back to the medieval church which adapted religious and didactic literary sources in order to harness moral lessons for religious education.

3) The Romantic Tale or Novella – In this category, the tales are more inclined and based on reality, although it follows a similar template to that of the *Marchen*. Here, the heroes represent simple people, who do not transgress human limitations and even "the antagonists are not demons and monsters but rather ruthless human characters whose cruelty has always a human motive" (Dorson 67). The themes of the RT are "more adventurous, pathetic and sentimental than wondrous" (Dorson 67). The Aarne-Thompson index catalogues the topics as follows:

> The Princess's Hand is Won- The Heroine Marries the Prince – Fidelity and Innocence – The Shrewish Wife Reformed – The Good Precepts – Clever Acts and Words- Tales of Fate- Robbers and Murderers (Dorson 67)

From the above typology, it is evident that there is a stress on wit, wisdom, endurance, trickery, much more than that of heroism (Dorson 67). Besides adventurous and amusing tales, the romantic tale also encapsulate stories of the "slandered, banished and innocent woman"

(Dorson 67) who is made to suffer in silence until her innocence is proven through revenge or through the unfolding of circumstances which are in her favour.

a) SIMPLE TALES:

1) Animal Tales – According to Degh, the animal tale is a primarily a short narrative with the animal behaving as the main protagonist of the story. Although they are animals, they are anthropomorphised to the extent that they show, speak and portray the same emotions like human beings. Even the style and structure of the plot corresponds to the human world. The Aarne-Thompson index classifies these tales according to the species:

> Wild Animals- Wild Animals and Domestic Animals- Man and Wild Animals- Domestic Animals- Birds- Fish- Other Animals and Objects (Dorson 68)

From the above classification, we can see that the connection between the animal world and the human world is intricate and correlated. Within a culture,

> the mono-episodic and independent stories become easily linked to each other, whereby clusters and even whole cycles tend to develop around certain animal heroes and their antagonists such as the fox versus wolf and bear, rabbit versus fox, and gazelle versus leopard (Dorson 68).

It can be said that the Lotha folktale corpus contains the highest number of animal tales. Almost every third tale collected during the field work constituted a reference to the animal or the animal world demonstrating the close kinship between man and the natural world symbolized by the animal. These negotiations become a way of engaging with diverse topics such as the Lotha view of ecology, understanding the mystical and the magical, as well as ecological ethics through the symbol of the animal.

2) Jokes and anecdotes – According to Linda Degh, the traditional joke, usually a statement used to elicit humour and amusement is reliant on a double meaning of words and context driven, in the sense that "it is not open and obvious to everyone" (69). Most of the time, the source of humour is based on the speech itself and how the joke is delivered (and not on the narrative). Any explanation of the joke derives it of the surprise in the punch line. According to Degh, "the joke deals with universal themes of uncommon occurrences in commonplace situations; it does not elaborate on the context, it is flexible and it travels speedily across

borders" (68). The anecdote on the other hand, is a brief and humourous experience characterising "a person, a memorable event, or a place" (70) and it is much more episodic than a full-fledged joke. Numskull stories and Tales of Lying both fall under this category. Numskull stories are often brief and reduced to a simile or a proverbial saying (70). Tales of Lying are closer to the Formula Tales.

Cathy Lynn Preston states that a joke is a form of a highly stylized play that conjures physical, visual and verbal frames of reference within the setting of a performance. According to her, jokes often circulate as an oral narrative, and "are invoked through some culturally agreed upon means as not being earnest or serious information-conveying modes of everyday communication" (750), echoing the words of anthropologist Mary Douglas who defined joke as a "symbolic joke of a social pattern" (750).

3) Formula Tales – are those tales that "include witty, gamelike forms with a brief narrative core" (Dorson, 70). In this kind of tales, there are stylistic devices that the narrator employs that ensures that the narrator gets an emotional response more than a focus on the content of the tale. The *cumulative* tale is one of the important tales under Formula Tales. Here, the narrative has a consummate core that must be repeated exactly, as a new actor (or an object) enters the tale (70). *Catch Tales* is another category of Formula Tales that entails a question that is ultimately rebuffed by an obvious answer. According to Degh (1960), "formula tales belong within the compass of the folktale and offer variable elements that skilled storytellers can adapt to given situations" (72).

The two types of tales (simple and complex) above constitute most of the tale types found in the Lotha corpus, except for the formula tale. The most common types of folktales found among Degh's typology was the localized versions of the animal tale (which in the Lotha context can be classified alongside plant tales, as they constitute the biospheric genre) and the romantic novella. Here, it is pertinent to point out that the similar to the folktales that today exist in what can be perceived as a fragmentary form, even the folk/ ancient poems have, through a process of cultural devolution, have started decaying and today, most of the ancient songs have lost their melody and remain today as ancient verses.

3.0 PROPPIAN MORPHOLOGY

Vladimir Propp's work "The Morphology of the Folktale", which was one of the defining works that emerged out of the Russian Formalist movement in literature in the early 20th century, analysed the genre of the heroic Russian tale by looking at the structural components on which the tales were framed. He was able to find altogether 31 Narratemes or elements that created the structure of the tale. He identified them with the use of specific symbols and their interpretative paradigm. They were:

1. Absentation β (beta): A member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced)

2. Interdiction γ (gamma): The hero is giving a warning such as ('don't go there', 'go to this place')

3. Violation δ (delta): The interdiction/warning is violated (villain/hostile force enters the tale)

4. Reconnaissance e (epsilon): The villain makes an attempt at (villain tries to find where the children/ prize are located or the victim questions the villain)

5. Delivery z (zeta) : The villain acquires information about the victim

6. Trickery h (eta): The villain or hostile force tries to lure the victim to a deception so that he can take possession of the victim/ belongings.

7. Complicity J (theta): Victim is persuaded by the deceptive words or act, and unknowingly aids the villain;

8. Lack and Villainy A: Villain harms a member of the protagonist's family either by means of abduction, theft of magical agent, etc while silmultaneously, a member of the hero's family or close circle lacks something or desires something (magical potion etc)

9. Mediation B: Misfortune or the specific lack is made known, (hero is dispatched, hears call for help, etc. Alternatively victimized hero is sent away, freed from imprisonment)

10. Beginning Counteraction C: The protagonist/ seeker/ hero decides to counter-act to the events

11. Departure of Hero ⇧: Hero leaves his home.

12. Test/ Challenge D : The Protagonist or the hero is made to undergo tests and challenges that will as part of him receiving some magical agent or helper (donor);

13. Reaction E: Hero reacts to actions of future donor. The reaction may elicit positive or negative results such as freeing a princess, defeating an adversary etc.

14. Provision of Receipt F: The protagonist acquires the use of a magical agent (could be an animal, an object or any other quality such as the transformation into an animal or plant.

15. Guidance G: The Hero is transferred (such as entering another kingdom or spatial transfer) or led to whereabouts of the object of his search
17. Branding J: The Hero is now given a mark, either by getting a scar in his body or he receives some a ring or an object that shows that he has wounded.
18. Defeat of Villian I: The hostile force and antagonist is defeated and victory has been achieved. The defeat can be through combat or contest.
19. Initial lack is liquidated K: Captive is freed, A dead person may be resuscitated
20. The return of the Hero ⇓: The protagonist comes back home or to his kingdom
21. Chase/ Pursuit Pr: A further drama takes place which sees the pursuer chase the Hero such as a beast trying to claw at a tree that the Hero is taking shelter in
22. Rescue from Pursuit Rs: The Hero is able to escape from the situation of chase where he is either carried away by a bird or through a rapid transformation
23. Hero reaches home/ another country but is unrecognized o
24. Unfounded Claims by a False Hero L: The hero may return home only to find that someone else has claimed his work such as a twin brother
25. Difficult task given to the Hero M: The hero undergoes several ordeals either by fire, food or drink, riddle solving or other tests
26. Task is Solved N
27. Recognition Q: Hero is finally recognized by virtue of his mark, scar or brand.
28. Villain is exposed Ex: Either the villain gives him away by virtue of his clumsiness or lies or other ways of exposure
29. Transfiguration of the Hero T: Either the hero is clothed in new robes or builds a new home
30. The Villain is punished U: Villain is killed, shot, banished from the scene
31. Wedding W: The hero is awarded with a kingdom or wife (spouse).

The above 31 narratemes that Propp details in his book correspond to the structure found in most Russian folktales. Additionally, he also identifies 8 dramatis personae.

1. Villain: character who is the antagonist against the hero.
2. Dispatcher: character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.
3. (magical) helper: helps the hero in the quest.
4. The princess or prize: the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfair evil, usually because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, thereby beating the villain.

5. Her father: gives the task to the hero, identifies the false hero, marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father cannot be clearly distinguished.
6. The donor: prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.
7. The hero or victim/seeker hero: reacts to the donor, weds the princess.
8. False hero: takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.

4.0 THE LOTHA FOLKTALE CORPUS AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL TRADITIONAL ENTITY:

One distinguishing feature of the Lotha and Naga tale type is that a significant amount of the corpus has been translated, preserved and adapted in written form that has in turn carved a Naga-specific vernacular of story-telling in the emerging literary scenario. The work of contemporary writers such as Easterine Kire and Avinuo Kire depart from this tradition of storytelling that imbue to their verse a richness of depth that is founded on indigenous story-telling. This is done by borrowing aesthetics of orality found in the Naga oral tradition such as interjections and inflections, vernacular words and idioms. The transition from the oral world of story-telling where unmediated performativity and narration played a role in disseminating stories into the written world where the relationship between the teller of stories and the reader was mediated through the written world also meant that the Naga mind and consciousness experienced a shift in the way thought reconfigured and structured the consciousness. For Walter J Ong (1982), the correlation between thought and writing is one that facilitates a continuity. He states that "Writing establishes in the text a line of continuity outside the mind" (39), while at the same time, forcing the mind to slow down and giving it an "opportunity to interfere with and reorganise its more normal, redundant processes" (39). As opined by Ong, the world of the oral is one that encourages and celebrates fluidity and fluency of thought and in their effort to structure knowledge, oral cultures "conceptualise and verbalise all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld" (42) and bring the objective world closer to the human experience. A culture in which writing exists however can afford to distance and "denature even the human, itemising such things" from the names of leaders or objects away from and out of the "human action context"(42). The Naga narrative culture, similar to most other cultures, have (for lack of a better word) evolved from a primary oral society, one in which no script, recording aids or any technology aided the existence of the word in a sudden movement to a written and chirographic and typographic tradition. In such a

case, one can see how the way in which Naga narrative culture exists within a multidimensional space where both oral, literal and mixed cultures intersect and correlate to each other. Each has an impact on the other and is able to change and amplify the other in ways one dimension cannot.

As far as the corpus of the Lotha oral narratives are concerned, the Lotha oral tradition encompass tales also constituting legends, proverbs and songs (ancient narrative verses that were sung and today classified as poems), and each of these categories diverge and connect with one other in myriad of ways that are underpinned by a shared contextual belief system. As far as the collection of data is concerned, it was found that the Lothas did not have any origin myth specific to the Lotha unlike the Aos, and additionally, did not have any epics or epic-length work in circulation. However, during fieldwork it was found that an epic once existed which was shared with the Ao tribe . The Ao informant stated that the name of the epic was called, "*Molung Mangtep*" in Ao meaning a story about love. It was believed that the song consisted of a number of stanzas with one Ao stanza followed by one Lotha stanza and so on.., to the breath of 16 stanzas. The reason for the loss of this epic was believed to be the notion that all those who could not complete singing all the stanzas would meet untimely deaths. Perhaps owing to this belief plus the fact that not many in the adjoining Lotha and Ao areas could not speak the other's language, the epic poem/song died over a period of time. Likewise and owing to its oral nature that relies on effective mnemonics, in the case of oral narratives as well, a significant decay from within has occurred which has led to the narratives accruing and shedding parts from the main body of the texts.

Today, there are numerous folktales, proverbs and sayings that are embedded within the culture and language of the Lotha. The folktales have a therapeutic, emotional, and cathartic usefulness as well as didactic functions. As fragmented as they may seem, the folk narratives are efficient in demonstrating in particular, the life system and beliefs of the Lothas, their allegiances to customary laws and kinship patterns and most importantly, the functioning of all these belief systems in rural and urban Nagaland.

The Lotha-Nagas are good narrators and story tellers. Prior to the advent of the literal (roman script), they had a rich tradition of storytelling as every clan and village had their repertoire of stories and tales which ultimately, over time, due to migration to towns and more exterior places, came to be classified under the banner of Lotha. Every oral expression with regard to the Lotha culture is a direct consequence of their experiences in their community life. The narrators of these tales are the everyday men and women whose understanding of the

norms, values, beliefs and customary law are consciously and subconsciously reflected in the narratives. Although traditionally, it was the men who were the storytellers and knowledge keepers of the community as more men were inducted and held important positions in the patriarchal order of Naga society. Even till today, when we look at Naga society in terms of availing the expertise of traditional knowledge, it is always the men who are the *bonafide* representatives. The healers and practitioners of traditional medicine are also predominantly male. The number of female healers to men healers is drastically disproportionate. Today, the folktales are narrated by both men and women, however, during fieldwork when the researcher had gone to the villages to enquire about informants, she was directed mostly to male knowledge keepers. The act of narration in the traditional sense is today, slowly dying. Very few of the folktales remain in circulation among the people in terms of their usage and applicability especially after the conversion to Christianity during the 1920s on ward. With the advent of the roman script as Christianity fostered in modern education, folktales were transferred into the medium of published book and they became the means of 'containing' culture. As already indicated, this is a facet not only of the Lotha Nagas but almost all the tribes in the North East of India.

The folktales below of the Lothas, collected on a field trip to different parts of the Lotha country and meetings with old folk, show how the life system and beliefs of the Lothas and their allegiances to customary laws and kinship patterns become propagators of Lotha identity both in rural and urban Nagaland. As Bascom has elucidated, folktales are "prose narratives… regarded as fiction." These folktales are narratives in themselves, as Ruth Benedict says, "Narrative can be seen not just a specific genre or work, but as a theme running through many forms, non-verbal as well as verbal. This too, can be studied in its own right, irrespective of conventional genre classification." (Benedict, 144) The folktales collected for this thesis came mostly from meetings with old people who have been personally handed down by word of mouth. These stories appear simple in their plot and characterisation and do not use formulaic frames in their narration. They are almost indicative of parables, usually containing life lessons and warnings to children, women and young folk regarding the different kinds of people one meets in life coupled with the folk beliefs of the Lothas. Many of these folktales have variations and versions according to the teller of the stories as there is no fixed template through which oral literature of this sort is disseminated. In their dissemination, folktales receive new variations and versions, and these versions and variations in oral literature, become part and parcel of the community's folklore.

4.1.Prototypes and Proppian Approximates:

A number of commonly available prototypes have been identified that are symptomatic of Lotha folktales. The prototypes are:

a) TRICKSTER TYPE TALES:

Narrative 10: *Apvuho* and *Mesao*

Apvuho and Mesao were friends. One was a notorious lad and the other, a simpleton. One day, they decided to cultivate rice together, dividing the work of weeding and other necessary field work among themselves. When the time for harvest came, Apvuho decided to harvest the upper parts of the plant allowing Mesao to harvest the lower parts. Mesao could harvest only the stem. Apvuho dried the rice and ate from the flavourful new rice while Mesao and his children had to make do with the hard stalk. From that day on, Mesao and Apvuho stopped cultivating rice together. Apvuho felt humiliated by Mesao's attitude and one day when he was eating meat, Mesao asked him, "Where did you get such good meat?". Already angry with him, Apvuho replied, "When a cow defacates from its vent, put your hand inside and you will get good meat." The simpleton Mesao went to the field and did exactly that to the cow to disastrous results as the cow nearly killed Mesao because it was traumatised. Mesao held on to a strong creeper and was at last, saved.

(Yanbeni, interview)

Motif Index combination:

H900-H999: Assignment and performance of tasks
J1700-J1749: Fools (general)
J2300-J2349: Gullible Fools
W100—W199. Unfavorable traits of character

Narrative 11: *Apvuho* and the children

Apvuho's misadventures and notorious tricks were famous through the Kyong country. Some people stopped him from entering their villages owing to the harm and destruction they had felt during their previous encounters. Now Apvuho wanted to enter a village, but waited inside the hollow of a big tree on the fringes of the village. When he felt that the villagers had gone for work in the fields, he quietly entered the village. Since he was hungry, he chased the children around the village, and ate their lunches. This went on for a few days. The children complained to their parents that a stranger was snatching their lunches and causing havoc during the time that they were left in the village. The parents decided to investigate this matter. One day, they pretended to go to the field but hid and watched. Apvuho thinking that the parents had again gone to the field, came out of his hiding place but the parents caught him. He was punished and asked to do 10 days of community service and sent off with a thrashing and a severe warning.

