FEMINIST CRITIQUE ON THE IMAGE OF WOMEN: A STUDY ON SÜMI NAGA FOLKLORE

A

THESIS SUBMITTED TO NAGALAND UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I sincerely thank Prof. Mohd. Akhtar Jamal Khan, my supervisor, for his ungrudging gift of time, invaluable assistance during the research process, and guidance as I worked to complete my thesis.

I am grateful to all of the professors and faculty at Nagaland University especially Department of English. I thank Prof. Nigamananda Das, HOD, for his essential advice and continual support.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the librarians and staff of the libraries where I was able to access the resources for my job. I also want to thank all the responders who provided me with the primary data I needed for this study.

My sincere thanks go out to my mother, who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue this study, as well as my family, my church, and friends, whose support and prayers helped me to complete my research work. My husband, Toino S. Rotokha, deserves a special mention because he has served as both an important critic and a steadfast mentor during my quest for knowledge.

Above all, I am grateful to Almighty God for being the source of my inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom, and I dedicate this work to Him.

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Abstract

Research on folklore plays a crucial role in elevating the position of women by providing a platform to examine and challenge traditional narratives, stereotypes, and gender roles that may be embedded in folktales and cultural practices. Since the time of Aristotle, there have been various prejudices that have been attached to women in particular. He states the differences between men and women and argues that women are more compassionate than men, but they are also more envious, querulous, slanderous, and contentious. He adds that women are more dispirited, despondent, impudent, and given to falsehood than men. Finally, he argues that men are more disposed to give assistance to danger, and are more courageous than women. Aristotle's views on women were influenced by his views on biology and his views on the natural order of things. He believed that women were inferior to men, and that they were naturally suited for domestic roles. His views were widely accepted in his time, and they continue to influence our understanding of gender today.

The way that women are portrayed in our culture has been a point of contention for many feminist movements. As folklore often perpetuates stereotypes and gendered expectations, this research *Feminist Critique on the Image of Women: A Study on Sümi Naga Folklore* makes an attempt to document and study the representation of Sümi women as depicted in selected genres of its folklore – folktales, folksongs, and proverbial sayings. This study has a limited scope in the content included to the portrayal of women

in folktales, folksongs, and proverbial sayings collected from the target sample only. It does not deal with other genres in folklore apart from the aforementioned. This study will confine itself to the analysis where women and girls feature prominently.

In gender representation, in Sümi Naga oral tradition shows that patriarchal dominance has had a significant influence. On the lesser position of women, it can be argued that cultural productions and ethos, such as oral literature, have a significant impact. Women are viewed as inferior in a patriarchal culture, according to studies of the chosen folkloric works. This is a result of ingrained assumptions that men are the family's head, provider, and protector. The analysis has revealed that women are not clever and intelligent and that they are poor decision-makers. However, practically speaking, women shoulder an infinite number of duties within the home, including childrearing, general child care, handling a variety of household chores, and in some instances, participating in fieldwork that is normally reserved for men.

The study adheres to the guidelines outlined in the MLA Handbook (9th edition) for in-text citations, works cited page, and overall document formatting. It includes document analysis on archival records and relevant literature through primary sources and secondary sources to contextualize the findings and support the qualitative data. Additionally, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants following a set of predetermined open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility in responses.

This study is grounded in feminist theory, which seeks to examine and challenge gender-based inequalities and power dynamics in a patriarchal backdrop. Feminism provides a critical lens through which to analyze gendered power relations, the social construction of gender roles, and the impact of these dynamics on women's opportunities and agency. By highlighting alternative narratives - overlooked or marginalized in mainstream narratives, and subverting traditional gender roles, it attempts to break down stereotypes and promote more inclusive and empowering representations of women. Women are not helpless beings who constantly require saving. They possess their own strengths, abilities, and resilience. By exploring tales of resilient, courageous, and independent female characters, this research provides role models and stories that challenge societal norms and encourage women to embrace their agency and potential.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I

In *Writing About Literature*, Edgar V Roberts states that literature means compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas, that it shapes our goals and values by clarifying our own identities – both 33positively, through acceptance of the admirable in human beings, and negatively, through rejection of the sinister. He adds:

> It enables us to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times we would never otherwise know existed. It helps us to develop a mature sensibility and compassion for the condition of all living things – human, animal, and vegetable… It exercises our emotions through interest, concern, tension, excitement, hope, fear, regret, laughter, and sympathy. Through our cumulative experience in reading, literature shapes our goals and values by clarifying our own identities – both positively, through acceptance of the admirable in human beings, and negatively, through rejection of the sinister. It enables us to develop a perspective on events occurring locally and globally, and thereby it gives us understanding and control. (Roberts 1-2).

The readers unconsciously participate in the ideological flow contained in literary works. This is because the process of reproducing literary works is not isolated from the

cultural, political, and social context of a society. It shapes the worldview of writers, readers, and the audience. Thus, literature becomes one of the most powerful catalysts in the process of building strong institutional beliefs right from childhood as the image of the characters is cemented into our conscience. Therefore, any society which is concerned with understanding itself cannot do so without paying due attention to its literature.

A feminist critique is a type of literary criticism that examines the ways in which literature reinforces or challenges traditional gender roles. It refers to the examination and analysis of various social, cultural, political, and economic issues from a feminist perspective. It involves assessing how these issues impact gender equality and the experiences of women in society. It seeks to expose and challenge the ways in which traditional norms, values, and structures contribute to gender inequality, discrimination, and oppression. It often focuses on exploring the ways in which women have been marginalized, silenced, or excluded from various spheres of society. It seeks to uncover the underlying assumptions and biases that perpetuate gender inequality and to promote social change and gender justice.

Feminist critiques can be applied to a wide range of areas, including literature, art, media, politics, economics, education, and more. The primary goal is to highlight and question the power dynamics, stereotypes, biases, and injustices that affect women's lives. Feminist critics argue that the way that women are portrayed in literature can have a significant impact on how women are perceived in society. They also argue that literature can be used to challenge and change traditional gender roles.

There are a number of approaches to feminist critique. Some feminist critics focus on the ways in which literature portrays female characters. They argue that female characters are often portrayed in a negative light, as being weak, emotional, and irrational. They also argue that female characters are often sexualized and objectified. Other feminist critics focus on the ways in which literature uses language to reinforce traditional gender roles. They argue that the use of gendered language can shape how readers perceive female characters. For example, the use of the word "girl" to refer to a grown woman can infantilize her and make her seem less powerful.

In her book *A Room of One's Own*, as a feminist critique Virginia Woolf argues that women's lack of access to education and financial independence has prevented them from achieving their full potential as writers. In her book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan argues that the traditional role of housewife and mother is stifling and oppressive to women. In her book *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf argues that the beauty industry is a form of oppression that keeps women from achieving their full potential.

Key tenets of feminist critique

Some of the key tenets of feminist critique can be seen in the following points:

1. Literature is not a neutral reflection of reality, but rather a product of the social and cultural context in which it is produced.
    a. In his book *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin argues that literature is always embedded in a particular social and cultural context, and that this context

inevitably shapes the way that literature is produced and interpreted. He argues that literature is not a mirror of reality, but rather a lens through which we can see reality in a new way. Bakhtin's ideas have been influential in literary criticism and theory, and they have helped to shape our understanding of the relationship between literature and reality. His work has shown us that literature is not simply a passive reflection of the world around us, but rather an active engagement with it. Literature can help us to see the world in new ways, and it can challenge us to think about our own beliefs and assumptions. (Bakhtin 1981).

2. The way that women are portrayed in literature can have a significant impact on how women are perceived in society.
    a. In her book *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter argues that the way that women are portrayed in literature is often shaped by the social and cultural context in which the literature is produced. She argues that women writers have often been marginalized and silenced, and that this has had a significant impact on the way that women are represented in literature (Showalter 1977).
    b. In her work *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states that "the way women are portrayed in literature can have a profound impact on the way women are perceived in society. When women are portrayed as weak, helpless, or subservient, it reinforces the idea that women are not capable of being strong, independent, or equal to men. This can lead to women being treated differently in society, and it can make it harder for

women to achieve their full potential" (Adichie 2015). She argues that feminism is not about hating men, but about equality for all people, regardless of gender. She also discusses the importance of representation in literature, and how the way women are portrayed can have a profound impact on the way they are perceived in society.

c. Similarly, in the essay "The Way We See Ourselves," Gloria Steinem writes about the importance of how women are portrayed in literature because “it can shape the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. When women are portrayed as strong, independent, and capable, it can help us to believe in ourselves and our potential. It can also help to challenge stereotypes and create a more just and equitable society". She argues that when women are portrayed as strong, independent, and capable, it can help to challenge stereotypes and create a more just and equitable society (Steinem 1983).

3. Literature can be used to challenge and change traditional gender roles.

   a. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," Adrienne Rich writes, "The work of a woman writer is to re-vision the world, and so to change it." She argues that by writing about women's experiences in new and different ways, writers can help to challenge the stereotypes and assumptions that perpetuate gender inequality (Rich 18-32).

   b. Bell Hooks, in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, argues that literature can be used to "deconstruct the dominant ideology of gender" and to "create new possibilities for thinking about and experiencing gender."

Feminist critique can be a powerful tool for raising awareness of gender inequality and creating a more just and equitable society for women. By examining the world through a feminist lens, it can identify and challenge the ways in which gender inequality is embedded in our society. It can be used to analyze media representations of women, to identify and challenge sexist language, and to expose the ways in which gender inequality is embedded in our institutions and policies.

Through feminist critique, scholars and activists aim to challenge gender norms, promote gender equality, amplify women's voices, advocate for women's rights, and create a more inclusive and equitable society. Feminist critique can also be used to create new knowledge about gender inequality, and to develop strategies for challenging and transforming the status quo as its goal is not only to analyze existing systems but also to advocate for gender equality and social justice. By highlighting and challenging gender disparities, feminists aim to bring about positive change, promote inclusivity, and create a more equitable and just society for all genders.

It is important to note that feminist critiques are diverse and can vary in their focus and perspectives, reflecting the broad range of feminist theories and approaches. It is a dynamic and evolving field of study that encompasses a wide range of perspectives, theories, and methodologies within feminism. In literature, a feminist critique might examine the portrayal of female characters, the gender dynamics within the narrative, and the overall representation of women. In politics, a feminist critique may analyze policies

and institutions to identify and challenge gender-based discrimination and unequal power relations.

In literature, the suppression of women under patriarchy has a tremendous impact on the representation of women both written and oral. Many scholars have critically studied the relationship between men and women in the light of subordination. Consequently, it has been argued that women have more or less been marginalized across time and space. Throughout the history of the development of human life, there have been situations of injustice in the position and roles of women shaped by the traditional gender roles assigned by society. In his book *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*, Neil deGrasse Tyson explains these traditional gender roles "cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (Tyson 83). These traditional gender roles are harmful to both men and women. They limit men's ability to express their emotions and their nurturing side, and they limit women's ability to be strong, decisive, and protective. Women are generally positioned as inferiors who must submit to the superiority of men who dominate human life (Bourdieu 2001).

Feminist theory has significantly contributed to the field of folklore studies by offering critical perspectives on the representation, transmission, and interpretation of folklore, particularly in relation to women's experiences and gender dynamics. It recognizes how folklore often plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms, beliefs, and values. These folklore studies aim to critically analyze the ways in which women are

portrayed in traditional folk narratives, legends, myths, fairy tales, and other forms of folklore, and to challenge and disrupt gender stereotypes and inequalities.

Key aspects of feminist theory applied to folklore

Feminist scholars such as Bell Hooks (1989), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Diane Goldstein (1986), Kay Stone (1979), and Barbara Babcock-Abrahams (1975) have employed various approaches and frameworks to analyze folklore from a feminist lens. Their work has helped to challenge the historical marginalization of women's stories and experiences, and has highlighted women's agency, creativity, and contributions as storytellers, folklorists, and cultural participants. Some key aspects of feminist theory can be applied to folklore:

1. Feminist folklore scholars have focused on uncovering and amplifying women's voices and narratives within folklore. They have sought to challenge the historical marginalization of women's stories and experiences by highlighting women's agency, creativity, and contributions as storytellers, folklorists, and cultural participants.
2. Feminist analysis of folklore aims to deconstruct and critique gender stereotypes present in traditional tales. These scholars examine how folk narratives often depict women in limited, stereotypical roles, such as passive princesses, evil witches, or obedient wives. They question and disrupt these portrayals to promote more nuanced and empowering representations of women.

3. Feminist theory explores the power dynamics and social structures within folklore, including the ways in which gender hierarchies and patriarchal norms are reinforced or challenged. Scholars examine how women navigate and subvert these structures through subversive narratives, trickster figures, or alternative folk traditions that challenge traditional gender norms.
4. Feminist folklore studies incorporate intersectional perspectives, recognizing that gender intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality. Scholars explore how different forms of marginalization and privilege intersect and influence the representation and experiences of women in folklore.
5. Feminist scholars have highlighted the significance of women's knowledge and expertise within oral traditions. They recognize that women have played key roles as storytellers, healers, keepers of cultural practices, and transmitters of knowledge. Feminist analysis seeks to acknowledge and value women's contributions within the broader context of folklore transmission and cultural continuity.
6. Feminist folklore scholars engage in the reimagining and retelling of traditional tales to challenge gender norms and offer alternative narratives. They create feminist revisions, adaptations, and contemporary folklore that reflect diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives, empowering women and promoting social change.

By employing these approaches, feminist theory enriches the field of folklore studies, shedding light on the ways in which folklore reflects and shapes gendered norms, identities, and power dynamics. It encourages a critical examination of the role of folklore in reinforcing or challenging gender inequality and provides a platform for women's voices and experiences within the broader narrative of human culture. Thus, feminist studies on folklore representation of women aim to critically examine and challenge the gendered norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics embedded in traditional narratives. By doing so, they seek to promote more inclusive, empowering, and diverse representations of women in folklore and contribute to broader discussions about gender equality and social justice.

Feminist theory on gender and sex

The definition provided in *The Oxford English Dictionary* of the word "gender" is as follows: “In mod. [modem] (esp. feminist) use, a euphemism for the sex of a human being, often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions between the sexes” ("Gender" Del 3b). A female is then supposed to possess femininity (e.g. being passive, inferior, silent, and sentimental) while a male is expected to have masculine traits (e.g. being active, superior, outspoken, and rational). Doing the household chores, looking after the children at home and preparing meals are feminine roles. Femaleness and femininity are closely linked with each other as Toril Moi (1989) suggests in the essay "Feminist, female, feminine":

> Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for "femininity" are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural. It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Patriarchy, in other words, wants us to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called femininity. (122-123)

As Louis Althusser (1984) suggests in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", we are hailed by ideology. "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 36), however people may be unconscious of such ideology. Similar to the "magic spell" in fairy tales that "interpellates" people, ideology does the same. This implies that how a woman and a man act and behave is what limits and defines them. Women are frequently stereotyped as sentimental, weak, passive, and other negative traits. Numerous theorists have claimed that femininity is not something that comes naturally but is instead produced culturally since the late 1940s. Making a distinction between sex and gender becomes essential to comprehending feminist ideology.

The social, cultural, and political facets of gender and how they interact with biological sex are examined by feminist theories on gender and sex. It acknowledges that society norms, expectations, and power dynamics are also important in determining gender, in addition to biological variables. The biological differences between men and women are referred to as "sex." Contrarily, gender is a characteristic that is associated

with people depending on their socio-cultural functions in society. Cultural and societal differences are mentioned.

The primary point in feminist ideology emerges when these biological and cultural aspects are taken into account. One of the key aspects of feminist theory on gender and sex is the social construction of gender. Feminist theory challenges the notion that gender is solely determined by biological sex. It argues that gender is a social construct, meaning that it is constructed and reinforced through socialization, cultural norms, and institutions. Feminists emphasize that gender roles and expectations are not fixed or universal but vary across cultures and historical periods.

In the Book II of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir rightly stated that women are made and not born (295). The statement proposes that a person develops their gender identity through intricate social processes and that gender roles and behaviours are not innate. As such the focus on the cultural component may be considered an effective way to liberate from patriarchal restrictions and to empower women as the social construct of femininity is the primary cause of female oppression.

Drawing on the groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) by of philosopher Judith Butler, feminist theory explores the concept of gender as performative. In this influential work, Butler challenges traditional understandings of gender as a fixed and essential characteristic. She argues that gender is not an inherent quality but a social construct that is continuously performed

and reiterated through everyday actions and behaviors. "Gender Trouble" examines how gender norms and identities are constructed and enforced through performative acts.

Butler suggests that gender is a repetitive performance that individuals engage in to conform to societal expectations, rather than a stable and natural attribute. She explores how the performative nature of gender opens up possibilities for subversion and resistance, challenging dominant notions of femininity and masculinity. Her work has had a profound impact on feminist theory, queer theory, and cultural studies. Butler's conceptualization of gender as performative has contributed to broader discussions about the fluidity and social construction of gender identities, paving the way for nuanced understandings of gender and sexuality.

Patriarchal ideologies lay clear-cut distinctive roles and norms for both males and females in society. Gender identity determines how we are perceived, and how we are expected to think and act as men and women, because of the way society is organized (March 19). Feminist theory critically examines power dynamics and the role of patriarchy in shaping gender relations. It highlights how patriarchal structures, institutions, and ideologies perpetuate gender inequalities and restrict opportunities for women. Feminists critique the ways in which gender-based power imbalances impact individuals and contribute to the marginalization and subordination of women. Hence, feminists consider examining how literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women shift as their job in the study of literature.

II

Understanding Folklore

In the nineteenth century, philologists in Germany and antiquarians in England started to develop fresh perspectives on the traditional literature of lower-class people, which led to the creation of folklore research as a new academic discipline. Influential books of folktales and interpretations of German mythology were produced in 1812 by the German brothers Jacob and Wehelm Grimm. Influential books of folklore and interpretations of Germanic mythology were first published by the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812. 'Volkskunde' was the old term for this new discipline, according to Dorson (1-2). But an English antiquarian named William John Thoms came up with the term "folklore" in 1846 to describe this field of study after realising that research on materials with a folkloristic bent was being done under various headings like "Popular Antiquities" or "Popular Literature." Handoo notes two significant effects of Thoms' contribution to global folklore scholarship in his essay "Folklore and Folklife: an Introduction" from 1989: first, it resulted in the establishment of an academic field known as folklore or folkloristic in many parts of the world; second, it also sparked a protracted and never-ending debate about the definition and its scope as to what should be included and excluded in the study of folklore (2).

The study of folklore today encompasses a wide range of academic fields that interact and overlap with one another. Folklore is studied broadly in fields like anthropology, psychology, sociology, literary studies, women's studies, and linguistics.

To have a deeper grasp of the culture and history underlying the provided oral literature, it becomes imperative to comprehend and analyze folk literature in the context of the aforementioned disciplines.

Folklore is a combination of the terms "folk" and "lore," which have different meanings. 'Folk' is equivalent to 'Folc' in Anglo-Saxon, 'Volc' in Dutch, and 'Volk' in German, whereas 'Lore' is equivalent to 'Lare' in Middle English, 'Lar' in Anglo-Saxon, 'Lear' in Dutch, and 'Lehre' in German. Folklore, then, is the wisdom of the people or the knowledge of the people. This is because the terms "folk" and "lore" have etymological roots in the words "people" and "knowledge," respectively. According to Oxford Dictionaries, "lore" refers to a collection of customs and information that are shared orally among members of a certain group. Folklore is unique in that no single author is responsible for it.

However, Alan Dundes challenges the idea that folk primarily pertains to the rural or peasant folk in his 1977 article "Who Are the Folk?" According to him, many folklorists in the nineteenth century believed that "folk" was the rural peasant class, which is intermediate between the pre-literate and civilized classes. Therefore, it is considered that the folklore that emerges from this group, which is neither as savage nor as educated as the urban population, is the one that reproduces folklore. His idea of 'folk' is as follows:

> The term ‘folk’ can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is—it could be a

> common occupation, language, or religion—but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group have a sense of group identity (*Frontiers of Folklore* 17).

Folklore is transmitted by such a group of individuals who share similar habits, philosophies, beliefs, mannerisms, and rituals, among other things. Folk has existed since prehistoric times, and as man became more civilized and embraced stable lifestyles, his folklore migrated and became ingrained in society. Similar to how the same rural people moved to cities with the onset of modernization and urban development, but not without their folklore. As a result, the folklore took on several shapes, but it was always a part of civilization and human life. A social group that consists of two or more people who share characteristics and show their shared identity through distinctive customs is referred to as "folk" in modern society.

Folklore, according to M.H. Abrams' Glossary of Literary Terms (1999) and Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1998), is a general term for sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that are typically passed down orally and not always in writing (104–105). A social group that consists of two or more people who share characteristics and show their shared identity through distinctive customs is referred to as a "folk" in modern society. In “Folklore: Materials, science, art” (2005), Ralph Steele Boggs states:

> Folklore refers to a body of materials, to the science which studies these materials, and to the art which applies these materials and scientific conclusions about them to practical ends. As a body of materials, folklore is the lore, erudition, knowledge, or teachings, of a folk, large social unit, kindred group, tribe, race, or nation, primitive or civilized, throughout its history. It is the whole body of traditional culture, or conventional modes of human thought and action. It is created informally in a group of persons for themselves, but has been accepted widely enough to have attained considerable currency, and over a sufficient period of time to have acquired traditional traits, such as anonymity of authorship and historic geographic patterns of variants of basic forms (3).

In their work *Leaving Folklore* (2005), Martha Sims and Martin Stephens define folklore as:

> Folklore is many things, and it's almost impossible to define succinctly. It's both what folklorists study and the name of the discipline they work within. Yes, folklore is folksongs and legends. It's also quilts, Boy Scouts badges, high school marching band initiations, jokes, chain letters, nicknames, holiday food… and many other things you might or might not expect. Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories. Folklore is present in many kinds of informal communications, whether verbal (oral and written texts), customary (behaviours, rituals) or material (physical object). It involves values, traditions ways of thinking and behaving. It's about art. It's about the people and the way people learn. It helps us learn who we are and how to make meaning in the world around us (1-2).

According to Temsula Ao's remarks in "From Antiquity to Modern" (2009), oral traditions, the basis of all folklore:

> Folklore study has come a long way from the days of antiquity and has emerged as a discipline in its own right. Geography too plays a significant role in tracing the evolution of folktales and identifying actual locations from legends and myths. The ramifications of folklore can now be heard in political discourse and ethnic assertions. Further, folklore or / and cultural studies have now become an integral component of comparative literature in many universities. Oral traditions, the source of all folklore is now being hailed as the chronicle of Human history, by providing evidence to the origin of people and their subsequent migrations to their final destinations (3).

Folklore transcends the confines of time in that it combines the cultures and civilizations of the past with those of the present to create a more complete picture. As it travels, it continuously advances with civilisation by assuming new forms. In this manner, it is never struck at once. It cannot be kept static or retained in a single form that claims to be the "original." People who are blissfully oblivious of its many features and its significant impact on our civilisation are regularly and spontaneously producing it. It no longer pertains to the majority of the rural or semi-urban population but is still very much a part of the modern world.

There have been numerous attempts to define, classify, and theorise the term "folklore" using terminology that can give it a specific meaning. Folklore encompasses everything, including cultural norms, behavioural codes, personal identities, feelings and emotions, religious beliefs, and experiences of not only a particular race or nationality but also of each individual living through it. Folklore does not just refer to information that is passed down orally from one generation to the next. Folklore is defined differently for each civilization or cultural group by its speakers. Any effort at a single definition of

folklore will fall short of capturing the variety of meanings it has been given by different people and numerous ethnic groups. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the historical development of folklore and its critical viewpoints. Dundes argues that "to avoid confusion it might be better to use the term folklore for the materials and the term folkloristic for the study of the materials" in *The Study of Folklore* (1965).

One can construct a definition that could be accepted from these definitions. Folklore can be viewed as a broad term that refers to oral traditions that have been passed down orally from generation to generation and include things like mythic legends, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, deaths, insults, teases, greetings, customs, folk dances, folk drama, folk art, folk belief, folk medicine, folk music, etc.

Functions of Folklore

Folklore may be defined in a variety of ways, but its primary purpose is to spread knowledge throughout society. As information is disseminated to the general public, this influence is significant in the delivery of informal education. According to Bascom's "Four Functions of Folklore" (1954), the four purposes of folklore are: 1. Education; 2. Validation of Culture and Social Norms; 3. Upkeep of Conformity and Social Pressure 4. Offers a release, an outlet, or the fulfilment of a wish. In "Folklore and Anthropology" (1965), he continues, "the most important functions of folklore are aiding in the education of the young, promoting a group feeling of solidarity, providing socially sanctioned ways for individuals, serving as a vehicle for social protest, offering an enjoyable escape from reality, and turning tedious work into play." Folklore influences social norms, people's

legal rights, children's education, and the expression of animosity against certain groups or ideologies. Lynne McNeill notes in Folklore Rules (2013):

> The same piece of folklore can serve multiple functions at once. An urban legend can serve as a warning for a whole community or simply as a psychological release for an anxious individual. A political joke can allow an adult to test the leanings of a social gathering, or it can allow a young person to unofficially push against parental ideology. A folk song can serve as a literal commentary on current or historical events, or as a symbolic expression of complex emotion. A customary holiday game or sporting event can provide social release as well as reinforce a group's identity (31).

Classification of Folklore

Material folklore (physical objects), verbal folklore (stories, songs, phrases, and popular sayings), and customary folklore (beliefs and methods of doing things) are frequent categories for individual folklore artefacts or materials. Artefacts of folklore are never isolated or self-contained; rather, they are details in a community's self-representation. In *The Handbook of Folklore* (1890), George Laurence Gomme comments "the importance of collecting and classifying such materials as we described must be at once recognised. Folk-lore is often the only pre-historic past of nations, and it is certainly the only means of tracing out many of the land-marks in the development of man" (Gomme 5).

According to Dorson, in his book *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (1972), the matters that occupy the studies of folklore and folklife can be classified into four

major sectors: material culture, social folk custom, folk performing arts, and oral literature. This classification of folklore has been accepted internationally.

Material Culture

The physical folklife generally called material culture includes all artefacts that one can touch, hold, live in or eat. Material culture is related to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generation and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation (Dorson 2). Folklorists are interested in the method of manufacture or construction of these material objects and their usages.

