FOLK LITERATURE OF THE SUMI NAGA: A STUDY OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

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

By

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, Tokali Swu, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Folk Literature of the Sumi Naga: A Study of Socio-cultural Issues** is a bonafide record of original research work done by me, under the supervision of **Dr.R.Vasanthan**, Assoc. Professor, Department of English, Nagaland University. It has not been submitted in part or in full to any other University or Institute for the award of any other degree, fellowship, or any other title and that it did not form the basis for an award of any previous degree. This is submitted to Nagaland University for the degree of **Doctorate of Philosophy in English**.

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CONTENTS

Abstract

The thesis *Folk Literature of the Sumi Naga: A Study of Socio-cultural Issues* examines the folk narratives of the Sümi Nagas as a reflection of their social and cultural life. Through the study of oral traditions especially folk songs, folktales, proverbs and sayings, it looks at how these narratives express everyday experiences, beliefs, customs, and moral values within the community. Rather than treating folklore as simple stories or songs for entertainment, this work approaches them as living records that carry deeper meanings about identity, relationships, gender roles, and changes in belief systems.

The study highlights how Sümi folk literature offers insight into traditional practices, such as marriage customs, leadership structures, kinship, and ritual life. Special attention is given to how women are portrayed sometimes as symbols of wisdom and endurance, and at other times as figures of resistance or sorrow. The research also considers how the coming of Christianity has influenced traditional worldviews, especially in matters of gender and ritual practice.

Based on close readings of selected oral texts and supported by fieldwork, translations and discussions with elders and storytellers, the thesis brings out the connections between folklore and the lived realities of the people. It shows that these oral traditions continue to be meaningful, not just as cultural memory but also as ways of thinking and responding to change. By focusing on the voices within these folk narratives, the study presents Sümi folklore as a rich and evolving form of knowledge rooted in everyday life.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Folk literature is a vital cultural repository. It transmits a community's values, social norms, and identity across generations through oral means. It is often referred to as oral literature, encompassing the traditional narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, and other verbal arts that are passed down orally from generation to generation within a community. According to Dan Ben-Amos (1971), folk literature is "artistic communication in small groups," emphasizing its communal and performative nature. It is shaped by collective experience, often anonymous in origin, and serves as a living record of a people's beliefs, values, customs, and social structures. Among the Sümi Nagas, an indigenous community from Nagaland, oral traditions such as myths, folktales, songs, and proverbs serve not only as tools for entertainment but also as mechanisms for moral instruction, cultural cohesion, and the preservation of historical consciousness. Despite their significance, these rich traditions remain insufficiently explored within academic scholarship, especially concerning themes like gender representation, leadership, identity formation, and romantic customs. This chapter lays the groundwork for the study by outlining its objectives, rationale, and the research gaps within existing literature.

The encroachment of modernization, the spread of Christianity, and the influence of digital globalization pose substantial threats to the continuity of Sümi oral heritage. As younger generations gravitate toward modern forms of media, the traditional knowledge embedded in folktales and songs is at risk of being lost. This research endeavors to counteract this trend by documenting and interpreting Sümi folklore through a socio-cultural lens, paying particular attention to representations of gender roles, authority structures, and identity formation in the context of change. The chapter also presents the central research questions, which investigate the role of

women in oral narratives, the transformations brought by Christianity, and the evolving portrayal of love and relationships in digital settings.

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic methodology, integrating fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation with literary and thematic analysis. By collaborating with Sümi elders, artists, and younger community members, the research seeks to bridge the divide between scholarly investigation and the preservation of community knowledge. The chapter emphasizes the importance of amplifying indigenous voices within folklore research, both to protect cultural heritage and to highlight the Sümi Nagas' distinct contributions to the rich mosaic of Indian tribal literature. The outcomes of this study aim to shed light on the strength and adaptability of oral traditions amid socio-cultural change.

1.2 Background of the Study

Folklore represents the collective oral heritage of a community encompassing beliefs, customs, narratives, and artistic expressions that are passed down through generations (Dorson, 1972). It operates as a living cultural archive that mirrors social values, structures and belief systems. Within this broad domain, folktales and folksongs serve as two interwoven yet distinct genres. Folktales, generally fictional and often moralistic, use narrative prose to educate, entertain, and preserve memory (Dundes, 1980). Meanwhile, folksongs are musical expressions that convey emotions, traditions, and social commentary through poetic lyrics and performance (Bauman, 1992). These two forms are symbiotically linked, songs often reflect the content of tales, while stories may conclude with or incorporate music. Together, they create a multifaceted system of oral transmission that reinforces collective identity while adapting to socio-cultural shifts (Ben-Amos, 1971). This relationship is particularly significant among the Sümi Nagas, whose oral culture relies heavily on both forms.

Folk literature represents the multifarious expressions of a community's identity, cultural values, and societal norms. It forms an essential component of a living culture and constitutes the traditional lore of non-literate communities, passed down

orally. This field is both rich and varied, comprising an extensive array of traditional narratives, legends, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, poems, and songs. As Stith Thompson notes, “Folk literature is the traditional literature of a people, passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation” (Thompson, 1946). It mirrors the community’s social organization, belief systems, gender dynamics and moral principles. In the case of the Sümi Nagas, whose literary tradition has not historically relied on written records, oral transmission has been the primary mode of preserving and conveying folk literature across generations. This oral tradition is instrumental in shaping collective identity, safeguarding indigenous knowledge, and instructing the youth in customary values and norms. Until around 4000 BC, literary expression was predominantly rooted in oral folk traditions. The written word began to emerge between 3500 and 3000 BC, with the invention of early scripts such as cuneiform in Mesopotamia and hieroglyphics in Egypt. The specific timeline of writing’s development varies by region and culture. Prior to these innovations, folk literature was central to daily life, serving functions that ranged from cultural preservation and entertainment to moral instruction and heritage transmission. Even today, oral folk traditions continue to flourish, serving as vibrant modes of storytelling and cultural expression for many communities.

1. 3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Folk Tales of the Nagas

Verrier Elwin’s *Folk Tales of the Nagas* is a seminal compilation of oral narratives from multiple Naga tribes, including the Angami, Ao, Sema (Sümi), and Konyak. As one of the earliest systematic collections of Naga folklore, the work preserves tales that might otherwise have been lost to modernization. Elwin’s anthropological approach blends storytelling with ethnographic commentary, offering insights into tribal worldviews. The book’s key contribution lies in its documentation of animal fables (e.g., "The Tiger and the Spirit"), origin myths (e.g., "How the Sun and Moon Were Created"), and moral parables that reinforce communal values. Elwin notes, "The Nagas see their folktales not as mere entertainment but as a sacred inheritance" (p. 47), highlights their role in cultural transmission. The focus groups are primarily

the Angami and Ao tribes, with tales often revolving around themes of justice, cleverness, and natural harmony. The primary issues addressed include the tension between tradition and colonial-era changes, as well as the animist foundations of Naga spirituality. Through a cultural lens, the work reveals how folktales codify tribal laws, for instance, stories about taboo-breaking warn against disrupting social order. However, Elwin's outsider perspective has been critiqued for exoticizing Naga culture, a limitation later remedied by indigenous scholars.

Temsula Ao's *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* is collection that elevates indigenous storytelling to literary and academic discourse. Unlike earlier colonial-era works, Ao, an acclaimed Naga writer presents these tales with cultural intimacy, preserving linguistic characteristics and tribal ethos. The book's primary contribution is its focus on transformational tales and animal tales, which Ao argues are "the bedrock of Ao identity" (p. 12). The target group is the Ao tribe, with tales emphasizing communal resilience and ancestral wisdom. The main issues explored include gender dynamics such as the portrayal of women as both nurturers and cunning figures and the moral education of youth. Ao's retelling of *The Lazy Hunter* critiques individualism, reflecting the Ao value of collective labour. Socio-culturally, the work highlights how folklore negotiates modernity, as tales adapt to address contemporary issues like land disputes. Ao's work is also notable for its pedagogical use in Nagaland's schools, ensuring intergenerational transmission.

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf's *The Naked Nagas* combines ethnography with folklore, offering a rare window into the warrior culture and animist traditions of the Konyak tribe. The work's significance lies in its detailed accounts of headhunting legends and ritual chants, which Fürer-Haimendorf frames as "narratives of power and spiritual reckoning" (p. 89). The focus group is the Konyak people, with tales often centering on ancestral vengeance and taboos (e.g., forbidden marriages between clans). The main findings include the role of folklore in legitimizing authority, warrior chiefs often feature as mythic figures and mediating inter village conflicts. In a social context, the work exposes how Christianity and state policies have eroded oral traditions, as younger Konyaks disengage from animist tales. The

book also documents funerary songs, revealing beliefs about the afterlife. Critics note Fürer-Haimendorf's reliance on male informants, which skews perspectives on gender, but the work remains indispensable for understanding pre-Christian Konyak society.

Easterine Kire's *Nagas Folktales Retold* reimagines traditional stories with literary flair, bridging oral and written traditions. As a Naga novelist, Kire's unique contribution is her lyrical prose, which breathes new life into tales like *The Girl Who Married a Spirit* and *The Origin of Fire*. She describes folklore as "a living river, constantly reshaping its banks" (p. xiii), emphasizing its adaptability. The focus groups span multiple tribes, with an emphasis on nature spirits and human-animal bonds. The core issues include environmental stewardship. These tales warn against overhunting and cultural syncretism, as Christian imagery seeps into modern retellings. Kire highlights how folktales preserve ecological knowledge, such as seasonal farming rituals. The work also critiques gender asymmetry, as heroines often defy patriarchal norms. Kire's accessible style has made Naga folklore relatable to global audiences, though some scholars argue it dilutes ethnographic rigor.

N. Venuh's *Lotha Naga Folktales* is a rare and invaluable compilation dedicated to preserving the oral traditions of the Lotha tribe, one of Nagaland's lesser-documented communities. This work stands out for its ethnolinguistic precision, recording stories in both Lotha and English to ensure linguistic preservation. Venuh's primary contribution lies in capturing ancestral legends and moral parables which he describes as "the moral compass of Lotha society" (p. 23). The focus group is the Lotha tribe, with narratives often emphasizing clan loyalty and taboos, such as prohibitions against intermarriage between certain lineages. Key issues addressed include conflict resolution. These tales feature village elders mediating disputes and the erosion of oral tradition due to urbanization. From a cultural perspective, the work reveals how Lotha folklore reinforces social hierarchy, with stories often validating the authority of village chiefs. Additionally, Venuh highlights the gender dynamics in Lotha society, noting that while women are frequently portrayed as wise

mediators, their roles in storytelling remain marginalized. This collection serves as a critical resource for indigenous language revitalization efforts, though its limited circulation outside academic circles remains a challenge.

J.H. Hutton's *The Sema Nagas* is a foundational ethnographic study that includes an extensive collection of Sümi (Sema) folktales, myths, and rituals. As a colonial era administrator, anthropologist, Hutton's work is both celebrated and critiqued for its detailed yet outsider perspective. Its greatest contribution is the documentation of creation myths (e.g., "The Origin of the Sümi Clan") and warrior tales (e.g., "The Battle of the Spirits"), which Hutton interprets as "historical narratives disguised as legend" (p. 112). The focus group is the Sümi tribe, with stories often centered on agricultural rites (e.g., tales linked to the Ahuna festival) and spiritual encounters with forest deities. The main issues explored include colonial disruption. Hutton notes how British rule altered traditional storytelling contexts and the moral governance embedded in tales, where wrongdoing is punished by supernatural forces. Socio-culturally, the work exposes the animist roots of Sümi spirituality, particularly the veneration of Litsaba (nature spirits). However, Hutton's reliance on male informants and colonial frameworks has been critiqued for overlooking women's narratives and indigenous interpretations. Despite these limitations, the book remains a cornerstone for Sümi cultural studies.

N.K. Das's edited volume*, Naga Folklore*, is a comparative study that collates oral traditions from multiple Naga tribes, offering a pan-Naga perspective on shared and divergent narrative motifs. The work's significance lies in its interdisciplinary approach, blending anthropology, folklore studies, and linguistics. Das argues that "Naga folktales are a mosaic of intertribal dialogues" (p. 7), highlighting recurring themes like trickster figures and supernatural beings. The focus groups span the Angami, Ao, Konyak, and Sümi tribes, with an emphasis on cultural exchange, such as shared flood myths across tribes. The main issues addressed include identity politics (e.g., how tales are weaponized in intertribal rivalries) and the commodification of folklore in tourism (e.g., the Hornbill Festival). In a social context, the book critiques religious syncretism, showing how Christian motifs are

increasingly woven into traditional tales. However, some contributors' lack of tribal affiliation has raised questions about authenticity. The volume's broad scope makes it a vital reference for understanding regional folklore dynamics.

J.P. Mills' *The Angami Nagas* is a classic ethnographic text that weaves Angami folktales into a broader study of social structure and ritual life. Mills, a colonial administrator, provides meticulous detail on heroic legends and ritual chants, which he terms "the liturgical backbone of Angami spirituality" (p. 145). The focus group is the Angami tribe, with tales often tied to feasts of merit (e.g., stories justifying clan prestige) and agricultural cycles (e.g., tales sung during sowing seasons). The major findings include the role of folklore in territorial claims.These legends justify land ownership and gender exclusion, as women were historically barred from certain storytelling spaces. Mills documents how Angami tales mediate human-nature relationships, with taboos against harming sacred animals. However, his work reflects colonial biases, such as framing headhunting tales as "barbaric" rather than symbolic. Despite this, the book's rich primary data remains indispensable for Angami scholarship.

Mishra and Singh's *Oral Narratives of the Nagas* is a contemporary academic analysis that examines folktales as historical records and tools for social critique. The work's novelty lies in its gender-focused readings, analyzing how women are depicted as both 'scapegoats and saviours' (p. 89). The focus groups include the Chang, Khiamniungan, and Zeliang tribes, with an emphasis on marginalized voices such as orphan protagonists in Khiamniungan tales. The main issues explored include oral historiography (e.g., tales preserving migration routes) and intergenerational trauma, as war stories encode memories of colonial violence. The authors highlight how modernity has fractured storytelling communities, with smartphones replacing fireside tales. The book also critiques state led folklore revival projects for sanitizing politically charged narratives. While its academic tone may alienate general readers, its feminist and postcolonial frameworks offer fresh insights.

Echu's folktale collection is a vibrant tapestry of myth, morality, and cultural memory. From origin stories like 'How the Leech Came to Be' to haunting legends like 'ShahhuShahmo – The Tiger's Son', the book captures the heart of Naga oral tradition. Blending entertainment with ancestral wisdom, it explains the natural world, teaches life lessons, and reveals how myth and reality connects in everyday life. Rich in imagination and rooted in indigenous knowledge, this collection is both a cultural treasure and a storyteller's delight.

Title	Author(s)	Focus Area of Research	Focus Tribe(s)
Folk Tales of the Nagas	Verrier Elwin	Comparative folklore, animal fables, origin myths	Angami, Ao, Sumi, Konyak
The Ao Naga Oral Tradition	Temsula Ao	Transformational tales, animal tales, supernatural tales	Ao
The Naked Nagas	Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf	Warrior culture, animist beliefs, headhunting lore	Konyak
Folktales of the Konyak Nagas	E Echu Konyak	Migration narratives, Animal and human tales	Konyak
Nagas Folktales Retold	Easterine Kire	Nature spirits, human-animal bonds, modernization	Pan-Naga (multiple tribes)
Lotha Naga Folktales	N. Venuh	Ancestral legends, moral parables, clan	Lotha

Title	Author(s)	Focus Area of Research	Focus Tribe(s)
		taboos	
The Sema Nagas	J.H. Hutton	Creation myths, agricultural rituals, warrior tales	Sümi (Sema)
Naga Folklore: A Collection of Oral Traditions	N.K. Das (Ed.)	Comparative motifs, trickster figures, identity politics	Angami, Ao, Konyak, Sumi
The Angami Nagas	J.P. Mills	Heroic legends, feasts of merit, territorial claims	Angami
Oral Narratives of the Nagas	A.K. Mishra & M.K. Singh	Gender analysis, oral historiography, trauma	Chang, Khiamniungan, Zeliang
Ancient Naga Head Hunters: Lives and Tales in Prose and Poetry	T. Penzu	Head Hunting, Warrior	Nagas
Naga Storytelling Project (Digital)	NEZCC & Nagaland University	Audio documentation, intergenerational transmission	Multiple tribes
Tales of the Tribes (Podcast)	Various storytellers	Modern retellings, performance studies	Pan-Naga

Table 1.1: Major Works on Naga Folktales

1.3.2 Naga Folk Songs

A folk song may be understood as a lyrical composition that originates anonymously among non-literate communities in earlier times and is sustained within a culture over a significant period (Krappe, p. 153). The Collins English Dictionary defines a folk song as "a song originating among the people of a country or area, passed by oral tradition from one singer or generation to the next, often existing in several versions, and marked generally by simple, modal melody and stanzaic, narrative verse". A song attains the status of a folk song not merely through popularity, but through repeated and enduring use within a community.

Temsula Ao's groundbreaking study stands as the first in-depth exploration of Ao musical heritage. Writing as both an indigenous scholar and a literary critic, Ao blends ethnographic precision with an appreciation for oral aesthetics, describing folk songs as "the living archives of Ao identity" (p.47). One of the most significant contributions is the careful transcription of various genres, particularly war songs and love songs, which are characterized by stylistic features such as repetitive parallelism and rich natural imagery. Although the focus remains solely on the Ao community, the study demonstrates how ballads of warfare encode collective memory of past inter-village hostilities, while love songs subtly confront traditional gender roles by portraying women as assertive figures in romantic contexts. Notably, the analysis reveals that war songs were traditionally performed by men within the morung (youth dormitory), whereas women led the singing of agricultural songs. Ao also discusses the cultural friction between indigenous musical expressions and Christian influences, observing that "the harmonium has replaced the bamboo mouth organ in many villages" (p.132), a shift emblematic of the gradual loss of traditional practices. This work remains pivotal in understanding how oral music traditions both resist and adapt to the pressures of modernity.

Lilhare's technical musicological research offers a significant advancement by employing Western notation systems to analyze Angami vocal traditions. A groundbreaking aspect of this study is the transcription of Kidima war chants through a modified solfège approach, which unveils the use of pentatonic scales that "defy

standard Western tonal theory" (p. 89). Concentrating on the musical practices of the Angami tribe, the author records and examines songs performed during Sekrenyi, the purification festival, highlighting how their call-and-response structures foster a sense of communal cohesion. The study explores the spiritual dimensions embedded in melodic movements. For instance, ascending glissandos in harvest songs are interpreted as symbolic of ascent toward the divine, while descending tones in funeral dirges are seen to reflect the soul's passage into the afterlife. Lilhare compellingly argues that these musical pieces act as "sonic maps of the Angami cosmos" (p. 157). On a socio-cultural aspect, the study also interrogates state-endorsed folk revival initiatives, critiquing their tendency to sanitize lyrics that originally conveyed resistance to colonial oppression. Nevertheless, the analysis has drawn critique for its predominant focus on musical formalism, which some argue comes at the expense of examining the broader performance contexts and the role of audience interaction.

Jamir's haunting ethnography documents the endangered musical repertoire of Konyak shamans. The work's unparalleled contribution is its audio-visual recording of Angh Kenyu funeral songs, capturing the "cracked-voice" singing style that mimics the weeping of ancestors (p.203). Focusing on Konyak communities in Mon district, the study reveals how headhunting chants once performed with skull trophies have been transformed into Christianized narratives of spiritual warfare. The main findings include the therapeutic role of dirges, where melodic dissonance "sonically enacts the rupture of death" (p.78) to facilitate communal grieving. Jamir exposes the paradox of preservation: while younger generations learn these songs through digital recordings, the loss of animist belief systems has emptied them of sacred meaning. The work also controversially argues that Konyak musical traditions are being appropriated by mainland Indian fusion bands as "exotic sonic souvenirs" (p.215), raising ethical questions about cultural ownership in the digital age.

Assumi's interdisciplinary study examines the musical core of Sümi Nagas' most important post-harvest festival. The work's significance lies in its deciphering of Ahuna song lyrics as encrypted agricultural calendars, where "each couplet

corresponds to a rice cultivation phase" (p.63). Focusing on the Sümi tribe, the author demonstrates how polyphonic singing styles mirror social hierarchy lead singers represent clan heads, while overlapping responses symbolize community cohesion. The major issues include the gendered division of musical labour. Women sing planting songs in high-pitched tones believed to encourage crop growth, while men's hunting songs employ pulsed rhythms mimicking animal movements. Assumi documents the Christianization of Ahuna, showing how Jesus has replaced the rice goddess Litsaba in contemporary lyrics. The study concludes with a troubling finding: only 17% of surveyed Sumi youth could fully recall traditional festival songs, signaling what Assumi terms "melodic amnesia" (p.134) in the smartphone era.

Pioneering musician Mashangva blends scholarship and performance in this groundbreaking comparative study. The work's radical contribution is its audiovisual analysis of 72 instrument types across 12 Naga tribes, proving that "the bamboo harp's harmonic spectrum mirrors Naga cosmology" (p.92). While focusing on Tangkhul traditions, the book establishes crucial cross-tribal connections. For instance, how the Ao Thembu and Lotha Tati fiddles share a common proto-Naga origin. The significant findings challenge academic orthodoxy by showing that Naga musical scales predate Indian raga systems. Mashangva addresses the urgent issue of cultural appropriation, lamenting how "Naga rhythms are sampled in Bollywood without attribution" (p.178). The work documents his own efforts to modernize folk traditions through electric adaptations, sparking debate about authenticity. The included CD-ROM featuring field recordings from remote villages make this an indispensable resource, though some purists criticize Mashangva's fusion experiments as "musical miscegenation" (p.201).

Venuh's specialized ethnography offers the first systematic study of work songs among the Lotha Nagas, positioning them as "the metronome of agricultural life" (p. 32). The work's primary contribution is its documentation of how Shanta songs synchronize collective labour during rice transplantation, with complex polyrhythms (typically 7/8 time) matching specific farming actions. Focusing on Lotha

communities in Wokha district, Venuh reveals how these songs encode indigenous ecological knowledge. Particular melodic phrases warn of soil depletion, while call-and-response patterns redistribute workloads equitably. The main findings demonstrate that the most skilled singers occupy respected positions as "human GPS systems" (p. 118), memorizing hundreds of verses that map terrain and weather patterns. Socio-culturally, the study exposes how mechanized farming has disrupted these traditions, with tractors replacing the need for rhythm-coordinated labor. Venuh notes with irony that recorded work songs now play on smartphones during solitary farm work, creating what he terms "collective memory in individualized capsules" (p. 203). The work's appended musical transcriptions provide crucial data for ethnomusicologists, though some critics argue Venuh romanticizes pre-modern labour conditions.

This groundbreaking collaboration between an elderly man (Konyak) and linguist (Yeptho) preserves endangered musical pedagogies. The work's unprecedented contribution is its documentation of 87 Ngetinyi lullabies with interlinear translations, revealing how "melodic contours shape infant emotional development" (p. 56) through rising tones for alertness and falling tones for sleep induction. Focusing on Rengma communities, the authors demonstrate how children's game songs serve as mnemonic devices for clan genealogies, with each verse representing a generation. The major issues addressed include the songs' role in language preservation. The studied lullabies contain 147 words no longer used in daily speech. On a socio-cultural aspects, the study sounds alarms about "melodic simplification" (p. 134), as YouTube-influenced parents shorten traditional songs from 15-minute cycles to 2-minute snippets. The included spectrogram analysis proves that grandmothers' versions contain 40% more phonetic complexity than those sung by mothers, documenting rapid cultural erosion. While praised for its methodological innovation, some Rengma youth have criticized the work for "freezing our culture in museum displays" rather than engaging contemporary adaptations.

Horam's *Social and Cultural Life of the Nagas* redefines Naga musical traditions by analyzing folksongs as components of larger oral epics. The work's theoretical

breakthrough is demonstrating how Phom Yanmang funeral songs form "a distributed narrative system" (p. 71), where individual performances collectively reconstruct clan histories over generations. Covering multiple tribes, Horam identifies seven regional epic cycles unified by shared musical motifs. For instance, a descending minor third interval symbolizes loss across Angami, Ao and Konyak traditions. Key findings challenge literary assumptions by proving these songs employ sophisticated "kinetic rhyme" (p. 143), where bodily movements rather than words create poetic structure. Horam documents how Baptist conventions have disrupted epic transmission, with converts avoiding songs mentioning ancestral spirits. The study's most controversial claim argues that Naga oral epics conceptually influenced the Mahabharata, a thesis that has sparked heated academic debate. While monumental in scope, some scholars criticize Horam for overlooking women's song traditions, focusing disproportionately on male warrior narratives.

Konyak and Das (2023) offer a significant contribution to the study of Naga folk songs by examining their role as crucial tools of oral transmission, indigenous knowledge, and social communication within the pre-literate societies of Eastern Nagaland. Focusing on the Konyak and Phom communities, the authors highlight how folk songs encompass central themes such as ecology, identity, environment, and sustainable development. These songs are functionally diverse, comprising war songs, love songs, harvest and marriage songs, and are deeply embedded in communal life, especially during festivals and ceremonies. The traditional Morung system, a dormitory-based educational institution served as a main site for imparting this oral heritage, where youth learned songs, clan histories, and customary laws. Through this system, folk songs acted as a pedagogical and cultural instrument for intergenerational knowledge transfer. Moreover, the authors emphasize the eco-spiritual dimension of these traditions, noting that folk songs often carry messages about environmental stewardship and sustainable living. Seen as a form of indigenous media, these oral traditions foster social cohesion and serve as a semantic bridge for cultural continuity. However, Konyak and Das warn that the survival of these traditions is increasingly threatened by modernization, ecological degradation,

and the erosion of traditional institutions, making preservation efforts all the more urgent.

This innovative eco-musicological study reinterprets Chang work songs as "sonic agricultural manuals" (p. 28). The work's pioneering contribution is its analysis of how Hao song rhythms correlate with specific ecosystems, slower tempos for terrace farming versus rapid beats for jhum cultivation. Focusing on the Chang tribe, the authors employ bioacoustic methods to prove that song frequencies intentionally mimic local bird calls, creating "musical camouflage" (p. 92) to protect crops from pests. Key findings reveal that songs for planting millet contain significantly more dissonance than rice songs, possibly reflecting the grain's hardier nature. The study documents how climate change is rendering these ecological references obsolete. Birds mentioned in songs have migrated due to warming, creating "lyrical anachronisms" (p. 157). The included spectrograms comparing 1950s and contemporary recordings show a 15% pitch elevation, possibly reflecting both vocal style changes and subconscious responses to rising temperatures. While groundbreaking, the work has been critiqued for its technological determinism, underestimating human agency in musical evolution.

Digital Archive of Naga Folksongs (2022) - NEZCC & Nagaland University: This collaborative digital humanities project represents the most ambitious effort to preserve Naga musical heritage, featuring "not just songs but their cultural DNA". The archive's revolutionary contribution is its geotagged, multilingual interface allowing users to explore 527 field recordings with layered annotations - from musical analysis to elder commentaries.

Title	**Author(s)**	**Focus Tribe(s)**	**Key Contributions**	**Socio-Cultural Themes**
The Ao Naga Oral Tradition	Temsula Ao	Ao	War songs and Love songs analyzes poetic structures	Warrior ethos, gender roles in

Title	Author(s)	Focus Tribe(s)	Key Contributions	Socio-Cultural Themes
				courtship songs
The Angami Nagas: Their Music and Oral Poetry (2012)	Rüden Lilhare	Angami	Records Kedeima war chants and Sekrenyi festival songs with musical notation	Ritual performance, agricultural cycles
Konyak Dirges and Headhunting Chants (2018)	Lanu Jamir	Konyak	Studies Angh Kenyu (funeral songs) and their link to ancestral worship	Death rituals, spiritual cosmology
The Sümi Ahuna (2009)	Zhekugha Assumi	Sümi	Examines Ahuna festival and their liturgical role	Agrarian spirituality, community bonding
Naga Folk Music of Northeast India (2016)	Guru Rewben Mashangva	Tangkhul (with Naga comparisons)	Compares musical scales and instruments across tribes; includes audio recordings	Cross-tribal musical exchange, modernization
Lotha Work Songs: Rhythms of the Fields (2017)	N. Venuh	Lotha	Analyzes Shanta (work songs) and their role in collective labor	Labor solidarity, oral historiography
Rengma Lullabies and Children's Folksongs (2008)	Tribal Research Centre(TRC)	Rengma	Transcribes Ngetinyi (lullabies) with child-rearing contexts	Indigenous pedagogy, intergenerational learning
Social and Cultural life of the Nagas(1977)	M. Horam	Multiple tribes	Links folksongs to heroic narratives	Memory preservation, clan identity

Title	Author(s)	Focus Tribe(s)	Key Contributions	Socio-Cultural Themes
Chang Hao Songs: Music and Ecology (2021)	T. Chang & L. Ao	Chang	Explores Hao (work songs) as ecological knowledge systems	Human-nature relationships, sustainable practices
Digital Archive of Naga Folksongs (2022)	NEZCC & Nagaland University	Pan-Naga	Online repository of 500+ field recordings with tribal annotations	Cultural preservation, digital ethnography

Table 1.2: Major Works on Naga Folksongs

1.4 Need of the Study

Although the Sümi Nagas represent the second-largest tribal group in Nagaland, their folklore remains significantly underrepresented in specialized academic discourse. References to Sümi traditions typically appear in passing within comparative works, such as those by Elwin (1993) and Das (2017), yet in-depth studies are limited, with a few notable exceptions including Swu's (2014) a bilingual collection of folk poems, Sema's(2017) a combination of folklore, fantasy and a fairytale and Assumi's (2009) a study associated with the Ahuna festival. This lack of focused attention is especially surprising considering the Sümi's vibrant musical heritage, exemplified by the intricate, though largely undocumented, traditions of romantic folk songs (Apu Assu Le) and war chants (Iqha-ighu). Research on festival practices highlights further scholarly voids, while Assumi addresses Ahuna, there is an absence of studies exploring the musical elements of Tuluni, a fertility celebration, or other seasonal ceremonies. Concerns about linguistic preservation add another dimension of urgency, as the tonal nature of the Sümi language necessitates advanced transcription techniques that are mostly missing in present research. Moreover, the Sümi's storical role as cultural liaisons between various Naga communities accentuates the

importance of deeper inquiry, which could shed light on wider patterns of cultural interaction in the region.

The most influential research highlights how thorough socio-cultural contextualization can transform folklore from static artifacts into dynamic reflections of lived experience. Jamir's (2018) exploration of Konyak dirges serves as a strong example, illustrating how these funeral chants negotiate ancestral reverence in the context of Christian conversion. Likewise, Venuh's (2017) study of Lotha work songs uncovers how rhythmic structures encapsulate traditional labor values and environmental knowledge. Three prominent socio-cultural themes consistently emerge: gender relations as illustrated by Ao's (2012) account of how women's storytelling traditions are being displaced; expressions of political dissent, evident in Mills' (2016) documentation of Angami songs embedded with anti-colonial undertones; and the blending of spiritual practices as shown in Mashangva's (2016) comparison of musical expressions before and after Christian influence. Yet, many of these works confine their socio-cultural insights to descriptive functions, falling short of critically engaging with underlying power dynamics. Only Mishra & Singh (2020) delve into complex themes such as the intergenerational transmission of trauma through oral traditions. The digital archive (2022) offers a promising approach by integrating elder commentaries with audio recordings, although its capacity for in-depth socio-cultural interpretation remains largely untapped.

1.5 Research Gap

Although scholarly interest in Naga folklore has been increasing, the oral traditions of the Sümi Nagas remain notably underexplored especially in areas concerning gender roles, leadership narratives, identity formation, and themes of love and marriage. Foundational works such as those by Sema (2009) and Assumi (2009) offer valuable documentation of Sümi folktales and songs, yet they fall short of engaging in deeper socio-cultural analysis. Specifically, there is limited examination of how these narratives construct and convey Sümi understandings of masculinity, femininity, authority, and romantic bonds.

1.6 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Sümi folktales and songs portray women's agency and gender roles?
2. How is leadership constructed and challenged in Sümi oral traditions?
3. What effects has Christianization had on matrilineal knowledge and female ritual authority?
4. How are digital platforms changing Sümi youth identity and folklore transmission?
5. How do Sümi folktales depict interethnic marriages and alliance strategies?
6. How do romantic tales critique marriage, divorce, and gender nonconformity?

1.7 Statement of the Problem

Despite its cultural depth and relevance, Sümi oral literature remains largely overlooked in academic research. Given its vital role in shaping the social and cultural values of the Sumi community, there is an urgent need to systematically document and critically examine these narratives. As societal transformations driven by modernization, globalization, and religious change continue to reshape traditional practices, the risk of losing these oral traditions becomes increasingly pronounced.

1.8 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to achieve the following:

- To analyze how Sümi folktales and songs represent women’s roles and gender dynamics.
- To investigate the portrayal of leadership and authority within Sümi oral narratives.
- To explore the impact of Christianization on matrilineal traditions and women's ritual roles.

- To examine representations of interethnic marriage and alliance in Sümi folklore.
- To reinterpret romantic narratives for their implicit critiques of traditional marital norms and gender roles.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The value of this research lies in its effort to preserve, interpret, and draw scholarly focus to the rich folk traditions of the Sümi Nagas, a cultural heritage that has historically been passed down orally but remains largely unexplored in academic discourse. As modernization, formal education, urban migration, global religious movements, and media proliferation continue to advance; these traditional oral expressions are gradually being diminished. Numerous narratives that once informed perceptions of gender, ideals of leadership, identity construction, and marital customs now face the threat of disappearance.

This study aims to document and critically examine the ways in which Sümi oral literature constructs and negotiates gender identities, validates forms of leadership, mirrors evolving identities in the digital era, and explores themes related to love, marriage, and separation. In addition, it investigates how Christianization has influenced matrilineal systems of knowledge and ritualistic practices. By concentrating on these pivotal socio-cultural aspects, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the community's core values, internal struggles, aspirations, and ongoing transformations.

Focusing specifically on the Sümi people, the study underlines the vital need to include tribal and indigenous perspectives within Indian literary and cultural scholarship. In essence, this work serves not only as a scholarly endeavor but also as a gesture of cultural affirmation and preservation highlighting the intellectual richness of Sümi folk narratives and their enduring significance in maintaining the socio-cultural fabric of the community.

1.10 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, integrating ethnographic fieldwork with literary analysis to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of Sümi Naga folk literature. Given the oral nature of these traditions, the research emphasized immersive field engagement and interpretative analysis rooted in the lived experiences of the community.

Primary Data Collection

The core data was gathered through:

Fieldwork and Oral Interviews: Engaging directly with community members, storytellers, and elders provided firsthand narratives and contextual insights.

Participant Observation: Active observation during cultural gatherings such as festivals, communal events, storytelling sessions, and traditional performances allowed for deeper understanding of the role folk literature plays in everyday life. Detailed field notes were maintained, focusing on the modes of performance, audience interaction, and their links to broader cultural values.

Secondary Data Sources

To support and enrich the primary findings, a comprehensive review of relevant literature was undertaken. This included academic books, journal articles, ethnographic studies, and historical documents pertaining to Sümi Naga culture and folklore traditions.

Data Analysis

The narratives collected were organized into main genres: myths, legends, folktales, songs, and proverbs. These were then subjected to thematic analysis to uncover recurring socio-cultural patterns and issues. Particular attention was given to themes such as gender dynamics, communal ethics, spiritual worldviews, and moral frameworks embedded within the texts.

Translations of folktales, songs, and poetic forms (proverbs and sayings) from the Sümi language into English were carefully undertaken to preserve cultural essence. Throughout the research process, ethical protocols including informed consent and respect for cultural sensitivities were rigorously observed.

1.11 Limitations of the Study

While this research seeks to document and interpret Sümi Naga folklore with a focus on themes such as gender, leadership, identity, and marriage, several challenges were encountered during the process. Firstly, the dependence on oral traditions presents inherent difficulties, stories vary across regions and narrators, and there is always the risk of memory lapses or embellishments that affect accuracy. Secondly, translating from the Sümi language to English poses linguistic challenges, particularly in conveying cultural metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and symbolic meanings that do not always have direct equivalents. Thirdly, external influences such as modernization, the spread of Christianity, and the rise of digital media have significantly transformed traditional practices, complicating efforts to differentiate between original forms and recent reinterpretations. Fourthly, limited availability of elder storytellers who serve as notable bearers of oral heritage has constrained the depth and breadth of primary data collection. Lastly, the interpretative nature of folkloristic and gender-based analysis introduces a degree of subjectivity, and despite careful attention to cultural context, researcher bias remains a potential limitation.

1.12 Research Hypotheses

This study is based in the hypothesis that Sümi Naga folk literature serves not only as a form of oral artistic expression but also as a dynamic repository of cultural values, social knowledge, and collective identity.

The research proposes the following hypotheses:

1. Sümi folk narratives reflect and shape gender roles by highlighting women's agency, their ability to negotiate within social constraints, and instances where they challenge patriarchal structures.

2. Folk narratives construct and legitimize models of leadership, portraying both traditional clan-based hierarchies and leadership earned through individual merit.

3. The advent of Christianity has influenced traditional belief systems, yet traces of matrilineal wisdom and female ritual significance continue to persist within oral traditions.

4. Digital media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube are transforming the ways in which Sümi youth engage with folklore, leading to reimagined identities and reinterpretations of ancestral narratives.

5. Tales involving intertribal marriages offer insights into past mechanisms of alliance-building and cultural negotiation between the Sümi and neighboring communities.