(Yanbeni, interview)

Motif Index combination:

P600—P699. Customs
P700—P799. Society — miscellaneous motifs
Q200—Q399. Deeds punished
Q400—Q599. Kinds of punishment

Narrative 12: *Apvuho* and the loving couple

There lived a loving and well-off couple in a village long time ago. Even though there were many efforts to bring discord between them, all failed. The couple rightfully earned the love and respect of the villagers as they showed that nothing could fail to bring discord between them. When Apvuho passed by this village, people remarked, "Although this is a well-known notorious fellow, even he will not succeed in bringing mistrust between this couple." Some jealous of their love even provoked Apvuho. Challenged by this, Apvuho went to the house of the couple and shouted, "Dear sister-in-law, please come out once." When she appeared, he told her, "Don't forget what we had discussed and planned yesterday" to her utter puzzlement, thus, quickly slipping away before she replied and before her husband appeared. She was utterly confused as she had never met Apvuho before. Her husband asked her, "what did he tell you?" The wife replied curtly that she didn't understand what he was talking about. Miffed with the curt reply, her husband became angry and started shouting, "how dare you lie to me that you don't understand while something has already been planned." They quarrelled on and her husband beat her and sent her away.

(Mhalo, interview)

Motif Index combination:

H300—H499. Marriage tests
H500—H529. Test of cleverness or ability
H1550—H1569. Tests of character
J2300—J2349. Gullible fools
K800—K999. Fatal deception
K1700—K1799. Deception through bluffing
Q200—Q399. Deeds punished
Q400—Q599. Kinds of punishment

Narrative 13: *Apvuho* and the witty old widow

The villagers of Apvuho's village were tired of his never-ending pranks and mischievous ways through which many had been troubled and traumatised. The villagers wanted to exact revenge on Apvuho so they came up with an elaborate scheme when the villagers had cleared the jungle land and was time to burn the clearings for cultivation. The villagers requested Apvuho to climb up the tall trees and pollard them which the villagers couldn't. After chopping down some branches, he climbed down shouting that the machete had loosened and gone off its wooden handle, while the truth was that he would dig a hole in the ground when he climbed down. Likewise, he continued until he built a hole enough for one person to take shelter. Now Apvuho had already sensed that there was some plan to burn him along with the jungle. While Apvuho was still on top of a tree, the villagers set fire to the clearings and left him by himself. He climbed down and tucked himself into the hole he had dug and covered it with a rock and

kept himself safe. After the fire, he got out and saw that there was a deer that had also died in the fire. Taking its entrails, he spread them over himself. When the villagers came, some of them took pity on Apvuho thinking that he was dead, while some said that it was better that he had died. In the evening, he came to the village and distributed the carcass (meat) to the people who sympathised and bones to the people who spoke against him.
After a few days lapsed, when he was sure that the villagers had eaten the meat he had given, he went around asking for paddy in return of the meat (as was Lotha custom). Finally he came by a widow's hut who didn't consume the meat like the rest of the villagers. When he asked her for paddy, she returned the meat (now foul smelling) to him. Apvuho was shocked at the audacity of the woman's wit and bewildered, snatched a stick and beat the woman on her knees cursing after her for outsmarting him, while the widow also shouted expletives at him.

(Mhalo, interview)

Motif Index combination

J500—J599.Prudence and discretion
J600—J799.Forethought
J800—J849.Adaptability
J2300—J2349. Gullible fools
K1700—K1799. Deception through bluffing
P300—P399. Other social relationships
Q10—Q99. Deeds rewarded

Narrative 14: *Apvuho* and the Assamese couple

Apvuho was becoming unbearably notorious for the people of his village. Now the people conspired many times to end his life. Because of his misdeeds, he had caused much hostility among people as well as between one village and another. One day the council decided that they would bury Apvuho alive as he deserved to die in that manner. Terrified, Apvuho pleaded, "If you want me to die, I understand but please do not bury me alive. Instead please put me in a drum with some fire, bitter gourd, soyabean, bamboo shoot, chilly, ginger and a rooster and cast me into the river from where I will float and eventually die". The elders of the village thought about it and decided to grant him this last wish and carried out the request.
The canoe floated downstream slowly, and each day Apvuho would see through a small opening of the drum and view the scene. One day he saw an old Assamese couple working on their field by the riverbank. The old couple pulled the canoe towards them and opened the drum only to see Apvuho inside. Apvuho, gathering his wits about him, said quickly "I have come from the hills as a representative to open trade and commerce with you brothers of the plains."
Over time, Apvuho lived with the old couple and even learnt their language. He worked with them on the field. One day Apvuho said, "Father, I am thirsty, please give me some water". The old man replied, "go and ask your mother". Apvuho went to the woman and said, "Mother, father has asked you to give me the pot of money". Puzzled, the woman called out to the husband, "Did you ask me to give him?" to which the old man replied, "Yes". So, the woman took the pot of money and gave it to Apvuho.
As he was running away with the loot, the darkness of the night descended on him. Scared of the dark and also from the wrath of the villagers who were chasing after him, he climbed up a Kapok tree and held on to the tree. It is believed that Apvuho died holding the Kapok tree. And till today it is believed in Lotha folklore that if the Kapok tree is cut, something like intestines oozes out of the tree, believed to be Apvuho's intestine.

(Mhalo, interview)

Motif Index Combination:

J800—J849.Adaptability
J850—J899.Consolation in misfortune
J1110—J1129. Clever persons
J2300—J2349.Gullible fools
K300—K499. Thefts and cheats
K1700—K1799.Deception through bluffing
K1800—K1899.Deception by disguise or illusion
Q200—Q399. Deeds punished
R200—R299. Escapes and pursuits
D400—D499. Other forms of transformation

The above tales of *Apvuho* (handpicked from the available corpus to demonstrate the structural framework) illustrates the use of anecdotes in Lotha society. Structurally, they begin with opening scenes that begin *in medias res* implying that the initial situation will either be revealed in the course of the story or is assumed already known by the listener (such as in narrative 4 and 5), where the narration begins with how *Apvuho* had been creating chaos in the village for a long time. This also shows how the Trickster tale was a popular genre in the narrative epistemology of the Lothas, that any introductory or prefatory element has been removed in the telling of his stories. Because of its succinct story plot and anecdotal characterization, the Trickster tales in the Lotha Corpus are not able to fulfill all the criteria of the Proppian paradigm but its own structural formulae follows the elements. Each of the tales is a mono-episodic narrative and when woven together, read as a cluster of interlinked stories that have developed around the character of *Apvuho*. The motif index shows that certain motifs play a recurrent role in facilitating the movement of the story, such as deception being the key recurring motif.

Dramatis Personae in the Lotha Trickster Tales:

1) Anti-Hero: Who is the embodiment of trickery and villainy but also the protagonist of the story. At times, he is his own downfall.

2) Adversary: The trickster's anti-thesis, but not specifically a hero. In the case of Lotha, it could be a community, an object, a person.

3) Challenger: The one who sets a task to the Trickster.

4) Victim 1: Helpless children, villagers, community, parents, animals

5) Victim 2: Turns aggressor and executes punishment on victim 1

The narrateme elements/spheres of action of the Lotha trickster tales goes as follows:

1) Prefatory narration: based on assumptions that the listener has previously either heard of the trickster's escapades. Provides contextual background to the main character

2) Initial action: A decision is made to do something about the situation/ Schemes are construed/ People stopped him from entering village

3) Interdiction γ (gamma): The trickster is given a warning such as ('don't go there', 'go to this place')

4) Violation δ(delta): The interdiction/warning is violated (villain/hostile force enters the tale)

5) Absentation β (beta): A member of a family leaves home/ villagers go to the field/

6) Confusion/ Trickery: The physical and emotion act of tricking and thereby creating chaos takes place

7) Complicity J (theta): Victim is persuaded by the words or act, and unwittingly serves the villain's purpose

8) Villain is exposed Ex: Villagers find out what new mischief he has done

9) Branding J: Either the protagonist is now given a mark/ scar by beating, or the victim 2 exacts punishment to victim 1 through physical beating

10) Transfiguration/ Transformation of the Trickster T

The Lotha Trickster tale follows this dominant narrateme linear structure. However, this does not mean that the structure is rigid. Owing to its oral nature, the narrative structure has a tendency to orient itself with the specific narrative styles that the teller of the story uses and is thus incumbent on the performer's narrative stylistics, allowing the narratemes to be shifted across the spheres of action, but they more or less follow this dominant type. Although there is transformation in the trickster tales, they do not conform to the metamorphoic quality that is there in the tales such as the *novella* where the shapeshifting is much more pronounced as an individual shapes shifts into another entity. In the trickster tale however, the transformation is more in the lines of a "merge", wherein the trickster's physicality is coalesced with another entity such as a tree.

4.2 TRANSFORMATION/SHAPE SHIFTING TALES/THERIANTHROPY:

Narrative 15: The Wax Girl (Version 1) / Era Loroe motsü

Once upon a time, there lived a very beautiful girl. She was so beautiful that men often peeped through walls to get glimpses of her, and when she spoke they were barely able to converse with her, owing to her great beauty. She would just smile at them and pass by them. Over time, she became very lonely. There was a quiet young, hardworking man in the village, who was the only male able to converse with her. Seeing his friends in their bewilderment, he decided to go for her. One day he went to her house casually, and as he spoke to her parents, they liked his character and temperament. Casually, he diverted his attention to the girl and asked for her hand in marriage. Now the parents withdrew and there was an awkward silence. The girl blushed and although he was not the type of man that she desired, she liked his hardworking nature and his wisdom, and so she agreed to marry him.

As per the custom of the Lothas, the young man went to serve at his father-in-laws house for a few years. When both the families came to discuss the impending betrothal, the girls father said, "You have proved yourself by serving us well for the past few years. But you have to promise us, that if we give our daughter's hand in marriage, you will not make her go to the field and till the land neither will she be sent to gather firewood or work in sunlight." The young man agreed and they were married.

Years went by and the young man kept the promise that he had made to his father-in-law. One year, the young man cultivated a very fertile piece of land and reaped such an abundant harvest that it became the talk to the village. Everyone raved about how he had worked and that his field was the best in all. The wife became curious and wanted to see for herself and begged her husband persistently to take her there. Tired of her incessant nagging, the husband decided finally to take her at the break of dawn.

The husband led her on to a huge rock outside their field hut and told her not to go anywhere but to stay put while he gathered weeds from the field. He also told her to run into the shack if the sun breaks through the clouds and shines directly. The wife stood on the rock, so pleased watching her husband work that she did not realize when the clouds broke apart and the sun shone directly. The wax lady had melted.

When the husband felt that it had become unusually quiet at her end of the field, he went to check on her but alas! She had completely melted on the rock. Horrified and shell shocked, the husband went running to his in-law's house and narrated the story to her parents. Her father cried out, "Did you touch any of the ornaments she wore after she melted?" to which her husband said, "No". Heaving a sigh of relief at this, the father in law advised the husband to go to the field the next day before sunrise and cover the rock on which she melted with leaves and to wait and watch. He also firmly warned him not to touch anything that belonged to her.

The next day, before dawn the worried husband went to the field and covered the area on which she had melted with leaves. As the sun rose, he saw bees come in from all directions onto the rock, hovering as if they were making a bee hive. Against that rush of bees, he saw his wife waking up and stretching her arms out as people are wont to do in the morning. The wife saw that the husband had a peculiar look on his face, so she asked him what it was that he was looking in bewilderment. But the husband just grinned and took her back home before the sun rose any higher.

Motif Index combination:

D400—D499. Other forms of transformation
F600—F699. Persons with extraordinary powers
H300—H499. Marriage tests
H900—H999. Assignment and performance of tasks
T0—T99. Love

Narrative 16: The Wax Girl (Version 2) / Era Loroe motsü

There was a wax girl by the name of Yensali Ezung who lived in Lümkhümchung. She was such a beautiful and delicate woman and got the name of the wax girl. How this name came to be is still not very clear. But even though she was virtuous and beautiful and men came to ask for her hand, her father always refused to give her hand in marriage. Now in the village, there lived a smart man Tsüngsotsü Shitiri, and he also came to ask for her hand in marriage. Seeing that he was one of the most wanted bachelors of the village, the father felt he could no longer say no as he had a good proposal and Yensali was also getting on in age. He agreed to the marriage on the grounds that his daughter was never to step foot in direct sunlight, collect firewood or go to the field as she would melt because she was made of wax. Tsüngsotsü agreed on these terms. As the years went on, Tsüngsotsü made sure to keep his wife sheltered and safe, not allowing her to step into the sun. But often, Yensali would hear of the great and fruitful fields of her husband and she often longed to visit her husband's great fields. So one early morning Tsüngsotsü led Yensali to his fields firmly telling her not to expose herself to the sun and keep herself shielded at all times. But as the hours went on, Yensali was enjoying her escapade to the fields so much that she forgot when the sun rays came directly above her and she melted on the stone. All that remained of her were her bangles and necklace. Meanwhile Tsüngsotsü felt that his wife had been eerily unresponsive so he turned to look at her only to see that she had melted on the stone. Panicked and not knowing what to do, he ran to his father-in-law's home to seek help. In response to this, his father-in-law asked him if he had touched any part of her after she melted, to which he said no. Then his father-in-law told him to go early to the field the next day before sunrise and cover her melted body with leaves. Tsüngsotsü did as he was told and as he stood watching, he saw that the form of Yensali arising from the melted wax. After this, Yensali seemed oblivious to what happened around her so Tsüngsotsü took her home and ensured she was always safe.
In the year that followed, Yensali became a mother to two boys, Chümpomongo (named so as their father was always in the Chumpo) and Shishanga (because their father religiously followed all the requisite rituals - Eshishanga - and feasts of the Lothas.

Motif Index combination:
D400—D499. Other forms of transformation
F600—F699. Persons with extraordinary powers
H300—H499. Marriage tests
H900—H999. Assignment and performance of tasks
T0—T99. Love
P600—P699. Customs

Narrative 17: *Lijao's* Daughter

Once upon a time, wild pigs entered a man's field and they foraged through the night damaging the crops badly. Next morning, the owner came and saw the damage done to his crops by the pigs. He went looking for the pigs, found them and wounded one with his spear. As blood

dripped from the wound, the man easily tracked the pigs and reached an unknown land and entered the house of a man called Lijao who was a fierce man possessing magical powers by which he could turn into a tiger and devour humans. There, he saw two girls tending to the pig that he had wounded. He came across Lijao who was shocked to see a man in that part of the forest. When the latter asked him what he was doing, he replied quickly, "I have heard that there are two beautiful girls around this place. I came to take one as a wife." Lijao replied, "Today is not a good day for that. Come another time." By the time the man returned after a few days, he had dressed his slave girl in his daughters ornaments and clothes while his daughter was clothed in rags. The young lad however saw through that and told Lijao that he loved his daughter only and would not take another woman for his wife. To this, Lijao agreed on the condition that if he is able to pass the tasks that Lijao sets before him, he will hand over his daughter to him. His daughter, sensing her fathers motives confided to her future husband telling him to tell her the tasks that her father challenges him with as she could help him out.

The first task that Lijao asked the man was to gather thorny palm leaves for making houses but the leaves should be brought without a single lead being torn and without a single scratch on his body. The girl advised him to gather the leaves with caution and roll them into a tight bundle. When Lijao saw the bundle, he exclaimed that it was not enough but when he opened, the palm leaves covered the expanse of his house. Although the man had passed the test, Lijao still did not allow his daughter to get married to him and gave some excuse or the other. After a few days, Lijao told the man, "If you are able to catch and tie up one of my pigs, I will give my daughter to you" giving him an un-split cane. He was determined and stalked the pig and when the pig came near, he launched at the pig and pinned the pig down with his weight, taking the strips of cane and tied the pig. Lijao was pleased to see that the task was done and gave his blessings.

After their marriage, the couple was happy but ultimately the girl became very unhealthy as she was deprived of the human meat that she used to take in her fathers house. The husband was worried as she was grew worse day to day. One day when the husband asked what he could do for her, she said, "Please go to my fathers house and bring me a parcel of meat wrapped in leaves. But do NOT open the parcel to see inside." When he reached and she had eaten the food, he could see a remarkable change in her demeanour and health. However after sometime, again she relapsed into weakness. This time when he went to get the food from her fathers house, he was going to open the packet but Lijao, sensing his intention had sent a bird that rattled "If you open I will tell father" repeatedly. When he reached his house, he gave the meat to his wife and on the pretext of going to a neighbours house he went to the back of the house and peeped through the cracks. He saw his wife eat human fingers and toes, after lightly roasting them over the fire. He felt disgusted and repulsed.

Later he went to his wife and asked her what it was that she had eaten. The wife replied that it was better if he did not ask her as there would be consequences that will be dangerous. The husband persisted, so the wife said, "I will turn into a tiger after I tell you so you must be careful to cover me with a bamboo basket or else I might even kill and eat you. Inside the parcel of leaves were human flesh". At these words, the woman turned into a tiger so quickly that her husband could not cover her with a basket so she caught him and ate him.

(Zanbeni, interview)

Motif Index combination

D100—D199. Transformation: man to animal
H300—H499. Marriage tests
H1550—H1569.Tests of character

K800—K999. Fatal deception
T200—T299. Married life

The folktales illustrated above behave as social commentaries on the agency of women in Lotha society an can be read as when examining this story more closely, one finds a pattern that evolves slowly: the shape-shifter character is at once both fragile, vulnerable and at the same time potentially demonic and destructive. It portrays the woman as an entity that is capable of being duplicitous and untrue to herself and her husband, whether she is conscious of her double nature or not. In this way, the shape-shifter (in this case the female shape-shifter) becomes a metaphor for instability and ambiguity, where the woman inhabits a place of "neither here, neither there" and remains an ambivalent character prone to periodic changes of moods spurred by circumstances that is controlled by male agency. In this configuration, the male figures emerge as agents of redress, perpetrators of order and stability and quite significantly as symbols of heroic heteronormativity culled from a Naga brand of patriarchy.