Social Folk Custom

The next important aspect of traditional life is called "social folk custom." It is concerned with many community and family observance and with "rites de passage" as birth initiation, marriage and death. These customs are often closely bound up with folk beliefs which are another important folklore genre. Customs with magical and sacred potency are known as rituals. Another social folk custom related to public performances and entertainments is festival and celebrations. The religious aspects of social folk custom are called folk religion which covers the modes of worship that lie outside the established modes of worship (Dorson 31). Folk medicines are also included in this group where miracle makers save souls and heal bodies. The spectrum of folk medicine practitioners extends from these users of invocations and secret charms to many

outstanding discoveries. Certain games and recreations, pastimes with traditional base are also included in this sector.

Performing Folk Arts

Another sector of folklore is called performing folk arts. Folk performing arts are the last sector of folklore and folk life; traditional music, dance, drama and other systematic movement recognized by an individual or a community are the good examples of folk performing arts. While the rendition of folklore or a folk song is now usually referred to as performances. Folk musical instruments, dance costumes and scenario props are also included here. The genres of performing arts intersect with each other and often appear in conjunction (Dorson 4).

Oral Literature

Oral literature is an aspect of folklore also called verbal art and expressive literature. It includes "spoken, snug, voiced forms of traditional utterance that shows repetitive patterns" (Dorson 2). One subdivision of it is folk narrative which has manifold distinction into genres like myth, legend and folktale, folk song or folk poetry and certain brief genres of oral expression are classed as proverbs and riddles. Unlike prose narrative forms and oral poetry, proverbs and riddles do not show much multiple existences. Proverbs and proverbial expressions have formed an inseparable part of the written literatures throughout the world; riddles have stayed in the folk life and functions as important devices of imparting knowledge about cultural semantics, folk logic and the

culturally ethical behaviour the younger members of societies are to follow. Folk speech and folk language is also included in this sector because it is also a vehicle of oral literature. Different forms of prose and verse narratives and other genres of oral literature are expressed through language or speech which is not always similar to standard language.

Every society has own folk speech with a distinct vocabulary which never enters the standard language. Folk speech has the uniqueness in its independent development through oral circulation. The grammatical, pronunciation and other features of folk speech are not always hard and fast as standard language. He further observes that these words or expressions may be taboo words or expressions. They may be a kind of passive vocabulary. Moreover, these characteristics of folk speech are not only limited to vocabulary but they exist at the level of grammar, idiom and phonetics as well. For example, slang in this respect is folk speech. Besides these major forms of oral literatures, there are other minor forms which also fall under the above sector. These are chants, prayers, laments, cries and even hollers. (Dorson 59).

Oral or verbal folklore treasures up traditions possessed in common and thriving in an environment which has shaped the life of the people. It is transmitted from one Individual to another as well as from generation to generation over the centuries. It shows the unity and solidarity underlying the diversities of life. An acquaintance with the different aspects of verbal folklore not only gives one an insight into the folk mind, but it further influences one's attitude to the folk themselves. Verbal folklore is indeed, an

important means of understanding the basic social set up, cultural mooring and artistic aspirations of a community, particularly of a tradition bound one. The present thesis will attempt to present and examine the aspect of verbal folklore focusing mainly on folktales, folksongs, and proverbs.

Folktales

Folktale is a general term for the various kinds of narrative prose literature found in the oral traditions of the world. The most important characteristic of a folktale is the way it has been passed down to newer generations without knowing who the composer of that story was. As Meyer Howard Abrams explains folktales are prose narratives of unknown authorship. According to Abrams (1999), a folktale is "a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form" (101). The prime aim of telling a folktale is to amuse the audience; among them, only the moral tales have the exception, as they are told to impart moral lessons among the people. Cristina Bacchilega defining the term "folktale" in *Encyclopedia of Women's Folklore and Folk life* (2009), states:

> Translating the German *Volksmärchen* (the people's "little story" or "news"), the term "folktale" refers to one of the main prose narrative genres that folklorists study. In contrast to belief narratives like myth and legend, the folktale features fictional characters in culturally meaningful situations, centres on the ordinary, and is primarily for entertainment. Classified into tale type by the Finn Antti Aarne and the American Stith Thompson in the early twentieth century, the folktale groups a number of subgenres, including the animal tale, magic tale, religious tale, joke, and formula tale. But the most prominent is the "tale of

> magic" - also known in English as the "wonder tale" and more commonly as the "fairy tale." Women - as characters, tellers, writers, listeners and readers- have historically engaged with and been powerfully associated with this particular kind of folktale, found in both oral and literary traditions (247).

In "Forms of folklore: Prose narratives" (1965), Bascom defines a folktale as:

> Prose narratives are regarded as fiction. They are not considered as dogma or history, they may or may not have happened, and they are not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, although it is often said that they are told only for amusement, they have other important functions, as the class of moral folktales should have suggested. Folktales may be set at any time and any place, and in this sense they are almost timeless and placeless (4).

Implicitly, it can be seen from above that the most important characteristic of a folktale is the way it has been passed down to newer generations without knowing who the composer of that story was. This leads to the definition provided by Abrams that folktales are prose narratives of unknown authorship. According to Abrams (1999), folktales is "a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form" (101). It defines folktale as a prose narrative genre of oral literature; and refers to the term as a legend or narrative originating in, and traditional among a people, especially one forming part of an oral tradition.

From these definitions, ffolktales are understood as an important sub-division of prose narratives which constitutes the major area of folklore. They are fictional compositions handed down orally from generation to generation either in the oral form or

in the written form. They are the literary creations of a society which may be considered as the common property shared by all members of a society. They are generally popular due to their entertainment value. The prime aim of telling a folktale is to amuse the audience; among them only the moral tales have the exception, as they are told to impart moral lessons among the people. According to Charlotte Sophia Burne, as explained in *The Handbook of Folklore* (1914), the characters in the folktales are "mainly anonymous; secondly, there is no note of time and place; and lastly, the story has a definite theme and a plot worked up to its natural conclusion" (Burne 262-263).

Although the genesis of the custom of telling stories cannot be yet one may be assume that folktales came into existence with the lives of people. This has resulted in the widespread of the tales, distributed and carried from tribe to tribe or continent to continent which continues till today. In *The Folktale* (1946), Stith Thompson observes the stories may differ in subject from place to place or the conditions and purposes of tale telling may change, but they always try to suit social and individual needs (Thompson 3). Oral folktales above all are not fixed in writing, but depend upon human imagination and memory for their preservation. This explains why numerous version of one story sometimes exist. As such folktales have much significance for people who use them and for others who access them as they assert social, economical, and political attitude. Besides, they help in children's intellectual development in a number of ways as they play an important role in knowledge transfer and personality development. They also influence a person's perception, attitude, behaviour, and many other factors important to human's life as well as to society.

Folktales have much significance for people who use them and for others who access them as they assert social, economical, and political attitudes. Besides, they help in children's intellectual development in several ways as they play an important role in knowledge transfer and personality development. They also influence a person's perception, attitude, behaviour, and many other factors important to human life as well as to society.

Folksongs

Folksongs are one of the oldest and most prevalent forms of folklore. However, it was not until the early 1900s that scholars began to consider folk music as a legitimate facet to be studied as part of a culture. The definition of folk music has led to a debate for many years. Many scholars use the term folk music and folksong interchangeably to refer to songs of traditional origin. Similarly, in this study the two expressions, 'folksongs' and 'folk music', are used to refer to the same thing. Scholars maintain that many folksongs have been around for so long that nobody is entirely sure who their composers were.

In *Essays in the Study of Folk-songs* (1886), Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco states:

> The folk-song probably preceded the folk-tale. If we are to judge either by early record or by the analogy of backward peoples, it seems proved that in infant communities anything that was thought worth remembering was sung, it must have been soon ascertained that words rhythmically arranged take, as a rule, firmer root than prose. "As I do not know how to read," says a modern Greek folk-singer, "I have made this into a song so as not to forget it (3).

According to Forcucci (1984), "folk music has been with us since the dawn of history" (16). Those songs are creations of one or more individuals, and the creative process can be collective, individual, or a mixture of both. It is the use of human expression in order to describe one's way of life. When these songs are sung, some words or part of the tune can be misheard or forgotten. Therefore, folksongs are not fixed in time; they evolve and change through the transmission. In the same way, folksongs "are ordinarily the product of an unknown person or group of persons" (18). Because the purpose of folk song is to describe human experiences, it is not surprising that a variety of folk songs exist.

In her note "The International Music Council," Maud Karpeles quotes what the International Folk music Council adopted as the definition of folk music after long discussion at Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1954:

> Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the traditions are; i) continuity which links the present with the past; ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives. The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community. The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the re-fashioning and re-creation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character (312).

This definition is adopted as the guide to the fundamental concept of folk music. The term, "folksong" covers a vast array of musical styles, but is most commonly used to refer to a narrative song that uses traditional melodies to speak on a particular topic. Often these songs are passed down within a community, and they have evolved over time to address the issues of the day. That is, folksongs are typically about a community of people, and the issues they feel are important to them. Folk songs were sung by common people during work or social activities. One of their most important characteristics is that they are part of oral culture. The melodies and the texts are learned by imitation and participation rather than from books.

Folk song comes to be established amongst the people through the ingenuity of the simple folks. The folk songs ruminates the essence of living of simple folks and bringing into focus the rudimentary philosophy of their way of life. The basic events of life that they have experienced or faced are thus engaged to conjure them into the form of folk songs to keep alive memories that could be relived in these songs by the future generations. Folk song shows the emotions and the spontaneity in the way the people of that generation characterizes themselves. Folk song bears testimony of the past. Events like war, relationship of the community, seasons, rites and rituals, belief system, moral norms, occupational behaviour, leisure times, or the total cultural and social milieu of the people are preserved and kept alive in the form of this genre of oral tradition. Folk song thus flourished amongst the rural folk as it was the product of a less classy community or in other words folk song was kept alive with the simple rustic people as it was their own unsophisticated product best known by them. Folk songs are very valuable ethnological

material as they open windows on traits of individual personality and the value-system of a society to the outside world other than their own.

Oral poetry or folk songs invariably lead us to some truths that are inextricably bound up with what the folks have encountered in their life. That is how the basic relatedness of the world that surround man of that time finds its way into their psyche and later formed into words and thus expressed out in the form of what we call the oral poetry or folk song. Therefore composing of folk songs is also about understanding the reality of life at the time the songs are been composed by the folks. Folk songs or oral poetries are thus by products of the thought-process of human rationality of the past that is passed on from generation to generations through word of mouth. They can be cultural dependant and multi-dimensional in its meaning. One needs to have a fair knowledge of the basic rudiment of the cultural fabrics of that community upon which the folk song dwells upon. One has to take into account the cultural aspects of the folks before venturing into the song to cull out any possible meaning of the folk songs through cultural or aesthetic interpretations. As and when the culture of the folk is given due importance, the task of cultural interpretation of the songs would be a lot easier. This would also go a long way in deconstructing the song meaningfully and giving further impetus to aesthetic interpretation which would amplify to the better understanding of the song in general.

Proverbs

In the "Introduction" to his work *Proverbs: A Hand Book* (2004), Wolfgang Mieder, a renowned paremiologist, says:

> The wisdom of proverbs has guided people in their social interactions for thousands of years throughout the world. Proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication. This has been the case during preliterate times, and there are no signs that proverbs have outlived their usefulness in modern technological societies either. Occasional claims persist that proverbs are on their way to extinction in highly developed cultures, but nothing could be further from the truth (xi).

Folk proverbs and sayings are an integral part of the spiritual treasures of the culture and language of the people, the age-old wisdom and skills used by them as an important part of the culture of human language. Proverbs form another genre of verbal folklore. Meider states “The definition of a proverb has caused scholars from many disciplines much chagrin over the centuries. Many attempts at definition have been made from Aristotle to the present time, ranging from philosophical considerations to cut-and-dried lexicographical definitions" (1). The term “proverb” is derived from Latin word *proverbium* to mean a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language.

In *The Science of Folklore* (1930), Krappe defines Proverbs as “the terse didactic and metaphorical statements containing concise homely truths on various aspects of life” (143). They are the wisdom of a community. In “What is a Proverb?” (1969), Milner observes proverbs as the “essence of thoughts and philosophy that a group of people acquire through the ages” (353).

According to *Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000), Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud define proverbs as:

> Short, crisply structured sayings widely known in a community, which convey traditional observations on human nature and natural phenomena, moral judgements, mockery, warnings etc. Though circulating orally, their wording is fairly stable; they generally display formal devices including alliteration, rhyme and assonance, rhythmic phrasing, balanced opposition, and parallelism (286).

In *How Proverb Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs* (1985), Linguist Neal R. Norrick defines proverb as “a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning" (78). He further introduces two basic categories of corpus which serve as sources for the study of proverbs. He distinguishes the appearance of oral and written tradition of proverbiality, though he explains that conversational dialogues either in recorded form or in transcribed form are rather scarce. Still the conversational nature of proverbs should not be neglected, because proverbs have the strong roots in oral tradition.

Before appearing in written forms, some of these proverbs have already been used in every day speech by common people. The main purpose of proverbs is to give people's assessment of the objective reality of phenomena as an expression of the world. Thus orally produced proverbs act as arguments in supporting one’s opinions and expressing certain observations. Proverbs and sayings are expressed the peculiar store or mindset of the peoples’ intelligence; way of judgment; view of features; indication of the way of life and everyday life; the spirit and character of the people; their manners and customs, and

beliefs and superstitions. Hence, proverbs and sayings most clearly illustrate lifestyle, and geography, and history, and traditions of a community united by a single culture.

Proverbs are the shortest expression of the long term experiences of life. In proverbs, the rich historical experience of the people, the ideas connected with work, life and culture of the people are reflected. As, the human experiences are related to the fundamental behaviour patterns of day to day life of the individual and there is a uniformity in behaviour patterns from age to age and from person to person, so proverbs current in a society seldom undergo any change unlike other elements of oral literature. The correct and appropriate use of proverbs and sayings give speech a unique identity and special expressiveness. Consequently, the proverb is a large subject which can be considered from many angles.

III

The Oral Tradition of the Nagas

As for the Nagas, orality forms one of the important aspects that contribute to the growth that defines and redefines the Naga culture and ethos. They must rely on its oral literature to establish its historical background. They depend on their oral narration for philosophical beliefs, customary and traditional law, habitual life, culture, and social structures. In his seminal work *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English,* K B Veio Pou asserts that "the oral tradition of the Nagas… constitutes the whole of history, culture, beliefs and relation with nature. In other words, it encompasses

the whole life-system of the people" (72). He summarizes oral tradition as "a tradition that primarily preserves its knowledge system by passing it down from generation to generation through different forms of stories, songs, dances and verbal instructions." (72).

Oral tradition becomes a dynamic medium of communication and transmission. As a result, myths, legends, folklore, and folk music all contain descriptions of the histories and identities of the Naga people. That assumption implies that oral artists are crucial to the continued existence of social philosophy. From that premise, it follows that oral artists are essential to the survival of social philosophy.

Pou further remarks that:

> To be able to talk about the roots of a people there is always a requirement to digress into the past to have a deeper understanding of the subject. At the same time, it becomes an intrinsic part of the process of constructing an identity for the Nagas today. (72)

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to claim that oral literature has a great deal of appeal on its own for anyone who wants to research any aspect of Naga culture. This could offer a crucial and frequently overlooked key to comprehending its societal beliefs and help it evaluate and reevaluate itself. Customary and traditional law plays an important role in determining the status of women in the Naga society. The cultural images associated with women reflect and promote the social ideologies and beliefs of society.

In the context of this research, folklore becomes a space for the representation of gender construction from the perspective of Sümi Naga community. The many gender roles that each character plays serve as a type of representation of the gender ideology in the Sümi Naga society. The purpose of this study is to comprehend how women are portrayed in Sümi Naga folklore, particularly in order to comprehend the status of women in society. The identity of being a woman or a man is constructed through the representational system found in folklore. Identity, in the study of feminism, is not understood as a singular thing. Identity is the result of the construction of individuals or groups in the self-labelling process. Gender, from the point of view of feminism, is seen as the result of socio-cultural construction prevailing in a society. The gender identity attached to the roles that men and women must execute is the result of human construction and is not innate. Therefore, gender identity is a political matter. The identity construction process does not occur in a single or causal process at the subject's will but is a temporal process that operates through the repetition of norms (Butler, 1993).

In this identity politics, feminism is positioned to attack the traditional identities attached to women based on traditional norms built from the point of view of men's minds. Women are invited to build awareness of their identity by understanding it as a flexible thing (plural) and not like what men have attached to it (Lara, 1998). In addition, the creation of identity is substantially influenced by both geography and time. Different surroundings foster the development of various historical viewpoints, while various moments produce various identity narratives. In this context, it is crucial to understand the form of gender identity built in the narrative Sümi Naga folklore.

In a traditionally ridden Naga society, the role of women is limited to little or non-involvement decision-making bodies. Women are confined to homes where their major roles include motherhood and looking after the family and the man's role in public and political affairs. She is subjected to male authority because she is a wife, daughter, and mother. A woman is also supposed to cultivate the virtues of selflessness, tenderness, and kindness that are considered to be feminine. The gender perspective examines how discrimination affects both the short- and long-term needs of women and men, with a special focus on variations in status and power based on gender. Through the prism of oral literature, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how people view Naga women in society.

Anthropological and sociological views on the Position of Naga Women

The current work is pertinent because it makes an effort to interpret how Sümi Naga women are portrayed in folklore, which presents a different perspective from numerous anthropological and sociological viewpoints. In the "Introduction," of the book *Women in Naga Society* (1998), Lucy Zehol observes:

> Early ethnographic materials suggest that studies have always been dominated by the male bias. This is perhaps because administrators turned scholar and the scholars have basically been males and therefore could not find easy access to the domains of women. It is now perhaps time to realize that a new perspective is needed so that women in society could be studied through the women's view point. And if this is developed in terms of methodology, we will be able to get a clearer picture of the human society where man and woman play an equally important role where one cannot so without the other (Zehol 1).

The status of women is marked by the position of women in society to men. In "Status of Naga Women at a Glance" (2016), Alongla Anichari comments:

> The status of women in North East India (NEI), inhabit a more liberal culture than their 'mainland' India, the reality is that women and children are in a particularly vulnerable situation because of the conflict in the region, especially those in indigenous, minority and low-income communities. Discrimination against women is widespread and incidents of physical and sexual violence are frequently reported. Almost all Tribal Councils categorically exclude women and their traditional customary law discriminates against them by denying them the right to own or inherit property (Anichari 221).

However, according to some anthropological theories, women in primitive societies are granted equal status as that of men. They contend that women hold the same role in tribal society as they do in other social structures. For instance, in "Tribal Women," Verrier Elwin remarks that the tribal woman is indeed in many ways the equal, if not the rival, of the tribal man:

> The most important thing about the tribal woman is that she is – a woman. I stress this because there is sometimes a tendency they were something altogether apart from ourselves, almost as if they were a different species. It is important, therefore, to emphasize that the tribal woman is, in herself, exactly the same as any other woman, with the same passions, loves and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues... The tribal woman is indeed in many ways the equal, if not the rival, of the tribal man (*Women in India* 219-222).

In his book *Nagaland* (1961), Elwin further states: "Although there is no matriarchy among the Nagas, women hold a high and honourable position. They work on equal terms with the men in the fields and make their influence felt in the tribal councils" (*Nagaland* 104).

In *The Naked Nagas* (1939), Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf makes the following observation:

> Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the wild Naga Hills, their free and happy life; and those who measure the culture of a people by the social position and personal freedom of the women will think twice before describing the Nagas as 'savage' (Fürer-Haimendorf 218).

In 1921, J. H. Hutton's *The Sema Nagas* is an ethnographic work on the Sümi Naga tribe as before this, there is little documented information on the aforementioned Naga tribe. In the book, he describes the features of Sümi Naga women as "stumpy and plain to ugliness, having cheerful disposition and make their men folk faithful wives and dutiful daughters. They are generally chaste and are good mothers and good wives". He adds that though girls do not marry against their will yet the match are arranged by the parents. He states that "a wife is chosen primarily for what she can do rather than her looks" and that such wives are placed high in the husband's household (Hutton 28). Hutton's statement reflects a description that focuses on physical appearance and traditional gender roles. It also reduces Sümi Naga women to their physical attribute or defining their worth solely based on their ability to fulfil traditional roles. He further states:

> The position of women in the Sema tribe, though they are possibly more restricted in the matter of the possession of property and in sexual licence than the women of the Angami and Ao tribes, is probably higher socially, as it is morally, than in either of them, at any rate as far as the families of chiefs are concerned (Hutton 183).

Hutton accords Sümi Naga women a higher status since they have the freedom to choose their spouses and are not subject to forced marriage. They are treated well in her husband's house as well (Hutton 184). Because of lack of documentation, his documentation of the origin, migration patterns, socio-economics, traditions, biodiversity use and folklore of the Sema Nagas may remain the most authoritative description of the Sema Nagas but one must realize that this can be limiting and unjust.

Inavi Jimomi issues a warning regarding the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Nagas in such anthropological documents in his 2018 book *Sümi Naga: the Origin and Migration of the Nagas:*

> The time in which historical evidences, narration and materials are recorded and collected matters alot... the Nagas are much indebted to J.H. Hutton, J.P. Mills, and other non-local writers, but at the same time we need to be more critical about the authenticity of the narration and the record for two reasons: first, it came through translator's mouth; second, it might have come from one with a biased view or wrong intention since Naga village lived independent of the other and were hardly a good neighbour, knowing still lesser about the other. (Jimomi xi)

This anthropological distortion of the Naga society fails to present the realities Naga women face. In "Political Mobilization of Women in Nagaland" (2002), Dolly Kikon, a Naga anthropologist states:

> Every Naga woman has experienced humiliation and insults from the men on the basis of her womanhood. These men are not outsiders or strangers. They are their 'respected' uncles, cousins and in some cases their fathers and brothers who never fail to remind them about the predestined inferior roles that have already been slated out for them. (*Changing Women's Status in India* 179)

Therefore, this study contains folklore, which may aid in the monitoring of people's behaviours, in an effort to grasp the thought that is provided. For academics, understanding how society regards women might be useful. Folklore has value and carries cultural messages. Academics claim that folklore demonstrates the mindset, way of life, attitudes, and cultural traits of the culture to which it belongs. Georges and Jones (1995) attempted to explain this function of folklore by defining the concept of folklore as follows:

> The word folklore denotes expressive form, processes, and behaviors (1) that we customarily learn, teach, and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions, and (2) that we judge to be traditional because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, beliefs, and feelings. (*Folkloristics: An Introduction* 1)

Inequalities have frequently been disregarded and gender relations in tribal societies have been rather idealised. Inequalities have frequently been disregarded and gender relations in tribal societies have been rather idealised. However, in "Gender Issues

in the Tribal Society of the North-East" (2006), Lucy Zehol explores the position of tribal women in the social system along with their role and duties and examines and considers whether or not they share the same gender concerns as non-tribal culture.: "If the non-tribal society suffers from gender problems so do the women of the tribes." The position of women is discussed in relation to their function in the social structure, which includes rights and obligations, in anthropological records.

Significance of the Study

The patterns of beliefs and habits of the people can be seen and observed through folklore. In this way, their folklore wisdom reveals the philosophy of life. For instance, characters in folktale help us understand the social climate and the position of women in society. However, folklore has historically been dominated by male perspectives and voices, often leaving women's experiences and contributions marginalized or erased although women have played active roles in the creation, preservation, and transformation of folklore. By examining folklore through women's perspectives, we can uncover and amplify women's stories, knowledge, and agency, allowing for a more inclusive representation of diverse cultural narratives.

Women's folklore research first began as a corrective drive. Women's folklore examines the shared culture, traditions, stories, beliefs, and behaviours that women transmit and perform with or for one another. The idea that the traditional knowledge, behaviours, narratives, and material culture of the more visible or dominant gender constitute the sum of what that culture has to offer is significantly corrected by this.

Women's perspectives on folklore provide insight into the social and historical contexts in which these narratives were created and transmitted. Women's experiences, challenges, and aspirations are embedded within folklore, reflecting societal norms, power dynamics, and cultural transformations. The anthropological records of Nagas illustrate how women are treated in a traditional society when they are daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. These records, however, do not discuss the women's legal standing or their chances for engagement on a larger and larger scale. Additionally, it should be mentioned that since these studies are typically from the perspectives of men, they frequently do not include the perspectives of women. This anthropological misrepresentation of Naga civilization leaves out the issues Naga women must deal with. Therefore, examining folklore through women's perspectives reveals instances of subversion, resistance, and alternative narratives that challenge traditional gender norms and power structures. Women's perspectives shall offer valuable insights into the ways in which women navigate and negotiate their identities and agency within folklore.

Thus, this study contains folklore, which may aid in the monitoring of people's behaviours, in an effort to grasp the thought that is provided. By examining folklore through women's perspectives, we can uncover and amplify women's stories, knowledge, and agency, allowing for a more inclusive representation of diverse cultural narratives. Women's perspectives on folklore will provide insight into the social and historical contexts in which these narratives were created and transmitted. Women's experiences, challenges, and aspirations are embedded within folklore, reflecting societal norms, power dynamics, and cultural transformations. It may be beneficial for academics to

comprehend how society views women. It is beneficial to highlight gender as a central theme in folklore research as a feminist critique. Even in cases where some effort has been made in previous studies to interpret the available folk culture artefacts, the epistemology that guides much of this interpretation raises some unsettling underlying issues. In general, it looks into how gender roles are portrayed and replicated in a traditional society, which aids in a better understanding of gender.

By acknowledging and exploring women's perspectives, we honour and validate the contributions of women to cultural heritage, fostering a more inclusive and accurate representation of a community's collective identity. Examining folklore through women's perspectives can empower women and girls by providing them with positive role models, inspiring narratives, and a sense of cultural belonging. Women's perspectives on folklore can contribute to the empowerment of women, fostering a greater sense of agency, self-expression, and participation in shaping cultural narratives.

Thus, examining folklore through women's perspectives is essential for challenging gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, understanding historical and social contexts, amplifying women's voices, and fostering a more inclusive and empowering representation of cultural heritage and identity. It contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of folklore and its significance in our lives.