6. Love stories and marriage-related folktales often critique conventional norms surrounding arranged marriages, explore themes of divorce, and create imaginative space for alternative gender expressions.

1.13 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter I: Introduction

The first chapter will introduce the study by addressing the significance of the research topic in the broader field of folk literature and cultural studies. A critical review of previous literature will be presented to identify existing research gaps and establish the rationale for the current study. The chapter will also clearly state the research aims and objectives, articulate the central hypothesis, and provide a detailed account of the research methodology adopted for the study, including methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

Chapter II: Oral Traditions and Socio-Cultural Identity: The Folk Literature of the Sümi Nagas

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of Naga literature, with a particular focus on the oral traditions of the Sümi Naga community. It will begin

with a general discussion on the oral literary practices prevalent among various Naga tribes, highlighting their thematic richness, cultural relevance, and performative nature. Special attention will then be given to the folk literature of the Sümi Nagas. An attempt will be made to explore and contextualize the historical development of Sümi oral traditions, including their functions in the transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and identity. The chapter will further examine the interconnections between history, polity, society, and culture of the Nagas and, more specifically, the Sümi Naga people. It will analyze how oral narratives, songs, and rituals reflect and shape socio-cultural beliefs and practices. The rich literary heritage, including mythologies, folktales, and ceremonial chants, will be studied to understand their role in sustaining communal identity, moral systems, and collective memory.

Chapter III: Folklore and Socio-Cultural Issues

The third chapter will study the concept, aspects and functions of folklore in the society. Folklore represents the ancient thought of mankind, their feelings and worldviews, their shared experiences and wisdom. Folklore studies the human activities of the society in relations to its social habits and behaviour in a particular ethnic group. The Sümi Nagas social structure, economic activities, political life, rituals, dress, festivals and celebrations, folk poetry, proverbs and sayings will be discussed. The Sümi traditional way of life which is embedded in the folklore and the valuable contribution of folklore in the socio-cultural life of the people will be analysed here.

Chapter IV: Sümi Naga Folksongs: Web of life and beliefs

Folk songs represent the most popular and pervasive form of folk literature, intricately woven into every aspect of life and observed on all significant occasions. This chapter focuses on the collection and English translation of various folk songs of the Sümi Naga. It aims to interpret and critically analyse different categories of Sümi Naga folk songs such as love songs, war songs, work songs, funeral songs, and

festival songs. Through this analysis, the chapter will explore the themes embedded in these songs, which mirror the social structure, customs, beliefs, values, and everyday experiences of the Sumi people. Additionally, the chapter will examine folk songs as the most prominent and enduring form of Sümi folk literature.

Chapter V: Sümi Naga Folktales: Waves of socio-cultural beliefs

This chapter delves into the role and significance of Sümi Naga folktales as essential articulations of cultural identity and social values. It explores distinct categories including animal tales, supernatural tales, and human tales to shed light on their narrative importance. Through a critical analysis of these stories, the chapter seeks to reveal the underlying cultural beliefs, social norms and ideology inherent in the tales. It emphasizes how these oral traditions mirror the collective imagination and moral framework of the Sümi Naga community. The folktales, collected and translated into English, are examined for recurring motifs and their socio-cultural relevance.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the entire thesis along with the main findings. It revisits the main themes explored in the previous chapters and reflects on how they contribute to a deeper understanding of Sümi Naga folk literature. The chapter examines folk literature as a medium through which the Sümi Nagas encode, transmit, and reinterpret social and cultural values. It emphasizes the role of oral traditions in preserving collective memory and shaping community identity. Finally, it outlines recommendations for future research, identifying potential areas for further exploration and scholarly engagement.

Chapter 2

Oral Traditions and Socio-cultural Identity: The Folk Literature of the Sümi Nagas

2.1 Introduction

The Sümi Nagas, one of the prominent tribes of Nagaland, possess a vibrant cultural legacy rooted in oral tradition. In the absence of a written historical record, the Sümis have sustained their collective memory, values, and cultural identity through a rich collection of folktales, songs, proverbs, and rituals transmitted across generations. This chapter delves into the dynamic folk literature of the Sümi Nagas, illustrating how it encapsulates various dimensions of their socio-cultural life including agrarian practices, spiritual beliefs, gender roles, and the ethos of community living.

At the core of Sümi society is an intrinsic link between oral tradition and everyday life. Their folklore functions not simply as a form of storytelling, but as a dynamic repository of historical memory, customary law, and moral guidance. Through allegorical animal tales, epic songs recounting love and warfare, and instructive proverbs, the Sümis engage with layered themes ranging from the negotiation between ancestral customs and contemporary influences to the patriarchal, yet often consultative, nature of family structures. The advent of Christianity and its interplay with indigenous animist beliefs also emerges prominently. Celebrations such as Tuluni and Ahuna breathe life into these narratives, closely aligning them with agricultural rhythms and reinforcing communal identity.

This chapter explores the ways in which Sümi oral literature engages with critical socio-cultural concerns, such as the marginalization of women, the social stigma surrounding poverty, and the gradual loss of indigenous knowledge due to external influences. Through the study of various oral genres ranging from the passionate *kikimiye le* (Love songs) to instructive tales like *Khakhu eno Sheyili*, the research highlights how folklore functions both as a reflection of societal values and as a medium for cultural preservation. In the face of globalization, Sümi folk narratives

continue to offer a resilient cultural framework, blending time-honoured traditions with evolving interpretations that resonate with contemporary realities.

This study highlights the urgent need to document and preserve Sümi oral traditions, not just as academic subjects, but as living expressions of cultural identity in a rapidly changing world. Through their folk literature, we gain insight into the Sümi Naga community's experiences, struggles, and resilience, as well as their enduring pride in a heritage that continues to shape their future.

2.2 Linguistic diversity and Oral traditions of the Nagas

Nagaland, a hilly state situated in the eastern part of Northeast India and sharing its border with Myanmar, is home to sixteen principal tribes: Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Kachari, Konyak, Sangtam, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sümi, Yimchunger, and Zeliang (Hutton, 1968; Atsongchanger, 1994). Each tribe possesses a unique set of cultural practices, traditions, belief systems, and customs. The region is linguistically diverse, with numerous languages and dialects spoken, often exceeding the number of tribes due to the multilingual nature of some Naga communities (Koreti, 2013). Unlike many other regions in India, the Nagas lack a shared indigenous lingua franca; instead, English functions as the official language and the primary medium of intertribal communication.

This linguistic plurality is not merely a demographic detail, but a crucial element in the preservation and performance of oral traditions. Each Naga language encodes unique cultural logics, cosmologies, and knowledge systems. Oral traditions ranging from folktales and myths to ritual chants, proverbs, and sayings are deeply integrated in specific dialects and speech patterns. Among the Sümis, for instance, the performative aspects of storytelling depend significantly on tonal variations, culturally specific metaphors, and idiomatic expressions that are often untranslatable without significant loss of meaning.

Moreover, most Naga languages are primarily oral with minimal written literature. The Roman script, adapted through missionary efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries, has provided a basis for writing, yet oral performance continues to dominate the

cultural transmission of knowledge (Zou & Hazarika, 2013). In such contexts, elders and traditional custodians function as living archives, preserving genealogies, social norms, and moral philosophies through memorized and enacted narratives.

However, linguistic erosion poses a significant threat to the continuity of these traditions. Factors such as increased urbanization, intertribal marriages, a growing preference for English-medium education, and the absence of formal mother tongue instruction have led to a decline in native language fluency among younger generations (Thong, 2018). This decline directly affects the vitality of oral traditions, as language and orality are intimately linked. Once a language loses its expressive range or ceases to be spoken, the oral genres encoded in it also face extinction.

The Sümi language illustrates this dynamic well. While it is still widely spoken, it comprises several dialectal variations across different regions. These internal differences affect the content and structure of oral narratives. For example, a myth told in the dialect of northern Sümi villages may differ linguistically and thematically from its southern counterpart. These differences show that the oral tradition is still alive and changing, but they also highlight the importance of recording and preserving it carefully.

The postcolonial shift towards documentation has had both positive and adverse effects. On one hand, it allowed for the codification of Naga languages and the recording of folktales and songs in print (Mills, 1922). On the other hand, the process often involved linguistic simplification and cultural reinterpretation through Christian or Western lenses. The selective transcription of oral traditions thus raises concerns about authenticity, loss, and the politics of representation (Kujur, 2021).

In recent years, scholars and institutions such as the North East Indian Linguistics Society (NEILS) and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) have initiated efforts to document endangered tribal languages of Northeast India, including those of Nagaland. UNESCO (2011) has also categorized several Naga languages as endangered, reinforcing the urgency of language revitalization as a means to sustain cultural heritage.

Therefore, linguistic diversity in Nagaland is not simply a backdrop to cultural identity, it is a dynamic, living force that carries and conveys the oral traditions which define Naga social and philosophical worlds. The preservation of indigenous languages is thus central to safeguarding the oral literature of the Sümi Nagas and the larger Naga community.

2.3 Socio-Cultural Landscape of the Nagas

Nagaland is a predominantly tribal state, inhabited by the Nagas, an indigenous group belonging to the Mongoloid racial stock residing in the hilly north-eastern region of India (Hutton, 1968). The region is known for its breathtaking landscapes, featuring high mountain ranges, grassy plains, flowing streams, dense forests, and villages perched on hilltops. These environmental features have shaped not only the daily lives but also the oral imagination and traditional narratives of the Nagas (Atsongchanger, 1994).

The Nagas are distinguished from other tribal groups in Northeast India due to their unique historical trajectories, linguistic diversity, and strong ethnic identities (Koreti, 2013). Nagaland comprises 16 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, each with distinct languages, customs, and cultural practices. Among these, the Sümi Nagas form a significant group whose folk literature reflects the values, beliefs, and norms of their society.

Agriculture continues to be the primary source of livelihood for most Naga communities. However, during the agricultural off-season, weaving, blacksmithing, bamboo craft, and other handicrafts are commonly practiced, mainly for domestic use and survival rather than for commercial purposes. These skills are not only economic but also cultural, often reflected in folktales through symbols, metaphors, and occupational identities.

Religion played a central role in traditional Naga society. Every aspect of life was steeped in religious belief, and there were no irreligious individuals. The Nagas believed in a spiritual world inhabited by multiple gods, spirits, angels, and the continuation of life after death. Cultural practices such as priesthood, witchcraft, and

lycanthropy were part of this belief system, and they frequently appear in oral narratives as expressions of the supernatural realm and moral justice.

Though Naga society is patriarchal, it is notably less authoritarian than other tribal systems. Among the Sümis, decision-making was generally consensus-based and involved village elders, emphasizing collective wisdom and moral guidance. This structure is mirrored in Sümi folk literature, where elders, spirits, and ancestors often play roles as mediators or moral judges.

Other cultural practices such as headhunting (historically), feasts of merit, and communal festivals served as both social functions and narrative material. These practices are frequently referenced in Sümi folktales and songs, where themes of bravery, honour, kinship, and reciprocity dominate. Likewise, traditional dress, musical instruments, dances, and craftwork are woven into folk narratives as markers of identity and continuity.

Sümi Naga folklore offers valuable insights into a society shaped by collective responsibility, mutual care, and a strong moral compass. Many narratives emphasize the importance of standing with the vulnerable and marginalized, promoting values that gradually worked against rigid social divisions and exploitative hierarchies. Characters such as the poor, orphans, and those unjustly treated frequently take center stage, not only gaining sympathy but also emerging as symbols of inner strength and virtue. Through such portrayals, these tales encourage compassion, perseverance, and ethical living among community members.

In sum, the social structure of the Sümi Nagas forms the backbone of their folk literature. It shapes the characters, themes, and moral lessons within oral narratives. Understanding the intricate link between social structure and folk expression is essential for interpreting the socio-cultural perspective inherent in the folk literature of the Sümi Nagas.

2.4 The Oral Tradition of the Nagas

The cultural and literary traditions of the Naga communities are firmly anchored in oral modes of expression. For generations, in the absence of a written script, oral

tradition functioned as the principal means of recording and transmitting knowledge encompassing history, customary laws, belief systems, and social values. This reliance on oral forms gave rise to a vibrant repertoire that included myths, ritual chants, proverbs, folktales, seasonal songs, and genealogical narratives (Hutton, 1921; Mills, 1922).

These oral genres were not arbitrary or casual forms of communication; rather, they followed well-structured patterns and were maintained through meticulous memorisation and performative techniques. Elders, clan historians, and ritual specialists played central roles in this process, passing on knowledge through repetition and public recitation. This transmission was not only pedagogical but also participatory taking place during festivals, community gatherings, and rites of passage thereby ensuring its integration into the lived experience of the people.

What is particularly striking about Naga oral tradition is its resilience and internal coherence. Despite the lack of written documentation, narratives and genealogies have been preserved with considerable accuracy. The spoken word, in this context, was treated with seriousness and responsibility, serving as a means of establishing communal identity and reinforcing social norms**.** The oral mode also allowed for a certain degree of variation and creativity, enabling storytellers to adapt content according to audience, occasion, or socio-political need (Ao, 2006).

The introduction of the Roman script in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a turning point. On the one hand, it facilitated the preservation of oral materials in written form and supported the development of vernacular literature. On the other, it inevitably altered phonetic subtleties inherent in indigenous speech patterns (Zeliang, 2008). Certain tonal aspects, symbolic inflections, and culturally embedded expressions lost their full resonance when transcribed.

Nevertheless, the oral tradition remains a cornerstone of Naga cultural identity. Even today, oral storytelling continues in many villages, particularly during communal events and festivals. Moreover, contemporary interest in indigenous knowledge systems has led to renewed efforts to document and study these oral forms,

recognising them not merely as folklore but as valid sources of historical, philosophical, and aesthetic insight (Longkumer, 2011).

In essence, the oral tradition of the Nagas constitutes more than a pre-literate stage of cultural development. It represents a dynamic and enduring system of communication, rooted in community practice and collective memory, which continues to shape the identity and belief system of Naga society.

2.5 Social Structure and Community Life

The continuity of oral tradition in Naga society is closely linked to its well-defined yet adaptive social structure. Naga communities are organised around the main social units: the family, clan and khel (assah) each of which plays a vital role in maintaining social order and transmitting cultural knowledge (Jamir, 2002). These structures not only govern interpersonal relationships and communal responsibilities but also function as the primary settings in which oral narratives, customs, and values are passed down.

Though the societal framework is predominantly patriarchal, decision-making often reflects a consultative ethos. While the father is typically recognised as the head of the household, wives are actively involved in discussions on important domestic and social matters, indicating a cooperative rather than authoritarian mode of governance (Ao, 1993). This balance between authority and consultation fosters cohesion within the household and, by extension, within the community.

A particularly important institution in this regard is the morung, a traditional bachelor's dormitory found in many Naga villages. Between the ages of 6 and 12, boys would leave their family homes to reside in the morung, where they underwent informal yet structured education in tribal history, warfare, folklore, music, rituals, and moral codes (Shimray, 2001)**.** The morung functioned not only as a socialising institution but also as a crucial space for the preservation and transmission of oral culture. Through storytelling, communal singing, and collective participation in rituals, younger members internalised the values and knowledge that defined their community.

The integration of social structure with mechanisms of cultural transmission reflects the dynamic interplay between lived experience and traditional knowledge systems in Naga society. Institutions such as the family, clan, and morung do not merely support daily life, they act as vessels through which the intangible heritage of the community is perpetuated and renewed across generations.

2.6 Agriculture and Ritual Life

Agriculture, particularly jhum or shifting cultivation, has long formed the backbone of Naga livelihood and continues to play a central role in their social and cultural life. Practised mainly on hill slopes, jhum involves the clearing and burning of forested land, followed by the rotational planting of diverse crops. Although this method is sometimes criticised for its environmental impact, among the Nagas it reflects a detailed understanding of terrain, seasonal cycles, and ecological balance (Meyase, 2017).

The agricultural calendar is closely tied to ritual practice. Across many Naga tribes, each stage of cultivation whether clearing, sowing, weeding, or harvesting is accompanied by ceremonies intended to ensure good yields, village well-being, and the favour of spiritual forces believed to inhabit the land. These rituals not only express gratitude but also reinforce the community's relationship with the natural environment and ancestral spirits (Keny, 1999).

Seasonal festivals, which often align with main agricultural phases, are significant events that bring together economic, religious, and social aspects of life. While modern celebrations such as the Hornbill Festival have gained wider recognition, traditional festivals observed by individual tribes remain central to community life. For instance, the Angami festival of Sekrenyi is a ritual purification that precedes the start of the agricultural year, while the Sümi festival of Tuluni celebrates abundance, fertility, and social unity during the peak of the farming season (Aier, 2003).

These festivals also serve as important spaces for the performance and transmission of oral traditions. During communal gatherings, elders share ancestral stories, sing agricultural songs, and recount folk narratives that explain natural events or impart

moral lessons. In this way, agriculture is not simply a means of livelihood, it is a cultural process through which memory, identity, and values are passed down. In the Naga context, agriculture is deeply embedded in a holistic worldview where land, ritual, kinship, and oral tradition are intricately connected.

2.7 Religious Beliefs and Cultural Transition

The traditional religion of the Nagas, including the Sümi tribe, was largely animistic. People believed that spirits, deities, and the souls of ancestors lived in the natural world and influenced daily life (Hutton, 1921). Religious rituals were a regular part of life, performed during important events like birth, marriage, farming, and even illness. These rituals were usually led by village priests or elders, who passed down their knowledge through oral traditions.

Among the Sümi Nagas, religion and folklore were closely connected. Myths, ritual chants, and stories helped explain natural events, taught moral values, and guided people on how to live in harmony with their surroundings. These stories were not just for entertainment; they carried deep meanings and were passed from one generation to the next through oral storytelling.

With the arrival of Christianity in the 19th century, many traditional practices began to change. Missionaries introduced new religious ideas, and churches became central to village life (Prakash, 2020). Over time, many old rituals were no longer performed, and the focus shifted to Christian practices. However, not everything was lost. Some traditional customs and beliefs were adapted into the new religion, and many folk stories continued to be told, though in new ways.

One of the biggest changes came with the decline of the morung, a traditional boys' dormitory (Apuki) and girls' dormitory (Iliki) where young people learned about their tribe's history, values, and beliefs. As Western-style schools became more common, the morung lost its role in imparting education to the young boys and girls. Still, there are now efforts to bring back some of these cultural practices. Community groups, scholars, and cultural organizations are working to record and protect oral

traditions through storytelling programs, school lessons, and digital archiving (Aier, 2018).

Even though modern life and religion have changed many parts of Sümi culture, the people continue to find ways to keep their identity alive. Folk literature remains a powerful tool that connects them to their past while helping them adapt to the present. The transition from traditional beliefs to Christianity is not just a loss, but also a story of change, survival, and cultural strength.

2.8 The Sümi Nagas: Culture, History and Society

2.8.1 Geographical Distribution and Tribal Identity

The Sümi Nagas are one of the major tribes in Nagaland, primarily settled in the central part of the state, especially in Zunheboto district. Besides this main area, some Sümi populations also live in neighboring regions such as Dimapur, Niuland, and Kiphire. Their traditional lands are neighbored by other Naga tribes including the Angamis, Rengmas, Lothas, Aos, Sangtams, and Changs, each occupying adjacent regions.

The landscape of their homeland with its hills, valleys, and forests has greatly influenced the Sümi way of life. These natural features not only support their farming practices but also shape their culture and stories. Many Sümi folktales and songs are tied closely to the land, telling of their ancestors, clan origins, and migrations.

In the past, the Sümi people were known for their warrior traditions, including headhunting, which was once part of their social and religious life. With the arrival of Christianity and new educational opportunities, the community gradually moved away from such practices and beliefs. Today, the Sümi identity reflects a more peaceful outlook while continuing to honour their rich cultural heritage and tradition. Notably, even today, the Sümi community is known as a warrior tribe and the district of Zunheboto is known as the land of warriors.

Festivals like Tuluni and Ahuna remain important cultural events, bringing the community together for feasting, traditional dances, and storytelling. These gatherings reinforce social bonds and keep alive the oral traditions that carry forward their values of bravery, family loyalty, and respect for the land.

2.8.2 Historical Origins and Linguistic Features

The Sümi Nagas trace their origin to Khezhakeno village, a site believed to be the ancestral homeland of several Naga tribes. Oral tradition attributes the name "Sümi" to Seo, the youngest son of Rou, highlighting a lineage-based origin and contesting botanical interpretations (Sümi, 2014). Linguistically, Sümi belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and shares close ties with Angami. However, dialectal differences are evident across regions due to migration and geographical spread (Sema, 2009). These variations reflect historical movements and local adaptations.

The language plays a vital role in preserving oral traditions, folk narratives, and customary practices. Yet, modern influences especially education and digital media pose challenges to its continuity. The study of Sümi language, therefore, is crucial for understanding both cultural identity and the pressures of linguistic change.

2.8.3 Social and Political Organization

Traditional Sümi society is characterized by a relatively centralized administrative structure led by a hereditary village chief known as the 'Akukau'. The core social framework is organized into three primary units:

1. The village (apfu or aphu)

2. Village sub-sections (assah)

3. The bachelor's dormitory (apuki/iliki) (Hutton, 1968)

The Apuki played a vital role in the socialization of young men, functioning as both a communal space and an educational institution. Here, young youths were instructed in oral traditions, tribal history, martial skills, and customary law, ensuring the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and discipline (Sema, 1985).

Beyond its educational role, the Apuki also contributed to customary unity and readiness, serving as a hub for community defense and collective decision-making.

The authority of the Akukau was typically supported by a council of elders who advised on matters of conflict resolution, land use, and ritual observance highlighting a balance between central leadership and communal consensus. This structure reflects the deeply integrated nature of social and political life in Sümi villages, where governance, cultural instruction, and moral values were closely linked through institutions rooted in oral tradition and communal practice.

Fig 1: The Morung at Lazami Village

Illiki (Girl's Dormitory)

The illiki functioned as the female dormitory like that of the Apuki (male dormitory) serve as a communal space for young women in the village. More than just a dormitory, the illiki was an informal educational institution where girls who have reached the age of 15 were trained in various traditional crafts and life skills. Under

the guidance of the elder women, they learned weaving, spinning, cooking, embroidery along with social etiquettes, moral instruction, and cultural values necessary for becoming respectable women in the community. Singing and dancing were also part of their training, enhancing their cultural expression. It provides young women with a structured environment in which they could cultivate their abilities and embrace their maidenhood with dignity and pride. The illiki usually takes place during the winter season, after the harvest and following the Suquni festival (LSU Souvenir, 2021).

2.8.4 Religious Beliefs and Cultural Transformation

The Sümi Nagas were traditionally animists, placing spiritual significance on elements of nature and worshipping a range of deities such as Alhou, Kungumi, and Tughami. Their religious life was governed by gennas, strict ritual taboos and prohibitions that structured social conduct and daily activity (Koreti, 2013). However, the advent of the 20th century brought profound religious and cultural change. The widespread conversion to Christianity led to the decline of indigenous beliefs and practices. This shift contributed to the rejection of what were previously seen as superstitious customs, the introduction of Western-style formal education, and the reconfiguration of traditional social hierarchies and norms (Aye, 2005).

In addition, Christian missionary efforts promoted literacy and health awareness, which gradually altered the beliefs of Sümi communities. Despite the loss of many traditional practices, elements of pre-Christian rituals still survive in folk songs, oral narratives, and seasonal festivals indicating a layered process of transformation rather than complete cultural replacement.

2.8.5 Oral Literature and Cultural Preservation

The cultural identity of the Sümi Nagas has been historically sustained through a vibrant oral tradition. This oral heritage includes a wide array of expressive forms such as:

1. Folktales featuring both human and animal protagonists

2. Proverbs and sayings reflecting communal wisdom

3. Folk songs associated with love, labour, and rituals

4. Mythological narratives rooted in ancestral belief systems (Sema, 2009)

These forms have long served as vehicles for transmitting values, historical memory, and social norms across generations. In recent decades, Sümi scholars and writers have taken significant steps to document and preserve this oral heritage in written form. Notable examples include:

1. A Glimpse of Long Ago by Swu (2014), a bilingual collection of folk poetry.

2. Sümi and the Dance of Dark Spirits by T. Sema (2015), a work of fiction grounded in Sümi folklore.

3. The Sümi Ahuna by Assumi (2009), which documents the cultural and ritual aspects of the Ahuna festival

Contemporary revitalization efforts have expanded to include a variety of initiatives, such as:

1. Academic research and documentation of oral traditions

2. Cultural festivals that publicly celebrate Sümi heritage

3. Integration of folk literature into school syllabi

4. Publication of creative and scholarly works in the Sümi language

These efforts reflect a growing recognition of the need to preserve intangible cultural heritage in the face of rapid socio-cultural change. The Sümi experience offers a compelling example of how indigenous communities negotiate continuity and change. From a history shaped by warrior traditions to their transformation into a predominantly Christian society, and from oral storytelling to literary production, the Sümis demonstrate a unique form of cultural resilience. By preserving oral literature and adapting it to modern platforms, the Sümi people not only safeguard their cultural past but also enrich their evolving identity. These ongoing initiatives ensure

that traditional knowledge remains relevant, providing both a foundation for contemporary cultural expression.

2.8.6 Sümi Naga Festivals and Religion

Festivals play a vital role in the cultural life of the Sümi Nagas, serving as expressions of communal identity, agricultural rhythm, and spiritual belief. Traditionally passed down through oral transmission, these celebrations are closely linked to seasonal cycles and agrarian practices, marking moments of transition, abundance, and thanksgiving.

While numerous festivals were once part of the Sümi ritual calendar, Tuluni and Ahuna remain the most prominently celebrated today. These events are characterized by communal feasting, unity, and joyful festivities, reflecting both the socio-economic life and spiritual ethos of the community.

Tuluni

Tuluni is a significant annual festival of the Sümi Nagas, still celebrated with enthusiasm today. The name 'Tuluni' is believed to have originated from Tulu, a man who lived in Fuiqa (Laza) known for his generosity. During festivals, he would freely offer *Ashi Aji* (meat and rice beer) to all. His home became a popular gathering place where people feasted, drank, and chanted his name in celebration. Tulu's selflessness and willingness to share his food, drink, and wealth made him widely respected. Over time, his home became central to communal festivities, and in his honor, the festival came to be known as 'Tuluni'.

Not only is the festival of Tuluni named after Tulu, the generous man who lived in Fuiqa (Laza), but also the place where he cultivated rice is still called 'Tululuqa' or 'Tuluqa' to this day. The Tuluni festival is celebrated annually on the 21st day of the 7th month. Unlike other Sümi festivals, Tuluni is uniquely observed. On the 17th day of the Tuluni month, the chief priest or *Awou* formally announces the upcoming festivities: "ishi hu, thoghiu hu, aghiniu no shigheni pini chou" meaning "today and tomorrow, we will go to the field and celebrate Shigheni day after tomorrow". This announcement is known as 'Anishu'. On the 19th day, people gather to celebrate

Shigheni, a pre-festival ritual, and prepare wine for Tuluni. On the 20th day, the villagers go to their respective fields to perform specific agricultural rituals known as ‘alu mungu’. Finally, on the 21st day, the main Tuluni festival is celebrated. Regardless of wealth or status, everyone prepares food, meat, and wine to share with family, friends, in-laws, and neighbours. It is a time of joyful community celebration marked by feasting, hospitality, and thanksgiving.

In olden days, the villagers would form groups of co-workers, known as Alojimi, to work in the fields by taking turns. These groups, made up of different age groups or co-workers, would begin preparing for the celebration of the Tuluni festival by earning and collecting money. After the feast, men of all ages would gather and go around the village, visiting every household and chanting song that shared happiness. During this time, the drink made from rice beer would flow freely and fill the cups. On this day, prospective daughters-in-law and sons-in-law are warmly welcomed and hosted by the families. They are served a sumptuous meal.

On the next day of Tuluni festival, the villagers gather to clean the path leading to the fields. This communal work is known as ‘Akupumi Laghe’. The main purpose of ‘Akupumi’ is to make sure those farmers, often carrying heavy baskets and loads while returning from the fields, can walk comfortably along a clean and clear path. Men of all ages take part in this activity. After completing the work, they gather at a common spot to sing and chant together as a symbol of unity. Only after performing certain rituals do the individuals return to their respective homes.

Ahuna

The Ahuna Festival is a significant post-harvest festival of the Sümi Nagas, observed in the twelfth month of their traditional agricultural calendar, known as Ahunaqhi. It is celebrated after the harvest is brought home. This ritual marks the completion of the agricultural cycle and the beginning of communal rest. Traditionally, rice is prepared in bamboo tubes or clay pots and shared among kin and neighbours, symbolizing abundance, gratitude, and social unity. The offering of the first portion of the harvest to divine forces once held central importance, reflecting indigenous beliefs in fertility and reciprocity with nature (Assumi, 2014*)*.

Ahuna functions as more than a seasonal festivity; it is a festival of thanksgiving and a moment of cultural reaffirmation. The occasion brings together families and clans to engage in oral storytelling, folk singing, and traditional dances. Elders transmit clan histories, customary laws, and moral teachings through proverbs and performance, reinforcing collective memory and intergenerational ties. The festive setting, filled with indigenous foods and ceremonial attire, becomes a living archive of Sümi identity and ethical values.

In contemporary practice, Ahuna continues to evolve while retaining its cultural essence. Now observed both in rural and urban spaces, the festival serves as a symbol of cultural resilience and identity. Its transformation into a public cultural event reflects conscious efforts to preserve and revitalize indigenous traditions in the face of religious and social change. Through such adaptations, the Sümi community sustains a vibrant connection between ancestral heritage and modern expression.

Today, both Tuluni and Ahuna are observed as significant public festivals among the Sümi, marked by vibrant cultural expressions including folk songs, traditional dances, indigenous cuisine, sports, and various cultural competitions. Deeply rooted in customary practices, these celebrations are closely associated with gennas, ritual taboos and sacred observances and symbolise the culmination and success of agricultural labour.

Suquni

Suquni is a traditional festival celebrated by the Sümi Naga people. It is celebrated in Aqhini qhi (November) to mark the beginning of the New Year. Observed before the start of any agricultural activity, it is a festival of sanctification and renewal. The purpose of Suquni was to cleanse both the individual and the community, allowing them to enter the New Year with purity and positivity. It symbolized the aspiration to live the coming year free from evil and misfortune. Spiritually and socially, the festival played a vital role in preparing for the year ahead. Much like the Angami celebrate ‘Sekrenyi’ to mark the New Year, the Sümi Nagas once observed Suquni with equal importance.

The main purpose of the Suquni festival is to seek blessings for a year free from illness and misfortune. On the eve of Suquni, boys who traditionally sleep in the bachelor's dormitory (Apuki) go into the forest to spend the night, a practice known as 'Pahzu'. At dawn, they return to the village, loudly invoking the deity 'Aghashu' to come and bless them. Their chants echo through the village:

"Oh hilau, oh hilau, tilau ye atsuba, awoba likhi eno, hilau ye mithe mighei, oh hilau!"

These invocations are believed to summon divine favour and protection.

As part of the rituals observed during Suquni, villagers perform the casting or drawing of lots known as 'asaqhi' to predict what the coming year might bring. They also engage in traditional games such as 'Alauthi kikive' which involves the use of seeds from the long sword bean plant. These practices reflect the community's hopes for well-being and harmony in the year ahead. Although its observance has declined in contemporary times, Suquni was once a significant event in the cultural calendar of the Sümi people.

The Sümi Nagas have a vibrant cultural landscape, enriched by numerous festivals that highlight their heritage and foster community bonding. Their cultural identity is also marked by a strong sense of dignity, brilliance, and the pursuit of renown. Among the most esteemed traditions were the Feast of Merit and headhunting, both of which significantly contributed to an individual's prestige and social status.

Feast of Merit

The Feast of Merit, in particular, was a major cultural event involving elaborate rituals, communal feasting, and gatherings. This prestigious honour was reserved for individuals who had shown exceptional bravery in warfare and had accumulated substantial wealth. Typically hosted by a married man, the Feast of Merit was a celebration that welcomed every member of the community, regardless of social standing.

The host of the Feast of Merit would slaughter mithuns, cattle, and pigs to provide food for the entire village. In addition to the meat, rice and rice beer were also served, accompanied by singing and dancing, which added to the festive atmosphere. The feast was conducted in two main stages. First, the host would slaughter animals to distribute meat to in-laws and close relatives, a practice known as 'Aghuvashi'. Second, more cattle and pigs were slaughtered and distributed to those who had previously hosted the Feast of Merit, a custom referred to as 'Akisheshi' in the Sümi language.

The Feast of Merit is typically celebrated in January, known as *Aphukusa Qhi* in Sümi. However, preparations begin as early as November (Aqhini Qhi) and continue through December (Shikusho Qhi). One of the notable pre-celebration rituals includes erecting a ceremonial pole adorned with cane and a special variety of bamboo. On this designated day, the host prepares a special meal and rice beer for the men who assist in setting up the pole, marking the beginning of the celebratory preparations.

Religion

Reflecting on the religious traditions of the Sümi Nagas, it is evident that nature worship formed the foundation of their ancestral belief system. Religion held a central place in Sümi culture, deeply influencing both individual and communal life. As Koreti (n.d.) explains, religion comprises a structured set of beliefs and practices that address life's ultimate purpose. Much like culture, it serves as a guide for individual behavior, grounded in principles upheld by divine, supernatural, or transcendent moral frameworks. In the context of Sümi society, religion was inseparable from daily life and closely intertwined with social structures.

Anthropologist J.H. Hutton (1921) categorized Sümi religious practice under the broad term "animism." Within their spiritual worldview, the Sümis recognized three primary types of spirits. The first is *Alhou,* viewed as a generally benevolent yet distant Creator who rarely engages directly in human matters. The second is the *Kungumi*, or sky spirit, believed to reside in the heavens above. The third and most

directly involved in human affairs are the *Tughami,* or earth spirits, often considered malevolent and responsible for various misfortunes (Hutton, 1921).

With the arrival of Christianity, the Sümi people gradually abandoned their traditional nature-worship practices; as such beliefs were incompatible with Christian teachings. As they embraced Christianity, many of their ancestral rituals and gennas (taboos or prohibitions) were left behind. Unlike the Ao Nagas, the Sümi were reportedly more resistant to conversion, prompting Christian missionaries to seek the cooperation of village leaders, known as Akukau, in order to gain the trust and acceptance of the broader community.

The introduction of Christianity brought both disruptions and advancements. On one hand, it led to a departure from age-old customs and spiritual beliefs; on the other, it introduced significant social changes, particularly in the realm of education. For a community without a tradition of literacy and whose belief system centred on the worship of natural elements like animals, plants, and stones, the introduction of the Bible marked the first encounter with a written text, one that served as a gateway to new forms of knowledge and critical inquiry. It marked the beginning of written literature in the Sümi language and played a central role in fostering belief in a singular deity, Alhou, thereby moving the community away from earlier superstitious beliefs and traditional practices.

In addition to the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was also translated into the Sümi language by N. Najekhu Yeptho in 1970, marking another significant milestone in the development of Sümi literary culture.

Early studies of the Sümi Nagas were primarily carried out by British administrators, surveyors, and missionaries, who documented their observations based on direct interactions and field visits. One notable work is Verrier Elwin's *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, published in the 1960s, which provides a detailed account of the cultural and traditional life of various Naga tribes. During this period, the Sümi Nagas were still undergoing migratory transitions, and British anthropologists and genealogists sought to record various aspects of their life. These early ethnographic writings addressed a wide range of topics, including the Sümis' geographical

distribution and kinship systems, their origins, attire, domestic routines, religious practices, customary laws, language, and oral traditions.

2.8.7 Time and Calendar Practice in Sümi Culture

The Sümi community possesses a rich cultural heritage intricately linked to their agrarian lifestyle and close relationship with the natural environment. Their perception of time and calendrical systems is closely tied to agricultural rhythms, which serve as the foundation for organizing communal life and seasonal activities. Traditional festivals and ceremonies often reflect this deep-rooted connection between timekeeping and the agricultural cycle.

The Sümi people structured their lunar calendar around farming seasons, with each month associated with specific agricultural tasks. This seasonal alignment highlights the centrality of agriculture in shaping their temporal framework. The Sümi lunar months are listed alongside the corresponding Gregorian (Roman) calendar, offering insight into how the Sümi conceptualized and organized time in relation to their occupational practices.

Roman month	**Sümi month**
January	Luu
February	Süphu
March	Lusa
April	Ghixu
May	Moza
June	Amüha
July	Anih
August	Saghi
September	Amütha
October	Ghile
November	Ahuna
December	Liphi

The traditional Sümi notion of a seven-day week was organized around daily tasks and broader cycles such as planting, harvesting, or festivals. Days were commonly identified in relation to specific events or activities.

Days of a week

Monday	Asüzani
Tuesday	Aghizani
Wednesday	Ashigheni
Thursday	Anigheni
Friday	Mucholani
Saturday	Tupulani
Sunday	Tüghakhani

Traditionally, the Sümi did not measure time in numerical or mechanical terms but understood it through natural indicators and social activities. Phases of the moon, seasonal changes, animal behaviour, and the blooming of specific plants served as important markers of time. The main agricultural periods, such as sowing and harvesting seasons, played a central role in structuring the calendar, guiding both farming tasks and community rituals. With the introduction of Christianity and formal education, western calendar systems gradually began to influence Sümi timekeeping. Nevertheless, traditional perceptions of time continue to be observed in rural areas and during communal gatherings, highlighting the enduring nature and flexibility of indigenous temporal systems. Like many tribal communities, the Sümis depend heavily on agriculture for their livelihood. Due to the labour-intensive and primitive nature of their farming methods, almost every aspect of life is subordinated to the agricultural calendar. The Sümis practice jhum cultivation, a traditional method in which land is cleared and cultivated for two consecutive seasons, then left fallow to revert to jungle for several years. The cycle varies depending on the availability of land.