The structure of the folktales in this category begins with an exposition that shows the introduction of a beautiful woman who is although well accomplished, not complete, beginning with a lacunae. The hero and the heroine find some resolution in marriage, but the resolution is further followed by another bigger challenge, as rules (warnings) are bent to allow the movement of the plot. The challenge is met with a calamity as the heroine is obliterated (for a brief moment). The supporting characters come to play as the hero seeks help from the supporting characters who provide him with the solution. The hero obeys the advice, thereby undoing what he had done (disobedience/ violation) and the hero and heroine are united.

This folktale is one that was used for the dual purposes of entertainment and teaching. It teaches that women need to be careful before they venture out into the outside world of men and beasts, while also metaphorically stating that what one sees on the surface is not always what it is. It also works as a warning to people who do not heed their parent's warnings about life and dangers. The folktale illustrates the rescue of a wife/betrothed from an other/magical world, and the bringing back of the female figure back into the normal human world. The story is replete with elements that are used on a daily basis in Lotha household. Aromatic leaves are usually consumed along with rice and meat on a daily basis and also used for medicinal purposes for cuts and burns. The use of a leaf in order to bring the melted woman back to life reflects a freshness and a newness that is also hopeful. The woman returning back to life indicates a circularity of life, death and rejuvenation. She is rejuvenated among the bees, thereby indicating that she is symbolically a queen bee. The heroine's beauty is radiant which

is why men peeped through holes to get glimpses of her. Much like her beauty, even the sun is radiant. She is compared to honey, which is sweet when it is accessible.

Exposition:

Dramatis Personae:

1. Protagonist/ Hero: The main character of the story, usually a heroic male

2. The Father – the one who sets the task, functions as a consultant to the Hero, guiding and testing him.

3. Heroine/ Princess/ Prize

4. Helper – This function is enacted by the Father or the Helper, either by providing hints or solutions to the problems

Similar to Proppian study, in which the function of the Princess and the Father are not clearly distinguished from each other as they aid the development of the narrative by acting as helpers. The tales above correspond to the Novella type in the mixed with elements of the *marchen* (magic tale). The main action of the tale takes place away from the spatial territory of the protagonist thereby illustrating their "otherness".

Identifiable Narratemes or spheres of action:

1. Trespass/ intrusion into another spatial frontier (where the main action/drama takes place). This is done either by introducing the space or indirectly referring to it

2. Lack is introduced A: Where a member of the family, victim, protagonist is seen to desire something, or lacking in some aspect.

3. Mediation B: Misfortune or the specific lack is made known to the protagonist

4. Test/ Challenge D : The Protagonist or the hero is made to undergo tests and challenges that will as part of him receiving some magical agent or helper (donor);

5. Task is Solved N

6. Initial lack is liquidated K: Marriage takes place/ union/ engagement

7. Interdiction is issued: The hero is made aware of a potentially dangerous situation and warning is issued

8. Interdiction is violated d: Driven out of curiousity, or coaxed by victim, the protagonist disobeys the strict warning

9. Transfiguration: In the shapeshifting tales, the transfiguration is more in the lines of a transmogrification as there is an undesirous change in demeanour

10. Hero returns to initial situation where he looks for answers to undo the transfiguration

11. Hero receives guidance and reprimand

12. Final Resolution is achieved.

4.3 LEGENDS

NARRATIVE 18: The Legend of *Ramphan*

When we were living at Tiyi Lungchum, there used to be a tiger that used to roam around the village and caused them much havoc, fear and loss. People lived in perpetual fear of this strong and ferocious animal. One day it killed nine people, and among the nine was a man called Ramphan's wife who was pregnant at the time. After this episode, the villagers got together and felt it was best to abandon the village once and for all, otherwise who knew, they too would fall prey to the tiger's hunger. Unable to come to terms with the untimely death of his wife and unborn child, Ramphan decided to go and kill the tiger himself, as he felt, he now had nothing to lose. To do this, he stuck a thin slice of bamboo on each of his fingers and laid down among the corpses of the nine dead people, armed only with a dao. Ramphan waited and waited. In the evening, as expected the tiger came and boasting to himself, went around the corpses, delightfully recounting how he had killed each person.

The tiger went on 'this one I killed when he went to collect firewood', 'this one I killed when she was going to the field', as he went over all his kills. Finally, when he came to Ramphan he could not remember the manner in which he thought Ramphan was killed so he kept him aside, and went to sleep, thinking he was also a dead body. After sometime had passed, Ramphan decided to put his plan to action. He began snapping the pieces of bamboo that he had stuck on his fingers to see if the tiger was asleep or not.

At he went on snapping, the tiger would move his ears whenever he heard the sound of the bamboo snap, which indicated that he had not yet gone to deep sleep. However, as the last piece of bamboo was snapped, the tiger the tiger did not prick its ears up, and Ramphan read this as a sign that he could now execute his plan. Ramphan got up and in the stealth of night, chopped off the tiger's head with his dao. He ran outside with the tiger's head and screamed a warrior's shout declaring that a head was taken. By then however, his village folk were deserting the village so he called on them not to desert the village but when he reached the village premises, he realised it was too late. The villagers had already moved on without him and his attempts to make them stay back in Tiyi had failed. Dejected, he ran after them and he saw that they villagers had sprinkled rice husk as a trail for Ramphan to follow them. As he followed the trail, he met a leper woman whose name was Mangtsilo. When she met him, she told him that a poisonous snake had told her "snake plant, snake plant" and moved around her leg, to which Ramphan said that that was the way in which she would be healed and told her to make a paste of the snake plant and apply it in those areas of her body where her leprosy had touched. As she did so, her leprosy was cured. Slowly, they fell in love and eventually Ramphan took Mangtsilo as his wife.

One fateful day, as Mangtsilo was working around the premsies of their home, Mangtsilo's brothers were also accidentally spinning tops with Ramphan's servants when one of her

brothers felt a tinge of recognition as if she was the long lost sister of their home. That evening, he told his parents that he saw someone who resembled his sister. Although at first, they did not believe him, they eventually came around to the idea and decided to see for themselves. The boys took the parents to where they last spotted Mangtsilo and they realised it was indeed their lost daughter. Seeing that she was now a wife to Ramphan, the family asked him for hanlam as was the custom of the Lothas. As per custom, he also had to serve in the house of his in-laws for a few seasons before claiming Mangtsilo as his bride but due to their unsual circumstance, they could not do so. In return, Ramphan also asked Mangtsilo's parents for a marriage feast at their place. Seeing that they were now in a fix, Mangtsilo's parents simply asked Ramphan for a token gift of handmade bamboo spoon and rice stirrer which Ramphan willing did, so that they could consider that as work done for the hand of Mangtsilo. Legend says that it was because of this small tokenistic work done that Ramphan and Mangtsilo were only able to birth two children, one daughter and one son.

*(*Wondango, interview)

Motif Index combination

H0—H199. Identity tests: recognition
H300—H499. Marriage tests
H500—H529. Test of cleverness or ability
H1400—H1449.Tests of fear
H1450—H1499.Tests of vigilance
H1500—H1549.Tests of endurance and power of survival
H1550—H1569.Tests of character
J850—J899.Consolation in misfortune
P600—P699.Customs
T0—T99. Love
T500—T599. Conception and birth
Z200—Z299. Heroes

Dramatis Personae:

Protagonist/ The Hero: The character around whom the narrative is woven

The villain: In this case, the tiger who terrorises the village

Helper: helps the hero in his journey of life

Princess/ Prize: Here, represented by his wife Mangtsilo. She also plays the role of the donor.

Her father: In the Lotha legend, the father is also the validator of the marriage

Exposition

1. One of the members of the family absents himself from home (Definition: absentation. Designation: ß)

a. An intensified form of absentation is represented by death of parents ($ß_2$)

2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero

a. An inverted form of interdiction is represented by order or suggestion (y_2)

3. The interdiction is violated (Definition: violation. Designation:)

4. The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family (Definition: villainy. Designation: A)

5. Misfortune or lack is made known, 'the hero is approached with a request or command, he is allowed to go or he is dispatched'. (Definition: mediation, the connective incident. Designation: ß)

a. Misfortune is announced ($ß_4$) – Death of the villagers

6. The hero leaves home (Definition: departure. Designation:)

7. The task is resolved (Definition: solution. Designation: N)

8. The hero returns (Definition: return. Designation:)

9. The hero is transferred, delivered or led to the whereabouts of an object of search (Designation: G)

a. The route is shown to him (G4)

b. He follows bloody tracks (G6)

11. The hero acquires the use of a magical agent (Definition: provision or receipt of a magical agent. Designation: F)

a. The agent is pointed out (F2)

b. The agent suddenly appears of its own accords (F6)

12. The hero is given a new appearance (Definition: transfiguration. Designation: T)

a. A new appearance is directly effected by means of magical action of the helper (T1)

13. The hero is married and ascends the throne (Definition: wedding. Designation: W)

14. Difficult task given to the Hero M:

15. Task is Solved N

16. The hero is recognised (Definition: recognition. Designation: Q)

In the study of folklore, the genre of legend is studied alongside the *Marchen.* As it stands in folklore scholarship, "what is unlike the *Marchen* is the legend" (ibid). Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's definition of legend emphasies that the legend is a "localised, down-to-earth" tale with a "historic validity" (ibid, p. 73). Degh (2010) in "Folklore – An Encyclopaedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art" defines the folk-legend thus:

> The folk legend, sharing traditional elements with the religious and heroic legend, has been defined by folklorists as one of the folklore genres. As a short, oral prose narrative, created by people and transmitted orally from generation to generation, it has been characterised as a story that treats its unusual, extranormal, metaphysical, or

> supernatural topics from the vantage point of the real world of its tellers and audiences. Bearers of legend tradition identify the legend in their native terminology as a "true story", "an account", "what is being told", "something passed around", "a saying", "a chronicle", or "a history" (773)

In "Folklore and Folklife", Degh (1960) states that the narrative of the legend, is not for the purposes of entertainment but for educative purposes. It is said as information about certain facts, or to arm them against any dangers that are there within a specific cultural environment (73). Legends usually contain a fragmented structure, with a prominent dramatis personae. Folklorists identified three kinds of legends:

a) etiological and eschatological legends – which include stories that run like explanations of creation, origin of the world, natural phenomena, unusual geological formations, which are ultimately processed by the community as folk-wisdom passed on from generation to generation.
b) historical legends – whose narratives form an intergral function in dispersing historical accounts of national history and behave in counter-hegemonic ways, if and when the need arises. Furthermore, there are two different kinds of historical legends – i) stories about national heroes and ii) stories of events that have had an effect on the lives of the local populace.
c) Supernatural legends – are those stories that are closely linked with local folk beliefs. These types of legends are concerned with supernatural events and personalities, and situations involving black magic is one of them.
d) Religious legends – Although the religious legends have their origin in literary sources, folklorists have added this genre to the list on account of them having been folklorised. The early Christian church is believed to have incorporated a lot of folk narratives into the fabric of the church especially stories about martyrs and saints and these stories have today become a part of the religious legends.

Transition forms of the folk narrative however, abound in many cultures. Kurt Ranke, the German ethnologist and folklorist stressed on the importance that students of folklore have to make on mixed-forms of folk narratives. He declared that it was possible, over time, for an animal story to turn into a fable, or a joke in the same way that a parable may be "downgraded and turned into a joke by one people who misunderstand its meaning, and a legend may be promoted into a *Marchen* during its long journey across cultures" (Dorson, 77-78)

5.0 GENERAL ANALYSIS:

The figure of *Apvuho* as the Lotha trickster, is a very famous prototype found in Lotha folktales. Like tricksters in different cultures, the character of *Apvuho* is usually perceived as male and filled with cunning, intelligence, knowledge and wit, which he uses to perpetrate damage to the people around him. *Apvuho* is a direct example of the Trickster figure as villain. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *Apvuho* is his similarity with trickster characters from all over the world. Lewis Hyde in his book, "Trickster makes this world" (2017) defines a trickster as someone who,

> is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city, and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce… Trickster is the creative idiot, therefore, the wise fool, the grey-haired baby, the cross-dresser, the speaker of sacred profanities. Where someone's sense of honorable behavior has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again. Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox (15).

By this token, it can be said that *Apvuho*, by creating mayhem and destruction in the world around him, reshapes, realigns, reconfigures and interrogates it. Just like the tricksters of other cultures, *Apvuho* has been type cast into a villainous role, and is considered to be a formidable opponent to the already established order of life, and the dominant discourse of heteronormativity that runs the patriarchal Lotha Naga society. Although he does not directly seek to destabilize the 'natural' order, his villainous acts can be seen as a representation of dissent and rebellion. He is someone with whom interaction is best avoided, and in that sense, he is demonized and communally ostracized which in turn compels him to cross social and physical boundaries. In his quest for survival, the antagonism that he meets on his journeys and expeditions makes him instead increasingly malicious and vengeful. In many ways, the Lotha trickster's existence behaves in counterhegemonic ways to the dominant and existing social order by refusing to conform to the expectations of the village folk. The trickster is characteristic of a Jungian archetype. Many times, his acts directly add to the distress of the characters while he himself is left unscathed. In fact, it is through his wit and cunning that, instead of confronting the issue, he is able to evade problems and other antagonists through unorthodox means. He is at the same time perceived to be some compassionate feelings and not completely devoid of emotion as illustrated in narrative 4, when he distributes a token to

those people who extended a hand of sympathy towards him. In this narrative, his rebellious nature is awakened when he feels that he has been insulted by the widow who returns the uncooked meat gifted by him showing that the trickster is threatened by societal rejection. His constant failure to assimilate himself into society validates and reinforces his rebellious streak with the end result that over time, it festers and turns him into a villain-like figure. Interestingly, in the Lotha corpus, the trickster although supposedly a male is not a typical male entity. He is someone who crosses the physical constraints of his body even metaphorically as he merges with the kapok tree in Narrative 5 and becomes one with the tree. This is crucial because in the Lotha corpus, it was mostly the female who could transcend their physicality and shape-shift into another figure. Most significantly, the Lotha trickster exists in open defiance to the established order and the laws of society which are represented by the other stock characters. Not only does *Apvuho* violate the norms without a care, he does it while very often laughing at the face of authority.

The Lotha tales that contain the element of transformation and shapeshifting appear inherently magical with elements of the occult in them. In its simplest form, the Lotha transformation tale, in its execution transforms the ordinary into a supernatural/ powerful entity. It can be viewed as a fantasy of empowerment in which a subtle, symbol-laden narrative shows different kinds of metamorphoses. The shape-shifting is either permanent or temporary and the ability to dramatically and magically transform into a different entity is not only a latent characteristic trait usually unbeknownst to the shape-shifter until awakened by circumstance but also acts as a way of entering another realm of existence where the boundaries of human culture are effectively eroded. The fantastic transmutation is usually part of the enchantment process which revolutionises the lives of the characters and the flow of the narrative. The metamorphosis is a way of breaking the social norm, and the boundaries that these normative structures represent. Social barriers are shattered, conventions debunked, and the lines between the physical and the metaphysical/ other world are blurred, even as the enchantment brings about a transmutation. In Lotha folktales as illustrated above, there are two kinds of transformations that take place – one is the transformation from human to anthropomorphic animal forms, and the reverse transformation of an exotic entity into a human being as a resuscitative transformation. These transformations become ways of understanding and engaging with the world of the other, and how the category of Self and Other become blurred and channelized in each other. In some sense, there is also an implicit sense of power in these transformations, and symbolises self-assertion, self-realisation and identity-transformation.

Aarne Thompson (1977) points out that transformation and reincarnation are identical. He states,

> "A person or animal or object changes its form and appears in a new guise, and we call that transformation; but if the living being dies between two stages, we have reincarnation. Yet inspite of this clear theoretical distinction, we have a great interchange of motifs between these categories" (258).

In the 'Motif Index', he states that, "No real difference seems to exist between transformation and enchantment. Unlike a transformed person, however, a bewitched or enchanted person may retain his original physical form, but maybe affected mentally or morally." (Thompson, 258). Transformation, or shapeshifting, is a transformation of the self and the creation of an alternate social identity/ alter ego. One significant aspect of the shapeshifter in the Lotha context is the woman-as-shapeshifter. The Lotha Naga storytellers as elucidated before, were mostly men. It can be presumed from this that the creative ethos was also predominantly masculine in nature. Given this contextual frame, it becomes interesting to note that in the folktales, the character of the male embody the notion of stability and are usually projected as trustworthy and truthful; and rescuers of an ill-fated circumstance. However, contrastively, the women characters (especially the shapeshifters) are fashioned as duplicitous, inclined to to falsehood and untrustworthy. This is done by using the trope of the shapeshifter who is usually female. Note must be made here to mention that the Trickster is also someone who is capable of shapeshifting, and while the Trickster is attributed with cunning, he is not typically masculine in the heteronormative sense, as his antics deliver him in situations which transcend the gender dynamics in place. So, in that sense, the Lotha Naga shapeshifters are those who exist beyond the polarities of us and them. These tales can also be read as reactions to and experiences with the natural world, as it also becomes a way of transcending the categories of the human and coming to terms with the hidden primal natures of one's self. In many ways, it becomes a sieve through which Man's fractured and broken relationship with the natural world is negotiated, and the wildness within is uncovered.