V.K. Nuh asserts in *My Native Country: The Land of the Nagas*:

> Whether memory change or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generations to

> generations. How it is possible for mind to and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, massages, and instructions for living which manifest continuity over time is one of the greatest wonders one can say, comparable only to human intelligence and thought itself. Oral traditional should be central to students of culture, ideology, of society, of psychology, of art and finally, of history. (14)

Although culture is not static, an attempt has been made to analyze Sümi Naga oral literature in the cultural context of the period before the breakup of the traditional social organization through colonial conquest in the early 1900s. It seeks not only to document but also to critically read what has been collected, published, documented, and archived on Sümi Naga folklore about women so that Naga folklore scholarship moves beyond the stage of collection, labelling and classification to that of theoretical framing and cultural analysis. It is impossible to present a comprehensive study of the socio-cultural forces of the Sümi Naga society of different region, we should be content with a brief outline of the society will be highlighted. This will also point out what implications such an analysis has on the modern Sümi Naga society. Since the Naga culture shares a related culture, this study shall also make a comparative study on the other Naga folklore.

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CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING GENDER POLITICS AND FEMINISM IN THE NAGA CONTEXT

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for the equality of the sexes and strives to address and challenge the social, political, and economic inequalities that women have historically faced. Feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchal systems, which are characterized by the dominance of men and the subordination of women, and promote gender equality in all aspects of life. Fighting against gender stereotypes and ensuring that women have the same educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities and outcomes as men are some of the change-making initiatives.

Feminism encompasses a wide range of theories, perspectives, and practices. It recognizes that gender intersects with other social identities such as race, class, sexuality, and ability and those experiences of oppression and privilege are shaped by these intersections. Therefore, feminism seeks to address and challenge the intersecting forms of oppression that affect women differently based on their identities and experiences.

Feminist movements have evolved over time, with different waves marking significant shifts in goals and strategies. The first-wave feminism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on suffrage and legal rights for women. Second-wave feminism, which gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, broadened the agenda to include issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and gender roles.

Third-wave feminism emerged in the 1990s and emphasized the diversity of women's experiences and perspectives, critiquing the essentialism and exclusionary tendencies of earlier feminist movements. Contemporary feminism continues to evolve and address new challenges and inequalities.

Feminism is not a monolithic movement, and there are diverse feminist perspectives and theories. Feminist theory refers to a collection of ideas, perspectives, and frameworks that seek to understand and analyze gender-based inequalities and oppression, as well as propose strategies for achieving gender equality. Feminist theory emerged as a response to the social, political, and economic challenges faced by women and aims to critically examine the power dynamics and social constructs that perpetuate gender discrimination.

Feminist theory encompasses a wide range of approaches and perspectives, each offering unique insights into the complexities of gender and its intersection with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Some key feminist theories include:

1. Liberal Feminism: Liberal feminists argue for equal rights and opportunities for women within existing social and political structures. They focus on legal and policy reforms to eliminate gender-based discrimination and strive for gender equality.
2. Radical Feminism: Radical feminists emphasize the need to challenge and dismantle patriarchy, which they view as the root cause of women's

oppression. They argue for fundamental changes in social structures, institutions, and gender norms.

3. Marxist Feminism: Marxist feminists analyze the ways in which capitalism and class struggle intersect with gender oppression. They explore how economic systems contribute to women's subordination and advocate for economic equality as a means to achieve gender equality.
4. Intersectional Feminism: Intersectional feminists recognize that gender intersects with other dimensions of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality. They examine how multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound, leading to unique experiences of discrimination for individuals with intersecting identities.
5. Postcolonial Feminism: Postcolonial feminists explore the ways in which colonialism, imperialism, and globalization have shaped gender inequalities, particularly in non-Western contexts. They critique Western-centric feminist theories and highlight the importance of cultural diversity and decolonization.
6. Queer Feminism: Queer feminists challenge heteronormativity and advocate for the rights and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals. They examine how gender and sexuality intersect and influence social, political, and legal structures.

There is diversity within feminist thought, with varying perspectives and approaches. Feminist theory provides a framework for understanding gender-based power

dynamics, analyzing social structures, and advocating for social change to achieve gender equality and justice.

It's important to note that feminism is not about advocating for women's superiority over men or diminishing the experiences of men. It aims to create a society where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal rights, opportunities, and freedoms. Feminism also recognizes that gender equality benefits everyone by challenging rigid gender roles and promoting healthier relationships and societal norms. Overall, feminism is a multifaceted movement that seeks to challenge and transform the unequal power dynamics and structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and oppression.

There are many different types of feminism, and feminists disagree on a number of issues. However, all feminists share the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Feminism has had a significant impact on society. It has helped to change laws and policies, and it has raised awareness of gender inequality. Feminism has also helped to empower women and give them a voice in society.

Feminism is still a relevant and important movement today. There is still much work to be done to achieve gender equality. Feminists continue to fight for issues such as equal pay, reproductive rights, and an end to violence against women. They also continue to challenge gender stereotypes and create a more just and equitable society for all.

Studies on women have their origins in second-wave feminism and were initially an opposition to knowledge that was defined and based around males. In order to develop a new "women-centered way of knowing" that would help them to challenge the predominately andocentric view of society and culture prevalent in the humanities and social sciences, feminists started organizing across disciplines by the middle of the 1970s (Jackson 2016).

According to Aili Nenola, in "Gender, Culture and Folklore," remarks that one of the most significant findings of the feminist movement and women's studies, has been the understanding of the function of gender and its impact on a person's status and quality of life in society. She remarks:

> Most researchers would furthermore argue that gendered statuses are everywhere unequal, so that men and maleness are dominant while women and femaleness are subordinate. This was recognized already early on, but it was considered to be a natural and inevitable state of affairs, which followed from men's and women's different essential natures, or directly from the laws of nature ordained by God. The basis for this essentialist thinking has been the biological and physiological differences between men and women, which are apparent above all in men's and women's different reproductive roles. The natural division of labour between insemination and childbearing has been thought to indicate that the nature and activities of men and women are different in other ways as well and belong to different areas of society and culture. (Nenola 21)

The de-centring genealogy of second-wave feminism attempts to investigate the situation and issues of black women who experience double oppression by both white men and black men in addition to the plight of white women. The Naga women, who

experience many problems, are not relevant to these feminism principles as they suffer from different issues. The chapter makes an effort to comprehend feminism and gender issues in the Naga setting.

Due to the growing interest in women's issues around the globe, tribal communities have recently begun to place more of an emphasis on women. The transition from swidden to settled agriculture and the consequent change from communal and collective ownership of land to private ownership today reflect developments and changes in tribal societies, particularly the change in the manner of living. These have prompted a critical analysis of the notion that tribal societies are egalitarian. Gender inequality is seen as being the most common kind of inequality in tribal society in its traditional environment, according to recent studies (Xaxa 354). The Naga society is no different. The Nagas have a patriarchal social system that is characterized by the idea of male superiority, like many other tribal civilizations.

The prevailing patriarchal order of society is represented by the Naga culture. According to this society, men are apparently born with more biological advantages than women. This brings up the fundamental feminist issues of women's rights, gender equality, and the often-repressed notion of autonomy for women. They are prohibited from participating in numerous political, social, and religious activities that are primarily practiced by men. Due to customary rules and practices, women face difficulties when it comes to enforcing their rights to property, inheritance, and land. Violence against women is a common occurrence in the patrilineal structural framework. If a woman is

single, childless, and opinionated in society, she is frequently made fun of. Women who are infertile and single are frequently treated with scorn and are despised as empty shells. A woman who is unable to birth a male child is likewise pitied and subject to many forms of prejudice. She is placed lower than other women.

The Naga women experience such discriminatory treatment, despite the fact that it may not seem as pronounced as it is on the Indian mainland. Zehol draws attention to this patriarchal system's oppression of female children in “Introduction” to *Women in Naga Society*:

> The fact that Naga society is patriarchal as well as patrilineal implies beyond any doubt that women are not equal to men in certain aspects of life. The patriarchal Naga society is reflected by notions such as the birth of a male child being auspicious, the man as the bread winner and the protector of the society, and women being subordinate to their households. (Zehol 2)

The primary occupation of the Naga women is the role of a wife and mother. Their responsibilities as a wife and mother are restricted to taking care of the home. They are expected to live up to the patriarchal society's standards of "ideal" femininity, which include maintaining their chastity, being devoted to their husbands and caring for their children. The second employment is evident in their engagement to agricultural activities. The social expectation that women must work and service the male population is very strong. With or without assistance from the male family members, the women are expected to handle all home responsibilities. The man, the family's leader, is the final arbiter in things pertaining to the home. Additionally, women continue to be marginalized

when it comes to political activities, which are considered as the sole domain of male members.

Gender becomes a tool for self-awareness in responding to and comprehending numerous phenomena around them as a basic dimension in understanding social life individually. Additionally, gender awareness affects how people view human interactions as a worldview from conception to death (Taylor 300–11). Therefore, a person is never born with a particular gender but with the freedom to determine the roles and positions they want in their lives.

Simone de Beauvoir rightly asserts in the Book II of *The Second Sex*: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 295). By stating that one "becomes" a woman, Beauvoir challenges the idea that femininity is an inherent, fixed characteristic. Instead, she contends that gender identity is shaped by societal norms, values, and expectations imposed upon individuals. From birth, children are socialized into specific gender roles, behaviours, and expectations, which perpetuate gender inequality and reinforce oppressive structures. She emphasizes that being a woman is a process of socialization, where individuals internalize and perform culturally prescribed roles and behaviors associated with femininity. It suggests that gender identity is not an essential quality, but rather a social construct that can be questioned, resisted, and redefined.

This perspective highlights the limitations and constraints placed upon women due to societal expectations. It calls attention to the ways in which gender roles can restrict individual freedom, limit opportunities, and perpetuate unequal power dynamics

between men and women. It also underscores the importance of recognizing that gender is not an innate characteristic but a social and historical phenomenon. It opens up possibilities for individuals to challenge and transcend the constraints of gender norms, envisioning a more equitable and inclusive society where individuals are not confined by rigid gender expectations.

The rigorous division between the public and private worlds, represented by the house and personal matters in the former and the outer world of administration and decision-making in the latter, is what allows for the unbalanced gender relations in tribal civilizations like the Nagas. This chapter aims to discuss the subject of Naga women striving to carve out a space for themselves in the public sphere through a bevy of women's organizations in the context of patriarchal societal structures.

Understanding Gender Politics in the Context of Naga Culture

Understanding gender politics within the framework of Naga culture necessitates looking at their system of social stratification, the power dynamics that already exist between men and women, and the process of learning the socially acceptable roles and behaviours. Despite the rich culture and traditions of the Nagas, this outdated and stereotyped society never accords women the prestige and position they deserve when it comes to making decisions. It should be mentioned that in Naga society, women's subordinate roles and status are influenced by various aspects.

Firstly, the subservient duties and status are greatly influenced by the patriarchal culture. The socio-cultural system is still biased and routinely keeps women out of society's mainstream, depriving them of equal chances. The ideals embodied in patriarchy, the traditional power structure that runs at the centre of Naga society, i.e. the village, regulate and strengthen it. The Nagas' traditional form of government is either chieftainship, under the control of the Village Council, or a selected council of elders. Only males from the individual clans are allowed to serve on village councils under this system. Males alone have the power to hold the position of chieftain. A common practice among all Naga tribes share is the exclusion of women from traditional events like the yearly citizens' assembly. Men are the only real "citizens" with the power to make decisions and have an impact on governance, according to this philosophy. It is possible to argue that the ancient practices of excluding women from conventional meetings and decision-making institutions are what led to the assumption that the "public" is solely composed of men.

Similar to other patriarchal societies, the father or male household member continues to be in charge of the entire family, its members, property, and other financial resources in the domestic sphere. All of the family's important decisions are made by him. In this situation, women take on a subservient role as prescribed by society. The institutional and structural relationships of dominance and power between men and women are articulated by this patriarchal culture. Women do not have complete freedom of choice; their conduct, actions, and thoughts are heavily constrained. It maintains that

men belong in politics and the public arena, whereas women belong in the home and in family life.

Secondly, political activities show how women are not included. The Nagas have a gerontocratic form of government, which means that the village's top political and administrative body, the Village Council, is headed by the male elders. While this system is in place, women will not be able to participate in politics or hold the position of village administrator. The traditional Naga society continues to adhere to the tried-and-true village governance structure that the forefathers established, despite the fact that modernization and globalization have created the way for reformation. Women continue to be excluded from some political platforms and social policy-making in such situations.

Thirdly, the law of inheritance has a detrimental effect. The Naga customary laws forbid women from inheriting any family property. The male family members who are sons inherit the properties. The closest male kinsman inherits such properties in the absence of sons. The daughters and wife have no right to these possessions. The widow continues to be the guardian, and her eldest son is the de facto family head. This traditional legislation is sexist and severely discriminates against women. She suffers from identity loss and social estrangement. Strangers are not allowed to inherit land in the Naga society. Women also end up as strangers and second-class citizens in this way.

Fourthly, the head-hunting custom has a negative impact on the status of women. Due of the enormous regard and respect accorded to head hunters in the past, this traditional game was the most played. According to "Early History of the Nagas" author

Najekhu Yepthomi, the Nagas held the notion that human heads have a unique blessed power. Wati Longchar in *Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India* states:

> Socially a person's status was dependent upon the success in headhunting… Those who did not hunt heads were considered effimonate and given no place in society. The villagers who brought the highest number of heads were held in the highest position (and) religiously people believed that there was *mana* (blessing) in the head. They offered human heads to the Supreme Being for blessing in the field, cattle, family, village and others. (Longchari 72)

Headhunting was, therefore, a socio-cultural, religious, and political practice. It was intertwined with the entire idea of life, past, present, and future. Since the high level of risk and expertise involved, women are physically incapable of playing this game since they lack the necessary bravery. It served as a symbol of women's lower status. Additionally, the strategic headhunting planning was only done in the *morung*, a bachelor home or dormitory for young boys, which implies that women are excluded because it was unacceptable and considered taboo for a woman to be in the dorm. In light of this, it only became true that males alone may provide honour, bravery, and gain respect. Women no longer needed to fear social convention. It became unnecessary for women to fain social recognition.

Lastly, the impact of Christian religion did little to advance the status of women in Naga culture. This theology was a result of the Evangelical Awakening in Europe and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As a result, these missionaries who served in the colonial empire promoted the imperial mentality that only western ideals,

cultures, and practices should be adopted by the populace. The Nagas' civilizations were so undermined as a result. Christianity has thus fostered the patriarchal idea of male superiority and the enslavement of women by endorsing the theology of a male deity and a male messiah. Christianity in Nagaland adopted the conventional village governance structure as its own from the beginning. All these factors made the society allocate roles, status, rights, and responsibilities to men and women respectively. Customary and traditional law plays an important role in determining the status of women in the Naga society. It is in the name of customs and tradition women are regarded as inferior and hence remain subjugated. The restriction comes as a taboo for women in the family and society. Women face discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization more in their own families and society than outside. The suffering and humiliation between the tribals and non-tribals women are different.

A stealthy revolution in Naga society was unpredictably sparked by India's declaration of independence. The adult franchise is guaranteed under the Indian Constitution, regardless of gender, caste, creed, or language. The Naga women were given the same voting rights as men under this provision. However, the old order still holds true in terms of its ancient institutions and village authority. There are various provisions, such as committees formed for community services and institutional functioning and village development boards for each village. The relevant regulation stipulates that women must be included as members. In fact, women's involvement in these bodies remains minimal.

As a result, the patriarchal system and its norms and traditions are some of the main causes of the exploitation and oppression of Naga women. The key topic that introduces the feminist discourse in the Naga context is this. Feminist criticism can be used to reinterpret the distinctive experiences of the Naga women.

Women's Movement in Nagaland

The greater political problem of the Nagas' right to self-determination, sovereignty, peace, and harmony has been emphasized alongside the concerns of Naga women. For many years, Naga leaders have been battling and negotiating with the Indian government on behalf of the Naga people. The women's movement in Nagaland in the early 1950s, when Naga women volunteers took part in the Naga freedom struggle, can be credited with inspiring the first wave of feminism. They contributed to the cause in a number of ways, notably by providing medical attention to the injured, gathering supplies, transporting meals, and carrying messages while eluding the Indian army. Their sole purpose was to make the homes more secure.

From the 1960s onward, the second wave of feminism became evident as women's groups from all tribes took part in various types of protest against killings, drawing public attention to violence against women and their voices. They have focused a lot of their efforts on promoting peace, rapprochement, maintaining the peace, and combating social problems. A women's organization can be found in almost all Naga tribes. The Naga Mothers Association (NMA), Watsü Mungdang (WM), Naga Women's

Union (NWU), Angami Women Organization (AWO), Sümi Totimi Hoho (STH), and Naga Women Hoho (NWH) are a few of the well-known women's organizations.

While some of these groups, such as the Watsü Mungdang, developed primarily as sociocultural organizations with Church support, others were set up as a reaction to particular occurrences. The Sümi Totimi Hoho, for example, was established in 1983 following a rape occurrence when the women decided to band together to combat such crimes and defend their rights. The other women's organizations in the state, with the exception of the NMA, NWU, and the NWH, which are not founded on a tribe, are representatives of their respective tribes and carry out their operations in their communities. These tribal women's organizations actively speak out against all forms of violence in society, but particularly violence against women.

The protection of women's rights is now one of their key priorities, along with serving as a peacemaker in any scenario of armed conflict. For instance, the NMA was founded with the goals of upholding womanhood, acting as a conduit for Naga women's interests and welfare, and combating societal ills that were prevalent in the region. The NMA has been fighting for the cause of peace since its founding. Over time, Naga women's organizations have transformed from being merely sociocultural groups to political organizations that may fight for their place in the institutionalized political system by promoting peace and working to end social violence. The events demonstrate how Naga women have taken on a public role that was formerly forbidden to them.

A Literature of Their Own

The theoretical framework of Naga women writers' creative works is derived from their suppressed, erased and hidden historical existence. Some of the earliest records of women's voices that reflect their existence of horror and suffering throughout the colonial era and times of war can be found in the Tenyidie folk poetry written by Tuonuo and Duosieü in 1945. Tuonuo and Duosieü stand in for the numerous women who endured great hardships while carrying out domestic duties during the years of war. The topic of marriage is also addressed in these poems, as the women are forced to accept an arrangement with their parents.

The writings of Naga women writers including Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Changkija, Nini Lungalung, and Kekhrievoü Yhome exhibit the Naga feminist worldview. The effort put forth in these works to create a forum for the expression of women's suppressed speech is what matters most. They discuss the distinctive encounters of the Naga women. These writings can be viewed as the Naga women's feminist historical discourse. As a result, Naga feminism may be seen in such literary works by Naga women authors.

In the works of Nagaland's first novelist, Easterine Kire, the plight of traditional Naga women are highlighted. As a result of these women’s education in the patriarchal society, a propensity to mistreat other Naga women is shown in her most well-known work of fiction, *A Terrible Matriarch*. The granddaughter in the book Dielieno does not start out as a feminist torch-bearer fighting for women's rights. She developed into a

powerful lady as she grew up, maintaining her feminism. To Kire, “she is not a feminist, but is more a womanist” (viii).

The term "womanism" became necessary during the early feminist movement, which was predominately driven by middle-class heterosexual white women who favoured women's suffrage while ignoring discrimination based on race and class. In her 1979 short story *Coming Apart*, Alice Walker first used the term "womanism" to define the narrative's protagonist as a womanist (3-11). *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, where she used the phrase, she says that it comes from the southern proverb "acting womanish." The womanly girl behaves in an audacious, daring, and revolting manner that is deemed to be outside the bounds of acceptable social behaviour. According to Alice Walker, "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender," meaning that womanism is a deeper, richer, more vivid, more regal ideology that lies beneath the much bigger ideological cover of feminism (Walker 401-9).

At its core, womanism is a social change stance based on the issues and experiences that ordinary minority women face, but it goes beyond that to look for ways to end injustices for everyone, making it pro-humankind. It asserts that womanists are everywhere. An integral component of the ideology is the self-authored spirit of activism, spirituality, and the woman's relationship with other women, and her environment. It contrasts the stereotype of women as weak and helpless by portraying them as independent and capable. Womanism encourages women to deviate from the conventional idea of womanhood by empowering them in this way. Kire also sees

womanism as a movement for the survival of Nagas in general and Naga women in particular, who live in double jeopardy as women in a patriarchal society that is itself struggling to deal with its post-colonial identity crisis.

Conclusion

The political climate in which the Naga women live is delicate. The Naga leaders have been battling and negotiating with the Indian government for many years on the long-running struggle of the people for self-determination, sovereignty, peace, and harmony. Dolly Kikon, a Naga feminist, questions and remarks in "What Kind of Nagaland are We Moving Towards?":

> What is the meaning of gender? Or of justice? Which comes first in Naga society? As is the case in many nationalist societies around the world, gender justice and rights have for long remained marginal for Nagas. We were told that such issues could wait till the Naga people gained their freedom. In that context, what does it mean to bestow any sort of rights on women in Naga society? These questions gain relevance in the context of violent opposition to the government's attempts to implement 33% reservation for women in Urban Local Body elections, which has brought Nagaland to a standstill. Municipal elections have been deferred for years because local tribal bodies believe that insisting on women's representation in these polls goes against Naga customary law, safeguarded by article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution. When terms like gender "rights" and "equality" invite extreme resentment from powerful Naga traditional bodies, they become meaningless. And if Naga customary law is seen as the foundation of justice, the exclusion of women from the state's powerful decision making-bodies negates this. *(Changing Women's Status in India* np)

The violent street fights between men and women that occurred in 2017 over the issue of women's political rights, notably the implementation of a 33% reservation for women in local body elections, are evidence that Kikon's concerns about the Nagas are justified. She further states:

> The denial of rights to Naga women by citing Article 371(A) is not new and has nothing to do with upholding the customary law and culture of the Naga people. It is a way to propagate male hegemony and authority in Naga society, cloaked in the language of justice. This pattern can be seen even in Naga history and its nationalist movement, where only Naga men became martyrs while women were always projected as victims. (*ibid* np)

Many Naga women who are striving to fight for significant change are progressively developing a feminist consciousness through modern education and related innovations, although the objective still seems unattainable in the face of patriarchal hindrances. Gender parity requires a simultaneous social knowledge among Naga males regarding gender stereotypes, along with the educational, economic, and other social accomplishments of the women. The status of Naga women will continue to be lower as long as the Customary Laws are not drastically altered. The Naga society is anticipating the emergence of women's new role in light of the recent concerns surrounding the passage of a measure requiring a 33 percent reservation for women's representation in civic and other bodies.

In Nagaland, it may be stated that feminism stands for equality, maintening peace and the end of social and political oppression of women. They vehemently reject the

oppression of women by native patriarchies. They also do not entail conventional feminists portraying third-world women, particularly Indian women, as victims. Feminism is a constantly evolving and expanding idea. Because the feminist ideology has not yet been thoroughly defined, Nagas can better define its own identity.

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CHAPTER 3

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE SÜMI NAGAS

One of the largest Naga tribes in Nagaland is the Sümi Naga tribe. Geographically speaking, the Sümi Naga Nagas reside in Nagaland's centre, where Zunheboto serves as their district headquarters. However, because they are a semi-nomadic tribe, their members can be found throughout the state. The monograph of Hutton in *The Sema Nagas* states the following:

> The Semas are bordered by the Angamis on the South, Rengmas and Lotha on the West, Aos and Lophomi Sangtams on the North, Yachumis and Tukomi Sangtams on the East, while in the north-east corner they touch the Changs and in the South East the Naked Rengmas. (Hutton 4)

A patriarchal society has long existed in the Sümi Naga. The Sümi Nagas followed oral tradition; hence they lack written documents like all other Naga tribes. There are gaps in the history of these people because of the gradual break from the previous order at the beginning of Christianity. As a result, it becomes crucial to check for any potential indicators in events or practices. Nowadays, the Sümi Nagas are portrayed as a group with a vibrant social and cultural life through the sporadic practice of oral tradition in the form of various genres of folklore during festivals and gatherings. The Sümi Nagas pass down their traditional lifestyles from one generation to the next. They are unique from the other Naga tribes in terms of their culture and identity (Ghosh 31).

It is challenging to summarize the entire historical story in this instance, but the study tries to highlight a concise account to provide readers a better understanding of the Sümi Naga tribe. The Sümi Nagas' social-cultural existence is highlighted in this chapter, particularly in the pre-colonial era.

Origin and Migration

There are a few distinct ideas on the origin and migration of Sümi Nagas, notwithstanding the lack of a conclusive discovery. The majority of these hypotheses have a connection to their myths and legends, but due to the hazy historical backdrop, there is little accurate information available regarding the classical tales. The sole information is provided via oral histories that have been passed down from one generation to the next (James 114). Furthermore, it should be underlined that no theory can definitively claim to describe the nature and dynamics of migration. According to Marion Wettstein's article, "Origin and Migration Myths in the Rhetoric of Naga Independence and Collective Identity":

> One of the main arguments for the Nagas not being Indians is based upon oral traditions that place Naga origins either somewhere to the southeast of their current homeland, or in the South Seas, Mongolia or China. From the narrative point of view, such myths are not very precise and not necessarily what one may encounter in an evening session of singing or poetic recitation around the hearth fire — the usual form in which Naga oral tradition is preserved. The stories may be summarised in a discussion or a speech and they may be recounted quite vaguely. They may, but rather seldom do, mention village names, most of which are nonexistent today and nobody knows exactly where they were once situated.

> Such village names are often associated or even equated with similar sounding village names somewhere in Mongolia, like Mongkhuma/Mongkonyu... In order to provide the claims with a scientific backing, argumentation by local intellectuals is enriched with speculations originally taken from the monographs of Mills and Hutton or from other authors of the early twentieth century. Evolutionist or diffusionist ideas often come into play. (Wettstein 217-18)

Generally, like the other Naga tribes, the Sümi Nagas belong to Mongoloid race and their origin could be traced to the eastern part of the world. It is believed that they migrated from the East via Burma (Myanmar) and north of Manipur. In the section "Sümi Folktales: How the Sümi became Highly Migratory," of his book *The Sümi Ahuna*, Zhekugha Assumi narrates the legend of Sümi, Chakhesang and Angamis, as brothers. Although each of these three tribes has its own version of the events, according to him, the basic plot is the same. According to folklore, there was a large, flat charm stone that was home to a spirit that increased paddy yield by twofold. The aforementioned brothers gambled by trying to dry the paddy on this mysterious stone. But one day they got into a fight because they couldn't agree on who had the next turn. The parents set fire to the stone after breaking eggs on it since they thought a bloody brawl was unavoidable. Thus, the spirit left the stone and fled. In one version it is believed that Sümi folloing the path of the spirit migrated towards the same direction. The stone's benefits were gone after that (Assumi 65). The legendary tale of how the Angamis, Chakhesang, and Sümis were once brothers of the same parents is told in an interview with a Sümi folklorist – H. Sukhato Rotokha, a former chairman of the Sümi Literature Board. After a protracted settlement at Makhel, a location to which almost all Naga tribes trace their history of

departure, the brothers moved to the current settlement. Makhel is located in Manipur's Senapati District.