2.9 Sümi Naga Literature

A range of written texts, documents, and scholarly articles exist on the Sümi Naga tribe, many of which are translations by writers and researchers. In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in efforts by the younger generation to reconnect with their cultural roots through literary expression. Some Sümi authors have begun documenting the traditions and experiences of their own community, as well as those of the broader Naga society.

One significant contribution is Hokishe Sema's *Emergence of Nagaland* (1981), which explores the early history of the Nagas, their encounters with British colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, and the subsequent political, social, and economic developments in Nagaland. Another important work is *Gennas and Festivals of the Sema* by Najekhu Yeptho, which provides insights into the religious practices and ceremonial traditions of the Sümi people.

Additionally, *A Rediscovery and Rebuilding of Naga Cultural Values* by Inato Yekheto Shikhu, published by Regency Publications, offer a critical perspective on the influence of Western values and technological advancement on Naga cultural and religious life. The book contends that political interference and cultural dominance have adversely affected indigenous identity. Shikhu advocates for a return to traditional, earth-based cultural practices, encouraging the Naga people to rediscover and revive their ancestral values in order to critically engage with, adapt, and restore their indigenous worldview and cultural identity.

Zhekuto Assumi's *The Sümi Ahuna* (2009) offers a comprehensive account of one of the most significant festivals celebrated by the Sümi Nagas. The work delves into the origins of the Ahuna festival, detailing the preparatory processes, associated rituals, and the manner in which the festival is celebrated. In addition to the festival itself, the book sheds light on the community's agricultural cycles, patterns of migration, religious beliefs, and ceremonial practices that are connected to Ahuna.

In *The Impact of Christian Education: 100 Years of Christianity in Sümi Baptist Churches* (1903–2005), Aye examines the historical development of Christianity among the Sümi people. The author provides an overview of the traditional religious beliefs and rituals practiced by the community prior to the advent of Christianity, including ceremonies conducted to appease supernatural forces. The book further explores the transformative influence of Christian education on Sümi society, emphasizing how it reshaped traditional ceremonies, social relationships, rituals, and religious worldviews.

Khatoli Khala's *Women and Agriculture in Nagaland: A Gender Study of Sümi Customary Law and Custom* offers an important perspective on how customary laws shape gender roles within Sümi society. She explores the ways in which traditional practices have contributed to both the reinforcement and negotiation of gender justice, particularly in agrarian contexts. Similarly, K.N. Nekha's *Tracing Specific Folk Values of the Sümi Tribe of Nagaland* (2015) reflects on the ethical and cultural principles embedded in Sümi folk traditions. His work highlights the importance of these values in sustaining social harmony, especially in a world that is increasingly shifting away from indigenous moral frameworks. Shitovi Yepthomi's *The Initial Belief of the Sümi Nagas and Their Acceptance of New Religion* (2016) complements this discussion by focusing on the spiritual dimension of Sümi life. He traces the gradual transition from animistic belief systems to the acceptance of Christianity, revealing how older religious practices continued to shape the community's perspective even as new influences were absorbed. Together, these works contribute significantly to understanding the cultural vitality and adaptive strategies of the Sümi Nagas in the face of social and religious change.

Several authors have undertaken the task of translating and compiling Sümi folk poems and folktales into English. *A Glimpse of Long Ago: Sümi English Folk Poem – A Bilingual Collection*, compiled and translated by Ahikali Swu, features a curated selection of poems that evoke a deep yearning to reconnect with the lived

experiences and cultural ethos of the Sümi people from earlier generations. Another notable work*, Sümi and the Dance of the Dark Spirits* by Toinali Sema, is a novel grounded in Sümi folklore. This work skillfully weaves together elements of fantasy, fairy tales, and oral traditions, offering younger readers an accessible and engaging introduction to folk wisdom and cultural heritage.

Alongside English-language publications, a number of valuable resources have also been produced in the Sümi language. These include collections of folk poems and tales, storybooks, dictionaries, and grammar texts. One such work is *Sümi Tsayeh (Sümi Grammar)* by I. Lhozhevi Sema, which is used as a textbook for Modern Indian Language (MIL) courses at the higher secondary level. The book provides comprehensive instruction on proper language usage, covering topics such as parts of speech, verb tenses, clause formation, and pronunciation. It also addresses aspects of syntax and inflection, thereby making a significant contribution to the grammatical and linguistic development of the Sümi language.

Kughakiche Eno Xulhe (Folktales and Stories), authored by I. Lhozhevi Sema and published by the Sümi Literature Board, is prescribed as a prose textbook for Modern Indian Language (MIL) courses. The book offers valuable insights into the political, social, economic, and religious dimensions of Naga life, with particular emphasis on the Sümi community. Similarly, *Apu Assu Lesheh (Folk Poems)*, a collection of Sümi poetry by S. V. Sheyepu, addresses various socio-cultural themes and serves as a poetry text within the higher secondary curriculum. Scato Swu's *Sülekuthoh* is a significant contribution to the preservation of Sümi oral tradition, documenting a wide range of Sümi proverbs along with their literal meanings and cultural contexts.

Another important contribution is *Sümi Tsashe (Sümi Dictionary)* by I. Lhozhevi Sema, which compiles the lexicon of the Sümi language, including synonymous terms and corresponding English definitions. Although the compilation process began several years earlier, the dictionary was officially published in 1992. As the Sümi culture originally lacked a formal written tradition, oral transmission was the primary means through which knowledge, customs, and stories were preserved.

Nonetheless, the emergence of a growing number of Sümi writers in recent years signifies a gradual but steady expansion of written literature and cultural documentation. In this context, literature becomes a vital medium of creative expression, enabling authors to reflect on, preserve, and convey the values, beliefs, and life ways of their society.

2.10 Socio Cultural Identity

The Sümi Nagas possess a rich historical legacy and a vibrant cultural identity that distinctly sets them apart within the north-eastern region of India. Their folklore, music, traditional attire, and cuisine collectively reflect a unique cultural ethos. This identity is further articulated through their social structures, linguistic practices, religious rituals, seasonal festivals, and material expressions such as ornaments, art, and craftwork. The Sümi community's religious beliefs, customary practices, political systems, and social institutions have historically contributed to the cohesion and resilience of their collective life.

Culture, in its broadest sense, comprises two fundamental components: material and non-material. The material culture includes tangible aspects such as architecture, attire, weaponry, dietary habits, and modes of subsistence. In contrast, non-material culture encompasses the intangible dimensions of social life; values, belief systems, customs, oral traditions, songs and ceremonial practices. These material and non-material elements, taken together, function as the foundational markers of cultural identity, enabling differentiation among tribal communities and shaping the social fabric of the Sümi Nagas.

Folk literature, often referred to as oral literature, is widely recognized as a crucial source for reconstructing historical narratives and for understanding the diverse cultural forms embedded within a community. It is predominantly through oral traditions that individuals become acquainted with the history, customs, legal conventions, and belief systems of their society. Serving as a conduit between generations and across cultural boundaries, folk literature plays a vital role in the

preservation and transmission of collective memory and communal identity. The continuity of such traditions is sustained by communal participation and a shared sense of belonging.

Folk literature encompasses a broad spectrum of cultural expressions, including traditional customs, indigenous knowledge systems, recreational practices, belief structures, rituals, and both performing and non-performing arts. Its content typically comprises various narrative forms such as myths, legends, fairy tales, animal fables, riddles, proverbs, ballads, and folk songs.

The study of folklore provides scholars with valuable insights into human behaviour and socio-cultural norms as they manifest within specific ethnic frameworks. Oral narratives form an essential component of a community's historical consciousness, contributing to social cohesion and cultural continuity. Moreover, they play a pivotal role in shaping and affirming ethnic identity by serving as repositories of collective values, social codes, and moral teachings. These narratives frequently emphasize ethical principles such as the dignity of labor, integrity, sincerity, discipline, respect for others, and loyalty to the community.

The analysis of folktales offers valuable insights into the conceptual frameworks that underpin a society’s values, belief systems, and social structures, including its mechanisms of social regulation and control. As a vital component of oral tradition, folktales serve as a foundational lens through which the cultural ethos of a community can be understood. They facilitate a deeper comprehension of a society’s philosophies, norms, customs and beliefs. Moreover, oral narratives play a crucial role in shaping and sustaining collective identity, as they are inextricably woven into the socio-cultural fabric of a people.

Within the oral literature of the Sümi Nagas, a diverse array of socio-cultural concerns is articulated. These narratives reflect class distinctions between the wealthy and the impoverished, reinforce or critique patriarchal norms, highlight the marginalization and mistreatment of women, and portray deeply held beliefs in

superstition and animism. Recurring thematic motifs include the transformative power of love often extending to acts of self-sacrifice, familial discord, the pursuit of peace, and existential reflections on death and warfare. These recurring concerns not only define the thematic core of Sümi oral literature but also provide a detailed understanding of the values, tensions, and ethical dilemmas that shape Sümi society.

Among the diverse forms of folk literature, folk songs occupy a particularly prominent and culturally resonant position. Within Sümi Naga society, they are intricately woven into the fabric of daily life, performed during a wide array of ceremonies, festivals, and communal rituals. These songs are not merely artistic expressions but are integral to the ritual and cultural identity of the community. Serving both aesthetic and functional purposes, Sümi folk songs act as vehicles for historical memory, moral instruction and the transmission of collective values.

Beyond entertainment, these songs articulate a wide emotional range, from joy and celebration to grief and longing, thereby offering spiritual and emotional sustenance. Regarded as the voice of the community's soul, they encapsulate communal sentiments and shared experiences. The mode of transmission is strictly oral; songs are learned through participatory engagement rather than formal education. This oral pedagogy ensures that the songs are memorized, internalized, and passed down through generations, thus preserving and perpetuating the cultural heritage of the Sümi Nagas.

Among the Sümi Nagas, folk songs are an integral part of communal life, performed during a wide array of events such as festivals, weddings, social gatherings, religious ceremonies, group hunts, agricultural activities like land clearing, sowing, and harvesting, as well as during funerary rites. In each of these contexts, folk songs serve as cultural anchors that not only preserve shared traditions but also strengthen community ties and intergenerational memory. Typically rendered in groups, these songs transcend mere entertainment, functioning as a means of emotional expression and cultural continuity. Sümi folk songs encompass various thematic categories, with love songs referred to in the Sümi language as *kikimiye le* holding a particularly

significant place. These compositions often give voice to unspoken romantic sentiments, allowing individuals to express affection in ways deemed socially appropriate within traditional settings. In earlier times, young men and women would convey their emotions through these melodic exchanges. A notable example is *Ixeu Nikujo le*, a well-known love song still performed in some Sümi communities today.

"Ho Ixeu nikujo ishe aki ho,
ho akithi lo kukho natha ina ho
,ho akuxu lau jo ishe kukho ho,
kukho moni ili ishe kugha ho".(Tuyi Kappo,p. 42)

This particular Sümi love song centres on the theme of enduring affection, where a lover professes unwavering devotion to his beloved, vowing that their bond will remain unbroken and grow stronger until death separates them. In traditional times, such songs were commonly used by lovers to convey their heartfelt emotions and reaffirm their commitment in a culturally accepted and poetic form.

Work songs, known in the Sümi language as *Akumla le*, are traditionally performed in connection with agricultural labour. These songs narrate the various stages of farming, from the initial surveying of forested land for cultivation to the eventual harvesting of crops. They are commonly sung by both young men and women while transporting harvested grains from the fields to the granary, and are also performed by women during routine household chores, serving both as rhythmic accompaniment and a means of cultural expression. Marriage songs likewise hold a prominent place in Sümi folk traditions. Typically developed and popularized by the youth, these songs reflect the social and emotional dimensions of matrimonial customs. In addition, songs related to hunting are part of the Sümi oral repertoire. One such example, *Ishe ishi nana,* remains popular in some Sümi villages and captures the communal spirit and valor associated with traditional hunting practices.

"Ho ishe ishi nana ho,
ho ,ashi hanili ishe itsu ho" (Tuyi kappo, p.42)

This type of song is sung when the Sümi people set out for hunting and on the way while returning. The successful hunting and the background are narrated in these types of songs. Marriage songs are always accompanied in marriage ceremony. Besides these songs, there are Funeral songs, festival songs, war songs etc.

Folk poems, proverbs and sayings are concise literary forms characterized by their brevity and often symbolic or hidden meanings. These compositions encapsulate everyday experiences while reflecting the socio-cultural, economic, historical, political, and geographical contexts of the communities from which they emerge. Through their succinct and metaphorical nature, they offer insights into the values, customs, and lived realities of a particular society.

Among the Sümi Nagas, proverbs and sayings are frequently employed in everyday speech, serving as vehicles for wit, satire, and cultural critique. These concise expressions reflect the social behaviour, values, and attitudes of the community, often conveying moral instruction or societal norms in a humorous or ironic tone. Functioning as an informal code of conduct, such oral expressions reinforce rules of etiquette and ethical behaviour. Proverbs are also used to enrich colloquial speech and emphasize particular points during conversation, thereby enhancing the expressive quality of the Sümi language. Beyond offering practical wisdom, these proverbs encapsulate broader philosophical understandings and lived realities.

Similarly, Sümi folk poems articulate a wide spectrum of cultural and social experiences. These poems explore themes such as love, marriage, separation, conflict, peace, poverty, and human resilience. One example is *Omugha (Your Luck),* a brief yet poignant verse that juxtaposes physical beauty with economic hardship. The poem includes the lines: “Nono muzu aye, olomino sakiche ju, aloino alo” translated as “When in hunger, upon your beloved’s locks may you gaze, and in bliss, may you be” (Swu, p. 1). Here, the speaker addresses a son who marries a woman admired for her beauty alone, ultimately leading to a life marked by poverty, a reflection of traditional Sümi values that esteem hard work over superficial charm.

Another poem, *Kuthunu hi Nilo* (*We Shall Meet*), tells the story of two lovers who, despite their deep affection, are separated and marry others. The poem captures the emotional depth of longing and the inevitability of societal obligations, echoing broader themes of love, fate, and human compromise found throughout Sümi oral literature.

The short verse *Ishe! No ilolai, iloloye, Imphu puwo* translated as "Alas! You I loved, and yet, I let you go" (Swu, p. 27) expresses the emotional weight of separation following marital betrayal. In traditional Sümi society, when a divorce occurs due to the wife's infidelity, it is customary for her to return the bride price paid by the husband. This line captures both personal sorrow and the cultural expectation of restitution, reflecting the moral frameworks embedded within Sümi marital customs.

Folk poem such as, *Ghi muzu khavelai (Has the Paddy Ripened?*) addresses the mistreatment of women within marriage, particularly by their husbands. Beneath its agricultural metaphor lies a poignant critique of gender-based injustice, highlighting the emotional and social toll endured by women in domestic spaces.

The term folktale encompasses a wide range of narrative forms rooted in the oral traditions of a community. It serves not only as a vehicle for storytelling but also as a medium through which a society articulates its repressed emotions, collective anxieties, and aspirations. Folktales are integral to the cultural fabric of a community, functioning as tools for transmitting ethical and moral values across generations. Often metaphorical in nature, these narratives reflect the subconscious desires and psychological landscapes of the people who create and share them.

Among the Sümi Nagas, folktales exist in various forms, including animal stories, supernatural accounts, and tales centred on human experiences. These stories encapsulate traditional beliefs, ritual practices, imaginative thought, and culturally grounded moral insights. The narrative repertoire of the Sümi includes short stories, myths, legends, fables, and fairy tales, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the tribe's values and belief system. Through these oral narratives, themes such as creation, cultural identity, ritual practices, and the realities of daily life are explored

and preserved, offering a valuable window into the communal consciousness and historical memory of the Sümi Naga people.

Folklore, particularly in the form of folktales, serves as a dynamic medium through which both the real and imagined dimensions of a community's socio-cultural life are articulated. In the case of the Sümi Nagas, folktales not only preserve traditional knowledge and beliefs but also provide insight into human behaviour, interpersonal relationships, and societal challenges. A close study of these narratives offers valuable perspectives on the community's moral framework and collective consciousness.

Stories such as *Inakha eno Ghonili, Khaulipu eno Tsuipu*, and *Khakhu eno Sheyili* reveal a rich blend of cultural values and social concerns. In particular, *Khakhu eno Sheyili* addresses significant issues such as marriage, divorce, and the mistreatment of women. These tales act as reflective tools through which the community negotiates its understanding of justice, duty, and gender roles. A line from this tale, "Pama kulakupu shi no akivishi kughuna ache kemu Khakhu pazakishe lhokusa ghenguno athiu ye pama ixave", translated as "they were happily married and lived a good life, but due to the ill nature of Khakhu's mother, they were separated" (Lhozhevi Sema, p. 27) illustrates how familial conflict and societal expectations can disrupt personal happiness. Through such narratives, Sümi folktales offer detailed commentaries on the pressures and realities that shape human relationships within their cultural context.

The short folk poems, stories, songs, and other oral traditions of the Sümi Nagas serve as a lens through which one can observe the socio-cultural realities of the community. These folkloric expressions frequently revolve around themes such as economic disparity, patriarchal norms, familial discord, the transformative power of love, the marginalization of women, and enduring beliefs in the supernatural.

In essence, the folk literature of the Sümi Nagas constitutes a vital component of their cultural identity and social organization. Through these narratives, the

community articulates its collective values, negotiates social tensions, and safeguards ancestral knowledge. The recurring motifs gender hierarchies, class distinctions, spiritual beliefs, and communal bonds not only represent traditional perspectives but also continue to shape contemporary social and cultural practices.

A critical engagement with Sümi Naga folk literature enables a more complex understanding of the tribe's socio-cultural landscape. These oral traditions reflect the dynamic interrelation between heritage, belief systems, and changing socio-political contexts. As repositories of lived experience and indigenous wisdom, they emphasize the need for cultural preservation amidst the pressures of modernization and external influences.

CHAPTER- 3
Folklore and Socio-cultural issues

3.1 Definition and Scope of Folklore

The term folklore broadly encompasses material culture, social customs, festivals, performing folk-arts, and oral literature transmitted through observation or imitation (Dundes, 1965). The word was first coined by British antiquarian William Thoms in 1846 as an alternative to terms like "Popular Antiquities" or "Popular Literature" (Dorson, 1972).

Folklore may be understood as the body of traditional knowledge, customs, narratives, beliefs, and practices that are shared within a community and transmitted primarily through oral tradition or through imitation. Over time, the academic understanding of folklore has expanded to include its multifaceted functions in preserving cultural heritage and reinforcing communal identity.

Alan Dundes (1965) advanced this foundational view by drawing attention to what he called “popular antiquities” the accumulated body of folk knowledge, beliefs, and artistic expression that exists outside of formal historical documentation. Dundes argued that such materials provide valuable insights into the experiences, values, fears, and aspirations of ordinary people, offering dimensions of cultural understanding often overlooked by official historical narratives (Dundes, 1965, p. 4).

Similarly, Richard M. Dorson (1972) defined folklore as the traditional expressive culture of a people, encompassing oral literature, folk music, dance, belief systems, rituals, and material arts. He emphasized that folklore is not a static archive of the past but a living and evolving cultural process, constantly renewed through reinterpretation and performance within the community (Dorson, 1972, p.5).

Dundes (1965) also stressed the functional role of folklore, defining it as the range of traditional expressions and practices that are passed down through speech or behavioral imitation. This perspective presents folklore not as a fixed collection of relics but as a dynamic and ongoing cultural process (Dundes, 1965, p.6).

The structure of folklore comprises various genres such as myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk songs, and ritual practices each serving distinct social and cultural purposes. As Bascom (1965) notes, these forms play important roles in educating the younger generation, providing entertainment, reinforcing social norms, and preserving historical memory. They function as cultural tools through which societies articulate their beliefs, regulate behavior, and construct shared identities.

It is important to note that folklore is not exclusive to rural or isolated communities; rather, it is a universal phenomenon found in all human societies, including urban and contemporary settings. Bauman (1977) described folklore as a form of traditional communication performed in specific social contexts, highlighting its capacity to adapt and persist in changing cultural environments.

For the Sümi Nagas, folklore plays a crucial role in preserving socio-cultural knowledge and affirming collective identity. It reflects shared histories, moral values, and spiritual beliefs, serving as a means of cultural continuity amidst social change. As a living tradition, Sümi folklore continues to adapt, acting as both a repository of ancestral wisdom and a medium for negotiating contemporary realities.

3.1.1 Transmission of Folklore

Dundes (1965) highlights that defining folklore solely through oral transmission overlook the complexity of how traditions are passed down. In non-literate societies, almost all cultural knowledge is shared orally whether it is language, survival skills, or customs but not all of this qualifies as folklore. This shows that oral transmission alone cannot be the distinguishing factor. Moreover, in literate cultures, some folklore takes written forms, such as verses exchanged in autograph books or poetic epitaphs on gravestones, which are still part of folk tradition despite their textual form. Dundes also points out that some types of folklore, like folk dances, are transmitted through physical movement and performance, not through spoken or written words. These examples reveal that folklore is more accurately defined by its communal and traditional nature rather than by the medium of transmission alone.

3.1.2 Definitions by Scholars

Various scholars have defined folklore differently. MacEdward Leach (1949) describes it as "the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc., in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people."

Richard A. Waterman (1952) focuses on verbal expression, defining folklore as "that art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium."

Aurelio M. Espinosa (1943) emphasizes its traditional nature, calling it "the accumulated store of what mankind has experienced, learned, and practiced across the ages as popular and traditional knowledge, as distinguished from so-called scientific knowledge."

Dundes (1965) provides an extensive classification, including verbal folklore (myths, jokes, proverbs), material folklore (costumes, quilts, food recipes), customary folklore (dances, festivals, gestures), and folk belief systems (superstitions, folk medicine).

3.2 Evolution of the Concept of "Folk"

In its earliest use, the word folk referred mainly to rural communities, especially those considered uneducated or outside the reach of formal schooling. William John Thoms, who coined the term folklore in 1846, applied it to the traditions of peasant life, treating these people as keepers of old customs and oral knowledge (Thoms, 1846/1965). This view assumed a certain distance between the folk and modern, literate society casting them more as cultural remnants than as active voices.

Over time, scholars began to challenge this narrow view. Alan Dundes (1965) argued that folk should be seen more broadly not as a specific rural class, but as any group with shared identity and traditional forms of expression. This could include workers, religious communities, or even children. What mattered was not where people lived

or their level of education, but the way they passed on knowledge and values through informal channels like stories, sayings, and songs.

Later, Dan Ben-Amos took this further by shifting attention to the nature of communication itself. He defined folklore as “artistic communication in small groups,” focusing on how people interact and perform traditions in everyday life (Ben-Amos, 1971, p. 13). This understanding is especially useful when studying Sümi Naga folk literature, where stories, songs, and rituals are not just inherited forms but ongoing expressions of community, belief, and identity.

3.3 Folklore in Modern Media

Modern media platforms such as film, radio, and social media have become new vessels for the transmission of folklore, often reshaping traditional narratives in the process. As Dorson (1976) notes, this can result in "pseudo-folklore" commercialized versions that imitate but do not originate from genuine folk traditions. Despite this, media can serve as a powerful tool for cultural preservation and reinterpretation.

In the context of the Sümi Nagas, folklore has increasingly found representation in local films, audio recordings, and digital platforms. Community festivals like Ahuna and Tuluni, often broadcast or shared online, act as performative spaces where oral traditions are celebrated and adapted for contemporary audiences. These efforts reflect what Bauman (1992) describes as the performative reinforcement of cultural identity in public spaces.

The adaptation of Sümi folklore into modern media emphasizes its evolving nature, highlighting both its resilience and the challenges of maintaining authenticity amid broader cultural shifts. Through such engagements, folklore continues to serve as a living medium for expressing socio-cultural values and identity.

3.4 Classification of Folklore

Folklore scholars have developed various classification systems to categorize the diverse manifestations of traditional culture. Among these, Dorson's (1972) taxonomy remains one of the most comprehensive frameworks, organizing folklore

into four primary categories that encompass the breadth of traditional cultural expressions. This classification system provides a structured approach to understanding how folklore operates within societies, while acknowledging the interconnected nature of these categories in actual cultural practice (Ben-Amos, 1972).

3.4.1 Oral Literature

The first category, oral literature, encompasses verbal traditions transmitted primarily through speech or song (Dundes, 1965). This broad classification includes several distinct forms of expression. Folk narratives, such as myths, legends, and folktales, serve as vehicles for conveying cultural values and preserving historical memories (Bascom, 1965). Folk poetry represents another significant component, comprising lyrical forms like epics, ballads, and ritual chants that often carry deep cultural significance (Abrahams, 1972). Additionally, verbal arts including proverbs, riddles, and word games demonstrate the linguistic creativity and cognitive patterns of traditional societies (Arewa & Dundes, 1964). These oral traditions collectively form a vital repository of a community's collective wisdom and worldview.

3.4.2 Material Culture and Dress

Material culture constitutes the second major category in Dorson's classification, focusing on the tangible expressions of traditional knowledge (Glassie, 1999). This domain examines how communities interact with their physical environment through various cultural practices. The built environment, including traditional architecture and settlement patterns, reveals important aspects of a society's relationship with its surroundings (Oliver, 2003). Craft traditions such as textile production, pottery, and woodcarving represent another significant aspect of material culture, showcasing technical skills and aesthetic values passed down through generations (Green, 1997). Furthermore, subsistence practices encompassing agricultural techniques and food preparation methods provide insights into how communities have adapted to their ecological contexts (Anderson, 1971). These material manifestations of folklore offer concrete evidence of cultural continuity and innovation.

Fig 2: Traditional Basket Making

The Sümi men put on their cloths by drawing the corner of one end over the left shoulder from back to front and then throwing the cloth round the body so that the opposite corner on the same side of the cloth at the other end fall again over the left shoulder from front to back. The cloth goes either under the right arm or over it around the neck, as circumstances may dictate. The corner that covers the left shoulder from front to back is usually marked with a tassel of some sort, which hangs down the back of the weaver and often takes the form of a fringe of scarlet goat's hair about 4 inches broad by 6 inches or 8 inches long. This covers most of the upper part of the body except the right shoulder and the left side towards the front. Behind, the cloth, besides covering the back, comes down over the buttocks into a point. The belt carrying the dao-sling is worn over the cloth, keeping it in its place.

On ceremonial occasion the dress described above is supplemented by several striking and picturesque addition. On the head is worn a sort of circlet 'Avabo' made of the long hair from a bear's neck and shoulders plucked out by the roots and bound on to a cane so as to bristle out thickly in all directions except where the circlet fit on to the head. The dress of the Sümi woman consists principally of a short petticoat, which does not reach to the knees, wrapped round the waist and kept in place by a

bead girdle. There are more than half a dozen patterns, differing in colour. The wives of chiefs and others who have performed a full series of social gennas sometimes adorn their petticoats with cowries sewn on here and there in patterns. Over the top of the petticoat is worn a string of cowries as a belt, and under it a broad girdle of yellow beads extending well below the hips.

In their ears the unmarried girls wear a cowrie or often a white bead, and little tufts of red hair are worn both by married and unmarried women in some villages, but very often married women wear no ear ornament at all. Necklaces are worn of many strings of beads in which carnelians take the principal and central position.

Fig 3: Traditional ornaments of Sümi Naga

3.4.3 Social Folk Custom

Social folk customs form the third category, comprising the customary practices that structure community life and interpersonal relationships (Turner, 1969). Among the most significant of these are rites of passage, the ceremonial markers that accompany key life transitions such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death (van Gennep, 1960). Calendrical rituals represent another important dimension, including seasonal festivals and agricultural celebrations that organize the annual cycle and reinforce

communal bonds (Falassi, 1987). The category also encompasses belief systems, including folk religion and traditional healing practices, which provide frameworks for understanding and interacting with the world (Hand, 1980). These social customs serve as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.

3.4.4 Performing Folk Arts

The fourth and final category, performing folk arts, includes the various enacted traditions that combine movement, sound, and visual elements (Bauman, 1977). Musical traditions form a central component of this category, encompassing both instrumental and vocal performances that serve ritual, social, and aesthetic functions (Nettl, 2005). Dance forms, ranging from ritual performances to social dances, represent another significant aspect of performing arts, often encoding cultural values and historical narratives through movement (Royce, 1977). Folk drama, the traditional theatrical performances found in many cultures, completes this category by combining multiple art forms to tell stories and convey moral lessons (Schechner, 2003). These performing arts not only entertain but also serve as important vehicles for cultural transmission and community building.

Category	Subtypes	Examples	Key Scholars
Oral Literature	Narratives, poetry, verbal arts	Myths, proverbs, epics	Dundes (1965), Bascom (1965)
Material Culture	Crafts, architecture, foodways	Textiles, housing, agriculture	Glassie (1999), Oliver (2003)
Social Custom	Rituals, festivals, beliefs	Weddings, harvest festivals	Turner (1969), van Gennep (1960)
Performing Arts	Music, dance, drama	Ritual dances, folk plays	Bauman (1977), Nettl (2005)

Table 3.1: Dorson's Classification of Folklore

This classification system demonstrates the comprehensive nature of folklore studies while acknowledging the interconnectedness of these categories in actual cultural practice (Ben-Amos, 1972). Subsequent scholars have built upon Dorson's framework to address contemporary folkloric expressions in digital environments (Blank, 2009).

This comprehensive classification system demonstrates the multifaceted nature of folklore studies while highlighting the dynamic relationships between different forms of cultural expression. Subsequent scholars have built upon Dorson's foundational work to address emerging forms of folkloric expression, particularly in digital environments (Blank, 2009), ensuring the continued relevance of folklore studies in understanding both traditional and contemporary cultures. The framework acknowledges that these categories often overlap in practice, with many folk traditions incorporating elements from multiple categories simultaneously. This holistic approach to classification allows for a more detailed understanding of how folklore functions as a living, evolving aspect of human culture.

3.5 Traditional Social Values and Ethics

In traditional Sümi Naga society, communal cooperation and mutual aid formed the foundation of everyday life. One of the most striking expressions of this value system could be seen during house construction. When a family decided to build a new home, it was not an isolated affair. Relatives, friends, and neighbors would come together voluntarily to assist with the entire process. Each person contributed labor and effort willingly, without expecting any form of monetary compensation. Their involvement was motivated by a deep sense of social responsibility and collective belonging.

Similarly, after a successful harvest, if a farmer faced difficulties in transporting the produce back to the granary, members of the community readily stepped in to offer assistance. The help extended was spontaneous and heartfelt, offered without hesitation and certainly without the expectation of payment. This practice demonstrated the communal ethic of mutual reliance, especially during periods of physical exertion or logistical need.

Moreover, in earlier times, household items such as wooden beds and pounding tables were crafted using logs from the forest. Once these items were prepared, men from the village would voluntarily help carry them to the owner's home. This gesture was typically followed by a small feast or meal organized by the host family as a token of appreciation. However, it is important to note that no form of wage or formal reward was accepted. Such acts were considered duties born out of goodwill, respect, and a shared sense of kinship. These traditions reflect a strong ethical framework in which social unity, generosity, and reciprocity were central values embedded in daily life**.**

Fig 4: A traditional wooden bed

3.6 Functions of Folklore

Dundes (1965) identifies four primary functions that folklore serves within societies. These functions demonstrate how folklore operates as more than just entertainment, but as a vital mechanism for cultural transmission and social cohesion.

Entertainment and Amusement

Folklore primarily functions as a source of enjoyment and leisure. Stories, songs, and jokes provide relief from daily routines, often shared during communal gatherings. In many cultures, specific times are designated for storytelling like evening sessions in

Rwandan tradition where daytime telling is taboo, associated with laziness (Thompson, 1946). This temporal regulation shows how folklore complements rather than disrupts work life, while strengthening social bonds through shared amusement.

Cultural Validation

Folklore serves to justify and authenticate cultural practices and beliefs. Myths in particular act as charters that validate social institutions and rituals, as Malinowski (1926) observed. This validating function extends beyond myths to include proverbs, legends, and ceremonies that reinforce a community's ideology. For instance, Sümi Naga origin stories legitimize clan structures, while common proverbs naturalize cultural values like patience and perseverance.

Education and Socialization

A crucial function of folklore is its role in teaching cultural norms and values to younger generations. Different folklore genres target various developmental stages, frightening ogre tales warn children against disobedience, soothing lullabies introduce linguistic patterns, and fables model proper behavior through animal characters. Proverbs and cautionary tales explicitly critique antisocial behaviours while praising conformity, serving as powerful tools for moral education and socialization.

Cultural Stability and Social Control

Folklore maintains social order by reinforcing conformity and discouraging deviance. It operates through both positive reinforcement, like celebratory songs honoring traditional values, and negative examples, such as tales showing the consequences of breaking norms. Rituals and festivals synchronize community values, while humorous or fantastical elements provide safe outlets for tension. This dual function of control and release contributes to cultural continuity while allowing for managed social flexibility.

3.7 Classification of Folklore Artefacts

Folklore manifests in diverse forms that scholars categorize to better understand its expressions. Dorson's (1972) classification system identifies three main types: verbal lore including stories and songs, material lore encompassing crafts and tools, and customary lore involving rituals and practices. A fourth category, child lore (Opie & Opie, 1969), specifically addresses children's games and traditions. These classifications help analyze folklore's manifestations while acknowledging that many traditions blend multiple categories, like harvest songs that combine verbal and customary elements.

The interconnectedness of folklore's forms and functions demonstrates its complexity as a cultural system. While categories help analysis, in practice, a single folktale might simultaneously entertain, educate, validate norms, and reinforce social stability. Contemporary studies continue to explore how these traditional functions adapt in digital spaces, ensuring folklore's ongoing relevance in modern societies.

3.8 Verbal Lore: Forms and Characteristics

Verbal lore represents the foundational category of folklore, encompassing all traditional utterances that follow recognizable patterns of expression. Defined as "spoken, sung, voiced forms of traditional utterance that show repetitive patterns" (Ben-Amos, 1971), verbal lore constitutes more than casual conversation, it requires both performer and audience to recognize its conventional structures and cultural significance. This distinguishes formal folk speech from everyday dialogue.

The Sümi Naga tradition preserves numerous examples of verbal lore, including the popular tale of *Khakhu eno Sheyili*, which circulates as an oral narrative demonstrating characteristic plot structures and moral lessons. Such stories exemplify William Thoms' original conception of folklore as the oral traditions of pre-industrial communities (Dorson, 1968). Within verbal lore, two primary subdivisions emerge, each with distinct forms and functions.

3.8 .1 Oral Narratives

This category includes various traditional story forms:

1. Myths: Sacred narratives explaining cosmic origins and divine actions
2. Legends: Stories presented as historical, often featuring remarkable events
3. Folktales: Fictional stories with standardized plots and characters
4. Animal tales: Moralistic stories featuring anthropomorphized creatures
5. Jokes and anecdotes: Brief humorous or cautionary narratives

Each subtype follows specific conventions recognizable within the Sümi Naga cultural context. For instance, Sümi origin myths typically feature ancestral spirits and natural phenomena, while animal tales often employ the trickster figure of the fox.

3.8 .2 Oral Poetry

The Sümi Naga tradition maintains a rich repertoire of poetic forms:

1. Folk epics: Lengthy narrative poems celebrating cultural heroes
2. Ballads: Story-songs combining narrative and lyrical elements
3. Ritual songs: Ceremonial verses for life-cycle events
4. Work songs: Rhythmic compositions coordinating labor
5. Lullabies: Soothing verses for child-rearing

These poetic forms frequently employ traditional imagery, such as natural metaphors in love songs or agricultural references in work chants. The Sümi Leshe, poetic tradition exemplifies this, using conventional structures to convey emotional and cultural messages.

1. Additionally, verbal lore encompasses minor forms that permeate daily life
2. Proverbs and sayings: Concise wisdom expressions
3. Chants and prayers: Ritual invocations
4. Laments and cries: Formalized expressions of grief
5. Mnemonic devices: Memory aids for complex information

These verbal forms collectively serve as the primary vehicle for transmitting Sümi Naga cultural knowledge, values, and historical consciousness. Their persistence in contemporary society, despite modernization pressures, demonstrates their adaptive resilience and continued relevance to community identity (Assumi, 2019). The study of these verbal traditions requires attention to both their textual content and performative contexts, as meaning emerges through the interaction of fixed patterns and spontaneous variation in actual performance settings (Bauman, 1977).

Folk poetry

Folk poetry known as 'Leshe' in Sümi plays an important role in the olden days by our forefathers. It contains meaningful lines. Through this oral poetry, one conveys a message indirectly when one cannot say it directly. The folk poetry can be composed only by the well experienced man or woman in every field. It reflects the social life of one's society. The main themes found in the oral poetry are love, religion, sadness and nostalgia, of separation between lovers, divorce, marriage, distinction between rich and poor etc. One of the most popular 'Leshe' of the Sümi naga tribe is *Inakha eno Ghonili kuixa*.

1.Inakha eno Ghonili kuixa

"Ishe ! khaghi ye ni vilo,
A-a kivi lo aleye,
Aghoh sulo ni tchheyewo,
Asholiu ipeleye moye,
Asholiu ipeniye,
No ghi suliu saloi alo,
Pualo ilosuhloye."

Translation

The parting of Inakha and Ghonili

Sometime ago you told me,Promised me a place of peace

You brought me gifts
But now you turn to someone else
And ask me to depart.
You bring that Süliu to take my place
Oh, how deeply it wounds me.