The legend of *Ramphan* represents and serves as an evidence of oral history of the Lothas. The narrative itself demonstrates a typical pattern in which the hero/ protagonist serves as a trope for steadfastness. He is the embodiment of the virtues of Lotha masculinity, in which bravery, honour, wit and presence of mind are his staunch supporters much in contrast to some of the women characters who are portrayed as the antithesis and representing discursive

volatility. Through the story of *Ramphan,* the ascribed gender roles in Lotha society find validation. When looking at this tale from a pedagogical frame, it shows how this tale subtly influences the listener or the child to adhere and stick to their gender-specific roles. Most significantly, the legend also serves as a way of questioning and denouncing the rigid norms of custom and not subscribing to social pressure even as *Ramphan* takes a wife without observing the *hanlam* when asked to do so. In this sense, the folktale works in a subversive way.

Similar to the Trickster and Legend tales, the narrateme elements in the Transformation tales demonstrate a similar structural ethos, with the presence of similar dramatis personae. The shapeshifting tales are particularly significant in the study of Lotha culture, because they allude to an otherness that is both cut off from the human and domestic world (as the main action seems to take place outside and beyond the confines of the everyday) but at the same time, part and parcel of the experiential every day. The animal, spirit and human world are elements that are birthed from the same cosmological unit and one cannot exist without the other. This can also be seen in the songs that emulate the sounds of nature and animals.

The tales illustrated above also show how the dissemination of the Lotha story type has changed. The primary and secondary data (stories gathered from interviews) and stories chronicled in the written word have a remarkable difference in that the written stories seem to have a more literary approach that looks for coherency, that establishes "frameworks" (Degh, 18) such as "Once upon a time", "happily married after" or associating descriptive stereotypes such as that for spinster, mother-in-law etc. The stories gathered from official tellers demonstrated the influence of a literary tradition that has established a paradigm of storytelling in which the oral stories correspond to stories which is "governed by consciously contrived, articulate rules" (Ong, 81). The stories gathered from other older folk who were not the official story-tellers did not have that quality to them. They are set without any established framework or descriptive formulas that are usually the building blocks of narratives in the literary text. In fact, the orally narrated stories often have an organically built-in framework that seems broken or fragmented, as if to test the attention span of the listener. Furthermore, the orally collected stories were narrated as part of colloquial speak and conversation, such as when a narrator said,

"Mo kvutoli nte ezovla, ombo ekhentav chan cho nzoe vancho, enhungo ombo motsu jo ete eso erang na ntsio ji tae, ombo motsu jo ekhentav elumoto lia"

- Mhalo, interview

"What can I say about *Apvuho*'s story, he used to be a scoundrel, now only us old people remember his story, there are many many stories of this boy"

or

"Lichao oka motsu jo ngaro thung na zocho, ayo enhungo shi jo elum mhona nchumche su taka, apo na eni oli vota thung a zo cho"

- Zanbeni, interview

"Lijao's story well, is part of our childhood, now I don't even remember it fully. Our father used to tell us all this when we used to go to the field"

These metafolkloric comments ("oral literary criticism" as Alan Dundes calls it) about the tale, which Alan Dundes calls, "the tradition bearers' comments on their traditions" (77), provides "contextual information for folklorists assessing the role of folklore in a society or situation" (77). In the Naga context, this information is crucial for understanding the influences of other forces on the textual material of folklore and how folk narratives become changed in the face of the literarising of folk narratives. The significance of these comments also reveal the "dominant attitudes and perceptions of folklore from a native viewpoint" (77), and thus these commentaries, which are typically left out of data collection. For him,

> A part oriented folklore collector would tend to regard his or her informants as relatively unimportant carriers of precious vestigial fragments, fragments which might prove useful in the central task of historically reconstructing the past… Folklore texts without contexts are essentially analogous to the large numbers of exotic musical instruments which adorn the walls of anthropological or folk museums and grace the homes of private individuals. The instrument is authentic as is the folklore text, but the range of the instrument, the tuning of the instrument, the function of the instrument, and the intricacies of performing with the instrument are rarely known (80).

Even in the Lotha context, the metafolkloric constituents, whether it is related to song, proverbs or tales are crucial for showing how Lotha folklore was part and parcel of the folklife of the people, and was not conjured up out of its contextual environment. Echoing the work of Alan Dundes, Danielle M. Roemer (McCormick and Kim Kennedy White 2011, 861) writes that recording and studying the way a performer or member interprets the folklore and adds commentaries on the meaning of the tale or proverb, gives the participants a "gives participants the means to talk about their communicative relationships to each other and to the ongoing discourse" (861).

6.0: OVERVIEW:

As mentioned before, the Lotha folk characters are typically good or typically bad – and the lines drawn between the good and bad characters are sharp which makes it easier for the audience/ listener to identify them. There are very few instances when the internal conflict of the characters is made known to the listener. In this way, one can say that the narrative style is one dimensional which is typical of narratives that have been orally handed down. They are portrayed as being driven by one chief characteristic trait – be it stupidity, greed, resentment, revenge, hate etc. As such, on the surface, they do not come across as complex characters since their feelings are not externalised and any internal conflict of the character of the folktale is often, not alluded to. Additionally, like other folktales, the characters of the Lotha folk narratives play on a host of stereotypes. We see, time and again, that societal values and norms codified by patriarchy are used to inject the character traits of an individual. Thus, there is a recurrence of the figure of the wicked step-mother, faithful friendship, the Fool, sibling rivalry, male camaraderie, feats of male prowess, etc. While physical attributes is a factoring element in the narrative, the use of disguises or trickery is not uncommon. Often, the protagonist of the folktale is isolated from the rest of the tribe without any human companion during which time, supernatural entities may come to her/his aid. A magical, enchanted object or entity may come to help fight against the evil forces.

The plot of the Lotha folk narratives is fragmentary in their telling. Generally, they are short and simple plots and do not contain a strict framework that restricts the way and manner the tale has to be told, although the plot seems to be formulaic in the progress of the narrative. A journey to a distant village, the unknown, or the jungle is also a recurrent pattern found in the Lotha folktales which can be symbolically taken to mean the journey of self-discovery of the protagonist. Events or the main action occur usually within the village or somewhere close to it. In its narrative framework, there are no embellishments in the description of either the settings or the characters (in fact, there are hardly any lengthy descriptions or explanations). Once the conflict is established, the plot quickly moves towards its resolution, which is usually the ending of the folktale. The action of the folktale does not slow down on any counts – mainly because of the presence of only one plot. There are no sub-plots in the folktale. The usual ending of the folktale is when the resolution has been reached, when the revenge has been had, when the villain has been penalized, when it reaches a point of catharsis or when some form of poetic justice has been executed.

The Lotha folktales, although existing in fragments today, resonate with strong and powerful themes and conflicts. The themes espouse the values of community-ship, selflessness, of valiant and honourable men, and of beautiful and dutiful women. Virtues of compassion, humility and kindness triumph over greed, malice and hubris. In its employment of stylistics, a contrasting element is usually found in the Lotha folktale. Example: a pretty woman maybe compared to her less-beautiful sibling, an accomplished and talented man is compared to his lesser brother. Such schemata again allows the audience/listener identify with the role characters quickly.

The style and language of the narrative is sparse and use of language is economical. However, there is a presence of repetitious phrases as these supply the rhythm of the narrative. Dialogue is common between characters and they embody the traits and basic nature of the characters being portrayed. Recurring thematic elements, however, are far and few in between. These motifs behave like mnemonic devices to give strength to the tales as they are being passed on through oral tradition. Some of the examples of common motifs found in the Lotha folktales are – travels through grim, unknown jungles, magical transformations, adventures with helpful animals or strange creatures, bargains, gargantuan tasks, deceptions etc. There is also a use of powerful visuals that listeners can immediately identify with rendering the tales with an enduring muscularity. Many folktale motifs are consequences of the supernatural and magic or with reference to the many beliefs of the Lotha, that are part and parcel of the everyday life and not something that is strange or foreign to their lived realities. This stylistic element dissociates the folktale from real life and is also responsible for blurring the lines between what constitutes folk literature and literary fantasy. In this way, folktales sublimate their protagonists/antagonists to levels of exaggerated qualities.

The folktales of the Lothas help to validate their cultural mores, transmit cultural values and assert or lessen societal pressures by the use of well crafted witticism. Most of the folktales discuss aspects of life through the use of metaphor and thematic subjects probe into the supernatural world of the folktales. The themes of the folktales can be said to correspond to an order of ontology that seek to address the nature of existence and reality and the basic coordinates of being. In other words, in these folktales, we are exposed to the questions of life, of existence, nature of the universe, the presence of god, questions of death and after-life, and the properties that govern the workings of life and living. The phenomenological impetus of Lotha folktales exposes the myriad of ways through which human experience and

consciousness is channeled. It studies the significance of objects, events, tools, the passage of time, the self through introspectory devices, as situations arise and are experienced in life.

Some of the major themes reflected in the Lotha corpus include:

1) Folk religion and mortality – Religion and the questions of mortality are an important and recurring theme in Lotha folktales. The folktales employ techniques through which religious tenets and rituals, and questions of mortality are addressed. Although they may not seem to be overtly talking about religion, the nuances they carry in them exhibit these questions.

2) Value System and Virtue –The folktales of the Lothas helped to inculcate and administer ideas of morality and virtue, especially in its pedagogical uses. On the surface, they may seem to lack the sophistication and embellishment of literary tales, but these simple tales carry lessons on morality and good behaviour and play a crucial role in disseminating lessons on how to lead a virtuous life.

3) Social aspect: The folk narratives of the Lothas are embossed with tradition, surviving customs, ancient festivals, archaic tales and proverbs. The tales can be studied in terms of their sociological content, its relation to social reality, and the functions they embody. These can be gleaned by studying the images evoked by the folktale which consist of symbolic references which reflects the social structure of the community and their function of supporting social values. Under this theme, the Lotha folktales can be said to have certain specific sociological functions, which further endorse and reinforce social norms, kinship patterns, familial nexus and gender roles. The folktales serve as guideposts for behavior, while at the same time providing listeners with mental images of what is accepted and unaccepted behavior.

4) Family and kin behavior – Perhaps one of the most important and recurring theme in Lotha folktales is the affirmation of family and kin behavior. Family archetypes are recreated even in anthropomorphic entities. Stories explore a description of family ties, conjugal relationships, kinship affiliations while reflecting also the challenges inherent in the system.

5) Community Responsibility – The stories under this theme lays emphasis on the ethical framework of social responsibility. The Lothas have a strong community life and this is reflected in the folktales. This stems from the credo that every individual has a commitment to his society, is obliged to participate in it and work towards the benefit of the community. Anyone who is seen as opposing or threatening the established order (like the trickster *Apvuho*) is immediately ostracized from the community. Infact, in most cases, *Apvuho* works as the outsider-insider, and can be said to work in a limbo/ outsider-insider continuum.

6) Gender roles – The Lotha community and culture, being a patriarchal one, provides a glimpse into the workings of patriarchy. It is believed that in primitive times, the Lotha storytellers were mostly male, and hence, more often than not, their representations of the female personality is coloured with their own exegesis. Although space has been given to female characters for their narratives to develop and a voice given to them for self-expression, they are either ascribed stereotypical roles or fetishized and associated with the element of the exotic and in this, they are circumscribed by the grander narrative of patriarchy. Lotha folktales also portray traditional gender relations as housed in motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood and examine how these roles are perpetuated and challenged by the systemic apparatuses.

7) Reinforcement of patriarchal codes – The Lotha community is a patriarchal community and the folktales. The gender stereotypes that are reflected in the Lotha folktales represent women in the role of passive, submissive, perfected or exotic objects. There are hardly any overt references to adulterous women or address the idea of female desire, and in this way, the folktales themselves validate existing patriarchal codes. Patriarchal constructs of existing social and individual patterns, of feminine identity expose the confines of patriarchal society. It is made clear that women and others must negotiate within a male-dominated society which is expressed symbolically throughout the tales. However, in the process, the folktales operate in the form of a hidden polemic against patriarchal traditions.

7.0 Conclusion:

This chapter studies three main kinds of folktales found in the Lotha country embodied in the legend, the trickster and the novella (shapeshifting tales). The beginning of the chapter provides the layout of the conceptual framework that defines and carries the methodology through which the tales have been studied. In its workings, the research first identifies the motif index combination that is used in each narrative to show how the motifs are recurrent in some tales, which in turn influence the structure of the narrative. Most significantly, it breaks down the folktale into its various narratemes to show how each of these popular three genres are structured in the story-teller's consciousness. Issues pertaining to shift of oral culture to a written culture and the impact it has on folk narratives have also been addressed. Furthermore, an indepth analysis of their contents has also been attempted out of which recurrent themes (thematic content) of the folktales have been exposed.

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CHAPTER FIVE

OTHER VERBAL GENRES: PROVERBS AND ANCIENT POEMS

Introduction; In this chapter, an attempt has been made to provide a structural and thematic study by deconstructing the Lotha proverbial sayings and narrative folk poetry (Ancient poems) that are in circulation among the Lothas. A structural analysis is important as it reflects the way a particular language and literature of a particular region is developing or devolving, and the influences that are impacting the development of the spoken word of that linguistic community while a thematic study underscores the dominant discourse and the psychological patterns prevalent within a particular community. Given these two important modalities, the chapter evaluates how the Lotha Naga proverbs and songs are structured by the influences it has incurred by English and other factors such as defragmentation (the cutting away of parts of the proverb owing to cultural and historical amnesia, or other devolving factors) and borrowings..

1.0: The Study of Paremiology

Paremiology (from Greek *paroimia*) meaning, 'proverb, maxim, saw' is the collection and study of proverbs. Richard Dorson in his book, "Folklore and Folk life" states that proverbs are "short and witty traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings" (119). Every community that places a premium on traditional elements has a plethora of wise sayings that are echoed as proverbs in their language. Proverbs not only portray the linguistic semiotics of a culture but also provide a basis of understanding the wisdom of a culture. Neal Norrick in "Introduction to Paremiology" writes that, "What we generally call proverbs are traditional, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognisable units. Proverbs are characteristically used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event" (7) Folklorists view proverbs as an item/genre of folklore alongside riddles, jokes and are "valued as folk wisdom and bearers of traditional lore. Their cultural salience renders proverbs interesting in cross-cultural comparison as well, including questions of intercultural transmission and translation" (7). McCormick and White (2007) writes that ,

> proverbs are short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and that

> are handed down orally from generation to generation. Numerous scholars have tried to formulate the proverb definition, ranging from abstract mathematical formulas based on symbolic logic to Archer Taylor's almost proverbial claim that "an incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not." … The elements of traditionality and currency always must be established before a particular short sentence can indeed be called a proverb… In addition to their fixed and (usually oppositional) structure, their relative shortness, and their common use of metaphors, proverbs usually contain some if not all of the following poetic or stylistic features: alliteration – "Many a little makes a mickle"; parallelism – "First come, first served"; rhyme – "No pains, no gains"; ellipsis- "once bitten, twice shy"; personification- "Love laughs at locksmiths"; hyperbole- "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eyes than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"; and paradox- "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" (1025, 1026, 1027).

Archer Taylor, the doyen of paremiology in his essay, "The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of one" (1981) writes that "a proverb is wise; it belongs to many people; it is ingenious in form and idea; and it was first invented by an individual and applied by him to a particular situation (3), "a proverb is practical as well as moral wisdom" (4), proverbs gives us a "kind of law not written down in books" (ibid). He states that some verbal phrases contain both verbs and comparisons, and that "proverbial comparisons may sum up a situation" (5).

In her analysis of Bantu, Zulu, Fulani and Thanga proverbs, Finnegan contends that hyperbole and exaggeration are frequent motifs (12), stating further that proverbs are "marked by a terseness of expression, by a form different from that of ordinary speech, and by a figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor" (19, 20). Like the Lotha proverbs, the African proverbs are also closely linked to nature, and they allude to animals and birds. Finnegan writes that very often the comparisons explicit in the proverbs echo the African's "mystical closeness to nature" (25), because "many live in relatively rural and sparsely populated areas where the animal world impinges closely on their lives" (25). Reflecting some of the dynamics of the context/background, Finnegan claims that, "It is often impossible to grasp the point or attraction of a given proverb without some knowledge of the cultural background and of what the thing mentioned means to those who utter it" (25). There are two themes that resonate through the African proverbs that have similarities with Lotha proverbs. 1) "*the sense of detachment and generalisation inherent in proverbs".* The speaker stands back, as it were,

from the heat of the actual situation and draws attention, for himself or others, to its wider implications. And 2) "*there is the oblique and allusive nature of expression through proverbs"* which makes it possible to use them in a variety of effective ways (27). Finnegan finally concludes by stating that "proverbs are used as a form of formalized conflict and its resolution, as an oblique and allusive way of communication, as a form of expression with a certain educational relevance, as an artistic activity in its own right, or as all these at once" (36).