According to tradition, as recorded by Ghosh in *Zunheboto District Gazetteer*, Sümi, Lotha, Rengma, Angami, and Chakhesang originated in Khezakenoma, a region in the southeast of Nagaland that borders Manipur. According to Kire, Sümi share the tale of brotherhood the Angami and Lotha tribes while they were in Khezhakeno. From Khezhakeno, they travelled beyond Kohima until they reached their current territory (Kire 178–79). The language similarity between the Angamis and the Sümis could be used to support an argument for their relationship. This linguistic relationship between the Khezami Angamis and the Sümis is noted by Hutton, who writes that it is "close enough to warrant the assumption that they have at some point in the past been more intimately connected than they are now" (Hutton 375). Ghosh continues:

> The Aos went ahead and were followed by the Lothas and then Semas. Then came the Rengmas being followed by the Angamis and Chakhesangs. It may be interesting to note here that the Semas refer to the Aos as Cholimi which means: ‘who: preceded’. Angamis are called Tsungumi which means ‘left behind’. This Sema nomenclature for other tribes corraborates the order of migration. (Ghosh 21)

According to Hokishe Sema, this current placement of these tribes provides a convincing order. (Sema 5). After arriving from the south, the Sümi people are thought to have lived there for a while before making their way up north and settling in their current territory (Ghosh 23). According to this belief, the Sümis' forefathers originated in a place

known as *Swemi*, *Semi*, or *Sümi*; this Semi or Sümi town is thought to have been the site of their original settlement. It is also asserted that this particular people's name was derived from this village. This Semi or Sümi village is said to be the first place of their existence. It is also said that the name of this particular people was named after this village. Hutton raises the prospect that:

> The tradition which tells of the ancestor of the Semas having come from that village is merely connected with the present village of Khezakenoma owing to that village being able to point to a stone as the actual stone spoken of in the legend on which the paddy set to dry doubled itself by nightfall. (Hutton 375)

The conflict between the nearby tribes is thought to be the reason the Sümis departed this town. They may have encountered a defeated Chakhesang conflict near Semi village that drove them to leave and eventually settle in Zubza. They were not any safer there, though, as the powerful Angamis continued their battle against them. They travelled further north as a result, eventually settling in the upper Doyang Valley at Lazami for one group and Ighanumi and Hebolimi for the other groups (Ghosh, 24).

According to one traditional belief supported by the available theories, the ancestors of the Angami, Chakhesang, Rengma, Lotha, and Sümi originated from the Khezakenoma cave and, through migration and settlement, occupied various locations in the Nagalan hill ranges where they now reside. The Sümi first moved from Khezakenoma to Semi before establishing additional villages at Lazami, Hebolimi, and Ighanumi. These settlements are thought to be the first Sümi settlements in Nagaland State's current

Zunheboto District. The Sümi people can currently be found in many other regions of the state. The Sümi village may be found in practically all of Nagaland's districts.

Social Life of the Sümi Nagas

Traditional Sümi society has a well-defined social structure that holds the entire existence together and is characterized by a close-knit social life. It is believed that living in a group is more significant than living alone. The community combines its residents for the Nagas as a whole. It develops into identification sign. R. R. Shimray accurately writes in his book *Origin and Culture of Nagas*, "From cradle to grave, a Naga identifies himself with his village" (Shimray 44). An individual's status in a Sümi community is determined by the village from which they hail. This chapter makes an effort to highlight the traditional Sümi community's social structure in order to help us understand the connections between its members and its institutions.

The Village

The original Sümi village system has uniform traits, just like other tribal groups. Although various clans live in the same Sümi village, no two tribes live there together. M. Horam notes in a comprehensive analysis *Naga Polity* that regardless of whether a village is a social, political, or religious unit, the fact remains that it is an independent unit within the tribe (Horam 61).

The Sümi villages are typically founded by a powerful man or a warrior who has a firm grip over a certain culture, or clan. The development of the chieftainship is linked to

the founding of the village. Inavi Jimomi describes the distinctive qualities of the leader or chief who would later become the *Ato Kukau* or Head-Chief of the hamlet in *Sümi Naga: the Origin and Migration of the Nagas*:

1. He should be physically fit enough to withstand any challenge from the enemy, be it men, wild animals, or harsh nature.
2. He should be both intelligent and brave,
3. He should be wealthy enough or in a position to provide the poor in times of trouble especially during the first three years of establishment of the village. (That is why in most cases the founder of a village is either the son or brother of the chief of the parent village from which he is migrating from).
4. He must possess protective and benevolent nature.
5. He must be influential yet just. (Jimomi 138)

However, it should be emphasized that the creation of the village is an important undertaking because it necessitates safety measures and ritualistic observances to ward off evil spirits and provide good omen. Traditionally, a hilltop is chosen as the location because it provides a strategic vantage position for defending against opponents' surprise attacks, particularly when head hunting is being practised. Horam also notes that every town constructs gates in key locations to deter intruders from accessing the village in the event of an invasion (Horam 49). The location also has a natural water source, ideally a creek that runs nearby. The location also has a natural water source, ideally a creek that runs nearby. The notional or symbolic village boundary is immediately drawn or marked

with some natural geographical features like rivers, mountain ranges, valleys, or utilizing stones after being chosen. The parent village's chief grants the leader permission to found the new community. The elaborate performance of rites and ritual by the awowu or top priest is then followed by the start of the preparation procedure. It should be highlighted that only a wealthy individual with such level of social and economic standing could afford such a purchase.

When the entrance of the new village is opened, one of the rites involves the *awowu,* or chief priest, proclaiming, "I am the chief warrior of both wild beast and enemy." He blesses the chief's wife by saying, "May you be the mother of the food," as they enter into the new village. The chief and his deputy follow her, then the other migrants, the warriors, and finally the other migrants. In his essay, “Migrational Genna of the Sümi Naga,” Husca Ayemi adds that the procession yells on top of their voice as they enter by hitting a big stone slab erected on the right side of the main gate. They chant a prayer:

> Let the village be as strong as the stone
> Let there be flow of young boys and girls in the village
> Let people live long and be a blessing
> Let the village be blessed with wealth in cattle
> Let there be love and care
> Let the village be bright and shine like the moon and the sun
> Bless the children
> Let the population grows like the babies of the spider and the crab
> Let it live long and be a blessing (*Taboos, Myths and Legends* 79)

After arriving at the chief's home, the chief priest opens the door and starts a fire in the hearth. Each owner of the home receives a fire, which is lighted in their individual hearths.

The Sümi village employs a centralized administrative structure, with the *akukau*, or leader, holding ultimate power. Every village is upheld by the *akukau* (chief), who works with the village's elders and subordinates to maintain law and order. The *akukau* is revered by all and has specific advantages in his role as the village's headman, protector, and guardian. The head of any domesticated animal slain for a feast, such as a cow or a pig, was offered to the chief. This was done to acknowledge him as the local chief (John 29). The chief's responsibility is to fairly adjudicate any disagreements that may arise in the community (Nuh 2).

Hereditary succession is the basic rule. The chiefship eventually descends to the chief's eldest son who is still living in the hamlet (Hutton, 148–49). Due to the succession law and the fact that women are still economically dependent on men, this arrangement makes it difficult for them to become chieftains. Usually, the village is also named after the one who founded the village.

The Dormitory System: *Apuki (*Male Dormitory) *and Illiki (*Female Dormitory)

In a typical Naga context, socialization takes the shape of Morungs, or dormitories. The Naga boys and girls gather in this traditional educational setting to learn about their values, traditions, rituals, and other topics. Young boys and girls were trained

to equip themselves with adult roles for the welfare of their community in this setting for interaction between peers and elders. J.P. Mills notes in his book *The Rengma Nagas* that a large portion of Naga culture, customs, and traditions have been passed down from generation to generation through the means of folk music and dance, folk tales and oral historical traditions, carvings of figures on stone and wood, and designs on clothing, all of which were taught and learned in the 'Morung' (Mills 49).

In every Sümi village, both the *tupuki* or *Apuki* for boys and the *Illiki* for girls are found. Each resident in the dorms has their own *achebo* or room. The boy’s dormitory is the most spectacular structure in a village. This structure is far more elaborate in both size and shape than a typical hut for habitation. The boy's dorm is a highly organized facility with several different functions. One of the main purposes is thought to be a political one for the village's defense. The dormitory is typically placed on a mound or high area with a good vantage position for defense. Instead, a watchtower is built so that the entire community and its boundaries may be seen from there. The dormitory boys continued to keep an eye out for any sudden attacks on the village.

When they enter puberty, the boys join *apuki* where they are divided into a number of age grades. Each grade receives specialized instruction and is given a specific set of duties for the operation and welfare of the dormitory in relation to the village. Here, they acquire the craft of crafting things out of wood, cane, and bamboo as well as blacksmithing skills for making machete, spears, spades, and methods for working in the fields from their elders. Sometimes knowledgeable elders from distant villages are

brought in to instruct in crafts, warfare talk, and folk song and dance. Additionally, it hosts a variety of sporting events, including kickboxing, wrestling, spear and kick, and target shooting.

Usually, the elderly and more senior members tell tales about their ancestry, migration, conflict, battles, warriors, war victories, tragedies, etc. All developing young men are informed of their culture and customs in this way. The community's young men are encouraged to take an active role in charitable endeavours and prioritize the welfare of a village

Similarly, *Illiki* is a crucial organization for socialization where females learn a lot from their seniors about things their parents couldn't tell them from this institution. A maiden learns from elders to become a mother there. When they enter adolescence, females join *illiki*, just like boys do, where elders help shape their moral character and improve societal values. The girls are housed at an elderly woman's home, ideally a widow, where they spend the night. Various groups of girls are housed in the village with various geriatric women. The older woman is the caretaker and protector. She is given the responsibility of preparing the girls for womanhood by providing them with all essential training. For instance, she teaches the process of cloth making. The following folksong is sung by the girls as they acquire the skills. It reveals the process of weaving cotton:

Original	**Translated**
Ayeküzü Le	**Song of Weaving Cotton**

Hei! Wolo wolono ilili wolo hei!	*Hei! wolo wolono ilili wolo hei!*
Hei! Zulo zulono ilili zulo hei!	*Hei! Zulo zulono ilili zulo hei!*
Hei!Nipuh Nisuh no khaghino ishi hei	Hei! This is the ways of our forefathers
Hei! Ishi puzu aluvaqhi no aluchi ighi	Hei! This is the field is cleared
Hei! Ishi puzu supha lu chi ighi hei	Hei! This is how the cottons are collected
Hei! Ishi puzu no supha xo ighi hei	Hei! This is how cotton balls are picked
Hei! Ishi puzu no supha ka ighi hei	Hei! This is how the cottons are ginned
Hei! Ishi puzu no supha pite ighi hei	Hei! This is how matured cottons are developed
Hei! Ishi puzu no aye zuphelu hei	Hei! This is how cotton sliver is produced
Hei! Ishi puzu aye puho ighi hei	Hei! This is how the threads are yarned
Hei! Ishi puzu ayeho te ighi hei	Hei! This is how the threads are starched
Hei! Ishi puzu aye putsu ighi hei	Hei! This is how the threads are rolled into balls
Hei! Ishi puzu no aghi ghü ighi hei	Hei! This is how they are dyed
Hei! Ishi puzu no aphi gho ighi hei	Hei! This is how cloth are wove
Hei! Ishi puzu aphi tsughu ighi hei	Hei! This is how we stitched the cloth
Hei! Ishi puzuno aphi u-ighi hei	Hei! This is how we wear these woven clothes

Hei! Ale qhiniye ale kucholo hei *Hei! Niye wonie ilili alo hei!* *Hei! Zulo zulono ilili zulo hei!* (Vitoli Zhimo, personal interview, 10 June 2020)	*Hei! Ale qhiniye ale kucholo hei* *Hei! Niye wonie ilili alo hei!* *Hei! Zulo zulono ilili zulo hei!* (Translated by Holika Yeptho)

It may be noted that the first two lines indicate the beginning of the song and the last three lines mark the end of the song. Even today, the young Sümi girls continue to sing and perform the song as instructed by the elders as one of the demonstrations of socialization in the traditional setting.

The Family

The Sümis have a particular idea of what it means to be *akibo* or a family in a traditional context. The inclusion of family members as a sign of a close-knit family extends beyond those who share a residence and includes those who are connected to them through marriage or blood. They do not, however, adhere to the joint-family arrangement. When they get married, children of either sex depart from their family of orientation. Most frequently, the youngest son stays with his parents. He takes care of the parents, and upon their passing, he receives the family home.

The Nagas have a patriarchal social structure in which a person's line of descent begins with their father or ancestor. A family's head is typically the father or a male

family member. He makes all decisions pertaining to the family. He is therefore in charge of his family's well-being. He oversees both politics and religion, and when necessary, he performs the role of a priest during family ceremonies. In addition, he is the owner of the household properties. His sons receive these properties as inheritance. Although parents give items like ornaments to their daughters while they are still living, daughters often do not inherit any family property. After the passing of the parents, the family's eldest son takes on the majority of the household duties.

The Girl-child and Women

Among the Sümis, the birth of a girl child is welcomed on the note that she can assist the mother in taking care of the household or any task traditionally assigned to women. Her birth is not as significant as the birth of the male child whose birth promises the sustaining of the lineage of his father. While explaining about the birth rituals in Sümi traditions in his book *Sumi Naga: The Origin and Migration of the Nagas*, Inavi Jimomi explain that from the tender age, “a girl child is given eel fish so that she may be able to hold on to sometime before she goes away for the girl child is expected to get married and live away from her parents”. He further adds that in the case of mother’s death during childbirth, if the child lives, he is raised by his father or his father’s relatives and becomes a part of his clansmen. However, in the case of the boy child she is given for adoption to a “childless couple who eventually takes half of the dowry (marriage price) of the girl” (Jimomi 173). One of the rituals that mark the transition of a young girl into womanhood

is wearing the sarong called *tsüghümini* (L. Sema xi). This implies that she has grown old enough to get married.

The Sümi women play a significant role because they are in charge of managing household duties and upholding their children's moral standards. The fact that women handle household duties and men act as providers is evidence that there is a division of work in the home that supports gender roles preference. Records demonstrate that Sümi women put in a lot of effort and divide the workload equally, even in the fields. Kumar Suresh Singh in his book *People of India* claims that in one such case "she hardly cares to snatch away time for leisure" (Singh 157). The position of Sema women is probably higher socially as it is morally than in either of the Ao and Angami," Hutton said of the Sümi women. According to Hutton, "the position of Sema women is probably higher socially as it is morally than in either of the Ao and Angami tribes" (Hutton 183). However, in a patriarchal community like the Sümi, women have no control over issues like property inheritance, headship, and decision-making.

The Marriage System

The Sümi marriage system adheres to the principles of clan exogamy in its traditional setting. Even though monogamy was maintained, polygyny was prevalent, especially among the wealthy members of the community. *Tusu tuxe* or the process of marriage negotiation is practised. In this system, there is a discussion related to expenses, bride-price and such related matters taking place between the two parties involved. This practice is found even today.

Traditionally, the Sümis have two forms of marriage based on the number of wives:

1. Monogamy: Even in a traditional setting, this system of marriage is the most common. A Sümi man finds it difficult to take on more than one wife because he must pay a high bride price for each wife he marries. Only a wealthy man in a high social and economic standing could have multiple wives.

2. Polygyny: This form is primarily practized by Sümi chiefs or wealthy men who have access to multiple wives. A man frequently takes on several wives to help him. If his wife is infertile or fails to give birth to a male heir, he may also wed another woman.

A Sümi marriage can, further, be classified into three categories based on obtaining a bride:

1. Arranged marriage: The Sümis traditionally use a method of marriage in which the boy's parents send a proposal to the girl's parents via an *anisu*, or middleman, or mediator. This individual is typically a family member or a respected local elder. If the girl's parents are on board, the boy's parents will visit the girl to discuss costs and the bride's price. The girl may be forced to accept the settlement in this situation.

2. Love marriage: Love marriage is discouraged in a traditional environment since it is seen as wrong. In addition, the girl was unable to pick her own husband.

However, the couple still asks their parents' permission in this situation in order to conduct formal marriage ceremonies and rites.

3. Marriage by Elopement: Even though this system is uncommon in the traditional community, it does exist when the parents disagree with the choice of spouse. Even if they flee, they return to carry out the traditional wedding ceremonies.

The Sümi marriage can also be categorized into three types based on gift exchanges according to the status of the families of both the boy and the girl:

1. *Amine Kimji xe*: Sümi Folklore for the origin of the *aminikimji mini*, an expensive wrap-around ornamented with precious beads, portrays the story of an old man named Khumtsa from the *Jimomi* clan well known for the wealth he possessed. His father was killed by the enemy when he was still in his mother's womb. Although poor and helpless, he grows up to become a strong and courageous warrior. He becomes wealthy as well and marries Tughunakha. They had eight children, four daughters and four sons. Khumtsa knew that Shonili the youngest was going to have a difficult life because of her weak heart. Therefore, Khumtsa and his wife plan a luxurious marriage for Shonili by showering her with lots of traditional clothes which included *aminikimji mini*, ornaments and other valuable items to help her in times of trouble. From that day *aminikimji* is worn and used till today though quite rare. (Ghovili 5-6)

Only wealthy and affluent families engage in this highest level of marriage since it is costly and represents the pride and honour of the family involved. Additionally, only those who have undertaken the necessary rituals—such as hosting a feast of merit for the entire village by butchering pigs and mithuns—can engage in its practice. Along with this *aminikimi* or sharong, she also receives different kinds of *amini* or sharongs and valuable ornaments such as strings of beaded necklaces as *achiku*, *achipu*, *achixathi* and other ornaments, domesticated animals in pairs. If any gift is omitted, it is thought that the bride would not live a good life. As a result, the girl's parents give this practice serious thought before carrying it out. The bridegroom's parents then returned the favour by giving a minimum of sixteen and a maximum of thirty mithuns.

2. Ashoghi or *Allapha xe*: This marriage takes place between families who are rich but here, *aminikimji mini* is not given to the daughter. However, *achiku*, *achipu*, *achixathi* and all the other valuable items like domesticated animals, ornaments and traditional clothes though not in pairs are given to the bride by the parents as gifts. In reciprocation, according to the gifts of the bride, a minimum of ten and a maximum of sixteen mithuns are given to the bride’s parents by the groom’s parents as *ame* or bride-price.

3. Lathala or *Moshomogho xe*: This marriage is based on an understanding of the families involved in terms of *ame* and gifts to the bride. This is practised among the lower class group in the Sümi community. As the families involved cannot

afford the expenses and gifts, they negotiate according to their family status. Both the families of the bride and the groom would accept what can be offered.

The Marriage Procedure

According to the Sümi tradition, the boy usually initiates and proposes to a girl for marriage ant not vice versa. The prospective groom or his parents normally make the first move; they arrange *Anisu* (negotiator) and sent him to meet the bride and his parents to propose marriage. Most Sümi marriage is made with consent and will of the bride, except in some few cases. When the bride's parents have agreed to the proposal, a day is fixed for *atsa ita* or an engagement ceremony is arranged. The go-between along with their groom relatives arrives at the bride's home and settles the type of marriage and fixes the date of *amekukugha* or the negotiation for bride-price (Inavi 192).

Another important part under the *ame* settlement is a*phiatho lame* or *aphi athome*, which literally translates as the 'bride's body price'. It is a mandatory gift from the groom's family to the bride's family specifically for the bride's chaste body. This may be a mithun, a cow or a pig but usually a mithun is preferred that is in healthy condition depending on the status of the families and in lieu of this gift the bride's family is supposed to give the best materials to the bride when she leaves for her matrimonial home. The negotiation and quantum of bride price depends on the type of marriage one intends to undertake.

After *Ame kukugha* or bride's price negotiation, formal engagement, *azanu julha* or 'mother solicit meat' is performed by giving a pig or more to the bride's parents by the groom's parents to be distributed among the bride's immediate. It is a token of appreciation for bride's mother in upbringing or taking care of her. Even if the marriage date is fixed, it cannot take place unless *azajunula* is performed. While the practice might sound charitable, it promotes the traditional narrative of women being groomed only for marriage. They become investments on the prospect of the higher returns through bride-price negotiation.

These customs, such as *amekuchu*, *aphiatho lame*, and *azanu julha*, appear to be justified by the high value placed on Sümi women, who are regarded as being particularly virtuous, chaste, modest, hardworking, and self-efficient in managing household duties and other tasks and upholding the honour of their parents and families thereby serving as authorization for the community to continue engaging in such behaviour. It takes on a lot of significance when you consider that such actions only serve to commodify women and harm their standing in society. As generations pass, people lose their sensitivity and cultural sensitivity. This disturbing culture simply reinforces the dysfunctional gender relations that encourage male supremacy through service and female servitude.

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CHAPTER 4

STEREOTYPING IN THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SÜMI NAGA FOLKLORES

I

In many societies, myths and stories play a significant role in shaping cultural beliefs, values, and norms. They often provide explanations for natural phenomena, human behavior, and the origins of the world and its inhabitants. Myths and stories help create a sense of order and coherence by offering narratives that make sense of complex and unpredictable aspects of life. Furthermore, myths and stories can serve as tools of social control and regulation, as they contribute to the construction of shared identities and collective beliefs. They can reinforce existing power structures, moral values, and social hierarchies by providing narratives that justify and legitimize certain behaviors, roles, and relationships within a society.

Myths and stories have played a significant role in shaping cultural narratives and beliefs throughout history. They often reflect the values, norms, and biases of the society in which they originate. In some cases, these narratives may reinforce stereotypes by presenting certain characters or groups in predictable and limiting ways. For instance, women in traditional myths and stories are sometimes portrayed as helpless damsels in distress, witches, or passive objects of desire. Men may be depicted as strong, heroic figures with little emotional vulnerability. These characterizations can reinforce gender

stereotypes and limit the range of roles and behaviors attributed to individuals based on their gender.

Literature has expressed views on the basic distinctions between the sexes throughout history, for instance in his book *History of Animals*, Aristotle on a section about the differences between men and women argues that women are more compassionate than men, but they are also more envious, querulous, slanderous, and contentious. He also argues that women are more dispirited, despondent, impudent, and given to falsehood than men. Finally, he argues that men are more disposed to give assistance to danger, and are more courageous than women (Aristotle 1997). Aristotle's views on women were influenced by his views on biology and his views on the natural order of things. He believed that women were inferior to men, and that they were naturally suited for domestic roles. His views were widely accepted in his time, and they continue to influence our understanding of gender today.

Miller points the origin of stereotypes in the book *In the Eyes of the Beholder*:

> The derivation of the word is the Greek stereos, meaning solid, and typos, meaning the mark of a blow, impression or model. The term was first used to describe a method of printing designed to duplicate pages of type. A metal plate, cast from a mold, was used instead of the original form. One link to contemporary usage was thus in the idea of duplication, that all products of the stereotype process would be identical. Another feature was rigidity or permanence. (Miller 4)

He states that stereotypes frequently take the shape of personality judgments often negative, it is critical to comprehend how these images are maintained and how a person comes to believe what they do. They are developed in the process of socializing, and inadvertently reinforced by voicing stereotypes (Miller 127).

Gloria Steinem discusses the significance of how women are portrayed in literature in her article "The Way We See Ourselves," stating that stereotype "can shape the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. When women are portrayed as strong, independent, and capable, it can help us to believe in ourselves and our potential. It can also help to challenge stereotypes and create a more just and equitable society". She contends that portraying women as strong, independent, and capable can aid in dispelling preconceptions and fostering a society that is more just and equitable (Steinem 1983).

Devine (1989), Fiske (1993), and Steele (1997) explain stereotypes often involve overgeneralizations of characteristics, which may or may not be based on actual observations. It also mentions that stereotypes can contain a partial kernel of truth, but they are ultimately misleading. Additionally, stereotypes are described as being resistant to change even when confronted with new information. While this description aligns with common understandings of stereotypes, it does not refer to a specific author or source.

Stereotypes serve as norms for how particular individuals and groups of people should be treated. Therefore, feminists critique and challenge stereotypes as they perpetuate gender inequality, restrict individual agency, and reinforce harmful social

norms. Feminists argue that stereotypes place rigid expectations and limitations on individuals based on their gender. Stereotypes often reduce complex and diverse identities to simplistic and narrow categories, stifling individuality and preventing individuals from fully expressing themselves and exploring their potential.

Stereotypes often reflect and reinforce existing power imbalances between genders. Feminists highlight how stereotypes portray women as passive, emotional, nurturing, and submissive, while men are depicted as dominant, rational, and aggressive. These stereotypes contribute to unequal power dynamics and limit opportunities for individuals to challenge and transcend traditional gender roles. It can have detrimental effects on individuals' self-esteem, mental health, and well-being. Women, in particular, face negative consequences when they do not conform to societal expectations. Stereotypes can lead to discrimination, prejudice, and unequal treatment, both in personal interactions and in broader social institutions.

OHCHR on women’s human rights and gender equality defines Gender stereotyping as:

> Gender stereotyping refers to the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group of women or men. Gender stereotyping is wrongful when it results in a violation or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (https://www.ohchr. org/en/women/gender-stereotyping)

It also states that a gender stereotype is a generalized opinion or assumption about the traits, qualities, or functions that women and men should or should not have, or do.

When it restricts a woman's or man's ability to grow personally, pursues a career, and/or makes decisions about their lives, a gender stereotype is damaging:

> Whether overtly hostile (such as “women are irrational”) or seemingly benign (“women are nurturing”), harmful stereotypes perpetuate inequalities. For example, the traditional view of women as care givers means that child care responsibilities often fall exclusively on women. Further, gender stereotypes compounded and intersecting with other stereotypes have a disproportionate negative impact on certain groups of women, such as women from minority or indigenous groups, women with disabilities, women from lower caste groups or with lower economic status, migrant women, etc. (ibid)

Feminism seeks to challenge and disrupt stereotypes by promoting diverse and inclusive representations of gender identities. Feminist movements work towards dismantling limiting stereotypes by advocating for equal opportunities, amplifying underrepresented voices, and challenging cultural narratives that perpetuate stereotypes.