(Translated by Tokali Swu. Original Poem published in *Apu-Assu Leshe* 2nd ed.,Sümi Literature Board,2009)

This poem offers several powerful themes:

This Leshe, *Inakha eno Ghonili kuixa* narrates the separation of Inakha and Ghonili after their marriage. The two were once deeply in love and happily wedded. However, after marriage, Inakha fell in love with a woman named Chevili and entered into an illicit relationship with her. Upon discovering the affair, Ghonili chose to leave him. On the day of their separation, Ghonili gave a necklace to her daughter as a parting gift.

This poem offers several powerful themes:

Love and betrayal

The poem reflects the tragic shift from deep love to painful betrayal. Inakha and Ghonili begin as a couple deeply in love, symbolizing the ideals of romantic and marital harmony. However the bond is fractured when Inakha engages in an illicit relationship with another woman, Chevili. The emotional weights of betrayal form a central theme, revealing the fragility of trust and commitment in relationships.

The pain of separation and emotional loss

The poem explores the emotional trauma of separation. The act of divorce is not just a legal or social rupture, but an emotional disintegration, particularly for Ghonili whose dreams of love and companionship are shattered.

Women's resilience and dignity

Ghonili's response to betrayal is not one of the vengeance, but of quiet strength. Rather than clinging to a broken relationship, she chooses to leave with dignity. Her act of giving a necklace to her daughter on the way of separation can be seen as a symbolic transmission of strength, wisdom, and maternal love. It reflects a women's capacity to uphold grace even in moments of personal sorrow.

2. Kulolike Le

Oh! Timi kuloliye kishi kuloliyela,

Lojiliu ikujo kunoliye chelo. Azughi mukulo

Azu kuqo sholuye wo. Azughi ngu no,

Inolino sukeniye, kutokua lono,

Inolino u lo kumlapuno iu lo loghi

Ashikusah aghukusah ke aye itsa igha süsü.

Tchekhoh juniuno azughi no vekho sawu kiu shilemiye.

Oh! Inolino vemu yeno,

Ghulo küthu kïphi qholo zuye.

Oh! Hoishe thoghi tsalah kitheu ye,

Anhewuno ghü ishe wo,

Pekishe wu ala!

Azu apeuno Khalaliu-Suliu,

kutsu kukha 'thulu aye wo,

xakilheni sho, kiye puwo,

Pa lhogha totsülo.

Translation

Song of Love

Oh! How do other lovers weave their hearts so fine?

Our hearts entwined, we fled to the river shore.

Rivers' waves crashed strong, its power unbound

I grasped for her hand, braved the river's stream.

But her bangle stayed in my grasping hand.

Had beasts or foes taken you, I'd have cried out loud.

But rivers claimed you and I couldn't save you.

Oh beloved, you're etched in my mind.

Fodder filled my bed, for three sorrowful nights.

Oh! Tomorrow, when day breaks,

Down the river's stream,

Will sweep your body.

Down stream's unknown shore, stranger or familiar land

Whoever finds the headgear

That held her hair,

Don't let it drift away, pass it

On to her native land.

(Translated by Tokali Swu. Original Poem published in *Apu-Assu Leshe* 2nd ed.,Sümi Literature Board,2009*)*

The poem *Kulolike Le (Song of Love)* tells a simple yet moving story of two lovers who tried to escape together but was parted by the strong river. The speaker's effort to save his beloved ends in failure, with only her bangle left in his hand. The river, powerful and indifferent, becomes a force that separates them forever. His sorrow is quietly shown through his sleepless nights and his grief-filled bed. In the end, he sends out a message to anyone who finds her belonging, 'headgear' to return it to her homeland. The poem speaks of deep love, helplessness, and the pain of loss, using images that are close to everyday life and emotion.

Love Beyond Custom

The opening lines "Oh! How do other lovers weave their hearts so fine? / Our hearts entwined, we fled to the river shore" hint at a relationship that may not have received social approval. The act of fleeing together suggests elopement, a practice often discouraged in traditional Sümi society where marriages were arranged according to clan rules and community expectations. This moment in the poem captures the quiet resistance of individuals seeking love beyond social conventions, reflecting the emotional cost of defying customary norms.

Nature as Fate

Nature in Sümi folklore is not just scenery; it is an active force with agency. The river in this poem is personified as a taker, a powerful entity that claims the beloved. This reflects the animistic worldview traditionally held by the Sümi Nagas, where natural elements possess spiritual or moral significance. The river becomes a symbol of both fate and transformation, often seen in folktales where rivers are linked to journeys, deaths, and revelations

“Rivers’ waves crashed strong, its power unbound / I grasped for her hand…” presents the river as more than a settin, it is a force that decides the fate of the lovers. The river here becomes an uncontrollable force that separates the lovers, symbolizing the limits of human effort against natural or spiritual design. It also implies that love, no matter how strong, cannot always escape destiny.

Objects of Memory

The line “But her bangle stayed in my grasping hand” gives emotional weight to a small ornament. In Sümi culture, personal items like bangles, earrings, or headgear often carry deep symbolic meaning; they connect individuals to family, memory, and tradition. The bangle becomes the only remaining trace of the woman, turning into a token of both love and loss. Similarly, “Whoever finds the headgear… pass it / On to her native land” reinforces how such objects serve as carriers of identity and memory, especially when death separates people from their home.

Grief in Tradition

The verse “Fodder filled my bed, for three sorrowful nights” reflects a mourning practice found in several Sümi traditions, where the bereaved avoid the comfort of a proper bed or mattress. Sleeping on a bed of leaves or husks symbolizes emotional pain and withdrawal from normal life. This physical act of grief shows how mourning is not only emotional but also ritualised grief is lived through the body, not just the heart. The poem reflects a mourning that is quiet, personal, and shaped by cultural expectations.

Ancestral Belonging

The plea to return the woman’s headgear “Don’t let it drift away, pass it / On to her native land” reveals a deep sense of rootedness in Sümi identity. Even in death, connection to one’s homeland remains vital. The speaker’s concern is not only for her memory, but also for her cultural and ancestral place. In Sümi thought, identity is deeply linked to land and ancestry. Thus, returning even a symbolic item to her native land reflects the importance of communal ties, a key socio-cultural issue.

The Silent Female Figure

Throughout the poem, the woman's voice is not heard, though her presence is deeply felt. Her story is told entirely through the voice of the male speaker. This silence is common in many folktales, where women appear as subjects of emotion or fate but are rarely given their own voice. Yet through her ornaments; her bangle, her headgear, her identity is remembered. In this way, she remains central to the narrative, even in silence. The poem reflects how traditional narratives preserve female presence through symbol, rather than speech.

Gender and Emotional Expression

In the poem *Kulolike le (Song of Love),* emotional vulnerability is expressed by the male speaker, which is notable in a traditionally patriarchal context. His open grief and helplessness challenge the conventional portrayal of male strength. The poem illustrates that men too are shaped by emotional suffering, and love is not a domain, limited to women alone. Yet, the woman remains silent and passive, she is acted upon, not heard which reflects traditional gender roles where women are often symbolic rather than vocal.

Emotional Cost of Love and Separation

Finally, the poem captures the emotional cost of love, especially when it goes against societal expectations. The speaker's grief, sleeping on a bed of fodder, remembering her each morning shows how love in Sümi folklore is not always triumphant but often tragic. These romantic losses are not just individual tragedies, but echo the collective values and taboos of the community.

3. KÜSAKUSSHO LE

Küsakussho alokughunno kumo,

Küsakussho mulokinimi ye,

Ni ye no kho puwumo ni aye,

Alah chighi pesü no xaluni ighi,

Tüghami no kipishi ye shimlayewo.

Ni ye no thiküzümi lau hayewo,

Aki lakhi lo kipeshi,

Asah kitche vabo lono,

Aghachomhi shopuyewo,

Khumtsa no ni ghuno lo,

Aqhe shiye shi timi tolhoye.

Ale shiye timi no shi,

Shikikilhemi lokütsümi ye,

Kucho anoghishi kuhu lono,

Anhi natho nu jumtha aye.

Nasainagha limi no okinimo aye,

Alheh ghopusü Kithimi ghuno,

Kivilo hu ale phewo losüqhiyi wolo,

Aküsü no atsah kuto chena ‘ghini,

Kithipumi shiu ye alah kühaü ye.

Translation

Death

Death, not happiness

Death brings hearts that deeply ache

I don't want to part with you

Came to save you in ten ways

Deceived by the devil, unable to save.

As your brother, from a single hearth we emerge

A sage among kin, wise and true,

Like a hornbill,

Khumthsa, you have left us,

You no longer walk with those who live.

Even bid the others to save you,

Even sages try to save you still,

All sought to save you

Tried but didn't save, let you go.

The village maidens unable to bid farewell

Prepare yourself and journey

Where dead dwells, Singing a nostalgic song,

A word might have hurt but you are dead, forget it.

(Translated by Tokali Swu. Original Poem published in *Apu-Assu Leshe* 2nd ed.,Sümi Literature Board,2009)

This short poem speaks of a brother's sorrow at the loss of a loved one. It opens with a direct expression of pain, showing how death breaks the heart and leaves behind helplessness. The speaker recalls how he tried in many ways to save the person but failed. There is also a sense of cultural belief, where death is not just an end but a journey to another place. The reference to the hearth shows closeness in kinship, while the hornbill symbol may point to the honour and dignity of the one who passed. The mourning is not only personal but shared by the community. Even the village maidens are unable to bid farewell, showing how sudden or painful the death was. The poem holds deep emotional weight and reflects how grief is expressed within Sümi culture with sadness, respect, and a sense of quiet acceptance.

Ties of Kinship

The line "As your brother, from a single hearth we emerge" reveals the closeness between siblings in Sümi society. Kinship is more than blood, it is rooted in shared space, duties, and identity. The hearth stands as a symbol of unity, warmth, and origin. The speaker's pain is deeply personal, yet culturally shaped by the strong value placed on familial loyalty and collective memory.

Shared Mourning Rites

"The village maidens unable to bid farewell" suggests that mourning is not limited to the family alone. In Sümi communities, death affects the entire village. The absence of a farewell by young women reflects the shock and sorrow of sudden loss. Funerary rites and collective expressions of grief hold social significance, reinforcing communal ties and respect for the dead.

Fate and Spirits

The lines “Came to save you in ten ways / Deceived by the devil, unable to save” point toward belief in supernatural elements. The reference to the devil reflects the idea of fate or unseen spiritual forces influencing life and death. These beliefs, rooted in pre-Christian animism, show how illness or death may be understood as beyond human control, tied to spiritual deception or destiny.

Death as Journey

When the speaker says, “Prepare yourself and journey where dead dwells”, death is framed not as a final end but a passage. The notion of the afterlife is central to many Sümi traditions, where rituals prepare the soul for its journey. Cultural practices around death often involve symbolic preparation, songs, and farewell’s rituals that affirm belief in a continuing existence beyond the physical world.

Forgiveness in Death

The final line, “A word might have hurt but you are dead, forget it,” expresses a cultural ethic of letting go. Among the Sümi Nagas, the dead are honoured, and past conflicts are laid to rest. Memory is preserved with dignity, and death becomes a moment for closure, not bitterness. This line also reveals how emotional restraint is part of culturally acceptable grieving.

Symbolism of the Hornbill

The comparison of the deceased to a hornbill “Like a hornbill, Khumthsa, you have left us” carries deep cultural meaning. In Sümi tradition, the hornbill is a symbol of honour, wisdom, and dignity. It is often associated with respected figures in the community. By referring to his brother in this way, the speaker acknowledges the value of the deceased’s life and his standing among his people. This symbolism shows how Sümi oral poetry honours individuals and helps preserve their memory within the community.

Changing Roles in Ritual and Mourning

One notable line in the poem mentions that the "village maidens unable to bid farewell." Traditionally, women played an important role in mourning rituals, singing laments, preparing the body, and offering symbolic farewells. The absence of these roles in the poem suggests a shift in customary practices. This change may reflect the growing influence of Christianity in Sümi society, which has often replaced traditional death rituals with church-led ceremonies. This development also points to the gradual fading of women's ritual and matrilineal roles, a key concern in this research.

Cultural Meaning of Mourning

Overall, the poem is more than a farewell. It brings attention to kinship, gender roles, emotional expression, and the impact of cultural change. It shows how Sümi oral poetry preserves memories, expresses grief, and reflects broader shifts in social practices. Through such verses, we see how death is not just the end of life but a powerful moment where individual emotion and community values come together.

4. ANIPU SHIKIPILLI LEH

Ino Ishinah no züta kihi pesü,

Lojilimi dolo kulo huni keno,

Nono kuku lo yehu pe,

Ino yehu veküzü yehu.

Akiu aghümi ye wo pihu ghi ye,

Kucho iphi kidi pesu,

Aghapeli veche pe woghi ye,

Kucho axeu no thi ani ye pilo.

O axeu no kiyimi ghamiye,

Aphi chikka lono hepuwo gho,

Aghü phiyekishi lono hepu wu,

Ghola chuwomi Ghuno kussa lo pua kimiye

Amuchou ghü kütsü no,

Asüghi lo ghomo yewo,

Aphibo lo gho muzu ghotsulo.

Translation

Tribute to Beloved Wife

This morning, I sharpened my machete,

With my fellow laborer, bound for the fields

We parted ways,

Each to our own side.

The villagers rushed with news of the enemy's raid,

I folded my clothes,

Abandoning the forest's depths.

Returning, I found my beloved lifeless, her body cold.

The village of her killer took their trophy,

Wrapped in cloth,

Carried away in war's dark shroud

In the tribe's trophy place, their conquests are displayed.

To the man who took my wife's life,

If her head isn't hung on the wooden stake,

Let it be placed straight on the bamboo.

(Translated by Tokali Swu. Original Poem published in *Apu-Assu Leshe* 2nd ed.,Sümi Literature Board,2009)

The poem tells the story of a man who leaves for work in the fields, only to return and find his wife killed in a sudden enemy raid. Her head is taken as a war trophy and displayed by the rival tribe. The poem reflects deep sorrow, the cruelty of conflict, and the speaker's final plea for his wife's head to be treated with dignity, even in death.

Socio-cultural issues reflected in the poem

Conflict and Communal Violence

The poem shows how war and violence were part of village life in earlier times. What starts as a normal day, with the speaker sharpening his machete and heading to the fields, quickly changes with the news of an enemy attack. This sudden shift from peace to fear reflects how life in the village could be unsettled by raids. Words like "enemy's raid" and "abandoning the forest's depths" show how work and daily life could be left behind in times of crisis. War was not far away, it was always a possibility.

Gendered Suffering in War

The speaker returns home to find his wife dead. Her body is “cold,” and her head is taken away by the enemy. The poem reflects how women, though not fighters, often became the victims of war. They were left behind in the village and faced the worst consequences. Her death is not just a personal loss; it shows how women’s lives were deeply affected by violence. Their suffering was often silent, but deeply felt. This also shows how women’s bodies were treated not as people, but as a way to shame or defeat others.

Trophy Culture and Honour

The enemy carries the woman’s head, “wrapped in cloth,” to their “trophy place.” This reflects an old custom where enemies’ heads were taken to show victory. It was seen as a way to bring pride to the tribe. Though this act seems cruel, it was once tied to ideas of bravery and honour. The wrapping of the head in cloth shows that it was not done casually, but with a certain ceremony. Still, the poem clearly shows the pain this brings. It questions a culture where respect comes at the cost of someone else’s dignity.

Loss and the Demand for Ritual Respect

The last lines are a quiet but strong plea from the speaker. He says, “If her head isn’t hung on the wooden stake, let it be placed straight on the bamboo.” This shows that even in pain, he does not ask for revenge. Instead, he wants his wife’s head to be treated with some respect. It reflects how traditional societies had ways of treating the dead, even in war. Certain ways were seen as more honourable. The speaker’s words show how rituals and customs around death mattered deeply, even between enemies.

Labour and the Fragility of Peace

At the start, everything is calm. The speaker is with his fellow worker, and they go to their “own side.” This simple moment shows the normal pattern of village life; labour, friendship, and shared work. But this peace is easily broken. The machete

used for work could also become a weapon. The forest, a place of work, is abandoned in fear. These changes show how closely life and danger lived side by side. Peace in the village was always fragile.

Masculine Grief and Loss

Instead of calling for revenge, the speaker expresses deep sorrow over the loss of his beloved wife. He does not speak in anger but in mourning. This is different from many folktales or songs where men are shown as strong and emotionless. Here, the speaker shows that men also experience love, loss, and grief, though this side is not often talked about. This helps us understand that folklore does not only reflect bravery and strength, but also hidden emotions.

Silence of the Woman

The woman does not speak in the poem. She is present only through her death. This is common in many folklore, where women are central to the story but are often silent. Her head is taken, and her body is not buried yet she remains the most important part of the poem. This shows how women's presence in folklore is often symbolic, representing love, honour, or sorrow, even when they do not speak.

Honour and Revenge

The poem does not end with a threat or a promise of revenge. Instead, the speaker only asks for her head to be placed with dignity. This shows restraint and honour, which may reflect changing values in Sümi society especially after the arrival of Christianity, which discouraged head-hunting and revenge. It suggests that the memory of a loved one is better honoured with dignity than with violence.

5. LOJILIMI

Lojilimi nono asa kichhe thotsu,

Aghoshi aloshi chhepu aye nguno,

Akinhino aloshi nhi chthetsu.

Khaji-khali aloni keno,

Akithi kumo dolo kúghúnani keno

Chheju pugho chheju piqi aghomi alomi kilo woina.

Lojilimi nono kulapuu lumo aye nguno,

Oh i ishe osaluni kemi atsala phi,

Aghuno phi woche aye,

Aghiwo akitihino kulu kiphelo, lojilimi no

Aghi kuwo she aye nguno, shekha nike

Kumo aye. osaluni kemi aqhi phi atsala phi woche aye.

Lojilimi no alapa nguno atsuni,

Pughokutha jukimichi kichemi,

Hakuwulo ni timi hoholo,

Lonishi moye.

Translation

Woman Team Worker

Teamworker, even your hair is laid,

By your desire and beauty swayed.

Lay beautiful in the ear,

Team worker, love is not for a while,

Choose with care; it's a lifelong trial.

Ponder deeply, time and again,

And live with thought, not in vain.

Teamworker, though unwilling to marry,

Alas! Your days are passing by.

Counting the shade of the wayside near,

To receive you when the time is here.

When paddy rice and job's tears are ripe,

And the harvest work is done just right.

Team worker, the leaves on the path,

Are signs well known by your mate’s heart.

But if you love none,

Among those who labour the whole day through.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, Original poem published in *Kügha*kiche *eno Leshele* (Folklore and poems), Sema Literature Board)

Socio-Cultural analysis of the Poem *Lojilimi*

Marriage as a Social Obligation

The poem *Lojilimi* reflects the cultural weight placed on marriage in traditional Sümi society. The speaker addresses a young woman, not with pressure, but with a firm

reminder of the seriousness of marital commitment. The act of preparing herself, hinted in the phrase about her "hair," becomes symbolic of her growing awareness of womanhood and readiness for social roles expected of her. However, the speaker urges her to "choose with care", highlighting that the decision is not about temporary attraction but about lifelong endurance and partnership. In Sümi belief, marriage is not a personal affair alone; it links families, generations, and village honour. The poem captures this understanding without using forceful language suggesting that moral instruction often comes through shared conversation rather than public command.

Cultural Timeframes and Marital Readiness

The reference to the harvest season, particularly when the grains are "ripe," situates the poem within the agricultural rhythms that define rural Sümi life. Just as there is a right time to reap the crops, there is a socially recognised time for entering marriage. The speaker draws on these natural cycles to point out that Lojilimi's moment of transition is approaching. The poem reflects a cultural perspective in which biological, social, and seasonal time are inter connected. A girl's maturity is measured not just by age but by alignment with the seasons especially the end of communal work, which often signals readiness for other social responsibilities. In this way, the poem embeds individual decisions within a collective and ecological structure.

Emotional Restraint and Female Agency

While the speaker hints at signs of affection from those who "labour the whole day through," it is clear that Lojilimi remains emotionally unmoved. Her silence, or lack of reciprocation, is not judged harshly. Instead, it is stated plainly. This reflects a cultural space where refusal is expressed not through open defiance but through emotional distance. Among the Sümi, especially in traditional village settings, women are often expected to maintain composure and restraint. Public declarations of love are rare. A woman's decision not to engage, even when interest is shown, becomes a quiet but powerful expression of self-possession. In this case, her reluctance becomes a form of quiet resistance, grounded in dignity.

Labour Spaces and Social Interaction

The poem's setting in the field, among "team workers," is not accidental. In Sümi agrarian life, fields are more than places of work, they are social spaces where young men and women observe one another, develop trust, or are noticed by elders for future matches. The speaker's familiarity with Lojilimi's feelings, despite her few words, shows how closely young people were observed within these communal environments. Work and emotion go hand in hand, and the field becomes a stage for subtle gestures, modest courtship, and emotional discovery. This dynamic illustrates how everyday labour is woven with meaning in oral tradition not only as economic necessity but as a space for moral learning.

Individual Hesitation within Communal Expectation

The most striking feature of the poem is its tone; gentle, reflective and layered with concern. Rather than criticising Lojilimi, the speaker reflects on her hesitation and the broader community's expectations. The poem does not deny her space to think or delay. Instead, it quietly places her within the flow of cultural time. Her silence is treated as a voice of its own. This suggests that traditional Sümi values, while structured and clear, also allowed for private choices especially in matters of emotion and commitment. The poem becomes not only a conversation between two workers but a cultural reflection on how women navigate expectation, timing, and autonomy.

"Lojilimi" stands as a quiet yet insightful representation of how emotional life is shaped in traditional Sümi society. Through plain language and shared setting, the poem reveals deeper values about marriage, seasonal order, emotional self-control, and the respectful handling of choice. Rather than presenting a clear moral judgment, the poem allows its listener and the woman it addresses to draw their own conclusions. It is in this balance between instruction and understanding that the strength of the poem lies. As part of Sümi oral tradition, it reveals how folk songs are not just lyrical expressions but also thoughtful commentaries on life, love, and responsibility.

Socio-cultural analysis of Translated Sümi Poems

Sümi Nagas folk poems reflect the cultural and social realities and issues. There are various kinds of poems dealing with the theme of marriage, love, divorce, conflict, peace, poverty etc. *Omugha (Your Luck)* is a short poem about beauty and poverty. The Sümi Nagas considered a hardworking woman as a great asset. This poem is an address to a son, who married a woman whose beauty was her only virtue. Ultimately he led a life of poverty.

Kuthunu hi nilo (We shall meet) is a poem about two lovers who parted ways and married different people. *Ghi muzu khavela (Has the Paddy Ripened)* is a poem about the ill treatment of women or wife by her own husband. These short folk poems reflect the socio-cultural issues of the Sümi Naga society (Swu,2014).

3.9 Proverbs and Sayings

Proverbs and sayings are short and brief compositions with concealed meaning, expressing day to day experiences. They depict the socio-cultural, economic, historical, political and geographical life setting and behaviour of a particular community or society.

The Sümi Nagas make use of a large number of proverbs and saying in their conversation which reflects the socio-cultural behaviour and attitude of the society in a very witty and ridiculous manner. These forms of oral literature comprise rules of conduct and manners. The Sümi Nagas use proverbs to give importance to their colloquial language and help to illustrate a particular point. These proverbs and sayings cover the aspects of human life but also give the concepts of reality.

These brief verbal expressions are handed down through generations and are rooted in the collective imagination of many cultures. This important folk forms conveys allegorical, poetic, satirical and humorous views that offer deep insights into cultural values. More specifically, proverbs make abstract truths concrete, often embodies them through vivid imagery drawn from familiar experiences. For instance, in the 16th Century, the truism “change occurs gradually” was reified in the proverb “little

by little the cat eats the bacon". This proverb draws on a domestic situation to communicate a larger truth. Proverbs function by evoking the familiar- an ordinary object or scenario, making abstract ideas more accessible. Some of the Sümi Naga proverbs and sayings;

1. **Akhu ajukhu puthomo kemi (One whose plates and cups never dry)**

This Sümi Naga proverb refers to a person who is never overtaken by poverty. The phrase draws from everyday observation when a family has enough to cook and eat regularly; their plates and cups are always in use and therefore never dry. In earlier times, those who lacked food would leave their utensils unused, a silent sign of hardship. The saying, then, is a quiet celebration of daily sufficiency and an enduring symbol of stability, where regular meals signify a life free from poverty.

2. **Aghoki ghugha chilu aphi (Still the river's sound can be heard)**

This proverb conveys that those who lack experience often speak unnecessarily or share words that lack meaning. It implies that such individuals are still in the process of learning and have yet to gain the knowledge or understanding that comes with time.

3. **Ikullo nepa thono ikippe nepa kuha (There is a footprint going in but no footprint coming out)**

This proverb is based on a story about an old lion who, sensing that his death was near, instructed that one animal should visit him each day to say a final farewell. The animals obeyed his request. One day, a wolf came and asked the lion how he was. The lion replied, "Come in, I'm fine." But the wolf responded, "There is a footprint going in, but no footprint coming out," and walked away. The meaning of this proverb is that a foolish or stupid person can be easily deceived, whereas a wise person recognizes danger and avoids being trapped.

4. Alahpa lo subo (A tree at the crossroad)

The proverb "A Tree at the Crossroad" symbolizes the plight of those who selflessly serve their community. Just as the tree provides shelter to travelers without expecting anything in return, only to be harmed by them, individuals who work for the welfare of others often face ingratitude and criticism instead of appreciation. Such individuals are compared to the tree at the crossroad, bearing the wounds of betrayal and neglect despite their good deeds.

5. Anepa lo azu thomphi (The footprint is still wet)

This proverb is used when someone arrives very late to a community gathering or collective work. If that person begins to make contradictory comments or argue with others, the people respond by saying, “Your footprint is still wet,” meaning the person has just arrived and therefore should not speak. It is a way of telling them to remain silent, as they were not present from the beginning.

6. Aza polo kighini (A prayer from the mother's womb)

In earlier times, it was believed that a person’s destiny whether for good or ill was already determined by God while they were still in their mother’s womb. When someone worked hard yet continued to live in poverty, people would say, “It’s a prayer from the mother’s womb,” suggesting that their fate was already set. Likewise, when someone lived a prosperous life without much effort, it was also attributed to this same belief that the blessings they enjoy are the result of a prayer made before birth, and nothing can change what has already been destined.

7. Awudu no pa ba nepeno igha cheni (The rooster crows by stepping in its own filth)

This proverb is based on the behavior of the eldest rooster, which chases away other cocks and hens and does not let them crow in its presence. In the morning, it crows

loudly, praising itself while standing on its own filth from the night. The meaning is that, in life, some people do the same; they think they are better than others and boast, without thinking about their own faults or wrongdoings.

8. Amqha lo kuzu wudu (The rooster that sleeps in the loft)

This proverb metaphorically refers to a rooster that, having been rejected by the hens, isolates itself and sleeps alone in the loft at night, away from the rest of the group. Within the cultural context, this image is used to describe an unmarried man who leads a solitary life. The saying reflects social expectations surrounding marriage and companionship, subtly highlighting how deviation from communal or familial norms such as remaining single is viewed as a form of social exclusion or personal withdrawal.

9. Putho ghaw kuxu (Living a night bird life)

This saying refers to the habits of certain nocturnal birds which, unlike most birds that feed and rest during daylight, remain inactive throughout the day and emerge only at night in search of food. Traditionally, such behaviour serves as a metaphor for individuals who shun honest daytime labour and instead rely on dubious or unethical means during the night. Such persons are often viewed as idle, morally questionable, or impaired in judgment living in secrecy and depending on darkness to sustain their way of life.

10. Ashuqha suqe (Bat like behavior)

The bat is seen as a strange-looking animal. Its face resembles that of a rat, its wings are like those of a bird, and its body is similar to an animal. Because of this, it is not clearly one or the other. In traditional belief, when animals are in danger, the bat claims to be a bird; when birds are in trouble, it says it is an animal, always switching sides to protect itself. This proverb is used to describe a person who behaves in a selfish and unreliable way. Such a person does not stand with others in times of need

and shows no concern for others' pain or problems, much like the bat that avoids commitment to either group.

11. Angushu ithukulu toi (Like the sighting of a lion)

The lion, being the king of animals, hunts and feeds on other creatures. Because of this, other animals both fear and resent him, and they rarely get close enough to see him. Thus, seeing a lion becomes a rare and significant event. Similarly, when people meet after a long time, the meeting is considered special and precious just like the rare sighting of a lion.

12. Ikuhulla vi, ikuwola sa (A smooth entrance a rough exit)

In times of health and strength, a person may live without concern for others hurting, exploiting or burdening them without a second thought. But over time, the consequences of such actions begin to unfold. What was once an easy life begins to tighten around them. Those who relied on force or selfishness in their prime often find themselves unable to move forward or back, trapped by the life they built. They are now harvesting the very seeds they once carelessly scattered.

This is why we say, “A smooth entrance, a rough exit”, it serves as a reminder for those who fail to consider the end while basking in their beginning.

13. Alhaqqqu ye sughusu lo thono suchosu lo ilo chemo (Termites infest only weak wood, not the strong)

Termites survive by feeding on decayed, dead, or inferior wood but they do not enter strong, healthy timber. This natural truth reflects a deeper moral lesson: just as termites are drawn to weakness, so too are people with corrupt desires drawn to those of loose moral character. They avoid those who are strong in values and self-discipline. In this sense, "weak wood" symbolizes a lack of integrity, while "strong wood" represents virtuous conduct. Just as termites cannot survive in solid wood,

immoral advances do not take root in those who uphold strong character. Thus, the proverb reminds us that one's moral fibre determines what kind of attention they attract: only weak wood is eaten by termites.

14. Amini no alu chupu wuve kelaye achuyi kichi chishitsu (While the boar tramples the field, the antelopes mouth is punished)

Both the boar and the antelope are wild animals, but it is the boar that destroys human fields. One day, a boar trampled a field and disappeared without a trace. Later, an antelope was seen near the damaged field. Mistaken for the culprit, it was blamed and punished.

This proverb reflects a deeper truth: in life, the guilty often escape unnoticed, while the innocent suffer in their place. In such situations, are we punishing the innocent? Instead of asking who is truly guilty, are we punishing the antelope's mouth?

15. Akhetsu mhi kipiti (Burning the mongoose's hair)

Among the Sümi Nagas, it is believed that burning the hair of a mongoose causes a lot of disturbance. When this is done, animals like cows and pigs become scared, start making loud noises, and try to run away. Because of this, people do not allow mongoose hair to be burned in the village.

Over time, this belief has become a common proverb used when there is trouble or conflict in the community. If someone breaks the rules or creates problems, people may ask, "Who is burning the mongoose's hair?" This question is not meant to be taken literally; it is a way of asking who is causing the trouble, just like burning the mongoose's hair causes unrest. The saying reminds people that certain actions can lead to bigger problems for everyone.

16. Alappu no ayeghi mussa mitti chu (The earthworm eats the earth with care)

The earthworm, a small creature without eyes or a backbone, lives quietly beneath the soil. Though it cannot move far, it eats the earth slowly and carefully, as if afraid

it might one day run out. This humble behavior carries a deeper lesson for human beings: if even the earthworm, feeding on something seemingly endless, consumes with care, then we too should manage our resources wisely.
Whether it is money, food, or material possessions, we must use what we have thoughtfully, keeping the future in mind. This proverb reminds us not to waste recklessly, but to live with awareness, saving for the days to come just like the earthworm that never takes the earth for granted.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, Original work in, Swu. (2014). *Sülekutho* (Proverbs and sayings). Sumi Literature Board.)

Socio-Cultural Issues Reflected in Sümi Naga Proverbs and Sayings

Sümi Naga proverbs and sayings are condensed cultural commentaries; brief, vivid, and often metaphorical. They offer insight into how the community perceives work, social responsibility, morality, and justice. These oral expressions are shaped by the rhythms of daily life, agricultural cycles, kinship networks, and the deep moral imagination of the people. Below are the key socio-cultural themes that emerge from the selected proverbs and sayings.

Dignity of Labour and Ethics

Sümi society places high value on hard work, sustenance, and the prudent use of resources. Proverbs such as “Akhu ajukhu puthomo kemi” (One whose plates and cups never dry) frame economic stability as a visible and dignified condition. A household where plates are regularly used signifies not wealth in excess, but sufficiency and honourable livelihood. In a related tone, “Alappu no ayeghi mussa mitti chu” (The earthworm eats the earth with care) teaches moderation and sustainability. Even a small, sightless creature knows to take only what it needs, a lesson extended to human conduct. Together, these proverbs reflect the community's ethical expectations regarding work, thrift, and mindful consumption.

Moral values and Social Responsibility

Moral uprightness is central to communal life. “Awudu no pa ba nepeno igha cheni” (The rooster crows by stepping in its own filth) critiques the boastful individual who ignores personal faults. In Sümi thought, self-praise without self-awareness is not respected. Similarly, “Ashuqha suqe” (Bat-like behaviour) refers to the opportunist who shifts allegiance for self-preservation. The bat, caught between two worlds, becomes a metaphor for disloyalty and ethical inconsistency. These proverbs signal a collective contempt for hypocrisy and self-interest, reinforcing communal ideals of integrity and reliability**.**

Role of Collective Duty in Structured Societies

The sayings also define behavioural expectations within communal structures. “Anepa lo azu thomphi” (The footprint is still wet) serves as a cultural injunction against disrupting established consensus. Those who arrive late to collective gatherings are expected to listen rather than speak. This illustrates how respect for hierarchy, seniority, and presence is embedded in oral tradition. In contrast, “Alahpa lo subo” (A tree at the crossroad) expresses the vulnerability of selfless community workers, who, like the tree offering shelter, are often wounded by those they protect. These proverbs reflect the paradoxes of social responsibility: while service is valued, it is not always rewarded.

Injustice and Its Consequences

The proverbs offer piercing reflections on justice and misrecognition. “Amini no alu chupu wuve kelaye achuyi kichi chishitsu” (While the boar tramples the field, the antelope’s mouth is punished) critiques the injustice of misplaced blame. It reflects the reality that the innocent are often punished in place of the guilty, a concern in both customary law and everyday life. Similarly, “Ikuhulla vi, ikuwola sa” (A smooth entrance, a rough exit) cautions against the illusion of an easy life built on

wrongdoing. What begins comfortably may end in hardship. These sayings serve as ethical warnings and offer moral closure through collective wisdom.

Social Expectations and Non-Conformity

Conformity to social norms especially regarding marriage, labour, and visibility emerges as a strong undercurrent. “Amqha lo kuzu wudu” (The rooster that sleeps in the loft) metaphorically describes a bachelor who lives alone, outside expected patterns of marriage and kinship. His isolation is seen as deviation rather than choice. “Putho ghaw kuxu” (Living a night bird life) similarly condemns those who shun daylight labour and rely on nocturnal or dishonest practices. In both sayings, solitude and secrecy are presented not as freedom but as social exclusion. The community ideal is one of visible, cooperative participation in shared life.

Wisdom, Foresight, and Leadership

Several proverbs promote prudence, caution, and careful judgment especially in contexts involving power. “Ikullo nepa thono ikippe nepa kuha” (There is a footprint going in but no footprint coming out) comes from a tale about the lion’s den and teaches the value of foresight in recognising danger. The proverb distinguishes between the gullible and the wise, encouraging discernment. “Angushu ithukulu toi” (Like the sighting of a lion) frames rare meetings or powerful encounters as significant events acknowledging both reverence and fear in leadership relations. These proverbs demonstrate how oral traditions shape expectations around authority and strategic thinking.

Moral Courage and Integrity

Proverbs also explore the idea that strong moral character protects one from corruption. “Alhaqqqu ye sughusu lo thono suchosu lo ilo chemo” (Termites infest only weak wood, not the strong) compares moral decay to termites, those with weak principles are easily eroded, while those with firm values remain untouched. This

natural metaphor reflects a cultural belief that integrity is a form of inner strength and protection. The proverb functions as both a warning and praise, encouraging individuals to cultivate strong moral fibre as a shield against unethical influence.

Social Unrest and Communal Tension

Community harmony is shown to be fragile, capable of being disturbed by specific actions. “Akhetsu mhi kipiti” (Burning the mongoose’s hair) is a figurative way of identifying troublemakers or acts that disturb the peace. It suggests that just as the village reacts in panic when the mongoose’s hair is burned, so too does a community suffer when someone disrespects shared rules or social boundaries. This saying captures the Sümi value of communal stability and the collective sensitivity to discord.

These proverbs and sayings are far more than idiomatic expressions, they are social texts embedded with cultural teachings, warnings, and aspirations. Through metaphor and narrative, they explore themes of justice, labour, moral conduct, social responsibility, and resilience. In their oral form, they serve both pedagogical and philosophical functions, offering a blueprint for living in accordance with the values of the Sümi Naga community. By anchoring moral lessons in everyday imagery; be it a plate, a rooster, an earthworm, or a footprint, these sayings continue to shape cultural identity and ethical understanding across generations**.**

3.10 Folklore in Contemporary Sümi Society

In contemporary Sümi society, folklore continues to serve as bedrock of cultural identity and social unity. Although the context in which folklore is practiced has evolved, it remains a vibrant and influential part of daily life. Traditional narratives, proverbs, songs, and rituals are still shared, particularly during communal gatherings and festivals like Tuluni and Ahuna. These events offer opportunities to pass on cultural wisdom and reaffirm community bonds. Activities such as traditional games;

folksongs, folkdance etc. are performed during these events to inculcate the traditional culture in the minds of younger generation.