Alan Dundes in his essay, "On the Structure of the Proverb" (1981) opines that there is a close *structural* relationship between the riddle and proverb. However, there are important *functional* differences – while the aim of the proverb is to illumine and elucidate, that of the riddle is to obscure (50). He states that the role of both the proverb and the riddle is to elicit a "topic-comment" and is constructed in that manner. A minimum proverb/ riddle has one descriptive element that serves as a metaphor which is made up of one unit that contains one topic and one comment. The only difference between the two genres is the point of reference – whereas in the riddle the descriptive element is to be guessed, in proverbs, the referent is presumed to be known to both the speaker and the addressee (52). Dundes contends that the proverb is fundamentally, "a traditional, propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, consisting of a topic and a comment" which implies that proverb should essentially contain two words. These kind of single-element proverbs are which have only one single descriptive element are non-oppositional. "Proverbs with two or three descriptive elements may be either be oppositional or non-oppositional" (60). He maintains that,

> non-oppositional multi-descriptive element proverbs emphasize identificational features, often in the form of an equation or a series of equal terms; oppositional proverbs emphasize contrastive features, often in the form of negation or a series of terms in complementary distribution. Some proverbs contain both identificational and contrastive features. The means of producing opposition in proverbs is strikingly similar to the means of producing opposition in riddles (60).

However meticulous his structural analysis, it needs to be seen if Dundes's proposition can be applicable cross-culturally. The underlying question is whether all cultures which have proverbs in their language exhibit similar proverb structure types? Oicotypes may also be apposite in such an equation.

Shirley L. Arora (1994) in her article, "The Perception of Proverbiality" writes that in general, proverbs (in any language) are grounded on the "traditional" – and this sense of traditionality, is in turn rooted in "historically- derived authority" or "community-sanctioned wisdom"(4). She goes on to state that the listener's recognition of a proverb as proverbial is actually a two-fold process. The first encapsulates the abstract notion of the proverb as a genre, and how it is culturally and ethically crafted. The second is "a means of assigning individual utterances to that genre" (6). This second step is crucial in deciphering the performative aspects of the proverb. Irrespective of whether the utterance of the proverb is truly 'traditional', the proverb functions as one with "all the accompanying weight of authority or community acceptance that the concept implies, as the direct result of the listener's perception, right or wrong, of its 'proverbiality' (6). Traditionality is an important and crucial attribute for proverbs to be identified as such. However, what is important and essential for a proverb's success is the "evidence that the utterance in question was 'not made up' by the speaker; that it belongs to the category of 'they say', not 'I say'" (8), which reinforces the idea of traditionality of the proverb. Arora alludes to Archer Taylor (1931) who in the "The Origins of the Proverb" famously remarked, "the acceptance or rejection by tradition which follows immediately upon the creation of the proverb is a factor in its making quite as important as the first act of invention" (35).

Neal Norrick in his book, "How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs" analyses proverbs as a generic component of folklore of a community. Seen in this light, proverbs can be perceived not only as worldly wisdoms/ wise words that have some structural resonances with riddles but as possessing "time-tested wisdom" from which the speaker draws authority (28). This corresponds to the idea that "proverbs most commonly have evaluative function and a didactic tone in free conversation" (28). The consequence of the traditional character of proverbs ensures that a bond is created between the speaker and the hearer in such a way that they do not contradict each other, and this relationship showcases the didactic moment of interaction. Norrick comes to the conclusion that functionally, (a) Proverbs are essentially conversational by nature; (b) They appear in conversations and exist independent and free of their context; (c) In terms of espousing meaning and logic they are evaluative astuteness about the general situations of life; (d) Functionally, they behave as commentaries charged with an authoritative force (30). In the method of analysis, he enumerates proverbs as, "inventorized" items of folklore drawn from tradition that are performative in nature, which means that they are able to recognize their meanings in contexts beyond what is expected on

the source of the idea encapsulated in the content alone; (3) Simultaneously, in order to unravel the meaning of the proverbs as texts, one must glean abstractions away from their textual significance (3). Norris's definition of proverbs succinctly encapsulates both structural and functional configurations. Drawing from a host of scholars such as Seiler (1922), Milner (1969) and Barley (1972), Abrahams (1972) etc, Norrick defines proverbs as, "self-contained sayings" (32), "propositional statements" (which distinguishes them from proverbial phrases), "pithy" (36), "traditional" (39), have a "fixed form" (33), and contain "poetic features" (46).

This chapter on the 'Other Verbal Genres' aims to study the minds and workings of the Lothas through an analysis of the proverbs and songs embedded within paradigmatic mores and cultural aphorisms. Proverbs carry allegorical connotations, and hence this chapter is also an attempt to explore the semantic complexities and any intertextuality (with other genres) inherent in them while interpreting and emphasizing their hermeneutic ingenuity.

2.0 THE PROVERB STRUCTURE: A general analysis

The structural components of proverbs can be classified into three distinct types based on the clauses and sub-clauses they possess. As far as the English proverb is concerned, the most common type is the 1) Simple sentence – which contains one main clause (subject and predicate) and no subclauses. Such sentences are simple, non-oppositional, descriptive and stylistically intact or devoid of structural peculiarities that make them stand out. They may appear in both affirmative and negative forms. Example: "Still waters run deep". In Lotha, the same corresponds to "*Woro voni na ha khvümhiala"*: Translation: Even the birds of the air make mistakes. 2) Complex sentences: are those which contain one clause and maybe supported by more than one subclauses, composed of adjectives or adverbs, deriving whatever semantic value it can by supporting the main clause. In Lotha, a stylistic feature of this type of proverb is the position of the subclause, which is usually present in the penultimate position such as *Oyak lea ünjan, Liko lea ünjan toka:* Translation: Translation: Doesn't reach the sky or the ground. In English, the same corresponds to a proverb such as "if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours". 3) Compound sentences – which is comprised of multiple independent clauses. Syntactically, they are balanced by a coordinator and illustrate a type of "semantic equality or contrast, which is created through the replication of the syntactic pattern" (Mac Coinnigh, 114). As far as English is concerned, verbs are rarely utilized in this type of proverb such as, "they must hunger in winter that will not work in summer" where "they must hunger in winter" is one clause and "truth lasts till the end of time" as another clause attached to each

other by a coordinator “that” in this case. Because of the syntax structure of Lotha, proverbs in the language do not correspond exactly with this type of structural framework, however close approximations can be seen as elucidated in the proverbs explicated in the corresponding pages.

Mac Coinnigh (2015) states that the sentences have essentially four different functions which can be applied to the interpretation of proverbs. They are, a) declarative (or indicative) b) interrogative c) imperative and d) exclamatory which can be put together under two groups – Affirmative and Communicative. The declarative function is the most common and favoured function in proverbs as it generates information for the listener. Interrogative sentences on the other hand, are presented in question form which may elicit either a yes/no answer or an open-ended response (communicative response). Exclamatory proverbs express “strong emotion such as anger, surprise, frustration, confusion, elation, joy, love, sorrow, etc” (116). In the Lotha context as well, they are both affirmative and communicative and this is done through the use of certain types of metaphors through which the message is communicated. However, unlike the English proverbs, Lotha proverbs are mostly declarative and imperative driven.

Anti-proverbs are another category of proverbs that have come into the study of paremiology today. They represent examples of how certain traditional formulas are perpetuated and memorialised in a culture, which are then consciously altered. Doyle, Mieder & Shapiro (2012) defines the anti-proverb as, “an allusive distortion, parody, misapplication, or unexpected contextualisation of a recognized proverb, usually for comic or satiric effect” (XII). McCoinick writes that an anti-proverb is created by amending “one element of an existing proverb e.g a noun, an adjective, a verb, etc. by replacing it with another item from the same grammatical category” (121). He cites anti-proverbs such as “Hair today, gone tomorrow” from “Here today, gone tomorrow” and “The pun is mightier than the sword” from “The pen is mightier than the sword” to demonstrate this point. Although no anti-proverbs could be identified in the analysis of the Lotha proverbs, it is nevertheless imperative to understand their workings so as to establish a proper understanding of the nuances of paremiology. Further study on Lotha paremiology in the context of modern proverbs may look at this aspect of proverb evolution.

As implied in the preceding stanza, cultural evolution means that items of folklore undergo change with traditional proverbs embracing new environments and thriving as anti-proverbs, shedding or accumulating meaning over the course of its evolutionary path. When seen from a diachronic prism, one can trace the trajectory of a proverb and look at structural modifications that may alter particular formulae or render a proverb redundant due to non-usage as well, as

reflected in the Lotha proverbs and poems that constitute the other verbal genres of oral narratives.

3.0 The Lotha Proverb as a Cultural Text:

The Lotha proverbs and sayings offer us an understanding of the socio-cultural strands of Lotha history and the ideas that cement their belief systems. Since the early history of the Lothas was not documented in the form of a script, the only avenue through which an engagement with history and traditional culture could be accessed was through the language and unlocking parts of folklore that carried these items. Hence, proverbs in the Lotha culture served as avenues through which one could understand and engage with the cultural mores of the society and became emblematic of a rich oral tradition where narrative was not only restricted to tales or songs but also reflected in proverbs, maxims, sayings, which were sometimes metafolkoric (folklore about folklore).

In terms of their structural skeleton, the Lotha proverbs are mostly made up of oppositional/ antithetical/ comparative descriptive elements in the head and tail of the proverb. Among them, the comparative type has been observed to be the most common of them all. Example of a comparative proverb: *Nya-nya (*Goats) *kichu (*brain) *tvü (*like*) ka (*GM*)*. Translation: Like a goat's brain. This proverb is used to refer to people whose cognitive and understanding power is not sharp. The contextual overlay of this proverb is situated in the anecdote of the encounter between a goat and a tiger. It is believed that when the tiger came to attack the goat, instead of running away from the tiger, it remained in the spot struck by shock. This was an indication of the slow-witted nature of the goat's brain. Moreover, the Lotha forefathers believed that eating of a goat's brain brought on a terrible headache, and hence, was not a favoured part of the animal for consumption. In this way, Lotha expressions carried connotations that were part of the folklore and folk belief of the people. The Lotha proverbial expressions are also made up of proverbial phrases which gives one the impression that they might have been, at some point, a part of a larger sentence structure, and the way they exist today (in fragments) are remains. This is because the contextual meaning of the proverb is sometimes so different from what it appears to mean. The gap between surface structure and the intended meaning is significant and it becomes the job of the researcher to uncover the intended meanings. Additionally, there are also culturally specific short, pithy expressions in the Lotha language that connote emotional bearings such as : *E…hüm* (Expression of weariness) *ji* (is) *njü (*unavailable*) :* Translation*: E..hüm* is not there. *E…hüm* is a popular

exclamation of weariness in Lotha with the closest approximate in the English language being a “Sigh”. This expression is used when there is something so deeply felt that it is indescribable by language. This saying exists today in what maybe fragments, and whether it may have had an anecdote or a narrative that supported or corroborated its meaning is difficult to ascertain as it is lost in the crevices of history.

The Lotha proverbs play diverse roles in society. Deeply embedded in the language, the innate role of the Lotha proverbs is in the exercise of pedagogy. The proverbs are used to stress upon an event or a situation, the lessons learnt and gleaned from them, and this is done by drawing comparative and contrastive analogies and juxtapositions. There is a proverb for almost every situation and circumstances and although their origins are not known or even precise, the expressions remain popular and circulated even today. It is imperative for one doing a study on Lotha proverbs to read them as historical texts carried over orally from one generation to the next, and one that provides insights into the life and world of the Lotha Naga especially given that the Lothas do not possess a written or linear historical narrative. Like proverbs of other languages, the Lotha proverbs derive their semantic value through an interplay of meanings, prescribed by linguistic, poetical and structural devices. These elements are responsible for ascribing expressiveness to the proverb, and bring out its memoriability. Some of the ways by which a proverb achieves this is through a) rhyme b) alliteration c) parallelism and d) ellipsis. However, as stated above, the Lotha proverbs are abundant in phrasal sentences constituting of fragments which are heavy in the use of metaphor and juxtaposition, with rhymes being far and few in between. The most common basis of the formula is made up of the ubiquitous comparative, oppositional, antithetical head and tail that uses a basic rhyme scheme. An example would be: “*Sola (*carrying) *kya (*cry) *pvüla* (sitting) *kya* (cry),” Translation: Cries when carrying, cries while sitting. This proverb is used to refer to a cries of a baby who has a stubborn nature and on whom no amount of cajoling works. Metaphorically, it is also used to describe a person who is difficult to satiate. “*Yimtuk* (utensil for fermenting rice beer) *ha Yimtuk, pharü* (carrying basket) *ha pharü to echung (come together) tav”* Translation: *Yimtuk* gets together with *yimtuk*, and *pharü* gets together with *pharü* is another proverb that uses a disorganized rhyme scheme to extract the meaning of the proverb. This proverb talks about the meeting of similar characteristics in a person. It illustrates how people with certain physical attributes, or educational qualifications, or character traits, come together or are automatically drawn towards each other. It is close and almost equivalent

to the English proverb, “birds of a feather flock together”, and could be a transmogrification of the same, or a borrowed proverb.

As such, the Lotha proverbs can be classified as anonymous folk proverbs that make evaluative comments on immediate situations. Most of the proverbial sayings existing in the form of axioms and maxims generalizes through inference without giving allusion to particulars. In Lotha, the longer the proverbial expression, the more complete the utterance becomes. In instances where the proverb seems like the remains of a longer sentence (which is most cases in Lotha), the meaning of the other sentence is implied. Proverbs and proverbial phrases are then “signs of situations or of a certain type of relationship between objects” (Permyakov, 1979, 20). Neal Norrick writes that, “in uttering a proverb a speaker quotes a traditional item of the folklore of a community” (28), and we can see this clearly in the Lotha context. Structurally, most of the Lotha proverbs are single statements that describe universal truths, and find denouement in short, bold statements or simple warnings.

In the preparation of this chapter, a total number of 56 proverbs were scrutinized to decipher and discern their contextual and idiomatic environments, and look at how they occur in a given specific situation and functions descriptively or normatively and most often, prescriptively.

4.0 Typologies of Sayings: The Lotha Corpus

A semiotic reading of proverbs renders them as a metalanguage, which is a language about language. Any semiotic dimension brings together three major aspects in the study of how linguistic systems work – the pragmatic (dealing with the language in use and the context in which the utterance is evoked), syntactic (the structure of sentence in a language), and semantic (relating to meaning in language) - and this can be applied to the study of proverbs and provide a glimpse into the deep structural patterns inherent within it and the environs in which they are provoked to fruition.

In the Lotha epistemology, there are three semiotic categories.

a) Metaphoric proverbs – which are figurative proverbs that use a representative or symbol to communicate its meaning. Example: *Mmhorü* (Tiger) *lümbüm* (heart) *ka* (is). Translation: A Tiger’s heart. This saying compares a brave, ferocious man with a tiger. Even if the tiger is wounded by an arrow or a *lepok* (traditional machete), he still runs around without fear and without giving up. The tiger is also known for its patience in approaching its prey. That is why,

in every situation, the brave hearted are called as people having a tiger's heart. The allusion to the tiger in this proverb is a recurrent motif in Naga folklore from tales to songs and proverbs. Not only is the tiger associated with agility and symbolic of animalistic prowess, but is viewed by Nagas as one of mankind's brothers along with the spirit world. Tales of therianthropy, weretigers and myths of Naga origin are littered with references to this animal.

b) Hyperbolic proverbs – which use rhetoric and amplification to bring about the desired effect. Sayings such as *Kyon* (people) *khen* (song) *oyi* (talk) *jo* (is) *mpong na lankok* (wind) *motsünga* (one) *na* (is) *ünphayakalato* (unreachable)*:* Translation*:* People's chatter is one step ahead of the wind is an example of this type of proverb. This proverb reflects on the nature of gossip, and the way news is carried on from one person to the other. It implies that gossip moves a step faster than the wind, and hence, the wind can do little or nothing to affect it. It reflects on the epidemic nature of gossip and the spread of news over the entire village/ tribe.

Although in English we find different semiotic categories such as metonymic or paradoxical proverbs, in the case of Lotha, only two recurrent semiotic categories were found to be in circulation. This points to an internal decay or devolution of the folklore due to language loss and decrease in the frequency of use among the people as well as a reflection of the variety of the Lotha "paremiological minimum" (a concept founded by Grigorii L'vovich Permiakov to indicate proverbs in a language with the highest recurrency rate) which shows that the proverbial sayings in the context of Lotha were composed of simple metaphoric and hyperbolic combinations. Such defragmentation of folklore items is indicative of an oral-based culture that does not use oral-formulas to aid memorisation, even though proverbs everywhere by their nature are contingent on oral performance. Ong (1982) states that "the memorable statements of oral cultures and of residually oral manuscript cultures tended to be of a proverbial sort" (131) which did not represent facts but "reflections, often of a gnomic kind, inviting further reflection by paradoxes they involved" (131). He states very importantly that behind proverbs, rituals and philosophical speculation "lies the memory of human experience strung out in time and subject to narrative treatment" (138). Proverbs universally are replete with observations about the human condition and the "human phenomena of speech" (9) in what Ong calls, "the native oral form" (9). The psychodynamic working of proverbs in an oral society is echoed in the words by Ong again when he states that ***thought*** in oral societies come into being "in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions …… in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the duel, the hero's helper and so on) in proverbs which are constantly heard by

everyone that they come to mind readily" (34) and in this manner, serious thought becomes mingled with "memory systems" (34). Once the Lotha epistemology moved to a script based culture, these proverbial systems became relegated to the peripheries of expression even as more and more proverbs were borrowed and the lexical inferences of the older traditional proverbs became distorted and today mostly exist as **proverb-like** sayings, instead of full-fledged long proverbs.