As a feminist activist and writer, Betty Friedan states in her groundbreaking work in feminist literature, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), that "the stereotype of the woman as inferior has been so long and so widely cultivated that many women have come to believe that they are inferior" (11). It analyzes the experiences of women in post-World War II America and critiqued the prevailing cultural and societal expectations that confined women to the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. She challenges the notion that fulfillment for women could only be found within the domestic sphere and sparked a national conversation about gender roles and women's rights.

Feminists actively work to challenge and dismantle stereotypes by promoting gender equality, advocating for inclusive and diverse representations, and empowering individuals to embrace their authentic selves. By questioning and challenging stereotypes, feminism aims to create a society that recognizes and values the full complexity and diversity of human identities and experiences.

In this study, an image is a notion that illustrates how women are portrayed in literature and in real life, or how society views women and their duties in relation to males. Ferguson refers to "stereotypes" as one component of how society regards women. As long as some preconceptions are present, the observer fills in the rest based on prior knowledge, which could be considered prejudice or prejudgment. She states that some psychologists contend that some stereotypes are particularly potent because they are shaped not by a specific society but rather by humanity as a whole. These strong stereotypes are: “images of myths, stories told in every society to impose upon and explain the inexplicable and chaotic aspects of experience” (9).

The concept of the "ideal woman" and stereotypes about women are closely interconnected. The concept of the "ideal woman" refers to a societal or cultural construct that defines certain characteristics, behaviors, and qualities as desirable or necessary for women to embody. It is an idealized and often unrealistic image of what women should be, based on societal norms, expectations, and values. This concept can vary across cultures, historical periods, and social contexts. Stereotypes often contribute to the construction of the idealized image of women by promoting certain traits or roles while

disregarding the diversity and complexity of women's experiences. These stereotypes can create pressure for women to conform to societal expectations and can lead to harmful consequences such as discrimination, gender inequality, and the suppression of individuality. It is important to challenge and dismantle these notions of the "ideal woman" and stereotypes by recognizing and valuing the diversity of women's experiences, abilities, and choices.

Understanding the idea of an "ideal" woman, or *totimi kuchou* in Sümi Naga setting, is essential in determining how society views women. In her dissertation, *Exploring Hokmâ (Woman Wisdom) Metaphor in Proverbs 1-9 from a Sümi Naga Woman's Perspective,* Jekheli Kibami Singh investigates how traditionally, both Sümi Naga men and women have accepted the *totimi kuchou* concept of womanhood as an ideal for Sümi women. This idea predates Christianity and has been formed and fostered by the customs, cultures, and behaviours that the Sümi society is accustomed to. It encourages the notion that women and girls should exhibit many attributes and virtues such as *kutuukulu* (patience), *alokütsü* (wisdom), *tsaqütsalei* (frugality), *amikucho* (honesty), *aqhokighe* (humility), and *iqüighai* (docility and demureness) (Kibami 143).

According to Singh, while these traits may be admirable to aspire to, they become problematic when they are applied culturally to Sümi women in order to define and assess who they are, or who they should be, as women. The social idea of womanhood is one that many Sümi women internalize from an early age and are required to express in their everyday interactions and relationships. *Totimi kuchou* is a socially and culturally

constructed concept, despite the fact that it is frequently thought of as a normative or natural ideal of feminine action. As a result, it affects how women view themselves and influences how they interact with others.

In her TED Talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a renowned writer and feminist, opines that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." She emphasizes the limitations and dangers of relying on stereotypes to understand women or any group of people. Stereotypes reduce individuals to simplistic and narrow categories, ignoring their diverse experiences, strengths, and complexities. Adichie's statement urges us to recognize the multiplicity of stories and identities within a group, rather than relying on a single narrative that perpetuates stereotypes. (www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_sin gle story)

Folklore records reveal that Sümi women enjoy a positive reputation in the community, particularly if they uphold the *totimi kuchou* principles. The more skilled they are, they have a better chance in society as such women fit the role of an ideal wife. AsSüming the position of an effective wife, one is responsible for managing the home. She significantly contributes to her husband's rise to power and prominence. These gender roles have played a significant influence in our culture and are the root cause of the disparities that women experience. It is challenging for us to recognize the injustice of a patriarchal society because we were raised in one and have internalized its ideals to the point that they are an integral part of who we are.

This chapter aims to highlight how literature normalizes gender roles for both children and adults, encourages specific behaviours in both men and women, and portrays alternative character qualities as undesirable and untypical.

II

The Portrayal of Women in the Sümi Naga Folktales

The following narratives from the selected Sümi Naga folktales display the representation of women in selected Naga folktales:

1. The Stepmother Stereotype:

The Tale of Khakhu and Sheyili

In the tale, Khakhu was highly regarded by the villagers because of his wife Sheyili. Sheyili was a very generous woman who in her capacity as the wife of Khakhu helped the villagers and never sent away anyone empty-handed from their doorstep. She finds favour in the eyes of the villagers. This is not the case with her mother-in-law who is also the stepmother of her husband. She is mingy and so she becomes jealous of her daughter-in-law. She starts to plot against her to separate the couple. When Khakhu and Sheyili lock their house and leave to work in the field, the stepmother would break in and spoil all their belongings. Unbeknownst to this, the husband blames the wife. However, she doesn’t confront her husband so that he would see for himself. Later, the husband finds out but he fails to take action against his stepmother. The couple, eventually,

separated because Sheyili realizes that her husband cannot protect her. Thus, the wicked plan of the stepmother worked. She also brings down the status of her husband because of her ill conduct. (Sema, 25-29)

The tales related to the stepmothers are highlighted in the folk tradition as irksome members of the family. This narrative of the wicked stepmother is reflected even in the Sümi folktales of stepmothers. She fails to qualify as an "ideal" woman or *totimi kuchou.* She is also put up as a foil to the naive and innocent step girl whom she mistreats and who eventually gains victory over her. She is presented as the type of woman whom the rest must avoid.

The stepmother stereotype in folktales is a common narrative trope that portrays stepmothers as cruel, wicked, and antagonistic figures. This portrayal often contrasts with the image of the biological mother, who is typically depicted as kind, nurturing, and loving. The stepmother stereotype perpetuates negative and unfair assumptions about women who marry into a family where they have stepchildren.

In many traditional folktales, the stepmother is characterized as jealous, manipulative, and abusive towards her stepchildren. They represent qualities that one equates with evil. They always strategize to exercise power and control over the members of the family including their husband and stepchildren. The stepchildren are the most popular victim of her marriage. She is often portrayed as mistreating or neglecting them, favoring her own biological children, or even plotting their harm. One hardly meets a compassionate stepmother, for, like all folktale figures, this stepmother is an archetypal

image, not the representation of a true person whose values, desires, and thoughts we are deprived of. This stereotype creates a binary and simplistic representation of women, reinforcing the notion that only biological mothers possess inherent love and care for children.

In the article “Why are Old Women often the Face of Evil in Fairy Tales and Folklore?”, Elizabeth Blair examines the choice of old and female figures for the antagonist from a feminist perspective. She remarks that old women in fairy tales and folklore practically keep civilization together. They judge, reward, harm and heal; and they're often the most intriguing characters in the story. Feminist critics such as Tatar, Gilbert and Gubar have demonstrated that the stepmother has also become a scapegoat, a terrifying figure who goes against all sorts of expectations for women and motherhood. It could be noted that women are, nevertheless, victims of the circumstances.

The stepmother stereotype in folktales can have real-world implications as well. It contributes to societal biases against stepmothers, who may face scrutiny and judgment in blended families. These stereotypes can undermine the efforts of stepmothers to build loving and harmonious relationships with their stepchildren and perpetuate feelings of exclusion and alienation. It is important to recognize that the stepmother stereotype in folktales is an oversimplified and biased portrayal. It is crucial to challenge and reevaluate these stereotypes, acknowledging that family dynamics are diverse and complex. Blended families can thrive when nurtured with understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. By challenging and subverting the stepmother stereotype, one can foster

greater inclusivity and understanding, acknowledging the diverse experiences and complexities of family dynamics in our society.

2. Women as a victim of extra-marital affair

The Tale of Inakha and Ghonili

The tale is about Ghonili, a daughter of Nikhena Asumi from Philimi village. She is regarded as the most attractive, upright, and diligent woman in the entire community. She is married to a gallant warrior, Inakha. However, one day while on a raiding expedition, Inakha comes across Chevili working in a field where Chevili, a cunning woman who tricks Inakha into liking her. Inakha betrays his wife by deciding to get a second wife, Chevili. In order to avoid rumour and social humiliation, Chevili's brothers coerced Inakha into marrying their sister. Inakha finally agreed to visit Chevili's home in nine days to talk about the bride price.

Inakha returned home and told his wife, " Ghonili, I made a mistake while I tried to preserve my life," with a troubled heart. "Oh! Don't worry, Inakha; people make mistakes," Ghonili retorted in response, “That is how things work in the world.” When Ghonili became upset, Inakha consoled her by offering to keep Chevili as the younger wife and keep Ghonili as the elder. However, Ghonili leaves her husband because she does not agree with this arrangement. She gathered her necklaces, bangles and other articles before leaving her husband’s home. Those were regarded as her property and it was at her disposal to be used as she deemed fit. (*Folktales from Nagaland* 90)

In a staunchly patriarchal society, Sümi women do not have the right to inheritance, especially ancestral lands and property. But she was entitled to keep her ornaments and other moveable items including livestock provided it was reared by her. Here, female inheritance often means that the women function mainly as carriers of property from father to husband, rather than active managers of their property. Feminist perspectives strongly advocate for women's right to inheritance and challenge the historical and cultural practices that have denied or limited women's inheritance rights. Like many societies, Sümi women have been systematically excluded from inheriting property, assets, and wealth, perpetuating gender inequalities and reinforcing patriarchal structures. It may be noted that denying women the right to inheritance undermines their economic independence, limits their opportunities for advancement, and perpetuates their dependence on male relatives. It can contribute to women's vulnerability to poverty, lack of resources, and limited decision-making power within their families and communities.

3. The Portrayal of Women as Sky Maiden

The Myth of Ahuna

The Sümi festival of *Ahuna* is associated with myth, rites and omens. In the tale, kungulimi, or sky maidens, descend to earth early in the morning to gather water from springs. Therefore, on the day of the feast, the men would leave for the neighbouring river or well at the first crow of the rooster, carrying new bamboo vessels, in order to acquire the water before the sky maidens. They took a bath, and then fill their bamboo containers with water to take home. The rituals were performed to mark the beginning of

this festival of harvest. However, women were not allowed to take part in rituals since it was thought that if any woman entered the enclosed area for rites, it would result in accidents for the family members while they were engaged in agricultural work.

The portrayal of women as sky maidens as an archetype in folklores can be seen as both positive and potentially limiting, depending on the specific context and interpretation. On one hand, being associated with celestial qualities and mystical symbolism can elevate women to a revered and ethereal status. It can highlight their beauty, purity, and connection to nature, emphasizing their value and significance. However, this portrayal can also be limiting as it often places women on a pedestal, presenting them as unattainable ideals rather than complex individuals with diverse strengths and abilities. It can reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, focusing primarily on women's physical appearance and their role as objects of beauty or desire.

4. The portrayal of women as flowers

The Tale of Anishe

The tale is about a Sümi woman named Nisheli from a rich family who is in love with her childhood friend Pheo from a poor family. Therefore, they plan to elope. Unfortunately, Kutupa, the antagonist who overheard the lover’s plan, overheard their plan disguises himself as Pheo and takes Nisheli far away into the dark thick forest. Cunningly, he remains silent throughout their journey so Nisheli fails to recognize him. When she recognizes him, he ties her to a tree and kills her. The blood of Nisheli flows

around the tree and transforms into an orchid flower called *Anishe*. When Pheo and his friends hunt the forest to avenge the death of his lover, the blossoms of *Anishe* act as an umbrella to shelter Pheo from the sun and rain wherever he goes. Everyone finds the phenomenon strange. While returning, Pheo pierces one of the blossoms with his spear and takes it home. In his dream, Nisheli talks to him and narrates her tragic story, "Oh, because of Kutupa we could not marry, I protected you only from rain among the people but why did you injure me by your spear, you also see your spear" (p 82). Pheo wakes up to find the blood of his lover in place of the flower. (*Folktales from Nagaland* 82-3)

Cultures, across the world, associate flowers with women since flowers are seen as a reflection of the traditional feminine ideal of delicate, fragile, soft, sensual, and gentle behaviour. Women and flowers have always been a symbol of life as they contain reproductive organs. This association seems to lead back to the gender constructions of men and women. Men are believed to be active, strong, dominant and aggressive members of society, whereas women are associated as objects of beauty, passive, nurturers, and subordinates. Depicting women as flowers tends to emphasize their appearance and aesthetics, focusing on their perceived delicacy, passivity, and ornamental value. This representation reinforces the idea that women's primary purpose is to be visually pleasing and to be admired by others. It disregards their intellectual, emotional, and physical strength, as well as their diverse abilities and aspirations.

Feminist perspectives often critique the portrayal of women as flowers or flower-like beings within literature, art, and popular culture. This portrayal reduces women to

objects of beauty and fragility, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and limiting their agency and complexity. This attitude is also prevalent in the Sümi folklore as seen in the tale of *Anishe*. Nisheli takes a passive role by simply agreeing to the plan of her lover Pheo, and is gullible enough to follow Kutupa only to meet her tragic fate. Upon her death, she becomes a flower. The portrayal of women as flowers perpetuates a limited and objectifying view of femininity. It reinforces the idea that women should be passive, submissive, and dependent on others for validation and protection. This can restrict women's autonomy and contribute to their marginalization and objectification within society.

5. The Portrayal of Women as Witch

The Tale of the Witch and the Wife

The tale of "The Witch and the Wife" narrates about a *kungumi* or angelic being named *Khaulipu* who marries *Tsüipu*, a human being. On the wedding day, *Khaulipu's* parents have one condition that *Khaulipu* must reach her husband's place without touching the ground and taking rest on the way. However, as he carried his new bride in a bamboo cradle, *Tsüipu hears* strange sounds from the cradle and it grew heavier. Exhausted, *Tsüipu* climbs and leaves the cradle on a tree that grows near the pond. He tells her to wait until he returns with a help. He goes to his village and calls his brother to help him carry the cradle.

While the husband is away, a witch named *Muchupile* comes to the pond to fetch water. To her surprise, she sees a beautiful face on the water and believes that it is her own reflection. She becomes furious and starts to destroy her water vessels by stating that a beautiful woman like her should not be living a wretched life. This amuses *Khaulipu* and she starts to laugh. The witch recognizes the beautiful face and she is filled with anger and jealousy. In her rage, *Muchupile* climbs up the tree and bites the skull of *Khaulipu* until she dies. She then buries *Khaulipu* besides the path and replaces herself on the cradle.

When *Khaulipu* and his brother return, they find *Muchupili* on the cradle. His brother is disgusted and leaves him by questioning "How can you marry such an ugly woman?" On the other hand, *Tsüipu* thinks that his wife has transformed because he has failed to follow the instruction of his father-in-law. Thus, he takes her home as his wife. (*Sumi Naga* pp 225-8)

The portrayal of women as witches has been a subject of feminist analysis and critique. In many historical and cultural contexts, the image of a witch has been associated with negative stereotypes and used as a tool to vilify and marginalize women who challenge societal norms or possess unconventional knowledge or power. The tales are usually embedded with warnings to the little girls about how they should behave and what will befall them should they choose to exhibit non-female traits. Young women are often described as more beautiful, pretty or fair than older women.

Beauty is highly revered in folk tales as in fairy tales. It is associated with intelligence, ability, kindness, worthiness and morality. In the face of beauty, everything becomes secondary. Women are often expected to conform to specific beauty standards, such as being thin, youthful, and having certain facial features or body proportions. This idealized image of beauty can create pressure on women to conform, leading to issues like body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. It is quite astounding that a man, or even another woman, ignores all the qualities and measures the beauty of a woman. This can be well perceived in the Sümi folk tales as well. *Khaulipu* is presented as a young, fair and attractive woman, whereas, *Muchupili* is presented as an old and ugly repulsive witch.

The culture makes it close to impossible not to subconsciously make comparison between the self and another woman. This self-comparison promotes the constant n of personal worth through domains like attractiveness, success, and intelligence. It, consequently, manifests into excessively competitive and judgmental attitudes. This beauty standard hampers the confidence of women as they internalize the idea that women need to be beautiful otherwise they will be rejected by the society. Beauty standards particularly relate to feminism as they imply that women are mere objects, appreciated solely for their physical appearance. Feminism values the cooperation of women, not the competition and comparison promoted through the endless images presented by the media that encompasses unattainable standards of beauty.

Further the tale of "The Witch and the Wife" informs how upon the grave of *Khaulipu* a lemon tree starts to grow and bear many fruits. One day, *Tsüipu* comes across this fruit. He plucks one fruit and gives it to an old widow who lives besides his house. The old woman does not consume it as she finds it too good to be eaten. When she goes to the field, the fruit would transform itself into *Khaulipu*. She finishes all the household chores for the woman. And finally when it is time for the widow to return from field, *Khaulipu* would go back to its lemon form and remains in the basket. Later, the woman witnesses the fruit transforms into beautifully *Khaulipu*. Symbolically, *Khaulipu's* transformation to *Mushuthi* can be inferred as a representation of her tragic life. Here, the comparison is made to the bitter-sour taste of the citrus fruit. Sümi tradition believes that these supernatural beings help human beings in need and so they are welcomed. Parents often tell the children to keep the house clean as an invitation to these beings.

Later, in the development of the plot, when the evil witch *Muchupili* dies, upon her grave grows *Thumsü* (Rhus semialata). The tale remains quite significant as it continues to become a point of reference with its cultural meaning. For instance, women are warned not to be talkative as talkative nature as *Thumsü* (Rhus semialata) originating from *Muchupili's* character of being evil and talkative. The fire wood from this tree makes a bursting sound like firecrackers when it is burned.

The depiction of women as witches often reinforces gendered stereotypes and reinforces patriarchal control. It portrays women who exhibit independence, intelligence, or non-conformity as dangerous or evil, perpetuating the fear of powerful women and

reinforcing the notion that female power should be suppressed or feared. The witch stereotype has been used to undermine women's agency, autonomy, and credibility. It has been historically employed as a means to control and persecute women who deviated from societal expectations, such as healers, midwives, or those who questioned established norms and authority.

6. Daughters as Victims of Bride Price

The Tale of Khumutsah and Tüghünakha

The Sümi folktale of “Khumutsa and Tüghünakha” portrays the character of Tüghünakha who defends Khumutsa against the ill-treatment of her parents. According to her parents, Khumutsa, an orphan, is an unsuitable match. This situation implies the prospect of a promising bride price for a daughter is slim over a poor suitor.

The Tale of Nisapa and Nisala

In the tale of “Nisapa and Nisala,” Nisala goes to the extent of quietly handing over her necklace to be sold and used as a bride price by Nisapa who is a poor orphan. She was not allowed to marry him because he fails to bring the bride-price on time.

The practice of bride price, also known as dowry or bride wealth, involves the payment or transfer of goods, money, or other valuables from the groom's family to the bride's family upon marriage. While bride price customs vary across cultures, it is important to note that the impact and implications of this practice can be complex and

multifaceted. In certain contexts, the payment of bride price has been criticized for perpetuating harmful gender dynamics and contributing to the devaluation and objectification of women. The payment of bride price can sometimes lead to the perception that women are commodities or property to be exchanged between families, reinforcing unequal power dynamics and limiting the agency and autonomy of women within marital relationships.

In some cases, the payment of bride price may also place a burden on the bride's family, leading to economic exploitation or financial hardship. This can result in daughters being treated as economic liabilities, and their worth being reduced to the value of the bride price offered by potential suitors. As a consequence, daughters may be seen primarily as sources of economic gain, rather than as individuals with their own desires, aspirations, and rights.

Feminist perspectives often critique the practice of bride price as it can perpetuate gender inequality, objectification, and the subordination of women within marriage. Feminist scholars and activists argue for the recognition of women's agency and the promotion of gender equality within marital relationships, advocating for the dismantling of practices that devalue and commodify women. In the Sümi folktales, the attitude of the parents reduces the girl child to the state of a commodity. We could also find that men without power, position and wealth get deprived of marrying a girl of their choice.

7. The Identity of Women

The Tale of Thochipa and Tusholi

In the folktale of “Thochipa and Tusholi,” the name of the female protagonist - Tusholi ceases to be mentioned after she gets married to Thochipa. She is only referred to as Thochipa’s wife in the rest of the tale. As the tale progresses, towards the end, Tusholi’s name is mentioned only after the demise of her husband Thochipa. Before marriage, the identity of a Sümi woman is embodied in the identity of her father. After marriage, this identity is transferred to who her husband was. In a good number of folktales, one could find the name of her father being repeated in the events preceding her marriage. In this stage, her name is taken as it is to narrate the events but the moment she gets married, she is referred to as the wife. Her name ceases to appear in the narratives. (*Kichitssathoh* pp 39-42)

The practice of identifying a woman through her husband's name, instead of her own individual name, has been a subject of feminist critique. This practice reflects historical and cultural norms that prioritize male identity and erode women's individuality and autonomy. From a feminist perspective, identifying women solely through their husband's name reinforces gender inequality and perpetuates the idea that a woman's identity is derived from her relationship to a man. It implies that a woman's worth or significance is tied to her marital status and diminishes her own accomplishments, achievements, and unique identity.

Feminist scholars and activists advocate for women's right to be recognized and acknowledged in their own right, separate from their relationships with men. This

includes the use of their own names, whether they are married or not, and the promotion of gender-neutral or inclusive language that respects women's autonomy and agency. Today, many women have chosen to challenge this naming convention by retaining their maiden names after marriage, adopting hyphenated surnames, or using alternative naming practices that reflect their individual identities. This movement seeks to disrupt the patriarchal norms that diminish women's autonomy and assert the importance of women's self-determination in defining their own identities.

In the tale, the name ‘Tusholi’ and her identity is at jeopardy with each given circumstances. Recognizing and respecting a woman's individual name is an essential aspect of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It acknowledges their unique experiences, achievements, and contributions, independent of their marital status or relationships. Feminism encourages society to move towards a more inclusive and egalitarian approach to naming practices, one that affirms women's autonomy and agency in determining their own identities.

III

The Portrayal of Women in the Sümi Naga Folksongs

The following narratives from the selected Sümi Naga folksongs display the representation of women in selected Naga folktales. It may be noted that, for greater clarity, I, or mentioned otherwise, have made an attempt for a translation of the original lyric which has been supplied in the right column of each table:

1. Women as a Victim of Headhunting

Folksong: *Viyili*

Original	**Translation**
Viyili	**Viyili**
Ishe! Ni Viyili	Woe is me! Viyili,
Lhoupu nonga ye	The child of Lhoupu,
Oh Ishe timi kighilike kishi	Oh! Like a child pampered upon,
Kighilike noye	I was lavished so.
Oh Ishe! Ino kighiliyeuno	Oh! So doted upon was I,
Timi suthapumo	Among folks I mingled not,
Timi zulo huwo puamoe.	Their woods I carried not.
Oh Ishe! Timi xamunu shiye	Oh! If folks were of flowers,
Mutsu ghuti	Monsoon clusters they were,
Kichi, iti no,	The old, the young alike
Xokighe woaye	Plucked them all away.
Oh ishe! Ino axamunu shiye	Oh! If I were of flowers,
Kichemunu, anhekusa lono	A precious bloom I was,
Pekighiu shiye	Perched high on rocky cliffs,
Timino ixomo.	Plucked away by none.
Oh ishe! Timi akha shiyeuno	Oh! If folks were of fishes,
Axusa ngunoye	Along the shores, they were,
Kichi, iti noye	The old, the young alike
Pekukulu kha shiye	Could catch them all away.
Oh ishe! Ino akha shiyeuno,	Oh! If I were of fishes,
Ayizu kutholo.	Upon the deepest, I was,
Oh ishe! Timi tughu kukamino	Only the skilled of divers

Pekulu kha shiye	Could catch upon me so.
Ikutsuye,	My trophy head bestow
Khuvushe papuno luvelo,	Onto Khuvushe's father.
Kijeuno luvekeloye	Upon the great one
Ikijeu, ixokulu aye	Is my prideful place,
Timi kije mutsa	My heart desires too.
Yepu keviloye	On equal terms with folks
Ilomuka aye	Never treat me so,
Oh ishe! Ipu	A restless soul,
Aye haye nguno	Then I will be.
Ipelino alachehu	Alas! Father of mine,
Kithila totsulo	This world is fading away
	My brothers, let them walk me
	Till path of death I reach
	(*A Glimpse of Long Ago* p 21)

Sümis associate headhunting with conflicts and warfare. It served as a means to establish dominance, assert territorial claims, and protect one's own tribe from external threats. But, more importantly, it held more significance where the severed heads were considered powerful symbols or objects of spiritual significance. It was believed that capturing an enemy's head would bring fertility, prosperity, or protect against evil spirits. It could be seen as a demonstration of bravery, valor, and prowess in battle. As a result, the male population engaged in the headhunting game to demonstrate their prowess as warriors and to advance their social status. Women were not exempt from this heinous practice, and there are numerous accounts in folklore of female victims of headhunters.

In the verses of *Viyili*, Viyili, the daughter of Lhoupu, sings of her misfortune as she was dying as a victim of the head-hunter referred to as Khuvushe's father. While she lived, she was loved and lavished with the best of everything by her parents, who treated her like royalty. She was a reputable young girl who avoided mingling with those who had to work every day in the fields. She compares herself to the precious and rare flower on a steep hill and to a fish only skilled drivers could catch, while the rest of the people are compared to banal flowers and countless fish on the shore. However, she accepts her fate as she became a trophy in the hands of the head-hunter – "the great one" (21).