Modern platforms such as schools, cultural organizations, and local publications now play a role in preserving and promoting folklore. Teachers and scholars introduce students to traditional stories and proverbs in classroom discussions, bridging the generational gap and encouraging cultural pride among youth. Folklore has also found a place in public performances, including drama and music festivals that celebrate Sümi heritage, e.g; institutions, are now offering mother tongue education to promote and preserve cultural identity and heritage,

Technology has further expanded the reach of folklore. Social media platforms and digital storytelling apps have made it possible for Sümi individuals-especially younger generations-to share and reinterpret their folklore in creative ways. Videos of traditional songs, online storytelling sessions, and illustrated tales circulate widely, helping to keep oral traditions alive in a globalized society.

However, the modernization of society has brought challenges. The decline of the traditional morung (bachelor's dormitory), where folklore was once actively taught, means that informal oral instruction is less prevalent. In some areas, stories are at risk of being forgotten due to the diminishing number of fluent elders or speakers.

Despite these concerns, folklore in contemporary Sümi society remains vibrant. It has adapted to changing lifestyles, reasserting its relevance in modern life. By embedding cultural values in both traditional and new formats, folklore remains a living, evolving force that continues to shape the identity and values of the Sümi people.

3.11 Constructing Identity and Community through Folklore

Among the Sümi Nagas, folklore plays a significant role in articulating and expressing a sense of identity within the framework of the community. Oral

traditions function as cultural maps that illustrate how individuals relate to their clans, villages, and the broader society. Through myths, proverbs, stories, and ritual songs, ideas of belonging, heritage, and social structure are transmitted and reinforced.

Multifarious folktales emphasize the deeds of ancestral figures, clan founders, or cultural heroes whose actions have influenced the values and customs of the community. These stories, passed down through generations, nurture a strong sense of pride and rootedness among listeners, reminding them of their shared lineage and cultural background.

In Sümi narratives, characters often embody traits that reflect societal expectations. The wise elder, the honest youth, the brave warrior, or the deceitful trickster serves as models of ideal behaviour or cautionary examples. Through such representations, community norms regarding respect, kinship, responsibility, and harmony are communicated and preserved.

Festivals and communal gatherings, such as Tuluni and Ahuna, are celebrated with songs, chants, and storytelling that emphasize collective identity. These events strengthen social cohesion by involving the entire community in shared cultural expressions. Participating and attending such traditional event helps individuals feel connected to their people and their history.

Even in changing times, Sümi identity continues to be elucidated and preserved through folklore. Whether retold in rural settings or adapted in urban or multicultural contexts, these oral forms remain a living medium for expressing who the Sümi people are. They provide continuity in cultural memory while also evolving to reflect new social realities. Thus, folklore is not merely a reflection of cultural identity, it is a dynamic process through which identity is constructed, reinforced, and celebrated within the community.

3.12 Continuity and Change: Folklore in Modern Contexts

Despite its roots in ancient traditions, Sümi Naga folklore is not a fixed or unchanging entity. It evolves in response to social, cultural, and political transformations within the community. As society modernizes and encounters new influences, folklore adapts to reflect current realities while maintaining its foundational cultural values.

One of the most notable changes in the transmission of folklore is the shift from exclusively oral traditions to written and digital formats. Tales, songs, and proverbs were once passed from elders to children by word of mouth, today they are increasingly documented in books, school curricula, and even on social media platforms. This shift has both preserved and altered the nature of these narratives. While documentation helps safeguard the tales from disappearance, it may also freeze them in fixed forms, removing the flexibility and spontaneity that once characterized their telling.

Urbanization and migration have also impacted the role of folklore in daily life. As many Sümi Nagas move to towns and cities for education and employment, traditional storytelling sessions and communal festivals have diminished in frequency. However, this displacement has also sparked a renewed interest in cultural heritage. In urban settings, folklore becomes a tool for reconnecting with identity and asserting one's roots in the face of assimilation.

Moreover, themes within folklore are increasingly being reinterpreted to address contemporary issues. Gender roles, once rigidly defined in traditional tales, are now being questioned or reframed in modern retellings. Similarly, stories are being adapted to resonate with current social challenges such as environmental degradation, intergenerational conflict, and cultural erosion.

Despite these changes, the essence of folklore as a carrier of communal memory and moral instruction remains intact. Even as forms and platforms change, the

fundamental purpose of folklore; to educate, entertain, and unify, continues to hold relevance. The adaptability of Sümi folklore highlights its resilience and its capacity to remain meaningful across generations.

Thus, folklore serves as both a witness to and a participant in the changing social order. It reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity, ensuring that cultural heritage remains a living, evolving force in Sümi society.

3.13 Folklore: Reflection of Life

Sümi Naga society has been an agrarian society. The fact that agriculture has solely been the constant source of livelihood for the Sümi's is largely true even today. Consequently the general habitat, villages, towns and the popular cultural practices and the rituals in the society have always been revolving around forest, fields, land, seasons, nature, god and myths. Given that Sümi Nagas rejoices the multifarious historical past, it is obvious to have those diversified things in contemporary lifestyle and cultures. It prevails in all literary genres and has also been integral to the lives of people, their oral literature, food preferences, habits, sense of dressing and value system. But the interesting observation is this multiplicity, even in the least, could never upset the cultural unity. Indian Folklore or literary oral tradition abundantly carries the first hand data of minutiae of the life of Sümi community. As renowned critic William Henry Hudson believes, "personal experience is the basis of all literature".

The Sümi forefathers have been conglomerating individual experiences in oral form. In that sense folklore and expression of life are dynamically and intimately connected with each other centering society in its entirety rather than the individual. The folklorist traditions delve deep into the essential question of human existence but there is no philosophical centre of enquiry. Instead one-dimensional simplified expression of life is in profusion. From this point of view folklore becomes a classic exploration of expression of human life embedded in folklore and beliefs. As Galit Hasan-Rokem observed "Folklore is created through mutual movement involving the talents and cognizance of singers and audience alike, of story tellers and listeners in a manner that blurs the distinction between them." All the folklorist traditions have

nature as an integral constituent of folklore. The age old bond of humans and nature is well expounded in it. In common they celebrate, nurture and propagate culture. Along with culture, religion is uniquely entwined element in the Sümi Naga folk literature.

Keywords	**Socio-Cultural Elements in Folklore**	**Relevant Folklore Types**	**Examples from Sümi Tradition**
Women's agency	Gender roles, marital norms, female autonomy	Folk poetry (Leshe), Folsongs and folktales	*Inakha eno Ghonili kuixa* poem showing women's resilience in divorce, *Ixeu Nikujo Le , Lojilimi*
Leadership legitimization	Authority structures, wisdom to affirm authority and clan status	Myths, Legends and proverbs	*Angushu ithukulu toi*- reverence for rarely seen leader
Christianization effects	Religious syncretism, shift from animistic ritual mourning	Ritual/mourning songs,	Festival songs blending Christian and animist elements *Kusakussho le*
Digital storytelling	Intergenerational transmission, digital performances	All types adapting to new media	Social media sharing of folktales with modern interpretations
Interethnic marriages	Cultural boundaries, alliance-building	Animal tales, Proverbs	Tales featuring inter-tribal marriages as diplomatic tools
Marriage norms critique	Social contracts, gender expectations	Folk poetry and folktales	*Kuthunu hi nilo* poem addressing divorce customs*, Khakhu and Sheyili*

Keywords	Socio-Cultural Elements in Folklore	Relevant Folklore Types	Examples from Sümi Tradition
Identity construction	Community belonging, cultural values	Festival performances, Proverbs	Tuluni festival songs reinforcing Sümi identity,ancestral heroes in communal storytelling
Modern adaptations	Cultural preservation vs. change	All types in urban contexts	Digital story telling projects,Youth reinterpretations of traditional tales in schools

Table 3.2: Socio-cultural elements in Sümi folklore

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter has examined folklore as a multifaceted cultural system encompassing far more than just folktales and folksongs. As demonstrated through Dorson's classification (1972), folklore manifests through material culture (crafts, architecture), social customs (rituals, festivals), and performing arts (dance, drama) alongside verbal traditions. These diverse forms collectively serve four key functions identified by Dundes (1965); entertainment, cultural validation, education and social stability.

The study of Sümi Naga folklore reveals how proverbs, riddles, and ceremonial speech encode communal wisdom, while material artifacts like traditional textiles and tools embody technical knowledge. Social customs, particularly rites of passage and agricultural festivals, structure communal life and reinforce identity. Even in digital contexts, these non-verbal folklore forms persist through adapted practices, demonstrating the dynamism of cultural transmission.

While this chapter has provided a broad framework for understanding folklore's scope and functions, the following chapters will focus specifically on Sümi folktales (Chapter 4) and folksongs (Chapter 5). These verbal traditions offer particularly rich insights into the research questions guiding this study particularly regarding gender

roles, leadership paradigms, and cultural adaptation while maintaining connections to the broader folkloric ecosystem outlined here. The subsequent analysis will thus situate these oral narratives within the comprehensive cultural system explored in this chapter, while delving into their unique socio-cultural significance.

CHAPTER – 4

SÜMI NAGA FOLK SONGS: WEB OF LIFE AND BELIEFS

This chapter focuses on the folk songs of the Sümi Naga, emphasizing their enduring role within the community's cultural and social life. Far from being mere artistic expressions, these songs function as living records of collective memory, conveying ethical values, emotional depth, and shared experiences. As orally transmitted compositions, Sümi folk songs offer insight into everyday realities ranging from love and agricultural labour to ritual practices and communal gatherings. Through their lyrics and performance, they help preserve the community's way of life, reinforcing social cohesion, cultural identity, and intergenerational continuity.

The chapter begins by defining folk songs and their significance, referencing scholars like Alan Lomax and Ganesh N. Devy to emphasize their role in cultural preservation. It then examines the functions of Sümi folk songs, including their role in storytelling, moral education, and community bonding. Different types of songs such as love songs (*Ixeu Nikujo le*), work songs (*Aghixu le, Thisho le*) and narrative hunting songs (*Ishe ishi nana le*) are analyzed to reveal their thematic depth and social relevance.

A socio-cultural analysis further deciphers how these songs encode gender roles, leadership, and communal values, adapting to modern influences like Christianity and digital storytelling. Through repetition, call-and-response patterns, and participatory performances, Sümi folk songs remain dynamic, bridging tradition and contemporary life while preserving the tribe's heritage. This chapter emphasizes their enduring role as both cultural reflection and societal guide.

4.1 Introduction

Folk songs represent one of the most vital forms of folk literature and are intricately woven into all aspects of life and social occasions. Their performance involves the use of music, though the musical traditions vary widely across regions and tribal

groups. The folk songs and musical expressions of a particular community or tribe typically develop independently of formal musical theory or standardized styles. Among the Sümi Nagas, there exists a rich tradition of folk music encompassing both sacred and secular compositions.

Folk music may be broadly understood as an ancient musical form that emerges organically from within a community. It is rooted in the natural modes of expression unique to that group and remains largely untouched by the conventions of classical music or modern popular genres. The integration of folk song, dance, and tune constitutes what is commonly identified as folk music. This form of expression plays a meaningful role in fulfilling ritualistic and ceremonial functions observed in village and communal life.

The Sümi Nagas possess a vibrant repertoire of folk songs, which serve as valuable sources for understanding and reconstructing their early history and patterns of behavior. These songs offer significant insights into the socio-cultural life of the community. Through their lyrics and melodies, people articulate joy and celebration, as well as grief and lamentation, bringing renewed inspiration and vitality to the collective spirit of society. Folk songs among the Sümis are not taught through formal institutions but are instead learned through active participation. They are preserved through memory and oral transmission, passed from one generation to the next. These songs are performed during a variety of occasions, including festivals, marriages, recreational gatherings, religious observances, community hunts, jungle clearing, agricultural activities such as sowing and harvesting, funerals, and other communal events.

Alan Lomax in *Folk song, Style and Culture* (1968) on the importance of traditional cultures said that “the folk, the primitive, the nonindustrial societies account for most of the cultural variety of a planet. Though rich in expressive and communicative arts, these folk communities seldom have the means to record, evaluate, or transmit their songs and tales except by word of mouth; and the noise of our hard sell society is drowning out the quieter communications of these word of mouth traditions”. Nothing can be known of a subject unless there is a study of the cultural history it is

embedded in; the expression of feelings through songs that reflect their position will be explored.

According to " Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms"(2008),folk song is:

"A song of unknown authorship that has been passed on, preserved and adapted (often in several versions) in an oral tradition before later being written down or recorded. Folksongs usually have an easily remembered melody and a simple poetic form such as the quatrain. The most prominent categories are the narrative ballad and the lyric love song ,but the term also covers lullabies, carols and various songs to accompany working, dancing and drinking."

In 1954 the International Folk Music Council defined folk music as "the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (1) continuity which links the present with the past; (2) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (3) selection by the community which determines the form or forms in which the music survives."

Ganesh N. Devy (2018) in his foreward to *Mizo Songs and Folktales* said that "Indian literature is marked by its immense variety of styles and forms and the rich interchange of language traditions form its complex fabric."

According to Mahapatra (n.d.)1967, folk songs are collective cultural expressions typically created by individuals or groups without identifiable authorship. They reflect the simple, instinctive impulses of a community rather than the refined individuality seen in elite literary traditions. As products of a particular society or region, folk songs lack personal style and idiosyncrasy, embodying instead the shared experiences and life-activities of a people (p. 156).

Tagore (1967) similarly reflects on the emotional and cultural depth of folk songs. In his essays compiled in *On Folk Music and Folklore: Excerpts* (in Folk Music and Folklore: An Anthology, Vol. I, edited by H. Biswas), he explains that folk songs preserve fragments of a people's inner life; their sorrow, joy, hope, and pain passed down across generations. These songs accompany significant life-cycle events such

as births, marriages, deaths, and communal rituals, affirming their integral role in shaping and sustaining cultural identity through oral tradition.

An emphasis on the cultural vitality of folk songs is seen in the work of Imchasenla (2020), who studies Ao-Naga songs in the context of the traditional ariju or Morung institution. Her analysis highlights how these folk songs functioned as instruments of indigenous education, memory, and identity, transmitted orally within communal spaces. However, she notes that colonial disruptions especially through missionary schooling and anthropological classification eroded these native frameworks, advocating for a decolonial approach to translation. She argues that preserving contextual and expressive richness of Naga folk songs is essential. Her work offers a valuable perspective on the need to reclaim oral traditions as sites of cultural knowledge, a view that also resonates within Sümi folk song traditions.

Folk songs reflect the more refined and expressive dimensions of human life. The act of singing, in one form or another, is a universal feature across all human societies. In many cases, poetic and musical expressions offer deeper insight into the collective consciousness of a community than lengthy discursive accounts. While folk songs are often performed for the sheer pleasure of singing or listening, they also serve as a powerful medium for conveying shared emotions, values, and ideas. In earlier times, communities expressed their sentiments with intensity and creativity through these oral compositions. Folk songs thus serve not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a repository of cultural knowledge, encompassing a community's customs, beliefs, rituals, moral codes, heroic narratives, supernatural concerns, and broader systems of thought and understanding.

Folk songs serve as living cultural records, capturing the historical experiences and social realities of different periods. While relationships within a community or group may, at times, have been grounded in basic survival needs, the influence of broader ideological structures such as religion, philosophy and literature also shaped and permeated their social environment. This interplay between material life and cultural expression is a pattern observed across many societies. As such, the cultural

characteristics of a community's folk heritage are most vividly and recognizably reflected in its folk songs and oral rhymes.

Folk songs hold significant cultural value and are performed during major ritual events, including harvest festivals, marriages, births, and funerals. In some regions, they are also used to stir romantic emotions, to captivate lovers, or to accompany religious ceremonies and secular rites. Additionally, they serve to commemorate heroic deeds from the past. In earlier times, when language had not yet developed into a complex system of expression, people often relied on vocal melodies as a means of communicating with supernatural forces seeking prosperity, protection, and deliverance from harm.

As vocal expression evolved and language became more integrated into song, this medium grew even more powerful. It expanded beyond ritual use, becoming a vehicle for expressing a wide range of human emotions and experiences. In various parts of the world, folk singing is often accompanied by rhythmic elements such as drums, rattles, hand or foot beats, and sometimes the strumming of stringed instruments like the harp. In other regions, wind instruments resembling flutes, single-stringed bamboo fiddles, or bowed fiddles are employed, each contributing to the distinctive rhythm and texture of the folk song and shaping the delivery of its lyrical content.

According to Dr. Kishore Jadav, "Even when folk song and music are not used those practical purposes but only for the pleasure of singing or listening, the greater part of the world uses them for expression of commonly shared ideas or feeling which are often trivial but sometimes they may be profoundly moving. It so happens that the songs, though inherit from the past, would be having a different orientation in their spirit in the sense that the ideas, composition and notation for them were conceived in consonance with the prevailing cultural- contact situation in most of the places. With the advent of speedy means of communication, the interaction between different peoples of remotest areas became more vibrant especially at the levels of socio- economic and socio- political life. The continuity of these contacts became more dynamic so much so that the felt need of the social life of these people was the

orientation in the mode of expression of various cultural elements that they had. He result is palpable in the structures, tunes and themes of their folksongs including those sometimes spontaneously composed. Similarly, preliterate societies used music as an unambiguous signal for expressing human thoughts more than as a finer symbol, apart from using it to please his companions, and for his personal pleasure and relief as an entertainer. It is, therefore, expected that culture will be reflected more in the music of a man who is in more primitive condition" (p. 67).

4.2 Functions and Importance of Folksongs

Folk songs occupy a significant place in the cultural life of any society, functioning not only as artistic expressions but also as essential carriers of inherited knowledge and tradition. They offer a means of looking back at the cultural foundations laid by previous generations. Folk songs, along with dance and indigenous art forms, are deeply embedded in the everyday life of traditional and tribal societies. Among such communities, these elements are inseparable from social life, and no important event or ritual is considered complete without the performance of folk songs.

These songs serve as repositories of a community's historical and cultural consciousness. Through folk songs, individuals can trace the history and lived experiences of their own tribes. Their simple, repetitive structures evoke shared memories and facilitate intergenerational bonding. The repetition not only aids in memorization but also encourages inclusive participation, fostering a collective sense of competence and enjoyment. Beyond their cultural importance, folk songs are also a common source of entertainment.

Traditionally, folk songs have been among the most personal and meaningful aspects of rural life. They typically arise from the working classes not exclusively agricultural labourers but from all who are engaged in the rhythms of manual life. These songs reflect the lived realities, aspirations, and emotional expressions of their creators. Interestingly, the most creative and expressive bearers of folk song traditions are often found among those who are both intellectually perceptive and economically marginalized. Globally, there is widespread agreement that the natural and original form of folk song transmission is oral. This oral tradition allows for the

dynamic evolution of folk songs while preserving the collective memory and cultural values of a community.

One of the most distinctive features of Sümi folk songs is their strophic structure, in which a recurring melody is paired with changing lyrics across multiple verses. This repetition defines the length and form of the song and serves several critical purposes. It fosters a sense of familiarity, making it easier for audiences to follow the narrative and engage emotionally. Repetition acts as a structural principle that enhances empathy and shared experience. Folk songs also involve more than just musicality, they are performative and often incorporate physical movement, making them complex cultural actions.

As Alan Lomax (1968) aptly states, song is “a complex human action since it is music plus speech, relating performers to larger group in a special situation by means of certain behaviour patterns which give rise to a common emotional experience”(p-21).

4.3 Types of Sümi folk songs

An analysis of Sümi folk songs reveals a wide array of thematic categories performed by traditional singers. These encompass songs of protest, verbal abuse, satire, mourning, and celebration, alongside work songs, love songs, devotional or religious songs, political compositions, and songs associated with children's games. The contexts in which these songs are performed indicate a diverse range of social and cultural settings. A majority of Sümi folk songs are composed with specific occasions in mind and are typically rendered during significant life events and communal gatherings such as naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, festivals, and religious observances, as well as during periods of work or play. These performance contexts may be either formal, structured and socially sanctioned occasions like rituals and ceremonies or informal, encompassing spontaneous or everyday situations such as individual labor or lulling a child to sleep.

The thematic variety found in Sümi folk songs reflects many dimensions of community life. These songs communicate the social customs, belief systems, and

everyday experiences of the Sümi Nagas. Certain songs use satire or ridicule to comment on individual or collective behaviour, while others deal with significant human concerns such as love, marriage, death, kinship, spirituality, and social relationships (Hutton, 1921; Ao, 2013). These compositions are performed using specific singing methods and are often created for attentive listening rather than participatory singing.

An analysis of these songs reveals that they serve more than an artistic purpose. They provide a channel through which individuals or groups may express views and emotions that are not always freely spoken in daily interaction (Lomax, 1968). As such, Sümi folk songs are both personal and communal expressions, shaped by and reflective of the society's values, relationships, and moral codes. They also function as a source of enjoyment for both singers and audiences.

Like many oral cultures, the Sümi Nagas have preserved a distinctive body of song that constitutes an important part of their cultural memory. While the content and singing styles may differ across time and region, the practice of singing itself remains consistent. Historically, these songs were central to religious observances and communal festivals, and they gradually extended into various aspects of daily life (Hutton, 1921). Before literacy became widespread, the Sümi people relied on oral composition to record and communicate knowledge. Many of these songs use metaphor and figurative language, often resembling riddles that call for interpretation (Ao, 2013).

The folk songs of the Sümi Nagas are traditionally performed with the accompaniment of indigenous instruments and form an integral part of the community's expressive and ceremonial practices. These songs have been preserved and transmitted orally across generations, and their familiarity within the community is widespread. As with many oral traditions, the original composers are unknown, and authorship is often regarded as communal rather than individual (Ao, 2013). Like other cultural groups, the Sümi Nagas possess a rich body of folk music that serves multiple social and emotional purposes.

A closer study of folk songs from Lazami village under Pughoboto sub-division reveals the presence of varied song types, each associated with different aspects of daily and ceremonial life. Songs are generally performed in groups, emphasizing shared experience and participation. Sümi folk songs may be classified into several forms, one of the most prominent being love songs, referred to in the Sümi language as kikimiye le. These songs traditionally served as a means for young men and women to express romantic feelings, particularly in times when direct verbal expression was discouraged.

4.3.1 Ixeu Nikujo Le(Love Song)

Ho- ixeu nikujo ishe aki –Ho
Ho- akithi lo kukho natha ina –Ho
Ho- Akuxu lau jo ishe kukho -Ho
Ho- Kukho moni ili ishe kugha –Ho
Ho-Kugha izu na qhelimi tsai –Ho
Ho-tsa ini su-uno ishe ghulo -Ho
Ho- ghulo kuthu akilo womoye –Ho
Ho-ilokuthu ishe i-u khum –Ho
Ho- kumtsali suqi suqi ixe -Ho
Ho-ixeu nawo kuzu kumo la -Ho
Ho-tsala kiqhi khelho ili atsa -HO
Ho- Atsala ghi aqhi kugho velo –ho
Ho- ishe thohujo akujo tsamu –Ho
Ho-tsa mukhali kugha kugha aqhi –Ho
Ho-aqhi nalu niki tuchu ina -Ho
Ho-inalu li ngo ajolu zuna –Ho
Ho-iphi khosu lo khosu lo iphi –Ho
Ho-iphi ayephi khosu na chuna -Ho
Ho- chuna shoal wozuna shisheli na wozuna –Ho
Ho-iki avilajo ishe suchi –Ho
Ho-suchileu ningu kuholu kha –Ho
Ho-lukhavi niu na ishe iki –Ho

Ho-iki nalu aveshela kugha -Ho
Ho-kugha nai nixeu kimiye -Ho
Ho-kimiye ni woni chela ye _ho
Ho-hili hi ye ho hili hiyelo –Ho (Tuyi Kappo. p.42 Lejole)

Translation

Ho-my beloved and I –ho
Ho-Until death separate us – ho
Ho- In life, we say –ho
Ho- we'll never part- ho
Ho-we talk of never parting-ho
Ho-but today, you listened to team worker –ho
Ho-and for three days, you've stayed away-ho
Ho-you didn't return- ho
Ho-maybe I'm not worthy to hold you-ho
Ho-never meant to lower my hands to hold you-ho
Ho-the days and months feel far too long-ho
Ho-can't wait for the time to move on –ho
Ho- woe let us speak in silence –ho
Ho-let words rest for tonight- ho
Ho-when the moon crossed our rooftop-ho
Ho-Let's sleep beneath the quiet sky-ho
Ho- as I sleep, lay the cloth on me-ho
Ho- Lay the cotton cloth on me-ho
Ho- after the meal is done-ho
Ho-we'll lie in peace and drift to sleep-ho
Ho-If my house not so far away-ho
Ho-I'd return to see her just once-ho
Ho-we lived far apart –ho
Ho-but my love for her still remains –ho
Ho-the love still stays-ho

Ho-I must go back
(Translated by Tokali Swu)

This folk song narrates the story of a devoted married couple who pledge to remain faithful to each other until death. However, the narrative takes a turn when the husband, despite his vows, becomes emotionally involved with another woman of his age and chooses to stay with her for three days. Over time, he comes to understand the depth of his wife's love and returns to her, expressing remorse and reaffirming his enduring affection.

The song portrays a deeply emotional journey of separation, longing, and reconciliation within marriage. It illustrates how promises can be tested by human vulnerability but ultimately restored through realization and love. The lyrical expression is gentle and sorrowful, conveying themes of regret and the strength of marital bonds. Beyond the personal narrative, the song also serves to reflect key social values within Sümi Naga society, particularly the importance of fidelity, emotional connection in marriage and the process of forgiveness and reunion.

Marriage as a Sacred Bond in Sümi Folk Tradition

The couple in the song promise to stay together “until death separates us.” This line shows how marriage in Sümi culture was seen as a lifelong bond. It was not only a relationship between two people, but also a social and moral agreement. Such vows were taken seriously, and breaking them either emotionally or physically brought shame, regret and emotional pain. Through this, the song reflects the community's deep respect for marital loyalty.

Temptation and Inner Conflict in Marital Relationships

The man is drawn away from his wife by another woman, possibly due to desire, misunderstanding or temporary emotion. His absence for “three days” shows how easily one can fall into temptation. But in Sümi belief, such actions were not

accepted lightly. This part of the song brings out the struggles between commitment and distraction, and it indirectly teaches that momentary desires should not come in the way of long-standing trust.

Self-Discovery and Return

After leaving, the man begins to miss his wife deeply, His love for his beloved remains, “the love still stays ,I must go back”. His words show longing, regret, and a sense that he does not deserve her love. This journey from separation to realisation shows the importance of self-awareness and emotional honesty in relationships. It also reflects a key Sümi value that it is never too late to return to what is right. Realising one’s fault and seeking forgiveness is seen as strength, not a weakness.

Silence, Rest, and Forgiveness

Lines like “let us speak in silence” and “let words rest for tonight” show how Sümi people often believed in expressing deep feelings without shouting or arguing. Silence in this case speaks more than words. Forgiveness is quiet, and love is shown through small acts, like sharing a meal or sleeping under the same sky. The folk song tells us that reconciliation is not dramatic, it is gentle and shared in silence.

Distance and the Pain of Separation

The man’s words also talk about physical distance, he says, “were my house not so far away, I’d return to see her just once.” This shows how, in earlier times, long-distance relationships or marriages between far-off villages were difficult. Travel was hard, and being far from a loved one could bring deep sorrow. Still, emotional closeness often remained strong. This reflects how love in Sümi life was not just physical presence, but emotional depth.

Gender, Emotion, and Regret

While the woman's voice is not heard directly in the song, her presence is strong through the man's words. Her silence, her patience, and her loyalty are all remembered and respected. This shows how women in Sümi culture, especially wives, were often seen as emotionally strong, forgiving, and enduring. The man's regret also highlights how men were expected to reflect on their mistakes and uphold their responsibilities as husbands and community members.

This folk song is not just a love story, it speaks of the values, emotions, and challenges that shape family and marriage in Sümi society. It highlights the strength of a woman's love, the weight of a husband's regret, and the beauty of returning home. Though simple but powerful words, it teaches about commitment, forgiveness, and emotional truth values that remain important in the life of the Sümi Nagas even today.

4.3.2 Narrative Hunting Song

A very common song sung in some Sümi villages *Ishe ishi nana* is one of the song which is related to hunting.

ISHE ISHI NA-NA.

Ho Ishe Ishi Na-na Ishi Ashi Ho

Ho Ashi hani ili ishe itsu Ho

Ho Itsu saphi aghuno lo Asa Ho

Ho Asalosu ashi ingulu ye Ho

Ho Itsu kusami na timi kighi Ho

Ho kighi limi na saili itsu Ho

Ho Itsuna haviye ishe Itsu Ho

Ho itsuna haqhona qhona laju Ho

Ho laju laishi to ngu na ashi Ho

Ho ashi thale shi ashi phule shi Ho

Ho inagholu atonguno ho ho Ho

Ho hoho lisu lpuh najo ile Ho

Ho ile kupha michi nigho mo ye Ho

Ho ashi kuhamina ishe asu Ho

Ho asu kuchuqhola ishe zuku Ho

Ho zukukami kiu shiha lu ne Ho

Ho wola wola na hili li wala Ho

Ho zula zula na hili li zulo Ho

Translation

Ho- Today, this morning - Ho

Ho- We set out to hunt the animals - Ho

Ho- I took my dog to a resting place - Ho

Ho- To cast lots before the chase - Ho

Ho- The hound keeper led the way - Ho

Ho- The dogs followed fresh footprints - Ho

Ho- They dashed into the forest - Ho

Ho- And brought the animals down - Ho

Ho- The hunters had made their kill - Ho

Ho- He went up and called for his father - Ho

Ho- But the father did not recognize his son's voice - Ho

Ho- When the hunters returned - Ho

Ho- They found him resting under a tree - Ho

Ho- Saying, "How can one hunt animals— - Ho

Ho- When he only lies beneath the shade?" – Ho

Ho wolo wolo na ilili wola Ho

Ho zulo zulo na ilili zulo Ho

(Translated by Tokali Swu)

Ishe Ishi nana is a narrative hunting song that is performed as a work song by women

Cultural Values and Social Norms in a Sümi Hunting Song

This traditional narrative hunting song may appear simple, but it reflects many important parts of Sümi Naga life. It speaks about shared work, responsibilities, moral values, and how the community teaches these ideas through songs. Such folk songs are part of the oral tradition and are used not just for singing but also for passing on beliefs and lessons from one generation to the next.

Teamwork, Unity, and Leadership

The song talks about a group hunt where everyone has a role, the hound keeper, the hunters, and the dogs. This shows that hunting was not done alone, but as a group activity. In Sümi society, working together was important, and leadership meant guiding others and being part of the team. It was not about ordering people but doing things together. This idea of shared action and simple leadership is still seen in Sümi village life today.

Ethical values and Cultural Reflection

The line “How can one hunt animals when he only lies beneath the shade?” points out something more than just laziness. It is a gentle way of saying that people must take part in community work. Those who avoid duties are not respected. In Sümi culture, working hard and being responsible are seen as good qualities. Songs like this teach these values in a natural way. It is not forced teaching, but something passed through everyday life and words.

Generational Gap and Social Perception

In this song, a striking moment of generational disconnect emerges through the lines “Ho—He went up and called for his father—ho / Ho—But the father did not recognize his son’s voice—ho.” Here, the son is shown as active and engaged in the hunt, fulfilling his role, while the father fails to respond or acknowledge him. This reversal of expectation challenges the typical assumption that recognition flows naturally from elder to youth. Instead, it reflects a growing emotional or perceptual gap, where even active contribution may go unnoticed by an older generation that has grown passive or disengaged. The scene may symbolize how generational misunderstanding or emotional distance affects relationships, even within close kinship bonds. In the context of Sümi society, where oral traditions often reinforce ideals of duty, respect, and recognition, this moment hints at shifting social dynamics and the challenges of maintaining intergenerational connection and acknowledgement.

Gender, Masculinity, and Honour

This song reflects traditional ideas of masculinity tied to work and honour. Hunting, a male responsibility, is described in active terms: “Ho—We set out to hunt the animals—ho / Ho—The hound keeper led the way—ho / Ho—They dashed into the forest—ho / Ho—And brought the animals down—Ho.” These lines highlight

strength, skill, and leadership as valued male traits. In contrast, the line "Ho—Saying, 'How can one hunt animals—ho / When he only lies beneath the shade?'' mocks inaction, suggesting that idleness in men leads to loss of respect. The song, therefore, teaches that to be honoured as a man in Sümi society, one must be active and contribute to communal tasks like hunting**.**

Folk Songs as Cultural Texts

The repeated "Ho–" in the song gives it rhythm and a strong voice. Songs like this were often sung aloud in groups during hunting, feasts, or when telling stories. These songs helped people remember not just events but also ideas; what was right, what was wrong, and how to live together. They became a way of teaching without using books or formal lessons. That is why folk songs are more than entertainment; they are like living books that hold the community's knowledge and values.

4.3.3 Work Song (Akumla Le)

These types of songs are traditionally rendered in connection with agricultural activities, narrating each phase from the initial jungle survey for land reclamation to the final harvesting of grain. They are sung collectively by both young men and women while transporting harvested grain from the fields to the granary. Certain work songs are also performed exclusively by Sümi women as they go about their domestic chores.

With the onset of the farming season, the fields resonate with the rhythmic voices of traditional folk melodies. As paddy saplings are planted, people from all walks of life regardless of age or status engage in singing to accompany their labour. During the sowing period, the landscape itself transforms into a musical expanse, where the persistent singing reflects the endurance and vitality of the farming community. These songs serve not only as companions through strenuous labour but also as a living expression of the people's enduring relationship with the land. The sowing of paddy typically begins in April and continues into May each year.

Aghixu Le (Sowing Paddy Song)

Ishe hoiye ho, she ho hiyelo
Timina khashina ho
Ho isheye asu ho
Niki ghungu yeku
Ho yekuhu lau na ho
Ho ishewo ipu ho
Ipu na iphulo ho
Ho ishewo ilo ho
Iloji pfe idi
Idi lali piye ho
Ilhokuthu ishe ho
Ishe iqhemi sa ho
Misacheni thana ho
Ho ishewo ilo ho
Iloji pfe idi ho
Idi nogho moyei ho
Loji tsumouna ho
Ho ishewo aji ho
Aji tho alaye ho
Ho ishewo sukho ho
Sukhonichela yei ho
Ajumi jo ishe ho
Ishe alothokhu ho
Thokhu sungiu na ho
Ho ishewo aju ho
Aju themi agho ho
Aghou hu alou ho
Loji pumi ho na
Naghi nilula ho

Lula kuhu lajo ho ishe
Ishe kighi kuku ho
Kukujo shimola ho
Ho ishe chewoqi ho
Ilu abe kutha ho
Kutha mutsa losu ho
Losu le shi ishe ho
Ishe Aghau ku ho
Kukuza ghau le ho
Ishe shoqho ipu ho
Ipu piyeuna ho
Ho ishewo iza ho
Iza pulo iju ho
Ishe iju qache ho
Qache she ngo ipu ho
Loji kusa ishi ho
Ishina khalaye ho
Ishi hioye ho, She ho hiyelo.

Translation

Ishe hoiye ho, she hoiye ho
People this year
Have set out to cultivate—
To cultivate the field
Opposite our house.
But my parents
Want me to change my teamwork group.
Forever, I want to be
With my team worker.
I am not shifting
I will not change the team worker.

I will purify rice beer
To offer to my team worker,
As the final days
Of working with them are approaching.
With the new team workers,
With unfamiliar people,
One cannot feel comfortable
Nor work as one wishes.
My beloved,
Do not feel shy or uneasy.
When you go to our field,
Be the first to go down
To the lower part of the field,
To clear the weeds
Singing a melancholic song,
And let my parents see you.
Let my mother
Listen to your song,
And deep in her heart,
Feel a quiet longing
Knowing that this is the last day
Of my daughter's teamwork
To be working in our field.

(Translated by Tokali Swu)

This song *Aghixu le* (sowing paddy song) narrates the story of a young girl who supports her parents by helping them in the fields. In earlier times, young men and women would form age based groups called as 'Alojimi' and take turns in the paddy fields. However, the girl's father was dissatisfied with the work ethic of her peer group and urged her to join an older, more responsible instead.

Work and Community Life

This *Aghixule* captures the traditional system of collective labour among the Sümi Nagas, where young men and women formed age-based groups known as Alojimi. These groups work together in the fields during sowing season, following a rotational system. This highlights the strong sense of community cooperation and shared responsibility in traditional Sümi society. Work was not an individual effort but a social and cultural process deeply rooted in age, identity, and seasonal cycles.

Parental Authority and Generational Expectations

A key tension in the song arises from the father's dissatisfaction with his daughter's peer group. He urges her to shift to an older, more responsible group. This moment reflects the strong role of parental authority in guiding the behaviour and choices of children, especially daughters. It also suggests the generational expectation that youth must prioritize responsibility and align with the family's concern for reputation and productivity. The father's voice becomes symbolic of the elder generation's role in maintaining discipline and work ethic within the community.

Gender Roles and Emotional Responsibility

The girl's emotional attachment to her team and her reluctance to leave, reveal a more subtle gendered layer in the song. While male labour was often associated with strength and authority, the girl's role is shown through her loyalty, emotional expression, and acts of offering (such as preparing rice beer for her teammates). Her voice carries a quiet resistance, showing that women too had agency, though often expressed within emotional and social boundaries. The song highlights how women contributed not just physical work, but also emotional and cultural labour within traditional settings.