4.1 How the Proverb is structured

Abrahams (1972) further conceptualizes the way in which the structured part of the proverb are tied together through a verb of equivalence or a verb of causation (Dorson 120). This renders the proverbial phrase or unit either positively or negatively. He surmises that there are four of these type of proverbs. Although the Lotha proverbs are not structured in the same manner as English proverbs are, from where he drew the examples, one can see as mentioned below, how the working of the semantics can be applied cross-culturally to Lotha proverbs as well.

1. Positive equivalence:

Woko[1] (Pig) *emhi* (tail) *ka* (is). Translation: It's a pig's tail.

This proverb is used to chide people who are fidgety and, like a pig's tail that cannot stay intact (always curls up), they are always moving. Even in sombre events, they are playful and noisy and their arrivals are always late.

2. Negative equivalence:

Hono (chicken) *ejü* (egg) *lo* (in) *oryu* (bones) *tsochev* (there) *ka* (GM). Translation: No bones inside a hen's egg.

This proverb is used to indicate people's ulterior motive and it is also an advice to people to be careful of other's sweet talk. It implies that if one is not careful with their words, they will get into trouble.

3. Positive Causational:

Woro (Birds) *voni na (*also*) ha khvümhiala (*mistake*)*:

Translation: Even the birds of the air ***make*** mistakes.

This saying is a consolation to people when they commit mistakes by an error of judgement or make wrong decisions in their lives. This proverb is used to encourage people from feeling dejected.

4. Negative Causational:

*Nno (*no*) vechiv (*fart*) jo (*then*) n (*no*) nanala (*smell*)*: Translation: If you do not fart, it does not smell.

This proverb reflects on human actions by stating that if one farts, or does an action whereby he draws attention to himself, then he will be in circumstances borne out of his own making. The proverb shows that if we don't tell/ do/ go somewhere, others will not know. Every circumstance in this life, as reflected, is based on action, whether good or bad.

4.2: SUBGENRIC CONSTITUENTS:

From the above data analyzed, one can come to the conclusion that there are certain subgenres even within the Lotha proverbs. These subgenres have been gleaned by studying their metaphoric content and ascertaining the manner in which the meaning of the proverb is delivered and understood by the listener.

a. Descriptive comparisons: Under this category, the proverbs here allude to an object that is completely different from it, similar to the ways a simile works. They elicit a comparison between two things. Many proverb-like sayings use this formula.

1. *Nya (*Goat) *Nyaro (*child) *zuta tvu (*like) *ka*. Translation: Like the act of suckling of a young goat.

The proverb comes from the observation that a mother goat breast feeds its young ones only for a very short time at a stretch (a short duration compared to other mammals). This gives it an appearance of not being serious about its breast-feeding or motherhood to onlookers. So the usage of the proverb refers to people who do things without too much thought, and quickly get distracted.

2. *Hono (*rooster) *hanpvü na nshak (*scratch) *cho tvü* (like) *ka*. Translation*:* Like the scratching made by a rooster.

This proverb serves as an exclamation of hopelessness towards a person who is careless, messy and creates chaos wherever and whatever he does. It is believed to be similar to a bad, unreadable handwriting but which the writer perceives to be a legible, good handwriting.

3. *Nya-nya* (goats) *chü* (bowel) *tvü* (like) *ka*: Translation: Like a goat's bowels.

The proverb is a reflection of human life. Like the bowels of a goat, which are made up of small, circular mounds, the character of human life is likewise – whether it is in the village, family or town, there are clusters of like-minded people and people who may or may not agree. Although they may be sitting in groups, there is no unity in thought.

b. Proverbial Anecdote: The proverbs in this category are those that have been extracted from a fable or a tale, or a short anecdote.

Hapvüro (Crab) *lantsa* (way-along) *ka* (the): Crab along the way. Translation: Crab leads the way.

This ancient proverbial anecdote is used as a lesson to parents of the dangerous consequences of living crooked lives as it will be absorbed and inculcated by their children and in this manner, carried on. This proverb has its roots in an anecdote that goes like this, "*once upon a time, a mother crab, on seeing her child walking in a twisted manner (as crabs are wont to), asked her child: 'Why are you walking in a crooked manner and not straight?'. To this, the child replied, 'I am only learning how to walk by watching the way you walk.'"* Crabs are found in plenty in ponds and rivers around the Wokha and Doyang valley (which is the Lotha hub), and has cultural and economic significance. Through such proverbs we come to understand the kinship that exists between animals and people.

c. **Proverbial phrases**: in this category, the sayings are not full-fledged sentences but appear as short pithy phrases

1. *Njü (*Bitter) *khoka (*spit) *je*: spit. Translation: Bitter spit (Not spit is bitter).

This proverb is referred to people whose curse/ bad words when lashed at someone else, comes true. Such people are believed by the forefathers of the Lotha tribe to have *Njü khoka*.

2. *Okhe* (hands) *süphoa* (long/big). Translation: Long hands.

This saying is a reference to people who are quick to steal or lose things and make a quick getaway. *Okhe süphoa* is also used to refer to kleptomaniacs.

d. Twin Formulas: Where two categories are clubbed together such as the English phrase "safe and sound"

Honoro (chicken) thong (for) Honolü (chicken egg). Translation: Chicken egg for chicken.

This proverb refers to second choices/second best/ substitutes. Folklore states that when the ancestors of the Lothas were making offerings to the *Omon* (spirit), they were supposed to sacrifice *Honoro* (chicks) but due to unavailability of the *Honoro*, they used *Honochu* (egg), and the work was fulfilled with that. This proverb is used to indicate the absence of a first choice, and the application of the second best in order to fulfil work, deeds etc.

e. Proverbial Exaggerations: In which hyperbole plays an important part to bring the meaning out of the proverb. The Lotha proverbs did not have any saying that drastically employed hyperbole. However, proverbs like the one below come closest to the description.

1. *Sotilo Ngotilo ka.* Translation: Extra flesh/ meat fats around the neck.
This proverb refers to a) those people who are good for nothings, untrustworthy, useless and irresponsible. They are neither here nor there. b) It also refers to people who are neither male/ female. Such people are called "*pokyulokyu*". It must be noted here that this is not said in a demeaning way. It shows Lothas are critical of their own laziness.

2. *Kyon* (people) *khen* (song) *oyi* (talk) *jo* (is) *mpong na lankok* (wind) *motsünga* (one) *na* (is) *ünphayakalato* (unreachable)*: Translation:* People's chatter is one step ahead of the wind.

5.0 Metaphoric and Motif-based classification

In order to extract the contextual and thematic content of the Lotha proverbs, an analysis based on their interactional contexts has been attempted in the following section. It is hoped that by studying the social, psychological and cultural aspects of the proverb, a systemization of the corpus can be realized. The themes in the proverbs appear to have an intrinsic association with the proverb as text.

The classification below has been determined by identifying their most dominant and significant quality, as all proverbs and saying semantically function as descriptive analogies at their core and many of the proverbs embody more than one type of classification. For instance: an animal and plant proverb can also come under eschatological proverbs, and a belief related proverb can always function as a proverb on folk philosophy. They are in that sense intersectional, so the typology given below only reflects the most dominant characteristic.

5.1 ECOLOGY:

Animal and Plant Proverbs – One of the most important and popular type of motifs present in the Lotha corpus is the animal and plant motif. The Lothas lived in close proximity to the forest. Lotha villages were situated some distance from each other and were bordered on all sides by dense thick forests in which it was believed that spirits lived. Before their conversion to Christianity, they practised a form of religion that can be loosely referred to as animism, and the close link between man, spirit and animal world is manifest even in the proverbs. Similar to the tales, the plant and animal proverbs demonstrate the ways the Lotha creative conscious drew metaphors from the environment around it and how the forest, water bodies and plant world was imagined and reimagined in the folklore of the tribe.

The proverbs in this category reveal the strive towards an affirmation of co-existence and the intrinsic value that people affix to different life-forms. We can understand from this that the Lothas value nature, and look at animals and plants as having soul. The proverbs regulate the ways in which we perceive nature by infusing human traits to animals and plants. It also suggests that the imaging of life and other forms reveal the people's knowledge about nature and environmental sensitivity.

1. *Hapvüro* (Crabs) *roso* (many) *ka* . Translation: Crabs in plenty.

This proverb is used to refer to people with numerous children. This is said with a negative connotation, as people with many children often find it difficult to bring them up and feed them. This proverb is reversely also pronounced as a blessing to newly- married couples so that they have a long and fruitful life with many children.

2. *Mmhorü* (Tiger) *ejankhe* (persistence/ character). Translation: Like a Tiger's persistence.

In Lotha culture, when somebody is injured or sick, or writhing in pain, a common phrase that is used is "*erum toa*" meaning, "have patience… " to encourage the people to feel strong and brave. This proverb is used in these situations when the sufferer, even in excruciating pain, does not give up. The proverb echoes the tiger, who, even when injured, runs along without fear and does not give up, but persists on his goal. This is a reference to the brave hearted. The tiger[1] plays an important role in Naga epistemology and is regarded as one of the brothers of man

3. *Hono* (hen) *lalok* (food) *loksa* (trough) *nkhüm* (fall). Translation: The falling of the hen's food trough.

This proverb refers to the incongruous situation in our lives when good intentions do not meet their requisite end, and instead, one ends up in an unexpected dreadful situation. The proverb is meant to be uttered in situations when the one's intentions and circumstance do not suit each other. It uses the metaphor of the upturning of a hen's trough on the hen as it scrambles for food and lands on the trough, thereby destabilizing the trough.

4. *Woko* (Pig) *emhi* (tail) *ka* (is). Translation: It's a pig's tail.

This proverb is used to chide people who are fidgety and, like a pig's tail that cannot stay intact (always curls up), they are always moving. Even in sombre events, they are playful and noisy and their arrivals are always late.

5. *Sangalia* (sangalia) *ka* (is). Translation: Like a Sangalia plant.

Sangalia is a plant/ weed that grows easily everywhere in all kinds of environment, even inside toilets. Its leaves are slippery and hence, considered very unadjustable. When this plant dies, worms are quick to eat it. Similarly, in human life, when a person is unable to make a decision/ is indecisive, or in a position of neither yes or no, during these times, this proverb is uttered.

6. *Yoothi* (banana) *choka* (sprouts) to *choka* (sprouting) je. Translation: The bananas are sprouting.

This proverb is said when a prediction/ premonition about the future comes true, and it is also used to refer to a hidden situation/secret when it finally comes out into the open. This proverb is said in both a positive and negative light.

7. *Yakso* (monkey) *khe* (hand) *ka* (is). Translation: Your hand is a monkey's hand.

This proverbial phrase is used to describe a careless person who is constantly moving and fidgety, clumsy and cannot remain still.

8. *Hono* (chicken) *ejü* (egg) *lo* (in) *oryu* (bones) *tsochev* (there) *ka* (GM). Translation: No bones inside a hen's egg.

This proverb is used to indicate people's ulterior motive and it is also an advice to people to be careful of other's sweet talk. It implies that if one is not careful with their words, they will get into trouble.

9. *Benjükkaro (fly/bugs) erü (rain) emeta ka*: Translation: Cleaning off the flies/bugs seen hovering around cows's intestines.

The proverb takes its metaphor from gnats/bugs usually seen hovering around cows. They are believed to have very small intestines and to clean its insides would mean being very sensitive to the least detail. So the usage of this proverb is to refer to a person who goes too deep into the minute details on anything, someone who would leave nothing back. It usually has a bad connotation (*maro mario*) about being too particular or nitpicking on something especially in human relations which can become counterproductive.

10. *Mmhorü (*Tiger) *na tea oso (*meat) *te ntso (*not eat) Translation: Even a tiger does not eat only meat.

This proverb refers to the gluttony of human beings. It was believed in Lotha culture, that even the Tiger (an important figure in Lotha folklore) ate meat only at the beginning and the end of each month. Another belief held that the Tiger ate meat for 6 months and then ate from the earth for the rest. This proverb is used to show how human beings should not always look for meat/ fish, but that he/she should be adjustable and eat other items too.

11. *Mmhorü (*Tiger) *lümbüm (*heart) *ka (*is): Translation: A Tiger's heart.

This saying compares a brave, ferocious man with a tiger. Even if the tiger is wounded by an arrow, *lepok* (traditional sword knife), he still runs around without fear and without giving up. The tiger is also known for its patience in approaching its prey. That is why, in every situation, the brave hearted are called as people having a tiger's heart.

5.2 PROVERBS REFLECTING FOLK PHILOSOPHY

Proverbs in this category espouse a system of values and morals, frequently by delving into the metaphysical aspects of human experience. Here too, the metaphors evoked are culturally specific, in that they are taken from objects, items and experiences of everyday folk life of the Lotha. The proverbs in this category can be read as reflecting the folk philosophy of the Lothas and reflections on the nature and trials and tribulations of life.

1. *Kyon (*People) *eküm (*life) *ha jüran (*ladle*) esüa (*like*) ekhophiala (movement)* Translation: Human life ripples like when the ladle hits the water.

This proverb is used to show how human life does not run smooth like water flow, but we are victims of our circumstances (because when the ladle is dipped in the pot, the water from below the vessel is mixed with those on top). Wherever and whatever we do, *jüran* (ladle that stirs our life) can be found.

2. *Mhyik khon (*face*) don-kük (*forehead*) echümpo (*difference*):* Translation*:* A difference of contrasts.

This proverb is a reflection on the human condition. It infers that the situations of our lives whether it is happiness or problems all have a different face. These situations of our lives are evident on a person's face – *Mhyik khon* and *don kuk* and many times, they may be different from each other.

3. *Oyak* (sky) *lea* (also) *njan* (don't reach), *liko (*earth*) lea (*also*) njan (*don't reach) *toka:* Translation: Doesn't reach the sky or the ground.

This proverb is used to indicate a wretched state of affairs where one does not want to remain in this world anymore. It is a reflection of a state of affairs where a person's life has not evolved and has retained the status quo for too long. The *"liko"* in this proverb symbolizes death.

4. *Nkhying* (burnt) *cholo* (before) *nshükacho* (drying) Translation: Burning before drying.

This proverb reflects on human situations when sometimes, in a person's life, problems and loss come repeatedly one after the other. It is during these periods of life that this saying is referenced. This proverb is also used to indicate how some people do not listen even when told or advised to do otherwise and are stubborn to deal with. This in essence, echoes the English proverb, "When it rains, it pours".

5. *Mani* (yam) *yo lo* (in) *ojü* (water) *phyanka* (poured) *cho* (did) *tvü* (as) *ka* (if):
Translation: As if water is poured on yam leaves.

Yam leaves, a regular feature of indigenous Lotha cuisine and gastronomy are silky in nature and hence unable to store or accumulate water, and when water is poured on them, they flow

out. This proverb is a comment on fickle minded people who instead of listening to instruction and advice, keep changing their words. Similarly, they are not determined and rendering instruction and advice to such folk is useless.

6. *Epankachio* (put one) *kha* (count), *Epanthechio* (pushed) *meka* (not).
Translation: To layer it up (express) instead of suppress (push or press down).

This saying is a proverbial advice to people to progress in life, instead of keeping their talents hidden or suppressed. *Epankachio* is the upward movement made by the *lepok* during cutting of trees or plants and *Epanthechio* is the downward movement. Boastful and boisterous (*chaya*) people are called *Epankachia*. This is also a reference to people who work after other people, flatter and praise them. This proverb can also be read as an agricultural proverb since it derives its origin from agricultural implements (*lepok)* and draw its analogy from farming technique.

7. *Nchüng ethi emhem nhyaka vansi jo esülam:*

Translation: If we keep waiting for today's harvest to ripe, you will be delayed/ late.

This proverb states that if we keep waiting for the day's fruit to ripe, it will not. This proverb is used when there is no hope left, or inability to execute plans. If a person keeps waiting for the moment of ripening instead of proactively going about things, it will result in loss as by the time it ripens, it will be too late.

5.3 PROVERBS ON SOCIAL CUSTOM/ INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR:

The proverbs encapsulate the various aspects of social experience that intersects with individual life. They reinforce, endorse and assimilate social structures, patterns of socially-accepted behaviour, while exploring and exposing the sociometry within a group of people, and the structure and agency meted out to individuals. These proverbs ensure that structural and systemic jurisprudence is maintained and observed so that the society functions in a way that is minimally invasive with minimal rules and principles, while at the same time, ensuring that individuals live tolerably together. As other Lotha proverbs, they are essentially pedagogic in nature towards both children and adults, and is one way in which social behaviour is sanctioned.

1. *Npüngnorünyuo (*undisciplined son*) 'tso (*will*) ka* (be): Translation: Will be an (undisciplined/ not imparting discipline) tso ka:

This proverb indicates a child raised by the parents without proper discipline and teaching. The child in this case becomes notorious and is not a contributing element to either his family or society.

2. *Kyon (*people*) nlyi (*tongue*) lojo (*in*) oryu (*bones*) njü (*not there*):* Translation*:* Human tongues have no bones.

This proverb reflects on the infallibility of human nature, on how language can be manipulated and also refers to changes in our demeanours. The proverb is used when people change their tune and their language. It also shows the flexible or inconsistent nature of humans.