2. Women as Victims of Polygyny

Folksong: *Inakha ngoh Ghonili Küyixa (*"Inakha and Ghonili's Separation")

Original	**Translation**
Inakha ngoh Ghonili Küyixa	**Inakha and Ghonili's Separation**
Ishe! Khaghi ye ni vilo,	You used to promise me before,
A-a kivi lo aleye,	You would let me live in a good place,
Aghoh sülo ni thcheyewo,	You gave me gifts,
Ito timi kivi sholuyewo,	But now you met someone else,
Asholiu ipeleye moye,	You're telling me to leave, I must depart.
No ghi süliu salo I-a lo,	You substitute that *Süliu* in my place,
Pualo, I losuloye.	And I'm upset.
O Ishe! Ni ghi ashelhu kumoye,	Ah! I'm not an *ashelhu*,
Ishe! Ni ghi avi abi kikkhi,	But a striped mithun,
Hi sülo ashou tsa khe-ala,	Awaited news from outside,
Amipiu juno ilomucho aye,	Furious with the man,
Kuo kükha juno ilomi shi,	You only cherished my neckpiece,

Asa losü tixe apushumo,	Cast a lot, you won't live long,
Ni woni che ala.	I'm about to leave.
Ishe! Ile anga qa küauye,	Ah! The crying child -
Amllo küsami nuli,	A child of a mourning parent,
Qah ani gho kucho,	Comfort the wailing infant,
Apuh aza anu küghüvümi nu,	The offspring of caring parents,
Qah ani ila aghoh shilulo,	She is sobbing; comfort the crying child,
Ilomucho chi joo tsüni,	It makes me sad, so I'll pull out my beads,
Süwo amullo küsami nu pinihlo.	Deliver it to the mourning parent's child.
Ishe! Iku kithiallo,	Ah! Heading there,
Xüsa kupu kuno,	The flowers flourish,
Timi kubu kumo hu niuno,	We did what people fear and avoid,
Asalo sü tixe apushumo,	Cast a lot, won't be around for long,
Ni woniche-ala.	I'm leaving.
(*Apuh-Assu Leshe* 1)	(Translated by Holika Yeptho)

In this folksong, *Inakha ngoh Ghonili Küyixa (The Parting of Inakha and Ghonili)*, *Ghonili* laments the end of her marriage with *Inakha* due to the latter's infidelity. *Ghonili* realizes that she is replaceable by any other woman. She reminds her husband that their marriage was of the highest category marked by mithun. This is a suggestion that the couple could hold such a respectable type of marriage because of *Ghonili*'s virtuous quality. In Sümi marriage tradition, the type of marriage is commensurate to the value of the bride. This, in turn, affects the value of the bride price. The highest bride price includes mithuns. *Ghonili* remarks "*Ishe! Ni ghi ashelhu kumoye* / *Ishe! Ni ghi avi abi kikhi"* (Ah! I am not an *ashelhu/* But a striped mithun). By stating

that she is not an *ashelhu* (ordinary mithun), *Ghonili* implies that she is not an ordinary woman but a valuable one.

Inakha decides to marry his lover *Chevili* as his second wife to show his power and status to others. This is so because only chiefs and rich men could marry multiple wives since they could afford bride-price. It is a matter of pride to have many wives which are seen as a conquest. *Ghonili* makes a bitter decision of committing the taboo of divorce and leaving her daughter. She sings *Timi kubu kumo hu niuno* which transtales as "We did what people fear and avoid." The marriage contract in the Sümi community is regarded as a permanent deal and indissoluble. Whereas the tradition allows men to marry more than one wife, it does not speak of women marrying more than one husband or permit divorce.

The practice of polygyny, which refers to a man having multiple wives simultaneously, has been a topic of feminist critique due to its potential negative impacts on women. While it is important to note that polygyny can vary across cultures and individual experiences, there are concerns raised by feminists regarding the potential for gender inequality and the mistreatment of women within polygynous marriages. Women may be forced or coerced into polygynous marriages without their full consent. Traditional norms and expectations, along with limited agency and decision-making power for women, can contribute to situations where women have little say in whether or not they enter into a polygynous marriage.

3. The portrayal of stepmother

Folksong: *Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le (“***Visheli’s Song of Her Mother”*)*

Original	**Translation**
Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le	**Visheli’s Song of Her Mother**
Ishe! ni mighimi, no qe ani,	Ah! I’m an orphan, serving you,
I phi ghoh, imini ghotsü ye,	Wove me body- cloth and waist-cloth.
O, hoishe! achi akiviu no,	Oh! But the best necklace,
Ikhü no tsuye.	Awarded to Ikhü.
Ikhü no mishi pime, ino avi pime.	Ikhü bride-price was a cow, mine, a mithun.
Iza Ghohali ino avi lache,	Aunt Ghohali, move aside,
Shi opiyeni ye iphesülo.	I’ll show you how a mithun walks.
Ithiu chelo.	Follow in my footsteps.
O, hoishe! timi shoinami no ghi,	People from distant villages are
Kichezü shi ilo,	Coming here to see the bride,
Inakha Ghonili no nu,	Visheli, daughter of Inakha and Ghonili
Visheli avi kipimemi huye,	Whose bride-price is mithun,
O nannu no kishi pucheni ila ye,	And to witness how she was adorned.
Ipu no no qhüchemo ye,	But my father does not adore me,
Iza no chi kikishe ye ikhollove ala.	And now my mother's necklace too short.
Iphi lhaqhi inami shosa ye	I'm ashamed to remove my shawl to display,
O hoishe! Ipu ojekipi huno,	O! Father, woe to your fame!
Pilo ilo wo ni Khabumi to aye	The fame that reached Kohima,
Pichilepe ayekiminimi to	Even among the maidens in white sarongs
Mujulimi to.	The maidens of Regmas.
(Apuh-Assü Leshe 2*)*	(Translated by Holika Yeptho)

In the folksong *Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le (Visheli's Song of Her Mother), Visheli* is the daughter of the famous couple *Inakha* and *Ghonili.* She sings about the biased treatment of her stepmother *Chevili.* The stepmother treats *Visheli* with contempt but treat favourably to her daughter *Hokhuli does*. The stepmother arranged a poor marriage gift for *Visheli* although her bride price was mithun. However, the stepmother gives the choicest neckpiece, "*achi akiviu"* for her daughter *Hokhuli,* also called endearingly *Ikhü*, even when her bride price is just an ordinary cow. The reference to the bride price of mithun to that of the cow indicates the worth and status of *Visheli* to that of *Hokhuli. Visheli*'s bride price was mithun only because she qualifies as a virtuous woman. According to the bride price, the parents send off the daughter with gifts. However, *Visheli* is wronged by her stepmother who treats her poorly. She sings of her humiliation.

Similar to the foktales even in Sümi Naga folksongs, stepmothers are portrayed in the negative light. The stepmother in the selected folk song portrays as lacking maternal love and affection towards their stepchildren. She shows favoritism towards her own biological children or prioritizes her own interests over the well-being of the stepchildren. This reinforces the notion that stepmothers are inherently incapable of nurturing or caring for children who are not biologically their own. While some stepmothers may face challenges and conflicts in their roles, many stepmothers form loving and nurturing relationships with their stepchildren. It is crucial to approach these portrayals critically and recognize that they are fictionalized representations influenced by cultural narratives and storytelling traditions.

4. The Step-daughter as a Victim

Folksong: ***Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe*** **("Step-Father and Step-Daughter")**

Original	Translation
Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe	**Step-Father and Step- Daughter**
Ampiu ju no azüküzü kumoyewo,	His physical appearance doesn't bore me,
Aki kicheqho lo che aye,	When I live under his roof
Ipu akishiu ijukumo no gho,	It's the will of my step-father who hates me,
Khalami asümi atsapi,	To accept a stranger's marriage proposal,
Pinizü amüzümla,	And I cannot disagree.
Ishe! Howo niki avi,	Ah! It's too sudden.
Ipüzü ashe inulo ani,	I live on the banks,
Ayizü lo amoyewo,	Not in the river,
Axüsa lo ilhucheno wono.	Making me cultivate in barren land.
Ayeghü lakhü lo alu chilu pe ayewo,	In a fertile ground,
Alu chilu pemoyewo,	He won't allow me.
Aluba lupe ani hoishe.	I toil at the foot of the field
O ilomüka kulhoshi ghi,	O! I'm weary from working,
Süye lakhi iza no qe,	I toil a year for my mother,
Kighili ye kulawuni che aye,	I was a young woman awaiting marriage,
Tsüngu mujupumi ishi ye khileno,	But I'm married to an Angami-Rengma man,
Yehu kishi kumo sholuye.	How unfortunate.
(Apuh-Assü Leshe 36)	(Translated by Holika Yeptho)

In *Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe* ("Step-Father and Step-Daughter"), the helpless step-daughter sings about her predicaments at the hands of her step-father. She recalls

how she lived poor and how she never felt at home at his house. She felt like an outsider. He starves her and makes her toil in unfertile land at the foot of the hills. Yet she works hard in the hope of good marriage for her. However, he makes every decision for her. Eventually marries off to someone from another tribe against her will.

Female subjugation is not a new phenomenon and it has been prevailing since antiquity as seen in the above folksong. Step-daughters are often portrayed as being mistreated or oppressed by their stepmothers or other family members. They may experience physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or unjust treatment. These narratives emphasize the step-daughter's vulnerability and her struggle to overcome adversity within her family. Step-daughters are often depicted as receiving unequal treatment compared to their biological siblings or other family members. They may face favoritism towards other family members, leading to feelings of exclusion and marginalization. This portrayal highlights the injustice and discrimination faced by step-daughters within their own households.

While the step-daughter as a victim of her stepfather is less commonly portrayed in folk narratives compared to the portrayal of step-daughters as victims of stepmothers, there are instances where such narratives exist. In these narratives, the step-daughter may face mistreatment, abuse, or exploitation at the hands of her stepfather. The stepfather, as presented in *Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe*, is often portrayed as an authoritative figure with significant control over the step-daughter's life. He may exert power over her decisions,

restrict her freedom, or subject her to oppressive rules and expectations. This dynamic underscores the power imbalance and the stepdaughter's lack of agency within the family.

Folklore presents the patriarchs who try to control every movement of women. According to M. H. Abrams, “Patriarchy is seen as male-centered and controlled and is organised and conducted in such a way as to subordinate woman to man in all cultural domains; familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic” (Abrams 89). This social construction has been criticized by feminists. To Kate Millet, patriarchy is the root cause of the subjugation of women. The daughters remain destitute from basic rights and their existence is tarnished.

The step-daughter hopes for a respectful marriage alliance for a better life. Unfortunately, her step-father arranges an inferior type of marriage by marrying her off to a man who is not a Sümi. Traditionally, the Sümi community with a parochial mentality does not encourage inter-tribe marriages and in some cases even inter-village marriages. The fear arises especially due to the differences in customs and practices amongst the different Naga tribes. The security of the daughters remains a concern in such alliances. The stepdaughter has no voice as she is expected to accept the decision of the step-father concerning marriage. Ultimately, she becomes a victim.

5. The Portrayal of a Helpless wife

Folksong: ***Asholoku Küsa le*** **(“Song of Marital Discord”)**

Original	Translation

Asholoku Küsa le	**Song of Marital Discord**
Ino ishina akilo asho	This morning, I had a problem at home
Asholoku küsa ji no aki	Because of it, in the evening,
Ki lo womo no agha lo züye	I did not return but spent the night in the wild
Ino qa ye she ni nga ghi qa ye	I cried, so did our child,
Ino qani 'khenu no musa ye	I cried as I was afraid of the dark.
Ikimiye, she ni nga kimiye	My heart aches for me and our child
Isalulo, she ni nga salulo	Please come and fetch us
Ayithu ki ni luba lo ani	There's a python's burrow is our field.
Mükakuki ni luphe lo ani	A devil's cave by the side o our field.
Ishe! Tile no ni nga saluye	Ah! It has taken the spirit of our child
Tsüzü küghü kuchou no asa	The real packing-leaf plant
Asaqhilli lo amüzü iko	Leaf out among the prickly bushes
Khimutsasa homutsasai iko	It grew evenly and perfectly
Iko kua no ni nga no toi	Just like our child
Küsakusho kixi hi sholuye	The worst misery, by far.
(H. Sukhato Rotokha, personal interview, 21 October, 2021)	(Translated by Holika Yeptho)

In *Asholoku Küsa le* ("Song of Marital Discord") a woman sings in distress caused by the marital disagreement. She fears for her fate as she sleeps in the field with her child. She hopes for her husband to come and rescue them. However, the husband fails his duty and leaves the helpless wife and child in the dark. Eventually, to her horror, the evil spirits take her child away. In the narratives of folklore, across cultures, the role of women is subdued as passive. The folksong *Asholoku Küsa le* is a classic example of a

woman in distress who must be rescued by a gallant man. This would ensure that the status of the man can be heightened when he succeeds in undertaking the mission. To fulfil such a narrative, women are never taught the art of defence. Rather, they are instructed to maintain their femininity associated with such traits as gracefulness, gentleness, empathy, humility, and sensitivity. She cannot rescue herself as it will defy the concept of an "ideal woman."

In folk narratives, wives portrayed as helpless are often depicted as dependent on their husbands or other male figures for their well-being and survival. They may lack financial independence, decision-making power, or the ability to assert their own needs and desires. Helpless wives are often presented as having limited control over their own lives. They may be subjected to strict societal expectations, traditional gender roles, or oppressive norms that restrict their actions and choices. This portrayal reinforces the notion that women's roles are primarily domestic and subordinate to their husbands.

The folksong is a subtle warning to the woman not to act impulsively as it could bring potential harm to her and others. It also implies that women must be tolerant in any given situation. The purpose of the narrative of the spirit taking away the child is to instill fear in women if they fail to behave. In this Sümi narrative, the helpless wife is depicted as needing rescue or salvation from her distressing situations. In these types of narratives, the wives seem to require intervention from a hero or a male figure to liberate them from their helplessness and provide a better life or a happier ending.

6. Women as 'Inalimi' or 'outsiders'

Folksong: ***Luxa Le* (“Weeding Song”)**

Original	Translation
Luxa Le	**Weeding Song**
Ho inalimi asholoku küsa ji no aki	Daughter-in-law owing to domestic conflict
Akilo womo, agha lo züye	Didn’t return home, slept outside
Agha lo zü ye khingu müsa ye.	Slept outside but afraid of evil spirits.
Inalimi ayeghi lo yeke tishi chelo	Daughter-in-law, that's just how things are.
Iqheküza kumo, ikülaki kumo	It's not my pride or my haughtiness,
Züta laghi no zübo chopu ye	The handle of the machete supports my back
Alo alo no illi li alo	*Alo alo no illi li alo*
Zülo zülo no illi li zülo	*Zülo zülo no illi li zülo*
(Vitoli Zhimo, Personal interview, 10 June 2020.	(The last two lines indicate the end of the song) (Translated by Holika Yeptho)

Luxa Le (“Weeding Song”) is a corresponding folksong of *Asholoku Kusa Le*. Once a Sümi girl is married off to another village, she is considered an *inalimi* or an ‘outsider’ by her villagers and the others. She is accepted in her new village as a *Napu-Nali*, a term to refer to her as a ‘daughter-in-law in a new village.’ This term denotes the sympathetic condition of a person as a stranger without any relatives in the village she is married into. *Luxa Le* narrates the condition of the daughter-in-law as an *inalimi* or an ‘outsider.’ Perhaps, in the period of adjustment to living in the new home, she disagrees. Without her kinsmen in the new village, she has nowhere to seek shelter. The line *Inalimi ayeghi lo yeke tishi chelo* (Daughter-in-law, it’s the way of the world) is a suggestion that

the Daughter-in-law should accept her condition as natural. She is expected to adapt to her new lifestyle with no grudges. From a young age, the patriarchal society ingrains in a girl that she must adjust and accommodate her in-laws and husband.

In her article "Theorizing Patriarchy," Sylvia Walby asserts that the concept of Patriarchy must remain central to a feminist understanding of society. She defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. This definition of patriarchy underlines the importance of viewing patriarchy as a social structure rather than as the exploitative acts of individual men. However, women have a dialectical relationship to patriarchal environment in which they do not live out their lives merely as passive victims trapped in the patriarchal structure but also act out of rational self-interest. The experiences of women under patriarchy are different as local culture and practices structure patriarchies and these structures have diverse effects on various women's lives (Walby 213-234).

Under patriarchy, girls and women are subordinate to men and are given away in marriage to patriarchal households. Women have less strong ties with their natal homes and their status within the household depends upon their ability to produce sons. The role of sons is critical in this cyclical process – women are preoccupied with ensuring the life-long loyalty of their sons, attempting to make the conjugal bond of son and wife secondary to the mother-son filial bond which becomes a form of social control, suppressing romantic intimacy between son and wife.

Being a mother to a son gives women a superior status. Patriarchy hangs the carrot of respect and a comfortable old-age, and retribution for their won struggles as a daughter-in-law, in front of women to lure them into accepting their own gender as inferior, which has no agency. You brought an heir into the family, you deserve respect and comfort. When the son will grow up, he'll bring home a wife, who will take care of you and for once, you'll have a higher position in the patriarchal hierarchy. (https://www.shethepeople.tv/home-top-video/compulsion-women-appeasing-mother-in-law/)

Patriarchal bargain represents the rational choices women make in order to maximize their life options. Women both accommodate and resist male dominated systems and the bargaining is the partial accommodation of patriarchy in order to deal with it in any given society. These strategies vary depending on the class, caste and ethnicity of women and the bargains play an important role in shaping gendered subjectivities in women. The reproduction of patriarchy happens through the patrilocal household in which the senior male exercises control over everyone including the younger men. In this system women are subordinate not only to the male but also to the senior female, the mother-in-law.

The women can become matriarchs only after successfully completing and living out the roles of wife and mother. The most important role for the women is the ability to produce a male heir. In this way, the matriarchs become powerful participants in social and family situations. However the young female members cannot become the matriarch.

These social setting can affect the balance between the younger and the older women. It becomes difficult for these young women in the non-traditional set up where they adopt the new lifestyle of their choice. Mothers play a crucial role in determining the consequences of such choices. The matriarchs can be seen to actively suppress younger women in their decisions. In the context of Indian women's writing in English, the mother-daughter relationship may be read as "power relationship" where the mother uses her influence to train the daughter to fit the cultural script of feminity (Bande 89).

In the article "Why is It a Compulsion for Women to Please Their Mother-In-Law?," Yamini Pustake Bhalerao explains that the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is often touted to be a doomed one, leading to either rivalry or discord. The new brides are usually advised to keep their mother-in-law happy for a successful matrimonial life. The mother-in-law feels that she is entitled to appeasement.

In "Bargaining with Society," Kandiyoti asserts that women and girls occupy a marginal status and are subservient to the authority and control not only of the father, but also of the elderly female or the matriarch of the family (279-80). The status of women in the household depends upon her ability to produce sons. Under the logic of the bargain women accept the deprivation and hardships as young brides till the time when the young daughter-in-law comes to the same position as the mother-in-law when she will have the same authority and control over the others: "Women's life cycle in the patriarchal extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own

subservient daughters-in-law" (Kandiyoti 279). However, even when women seem to be able of making choices within the circumscribed limits of the patriarchal system, they do not have the power to change the system as they are already framed by the discourse of patriarchy.

The role as a matriarch, women have access to authority within the family, which is used to maintain the traditional power structures in the family. Usha Bande in *Writing Resistance* states that the matriarch may be identified as "a representative of patriarchy who in order to sustain the dominant discourse exercises control over the valve-system" (86). Kandiyoti examines this situation as "patriarchal bargain" (274) where women strategize and bargain for power in a system that renders them powerless (274-90).

According to Kandiyoti, market force is one way of dismantling such power imbalances. As women enter the labour force and the income of the household increases women may enjoy some freedom from the control of patriarchal households, making their control by mother-in-law more difficult. Women do not live their lives as victims trapped in patriarchal structures. Women's coping strategies, what is termed as the "patriarchal bargain", show that women strategize within the circumscribed nature of patriarchal system in order to enhance their life options.). Patriarchal bargaining represents the rational choices women make in order to maximize their life options. In this system women are subordinate not only to the male but also to the senior female, the mother-in-law.

7. Women as Victims of Forced Marriage

Folksong: ***Ghi muzu khavelai?/*** "**Has the paddy yellowed?"**

Original	**Translated**
Ghi muzu khavelai?	**Has the paddy yellowed?**
Aghakhulo pumi	Young men upon our land
Aghulo khanimo	There was not a day,
Ivehu kighini kumou ili	When my hand they did not ask.
Ipulo aza kumano	My father and my mother both,
Ime chunili	A better price to take
Inakukhu itsu cheni aza	Upon other lands they ventured.
Oishe! Atsala ghi,	Alas! On seasons of spring,
Tuqhu tsala shingo	He showered me with praises
Ishe shesheli	Alas! On seasons of rains,
Oishe! Atsala ghi	He treated me with harshness.
Mmtsu tsala shingo	With heart forlorn,
Nisa kiyenilo	My pack I tied
Ilomukali,	Down I went
Ilheghope	Beside the river bank.
Cheqi ghoki mukulono	High and low,
Cheju puhu	I cast my glance
Cheju puwo,	My maiden village lands,
Ipuno izano kuma ghami,	Their paddy, has it yellowed?
Ghi muzu khavelai?	(A Glimpse of Long Ago p 15)

The practice of bride-price among Sümis is deeply rooted in patriarchal systems and reinforces gender inequalities. The transactional nature of bride-price can perpetuate

the idea that women are property, owned by their families and then transferred to their husbands. This power imbalance can make it difficult for women to assert their autonomy and resist forced marriages. In the folksong *Ghi muzu khavelai?*/ "Has the paddy yellowed?", the woman depicts about her unhappy marriage with a man from different village. Her parents traded her into wedlock to the highest bride-price offer. However, she longs to go back to live with her parents because her husband does not care for her. To get to her parents, she needs to cross the river. She therefore waits for the paddy to turn yellow because that will signal the end of the monsoon and make it simpler to cross the river.

In societies where bride-price is prevalent, the financial transaction involved can place economic burdens on the bride's family. In situations of poverty or economic hardship, families may feel compelled to arrange marriages for their daughters to alleviate their financial burdens or secure economic stability. This can lead to situations where the consent of the bride is disregarded, and she is forced into a marriage against her will. The woman in the aforementioned folk song clearly wasn't allowed to pick the husband of her choosing, despite the fact that other men made proposals.

8. Plights of "Spinsters"

Folksong: ***Ilimi, Xuwumovekemi Le* / "A Spinster's Song"**

Original	**Translated**
Ilimi, Xuwumovekemi Le	**"A Spinster's Song"**

Itijighi, tsutsu shi wocheni,	Tonight too, the thunder is approaching
Tsutsu su mulo, niha luve aye	The thunder storm, upon me reaching
Oishe! Niye cheilono,	Alas! Along I went,
Azukuqho sholu.	A river, I came upon.
O ishe! Timi aghakhulo,	Alas! Upon the land
Kixekulu mino,	Courting mates, I came upon.
Xeuno akhopu, Xeuphi pesuno,	Their men, the load they carried,
Akutsulo bepe kuzupusu	Their cloak, their heads it sheltered,
Ato ina kuwo lono	Along they went, upon the mounts.
Oishe! Niye xeu kuha aye	Alas! A mate, I do not have,
Azumuku lono muloqa lhoaye.	Beside the river bank, I wept so weary,
Timi lojipumi vilo	Upon the young men, if I call,
Ta nisukelo pinamu	A helping hand, to lend me
Tino akithilo niphisunike	Upon their death, to be counted
Musa aye	Among their feats, that I fear
Ni itilo Nachumi kixekulumi vilo	Upon my childhood mate, if I call,
Atoina wokevino chile hu ghino	Upon the mounts not to go,
Azumuku lono	Beside the river bank to return
Tanisukelo pina anikeno,	A helping hand to lend me.
Ohishe! Ogho kumo aye	Alas! This is beyond your will,
Ohishe! Igho kumo aye	Alas! This is beyond my will,
Ohishe! Tiye kungulo kiqi shi aye.	Alas! This was fated from above.
Axathighi,	Even of fruits,
Akipithiu bokumo aye	Fruitful, if not its tree,
Xileve aye	Scrapped away it is.
(*A Glimpse of Long Ago* p 15)	

The term “spinster” historically referred to an unmarried woman, typically beyond the usual age of marriage. In a traditional Sümi society, the worth of a woman is measured through her status as a wife and a mother. Therefore, the community moulds daughters from their tender age to become a dutiful wife. However, by remaining unmarried, she fails to fulfill such role as an “ideal woman.” Thus, the society assumes that these women lead unfulfilled lives, as their value is often tied to their marital status and ability to have children. Their accomplishments or personal happiness remain overlooked or devalued. They usually face social isolation due to societal expectations surrounding marriage and family. They also face pity or ridicule, as their unmarried status may be perceived as a personal failing or undesirable characteristic. They might be seen as "leftovers" or as having missed out on an important aspect of life. The stereotypes associated with spinsters are being overly strict or rigid, or being unsuccessful in romantic relationships.

In the *Ilimi, Xuwumovekemi Le* the unmarried woman laments her difficult and lonely life as she struggles with social isolation. She does not have any one to turn to during the times of hardship. She metaphorically sobs that she cannot cry for aid as the thunderstorm approaches her. Even all of her childhood friends are likely already married. She remains helpless. In a traditional Sümi society, one of the death rites include honouring the dead by having sticks placed next to his body in proportion to how many wives he had in his lifetime. Thus, the spinster bemoans her inability to elevate any man's honour. This illustrates how society tells women to live for elevating the honour of men

rather than for themselves. She knows that the society will deem her worthless. She concludes by saying that she is like a tree that is cut down since it did not produce fruit.

IV

The Portrayal of Women in the Sümi Naga Proverbs and Expressions

The root of the mindset that governs gender relations today goes back to the olden times when women were restricted within the household vicinity while men were allowed to show their valour through head-hunting. The following Sümi Naga proverbs and expressions are selected from the books Scato Swu's *Sülekuthoh and* Hokishe Yepthomi's *Kichitssathoh* in order to display the representation of women in the Sümi Naga community:

1. Women as the weaker gender

i. "Tomoke ghenguno totimi ipi"

Translation: "Termed as a woman because of her weakness/incompleteness"

The term *'totimi'* is merged from two words of Sümi dialect - '*to*' meaning 'victory' and '*timi*' meaning 'human being'. It may be translated literally to 'victorious human being.' The term *'tomo'* is the antonym of '*to*'. Therefore, the word *'totimi'* should not be misconstrued as 'loser' or 'weak' or 'incomplete'. Although the proverbial expression *"Tomoke ghenguno totimi ipi" / "Termed as a woman because of her weakness/incompleteness"* may seem contradictory to the literal meaning of the word

'totimi' yet it has gained a negative connotation. The term itself is understood as 'weak', 'inferior', 'flawed', and 'incomplete' by the people. The statement "termed as a woman because of her weakness/incompleteness" suggests a negative perception of women, associating them with weakness or a sense of incompleteness. It implies that being a woman is inherently negative or lacking in some way.