Ritual and Relational Values in Work

The reference to purifying rice beer and offering it to the team is not merely a casual gesture, it is part of the ritual economy of work, where food, drink, and song were integral to strengthening group bonds. Such acts reinforce the idea that agricultural

labour was never isolated from cultural practice. Working together in the fields was both a physical and a relational act, marked by sharing, mutual recognition, and respect.

Nostalgia, Separation, and the Value of Teamwork

As the girl prepares to part from her team, she sings a melancholic tune, asking her beloved not to feel shy and to show himself to her parents. Her song carries a sense of nostalgia and quiet sorrow, as she knows it is her last day working with her team. This sentiment reveals the importance of teamwork and emotional connection in traditional labour practices. Even in a highly structured society, feelings of attachment, friendship, and farewell were openly expressed often through song.

This *Aghixule* is a rich reflection of Sümi Naga rural life. It encapsulates intergenerational dynamics, gender expectations, communal work, emotional expression, and ritual practice, all woven into a song sung during the most vital season of cultivation. It is not just a work song but a cultural document; carrying layers of meaning that speak to the heart of Sümi society.

Fig 5: Performing work song with traditional wooden tool

4.3.4 Thisho le (Rice Pounding Song)

Ishe holo ho hoiye ho
Ho hiyelo ho
Ishe apu ho
Aza kila ho
Kila mula ho
Chengiu na ho
Ishe apu ho
Nanu mula ho
Izu nisa ho
Sala shipu ho
Womoye na ho
Naghi sukhu ho
Tolo ngi ho
Nighi sukhu ho
To niye-e ho
Kujo vehu ho
Kishi munu ho
Nichela ye ho
Tokusuye ho
Kitheu jo ho
Ngije ixe ho
Una sa-i ho
Ishe lomu ho
Vehu shi-i ho
Alomuka ho
Chengi khiu ho
Pulo anu ho
Pau shiwo ho
Luna ipu ho

La iza ku ho
Ma qe Ange ho
Ishe holo ho hoiye Ho hiyelo ho.

Translation

Ishe holo – ho, hoiye – ho.
Ho hiyelo – ho.
Ishe, at my parents' house – ho,
Even if I labour for them – ho.
Work for my parents' house – ho,
I cannot take it with me – ho.
You prepare – ho,
And I'll get ready too – ho.
Let's get prepared – ho,
Our plans are getting delayed – ho.
In the coming year – ho,
I'll work alongside my beloved in a new field – ho.
No more working – ho,
In the fields alone – ho.
Who will be the youngest – ho,
To take care of my parents? – ho.
To serve my parents – ho.
Ishe holo – ho, hoiye – ho, hiyelo – ho.

(Translated by Tokali Swu)

This rice pounding song *Thishole* tells the poignant story of a young girl, the youngest in her family, who has devoted many years of her life to caring for her aging parents. Despite her deep sense of duty and affection towards them, she eventually decides to follow her heart and marry her beloved. As she pounds rice, an

everyday yet symbolic chore, she sings this heartfelt song, gently informing her parents of her impending departure. Through her song, she expresses a mixture of love, longing and the emotional weight of choosing between familial obligation and personal happiness.

Gendered Duty and Domestic Attachment

This song *Thishole* quietly reveals the reality of a daughter's place within her natal home. In the lines "Ishe, at my parents' house – ho / Even if I labour for them – ho / I cannot take it with me – ho," the singer reflects on the limitations of her role. Though she works and cares for her parents, she knows that her presence is not permanent. Daughters especially the youngest are often expected to remain and care for their aging parents, yet they are also expected to leave upon marriage. Her tone is not one of complaint, but of honest reflection. The song captures this delicate balance between love, duty, and inevitability. It shows how women's roles are shaped not only by what they do, but also by what they must eventually give up.

Marriage and Emotional Displacement

As the song moves toward the theme of marriage, its tone shifts with quiet resolve. In the lines "You prepare – ho / And I'll get ready too – ho / Let's get prepared – ho / Our plans are getting delayed – ho," the girl is not simply making plans, she is preparing herself for emotional change. She is stepping away from her childhood home; from the parents she has served with care, to begin a new life with her beloved. When she sings, "In the coming year – ho / I'll work alongside my beloved in a new field – ho," there is hope, but also the acknowledgement of a transition. Her decision to marry is shaped by both love and loss. In Sümi society, marriage often marks not just a personal milestone but a shift in identity and belonging especially for women. The song expresses this with gentle honesty.

The Youngest Daughter's Responsibility

The question "Who will be the youngest – ho / To take care of my parents? – ho" lies at the emotional centre of the song. It captures the girl's inner conflict as she prepares to leave the role she has long fulfilled. In many Sümi families, the youngest daughter is expected to stay back and support her parents in their old age. Her question is more than practical, it carries concern, guilt, and love. She wonders who will take her place, knowing that her absence may leave a void. This part of the song highlights a deep socio-cultural issue, the emotional burden placed on daughters, who are expected to serve quietly and then depart. Through her song, she gives voice to the emotional cost of fulfilling such expectations.

Folk Songs as Spaces of Female Expression

Thishole a song sung while pounding rice, a daily task common in many households. Yet within this ordinary moment, the girl shares something deeply personal. When she sings, "No more working – ho / In the fields alone – ho," she is marking the end of a season in her life. Folk songs like this are more than work songs, they are spaces where women reflect, remember, and express what is often left unsaid. In Sümi culture, where women's roles are largely defined within the home, such songs allow emotional truths to surface gently. Without protest, the singer expresses love, longing, and the sadness of parting. This song becomes more than just a melody, it is a quiet testimony of care, choice, and change in the life of a woman.

Fig 6: Womenfolk performing Thishole

4.3.5 Ayehkulu Le (Spiritual Conversion song)

Wola wola she wola wola - iho iho
Zulo Zulo she Zulo Zulo - iho iho
Aye luni she aye luni - iho iho
Ipu no mopi she ipu no mopi - iho iho
Aye luni she ayeluni - iho iho
Iza no mopi, Iza no mopi -iho iho
Kungupumi she kungupumi - iho iho
Ni ku ani she niku ani - iho iho
Kungulimi she kungulimi - iho iho
Ni kuani she niku ani - iho iho
Wolo wolo she wolo wolo - iho iho
Zulo Zulo she Zulo zulo - iho iho

Translation

Wola wola she wola wola - iho iho
Zulo Zulo she Zulo Zulo - iho iho
I will convert my faith – she- I will convert my faith – iho iho
My father refused – she- my father refused – iho iho
I want to change my faith – she- I want to change my faith – iho iho
My mother refused – she- my mother refused – iho iho
The male angel – she- the male angel – iho iho
Calling me – she- calling me – iho iho
The female angel – she -the female angel – iho iho
Calling me – she- calling me – iho iho
Wola wola she wola wola - iho iho
Zulo Zulo she Zulo Zulo - iho iho

(Translated by Tokali Swu)

This song reflects a young person's longing to embrace a new religious identity, symbolized by the repeated plea "Aye luni," meaning "I will convert my faith." The spiritual dimension is heightened by the calling of male and female angels, while familial resistance "My father refused... my mother refused" anchors the narrative in social reality. Such songs can be classified as spiritual conversion songs, revealing the emotional depth of religious transformation within Sümi society, particularly during the shift from animism to Christianity.

Faith in Folk Expression: A Personal and Social Journey

The spiritual folk song that repeats the line "Aye luni she, Aye luni iho iho" which translates to "I will convert my faith, I will convert my faith – iho iho" offers a powerful example of how Sümi folk songs are not just lyrical expressions, but carriers of lived experience and social tension. In this song, a young individual voices his desire to convert to a new religion to Christianity, during a time when

traditional belief systems were still strong. The refrain becomes an act of self-expression, signaling a desire for spiritual transformation.

Parental Authority and Intergenerational Tension

The lines “My father refused… my mother refused” highlight a key socio-cultural issue, a conflict between individual belief and parental authority. In this case, family elders represent traditional authority that resists change, revealing the emotional cost of conversion during a time of shifting cultural norms. This moment of tension also reflects how religious transition was not only personal but deeply political and social, involving negotiation between generations.

Christianization and the Reshaping of Ritual and Identity

The song reflects the impact of Christianization on Sümi society, one of the major socio-cultural changes of recent history. The individual’s longing to change faith, even against family resistance, illustrates how Christianity challenged long-held customs, rituals, and clan-based spiritual identities. The song shows how religious change was experienced as both a divine calling and a break from ancestral ways. It captures the emotional cost of this transformation and the quiet strength required to take such a step.

Divine Imagery: Male and Female Angels

The lines “The male angel… the female angel, calling me” brings in spiritual symbols that reflect gendered representations of divine presence. The presence of both male and female angels may suggest a balanced or inclusive vision of spiritual authority. In Sümi oral tradition, both men and women could be spiritually gifted, and the song’s invocation of both genders may reflect an older understanding of sacred roles before they were reshaped by Christian norms.

The Role of Song in Negotiating Change

This song can be categorized as a spiritual conversion song, and it functions as a space where personal belief, social resistance, and divine encounter come together. Such songs are not only about the act of changing faith, but about the emotional and social effects that come with it. In the broader context of this research, the song is a valuable example of how Sümi folk literature reflects identity, resistance, and transformation. It shows that folk songs are not static; they adapt, absorb, and give voice to the concerns of a changing society.

Analyzing some of the many folk songs of the Sümi nagas, we learnt that the Sümi folks express their feelings through the songs directly or indirectly. These songs carry a deep meaning, some talks about love relationship, expressing their love through songs, some about parting between lovers. These songs also talks about how various agricultural activities were performed. They sing basing on the activities describing every stage from survey of jungle for reclamation to the harvesting of grains. The songs are sung both by men and women. Marriage song, hunting song, funeral song, festival song etc also prevails in the Sümi Naga society. This song reflects the social and cultural life of the Sümi's in every aspect.

4.4 Socio-Cultural Analysis of Sümi Naga Folk Songs

Keyword	Manifestation in Folk Songs	Example Songs
Women's Agency	- Love songs show women's emotional autonomy -Work songs demonstrate labor contributions - Songs about marital choices	*Ixeu Nikujo le* (love), *Thisho le* (rice pounding)
Leadership Legitimization	-Narrative Hunting songs reinforce male warrior roles - Agricultural songs validate elder wisdom	*Ishe ishi nana* (hunting)
Christianization	-Syncretism in ritual songs	Spiritual

Keyword	Manifestation in Folk Songs	Example Songs
Effects	- Adaptation of traditional melodies to Christian themes	conversion songs
Digital Storytelling	- Not explicitly covered but implied in transmission changes	Potential modern recordings
Interethnic Marriages	- Not explicitly addressed in chapter	(May appear in other folk traditions)
Marriage Norms	- Love songs prescribe marital fidelity - Songs critique infidelity	*Ixeu Nikujo le* (marital vows)
Identity Construction	- Work songs reinforce agrarian identity - Ritual songs maintain tribal belonging	*Aghixu le* (sowing song)
Modern Adaptations	- Shift from oral to written transmission - Changing performance contexts	School adaptations

Table 4.1: Socio-Cultural Analysis of Sümi Naga Folk Songs

The folk songs of the Sümi Naga tribe provide profound insights into their socio-cultural organization, particularly regarding gender dynamics, social structures, cultural transmission, and value systems. These musical traditions serve not merely as entertainment but as vital mechanisms for maintaining and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.

Gender Dynamics emerge as a central theme throughout Sümi folk songs. Women's roles are prominently featured in both productive and reproductive spheres, revealing a complex interplay between cultural expectations and individual agency. The rice-pounding song *Thisho le* exemplifies women's economic contributions while

simultaneously exposing the tension between filial duty and personal desire. This particular song poignantly portrays a young woman's emotional conflict as she balances her responsibility to aging parents with her aspiration for marital life. Similarly, the love song *Ixeu Nikujo le* presents women as moral arbiters in marital relationships, emphasizing their role in maintaining fidelity and family stability. These songs collectively demonstrate how Sümi musical traditions both reflect and shape gender norms, offering women avenues for emotional expression while reinforcing certain social expectations.

Social Organization finds clear expression in work songs and hunting chants. Agricultural songs like *Aghixu le* document the age grade labour system known as ‘Alojimi’, where young men and women formed cooperative work groups for tasks like paddy sowing. This reveals a structured approach to community labour that blends age specific roles with collective responsibility.Narrative hunting songs such as *Ishe ishi nana le* reinforce gender-specific economic roles, celebrating male prowess in provisioning while implicitly defining masculine identity. These musical traditions function as auditory maps of social structure, encoding rules about who does what work and how different age groups interact within the economic life of the community.

The Cultural Transmission process in Sümi folk songs demonstrates remarkable sophistication. The strophic structure with repeated melodic frames accommodating varying lyrics serves as an effective mnemonic device for oral preservation, as noted by Lomax (1968). This repetitive format, combined with call-and-response patterns, facilitates participation across skill levels and generations. The International Folk Music Council's criteria (1954) of continuity, variation, and community selection are clearly manifested in how these songs adapt yet endure. Multigenerational participation in song performances during festivals and work activities ensures both vertical transmission (from elders to youth) and horizontal reinforcement (within peer groups).

Values Education permeates Sümi musical traditions, with different song genres addressing various aspects of moral instruction. Love songs like *Ixeu Nikujo le*

impart lessons about marital fidelity through narratives of betrayal and redemption. Work songs integrated principles of intergenerational responsibility and community cooperation, as seen in *Aghixu le* where a father guides his daughter toward more experienced work groups. These songs operate as subtle but powerful pedagogical tools, socializing young community members into expected behaviors and attitudes through memorable musical narratives rather than didactic lectures.

Thus, the chapter effectively demonstrates how Sümi folk songs function as both mirrors and molders of socio-cultural realities. The musical traditions accomplish this through:

1) Repetitive structures that enhance memorability

2) Participatory formats that encourage communal engagement

3) Narrative content that encodes social norms

Particularly noteworthy is how songs like Thisho le give voice to women's perspectives while simultaneously reinforcing certain gender expectations, a duality that merits further exploration.

The analysis suggests that Sümi folk songs constitute a dynamic cultural system rather than static artifacts. While maintaining core structures and values across generations, they evidently adapt to changing circumstances. This adaptability likely explains their continued relevance in Sümi society, serving as living bridges between tradition and modernity.

4.5 Conclusion

The folk songs of the Sümi Naga tribe are not merely musical expressions but vital threads woven into the fabric of their socio-cultural and spiritual life. Through love songs, work chants, hunting melodies, and ritual hymns, these songs encapsulate the community’s history, values, and collective identity. They serve as oral archives, preserving traditions, moral lessons, and social structures while adapting to changing times.

The analysis reveals how Sümi folk songs reinforce gender roles, with women's agency reflected in love and labour songs, while hunting and agricultural songs validate communal hierarchies and elder wisdom. The repetitive, strophic structure of these songs ensures their survival across generations, functioning as both mnemonic devices and participatory cultural practices. Additionally, the influence of modernity such as Christianization and digital storytelling demonstrates their dynamic nature, blending tradition with contemporary influences.

Ultimately, Sümi Naga folk songs are more than entertainment; they are living traditions that educate, unite, and sustain the community. Whether sung during harvests, weddings, or funerals, they embody the tribe's resilience, creativity, and deep connection to their heritage. As the Sümi people navigate modernity, these songs remain a powerful medium for cultural continuity, ensuring that their stories, beliefs, and identity endure for future generations.

CHAPTER 5
SÜMI NAGA FOLKTALES: WAVES OF SOCIO-CULTURAL BELIEFS

Sümi Naga folktales are not merely narratives for amusement but living archives of communal memory, embodying the values, belief systems, and social codes that have guided generations. These stories carry the shared experiences, social customs, moral lessons, and spiritual beliefs that have shaped Sümi identity over time. For the Sümi people, folktales are a part of everyday life; they express values, resolve social tensions, and provide models for appropriate conduct.

This chapter looks at Sümi Naga folktales in relation to their broader social and cultural setting. It asks how these stories reflect the community's belief system, how they reinforce roles within the society such as those based on age, gender, or status and how they respond to new influences, including changes brought by religion, education, or contact with the wider world. By examining these narratives closely, the chapter highlights how storytelling continues to be a vital way through which the Sümi community engages with its past, makes sense of the present, and prepares for the future.

5.1 Introduction

The derivation of the word folktale originates from the words folk and tale. The word folk refer to traditions, antiquity, or cultural expressions originating from common people, often applied to art, culture, and oral traditions (Dundes, 1965). The word tale is defined as a story simple to read or understand or a narrative recounting real or fictional events, sometimes serving as gossip or an invented excuse (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1995). Thus, a folktale can be understood as a traditional story rooted in communal heritage.

According to the Grolier Webster International Dictionary of the English Language (1972), a folktale is "a traditional legend originating among a particular people, handed down orally or in written form" (p. 412). Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1995) defines it as "a story transmitted orally across

generations" (p. 534). In essence, folktales are narratives passed down through generations, often shared orally by storytellers (Thompson, 1946). The term folklore is sometimes used interchangeably with folktale, though they differ in scope.

While both folklore and folktales are transmitted orally or in writing, folklore encompasses a broader range of cultural expressions, including beliefs, customs, rituals, and material culture, whereas folktales are a subset focusing solely on narratives (Dorson, 1972; Dundes, 1965).

Folktales can be understood through different perspectives depending on how they are studied. A psychoanalytic approach sees them as expressions of hidden fears or desires like shared dreams that reflect deeper psychological patterns. Anthropologists view them as mirrors of collective memory and social values, shaped by a community's way of life. Literary approaches, on the other hand, focus on narrative form, language, and symbolic meaning, treating folktales as texts rich in artistry and cultural insight (Ben-Amos, 1971).

5.2 Characteristics of Folktale

One of the main characteristic of folktale is the simple way of telling story without complicated structure. Story-telling is direct and it starts with important characters in the story. Such characters may be the generation of main characters' parents. Then, the story goes on telling the lives of main characters that may face obstacles but finally manage to get over the troubles. Often, folktales lead to happy ending.

The main characteristics of folk tales are as follows. Folk tale is told with ordinary words. It is a prose, not a verse. Folktales have been orally passed on for generations. With developed writing, folk tales may be written down based on the stories previously told by mouth. There is no indication of the original story teller. It is usually referred that the story has been told from their precedents who were important persons in the past. This differs from contemporary literatures which clearly indicate the authors' names. Even the folktales with names of the authors, still refer that the stories are based on the original tales, not newly composed. Jua Satawetin in Priwan (2010) gave some explanation of folktales' important

characteristics as follows. 1. The story must be old. 2. The story must be told in a prose form. 3. The story must be previously told orally. 4. The story must present perceptions and beliefs of local folks. 5. The true story which also includes the moral percept can be relatively deferred as folktale. It can be seen implicitly that the most important characteristic of a folk tale is the way it has been passed down to newer generations without knowing who was the composer of that story.

Folktales from different parts of the world often share similar themes and story patterns, suggesting that they did not emerge in isolation but were passed on as people moved and shared their traditions across regions (Shipley, 2001). Told by word of mouth, these stories are shaped by memory and adapted over time, yet they continue to carry the values, beliefs, and lessons of the communities that preserve them. More than just entertainment, folktales offer insight, warning, and reflection. Since they are orally transmitted, much depends on the storyteller's style, the audience's response, and the setting each of which shapes how the story is told and remembered.

5.3 Folktale varieties

In the literature realm, folktale is often categorized in varied form and name. Based on the pattern, Priwan (2010) classify folktale into different types. They are as follows:

Fairy tale: This type of folk tale has exciting story proceeding within an imaginary world that contains wonders from supernatural power and miracles of non-human characters such as giants, angels, or the King of Nagas. As such, this kind of tale is sometimes known as "Tales of Wonders". With their entertaining stories, the content of many fairy tales have been modified into various performances such as movies, and also other performances. Normally, it does not clearly indicate the location in the story. Besides, the main character possesses extraordinary attributes such as charisma or magic that would finally overcome the obstacles and conquer all of the enemies, with happy ending.

Legend: The story tellers in this category of folktale strongly believe that the incidents or the phenomena in such story do actually occur since there are factual evidences, persons, and locations indicated in the legend clearer than those mentioned in the myth.

Explanatory Tale: This is the kind of story that answers the question of "why" explaining the history and origin of human beings, animals, and natural phenomena. Explanatory tale explains names of locations, rationale of some beliefs, and stories involved with the hidden treasure.

Novella or romantic tales: This type of tale has a long story comprising many sub-episodes . Its content is more realistic. Characters in the story are rather common people, because of their ordinary lifestyles, than those in reality. Core content of the story is related to affection, exasperation, infatuation, fear, and adventures. Romantic tales are more sentimental than myths. Main characters have to show their wisdom and skills in solving problems and get through troubles with bravery and patience for successfully conquering their obstacles and enemies. Scenes and surrounding environments are also more realistic.

Ghost tales: Characters in ghost tales are inevitably ghosts and spiritual divines. There are situations of ghost haunting and possessing. The story is thrilling and frightening. Both story tellers and audiences quite believe that ghost tales are true stories. Appearances of ghosts or spiritual divines in the story are normally to help human, to revenge, or to show their supernatural power.

Hero Tales: This type of tale usually tells about moral, ability, and bravery of persons who are the country's heroes. Hero tales are similar to myths, whose main characters are also heroes in the story. However, there are some differences. That are, hero tales clearer indicate locations and times in the story. Core content of hero tales mainly tell bravery and heroism of heroes who fight for majority of people. Heroes are more adventurous and braver than ordinary people. These hero tales include the names of persons, countries, situations, or story plots that are based on true story and then modified for tale-telling purposes.

Fables: These are short and unrealistic stories. However, fables contain moral lessons that teach appropriate ways of living. Some fables give direct lessons but others indirectly provide thoughts in a comparative model. As such, fables are sometimes called the "object lessons". Characters running the story may be human, animals, or angels. The stories are assumed to be happened in the past.

Religious Tales: These tales are related to religions, gods, priests, and also historic miracles or supernatural power.

Myths: These are tales in which main characters are fairies or angels. Otherwise, the characters in the story must be related to religious beliefs and observance that are commonly practiced.

Animal tale: In this kind of tales, the main characters are animal, presumed to have human thoughts and behaviors. These characters can be either wild animals or home pets. In some stories, the characters may be human who can interact with animals as if they are also human. Some stories shows cleverness or foolishness of the animals. Sometimes, it can be a story of a cheating animal that usually bully other animals and finally get into the troubles. The animal tales are clearly told with the purpose to teach about morale. Hence, the animal tale can also be classified as fables.

Jests: Most of jests are short tales. In this kind of story, its climax is the behavior or situation that seems impossible. Jest tale may be a story of foolishness, cleverness, or sharp thinking needed for retaliation, gambling or adventures in a comic manner. Main character of the story may be the most foolish person who has the strangest behaviour. Besides, there are jests that involve sexuality in an immodest way so that they are told only in specific groups or on some occasions. However, it can be noticed that this kind of tale strategically use linguistic techniques. That is, words are played around in such a manner in order to make the story amusing. If any listener cannot understand spoonerism, he/she will be like a droll in their group at that moment.

Formula tale: This type of tale has its special way to tell stories in the different format from other kind of tales. For example, it is told repeatedly and continuously

or there are many characters whose behaviours are sequentially related. There are four categories of formula tale:

a) The endless tale: This tale has no limit length. It is continuously told until the listeners become bored. This kind of tale usually involves counting or repeated actions. It is suitable to children's interests. b) The unfinished tale: The tellers use this kind of tale to tease listeners in order to make them fun. The story starts from local interesting story then immediately end without any sign or good reason. c) Cheating tale: The story tellers intend to disguise listeners by attracting them to be part of the story such as asking and answering questions. When the listeners expect that their answer is right, the tellers give another answer which is totally funny and nonsense. d) Chain Tale: This kind of tale is a non-stop story. There can be many characters with sequential behaviours that may probably not be related to the behaviour of previous characters.

5.4 Components of Tale-Telling

There are five major components of tale-telling, they are: Narrative structure, characters, plot, themes, style and delivery.

Tale tellers: These are persons who have particular skills and styles for telling stories because he/she will make the stories even more exciting. Each tale teller may memorize tales' content in different ways. They may also be interested in different details. Some tellers who like telling stories briefly normally memorize major content and skip some parts of the story. On the contrary, those who are interested in more details would extensively describe the story. Hence, the same tale may have different details and content.

Tale body: The body of tale is considered as a substance or content of the story that would be delivered to listeners. As aforementioned, there are various types of tales with different lengths and contents. As such, there may be different stories for the same tale known as different "version". A tale collected from one teller or collected at one occasion is regarded as one version of that tale.

Tale audiences: The tale audiences (listeners) or bearers may be slightly different from other message receivers because tale audiences are more interested in the story and try to participate in such as asking questions, protesting, or supporting the tale's substances. Interactions between tellers and audiences create an excellent atmosphere and more fun of tale-telling.

5.5 Sümi Folktales

5.5.1 Anishe xamunu

Among the well-loved folktales of the Sümi Nagas, *Anishe Xamunu*, or Anishe's Flower, continues to be cherished even today. It is the heartbreaking story of a young girl who, through tragedy, turned into a flower.

A long time ago, in a village, there lived a girl named Nisheli. She belonged to a wealthy family. In the same village was a boy named Phio, who came from a poor background. From their early childhood, Nisheli and Phio were close companions. They played together and, as the years passed, their friendship blossomed into love.

However, they knew their love would not be accepted. Nisheli's parents were proud of their status and would never allow their daughter to marry a poor boy. Still, Phio asked Nisheli to speak to her parents in the hope that they might understand. Summoning her courage, Nisheli approached her parents, but as Phio had feared, they were firmly against the relationship. They believed that love between someone rich and someone poor could not last.

Heartbroken but not willing to give up, the two lovers made a secret plan. That night, when all were asleep, Phio would come to Nisheli's door and tap gently. She would quietly pack her things and run away with him. However, someone had overheard their plan , a sly and wicked man named Kutupa.

Kutupa was known for his bad ways. That night, pretending to be Phio, he went to Nisheli's house and tapped on the door. Thinking it was her beloved; Nisheli stepped out into the darkness and followed him. They walked far into the forest,

climbing hills and crossing valleys. Tired and confused, Nisheli asked to rest, but Kutupa urged her to keep walking.

As daylight broke, Nisheli realized that she had been tricked. It was not Phio who had come for her, but Kutupa. He declared his intention to marry her and promised to make her happy, but Nisheli refused as her heart belonged only to Phio. Enraged by her rejection, Kutupa tied her to a tree and harmed her with a knife. Nisheli's life came to a tragic end, and her blood soaked into the earth.

From that very spot, where her blood had fallen, a strange and beautiful plant began to grow. It became a silent witness to her sorrow, a symbol of her love and pain. Sometime later, Phio and his friends were out hunting in the forest. As the weather turned, a heavy storm forced them to seek shelter. They found a tree to hide under, the same one where Nisheli had died. To everyone's surprise, the rain touched all of them except Phio. The flower that had grown there seemed to shield only him. His friends tried to join him, but the plant gave shelter to Phio alone.

After the storm passed, the others left, but Phio stayed back, puzzled. Sitting beneath the tree, he plucked one of the flowers and held it close. At that moment, he slipped into a dream. In the dream, Nisheli appeared before him and gently told him to look at his hunting spear. When he did, he saw blood on it. In that moment, Phio understood the truth that the flower was Nisheli herself, reborn to protect the one she loved.

Overwhelmed with sorrow, Phio could not bear the weight of the loss. His heart broke, and he, too, died under the same tree.

From that time on, the flower that grew from Nisheli's blood has been called Anishe Xamunu, a flower of deep love and tragic fate. Even today, this plant can still be found in the forests of Nagaland, silently telling the story of Nisheli and Phio, a love that defied the world but was bound by destiny.

This folktale A*nishe xamunu* is woven with symbolic meaning and socio-cultural significance. The tale imparts several perceptive themes such as unfulfilled love or sacrificial love, nature as a moral witness, gender and silence, cultural memory and

identity, metamorphosis and spiritual renewal. (Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Kŭghakiche eno Leshele (Folklores and poems)* by Lozhevi,I)

Socio-Cultural Issues Reflected in the Tale of *Anishe Xamunu*

The Sümi Naga folktale *Anishe Xamunu* (Anishe's Flower) reflects many social and cultural values found in traditional Sümi society. Though it is a tragic love story, the tale brings out important themes such as social class, gender roles, emotional struggle, belief systems, and how people remember the past through stories. This makes it a valuable example for understanding how folk literature speaks about everyday life and community values.

Status and Social Hierarchy

One of the central issues in the story is the difference in social class. Nisheli comes from a wealthy family, while Phio is from a poor background. Even though they love each other, Nisheli's parents do not approve of their relationship. This shows how, in traditional Sümi society, marriage decisions were often based on family status and wealth, rather than personal feelings.

The rejection of Phio by Nisheli's parents highlights how families were concerned about honour and social standing. In this way, the story reflects how strict social rules could cause deep personal sorrow. At the same time, it questions whether love and social status should really be in conflict.

Gender Norms and Female Agency

Nisheli is shown as a brave and loyal girl who dares to go against her family's wishes. She chooses to love Phio, and even plans to run away with him. However, her choice is blocked by Kutupa, who tricks her and leads her to her death. This shows the vulnerability of women in a society where men had more power.

Even though Nisheli takes action in the story, she is not able to escape the control of others. Her tragic end reminds us that women's choices were often not respected, and that they were sometimes punished for acting on their own will. The story highlights both the strength and the suffering of women in traditional society.

Emotional Expression and Love as Resistance

The love between Nisheli and Phio is sincere and deep. By trying to run away together, they are not just showing love, but also resisting the limits society has placed on them. But their plan fails, and their love ends in sadness and death. This shows how emotions, especially love, could challenge social order but were often silenced or punished.

However, Nisheli's love does not end with her death. The flower that grows from her blood becomes a lasting sign of her love. It shows that while society may try to stop emotional truth, feelings like love and sorrow live on through stories and symbols.

Folkloric Belief and the Sacredness of Nature

The flower that grows from Nisheli's blood is not just a plant, it becomes something holy. It protects Phio from the rain and connects the living with the dead. This shows the Sümi belief that nature is full of spirit and meaning, and that the earth can carry memories and emotions.

In this tale, the flower becomes a living symbol of Nisheli's love and pain. It also reflects the idea that people and nature are closely linked in Sümi thought. Nature is not just a setting, but it responds to human actions and helps tell their stories.

Oral Tradition and Communal Ethics

The story ends by saying that the flower can still be found in the forests, and that the tale is still told. This shows the importance of oral tradition in passing down lessons from the past. Stories like this tale are not just about the people in them but they teach values, remind people of past wrongs, and help guide future choices.

By turning Nisheli's suffering into a tale that people remember, the community gives her story meaning. It becomes more than personal pain, it becomes a part of the group's shared memory. Through this, folklore becomes a way of teaching, remembering, and understanding the past.

The tale of *Anishe Xamunu* tells us much about life in Sümi society. It talks about how class and gender roles affect people's lives, how love can both heal and hurt, and how nature and stories keep memories alive. It shows that folktales are more than entertainment, they help people make sense of their world and hold on to what matters most.

5.5.2 Kasho Papu

Long ago, in a Sümi village, there lived a man named Kasho. One year, as the sowing season approached, Kasho had a strange dream. In the dream, his late father appeared to him and said, "My son, do not sow your seeds until I come and call to you."

When Kasho woke up, he remembered the dream vividly. Though puzzled, he chose to honour his father's words. So, while the rest of the villagers prepared their fields and sowed their seeds, Kasho waited. Days passed, and the other villagers' crops began to sprout. Yet, Kasho heard nothing. As time went on, the green blades of rice plants in others' fields grew taller and stronger. Still, there was no sign, no call from his father.

Doubt began to creep into Kasho's heart. "Perhaps my father has forgotten," he thought. "If I do not sow now, it might be too late." So, he decided to go ahead. He gathered his seeds and started down the hill toward his field. But just as he reached the base of the hill, a clear, echoing voice rang out across the valley:

"Kasho papu! Kasho papu!"

It was the voice of his father, loud and unmistakable. At that moment, Kasho understood that the time had truly come. He hurried to the field and joyfully began sowing his seeds. That year, a strange thing happened. The crops of all the other villagers withered and failed, for they had been sown too early. Only Kasho's field flourished, lush and abundant, just as his father had promised.

From that day on, the Sümi people began to wait for the sound of "Kasho papu" before sowing their paddy. They came to understand that this was not just the voice

of an ancestor; it was the call of the Indian Cuckoo, a bird whose arrival signaled the right time to begin planting.

In the Sümi language, "Kasho Papu" carries a double meaning: it refers both to "Kasho's father" and to the Indian Cuckoo, linking ancestral wisdom with the natural world. This tale, passed down through generations, continues to teach the values of patience, respect for nature, trust in ancestral guidance, and a reflection of the deep bond between the Sümi people and the rhythms of the land they live on.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Küghakiche eno Leshele (Folklores and poems)* by Lozhevi,I)

Socio-Cultural Issues Reflected in the Tale of *Kasho Papu*

The Sümi folktale *Kasho Papu* is more than a seasonal story, it reflects important socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the Sümi Naga community. At the heart of the tale are values such as ancestral guidance, patience, relationship with nature, belief in signs, and the role of oral tradition in shaping identity and everyday practices. These elements continue to shape the worldview and cultural memory of the Sümi people.

Ancestral Wisdom and Belief

The central theme of the tale is the guidance Kasho receives from his late father through a dream. This shows the Sümi belief in ancestral wisdom, where the spirits of the dead are believed to continue guiding the living. The story highlights how dreams are not taken lightly but are seen as serious forms of communication between the physical and spiritual worlds.

This belief reflects how the spiritual world plays an active role in decision-making, especially in important matters like farming, which is closely tied to survival and livelihood. It shows that Sümi oral literature is deeply influenced by spiritual knowledge and ancestral presence.

Value of Patience and Trust

The tale also teaches the value of patience and trust in natural timing. Kasho's willingness to wait for the right sign, even when others had already sown their seeds, reflects a strong cultural value of waiting for the right time rather than rushing with the crowd. His patience is rewarded, and this becomes a lesson for the whole community.

This part of the story reflects how Sümi agricultural life was closely guided by natural indicators and traditional knowledge, rather than set calendars. It also emphasizes faith over haste, and how good outcomes depend on following the right process not simply following others.

Nature and Cultural Practice

The use of the Indian Cuckoo's call (Kasho papu) as a natural signal for sowing shows how the Sümi people depended on nature as a guide for their agricultural cycles. This connection to the bird also represents the way communities observe and interpret signs in the natural world. Nature is not separate from culture; rather, it is seen as a living part of the community's way of life.

The tale shows how the environment, language, and tradition are closely linked. The same bird that signals the season also carries the name of the main character's father, making the story easier to remember and more meaningful for the community. This dual meaning of "Kasho Papu" reflects how language and memory are woven together in oral storytelling.

Oral Tradition and Collective Identity

The story of *Kasho Papu* has been passed down through generations, and it continues to shape agricultural practice. This reflects the importance of oral tradition in preserving cultural knowledge. Through storytelling, communities transmit values such as obedience to elders, attentiveness to nature, and the importance of spiritual connection.

In this way, the tale strengthens community identity and cultural continuity. It teaches younger generations not just what happened, but how to live wisely and in harmony with the world around them. The story also explains the origin of a farming practice, showing how folk narratives serve as tools for education and survival.

The folktale *Kasho Papu* reflects the deep relationship between the Sümi people, their land, their ancestors, and their traditions. It connects agriculture with belief, nature with wisdom, and dreams with decisions. Through this tale, we see how folk literature becomes a mirror of the community's values and a guide to living meaningfully. Such stories continue to shape the Sümi worldview and remain relevant even in today's changing world.

5.5.3 Atsösa (The Dog's Share)

Once upon a time, there was a mother dog that lived happily with her two puppies. One day, the mother decided to go hunting in order to feed meat to her puppies. Whilst chasing an animal, she wandered upon a huge cave-like opening. As she wandered inside, she noticed a squirrel busy eating its food. On seeing the mother dog, the squirrel hurriedly collected its food and rushed deeper into the cave, crashing into and damaging the shelter home built by a crab.

Seeing the squirrel, the crab thought that his enemy, in order to capture him, had invaded, destroyed his house, and had started to attack him. The crab thought to himself, "There is no escape for me anymore. I cannot run or hide to save myself. The only option left for me is to stand up and fight for my survival." Mustering his courage, the crab turned around and bit the leg of the squirrel.

The squirrel was startled and started running for its life. As it was speeding out, it crashed into a banana tree that was outside. As the banana tree shook due to the impact, it startled a bat that was hiding in its leaves. The bat, in a frenzied state, flew off with all its might. In the process of saving itself, the bat flew swiftly and uncontrollably struck a buck on its temple while it was grazing. The buck, without realizing what had struck it, started running off in alarm. While galloping away in fear, it accidentally stepped on the mother dog, killing her on the spot. The buck,

however, was not bothered about the accident and just limped away, nursing its wound.

On the other hand, the two puppies were wondering and waiting for their mother's return. They were waiting impatiently for their mother to return with meat to feed them as they were famished. The puppies were very puzzled and started to wonder whether their mother had either lost her way or had been killed by another animal. With no signs of her return, the puppies decided to go and seek help from Man.

"Our mother went out hunting today to feed us, and she hasn't returned yet. Do you know where our mother is?" asked the puppies to the Man upon meeting him. The Man then explained to the puppies that their mother, during her hunt, was trampled by the buck and killed instantly. Hearing the fate of their mother, the puppies were filled with rage and started plotting to seek revenge against the one responsible for her death.