*3. Ni (*your*) otsi (*food*) tso (*eaten*) si a (*my*) mangsü (*cow*) phano (*chase*) wota (*gone*) ka*: Translation: After eating your food, he/she is chasing my cow.

This proverb reflects the people who a) think only of their own benefit and b) People who claim their food from one place, but instead of bringing any source of income, or helping out in the work, work elsewhere. The Lotha custom is to work/ contribute at the place from where one eats/ attains his daily bread.

4. *Ozhü (*Meat) *ünkhi (*not taken) *han* (ed). Translation*:* Didn't take meat/ flesh.

This proverb refers to people who are disrespectful and shameless. Even when elders give advice, they do not listen to them. In these situations, the said disrespectful people are referred to as "*Ozhü* (meat) *n (*not) *khi* (taken)". People are warned against bringing up their children in this manner, so that they do not become "*Ozhü nkhi*". Meat is an important component in the indigenous Lotha belief system bearing symbolic significance in socio-political life. Hence, meat in this instance can be read as symbolic of substance, and those people who are discourteous are identified as being substance-less.

5. *So kyui ri kyui nta ka je:* Translation*:* Enemy in abundance.

Previously, during the age of the fore-fathers, hunting and acquiring the head of an enemy entailed achieving a prestigious status in the community. During some days when the situation in the village was sensitive (or when the enemy became very powerful and ferocious), the

individual, family and village altogether became extra vigilant and careful. It is during these times that this proverb is used.

6. *Jonpho* (Heels) *lo* (in) *ottyo* (thorns) *chakthe* (prick) *cho tvü* (like) *ka*: Translation: Like a pricking of thorns on heels.

This proverb is used when some people become too difficult to deal with. It is said that during these situations, dealing with such people become like a thorn pricking on someone's heel – painful and annoying.

7. *Ero Eshüp ka:* Crocodile incubation is. Translation: Like the incubation of a crocodile.

It is believed that the origin of this saying comes from the way a crocodile would incubate. The crocodile would stay far from its eggs and try to incubate from a distance without making any physical contact with its eggs. And so the usage of this saying is a description of a person who does not complete an undertaken task (*tsoshok tsori)*, or someone who claims property or land without working the land. It can be said to be a commentary on entitlement.

5. 4: Gender

Although not many proverbs were found that were specifically looking at the portrayal of women or reflecting family dynamics, the proverbs below encapsulate the essence of family life and use the subject as a way to comment on the social mores. It is interesting to note that during the data collection, not a single proverbial reference to the grandfather or male members of the family were found but references to women figures were available. Whether there were proverbs which also reflected male categories is yet to be ascertained. This echoes the ways gender has been constructed in Naga oral narratives and sayings, which reflect the world view of the Lotha. Men are often portrayed as stoic and staunch entities, symbolizing stability and order while women are often presented as much more malleable, and prone to vicissitudes.

1. *Atsü (*Grandmother) *tapüm* (character) *ka* (is): Translation: Grandmother's bluntness/ brazen behaviour/ character.

The proverb reflects on the ineptitude and clumsy behaviour of people especially in social situations. Just as a grandmother is sometimes awkward and unabashedly rude in some situations, a person who is curt in certain situations is referred to as *Atsü tapüm ka.*

2. *Ono (*Mother-in-law) *jo rarakhüm (*medicinal plant) *tvü* (like) *ka*: Translation: A mother-in-law is like *rarakhüm* (medicinal plant).

This proverb is said to invoke respect towards a mother-in-law, especially in a generation where respect for mother-in-law is absent. The mother-in-law is compared to a *rarakhüm*, an aromatic plant used for medicinal purposes underscoring how it is pleasant and enriching to have them around.

5.5: BELIEF/ SUPERSTITION RELATED

The examples in this section are those that are grounded on custom, belief and superstition which have found denouement as sayings and proverbs. Here, the emphasis is on the actions of people and serves as lessons and warnings on good conduct in society.

1. *Ni* (Your) *chü* (faeces) *shai* (this) *tsoa (*eat*) ni (*you*) yiv (*go*) ka* . Translation: You will eat your own feces.

This proverb is both a curse and a warning to people to be careful and against condemning evil to anyone, especially if the curse comes true, or if the curse is deflected and arrives at the person's life instead of reaching its target.

2. *Ete (*Our) *bobo* (self) *kvüri* (head) *tsan* (hair) *ntsüala* (not cut) Translation*:* One does not cut one's own hair.

This proverb is a meaningful saying to people against blowing their own trumpet, i.e., boasting about their own selves. In the same manner as the Lothas do not traditionally cut their own hair, so also people should not boast about themselves.

2. *Efvüi* (stealer) *menkirang* (ego) *tsüpho* (big). Translation: The stealer has more ego.

This proverb states how some people, who, even after committing crimes like stealing/ lying are too egoistic to listen to instruction and advice when people correct them. Instead, they get angry at the audacity of people who correct them. Such people are not liked by others and are referred to as, *efvüi menkirang tsüpho.*

3. *Ejüng* (lie) *phyocho* (saying) *efvücho* (stealing) *kheti* (same). Translation: Lying and stealing are the same.

This Lotha proverb echoes the ancient view of the ancestors that believed that lying and stealing were both the same as it involves making the other person experience loss, hurt, and sadness. That is why in Lotha belief, it is said that those people who lie are like thieves. In turn, those who steal are liars.

4. *Epierai* (selfish/greedy) *jo* (is) *ntsonshi* (hardship) *hungala* (find). Translation: Selfish/ greedy people meet hardships.

This saying is a warning to people who, even after finding their destiny, are not satisfied and continue to keep searching for more, in a greedy fashion. This particular character in a person makes *Sukhyingo* (fate) laugh at them which brings them problems, losses and hardships.

5.6 ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatological proverbs encapsulate those proverbs that deal with the ultimate destiny of humanity. They address those aspects of life that deal with the finality of history and the end of times. They work as premonitions and omens and provide a glimpse into the working of the Lotha folk belief system, their fears and anxieties about the future.

*1. Limha (*Earth*) chüm (*end*) janana (*reach*) kyong (*people*) na (*will*) tsüngzen (*desire*) longzen (*attraction*) tsota (*do*) yivka (*go*).* Translation*:* At the end of the world, humans will become engrossed in desire and attraction and will reach the end of the world, thusly.

This proverb shows how the ancestors of the Lothas foresaw the future. This ancient saying was also a premonition of the end of the world and a vision of the things to come where people would be filled with desire and attraction that would overpower them and in this way, humanity would meet the end of the world.

2. *Limha* (earth) *chüm (*end*) janana (*reach*) kyon (*people*) na (*will*) kvüso-yakso (*monkeys*) von (*like*) khvüta (*sound*) yivka (*go*)*: Translation: At the end of the world, humans will make sounds like monkeys and reach the end of the world.

This proverb reflects on the ignorance of the current generation. Lotha folklore holds that during the time of the ancestors, "*Sali saphü"* (a kind of social ostracization) was observed very diligently. However, this tradition has completely disappeared. The proverb implies that since we are not observing *Sali saphü*, we are becoming like monkeys (animals) and imitating

their rowdy and uncivilized ways. This proverb is a reflection of the loss of traditional customs and laws due to which the Lothas are losing out on their cultural identity. The underlying implication is that the Lothas would ultimately start imitating animals as their awareness of social norms were decreasing with time.

6.0: NARRATIVE FOLK POETRY/ SONG OF THE LOTHA NAGAS:

In academic parlance, a folk song is understood to be a "traditional song type that expresses rather than depicts and narrates" (McCormick and White, 2014, 545). Ethnomusicology in turn, is dedicated to the study of why and how human beings are musical (Rice, 1). This interpretation of the study of music and song vis- a-vis ethnomusicology, posits this approach as a significant one in the study of song, taking into consideration, its social, cultural, and artistic nuances. Singing, songs and music have been an integral part of the life system of primitive cultures, and carried over as part of the corpus of oral tradition being handed down. In non-literate communities, the song is not only an emotive or ceremonial performance enacted or voiced out to reinforce status quo, but also a literary and cultural text that throws light on the workings of cultural and systemic frameworks that are at play in their precincts. Given this backdrop, a folk song can generally be understood as "the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are (1) continuity which links the present with the past (2) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group, and (3) selection by the community which determines the form or forms in which the music survives" (Lloyd, 15). There are some criterias which need to be determined to identify a folk song as a folk song. They are a) origin b) social ramifications c) manner of transmission and diffusion and 4) performative aspects. In contrast to popular or classical forms of music, which are determined by a certain degree of professionalism, economics (profit making) and mass media, folk songs are more altruistic in their behaviour. It contains a personal emotional association with people, events and places and is usually sung in a simple form and style, which inhibits people from questioning its structural constructs. Bruno Nettl (2014) writes that,

> "Generally, "folk music" refers to music that broad segments of the population—particularly the lower socioeconomic classes—understand, and with which they identify. In this respect it is the rural counterpart to urban popular music, although that music depends mainly on the mass media—recordings, radio, television, and to some degree the Internet—for dissemination" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

It is not necessary that a folk song is composed by the community. A folk song may have its origins in an individual composer, but when that song/ tune gets absorbed into the oral culture, simultaneously gaining versions and variations, then the song is deemed to be a folk song. In contemporary times, a folk song has come to mean a song that encapsulates the peasant experience, where the melody and structure is borrowed from the oral, traditional corpus and where most of the time, the themes echo agrarian and socio-religious situations.

Any analysis of music must take into consideration what Alan Lomax, the founder of cantometrics, states: "the musical event as a whole" (133) He proposes that the discipline of musical ethnography should be based on the study of "musical style or musical habits of mankind" (133). He goes on to emphasize that "the social organisation of music, the characteristic timbre of the voice and its method of production, the motor activity connected with the music and the inner emotional intent of the music" (134) since these variables form the fundamental building blocks of music, unlike the formal material which is usually taken as the source of music study. By analyzing the overall data and taking into consideration the association between song and social structure, it was found that

> harsh vocal timbres predominate in cultures that stress the development of aggressiveness in males. Narrow vocal widths and a high degree of nasality occur in cultures with tightly controlled sexuality. Rhythmic regularity reflects the inculcation in childhood of habits of obedience and adherence to structured rules, and irregular rhythms occur in cultures with indulgent child-rearing practices (McCormick and White, 235).

Some of the various findings of cantometrics holds the view that style is significantly affected only by certain cultural elements (political structure, conventions, social order and complexity of class structure). It further holds that these elements affect songs cross-culturally (Not only will the songs resemble each other in terms of their component parts, but the above elements will also be reflected in the manner of singing).

The Lotha folk songs/ancient poems are also carriers of history, and must be read taking into consideration, contextual and other factoring elements in their interpretative expositions. In the absence of a written script, the Lotha oral tradition plays a decisive role in determining and charting the historical patterns of collective memory. They expose the workings of the collective creative psyche of the people. Ancient folk songs of the Lothas is one way in which any approximates of history can be mapped and reconstructed by looking at the cultural context

enmeshed within the folk songs. In stark contrast to other forms of sophisticated musical traditions, which function carry both aesthetic and entertainment functions, folk songs are usually associated with "calendric or life-cycle rituals, work, games, enculturation, and folk religion; folk music is also more likely to be participatory than presentational" (Nettl, 2014).

As implied above, folk songs integrate various aspects of the human experience, and hence, the types of folk songs available are varied and rich in number. In the Lotha context, folk songs (non-hybrid, ancient folk songs) can both be read as literary (as sung-by-rote poems that may or may not have gained musical currency) and artistic (as made up of melodic parts that are harmonised in certain sections). Occupational songs, songs of the village, songs about romantic love, and tasks common to familial and social relationships are the most common type of folk songs in the Lotha collection. Above all, the sense of communityship, and responsibility to remember through song and recreation, runs deep into the fabric of the song/poem. Memory plays a key role in shaping the melody and tune of the song, through either a strategic patterning of rhythm, tone, melody and timbre or through oral-formulaic variables. The Lotha folk songs, in this sense, are found in agrarian peasantry. This contextual basis has pitted folk song/ music against the more elite forms of popular/ classical music, which has led to the distinction between high art and low art – with folk art somehow being associated with low art.

6.1 TRADITIONALITY AND THE FOLK SONG

A folk song is coupled with tradition and plays a role in narrativising community history. "Three major factors shape the folk song tradition: economic factors, anonymity and orality" (Mills, 29). Folk songs, as stated above, traditionally belong to the repertoire of collective memory of the peasants, pastoralists and rural/ agricultural communities. Mostly, as in the Lotha corpus, the folk songs are sung by people involved in the village life. During the field work, it was observed that some of the most creative and reputed folk singers were also the tradition bearers who were renowned for their knowledge of Lotha culture. However, it must be noted here that in the Lotha context one hypothesis is that, most of what we today understand as poetry (in the literary sense of a verse poem) were songs in verse. The nomenclature "poem" seems to have been accorded to these songs once their melody was lost or when the tunes attached to the poems started becoming distorted. Such devolution of the folk item delineated and created a new genre away from the narrative folk poetry (a folk poem that is sung) to what we understand today as folk poem.

In its natural state, the folk song (due to its oral nature) gains versions and variations, as it moves from singer to singer. The versions and variations maybe in terms of melody or structural alterations, but nevertheless, these changes become characteristic of what we understand as a "folk song". The vernacularism of folk songs show how they are used by mostly illiterate/ semi-literate communities, and even though some singers (once they attain literate status) write out the folk song to help in the memorialisation process, the chief characteristic – its orality – remains independent of the written word.

7.1.1 The Lotha Song Styles:

Today, the Lothas have predominantly five singing styles that correspond to a certain pitch-style measurement. All these are symptomatic of group songs. They are:

1. ***Tsoro/ Choro***: This singing style is sung by both male and female in most villages. This is one of the higher singing pitches in the Lotha song system, that is almost equivalent to the soprano of English

2. ***Tssotsu***: This singing style can be adopted by both genders as well. This corresponds to the English Alto voice.

3. ***Terio***: This is the highest female voice. Somewhat resembling a soprano. This part of the song is sung by females only, unlike the *tsoro* which is sung by both male and female.

4. ***Ho ho***: The lowest male voice. Sung only by males. Women are prohibited from singing in this style of song.

5. ***Echengka***: Mid voice sung by female. It does not reflect the main melody of the song but a part of the song in which there are more than two parts.

6. ***Eyemo***: Serves as a background sound or filibuster during the performance of a song in which, there are breathing sounds, or drum like sounds.

6.2 Types of Traditional Lotha songs:

The Lothas had many different types of songs with the following being the major genres. There were many songs under each genre with variations and versions available from village to village. The genres collected below include songs from all the three different ranges of the Lotha country: upper, lower and middle ranges, with the main source of collection done from Longsa village, Wokha. This is not an all-exhaustive list but encapsulate all those styles that were traditionally sung in the Lotha area.

1. *Lijon/ Likhe Khen*: Grass cutting song especially sung during summer in the fields.
2. *Loroe Soa Ka-He aka Yanpiyanthan khen*: Sung by *khyingroe* (youth)
3. *Tssuktsu Khen*: Also known as husking song. In Longsa village, also known as Senjanbemo Khen. Husking song.
4. *Lanvon Khen:* Road making song.
5. *Yantso Khen:* Songs about making of the village.
6. *Loroe-khyingroe nzanta khen*: Song sung between lovers
7. *Poni Nzanta khen*: Love ballad between husband and wife
8. *Poni pyonta khen*: Song of divorce
9. *Ekhyo Khen*: Songs of victory
10. *Ponjon Khen*: This song is a song sung during the act of burning the forest during Jhum cultivation to make way for the vegetation and rice cultivation.
11. *Rütso khen, Ralo evo khen:* War songs.
12. *Rümphi khen:* This song is sung during March-April by all. The song encapsulates the Lotha essence of roaming.
13. *Rapha Khen*: Lotha Oral Tradition holds the view that the meaning of the Rapha song is embedded in folk practices. It is linked to the animal world and references the bandage made of sliced bamboo that is cast on injured animals such as a companion dog that is taken during hunting and homes for chickens. The song is sung by males only, and indicates the connection with nature.
14. *Chumpo etsso Khen*: Only unmarried males would sing the songs of the Chumpo khen. Lotha Oral traditional states that during the ancient times, those who have gone on a journey outside the village and returned, they are asked to stay for one night in the Chumpo, only after which, they can return to their homes. This is a kind of ritual cleansing of the outside world, and a purification of the physical body.
15. *Osho Khen*: Song sung during feast of merit or *"genna"* song.

16. *Ngaro ejicho khen*: lullaby

17. *Echünungra khen:* funeral song

18. *Pharance Khen*: *Ho ho*. Only sung by males. Combination of *tssotsu*. War victory song.

19. *Pangti Khen:* A song style which is conversational in nature, sung only by males. Earlier it was sung by both males and females but now it is only in the domain of male voices. It is not to be confused with the village Pangti, but the name of the song is used to refer to a type of singing that combines *Hoho* (male voice) and *Tssotsu*. Oral tradition believes that when the females used to sing this song, all the men who were singing the song were killed by enemies. That is why women are not allowed to sing this song.

20. *Likhyo khen:* Song for lunch sung in the field or after a successful fishing session.