The community holds this proverb as truth, thereby, maculating the image of women. It is frequently used by both young and old alike to denounce the behaviour of women. Such an expression also stereotypes women as incomplete. At its core, a gender stereotype is a 'belief' and that belief causes the holder to make assumptions about the members of the subject group, men and women. Such beliefs continue to limit women's progress because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes and behaviours towards them. Women often internalize such beliefs.

ii. *"Totimi toi k*ü*nhachi ani"*

Translation: "Weak like a woman"

The statement "weak like a woman" is a gendered stereotype that perpetuates harmful and unfair generalizations about women. It implies that women are inherently weak or lacking in strength compared to men. This is a popular metaphor that directly refers to women as weak. It is usually used to remark upon any man or boy who seems weak or possesses any feminine trait. In a patriarchal setting, femininity is portrayed as equivalent to weakness, servitude and even shame. The feminine trait is not appreciated.

It is crucial to recognize that strength and weakness are not determined by gender. Both men and women can possess physical, emotional, and mental strength in various capacities. Making blanket statements that suggest women are universally weak oversimplifies the complexity and diversity of human capabilities.

2. Proverbs and Expressions related to the worth of women

i. *"Ajukiviu aji shokusau"*

Translation: "Attractive but unpleasant to drink"

This expression implies that attractive people are usually deceptive. This is a biased observation to insinuate that beautiful women are usually deceptive. It is a warning, especially for women not to be just an object of beauty but to be functional. Beauty is not the main attribute which boosts the girl's image to be eligible for marriage. The worth of a Sümi woman is weighed according to the skills she has to be an 'ideal' woman. An 'ideal' woman should be respectable, modest, chaste, good-tempered and hard-working. Unless she has all these qualities, she is regarded as useless.

Referring to women as "attractive but unpleasant to drink" is a derogatory and objectifying statement that reduces women to mere objects of physical appearance and dismisses their value as individuals. It perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the notion that a woman's worth is solely based on her attractiveness to others.

ii. *"Ajukiviu abo kümsa"*

Translation: “Attractive but worthless”

Another similar expression is *“Ajukiviu abo kümsa”/ “Attractive but worthless”*. This expression also carries the same connotation for women who are pretty but have poor character. In the Sümi culture, beauty is seen as a trivial aspect if it is not accompanied by ideal qualities. Referring to women as "attractive but worthless" is a demeaning and degrading statement that undermines the value and worth of women as individuals. It reduces them to superficial judgments based solely on their physical appearance while dismissing their inherent qualities, abilities, and contributions. This type of comments are disrespectful and dehumanizing, promoting the objectification and objectifying women based on their physical appearance rather than recognizing their intelligence, talents, achievements, and individuality.

iii. *“Totimi ye timi shisholo küda”*

Translation: “Women are minced meat stuck on someone’s chopping block”

This is a proverb that states the worthlessness or insignificance of women. Women are compared to a piece of minced meat stuck on the chopping block. It reminds women to be aware of their position in society. Women take the subordinate role depending on the men's folk survival. Their contribution is regarded as trivial and unimportant. Women are raised to be dependent partners of men and not as independent individuals.

The phrase "Women are minced meat stuck on someone's chopping block" or the notion that women are insignificant is highly derogatory and disrespectful. It devalues and objectifies women, reducing them to mere objects or commodities without agency or worth. Such statements perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce gender inequality. They disregard the diverse talents, capabilities, and contributions of women in various aspects of life, including personal, professional, and societal realms. It is essential to reject and challenge such language and attitudes that undermine the rights and dignity of women.

3. Proverbs and Expressions related to management

i. *"Aulaküsa totimi"*

Translation: "Women without prosperous hands"

To be an 'ideal' woman, one must be an efficient woman who can manage available resources. She is judged according to her capacity of multiplying such resources. However, if she fails, she is remarked as a woman without prosperous hands. Similarly, she is also condemned as a loose-handed woman. The notion that women are inherently less efficient or incapable of multiplying resources is a discriminatory perspective. It fails to consider the structural and systemic barriers that women may face in accessing economic opportunities. Societal, economic, and systemic barriers can impact individuals' ability to generate wealth, and these barriers often disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including women.

ii. *"Auloba ixü"*

Translation: "To be loose-handed"

This is an expression targeted at a woman who fails to use the harvest judiciously to sustain the entire year. A woman as a wife or a mother is, especially, closely observed to detect such faults. Usually, men are not scrutinized even if they may be spend-thrift. They are also condoned for their mismanagement as they are deemed as the bread earners.

The phrase "to be loose-handed" typically means to be extravagant with spending, often to the point of being careless or not exercising financial prudence. It suggests a tendency to spend freely and without restraint. The term "loose-handed" is often used to describe someone who does not handle resources with caution or careful consideration. Instead, they may be inclined to spend impulsively or excessively, without considering the consequences or long-term financial implications.

4. Silencing the Women

i. *"Totimi tsaye ini kelo"*

Translation*:* "Do not listen to the words of women"

The proverb warns people not to listen to women. Thus, it silences women from speaking their mind as their speeches are considered meaningless. The statement "Do not listen to the words of women" is a deeply discriminatory and sexist perspective that seeks

to silence and devalue the voices of women. It perpetuates gender inequality, denies women their agency, and reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Such a statement disregards the fundamental principles of equality, respect, and inclusivity. It undermines the contributions, knowledge, and experiences of women, limiting their ability to participate in decision-making processes, express their thoughts, and are heard in various aspects of life, including personal, professional, and societal realms.

It is crucial to challenge and reject such statements, promoting gender equality and empowering women to have their voices heard. Recognizing and respecting the diverse perspectives and voices of women is essential for creating a more inclusive and just society. By fostering open dialogue and providing equal opportunities for women to express themselves, we can promote greater understanding, collaboration, and social progress.

ii. *"Tiye topu-toghu tsa"*

Translation*:* "That's an old woman's small talk"

This expression is referred to any speech that seems unimportant. There are several factors which may contribute to perceptions of women as silent including male dominance, male control of language, informal training at home, institutions which teach women to be silent, traditional values of community and the fear of being characterized as insane, and evil or fear of being scolded.

The phrase "That's an old women's small talk" appears to be a derogatory statement that dismisses or belittles the conversation or topics typically associated with older women. It implies that their conversation is trivial, insignificant, or lacking substance. Using age or gender as a basis to demean or devalue someone's conversation is disrespectful and reinforces ageism and sexism. It perpetuates stereotypes and undermines the diverse experiences, wisdom, and contributions of older women. It is important to recognize that people of all ages and genders can engage in meaningful and valuable conversations, and dismissing or diminishing their contributions based on stereotypes is unfair and discriminatory.

iv. "*Atsa mpi mloqhi xü*"

Translation*:* "To live without a voice"

As seen in the aforementioned proverbial phrases, women are usually silenced by the society. The phrase "to live without a voice" typically refers to a situation where an individual or a group is marginalized, silenced, or not given the opportunity to express themselves or have their opinions heard. It can represent various forms of oppression, such as social, political, or cultural limitations that restrict someone's ability to speak up, advocate for them, or participate fully in society. This can manifest in situations where individuals are denied their rights, face discrimination, or are subjected to systemic barriers that prevent them from having a voice and being heard.

Women have historically faced systemic barriers and have been silenced or marginalized in various ways in many societies. This silencing can take different forms, including limited access to education, restricted participation in decision-making processes, cultural norms that discourage women from speaking out, and unequal power dynamics that prioritize male voices. Promoting respect, empathy, and inclusive dialogue is essential in fostering understanding and appreciation for the perspectives and experiences of individuals, regardless of their age or gender.

5. Women and morality

i. "*Akimi thia kelaye alojipu-u kümsü qa*"

Translation*: "*Like a woman crying for her lover on her husband's death"

The phrase "Like a woman crying for her lover on her husband's death" is a metaphorical expression that compares the intense grief or longing of a woman mourning the loss of her lover to the situation of a woman grieving her husband's death. It implies that the woman's emotional attachment to her lover is stronger or more significant than her attachment to her husband. The phrase highlights the idea of conflicting emotions or attachments, suggesting that the woman's loyalty or affection lies more with her lover than her husband. It may also imply a sense of betrayal or unfulfilled desires within the context of a committed relationship.

This proverb is used to warn women from being unfaithful to their husbands. It is a reminder that a dutiful wife must always be loyal to her husband.

ii. *"Aza küsa ti"*

Translation*: "*Child of a characterless mother"

It implies that a woman of poor character begets an immoral child. Such a mother is discriminated against in society as she fails to be an "ideal" woman. The phrase "Child of a characterless mother" is a derogatory statement that insults and shames an individual by attacking their mother's reputation and character. It is intended to be highly offensive and hurtful. Such derogatory phrases are used to demean and belittle a person by suggesting that their upbringing or lineage is tainted or morally flawed. It is important to note that using derogatory language or engaging in personal attacks is disrespectful and can perpetuate a culture of hostility and harm. It is generally best to promote understanding, empathy, and respectful communication in order to foster positive and inclusive interactions.

iii. *"Aza juno anipu lulo"*

Translation*:* "Know the mother before you marry the daughter"

This is a Sümi proverbial expression that suggests the importance of understanding and getting to know a person's family background, particularly the mother, before entering into a marital relationship with their daughter. This expression emphasizes the belief that one can gain insights into a person's upbringing, values, and character by observing their mother's qualities, behaviors, and attitudes. By familiarizing oneself with the mother, it is believed that one can better understand the potential traits

and characteristics that may be present in the daughter. It suggests that family upbringing and dynamics play a significant role in shaping an individual's personality and behavior. It points that understanding the family context can provide valuable information about the person's values, upbringing, and potential compatibility within a family unit.

While it points that the mother's qualities and characteristics are crucial factors in evaluating a potential partner for marriage, it also places an expectation on mothers to embody certain desirable traits and to be scrutinized as a reflection of their daughter's potential suitability as a spouse. The pressure arises from the assumption that the mother's influence and upbringing directly determine the qualities of the daughter. It places an undue burden on mothers to meet certain standards and expectations of *totimi kuchou* or “ideal” women, which may not be fair or realistic. It overlooks the agency and individuality of both the mother and the daughter, reducing them to stereotypes and generalizations.

6. Women and Taboo

i. *“Totimi ye aki-alu tsa pi chini”*

Translation*:* “Women must not speak about land properties”

The statement "Women must not speak about land properties" reflects a discriminatory and restrictive perspective that seeks to silence women's voices and limit their involvement in matters related to land ownership or property rights. This viewpoint

is rooted in patriarchal norms and gender inequality that have historically marginalized women and denied them equal rights and opportunities.

Such a statement perpetuates gender-based stereotypes and reinforces unequal power dynamics. It implies that women are not capable or deserving of participating in discussions or decision-making related to land ownership and property matters. This exclusionary attitude denies women their agency and rights, hindering their ability to assert their interests, protect their assets, and participate fully in economic and social spheres.

For women, the laws of inheritance, property and land rights are challenged due to customary laws and traditions. The taboo reveals that women are not entitled to inherit landed property and hence, they are also prohibited from speaking or discussing such matters. Women are silenced in matters that are considered important and exclusive to men.

ii. *"Kiptimi ye totimi no ashi yikeu chu chini"*

Translation: "It is taboo for a man to eat the hunt brought by a woman"

This prohibition implies that women are brings ill luck especially if a man eats the game hunted by women. In the traditional community, hunting is a domain for men to exhibit their skills and gallantry. Therefore, it does not allow a woman to show such hunting skills to avoid showing men's weakness as hunters. Patriarchy feeds on the lie

that women are the weaker gender in society. It is based on women's submission to the dominance of men since ancient times.

The statement "It is taboo for a man to eat the hunt brought by a woman" suggests the existence of a cultural or traditional norm that prohibits or discourages men from consuming the game or prey that a woman has brought through hunting or gathering. Taboos are social or cultural rules that govern behavior and are often deeply rooted in specific communities or belief systems. This particular taboo, if it indeed exists in a particular cultural context, may stem from gender roles and expectations surrounding hunting and gathering activities. It could reflect traditional gender divisions where men are typically associated with hunting and women with gathering or other activities.

iii. *"Totimi ye fulili peitha chini"*

Translation: "It is taboo for a woman to play flute"

This taboo forbids Sümi women from playing flutes while men are allowed. This is so because it is said that "women who play the flute skillfully will seduce young men and become deparved" (Jimomi 305). This belief suggests that women who possess skill and talent in playing the flute may be seen as a potential threat to the virtue or morality of young men. The statement reflects a gender bias that suggests women should not strive for high levels of skill or expertise in certain areas. This belief implies those women's skills or abilities should be limited or restrained, potentially perpetuating traditional gender roles and expectations.

The taboo implies a gender-specific restriction that limits the autonomy and agency of women in providing for their communities or families. It reinforces traditional gender roles and can be seen as a form of gender inequality or discrimination. Challenging such taboos is crucial for promoting gender equality and recognizing the valuable contributions that individuals of all genders can make to their communities and households.

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CHAPTER 5

THE UNSUNG HEREOS: RESILIENT FEMALE CHARACTERS DEFYING THE STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes can manifest in various forms, such as the portrayal of women as overly emotional, irrational, overly dependent on men, or solely focused on their appearance and relationships. These stereotypes not only overlook the complexity and individuality of women but also contribute to gender inequality by reinforcing harmful narratives and limiting opportunities for women in various spheres of life. Since stereotyping in the representation of women refers to the practice of portraying women in limited, predetermined ways, it is important to draw attention to and celebrate the wide variety of resilient female characters in literature, history, and everyday life. By doing this, we may dispel myths about women's strength and resilience, advance gender equality, and build a more inclusive and powerful narrative.

Gender stereotyping is a result of patriarchal conventions and ideas that specify how men and women ought to act, what positions they ought to hold, and what traits or qualities are proper for each gender. These preconceived notions serve to support the idea that men are powerful, forceful, and logical, whereas women are viewed as nurturing, submissive, and emotional. These preconceived notions may result in an unfair distribution of assets, chances, and decision-making authority, which would serve to reinforce gender inequality. Therefore, resisting patriarchy is a central goal of feminism

and refers to challenging and dismantling the social, cultural, and institutional systems that perpetuate gender-based oppression and privilege male dominance.

One important aspect of resisting patriarchy is raising awareness about its existence, manifestations, and harmful effects. This involves questioning and challenging traditional gender norms and expectations that reinforce unequal power dynamics between men and women. This includes dismantling stereotypes, roles, and behaviors that restrict individual freedom, reinforce gender hierarchies, and limit self-expression. It also involves advocating for policies and legislation that promote gender equity and protect individuals from discrimination and violence. Thus, it implies educating individuals about the ways in which patriarchal norms and practices shape society, perpetuate gender inequality, and limit opportunities for women and marginalized genders. It is important to critically examine and challenge such stereotypes, as they contribute to the marginalization and oppression of women.

By diversifying the representation of women in folklores, highlighting their strengths, achievements, and agency, and portraying them in a more complex and multidimensional manner, the narratives can contribute to more inclusive and empowering cultural perspectives. It is an ongoing and multifaceted process that requires individual and collective efforts. In her work *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states that "the way women are portrayed in literature can have a profound impact on the way women are perceived in society. When women are portrayed as weak, helpless, or subservient, it reinforces the idea that women are not capable of being strong,

independent, or equal to men. This can lead to women being treated differently in society, and it can make it harder for women to achieve their full potential" (Adichie 2015). She argues that feminism is not about hating men, but about equality for all people, regardless of gender. She also discusses the importance of representation in literature, and how the way women are portrayed can have a profound impact on the way they are perceived in society.

Resilient female characters in storytelling and real-life examples can defy stereotypes and challenge societal expectations. These characters possess inner strength, determination, and the ability to overcome obstacles, going against the notion that women are inherently weak or passive. Such female characters often exhibit qualities such as perseverance, courage, and adaptability. They refuse to be defined by societal limitations and demonstrate their capability to navigate difficult circumstances, whether it is in personal relationships, or broader societal challenges. By defying stereotypes, resilient female characters inspire and empower others. They break through barriers, challenge oppressive norms, and show that women are capable of achieving great things and making a positive impact in the world. Their stories provide important role models for individuals to draw inspiration from and help to reshape societal perceptions of women's capabilities.

By challenging stereotypes and embracing more inclusive representations of women, one may foster a culture that values gender equality, respects individuality, and celebrates the diverse contributions and experiences of all women. This shift can lead to

more opportunities, empowerment, and a more equitable society for women and girls. Defying the stereotype means consciously and intentionally acting or behaving in a way that goes against the expectations or generalizations associated with a particular group or identity. It involves challenging and breaking free from the limitations and biases imposed by stereotypes.

When individuals defy stereotypes, they refuse to conform to the narrow definitions or assumptions that society may have about them based on their gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other factors. They assert their individuality, showcasing their unique talents, abilities, and perspectives that may deviate from societal expectations. Defying stereotypes can be a powerful form of self-expression and empowerment. It involves embracing one's authentic self and refusing to be confined or defined by societal norms or prejudices. By defying stereotypes, individuals can inspire others, challenge the status quo, and contribute to positive social change. It is important to note that defying stereotypes is not about putting pressure on individuals to fit into a specific mold of "non-conformity." Rather, it's about creating space for people to be true to themselves, express their identities authentically, and challenge societal expectations that limit their potential.

Sümi Naga Folklore is rich with characters who exhibit resilience and resistance against patriarchal norms and expectations. Feminist folktale characters are those who challenge traditional gender roles, confront patriarchy, and assert their agency and independence. These women overcome challenges, display leadership qualities, and make

significant contributions to their communities. Their stories showcase the strength and capabilities of women within Sümi Naga society.

In the predominantly masculine society, Sümi women have overcome all obstacles, including male arrogance and traditions that attempted to limit them to the home and hearth solely, to establish their value. Their achievements are a testament to their strength, resilience, and determination. They have overcome many obstacles, and they have made significant contributions to their communities. They have established themselves and folklore chronicles their stories. By presenting such characters, folktales can inspire individuals to question oppressive traditions and strive for gender equality and empowerment.

1. The Tale of Brave Hearted Yeholi

The tale depicts of Yeholi known as a brave hearted woman. Yeholi saw her village's men chasing a wild tusked boar as she was heading to the field. The tusked boar is regarded as one of the most intelligent, swift, tough, and agile wild creatures that can even outrun the tiger. The men were relentlessly pursuing and attempting to kill the animal, but the wild boar's ferocity put them to flight. Yeholi was intently studying the areas where the men were struggling to take down their prey. Yeholi was unable to contain herself, so she dropped her basket, dashed over to the action, swiftly stole a spear from one of the hunters, and headed straight for the boar, killing it in the process. She removed the boar's tusks and took it as a souvenir and to identify herself as the person who killed the wild animal (Wotsa 00:10:50 - 00:12:13).

Traditional societal assumptions that women are weak have been prevalent in many cultures throughout history. These assumptions often stem from gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures that assign certain roles and characteristics to men and women. However, it is important to recognize that these assumptions are not based on inherent truths but are rather social constructs that can limit women's opportunities and potential. Yeholi demonstrates that women possess the skills, intelligence, and courage needed to face and overcome formidable beasts. The tale challenges the notion that only men can be heroes and highlight the strength and capability of women.

2. The Sümi Women Warriors

A. The Tale of Pitheli

A heroic woman named Pitheli Zhimomi lived during a time when headhunting was a prevalent practice and neighbouring villages were at war. The whole male population of her village left, one day, to engage in combat with their adversaries. Pitheli was weaving fabric next to a mat covered in grains of job’s tear that had been laid out in the sun to dry while she awaited their return. She could have picked any variety of grain, but being a wise woman, she chose job’s tear because anyone who steps on it will trip because it is slippery. This was her strategy for stopping any enemy who might ambush the village using the missing men as cover.

Pitheli was actually targeted by an enemy who tried to kill her. However, the he stumbled and fell, at which point the woman killed him using a weaving instrument called an "aghuqa" (a flattened bamboo weaving tool with a blade-like side). When her

father and siblings learned about the situation and witnessed what had occurred, they were incredibly proud and happy of her. They said “If you were a man, we would have planned a feast of merit to recognise your act of heroism. You being a woman, such a ceremony cannot be done for you; instead, we will weave a sarong to honour you.” Thus, a sarong was designed and came to be known as *Aghukiyi mini,* a warrior’s garment. It didn't take long for word to reach other Sümi villages about this woman's fortitude. In her honour, they also made a crown for Sümi women. (*Sümi Tuphimini eno Anannuqo* 13)

This tale showcases feminist warriors who rise above societal restrictions, challenging gender norms, and proving their worth through their strength, skill, and determination. Unlike, the women characters that remain helpless and wait to be rescued, Pitheli takes control of her own destiny and makes decisions based on her own convictions. She demonstrates agency by stepping outside her comfort zone, taking risks, and charting her own path.

B. The Tale of Ghothali

In this Sümi folktale, Ghothali, who chose a sword over a knife in contrast to other girls, grows up to become a renowned warrior in a Sümi village. Her father trimmed her hair short when she was young and taught her martial arts. Even the male commander and other warriors were envious of her skills, power, and intelligence enough to plot against her. Her repute was widely known. They tried every method to defeat her in an effort to gain greater notoriety, including sending an army of insects with poisoned stings and deploying a bunch of enormous ghosts. But each time, she escaped death. She

didn't play any games of war either because she had no desire for power. Many warriors were enraged by this, and they labeled her a "sorceress". She was displeased by the behaviour of the people. As a result, she relinquished her power and became a blossoming plant. This made her adversaries at peace. (*Fables from the Misty Mountain* 156-58)

The tradition of Naga holds that no woman can become a warrior. The tale suggests that society cannot allow a woman warrior to survive. The male members are seen as the typical chauvinistic who outcast her from society. The enemies of Ghothali came in peace only when she surrendered her power. However, she defies traditional gender roles, challenges societal expectations, and exhibits bravery and intelligence to protect her family and country.

The theme of patriarchy against women warriors is a common narrative found in various literary works, folklore, and historical contexts. It highlights the struggle and resistance of women who defy traditional gender roles and expectations by embracing roles typically associated with men, such as warriors or fighters. These narratives often explore the challenges, discrimination, and resistance faced by feminist women warriors within patriarchal societies. In such narratives, feminist women warriors often confront societal norms and expectations that seek to limit their agency, power, and independence. They may face opposition, discrimination, and even violence from patriarchal institutions, individuals, or systems that seek to maintain male dominance and control.

However, these narratives also emphasize the strength, resilience, and determination of feminist women warriors. They highlight their abilities, skills, and leadership qualities, showcasing their capacity to challenge and overcome the obstacles imposed by patriarchy. They challenge stereotypes about women's abilities and roles by proving herself as a capable warrior. They subvert gender norms and demonstrate the potential for women to occupy positions of power, courage, and leadership traditionally associated with men. They inspire individuals to question and challenge oppressive gender roles and advocate for gender equality.

Similarly, the story portrays the struggle of women warriors who challenged patriarchal norms and expectations, facing resistance and oppression in their pursuit of equality and empowerment. In many societies, patriarchal structures and ideologies have traditionally relegated women to subordinate roles, limiting their agency and power. Women who deviate from prescribed gender norms and embrace roles typically associated with men, such as warriors or fighters, often face significant backlash and resistance from patriarchal systems.

Ghothali as a feminist woman warrior challenges traditional gender stereotypes that define women as weak, passive, or solely responsible for domestic duties. She defies societal expectations and proves her strength, courage, and combat skills, thus challenging the assumption that women are unfit for combat or leadership roles. The narrative also sheds light on the ongoing fight for gender equality, challenging societal

norms and empowering individuals to challenge oppressive systems and strive for a more equitable society.

3. Sümi Folktale about Women as Village Founder and as Chief

A. The Tale of Shesüli

Sümi folktale *Shesü* of the Shesülimi village in Ghathashi, located within the Pughoboto area, is a tale about *Shesü* who is said to be the founder-chief of the Shesülimi village. Shesü is the only girl-child of the family. She has four brothers Ighanu, Hebo, Chishi and Chisho who founded their own villages named after their individual name. One day Shesü seeks permission from her brothers saying, "I, like you all, would also like to establish a village". However, Chisho, one of her brothers was not happy and stood against her idea. Inspite of it all, Shesü established her own village under her name. This act vexes brother Chisho. Therefore, he demands that she pays tribute as an act of payment to him according to his choice of goods.

Shesü agrees and continues to pay tributes to her brother Chisho. Even though the demands involve difficult task such as collecting basket full of sand termite she never failed him. Over time, the some demands became too unrealistic for Shesü to fulfill such as demand for a dog with horns. The intention of Chisho was to bring shame and insult Shesü as an unfit head of the village as she fails to pay tribute. The villagers of Chisho loathed her. Eventually, a battle erupts between the two villages. However, Shesü displays her worth as she wins the battle. It is said that many people of Chisho were

killed by the Shesü's tribe during the battle and some of the people from Chisho had to flee to Chizami village. The descendants of the people who fled to Chizami village are believed to continue their stay and said to be found even today. ("The Tale of Shesüli," Khetoho Awomi, personal interview, 1 November 2019).

There are no written records about her life and role yet she is the eponym for the village Shesülimi. The general rule of succession of chieftainship in Sümi tradition makes it impossible for women to become chief. The women remain economically dependent on men. Usually, the village is also named after the one who founded the village. In a rare occasion, if the founder dies, the village is named after his son. Women have actively contributed to the development, preservation, and alteration of folklore, yet historically, folklore has been dominated by male perspectives and voices, leaving women's experiences and contributions marginalized or eliminated. Irrespective of whether she was a chief or not, Shesü defied the norm of male chieftainship.

B. The Tale of Shesülimi village

In a personal interview, Dr. S. Samuel Swu narrates another tale of Shesülimi village, as foretold or handed down from elders goes that Shesü and Mugho Assumi migrated from Kinni, present-day, Awohumi village, and established a villages. The forefathers also call Awohumi as Phuyemi (Phemi).