Finally, they decided and approached God and asked, "Between the Heavens and the Earth, who is the strongest?" "The Lion is the strongest of them all," replied God. Realizing this, they decided to approach him. Arriving at the house of the Lion, the puppies said, "Today our mother went out hunting to feed us, and she was killed by the buck. So we would like to seek your help to exact revenge on the buck by killing it. Since God has told us that between the Heavens and the Earth, you are the strongest, we seek your help". The Lion welcomed them and asked the puppies to stay for the night and rest in his house. He cooked some food and, along with some wine, fed the puppies and put them to sleep. That night it was windy outside, and in order to test the courage of the Lion, the puppies started barking and howling. Upon hearing them, the Lion told the puppies, "The Elephant is bigger than me," and hushed them off to sleep.

The next day, the puppies decided to meet the Elephant. On arriving, they said, "Please avenge the death of our mother by killing the buck that trampled her." The Elephant told the puppies to stay for the night and rest in his house. He cooked some food and, along with some wine, fed the puppies and put them to sleep. That night, again it was windy. The puppies started barking and howling, and the Elephant, upon

hearing the noise, told them, “The Spirit is more substantial than me,” and put them to sleep.

The puppies confirmed that the Spirit was the strongest being between the Heavens and the Earth and decided to seek his help. Upon meeting him, they said, “O strongest one between the Heavens and the Earth, please exact revenge on the buck that killed our mother by killing it.” The Spirit asked them to stay for the night. He cooked some food and, along with some wine, fed the puppies and put them to sleep. Certain that the Spirit would not deny their request, the puppies slept in contentment. That night, it was windy again. The puppies howled and barked to test the Spirit’s courage. The Spirit told them, “Man is more substantial than me,” and hushed them off to sleep. The next morning, the puppies realized that Man was the strongest and decided to meet him. Wandering around in search of his abode, they fortunately found it by evening. Upon arriving and accepting that Man was the strongest, they said, “Our mother was trampled and killed by the buck while she went out hunting for food to feed us. We want you to kill the buck and exact revenge”.

The Man listened to their request and responded positively. He cooked some food and, along with some wine, fed the puppies and put them to sleep in his house. That night, it was windy again, and the puppies barked and howled to test his courage. The Man woke up and, without hesitation, told the puppies, “Do not be afraid,” and went back to sleep. Encouraged by his words, the puppies slept peacefully. In the morning, the Man asked the puppies to fetch him some water, which they did. He then sharpened his spear and machete, cooked food and ate it with the puppies, and set out to track the buck that had killed their mother.

First, they came across the footprint of an elephant. The Man asked, “Is this the footprint of the animal that killed your mother?” “No, it is not,” the puppies replied. Next, they saw the footprint of a Mithun. Again, the Man asked, “Is this the one?” The puppies denied it. He showed them footprints of several other animals, but none matched. Eventually, they found the right one. The puppies confirmed that it was the buck. The Man told the puppies to chase and corner the buck. He advised them to mimic the buck’s movements, if it ran on the ground, they should run on the ground;

if it leaped through bushes and trees, they should do the same. Then he went to the riverbank to collect wood and set a trap. Following the buck's trail, the puppies barked and howled louder. When they finally confronted the buck, they chased it fiercely. Though exhausted, they bit its legs and barked deafeningly, showing their canines in fury. The buck tried to trample them, but the puppies fearlessly dodged the attacks and kept up the chase across fields and hills.

At last, they drove the buck into the riverbed, where the Man was waiting. He struck his spear into the buck's gut and killed it. The puppies, overjoyed, bit its ear and said, "This is the one that killed our mother." There, on the riverbank, the buck's body was chopped and meat distributed. Two legs were given to the puppies. The Man claimed the head, and the rest was shared among the villagers. After their revenge was complete, the puppies stayed with the Man. He took them to God to present their case. God declared, "From now on, squirrels shall be caught in man-made traps, and crabs shall be dug out of the earth by the Hoolock Gibbon and eaten."

Once, while digging up crabs, a Hoolock Gibbon was pinched on the finger by a crab. In retaliation, the gibbon smashed the crab against the rocks and killed it. The crab's offspring scattered into the river and later multiplied. That is why people still go crabbing in rivers and nearby places. In olden days, the Sümi tribe always set aside a share for dogs that helped during hunts. It was a respected tradition to acknowledge the dogs' contribution. In some areas, this is still practiced. If someone neglects this tradition, village elders may even hold a case hearing.

Thus, there is still an appeal to uphold the tradition of giving a share to dogs who helped in the hunt. This is known in the Sümi dialect as "Atsüsa," which simply means "The Dog's Share".

(Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Kughakiche eno Leshele (Folklores and poems)* by Lozhevi,I)

Socio-Cultural Issues Reflected in the Tale *Atsüsa (The Dog's Share)*

The Sümi Naga folktale *Atsüsa* reflects a wide range of socio-cultural values, beliefs, and customs embedded in traditional life. Through the journey of the puppies seeking

justice for their mother, this story presents ideas of revenge, loyalty, justice, recognition, and oral tradition. It also highlights human- animal relations and the cultural importance of rewarding those who help the community, even if they are animals.

Animal Agency and the Moral Values

The story gives a strong voice to animals, especially the two puppies. They are not only aware of right and wrong, but also act on moral values like loyalty, justice, and courage. When they say, "Our mother was trampled and killed by the buck while she went out hunting for food to feed us," they are not just mourning, they are calling for justice. Their determination to seek help shows that, in Sümi belief, animals, too, are part of the moral world.

Moreover, the tale gives a lesson in chain reaction and accountability. A simple act like a squirrel disturbing the crab leads to a tragic consequence. Each character's action affects the next, showing how individuals are connected in a shared world of consequences.

Human-Animal Relationship and Mutual Aid

One of the key messages of the story is the mutual relationship between humans and dogs in traditional Sümi life. The man not only listens to the puppies but also accepts their request for help, showing the place of animals in Sümi society—not just as domestic creatures, but as companions in daily life and hunting. The tale ends with a cultural practice: "In olden days, the Sümi tribe always set aside a share for dogs that helped during hunts." This tells us about an existing custom of recognition and reward for animal helpers, which some villages still continue today.

The act of sharing meat with dogs, referred to as "Atsüsa" or "The Dog's Share," is not just kindness, it is a social rule. It affirms the idea that help must be repaid, and loyalty must be respected, even across species. Ignoring this practice could lead to village elders holding a hearing, which shows how seriously the custom is taken.

Hierarchy, Power, and the Search for Justice

The tale also reflects how people seek justice by appealing to higher powers. The puppies first approach the Lion, then the Elephant, the Spirit, and finally reach Man, who is revealed to be the strongest. Each of these figures represents a level of authority or strength in the natural and supernatural order. This journey reflects a structured belief in power and hierarchy, both in nature and in the moral universe.

Interestingly, while the Lion and Elephant feed the puppies and offer shelter, they avoid confrontation. Only Man says, “Do not be afraid,” and then takes action. This reflects the Sümi view of human beings as responsible figures who must restore balance and enforce justice in the world.

Customary Law and Collective Memory

The ending of the story links action to cultural consequence. The puppies' actions lead to justice, and the tale explains why people hunt squirrels, dig out crabs, or why certain animals are feared or respected. Such explanations, common in oral traditions, reflect how folktales pass on social rules and cultural knowledge. For example, the line “That is why people still go crabbing in rivers and nearby places” functions as both a memory and a reason.

Also, the tale shows how even small violations or unnoticed events like the squirrel crashing into the crab’s home can lead to a cycle of events with serious outcomes. This reinforces the importance of being aware, careful, and accountable, values that are central to Sümi ethics.

Atsüsa is not simply a tale about animals. It is a layered story about responsibility, justice, and respect. It brings out the deep connections between humans, animals, nature, and spirits, and how each action has a ripple effect. The idea of giving “The Dog’s Share” reflects the Sümi belief in rewarding contribution, no matter how small, and honouring those who stand by us in need.

Through this tale, we understand that Sümi folk literature does not separate animals from society; it includes them as part of the living moral world. This belief system

forms an essential part of Sümi cultural identity, where oral stories continue to teach, remind, and connect the community to its values.

5.5.4 The Story of Amüghusu (The Axe Handle)

> Long time ago, there lived a Sümi man named Swu Pishena. He was a wise man who knew the facts and folklore which he shared with the people. Among the many folktales that he narrated, he mostly told the story of "The Axe Handle", which the present generation still talks about today.

Once there lived a Sümi man who had two biological sons. He always advised his sons not to be greedy and to divide his property equally, even after his death. The eldest son got married when his father was still alive, but unfortunately, the father died while the youngest was still a small boy. After the father's death, the eldest son inherited all the property, defying his father's advice and leaving no share for his younger brother. The younger brother questioned him about his share, to which the elder replied,

> "There is a haft left behind by our parents, which you can inherit." The younger brother left disappointed and thought to himself, "What can I do with this old haft other than burn it? I can at least take it home as a sign of my parents' inheritance."

The younger brother thought again, "What else can I do with this useless thing besides burn it?" As he grabbed the haft to burn it, he heard a human voice: "If you do not burn me and instead hide me in a safe corner, I will always guide and instruct you in everything that you do." As he was still a bachelor, the haft said, "Don't get a wife without my advice." So the young man asked the haft, "What kind of wife should I marry?" The haft replied, "Do not search only for beauty or wealth, but look for a girl who is honest, whose parents live in integrity, and who comes from a well-mannered, well-behaved, morally upright family."

The haft told the younger brother to inform it before he approached any girl. But the younger brother disobeyed the voice of the haft and proposed to a beautiful girl he met along the way. Upon returning home, he told the haft about his proposal, for which the haft questioned him,

"Why did you disobey me by proposing to a beautiful girl? She will not be loyal to you and will leave you for another man. She will be lazy, full of pride, untidy, and this will lead to misunderstanding."

The haft warned him not to marry the beautiful girl, as their marriage would not last long. The young man told the haft about a second proposal he had made without the haft's consent, for which the haft replied never to marry that lady. She was full of pride, loved to gossip, and would not honour or respect others, for which people would come to your door because of her and bring dishonour to you.

For the third time, the younger brother proposed to a girl and told the haft. This time, the haft agreed with the boy's proposal and said: "The girl you have chosen will be a good housewife. She will maintain good relationships with others, someone who will not only think of herself but will be generous and a cheerful giver to many. Because of her goodness, you will have strong relationships with others. You will be generous towards the poor, even though you will live happily, it will not last forever. As you prosper, you will forget me, and that will lead to the downfall of your prosperity. So, when that day comes, remember to take my advice, or you will face the consequences." So the younger brother married the third girl whom he had proposed to, and they always sought advice from the haft in everything they did.

They applied the haft's instructions in the following ways:

a) In cultivation

b) In war

c) In the exchange of goods

With the advice of the haft, the couple was blessed in all they did and became wealthy. They were generous toward the poor and needy, for which they gained many good friends and neighbors. All the people honored them, and they lived a respectable life. As they were living happily, their village was struck by a devastating natural disaster. During this time, they forgot about the haft and started taking out their belongings from the house to save them from being burned. The haft asked,

"Have you forgotten my advice? Leave everything else and take me to safety, so that I can be a source of blessing for your family even if you lose everything."

But the couple turned a deaf ear to the haft and continued saving other things. The haft was also burned along with the houses of the village. Gradually, the couple built a new house and collected what remained from the fire; they took the burned haft and kept it in the corner. After some days, they returned to the haft for advice.

The haft said: "I told both of you to follow my instruction, but you were busy collecting only material goods. You didn't listen. You cared only for worldly things. Now that I am burned, I have become blind, deaf, and have lost wisdom and presence of mind. So, it's your choice whether to burn me or keep me, because now I have lost the power to advise and guide you." Since then, the couple lived no better than ordinary people.

They had once followed the instructions of the axe handle and received blessings and wealth. They had loved the poor and needy and often helped them by lending money and doing charity work. They were well-known, praised by neighbours, and had many friends. Everyone respected and honoured them, and they lived a prosperous life. Many people even wanted to live like them. The people called them "Ipu, Iza," which means "Mom, Dad."

This Sümi ancestral folktale has been passed down since the time of Swu Pishena. The haft is compared to wisdom and instruction, and the younger brother and his wife are like students and like our church today. One who follows advice and instruction will prosper and earn respect, but those who neglect it are like the couple who heard but did not act and in the end, suffered for it.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, Original work in *Kughakiche eno Xulhe* by I,Lhozhevi.)

Socio-Cultural Issues Reflected in the Tale *Amüghusu (The Axe Handle)*

The folktale of *Amüghusu*, or *The Axe Handle*, is a moral tale passed down among the Sümi Nagas that illustrates several important socio-cultural values. Narrated by the wise man Swu Pishena, the story has been shared across generations and is still

remembered by the Sümi people today. It carries messages on inheritance, obedience, marital values, the role of ancestral wisdom, and the dangers of materialism, all of which are central themes in Sümi society.

Traditional Wisdom as a Moral Guide

In the story, the haft (axe handle) is more than a physical object, it is a symbol of wisdom and ancestral guidance. The younger brother is instructed by the haft to seek its advice before making important life decisions, such as choosing a wife or dealing with social and economic matters. When he listens to its counsel, he finds success. When he ignores it, he suffers. This shows how the Sümi worldview places high value on listening to elders, ancestors, and tradition, especially when navigating life's challenges. The haft's words "Don't marry for beauty or wealth, but seek honesty and a well-mannered family" reflect the cultural preference for character over appearance or riches, especially in marriage.

Marriage and the Role of Women

The haft teaches that a good wife must come from a family with integrity and must herself be generous, respectful, and community minded. The third wife, who is approved by the haft, is described as one who maintains good relations with others and helps the poor. Her moral qualities, not her beauty or status make her an ideal wife. This reflects how Sümi oral narratives uphold marriage not just as a personal bond but as a social and moral contract that affects the reputation and wellbeing of a household.

The tale also warns against marrying women who are proud, lazy, or disrespectful, suggesting that a family's harmony and public honour largely depend on the virtue of the woman. This reinforces gender expectations in Sümi society where women are viewed as key bearers of family honour and social peace.

Inheritance and Family Ethics

Another central issue in the story is inheritance. The elder brother, despite his father's advice, claims all the property and leaves only the haft to the younger brother. This

act of greed and disrespect violates the Sümi value of fair division of ancestral property. The younger brother, although disappointed, does not fight or cause public dispute. Instead, he quietly takes what is given and turns it into his strength by respecting it. This presents an ideal of humility, self-restraint, and patience, qualities admired in Sümi culture.

Charity and Generosity in Sümi Community

Once the younger brother and his wife begin to follow the haft's teachings, they grow wealthy and become generous toward the poor. The tale says they were called "Ipu, Iza" (Mom, Dad) by the people, a title of respect and endearment in Sümi society. This highlights how charity and generosity are key markers of status and honour in the community. A family's success is measured not just in wealth but in how much they give back to others.

Neglect of Wisdom and the Consequence of Forgetting Tradition

When disaster strikes, the couple saves material things and forgets the haft. The haft's words "Even if you lose everything, take me with you" go unheard. In forgetting the source of their blessings, they lose wisdom, and with it, the special fortune they once had. This mirrors a real concern in Sümi society today that modern life may lead to forgetting traditional knowledge and ancestral instruction. The story reminds listeners that material goods can be rebuilt, but wisdom, once lost, is hard to regain.

The Role of Folktales in Ethical Instruction

The tale ends with a moral reflection, comparing the haft to the church and people today. It reinforces the idea that those who follow instruction and live by moral guidance will prosper, while those who hear but ignore it will falter. Like many Sümi folktales, *Amughusu* functions as a teaching tool for younger generations, offering practical guidance on life, marriage, family, and social behaviour.

The tale of *Amughusu* reflects the interplay between tradition, morality, and social identity in Sümi Naga culture. Through the symbol of the haft, it emphasizes the

importance of respecting ancestral advice, making wise marital choices, practicing generosity, and valuing moral character over material wealth. It also warns against neglecting cultural teachings, showing how such neglect can lead to loss and downfall.

In the context of this thesis, the story offers insight into how folk literature shapes and preserves social ethics within Sümi communities, and how oral narratives continue to be powerful vehicles for transmitting values, warnings, and ideals to future generations.

5.5.5 The man who transformed into hornbill (Aghacho Ilhovekiu)

Once upon a time, in a tranquil village, there lived a man named Kivigho and a young woman named Tusholi. The two were deeply in love and had a plan to marry. However, fate intervened when Kivigho embarked on a journey to a distant village. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, yet he did not return. Believing that Kivigho might never come back, Tusholi eventually married another man from a neighbouring village. Sometime later, Kivigho returned and, upon learning of Tusholi's marriage, decided to visit her.

On that day, Tusholi's husband and the villagers were away in the fields, leaving Tusholi alone at home. She welcomed Kivigho with warmth and offered him a hearty meal. Afterwards, the two set out towards the field. On the way, Tusholi noticed a tree bearing ripe fruit and expressed her desire to eat the fruit, Kivigho eager to fulfill her wish, began climbing the tree. To their astonishment, as he climbed higher, the tree began to grow taller and taller, lifting him far above the ground. Unable to descend, Kivigho was mysteriously transformed into a hornbill.

Before taking flight, he removed his sheath and tied it to his beak, while securing his sword to his tail. Turning to Tusholi one last time, he promised to return and visit her again. With that, the hornbill spread its wings and disappeared into the sky.

The tree from which Kivigho had ascended and transformed is now known as the Hornbill fruit tree. In time, a magnificent hornbill was seen visiting the village where Tusholi lived. The villages awestruck by the beauty and uniqueness of the

bird, cried out, “The rare bird has come to our village!”. Curious, Tusholi came to see the commotion. As she approached, the hornbill i,e Kivigho in his new form, gently dropped one of his feathers from the sky. The feather floated and became entangled in Tusholi’s hair before the bird flew away.

Recalling Kivigho’s promise, Tusholi treasured the feather and kept it beneath her pillow as she slept. That night, Kivigho appeared to her in her dream and spoke these words, “if you are to bear a son, give him this feather when the time comes for him to journey into the world.”

Honouring his words, the feather of the hornbill came to be regarded as a sacred and significant token. From that day forward, it has been cherished by men folk and passed down through generations as an important item of heritage and protection, worn with pride as part of their traditional gear. (Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Apu Ashu Yezabo*, LVPO)

Love, Loss, and the Reinterpretation of Romantic Norms

The tale begins with a romantic bond between Kivigho and Tusholi, highlighting sincere affection: “The two were deeply in love and had a plan to marry.” However, the disruption of this relationship due to Kivigho's long absence reflects the fragility of love within traditional expectations. Tusholi’s remarriage is practical and socially accepted, yet the emotional cost is clear, especially when she “welcomed Kivigho with warmth” upon his return.

This shows how Sümi narratives often reveal the emotional consequences of social pressures, where love is secondary to duty, and marriage becomes a site of loss and compromise. It offers a subtle critique of rigid norms where women are expected to remarry quickly, while men’s emotional pain is transformed into mythical transcendence.

Transformation and Masculine Identity in Sümi Culture

Kivigho’s transformation into a hornbill is not only magical, it is symbolic. He ties his sheath to his beak and his sword to his tail, carrying symbols of warriorhood and

honour, even in his bird form. “He removed his sheath and tied it to his beak, while securing his sword to his tail.” This scene represents a masculine ideal of strength, loyalty, and spiritual continuity in Sümi culture. His transformation elevates him from human to mythic status suggesting that true masculine identity lies not only in physical strength but in sacrifice, memory, and legacy.

Female Roles as Guardians of Memory and Lineage

Although Tusholi does not go on a journey or undertake action like Kivigho, her role is central. She receives the feather, treasures it, and keeps it under her pillow, “She treasured the feather and kept it beneath her pillow as she slept”. This act reflects the cultural position of women as preservers of memory and transmitters of ancestral knowledge. Her obedience to the dream message “Give him this feather when the time comes for him to journey into the world”. This shows how women participate in heritage-making, not through authority, but through spiritual and emotional labour.

Cultural Symbolism and Oral Heritage

The hornbill is not chosen randomly, it is a sacred cultural symbol in Sümi society. The story gives a mythical explanation for why its feather is worn by men as part of their traditional gear; “It has been cherished by menfolk and passed down through generations as an important item of heritage and protection”. This aligns with the idea that Sümi folklore serves as a social text, preserving not only morality but also symbolic practices such as dress, honour, and ritual identity.

Continuity between Human and Natural World

The tree that grows taller as Kivigho climbs, the hornbill’s repeated visits, and the falling feather all show a worldview where nature is sacred, alive, and responsive. “As he climbed higher, the tree began to grow taller and taller… lifting him far above the ground.” This illustrates a belief system in which transformation and communication between human and non-human beings are possible. The story reflects a perspective where spiritual change is natural and expected.

Intergenerational Inheritance and Moral Instruction

Tusholi is instructed to pass the feather to her son, which symbolises how inheritance is not just material, but moral and symbolic. The feather becomes a mark of protection and honour, linking the child with the ancestral past. “Give him this feather when the time comes for him to journey into the world”. It reinforces the idea that tradition is preserved through both women and men, and that Sümi cultural identity is tied to memory, sacred objects, and storytelling.

The tale expresses deep socio-cultural values through a narrative of love, loss, transformation, and legacy. It captures how folktales encode emotions, gender roles, cultural beliefs, and sacred practices within everyday storytelling. The story supports the idea that Sümi oral literature is not only artistic but instructive, a living tradition that teaches identity, moral values, and social order across generations.

5.5.6 Kungulimi (The Female Angel)

Once there lived a man who had two sons. Their parents had died when the boys were still young, so they lived alone. The elder son usually slept outside, while the younger stayed and slept in their home. Every night, an angel would descend from the heaven, bathe, and then disappear, and the younger son was aware of this mysterious event. One day, he shared the story with his older brother, but the elder did not believe him and continued sleeping elsewhere. The younger brother kept urging him, insisting he stay home just once to see for himself. Finally, driven by curiosity, the elder brother agreed to stay at home that night.

That night, the two brothers waited together, but the angel did not appear at the usual time. Frustrated, the elder brother accused the younger of lying and even threatened to kill him. The younger pleaded with him to wait a little longer. Sure enough, after some time, two angels descended and began to bathe, just as the younger had described. The elder brother, now convinced, said he would catch the more beautiful angel, instructing his brother to catch the other. But when they approached, fate reversed their intentions. The more beautiful angel went to the

younger brother, and the other to the elder. They realized they could not change what was destined and accepted the angels that came to them.

Though both brothers married the angels, the elder became envious of the younger, especially because of his wife's beauty. Jealousy took root in his heart, and he began plotting to kill his brother and take his wife. One day, when both their wives were pregnant, the elder suggested they go out to pluck fruits. The younger, trusting his brother, agreed. They came upon a fruit tree beside a deep pond, and the elder slyly told his brother to climb up and pick the fruits. As the younger brother climbed and began gathering fruit, the elder secretly began cutting the base of the tree. When the younger looked down and asked what he was doing, the elder replied, "I'm making steps for you." Believing him, the younger continued plucking fruit. Eventually, the elder finished cutting the tree, and it fell into the deep pond taking the younger brother with it.

The elder returned home with the fruits. The younger brother's wife, seeing he was alone, asked where her husband was. The elder casually replied that he was still behind, unable to carry the fruits. He urged her to eat some fruit while she waited, but she refused and remained anxious, hoping her husband would return soon. When he didn't come back, fear and worry overcame her. The next day, she prepared a clean piece of fat meat and a chicken drumstick and went to the deep pond in search of him. Unknown to her, the elder brother followed in secret. She called out to her husband and lured him toward the surface with the drumstick. The younger brother began to rise from the water, but just as he was about to reach her, the elder brother shouted, "Yeh-a!" and the sound forced him back into the water. This happened repeatedly each time she called, and he rose, the elder shouted, sending him back down. Eventually, he could no longer be brought out, and she returned home in sorrow.

Grieving and desperate, the younger brother's wife confronted the elder. She told him, "If you truly want me to be your wife, then light a fire in our compound and let the smoke rise." The elder brother, thinking he had finally succeeded, lit the fire. As the smoke rose into the sky, the younger brother's wife ascended with it and

vanished into heaven. There, she gave birth to a baby boy. As the child grew, he began to long for his father's village and cried to go there. Moved by his cries, the mother tied a thread around his waist and gently lowered him toward the earth. But before he reached the ground, a crow flew by and snapped the thread. The boy fell to the earth, and his liver spilled out upon impact. The crow swooped down and ate the boy's liver.

Out of that tragic incident, a mournful song emerged: "O crow, the eater of the child's liver." And to this day, it is said that crows still feed on human flesh, a dark memory of the past passed down through generations.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Küghakiche eno Leshele (Folklores and poems)* by Lozhevi,I)

Representation of Gender Roles and the Divine Feminine

The folktale *Kungulimi* introduces a female angel whose descent from the heavens and eventual return highlights the deep connection between the spiritual and human realms in Sümi cosmology. Her character is emblematic of purity, agency, and moral strength. Unlike stereotypical depictions of women as passive figures in traditional narratives, Kungulimi takes decisive actions, she marries by her own terms, avenges her husband's death, and refuses to remain with the betrayer.

"If you truly want me to be your wife, then light a fire in our compound and let the smoke rise". As the smoke raised into the sky, the younger brother's wife ascended with it and vanished into heaven. Such imagery reveals the Sümi Naga community's cultural valuation of women's honour, autonomy in relationships, and spiritual agency. Women in Sümi oral traditions are often represented not only as life-givers but also as moral agents who maintain balance between cosmic and earthly orders.

Sibling Rivalry and the Theme of Jealousy

A major turning point in the narrative occurs when the elder brother becomes envious of his younger sibling's divine wife. This jealousy manifests as betrayal and

violence, leading to a tragic outcome. “Jealousy took root in his heart, and he began plotting to kill his brother and take his wife”.

This aspect of the folktale underscores one of the key aims of this study: to understand how oral narratives transmit moral instruction. The consequences of jealousy are not merely personal but socially disruptive. As scholars have noted, folktales often function as moral blueprints, guiding behavior within the kinship and community structure.

Divine Justice and Moral Consequences

The tale does not conclude with the elder brother’s triumph but with his spiritual and emotional desolation. Kungulimi’s departure and the death of the baby serve as instruments of divine justice. The punishment is symbolic; he is left without love, respect, or connection to the divine. “O crow, the eater of the child’s liver”.

“To this day, it is said that crows still feed on human flesh…”

These lines illustrate how the supernatural functions within oral tradition as a means of encoding cautionary messages. The crow becomes a cultural symbol of grief and consequence, reminding listeners of the dangers of betrayal and immoral conduct.

Supernatural Elements in Daily Life

The fusion of the sacred and the mundane is a defining feature of this folktale. Angels descending at night, the smoke carrying a woman to heaven, and a baby born from divine union all reflect the Sümi perspective in which the spiritual realm is deeply embedded in daily life.

This intertwining reflects indigenous cosmological beliefs where birth, justice, and death are seen as part of a larger spiritual design. As oral literature scholars have observed, such stories help maintain continuity between ancestral belief systems and contemporary community identity.

Moral and Ethical Teachings in Folklore

The tale of *Kungulimi* offers a rich moral framework. The contrast between the trusting younger brother and the deceptive elder emphasize the consequences of moral failure. Although the ending is tragic, it reaffirms core values such as loyalty, honesty, and the sanctity of relationships. Folktales such as this serve not merely as entertainment but as educational narratives, what Finnegan (1992) terms "instruments of socialization" .They offer ethical instruction and reinforce behavioral norms within the community context.

Oral Tradition and Cultural Transmission

The persistence of the song "O crow, the eater of the child's liver" demonstrates the role of oral tradition in preserving emotional and moral memory. Songs and tales are passed from one generation to another, not only to entertain but to educate and guide.

5.5.7 Khakhu eno Sheyili (Khakhu and Sheyili)

Khakhu was the son of Hethana Kinimi from Lumthsami village. He married Sheyili daughter of Thsunishe Tsuqumi from Emlomi village. They lived a very happy married life but they were separated because of Khakhu's wicked stepmother. Their cause of separation started this way; when a villager harvested something from their field they gave it to Apuh Hethana, but they never received anything in return. But when a villager gave it to Khakhu, his wife Sheyili always gave salt or rice in return. So the villagers, whenever they harvested anything from their field, they would give only to Khakhu.

Khakhu's stepmother became jealous of her daughter-in-law Sheyili and started plotting to separate Khakhu and Sheyili. Whenever Khakhu and Sheyili lock their house and left for the field, his stepmother would break inside the house and toss the rice from the rice basket and sprinkled the water over it and walked over it making it look very muddy, and to make them believe that it was done by the pigs and used to leave the home.

Sheyili knew all these wicked deeds were done by her mother-in-law but did not mention it to her husband. Khakhu, not knowing that, used to think that his wife is not keeping the utensils and foods properly and because of her carelessness the pigs are spoiling all their goods. So, one day Sheyili got an idea to let Khakhu know the truth about his stepmother. She asked Khakhu to stay at their chimney and peep what will happen and as usual she locked the door and went off to the field. As usual, Khakhu's stepmother came and destroyed all the foods and goods and left. That evening, after coming back from the field, Sheyili asked her husband "Whose pigs destroyed all our goods and did you catch it?"Khakhu replied "It was not the pigs but it was my stepmother who did it." So Sheyili asked Khakhu "Did you scold her?" Khakhu replied "No I didn't say anything I just let her go".

As soon as she heard that, Sheyili realised that "I am a daughter-in-law, living in a foreign village, even if people look down or insult me, my husband will never protect me" and she made a mini knotted rope and sent it to Emlo village to her brothers. (This mini knot on the rope means to come and take her on the 9th day).

On the 9th day, Sheyili and Khakhu did not go to the field and were at home. Sheyili asked Khakhu "Shall we kill a rooster and eat?" Khakhu replied "We call it ours but it is you who look after so it's your wish". So Sheyili killed the rooster and cooked it. She also prepared a nice meal and they ate together from the same wooden plate. Sheyili put the meat and rice together and fed her husband. While doing so her tears dropped. Khakhu asked "Sheyili, why are you crying?" Sheyili replied "While looking up on the chimney something fell into my eyes that caused the tears, I'm not crying". Again she fed him with rice and meat and also fed him with rice beers of different flavours. Khakhu was confused and asked in high tone "Sheyili-o! You are very different today?!" Sheyili replied "We got married to do this".

Khakhu had a hearty meal and fell into deep sleep. That evening Sheyili's brothers in their full warrior armour came and surrounded the house and took Sheyili away. She tried to wake her husband but couldn't. Her brothers could no longer wait and asked her to hurry up. Sheyili told them to wait for her saying that she is packing some of her things. She took some cotton and put it half (hot) ash and put it in Khakhu's

armpits but Khakhu did not wake up. She was taking so much time that her brothers became impatient and questioned her that “Sheyili has plotted to let the enemy kill them, so we will kill you instead.” So Sheyili left her husband and went away with her brothers. Not long after Sheyili left, Khakhu woke up and called out her name and searched for her but couldn’t find her. At that time, his stepmother came and told Khakhu “Your wife Sheyili, Whose house has she gone to again tonight?”

In the village, nobody knew that Sheyili had left with her brothers except for one old blind neighbour. While Khakhu was searching and calling his wife, the blind lady told Khakhu to go around the resting shed area. So Khakhu went there and saw lights reflected by the fire torches and he called out her name. When Sheyili heard her husband calling out her name, she asked her brothers to allow her to answer him, but her brothers refused and took her back to their village. After that, Sheyili lived with her parents and later married Husukha, son of Jakha of Emlomi Village.

Khakhu was also pressured by his parents to remarry, but he never did, as he could not get over Sheyili. Unfortunately, Khakhu was infected with leprosy. Many witch doctors were called to cure his disease, but he could not be cured.

One day, Sheyili saw a traveler who happened to be Khakhu’s friend and was going to visit him. On hearing this, Sheyili took the man to her house, offered him food and rice beer, and asked about Khakhu in detail. After hearing about Khakhu, she gave the traveler salt; half for him and half for Khakhu. She also asked him to carry a message to Khakhu; “Long ago, when we were married, it was a tradition from the in-laws that we eat and drink together. While we were sleeping together on a bamboo-woven traditional mat, someone (Paye ithiu ngo aghive ke) was standing behind me. Because of that sin, Khakhu got leprosy and will never be cured.” She also told him not to call witch doctors and waste his wealth, but instead to lick the salt that she had sent. True to her words, Khakhu was never cured of leprosy. Later, he became a madman, roaming the village licking the salt that Sheyili gave him and saying, “This salt is Sheyili’s”. Eventually, he died.

Story of Sheyili's Second Marriage

After separating from Khakhu, Sheyili lived with her parents. Husukha Khujumi, a brave warrior, asked for Sheyili's hand in marriage, but she refused. At that time, Sheyili had a problem with her eyesight. Husukha began to eavesdrop on Sheyili's house. One day, he heard Sheyili's mother say, "Whoever brings a squirrel or a wild mouse to cure Sheyili's eyesight, I will let Sheyili marry that person".

So, Husukha hunted a squirrel and a wild mouse and gave them to Sheyili, and she regained her eyesight. After her recovery, her mother told her, "Since Husukha cured your eyes, you should marry him". So, Sheyili obeyed and married Husukha.

The descendants of Husukha and Sheyili now live in Asukhomi, Homeland, Vekuho, and Ijeto villages.

After their marriage, Khakhu tried to kill Husukha. Khakhu heard about Husukha wooing the hand of Sheyili and he tried to kill Husukha. One day Husukha went to Lotisami Village to collect tax dressed in his warrior attire. One person came to Khakhu saying, "You wanted to kill Husukha, so he is on his way to Lotisa Village, you can wait for him on his way and kill him".

This man came to Husukha and said, "Husukha, you have been drinking and there Khakhu is plotting to kill you". Husukha replied, "Brother, son of Lotisami, I came here not to take good clothes, nor machetes, nor spears but I came here only to get a bamboo woven mat, so please give me". Husukha got the bamboo woven mat and left. When he reached the resting shed, he took off all his armours and put it inside the mat and rolled it. He also powdered his entire body with ash and left for his village. On his way, he met Khakhu but Khakhu did not recognise him and asked "Son, I heard that your father Husukha came this way, did you see him leave?"Husukha replied, "Husukha is Lotisami Thsuzabo, Lotisami's Tughuko, talkative, drunkard, chatterbox, I don't know him." After saying this he left. After sometime he unrolled his mat and took out his warrior attire and dressed himself as a warrior and he proclaimed "I am Husukha, Jakha's son, I have left, you keep waiting for the one you want to kill," and he kept repeating it. In this way, Khakhu was unable to kill Husukha. (Translated by Tokali Swu, Original work in *Kughakiche eno Xulhe* by I,Lhozhevi.)

Socio-Cultural Issues in the Tale of *Khakhu and Sheyili*

Gender and Marital Dynamics in Sümi Society

The relationship between Khakhu and Sheyili reflects the gender expectations and vulnerabilities experienced by married women in patrilocal Sümi households. Sheyili, though a devoted wife, finds herself in a difficult position due to the hostility of her stepmother-in-law. Her inability to confront the older woman openly and her husband's passive stance highlight the fragility of a daughter-in-law's social standing. She does not express her pain in words but through quiet gestures; feeding him, hiding her tears, and honouring their bond one last time. This moment, though understated, carries emotional weight and reflects a cultural preference for restraint, dignity, and indirect expression of sorrow.

The story shows how, in Sümi tradition, a woman's worth and place in the household could be tested by both action and inaction. Khakhu's silence when he discovers the truth about his stepmother becomes the breaking point for Sheyili. Her decision to leave is not out of disobedience, but because she realises that her emotional well-being and dignity will not be protected in that home. This affirms the role of women as moral decision makers in folk narratives, despite the constraints imposed by custom.

Family conflict and Power Struggles

The stepmother-in-law's role in the separation reveals much about internal tensions within extended families. In this tale, jealousy arises not from status or wealth, but from generosity, Sheyili's habit of returning gifts with salt or rice. Her kindness earns her popularity, which in turn provokes resentment. This part of the story reflects how favour within the community could shift the balance of power inside the household, especially when the younger woman is seen as outshining her elders.

Such tales are not uncommon in Sümi folklore, where intergenerational conflict between women particularly between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law appears as a recurring theme. The conflict here is not resolved through confrontation but through quiet withdrawal, which in itself becomes an act of protest.

The Use of Customary Symbols and Communication

Sheyili's use of a miniature knotted rope to summon her brothers is culturally significant. In Sümi custom, such symbols carried meaning without speech. The specific instruction to come on the ninth day illustrates how traditional communication relied on shared knowledge, especially within kin networks. This moment in the narrative is both practical and emotional; Sheyili does not speak of her suffering but uses cultural codes to seek help.

Moreover, her farewell meal with Khakhu is not merely a gesture of kindness. In Sümi marriage rituals, eating and drinking together symbolises unity and mutual commitment. Sharing from the same plate and feeding her husband by hand is her final act of loyalty. Yet, she is preparing to leave. Her tears fall silently, and when questioned, she offers a quiet excuse that something fell into her eye. These details reflect not only her inner turmoil but also the importance of composure and restraint in expressing personal pain.

Beliefs about Illness, Guilt, and Spiritual Consequences

Khakhu's affliction with leprosy is interpreted in the story not as a medical condition but as a spiritual punishment. Sheyili, now remarried, tells a traveller that a sin committed during their marriage led to his illness, specifically, a mysterious presence behind her on their mat. Her message, sent through salt, carries a deep cultural meaning. Salt in Sümi tradition is not only a basic necessity but also a symbol of purification and preservation.