21. *Nchaka*: Oral tradition believes that women of fertile age are not supposed to emit the sounds of the animals which the *Nchaka* signifies. Unmarried women aka "*loran*" are however, allowed to do so.

22. *Lomyak Khen*: Romantic Ballad.

23. *Liru Khen*: A type of harvest song *Tokhü Khen*: Song sung during the harvest festival of the Lothas

As mentioned, the list is not exhaustive of the types of songs available in all the Lotha villages but is representative of the currently available corpus in which the folk songs exist in two different realms – a) as ancient songs that were part and parcel of the everyday life of the people and as b) hybridized texts that amalgamate modern ideas into the inherited folksy tunes. Below are analyses of certain types of songs that were collected in the course of data collection

1) Ballad-type songs: In terms of their generic composition, the folk songs of the Lothas are mostly made up of ballads (which is a form of song that narrates a story in either verse/non-verse). Mc Cormick and White (2004) defines the ballad as, "a narrative song that is characterised chiefly by concentration on a single episode, dramatic development through dialogue and action, and objective tone, and that is structurally rooted in repetitive verbal patterns and tight, balancing scenes" (p. 2015). The Lotha ballads display a break away from the conventional form of the classical ballad, in that they do not use metrical composition, but only the stanzaic form. The rhythms confined in the ballads are dictated in a slow-moving beat pattern, and are mostly sung in two-three parts (alto-soprano-bass) together in unison. In the

Lotha ballads, there are no parts that are sung by individuals, although the narrative themselves speak about an individual journey or story. An example of this is the story of two friends encapsulated in the song "Supen thera" who went to the mythical of *Tyui*. The song's lyrics echo the historical reality of the Lotha people, and the oral tradition that holds the belief that Lothas had an entire civilisation in the fabled Mount Tyui, from where the Lothas moved to other villages.

Supen Thera (Rhododendron)

Shompo eni Tiyi Enüng ngi chüngotav to kota le,
Chungo zela süpen tong ngo na merüma ki
E shomvü eni na yio, rhonla tola echüi thera sayi,
Rhonlatola nsa na ün rhona sayi,
Ejo lepok Tiyi khi khüma rhona sayi,
Eshungtivü phae khi khüma rhona sayi
Sümro rümbüm phongi khi khüma rhona sayi
Mongsangosü chüppi khi khüma rhona sayi
Potsüo chum mi chanchi le shomüo
E shomvü eni na yio, ejo lepok Tiyi khi khüma ün rhon küma,
Eshongtivü phayi khi khüma ün rhon küma
Sümro rümbüm phongi khi khüma ün rhon küma,
Mongsangosü chüppi khi khuma ün rhon küma,
Shomvü eni na yio, ün khümjancho,
Ezhü ntavü tsayila, zechi le shomvüo.

FREE TRANSLATION

My friend and I went to *Tyui* one day after planning,
When we reached, the flower '*supen thera'* was blooming,
My friend and I wanted to pick the flower,
but saw that it was the flower of the dead,
We wanted to remove it, but we could not remove it without rituals
It is the flower that has emerged out of the Tiyi *dao* (machete)
The *dao* of Tiyi is used as worship and kept near the flower (to remove it)
Arm bands are removed and kept near the flower and used as worship
Bangles are removed and kept near the flower and used as worship
Longpensu (Lotha male shawl) is folded and kept near the flower and used as

Worship,
Now as we looked at the horizon, stretched as it was from one end to another,
My friend and I did not have anything, we were not armed with the Tiyi *dao,*
We were not in possession of the arm band,
We were not in possession of the bangles,
We were not in possession of *Longpensu,*
So we cannot worship and pay homage,
Rough winds are coming, my friend, lets go.

This simple ballad talks about two friends who ascend Mount Tiyi to pluck the 'supen thera) rhododendrons thay grow in plenty there. However, as they proceed to remove the rhododendrons, they remember that they have to undertake a ritual to remove them from their place of habitation. For the removal of the rhododendrons, they must enact a ritual, because it was believed that it was from this flower that the ubiquitous *dao* (Naga/ Lotha indigenous machete) was born. Then the song goes on to describe the ritual associated with the flower, which entails removal of the arm bands, bangles, and *Longpensu* (which is the male shawl) in order to pluck the flower. As it turns out, the two friends forget to bring the required paraphernalia to the location, and thus cannot worship the flower. In the end, the friend exclaims that there are rough winds coming along the way, and indicates that they have to go back. The rhododendron plays an important role in the Lotha collective imagination. It is believed that if one plucks the flower from Mount Tyui and brings it back to the home without observing the rituals, then the person will be met with bad luck and that the flower itself will not bloom outside the circumference of Tyui. Rhododendrons are lively-red coloured flowers that are native to the hills around Wokha district, and thus have gained much cultural significance. They are also used as earrings by women.

***Lomyak khen/ Loroe Khyingroe nzanta khen*-** One facet of Lotha songs that feature regularly is the love song. This ancient love song also called the *Lomyak Khen,* where the lover gazes at the beauty of the beloved and asks her where she got her paraphernalia from. The song begins with the chorus asking the girl and her friends, where she got her dress and paraphernalia from. Although the song begins with the implied singer as the male, it is only at the end of the song that we get to know that the men are speaking on the behalf of the mother. Throughout the song, there are allusions to the natural world as the beauty of the items described is constantly compared to objects that are present in the natural world of the Lotha. This shows the deep

connection that the Lothas felt towards the natural embodiments of animals and ecology, and this is reflected in the way the beauty of *Tsuropeno* finds validation in nature.

Tiyi Lungchum Yan Lo Vanathung "Lomyak Khen"

Romantic Song sung during stay in ancient Tiyi Lungchum Village

Shom woro eworo somio, oh, Tsuropeno
Sungro Rumbum Eshilona, Shichencho Alo,
Eshong kvu eshilona, shichencho ala
Eryu lakup eshilona, shichencho alo,
Yonjomotsen eshilona, shichencho alo,
Yanaloyi eshilona shichencho alo.

E….. Khonorotsung jiha Yiphiro Emhi Tsoa Shan
E…. Nongnong Tsung jiha Yiphiro Emhi Tsoa Shan
E…. Khono rotsung Jiha Yiphiro Emhi Tsoa Shan
Ranchongo tsung, ochona shancho. Opona anho
Ralowoy ochona rhoncho, opvuna enga.

FREE TRANSLATION

Girl friends, our friends, oh *Tsuropeno* (girl's name)
Did you buy the *Sungro rumbum* (bangles) or
Did you extract it from a bamboo hole?
Did you buy the *Eryu Lakup* (waist band) or
Did you get it from the blacksmith or
Did you get it by searching?

e…. Your breastplate also resembles the characteristic *yiphiro's* movement (black bird/sparrow's tail)
e…. it resembles the seeds of the *nongnong (family of teak)* tree's movement
e…… it resembles the *khono* (fruit tree) tree's movement

it resembles the *ranchongo* (wood), who crafted this?
Did someone go to the jungle and pluck it?
The mother asks…

There are also other themes that resonate within the ballad form in the Lotha corpus. Aspects of work, romantic love, religion are some of them. A ballad usually has a repetition and a refrain, which can be either stanzaic or couplet. The Lotha ballad speaks of an event which has a clear cut beginning (goal), middle (conflict ridden/ lacunae discovered) and an end (resolution/acceptance of the established order or status quo). Although the conventional ballad has a third person narrator who gives an objective account of the situation, the Lotha ballads are almost dialogic. It has to be noted here that the standardized western generic classification cannot be applied in the context of Lotha songs because of their varied characteristics that can be found in more than one genre.

2. *Echünungra Khen*: This type of song encapsulates grief and sorrow and is usually sung by both males and females. Nostalgia, lament and melancholia are themes that resonate through this type of song. In the song elucidated below, a person laments the death of someone close to him/ her. In this song, one can see how cultural metaphors are mapped even as the figure of the bird and the wild animal (symbolic of life, liberation and freedom) are commingled in order to evoke the image of death.

OKHUMO ONI EKUM EVANTHUNG MUNGYAN KHEN
Song sung about when they were alive together

Oh.. Shombon Eni, Eni Nongothung,
Kilo Mongtasi
Echuo tchuka, tchuka tchücholo, jowo zele
There also -Jilojiha, zürü zaeli, hoji tsavoto
Wotsu rüjüngden rüma oro vani vanilla
Hoji tsov to yichi vüngiden oro vanilla
Hoji tsov to woro woshaden odena oro oro vanilla

Shombon eni ekumthung saliwo,
Nisharo renkae, renkae vasi, nikhüma
Mongü shombon eni, ekhumthung sawo,

Hojilo jiha Mvutsoro tsokae, tsokae vasi,
Nikhüma müngu.

FREE TRANSLATION

Oh mister, when we were young, we stayed together in the house.
I went to see the path of the dying well where the water was drying-
Imagine if there also, that *zürü* (wild animal) is standing, like that
Like group of hornbill birds coming together and staying there, like that
Like *yichi vungiden* (birds) who come together and stay, like that
All these kinds of birds are sitting together.

Mister, if we were still together alive
I would install the glue-trap and place it here and there and adore you,
My mister and I, if we were both alive
We would construct a bamboo house and will adore you.

3. Tokhü Khen: This song is an example of the type of song that used to be sung during the *Tokhü Emong* festival. It was collected from Longsachung village where it was performed during the *Tokhü* festival, and was sung only by males. As translated, the song is an invocation of the ancient beliefs of the Lothas and the way *Tokhü* was celebrated. The themes exonerated in the lyrics testifies to the ritual practice before the *Tokhü* festival during which time the *pvüthi* (priest) along with his assistants went to house to house to gather the offerings for the festival. It was during this time this song was sung, wherein references to the godling *Ngazo* is invoked. It was a belief among the Lothas that the bigger the offering that was handed in the basket of the *pvüthi*, the greater the blessing, and this belief is clearly indicated in the second stanza of the song. In the absence of a chronicled history, this type of song become emblematic of the folklore and the rich tradition of the Lothas. The beginning parts of the song reflect the *"Ho-Ho"* style which is a singing style that is sung in the bass voice by men.

HO----- HO----- HO-------
HAYILE HO------- HOLA YILE HO---- HOLEHO-----

Emungyanthe Oh---------- tssuphoedeno….

Evontero na nte kilo ruma tssayila….
Esothe na thumkum liki pyingtokvula…
Sukhying tsoso sukhying mmhomo soa tsayila
Ngazo tsosi ngazo mmhomo soa tsayila

Evondenro na meta cham to rumatsayila…
Evondenro na zukhi/ü cham to rumatsayila…
Evondenro na maru elum un-rola…
Evondenro na zukhi elum un-rola…
Maru tsosi motsunga na nzotaro nyantavla
Zukhi tsosi motsunga na nzotaro chantavula

Nte chanla O.. Rhujung-hampongdento nte chanchela
Nte chanla O.. yizum-haponggden to nte chanchela

FREE TRANSLATION:

Charming oh….. great people
Our voice is visiting your house
Receive us, and fill up our field-huts
We are bringing a real blessing
We are carrying the blessing of a good (*Ngazo*) spirit

Our voice may be passing through in view of some place
Our voice may be passing through the river
Our voice may not be good to get a reward
Our voice may not be good to get a wine
If we reward one, will 100 people cooperate/getting together?
If you offer one cup of wine, will it serve 100 people?…

We are pouring for you o.. you the cock hornbills…
We are pouring for you o…. you cock yizum…

As shown from the examples illustrated above, the Lotha folksongs show a remarkable quality of resilience from change. In contrast to other popular Lotha songs which display the influence

of western genres in their structural components reflected in the use of refrain, chorus and stanza, the Lotha folk songs on the other hand, do not reflect such modifications and have remained in their traditional settings so far. Similarly, contextual changes due to modernity have rendered most of the meanings of the lyrics lost, but they are still sung in their original avatars. Not only in their structural components but also in their singing styles, the traditional Lotha folk songs do not appear to have been changed as the western music structure of Alto – Bass – Soprano – Tenor are not used to sing the indigenous songs, but rather employing their own singing styles such as the *Choro* or *Terio.*

7.0 CONCLUSION:

This chapter provided an structural and thematic analyses of the proverbs by breaking them down into their subgenres and looking at how the meaning of the proverb is elicited in a conversation. The thematic analysis was done by identifying the dominant motif of a particular proverb. Similarly, a study into the narrative folk poetry of the Lothas was also attempted by looking at the ethnic genres of the Lothas and analyzing the singing styles inherent in each type of song. This approach was used so as to show the degree of change (if any) inherent in the structures and themes of the genres analyzed.

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Conclusion

At its fundamental core, this thesis has been founded on two fundamental principles that have guided the methodology and the theoretical underpinnings of the work – to engage with the folklore of the Lotha community, and to understand the various kinds of influences that Lotha folklore has embodied through the years and how these various perambulations and configurations manifest themselves in the various verbal genres that have been studied in the course of developing this thesis. For arriving at this evaluation, a diachronic ethnographic approach was undertaken to demonstrate the contextual nuances of Naga society and culture, which was layered by using structuralist and ecocritical concepts to provide a wholistic interpretative paradigm. The purpose of integrating these two schools of thought was to provide both structural and contextual interpretation as using only a structuralist paradigm massively decontextualizes the textual environment in which these folklore(s) occur. Futhermore, reading between the lines and unlocking the metaphoric content of the items such as proverbs and proverbial sayings as well as reading the ecological and ecocentric motifs and symbols embedded within these generic constituents enables the *other* to partly see the world of the Lotha from the eyes of Lotha. This emic aspect is important because traditional Lotha folklore can be read as one of the many ways that the Lotha interpreted and made sense of the world around him. The creation of narratives, the ceremony of ritual and the beliefs that hold these configurations in place are echoes of an order of thinking that existed before the chirographic chronicling of Naga history itself, and must be read in the complexity of the oral continuum in which it exists – as fragments of history and as reactions to historical and cultural processes. It is with this purpose that the thesis makes a humble attempt to bring together these diverse and important strands of thought to demonstrate and reflect on the currency of the traditional Lotha Naga folklore as it exists today.

The first chapter serves as a basic primer and an entry point into the thesis by introducing the conceptual, theoretical and ethnographic viewpoints in order to establish the fundamental framework of the thesis. It delineates the theoretical postulations in the field of folkloristics, while also throwing light on the other methodological apparatus such as the Syntagmatic structuralism of Vladimir Propp and the Ecocritical movement in Literary Thought from whom this work borrows heavily. Furthermore, it briefly outlines the history of the Naga people and Nagaland in order to portray a layered summary of what the succeeding chapters explain in detail.

The second chapter titled “Lotha Folklore and Folklife” moves the lens of study closer to the “folk” who use, circulate and perpetuate the folklore. By using both primary and secondary sources, the chapter provides a detailed study of the Lotha tribe to demonstrate the intricate relationship between folklore and folklife and how they are mutually dependent on each other. It also looks at the nature of orality in the Naga context and looks at how Naga and Lotha Naga tribal identity is created, and how the different realms of native Lotha folklore correspond to an order of reality that Alluding to the anthropological work of Victor Turner and Erwin Goffman, an attempt to understand the folklife through the traditional folk religion of the Lotha by looking at the life cycle ritual has also been made here to show how belief threads the various folklore of the Lothas.

The third chapter is a comprehensive and analytical overview of the ecological themes and motifs existing in the texture of the narratives, which include both tale types and proverbial sayings. It studies and interrogates the apparent anthropomorphism of the tales, the portrayal of the environment wherein the Lotha concept of the environment and ecology is engraved. Other ecological inflections such as ecological ethics and the correlation of the human and the ecological worlds, and the negotiations they find in the tale types are all examined in this penultimate chapter. As such, it functions as a point of departure for a thematic interpretation that colours the folktales, proverbs and songs studied in the remaining part of the thesis.

The fourth chapter delves into the syntagmatic structuralism of Proppian and the application of the same in the context of Lotha Naga tales. The Lotha Naga tales examined in the thesis correspond as the Lotha oikotypes. Similar tales of trickery and deceit as manifested in the Apvüho stories also exist in the character of “Iki” in the Sümi tribe. In this chapter, different kinds of tales are also examined, their ATU indexes identified, and a forensic structural deconstruction of the tales have been done by breaking down the tales into different narratemes. The genres of tales studied are the tales of the Trickster, Legends and Shape-Shifting tales, which are the most common types of tales circulating in the Lotha corpus.

The fifth chapter is an attempt at a structural analysis of two other verbal genres, namely Proverbs and Proverbial sayings and Narrative Folk Poetry. The purpose of analysing these other verbal genres was important because proverbs layer conversations and styles story-telling, while also existing as an independent genre. They are sometimes gleaned from the tales

themselves, and constitute an important part of the narrative technique. Additionally, in the absence of a written script, proverbs in the Lotha context also function as repositories of lexical and narrative styles that contain within them the legacy of an oral tradition. At the beginning of the research work, around 70 proverbs and sayings were collected, which also included loaned or borrowed proverbs that constituted as part of the proverbial minimum. However, during the course of developing the analytical paradigm, the closest indigenous proverbs were transliterated, translated and analyzed by using Roger D Abraham's exposition of Equivalence and Causations delineated in Richard Dorson's Folklore and Folklife, and highlight how elements of the proverb such as "tail" and "head" engenders meaning in the Lotha context. Furthermore, Narrative folk poetry existing in their respective cultural genres has also been enumerated.

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