Following the establishment of the village, visitors would arrive in their community from both nearby and far-off locations. Shesü would cook substantial meals

for the visitors and travelers to consume, and would pack food for their upcoming journey during such occasions. As she waved them off from the village roadside and wished them a safe journey, she would tell them that when people inquire about their whereabouts, they should reply that they are returning from the village of Shesü. She welcomed strangers and guests with the finest hospitality since she was kind and hospitable towards them.

The nearby villages could always tell when there were clouds of smoke rising from Shesü's village because it meant that visitors had arrived there and that preparations were being made to welcome them. Since no one knew who the village belonged to at the time, they frequently questioned one another about its name before being informed by passing travellers that it belonged to Shesü. As a result, the village's name became known as Shesü village. Afterwards it was known to become as Shesüimi village as the village was mostly populated by Shesü’s clan. She was known to be clever, intelligent and competent. People began to follow her because she was a captivating and angelic woman. Their local people created a mekhala (waist cloth) in Shesü's honour, which they named Shesü Mini. ("The Tale of Shesülimi village," Dr. S. Samuel Swu, personal interview, 24 May 2020).

The tales of Shesü depict that when a woman attempts to become the head of a village, she faces skepticism, discrimination, and resistance from especially from men who adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations. Patriarchal norms may dictate that women are not suited for leadership positions or that their roles should be confined to

domestic and care giving responsibilities. This entrenched bias against women's leadership can manifest in various ways, such as questioning their competence, undermining their authority, or subjecting them to additional scrutiny and criticism.

The theme of patriarchy opposing women as heads of villages reflects the societal barriers and resistance faced by women who aspire to take on leadership roles traditionally dominated by men. In patriarchal societies, power structures and social norms often prioritize male authority and reinforce gender inequalities. As a result, women seeking leadership positions, including the role of village head, often encounter significant challenges and opposition.

The reactions of brother Chisho and the opposition faced by Ghothali aspiring to be village head could also be rooted in the fear of disrupting established power dynamics and challenging the status quo. Patriarchal systems often prioritize male control and may resist any shift in power that challenges existing gender hierarchies.

Despite the obstacles, Shesü, successfully overcomes patriarchal barriers and assumed leadership roles within villages. She could attain this status only after demonstrating exceptional strength, resilience, and determination to prove their capabilities and gain the trust and acceptance of their communities. The narrative provides a platform to challenge gender norms and advocate for equal opportunities for women in leadership positions. By highlighting the struggles and achievements of women like Shesü, such narratives inspire and empower individuals to question and challenge patriarchal structures, working towards more inclusive and equitable societies.

4. Sümi Folktale about Women as Village Chief

Legend of Teli of Ighanumi Village

The legend of Teli is about a woman originally from Assumi clan, named Teli Kivelimi, recorded as the first woman chief among the Naga tribes. She was the wife of Ghopuna Kivelimi from Ighanumi village, an ancestral Sümi village, located in Ghathashi circle of Zunheboto district in Nagaland, India. Ghopuna Kivelimi was appointed as the chief of the village by Sir Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) of Naga Hills during the rule by the British Colonials. He was a wise, respectable and prosperous village chief who had numerous granaries, livestock and lands. After Ghopuna passed away, Vikha, a close relative of Ghopuna, took over as chieftain. Vikha's tenure, however, was brief as he was impeached since the residents disapproved of his corrupted ways of administering the village.

Teli was then named by the DC as the Chief of the Assumi clan. Some of the close relatives of Teli's spouse were angry with her. When she was in charge, Khumtsa, the brother of her husband, once took the stone hearth out of her kitchen and flung it outdoors. Teli knew that if she had been a man, it would not have happened, and she also believed that it was happening because she was a widow. She then brought a case against Khumtsa before the Kohima Deputy Commissioner's court, and the DC rejected the decision in her favour. The court ruled that Teli was free to utilize her late husband's property and to continue residing at his home. All of the properties would, however, return to her husband's family following her passing. As Teli didn't have sons, all the

property was claimed by the husband's family. None of her three daughters receive any inheritance because Sümi traditional inheritance laws forbade it.

Sümi Naga customary law is biased to men and has an advantage over women when it comes to acquiring property. It does not permit giving land to women. Except for moveable property, such as ornaments and kitchen utensils, which has a rigorous custom linked to it, the choice of land ownership was always granted to men, and women were not permitted to receive their part.

The historical exclusion of women from positions of power and leadership within traditional societies can reinforce the notion that women are not suited for such roles. The exclusion of women from chieftainship position in the customary law system of Sümi traces back to longstanding traditions that have not evolved to accommodate gender equality. These longstanding practices and customs can be deeply entrenched and resistant to change. The Tales about Shesü and the legend of Teli of Ighanumi Village challenge such practices and highlight the achievement and competencies of women.

5. Sümi Folktale about Women as Skilled Weavers.

Tale of the Origin of *Lazalimi mini*

The tale of the origin of *lazalimi mini*, a special sarong of the Sümi Naga women of Pughuboto area under Zunheboto district, is about prasing the skills and creativity of Sümi Naga women. One day a man happened to come across a tree called *muwobo* with white stripes covering its entire trunk while roaming through the wilderness. The man

went back to his fiancé to show her the tree after falling in love with its distinctive design. His fiancée also fell in love with the stunning tree with the white stripes. Being inspired by the design of its bard, she mermorized its pattern and made a promise to herself that she would weave a waistcloth in the style of this tree. Today, this sarong is called *lazalimi mini* (*Sümi Tuphimini eno Anannuqo* 11).

The tale reflects the worth of women by highlighting their intelligence, creativity, and the valuable contributions they make to their communities and societies. It portrays women as strong, resourceful, and capable individuals who possess unique skills and talents. They challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes by showcasing women as more than just passive characters, but rather as active agents who can shape their own destinies and positively impact the world around them. By emphasizing women's creativity and showcasing their abilities to bring forth innovation, these types of folktales promote the idea that women's contributions are essential and valuable. They challenge the notion that women's worth is solely defined by traditional roles or limited to domestic responsibilities. Instead, these stories celebrate women's intellectual capabilities, problem-solving skills, and their potential to bring about positive change.

Conclusion

Resilient Sümi women characters break the mold of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By showcasing women who are strong, independent, and determined, these characters challenge preconceived notions about what women can or should be. They provide alternative narratives that go beyond limiting stereotypes and empower women to

be their authentic selves. They also serve as role models for readers and viewers, particularly women and girls. Seeing characters who overcome challenges, navigate adversity, and assert their agency can inspire and empower individuals to do the same in their own lives. It encourages women to break free from societal expectations and pursue their goals and aspirations. It helps to counter the notion that there is only one "ideal" or "normal" way to be a woman. Through storytelling, resilient women characters can challenge deeply ingrained beliefs and social norms about women's roles and capabilities. By defying stereotypes, these characters contribute to a broader cultural shift in attitudes and perceptions of women. They can encourage society to question and reevaluate limiting gender norms, leading to more inclusive and equal opportunities for women.

Resilient women characters can help foster empathy and understanding among audiences. By portraying the challenges, triumphs, and complexities of women's lives, storytelling creates opportunities for individuals to connect with and relate to these characters. It cultivates empathy, compassion, and a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences and struggle women face, ultimately fostering greater gender equality and respect.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Orality forms one of the important aspects that defines and redefines the Naga culture and ethos. Customary and traditional law plays an important role in determining the status of women in the Naga society. The cultural images associated with women reflect and promote the social ideologies and beliefs of society. The use of folklore is still predominantly a feature of the Naga society. The gender roles displayed in the folklore are "real" for Naga people, at least in a "traditional" society. In addition, the images in these folklores have been carefully distinguished between the representation of common human nature on one hand and the strict configuration of gender dichotomies on the other. This folklore symbolizes the domains of - warfare, hunting, domestic affairs, politics, religion, and others. It is on this theoretical premise that this study provides an important understanding of the image of women in Sümi Naga folklore to see how people perceive women. This concluding chapter recaptitulates by taking stock of the findings and observations which were arrived at the forgoing discussion.

I

General Observations

Chapter 1 "Introduction" highlights the aim of this study to analyze the representation of Sümi Naga women as depicted in the selected Sümi folklores including

folktales, folksongs, proverbial sayings and expressions. The first section points the importance of the feminist studies on folklore representation of women to critically examine and challenge the gendered norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics embedded in traditional narratives. The section discusses about folklore and its components. The third section highlights the oral tradition of the Nagas. It also highlights about the significance of the study on folklore in playing a crucial role in elevating the position of women by providing a platform to examine and challenge traditional narratives, stereotypes, and gender roles that may be embedded in folktales and cultural practices. By doing so, they seek to promote more inclusive, empowering, and diverse representations of women in folklore and contribute to broader discussions about gender equality and social justice.

Chapter 2 "Understanding Gender Politics and Feminism in the Naga Context" highlights the components of feminism. It highlights feminism as a movement that began in the west during the late 19th century. The movement sought to equalize the status of men and women. Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, intersectional feminism, postcolonial feminism, and queer feminism are only a few of the diverse schools of thought that it covers. Although this movement claims to speak for all women, not all the groups it purports to represent are enthusiastic about it. For example, some women mistakenly believe that feminism entails radical feminism, hate of men, and complete contempt for tribal traditions, including the particular struggles of Naga women. The chapter makes an effort to comprehend feminism and gender issues in the

Naga setting. As Naga women experience many problems that are not relevant to the western feminism principles as Nags tackles different issues.

It also presents the different factors that influence the subservient duties and status of the Naga women: i. Patriarchal culture deprives women of equal status; ii. Political activities exclude women from decision-making system; iii. The law of inheritance authorized and legitimated by the Naga customary laws have a deter mental effect on women's independence as it forbids women from inheriting family property; iv. The head-hunting custom prevents women from achieving higher social rank since it forbids their participation; v. The impact of Christian religion that only strengthened the role of patriarchs in the society and as the Nagas adopted the conventional village governance structure from the beginning. It also highlights the women's movement in Nagaland with its first wave as women involvement during freedom struggles; second wave marked by women's tribal groups taking part in protest against killing and advocated in promoting peace; and the third wave of women fighting for reservation to promote women's participation in political and decision-making bodies. The chapter also highlights the pioneers of Naga women writings. It concludes with the observation that feminism in Nagaland stands for equality, maintaining peace and the end of social and political oppression of women.

Chapter 3 "General Background of the Sümi Nagas" makes an effort to highlight the traditional Sümi community's social life and social structure in order to help us understand the connections between its members and its institutions by doing so. It shows

the position of women. It discusses about the origin and migration of the Sümi Nagas as found in lures. It presents the Naga village as a social, political, or religious unit. And further highlights the family unit where women play a significant role in managing household chores or domestic responsibilities. It also stresses on the Sümi marriage system that plays an important role in determining the status of women backed by the practice of bride-price. It points how customs, such as *amekuchu*, *aphiatho lame*, and *azanu julha*, appear to be justified by the high value placed on Sümi women, who are regarded as being particularly virtuous, chaste, modest, hardworking, and self-efficient in managing household duties and other tasks and upholding the honour of their parents and families thereby serving as authorization for the community to continue engaging in such behavior. When one considers that such activities only serve to commodify women and lower their status in society, it assumes a great deal of significance. People lose their cultural awareness and sensitivity as generations go by. The problematic gender relations that support male domination through service and female servitude are only strengthened by this unsettling society.

Chapter 4 “Stereotyping in the Representation of Women in Sümi Naga Folklores” highlights, in the first section, the concept of the "ideal woman" and stereotypes about women that are closely interconnected. The concept of the *totimi kuchou* or an "ideal woman" refers to a societal or cultural construct that defines certain characteristics, behaviors, and qualities as desirable or necessary for women to embody. It discusses how literature normalizes gender roles for both children and adults, encourages specific behaviours in both men and women, and portrays alternative

character qualities as undesirable and untypical. It analyses narratives in the selected Sümi folktales, folksongs and proverbial sayings.

The second section focuses on the representation of women in selected Naga folktales in the form of stereotypes. Firstly, the folklore highlights the stepmothers as obnoxious family members in stories about them. This narrative of the evil stepmother is depicted even in Sümi folktales about stepmothers as discussed in "The Tale of Khakhu and Sheyili." Secondly, in "The Tale of Inakha and Ghonili", the plight of a wife who becomes a victim to an extra-marital affair committed by the husband. Thirdly, the portrayal of women as sky maiden is depicted in the "Myth of Ahuna". Women being associated with celestial qualities and mystical symbolism elevate women to a revered and ethereal status as it highlights their beauty, purity, and connection to nature, emphasizing their value and significance. However, this portrayal limits as it often places women on a pedestal, presenting them as unattainable ideals rather than complex individuals with diverse strengths and abilities. Fourthly, the portrayal of women as flowers is discussed in "The Tale of Anishe." Since flowers are viewed as a representation of the traditional feminine ideal of delicate, fragile, soft, sensual, and gentle behaviour, cultures all over the world associate flowers with women. Fifthly, the tale of "The Witch and the Wife" presents the image of a witch has been associated with negative stereotypes and used as a tool to vilify and marginalize women who challenge societal norms or possess unconventional knowledge or power. Sixthly, the tale of "Khumutsa and Tüghünakha" and the tale of "Nisapa and Nisala" depicts about

predicaments of daughters under the system of bride-price. Lastly, "The Tale of Thochipa and Tusholi" is discussed in the light of women's identity.

The third section discusses narratives from the selected Sümi Naga folksongs about the representation of women in selected Naga folktales. *Viyili* discusses about women as a victim of headhunting. Folksong: *Inakha ngoh Ghonili Küyixa* ("Inakha and Ghonili's Separation" presents women as victims of polygyny. The portrayal of stepmother *Inakha ngoh Ghonili Küyixa (*"Inakha and Ghonili's Separation"). In *Visheli no li Za Shikipili Le (*"Visheli's Song of Her Mother"*)* the predicaments of the step-daughter is discussed. *Apu-kishe eno Anga-kishe* ("Step-Father and Step-Daughter") highlights the step-father mistreating the step-daughter. *Asholoku Küsa le* ("Song of Marital Discord") portrays women as a helpless wife. *Luxa Le* ("Weeding Song") presents women as '*inalimi*' or 'outsiders'. In *Ghi muzu khavelai?* ("Has the paddy yellowed?"), women are presented as victims of forced marriage. *Ilimi, Xuwumovekemi Le* ("A Spinster's Song") depicts about the plights of unmarried women.

The fourth section displays the representation of women in the Sümi Naga community through its proverbs and expressions. These sayings, which are valued by every member of the community and which have been passed down through the generations like folktales and folk songs, demonstrate how the Sümi Naga philosophy of life is reflected in them. Proverbs and Expressions related to the worth of women are discussed. It also highlights sayings on women as the weaker gender. Proverbs and Expressions depict women as poor managers of wealth. It also highlights the theme of

silencing the women. Proverbs and expressions also warn women about their morality. It concludes with discussions on taboos related to women.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that, despite some unfavourable stereotypes perpetuated by society, women are regarded as courageous individuals capable of outwitting their adversaries. Since stereotyping in the representation of women refers to the practice of portraying women in limited, predetermined ways, it draws attention to and celebrates the wide variety of resilient female characters in Sümi folklores and everyday life. By presenting such characters, folktales can inspire individuals to question oppressive traditions and strive for gender equality and empowerment. Firstly, in the "Tale of Brave Hearted Yeholi," Yeholi proves that women have the abilities, brains, and bravery required to meet and defeat fearsome monsters. The story disproves the idea that only males can be heroes and emphasizes the power and potential of women.

Secondly, the tales of "The Tale of Pitheli," and "The Tale of Ghothali," focus on the female women characters as warriors. According to Naga tradition, women are not permitted to become warriors. In "The Tale of Pitheli," feminist warriors defy social conventions, question gender roles, and establish their value through tenacity, talent, and willpower. Pitheli, in contrast to the other female characters, takes charge of her own fate and makes choices based on her own convictions. By venturing outside of her comfort zone, taking chances, and choosing her own course, she exemplifies agency. In the "The Tale of Ghothali," society does not permit a woman warrior to endure yet Ghothali goes against social norms, opposes gender stereotypes, and demonstrates bravery and wit to

defend her family and village. These stories also highlight the fortitude, tenacity, and resolve of feminist women warriors. They demonstrate their prowess, talents, and leadership traits, demonstrating their capacity to confront and get past the constraints placed on them by patriarchy. They disprove preconceived notions about the skills and roles of women by demonstrating her prowess as a warrior.

Thirdly, the "Tale of Shesü" and the "Tale of Shesülimi Village" discuss the character of Shesü who is seen as the village founder and a chief defying the general rule of succession of chieftainship in Sümi tradition limited only to male members. The tales of Shesü depict that when a woman attempts to become the head of a village, she faces skepticism, discrimination, and resistance from especially from men who adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations.

Fourthly, "The legend of Teli" of Ighanumi village portrays the capacity of women to become village chiefs. Due to long-standing norms that have not been altered to provide for gender equality, the Sümi system of customary law does not allow women to hold chieftainship positions. These traditions and practices become quite entrenched and difficult to alter. Both the Tales of Shesü and the legend of Teli of Ighanumi Village oppose such beliefs and emphasize the accomplishments and skills of women. Resilient Sümi women characters break the mold of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. They offer different viewpoints that go beyond constricting preconceptions and enable women to be their true selves. In particular for women and girls, they act as role models for readers and viewers.

Fifthly, the story of the creation of *lazalimi mini*, a unique sarong worn by Sümi Naga women in the Zunheboto district's Pughuboto area, celebrates the talents and ingenuity of Sümi Naga women. The story shows women as expert weavers who can make themselves stand out from the crowd. The story honours women's inventiveness and demonstrates how their special skills and creative expressions may affect positive change and motivate people around them.

II

Specific Observations

1. Stereotyping of Women

The representation of women in Sümi Naga folklores, like in many cultural narratives, is influenced by stereotypes. When women are only shown in traditional gender roles, it can reinforce the idea that these are the only roles that women should be in. In Sümi Naga's oral literature, the representations of women as stereotypes have both positive and negative attributes. Some common stereotypes found in Sümi Naga folklores include the portrayal of women primarily as caretakers, passive figures, or symbols of purity and virtue. They are also depicted as dependent on male counterparts or limited to specific domestic roles. Women are portrayed as witches, wicked stepmothers, helpless wives waiting to be rescued, spinsters, "inalimi" or "outsiders," weaker gender, and ineffective managers of wealth. It also portrays daughters as products on the marriage market, supported by the custom of paying a bride price and women who are steadfast in

their marriages. In a relatively positive representation of women in the Naga folktales, they usually focus on some types of women among others. That is, for instance, mothers are described as thoughtful and loving. Thus, women in some tales have been depicted positively as faithful, honest and loving even though many of the tales regard them as unfaithful, dishonest, liars, adulterous, etc. Only when a woman fulfils the role of an "ideal" woman then she is appreciated in society.

In real life when women are only shown in traditional gender roles, it reinforces the idea that these are the only roles that women should be in. This can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and it can make it difficult for women to achieve their goals.

2. Internalization of the Beauty Standard

The internalization of beauty standards as dictated by folklores refers to the process by which individuals come to accept and adopt societal ideals of beauty that are conveyed through traditional stories, myths, and cultural narratives. Sümi Naga folklores depict such physical attributes, appearances, or beauty ideals that are considered desirable. These depictions shape people's perceptions of beauty and influence their self-image and self-worth. In real life, when individuals repeatedly encounter these beauty standards in folklores, they may internalize them and strive to conform to these ideals.

The culture makes it close to impossible not to subconsciously make a comparison between the self and another woman. This self-comparison promotes the

constancy of personal worth through domains like attractiveness, success, and intelligence. It, consequently, manifests into excessively competitive and judgmental attitudes. These beauty standards hamper the confidence of women as they internalize the idea that women need to be beautiful otherwise they will be rejected by society.

This internalization can lead to various consequences, including body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and harmful beauty practices. It can create unrealistic expectations and pressures, particularly for women, to meet the prescribed beauty standards perpetuated by folklores. Beauty standards particularly relate to feminism as they imply that women are mere objects, appreciated solely for their physical appearance. Feminism values the cooperation of women, not the competition and comparison promoted through the endless images presented by the media, which encompasses unattainable standards of beauty.

3. Objectification of Women

The patriarchal point of view in folklore has deep roots and spreads in the community. It reinforces the idea that women should be passive, submissive, and dependent on others for validation and protection. This can restrict women's autonomy and contribute to their marginalization and objectification within society. It reveals how the objectification of female figures is carried out in the form of women as objects, women as a medium of exchange of power, and women being passive and working in the domestic sphere. This finding shows that folklore cannot be separated from patriarchal ideology. The folklore shows that women in the imagination of the Sümi Naga occupy an

inferior position compared to men. Furthermore, the female characters also experience objectification and inequality in folklore.

4. *Totimi Kuchou:* Sümi Concept of an "Ideal" Woman

This concept of “ideal” is seen as a woman, who lives a chaste life, knows the entire work related to the household or field, marries a man to become a dutiful wife serving her husband, and looking after her children with endurance. In order to understand how society regards women the Sümi Naga context, it is crucial to comprehend the concept of the "ideal" woman, or *totimi kuchou*. Added value is given if she is beautiful and if she can bore a son who shall carry the name of his father. Folklore accounts show that Sümi women have a good reputation in the society, especially if they keep the *totimi kuchou* values. Their chances in society are better the more skilled they are, as these ladies would make the best wives. In order to be an effective wife, one must take charge of the household. She makes a substantial contribution to her husband's ascent to popularity and power. For instance, stepmothers are portrayed as not a *totimi kuchou* or an "ideal" woman as they are framed as cruel, wicked, and antagonistic figures. This portrayal often contrasts with the image of the biological mother, who is typically depicted as kind, nurturing, and loving. These gender roles have had a major impact on our culture and are the main reason why women endure inequalities. We were bred in a patriarchal society and have internalized its ideas to the point where they are ingrained in who we are, making it difficult to see the injustice of it.

5. The Silent or Voiceless

The silencing of women in folk narratives can have several implications. It perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces the notion that women's voices and experiences are less valuable or important than those of men. It limits the representation and agency of women, reinforcing their subordinate position in society. It also restricts the diversity of narratives and hinders the exploration of women's stories, perspectives, and contributions.

There are several factors which contributes to perceptions of women as silent including male dominance, male control of language, informal training at home, institutions which teach women to be silent, traditional values of community and the fear of being characterized as insane, and evil or fear of being scolded. This problem can be understood by breaking down the phallogocentric use of language that has even appropriated spaces of achievement of women or any other non-normative hero with the cunning use of language. Efforts have been made to reclaim women's voices in folklore by highlighting stories that center on women's experiences, challenges, and triumphs. This includes celebrating folktales and myths featuring strong female characters who defy traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

6. The institution of Marriage

Marriage remains one of the most important institutions that manipulate the value of women in the Sümi Naga community. Seemingly, these practice of *amekuchu* (bride-price) or a*phiatho lame* (bride's body price) or *azanu julha* (bride-price) are attributed to the high value of Sümi women as they are considered highly virtuous, chaste, modest,

hardworking, and self-efficient in managing household chores and any other works, thereby, maintaining the good name of their parents and family thereby, becoming a warrant for the community to practice such acts as it prevails even today. At its core, it becomes quite significant as such practices only commodify women and become detrimental to their well being in society. The successive generation becomes less sensitive and unaware of any fault with its culture. This unsettling culture only facilitates the unequal gender dynamics that foster dominance through provision on the part of the men, and subservience on the part of the women.

7. Commodification of Women

The commodification of women through bride-price refers to the practice in certain cultures or societies where women are treated as commodities or objects that can be bought and sold through the payment of a bride-price or dowry. This practice, as seen in Sümi Naga traditions, reinforces traditional gender roles and power dynamics, treating women as possessions or economic transactions. It contributes to the objectification and devaluation of women, as their worth becomes tied to monetary or material considerations. The bride-price creates an unequal power dynamic within marriages, where women may be seen as subservient or indebted to their husbands or in-laws. It perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes, limit women's choices and opportunities, and undermine their status and rights within society.

8. Resilient Female Characters Defy the Stereotypes

Gender stereotyping is a result of patriarchal conventions and ideas that specify how men and women ought to act, what positions they ought to hold, and what traits or qualities are proper for each gender. Therefore, resisting patriarchy is a central goal of feminism and refers to challenging and dismantling the social, cultural, and institutional systems that perpetuate gender-based oppression and privilege male dominance. Resilient Sümi women characters break the mold of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By showcasing women who are strong, independent, and determined, these characters challenge preconceived notions about what women can or should be. They provide alternative narratives that go beyond limiting stereotypes and empower women to be their authentic selves. They also serve as role models for readers and viewers, particularly women and girls.

Gender representation in Sümi Naga oral tradition in the genres of folktales, folksongs, and folk proverbial sayings indicates that it is highly influenced by patriarchal power. It can be argued that cultural ethos and cultural productions, including oral literature, exert substantial influence on the lower status of women. The analyses of the selected works in folklore also reveal that women are considered inferior in the patriarchal society. This is due to embedded implications that men are the head of the family, providers and protectors of their families. The analysis has revealed that women are portrayed in a negative light. However, practically women carry an unlimited number of responsibilities in their family: bearing children, looking after the children and the house in general, taking care of several domestic chores; and even in some cases women are seen taking part in fieldwork that is typically meant for men.

III

Recommendations

- As research on women's folklore is an important and growing field of study. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of women's history, culture, and experiences. The extension of this field's horizons will require more research and discoveries.
- The paucity of written records and translated work on folklore made this study difficult; consequently, more recordings and translation will facilitate a successful study.
- Women's folklore is not monolithic. It varies from culture to culture and from generation to generation. Therefore, documenting the diversity of women's folklore will help in understanding the richness and complexity of women's experiences.
- As this study has a limited scope in the content included to the portrayal of women in folktales, folksongs, and proverbial sayings collected from the target sample only, further studies on other folklore genres will give more insights on the portrayal.
- Through a comparative analysis between the different Naga tribes will give a better understanding on the similarities and contrasts as found in their traditions.

- Children's stories and oral histories can have a significant influence on our attitudes and values. A pedagogical investigation into the significance of folklores will therefore be essential.

Although limited in its scope, the researcher of this study believes that the findings may aid readers and other academics in their knowledge-seeking endeavours.

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