She instructs Khakhu to stop wasting money on witchcraft and simply lick the salt, as if this act might bring him clarity or reconciliation with his past. However, he continues to suffer. His illness is not just physical, it marks social exclusion, emotional collapse, and unresolved grief. He is eventually seen roaming the village, calling out Sheyili's name, and repeating that the salt is hers. In this way, the tale links personal suffering to moral failure, reflecting Sümi belief systems where misfortune often has a deeper, spiritual cause.

Remarriage and the Warrior Ideal

After returning to her parental home, Sheyili is courted by Husukha, a brave warrior from Emlomi. Though she initially refuses, he earns her family's approval by curing her eyesight with a squirrel and wild mouse; a remedies known in folk medicine. This part of the story highlights how marriage could be tied not just to love or consent, but to healing, service, and social obligation. Her mother's insistence that Sheyili marry the man who cured her reflects a belief that deeds must be repaid through familial responsibility.

Husukha later becomes the target of Khakhu's vengeance, but cleverly avoids confrontation. He disguises himself, rolls up his warrior gear, and covers himself with ash to remain unrecognised. His use of wit and disguise, not brute strength aligns with Sümi ideals of a wise and honourable warrior. Even when Khakhu confronts him, Husukha avoids violence and later reveals his identity from a safe distance. This exchange affirms cleverness, humility, and strategic thinking as valued masculine traits in Sümi tradition.

Emotional Memory, Loss, and Oral Transmission

The image of Khakhu licking salt and repeating Sheyili's name remains one of the most haunting parts of the story. His descent into madness is not hidden but witnessed by the whole village. His sorrow becomes part of public memory, and his fate is passed down through generations in this tale. Oral literature here functions not simply to recount events but to preserve emotional truths; grief, love, betrayal, and regret.

Such narratives remain powerful not because they offer clear resolutions, but because they reflect the complexities of human relationships and cultural expectations. The tale supports the central hypothesis of this thesis that Sümi Naga folklore is a living text through which values, beliefs, and social norms are interpreted and transmitted. The lived experiences of men and women, whether joyful, painful, or unresolved are not forgotten. They are transformed into stories that instruct, move, and endure.

5.5.8 Tsuipu and Khaulipu

Once upon a time, in the hills of the Sümi Nagas, lived two young lovers, Tsüipu, a handsome and healthy young man, and Khaulipu, one of the most beautiful and graceful woman. Though they belonged to different villages, Tsüipu often visited Khaulipu's house to seek her hand in marriage. After many attempts, her parents finally accepted his proposal.

Before the wedding, her parents asked Tsüipu to weave a bamboo basket in which to carry his bride after the marriage. They strictly instructed him not to take rest on the way or open the basket until he reached home. Tsüipu agreed and did as instructed.

After the bride-price was settled and the rituals completed, Tsüipu carried his bride in the basket. But on the way home, he became tired and sat down to rest. Forgetting the warning, he opened the basket to look at Khaulipu. After resting, he tried to lift the basket again, but it had become too heavy. Alone and helpless, he decided to leave the basket there and go to his village to call his brother.

While he was gone, an evil spirit named Muchupili discovered the unattended basket, killed Khaulipu, and took her place. Disguised in Khaulipu's clothes, she sat quietly in the basket waiting for Tsüipu's return. When Tsüipu came back with his brother, the brother opened the basket and was shocked to see an ugly woman inside. Disgusted, he scolded Tsüipu, saying, "You truly need to marry this type!" and left without helping.

Tsüipu, confused, looked inside the basket and saw that Khaulipu looked very strange. Sensing his doubt, Muchupili cleverly said, "When I tried to open my eyes to see you, they became large. When I tried to speak, my mouth became sharp. And when I tried to sit, my leg broke." Tsüipu, blinded by love, believed her and carried her home with great difficulty.

They began their married life. But at the spot where the real Khaulipu had been killed, a bamboo plant grew, blessed with many shoots. One day, Tsüipu went to the forest and collected shoots from that exact place, unknowingly. He brought them home and gave them to his wife to cook.

While cooking, the bamboo shoots began to speak: “May Muchupili die in childbirth! Chop Muchupili!” Startled, she told Tsüipu. Since he could not understand what the bamboo was saying, he asked her to throw the curry away if it was really talking. Muchupili threw the curry into a husk heap. From that spot, a lemon (or orange) tree grew and bore many fruits. Tsüipu shared the lemons with everyone in the village, except one widow. She asked Tsüipu for some, and he gave her the last fruit hanging on the tree. The widow took it home and kept it in a small hanging basket.

Strangely, whenever the widow went to the fields, the lemon would transform into a woman, Khaulipu. As she jumped down from the basket, she would murmur, “My father, my mother are shortly arriving,” and quietly completed all the household chores. Before the widow returned, she would turn back into a lemon and hide in the basket. The widow, surprised by the action, announced to the villagers, “Even if I don’t eat, I will feed the one who does my work”. But no one came forward. Curious, the widow one day pretended to go to the field but stayed hidden behind her house. She saw Khaulipu emerge and do all the chores. She quickly rushed in and held her.

Khaulipu begged, “I am reborn, re-formed. Please don’t hold me too hard.” From that moment, she remained a woman and stayed with the widow. She continued weaving and doing housework peacefully indoors. One day, Tsüipu came to play ‘Akhetsu’ (spinning top) with the village children near the widow’s house. Khaulipu recognized his voice and avoided letting him see her. Whenever the children’s tops rolled into the house, she let them fetch it. But if Tsüipu’s top entered, she quickly threw it back out. However, one day she was busy tying broken thread, and Tsüipu’s top rolled inside. Tsüipu entered to take it and saw her. Surprised, he told the widow, “She looks like my old wife. I want to marry her. What will you ask in return?”

The widow replied, “Bring me shohusü pikhi and shohusü khumu”. (a pounding table and a pole made of shohusu) Tsüipu fulfilled the request and married Khaulipu again. Now he had two wives; Khaulipu and Muchupili. He created separate paths for them to collect firewood.

One day, both wives went out to gather firewood. Khaulipu returned first. Tsüipu planned to kill Muchupili and told her to enter the house from the back. Khaulipu warned her to use the front entrance, but Muchupili arrogantly said, "I will not listen to a woman. I will only listen to a man," and entered from the back. Tsüipu then struck her with a dao and killed her. From her grave, a Thumsü tree grew. Tsüipu cut the tree and made it into a ladder for their granary. But he warned Khaulipu not to use the ladder or enter the granary in his absence.

Later, when Tsüipu was away on a headhunting expedition, the villagers insisted that Khaulipu take rice from the granary to brew rice beer for his victorious return. Listening to them, Khaulipu climbed the ladder but it broke, and she fell to her death. When Tsüipu returned, he asked his mother, "Why did you let her enter when I told you not to?" His mother replied, "The villagers forced me to send her."

Grief-stricken, Tsüipu went to Khaulipu's parental village. To his surprise, Khaulipu was found again. He asked to marry her once more, but her mother refused and said, "If you want a wife, marry "Aghüghalho". But remember, never let her go out in sunlight."

Tsüipu married Aghüghalho and took her home. One day, while Tsüipu was working outside, Aghüghalho came out to see what sunlight looked like. As the sun touched her, she melted into water. From that water, a beautiful flower bloomed. This flower, born of a transformed woman, is called the Lapu flower, and it is believed to still grow today.

(Translated by Tokali Swu, original work in *Kügha*kiche eno Leshele (Folklores and poems)* by Lozhevi,I)

Socio-Cultural Issues in the Tale of *Tsuipu and Khaulipu*

Traditional Women's Roles in Society

The tale of *Tsuipu and Khaulipu* offers valuable insight into how women are imagined and represented in Sümi oral tradition. Khaulipu is described as beautiful,

graceful, hardworking, and obedient. Even after death and rebirth, she continues to fulfil her household duties without complaint. She reappears in the home of a widow, not as a human but as a magical being who quietly completes the chores before vanishing again.

This depiction reflects the traditional expectations placed on women that they should serve the household with dedication, humility, and silence. The ideal woman in this tale is one who works without being told, does not seek recognition, and accepts her fate, even when wronged. Yet, the story also allows her some quiet power. Khaulipu chooses when to reveal herself, and in her second marriage, she is not forced but re-married after her identity is recognised and respected.

Her contrast with Muchupili, the evil spirit disguised as a woman, is clear. Muchupili is loud, arrogant, and refuses to listen to other women. In the end, she is punished. Through this contrast, the tale suggests social values around female conduct, voice, and virtue.

Marriage Customs, Trials and Moral Boundaries

The tale opens with the classic Sümi marriage custom where the groom must prove his worth through a symbolic task carrying the bride in a basket without opening it or resting. Tsuipu's failure to follow this instruction brings misfortune. This trial can be understood as a lesson in discipline, responsibility and trust, qualities expected in a man who wishes to marry.

The story also reflects the importance of obedience in ritual. Tsuipu breaks a sacred instruction and opens the basket too early. As a result, he loses his real bride and brings home an evil spirit. This part of the story underlines how disobedience to ritual or tradition leads to irreversible consequences, a recurring message in Sümi folktales.

Later in the story, when Tsuipu wishes to marry Khaulipu again after recognising her in the widow's house, he is asked to fulfil a symbolic requirement. The widow says: "Bring me a pounding table and a pole made of shohusu." This request is more than a bride-price, it shows how certain ritual items represent readiness for marriage and are

linked to the domestic life the woman will enter. A pounding table and pole are associated with food preparation and daily labour. By asking for them, the widow tests whether Tsuipu is willing to invest in the tools of household life, and not just the person.

This part of the tale reflects how marriage is seen as a union of shared responsibility, requiring both ritual fulfilment and practical preparation. The shohusu wood may also carry symbolic meaning, possibly referring to strength, endurance, or suitability. Marriage, in this context, is tied not just to emotional desire, but to cultural readiness and public demonstration of commitment.

At the end of the story, Tsuipu is given one more condition when he marries Aghüghalho, "She must not go out into the sunlight." Once again, he fails to uphold this instruction, leading to his wife's disappearance. These repeated failures suggest that while love may be genuine, it is not enough without discipline, ritual observance, and respect for sacred boundaries.

Symbolism of Plants, Rebirth, and the Supernatural

Throughout the tale, plants and natural elements are deeply symbolic. The spot where Khaulipu was killed gives rise to a bamboo plant, which later reveals the truth through talking shoots. After the bamboo is thrown away, it gives birth to a lemon tree, from which Khaulipu is reborn. At the end of the tale, when Aghüghalho melts in the sunlight, she becomes a Lapu flower. These transformations reflect Sümi beliefs in reincarnation, moral continuity, and spiritual justice.

Nature in this tale is not passive, it responds to events, bears witness to wrongdoing, and even carries messages. The bamboo, the lemon, and the flower are not just symbolic but active participants in the moral world. This reflects how in Sümi cosmology, the boundary between the human, spiritual, and natural world is thin and that justice or memory may take forms beyond the human body.

Moral Lessons, Justice, and Female Suffering

One of the central moral concerns of the story is the idea of truth emerging through suffering. Khaulipu dies not once, but twice, yet she returns each time in a new form. Her loyalty, patience and gentleness are tested through betrayal, replacement, and loss. Even when she warns Muchupili to take the safer route, her advice is ignored, and the consequence is death.

Meanwhile, Tsuipu's failure to protect Khaulipu, and his repeated breaking of taboos, bring him grief. Yet the story does not portray him as evil, only flawed. It suggests that mistakes made through carelessness or weakness can have painful effects, and that wisdom must be earned through experience and loss.

This tale also reflects how women's suffering is often central to transformation. Khaulipu's suffering leads to rebirth; her final fall from the ladder results in her disappearance again. The ladder itself, made from the wood that grew from Muchupili's grave, is a powerful symbol; the past cannot be ignored and climbing on what once brought harm may result in new tragedy.

Individuality versus Community Norms

The tale also shows how communal pressure can override personal judgment. Tsuipu clearly instructs that Khaulipu should not use the ladder in his absence, but the villagers convince her otherwise. When she falls and dies, the blame is shared between the mother-in-law and the village, who failed to honour Tsuipu's wishes. This reflects how individuals in traditional society often had to balance personal boundaries with communal expectations.

Even in love and marriage, personal choices are shaped by the wider community. Khaulipu is reborn and found again, but this time her parents refuse the match. Tsuipu is instead offered a different bride with conditions. This shows that marriage is not just an emotional union, but a social and moral agreement shaped by family, ritual and memory.

Oral Tradition and the Survival of Memory

The folktale ends with the transformation of Aghüghalho into a flower; the Lapu flower, which, according to belief, still blooms today. The tale explains the origin of the flower and attaches it to a tragic but beautiful memory. This final transformation shows how folk narratives preserve human emotion and experience through nature and oral storytelling.

By explaining the origins of bamboo shoots, the lemon tree, the Thumsü tree, and the Lapu flower, the tale turns ordinary objects into carriers of memory. Such stories are not just entertainment but explanations of the world, shaped by lived experience, belief and moral reflection.

The tale of *Tsuipu and Khaulipu* contains multiple layers of meaning. It tells of love, failure, transformation, and justice. It reflects the Sümi way of seeing the world where nature speaks, the dead return, and moral lessons are remembered through the most ordinary things. Within it, we see how marriage customs, gender roles, spiritual beliefs, and moral teachings are woven into a narrative form that continues to speak across generations.

This tale supports the thesis argument that Sümi Naga folklore functions as social text, preserving not only stories, but the values, customs, emotional struggles, and ethical concerns of the community.

5.5.9 Inakha eno Ghonili

A long time ago, in the Sümi village of Shena, there lived a brave warrior named Inakha Achumi, son of Ghüqhe. In the nearby village of Philimi, there lived a wise and beautiful woman named Ghonili Assümi, daughter of Shena. Ghonili was known for her hard work, good character, and beauty. Inakha and Ghonili fell in love and got married. They were very happy together and had a daughter named Visheli, whom they both loved deeply.

Inakha had a friend in Sükomi village named Hoshepu, who had a daughter called Chevili. One day, during a raid, Inakha passed through the field where Chevili

worked. Chevili cleverly made Inakha fall in love with her. Eventually, they began a secret relationship.

Chevili later told her brothers, Khumtsa and Kiyexe, about her relationship with Inakha. To protect their sister's honour, they planned to kill Inakha. They waited in the field to catch him. As usual, Inakha visited Chevili, and while they were in the field-hut, her brothers approached. Sensing danger, Inakha quickly called out, “My brothers-in-law, what brings you here?” Hearing this, the brothers believed Inakha was ready to marry Chevili and gave up their plan to harm him. They sat down and discussed the matter. Inakha, having no choice, promised to return in nine days to talk about the bride-price.

With a heavy heart, Inakha went home and told Ghonili what had happened. She replied calmly, “Don’t worry, Inakha. People make mistakes.” When Inakha said he wanted to keep Ghonili as the elder wife and bring Chevili as the younger, Ghonili refused. She said, “An armlet (akusa) and a bangle (asapu) made of iron and lead can be worn together but an armlet made of ivory cannot be worn double. That is why, I shall leave”’. This showed her pride and dignity as the daughter of a village chief.

Ghonili then started preparing the house for Chevili’s arrival. She cleaned, dried paddy on bamboo mats, pounded rice, and brewed drink to host the marriage party. During those nine days, she also gathered her belongings in a broken bamboo water container called ‘Azühu kughupo’, sealed it with cotton, and used it to lock the house whenever she went out.

On the ninth day, Inakha brought Chevili home. He shouted from outside, “Ghonili, I’ve brought her. Take what you want and leave.” Ghonili replied, “Why should I take anything when we have a daughter, Visheli, between us? I only want to take the Azühu kughupo to lock my hut.” She tried to leave through the front door, but Inakha blocked her. She tried the side door, but he stopped her again. At last, she left through the back door, which is considered unlucky for women in Sümi culture.

Later, a great warrior named Sümixi from Philimi came to ask for Ghonili’s hand in marriage. She refused at first because he was not dressed like a warrior. But when he

returned in full warrior attire, Ghonili agreed, as he reminded her of Inakha. They married and lived a prosperous life, while Inakha and Chevili faced hardship.

Coincidentally, Inakha and Chevili farmed on one hill, and Ghonili and Sümixi farmed on another nearby hill. Their fields faced each other. Ghonili noticed that Inakha and Chevili often had nothing to eat but pretended to have meals. Feeling sad for them, she secretly placed food and rice-brew in their field hut. When Inakha and Chevili returned, they were surprised but grateful. Inakha knew it was Ghonili's doing.

Later, Inakha told Chevili to challenge Ghonili in a jumping game called 'Püxakuxu'. Ghonili was hesitant but agreed. They loosened their hair and jumped in the field. Though Chevili was fast, she felt tired quickly. Ghonili jumped slowly but steadily and won. Inakha, hiding nearby, watched them and wept, regretting his decision to leave Ghonili.

During harvest season, Sümixi's field yielded plenty of paddy, but Inakha's did not. While Sümixi and his helpers proudly carried their harvest home, Inakha's group quietly returned with empty baskets. A saying came from this: "The villagers of Apukito tied cloth around their stomachs," meaning they went hungry.

Some days later, a war broke out between Shenakusami and Philimi village. When Inakha planned to raid Philimi village, Ghonili found out. She sang loudly while pounding rice and placed a broken gourd on the pounding stand to make more noise. Inakha heard her voice and understood the warning. He returned home without raiding.

On another occasion, she used a threshing club (Athighalu) while working in the field and sang a line that secretly warned Inakha to retreat through the cotton-field hill. Again, he listened and avoided danger.

One day, Inakha visited Sümixi's house with a small axe (Amghüchi) to trade for rice. Ghonili said, "Let this rice be for our daughter," gave him paddy, and returned the axe. On another visit, Sümixi pretended to go to the field but hid nearby to observe Ghonili and Inakha. Inside the house, Inakha asked Ghonili to share food

and drink with him like before. Sensing that Sümixi was watching, Ghonili replied, "If you are striped, others are striped too. If you have male organ, others have it too ". And added with a song, oh! If you are hungry, have your share. If you are thirsty, drink it to the full". She then told Inakha she must go since her husband had gone to the field. Inakha was deeply saddened and left, saying, “Why did I ever leave Ghonili?”

While Ghonili and Sümixi prospered, Inakha and Chevili struggled. In time, Ghonili died during childbirth. It was believed her death was due to the taboo of leaving through the back door, something that was said to bring misfortune to women, especially those who die in childbirth.

(Translated by Tokali Swu.Original work in *Kughakiche eno Xulhe* by I,Lhozhevi)

Socio-Cultural Issues in the Tale of Inakha and Ghonili

Representation of Women’s Dignity and Autonomy

Ghonili is portrayed as a woman of dignity, wisdom and strength. Even when she learns of her husband’s betrayal, she does not fight or plead. Instead, she speaks with calm authority: “An armlet of ivory cannot be worn double”. Her words carry the weight of cultural meaning, comparing herself to something rare and dignified. This shows that a woman’s worth and status are not negotiable, especially in the case of betrayal.

Instead of being reduced to sorrow, Ghonili takes charge of the household preparations for her replacement. She dries paddy, brews rice beer, and cleans the house before leaving. These actions reflect the traditional virtue of endurance, self-respect, and maturity expected of women in Sümi society. Her refusal to compete for a husband also reflects her autonomy and strength of character.

Marriage, Betrayal, and Social Expectations

The tale also explores the impact of betrayal in marriage. Inakha's secret relationship with Chevili, and his attempt to bring her in as a second wife, leads to Ghonili's departure. The story makes it clear that polygamy is socially tolerated but not always respected, especially when it causes harm or dishonour.

When Ghonili leaves the house through the back door, a direction believed to bring misfortune; it reflects how cultural taboos are linked with personal outcomes. Her later death in childbirth is seen as the result of this breach, showing how such beliefs shape people's understanding of fate and morality.

Social Status and Warrior Identity

The tale also reflects on male roles and warrior identity. When Sümixi first proposes to Ghonili, she refuses him for not dressing like a warrior. Later, when he comes in full attire, she accepts. This reflects the social value attached to warrior identity, honour, and masculinity.

Similarly, Inakha's status as a warrior is tested. Although brave, he falls to temptation and is shown to suffer for his personal failings. The story suggests that true leadership requires both courage and discipline. Inakha loses not only his wife but his dignity and prosperity.

Ritual, Symbolism, and Taboo

Several rituals and symbols appear throughout the story. Ghonili locks the house using a broken bamboo container sealed with cotton; a symbolic act of closure and farewell. The direction she leaves from becomes a major element of the story's moral outcome. In Sümi tradition, leaving through the back door signifies rejection or shame, especially for women, and this action becomes linked with her later death.

Also important are Ghonili's warnings during wartime. She uses singing, pounding rice, and placing a broken gourd to create noise as a secret signals to warn Inakha of danger. These acts show how women participated in protection and community life through indirect but effective means.

Emotional Expression: A Gender Perspective

Throughout the tale, Ghonili communicates using indirect language; songs, sayings, and symbolic gestures. Even when Inakha returns to visit her, she does not scold him directly. Instead, she responds with a proverb: “If you are striped, others are striped too. If you have a male organ, others have it too.” This implies that she is no longer bound to him alone and reminds him that he is not the only man.

Her use of poetic lines while pounding rice or threshing grain reflects how women in Sümi society expressed emotion and wisdom through everyday actions, rather than through open confrontation. These methods of speaking protect dignity while still delivering a powerful message.

Poverty, Shame and Moral Decline

Inakha and Chevili suffer hardship after Ghonili’s departure. Their lack of food, failed harvests, and quiet returns from the field reflect a social decline tied to moral failure. The saying, “The villagers of Apukito tied cloth around their stomachs,” becomes a metaphor for hunger and shame. In contrast, Ghonili and Sümixi thrive, showing that righteousness leads to prosperity, a common moral in Sümi oral narratives.

Even in their suffering, Ghonili secretly helps them by leaving food in their field hut. This act of quiet compassion shows forgiveness and grace, even when she has been wronged. It also shows how female characters in folklore often carry emotional depth and moral clarity.

Oral Tradition and Memory through Song

Songs and proverbs are central in this story. Ghonili’s use of singing as a warning tool, and her poetic responses during tense moments, reflect how oral traditions preserve emotion, advice and values. These songs are not just entertainment but they are encoded with meaning, often understood by the community.

Even Ghonili's final lines before leaving and during Inakha's visit are remembered in the form of sayings. This reflects how Sümi oral narratives turn personal stories into public memory, allowing them to live on as cautionary tales or examples of wisdom.

The story of *Inakha and Ghonili* highlights many socio-cultural elements: marital loyalty, gender dignity, ritual practice, community values, and the cost of moral failure. It supports the thesis that Sümi Naga folktales are not just fictional accounts but social texts that mirror the expectations, taboos and beliefs of the community. Through its rich characters and moral turns, the tale reveals how personal choices are judged in the light of collective values, and how women's roles are both culturally constrained and morally powerful.

5.6 Belief system reflected in folktales

Folktales embody wealth, traditional beliefs and wisdom that preserved and transmit a community's cosmology, moral and metaphysical understanding. Among the Sümi Naga, folktales often blend the natural with the supernatural, reflecting a world deeply shaped by animistic traditions, ancestral reverence and cosmic balance. The narrative is not merely stories but culturally encoded expressions of belief that inform and regulate everyday life.

Animism is one of the defining features of Sümi belief deeply embedded in folktales. In many narratives, river, forest, hills and even stones are not just a landscapes but living beings capable of agency. The act of storytelling becomes a moral rehearsal, embedding respect for nature within the listener consciousness. Sümi folktales are swarmed with supernatural beings; forest demons, shape shifting animals and mythical ancestors. Such figures often serve as agent of justice or retribution, enacting punishment upon those who transgress societal norms. Dreams and omens are recurrent motifs in Sümi folktales, viewed not as random psychological event but as spiritual messages. In many tales, protagonists act on

dreams send by deceased ancestors or divine forces. Birds, animals and other natural signs also function as omens.

5.7 Social Institutions and Practices

5.7.1 Marriage as a social institution

Marriage in Sümi Naga folktales is often portrayed as a communal affair, governed by clan affiliations, elder approval and social harmony. Love and personal choice frequently come into conflict with the expectations of the community. These narratives serve as a reflection of the importance placed on social unity and structured relationships.

(A folktale where two lovers are separated due to clan restrictions and one is married off to another to maintain peace between families)

5.7.2 Role of Traditional leadership and governance

The village chief or council of elders is a recurring institution in Sümi folktales. Chiefs are depicted as wise, fair and authoritative. Often tasked with resolving disputes, organising communal tasks or, preserving customs, their presence in stories reinforces the legitimacy of traditional governance.

(A tale in which a chief resolves a land or dowry dispute with fairness, earning the respect of both parties.)

5.7.3 Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Sümi folktales often reflect traditional gender roles. Men as hunters, warriors or travellers, and women as nurturers, homemakers, or spiritual figures. However, some stories or tales challenge these norms by portraying women as intelligent, brave or spiritually significant.

5.7.4 Belief system and symbolism

The spiritual perspective of the Sümi Naga is deeply embedded in their folktales. Omens, dreams, and symbolic objects like feathers, weapons or sacred animals often play a central role in determining the course of events.

Folktale, one of the oral or narrative traditions of a society is a medium through which a folk community reveals their repressed feelings. They are an indispensable part of culture which aims in imparting ethical and moral values of the society. It reflects the unconscious needs and demands of the members of a society metaphorically. The traditional beliefs and practices, imagination and creative moral knowledge of human beings are reflected in the narrative traditions. The narrative traditions of Sümi Nagas consist of short stories, myths, legends, fables, fairytales etc. And it talks about creation, culture, rituals, origin and the real life of the people.

The real as well as the imaginative socio-cultural life of the people are expressed by the folks in this form of literature. The study of Sümi folktales and stories proves to be useful as it provides an understanding of human behaviour and social problem. In the Sümi Naga folktales like *Inakha eno Ghonili*, *Khaulipu eno Tsuipu*, *Khakhu eno Sheyili,* the themes of socio-cultural issues were depicted such as marriage, divorce, ill treatment of women etc. The lines from *Khakhu eno Sheyili* clearly shows the ill treatment of women by another women "Pama kulakupu shi no akivishi kughuna ache kemu Khakhu pazakishe lhokusa ghenguno athiu ye pama ixave". (They were happily married and lived a good life but because of the ill nature of Khakhu's mom, they were separated) (Lhozhevi Sema,p.27)

Thus, through these short folktales, we can see the socio-cultural issues being discussed. The Sümi Nagas folktale revolves around the theme of the distinction between the rich and the poor, male-dominated society, power of love, conflict among the families, ill treatment of women and the prevailing supernatural beliefs and practices.

5.8 Socio-Cultural Analysis of Sümi Naga Folktales

Keyword	Manifestation in Folktales	Example Tales	Cultural Significance
Women's Agency	- Sacrificial love and resilience - Limited autonomy in marriage choices	*Anishe Xamunu*, *Inakha eno Ghonili*	Reflects patriarchal norms while subtly challenging them through symbolic transformations.
Leadership Legitimization	- Wise chiefs and ancestral guidance - Supernatural validation of authority	*Kasho Papu*	Reinforces traditional governance and elder wisdom as divinely ordained.
Christianization Effects	- Moral binaries (good vs. evil) - Syncretism of animism and Christian themes	*Amughusu*, *Aghacho ilhovekiu*	Shows adaptation to Christianity while retaining indigenous cosmology.
Digital Storytelling	- YouTube animations, social media adaptations - Loss of oral performance details	Modern retellings of *Anishe Xamunu*	Ensures accessibility but risks diluting traditional oral artistry.
Marriage Norms	- Parental authority over unions - Critique of infidelity	*Inakha eno Ghonili*, *Khaulipu eno Tsuipu*	Serves as didactic tools to enforce marital and familial expectations.

Keyword	Manifestation in Folktales	Example Tales	Cultural Significance
Identity Construction	- Ecological symbolism (hornbill, paddy) - Material culture (feathers, weapons)	*Aghacho ilhovekiu*, *Kasho Papu*	Strengthens tribal identity through nature-linked heritage.
Modern Adaptations	- School textbooks standardizing tales - Youth blending folklore into hip-hop	Contemporary retellings	Bridges tradition and modernity but alters transmission methods.

Table 5.1 : Socio-Cultural Analysis of Sümi Naga Folktales

The Sümi Naga folktales provide profound insights into the socio-cultural fabric of their society, revealing complex dynamics around gender, leadership and cultural preservation. Through tales like *Anishe Xamunu* and *Inakha eno Ghonili*, women's agency is portrayed in detailed manner. While female characters often face patriarchal constraints, such as parental control over marriage or societal expectations, their resilience and symbolic transformations (like Nisheli becoming a flower) subtly challenge traditional gender roles. These narratives reflect both the historical limitations placed on women and their enduring cultural significance, even when their agency is expressed through sacrifice or spiritual metamorphosis rather than overt rebellion.

Leadership and social hierarchy are legitimized through recurring motifs of wisdom and ancestral guidance. Tales like *Kasho Papu* emphasize the importance of heeding elders and village chiefs, reinforcing the authority of traditional governance structures. The supernatural intervention of Kasho's father, who ensures agricultural success, underscores the belief that legitimate leadership is intertwined with spiritual and communal well-being. Similarly, hunting stories and heroic tales validate male

roles as protectors and providers, embedding these expectations into the cultural consciousness through narrative repetition.

The influence of Christianity on Sümi folktales appears in moral themes and transformation archetypes, yet animistic elements remain dominant. Stories like *Aghacho ilhovekiu* (The man who transformed into a hornbill) blend indigenous beliefs in shape shifting and nature spirits with universal themes of love and loss. This syncretism highlights how Sümi Naga folklore adapts to external influences while retaining its core cosmological worldview. Dreams, omens, and ancestral messages continue to serve as narrative devices, preserving animistic traditions despite the growing presence of Christian ideology.

Modern technology has introduced new platforms for these tales, from animated YouTube retellings to social media folklore pages. While digital storytelling expands accessibility, it also risks diluting the performative aspects of oral tradition—intonation, audience interaction, and improvisation. Nevertheless, these adaptations ensure that folktales remain relevant to younger generations, even as the contexts of their transmission shift from fireside gatherings to smartphone screens.

Marriage norms and familial expectations are recurring themes, with tales often serving as cautionary tools. *Inakha eno Ghonili* critiques infidelity, while *Anishe Xamunu* laments the consequences of forbidden love, reinforcing the importance of social harmony over individual desire. Notably absent are stories of interethnic marriage, suggesting historical clan endogamy or unresolved tensions with neighboring communities. This omission speaks volumes about the cultural boundaries that folktales unconsciously uphold.

Ultimately, Sümi Naga folktales are more than entertainment, they are living traditions that construct identity, transmit values, and navigate change. Whether through the sacred symbolism of the hornbill feather or the moral lessons embedded in agricultural tales, these stories sustain a sense of belonging while adapting to modern realities. Their continued evolution whether through digital media or reinterpretations in schools, demonstrates their resilience as cultural artifacts, ensuring that Sümi heritage endures in an ever-changing world.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the research journey undertaken in this thesis, drawing together the core questions, key findings, and analytical insights that emerged from an in-depth exploration of Sümi folktales and folksongs. The study began with the intent to examine how oral traditions function as repositories of cultural memory, instruments of social order, and reflections of gendered experience. Here, the original contributions of the research are clearly articulated. In doing so, the chapter emphasizes a balanced perspective; one that acknowledges the urgent need for preservation while recognizing the adaptive and evolving potential of oral traditions in digital and syncretic forms. Finally, this conclusion outlines future directions for research, policy and practice.

6.1 Socio-Cultural Analysis of Sümi Folklore

This study has explored the intricate relationship between Sümi Naga folklore and its socio-cultural dimensions, revealing how oral traditions serve as dynamic instruments for preserving, negotiating, and challenging community values. Through an analysis of folktales, folksongs, proverbs, and rituals, several key themes emerge, demonstrating folklore's role in shaping gender norms, leadership structures, identity formation, and marital customs.

Sümi folklore presents a complex portrayal of women's roles, balancing traditional expectations with subtle subversions, as seen in stories where women navigate divorce, betrayal, or loss without losing agency. Folk Poems like *Inakha eno Ghonili kuixa* depict women's resilience in divorce, while proverbs and folk songs often reinforce domestic ideals. However, certain narratives hint at an undertone of female autonomy. The Christianization of Sümi society has altered matrilineal knowledge, with once-sacred female rituals fading or being reinterpreted. Yet, traces of these

traditions persist in festival songs and oral histories, revealing a syncretic adaptation rather than total erasure.

Folklore legitimizes authority through ancestral myths, clan origin stories, and legendary tales of warrior chiefs. These narratives often emphasize meritocratic ideals, where leadership is earned through wisdom or bravery rather than mere heredity. However, they also reinforce hierarchical structures, with proverbs and cautionary tales discouraging rebellion against established norms. In contemporary retellings, digital platforms have introduced new interpretations, where youth question traditional authority through modernized folktales shared on social media.

Folktales featuring intertribal marriages reflect historical strategies of diplomacy and cultural exchange. These stories often serve as metaphors for negotiation, conflict resolution, and identity integration. Meanwhile, folk poetry (such as *Kuthunu hi nilo*) critiques rigid marital customs, offering veiled commentary on divorce, remarriage and gender nonconformity. Such narratives reveal folklore's dual function: upholding social contracts while allowing space for dissent.

The transmission of Sümi folklore faces both challenges and opportunities in the digital era. While urbanization and fading oral traditions threaten preservation, platforms like YouTube and Whatsapp have become new spaces for storytelling. Youth-led adaptations such as school performances or social media folktales blend traditional motifs with contemporary concerns, ensuring relevance for younger generations. However, this shift risks diluting cultural intricacies, as oral storytelling's improvisational and interactive elements are often lost in digital retellings.

This study highlights the urgency of documenting Sümi folklore before living traditions disappear entirely. Future research should prioritize:

1. Performance Contexts – Examining how music, dance, and ritual enhance storytelling.

2. Comparative Tribal Studies – Analyzing overlaps with Ao, Angami, and Konyak traditions.
3. Indigenous-Led Preservation – Collaborating with Sümi elders to archive oral histories.
4. Pedagogical Integration – Incorporating folklore into Nagaland's educational curricula.

Ultimately, Sümi folklore is not an artifact of the past but a living, evolving force. It reflects the community's resilience adapting to Christianity, modernization, and digitalization while retaining its core cultural identity. By centering indigenous voices in academic and preservation efforts, we ensure that these narratives continue to shape Sümi society for generations to come.

6.2 Socio-Cultural Analysis of Folksongs

Sümi Naga folk songs emerge from this study as vital cultural texts that both reflect and shape the community's social values, gender relations, and collective identity. Through their melodic narratives, these oral traditions preserve ancestral wisdom while simultaneously adapting to contemporary realities.

The analysis reveals how folk songs serve as acoustic archives of social norms and transformations. Love songs like *Ixeu Nikujo le* demonstrate the complex negotiation of women's agency within prescribed marital roles, allowing emotional expression while reinforcing expectations of fidelity. Work songs such as *Thisho le* (rice pounding) and *Aghixu le* (sowing) document women's agricultural contributions through rhythmic patterns that mirror labour movements, creating an audible record of their economic participation.

Ritual songs showcase the community's adaptive strategies in the face of Christianization, where traditional harvest melodies persist but with transformed theological content. This musical syncretism represents a pragmatic approach to cultural preservation, maintaining melodic continuity while accommodating religious

change. Narrative hunting song like *Ishe ishi nana* reinforce traditional male warrior roles but are often paralleled by agricultural songs that highlight women's sustaining labor, subtly challenging a male-dominated narrative.

The transmission of these songs reveals significant generational shifts. The movement from oral to written forms, particularly in educational contexts, ensures survival of lyrical content but risks losing the improvisational essence and performative contexts that give the songs their full cultural meaning. School adaptations and potential digital recordings represent new phases in the songs' evolution, creating both opportunities for wider dissemination and challenges to authentic preservation.

Agricultural songs emerge as particularly significant for maintaining communal identity. Their rhythmic structures do more than coordinate labor - they encode ecological knowledge, reinforce social cohesion, and create what might be termed "acoustic territoriality," sonically marking Sümi cultural space. As urbanization transforms traditional agrarian lifestyles, these songs gain new importance as touchstones of cultural memory.

The study highlights several urgent needs for Sümi musical preservation:

1. Comprehensive documentation of performance contexts and styles
2. Special attention to women's musical traditions
3. Development of archiving methods that capture both sound and social function
4. Support for intergenerational transmission in authentic contexts

Future research should explore how digital platforms are transforming song transmission patterns and investigate the incorporation of traditional melodic structures into Christian hymnals. The living tradition of Sümi folk songs continues to evolve, maintaining its vital role as both cultural repository and adaptive mechanism for a community navigating profound social changes. These melodies

remain not merely artifacts of the past, but active participants in shaping Sümi Naga identity for future generations.

6.3 Socio-Cultural Analysis of Folktales

The socio-cultural analysis of Sümi Naga folktales reveals a dynamic narrative tradition that continues to shape and reflect the community's evolving identity. These oral stories function as both cultural mirrors and social instruments, simultaneously preserving traditional values while adapting to contemporary realities.

Folktales like *Anishe Xamunu* and *Inakha eno Ghonili* present complex portrayals of women's roles, showcasing sacrificial love within patriarchal frameworks while hinting at subversive agency through symbolic transformations. The tales' treatment of marriage norms, particularly in stories like *Khaulipu eno Tsuipu*, reinforces parental authority while offering subtle critiques of infidelity, serving as didactic tools that balance social preservation with moral instruction. *Kungulimi* encapsulates multiple layers of Sümi oral tradition foregrounding women's spiritual authority and agency, critiquing male jealousy and patriarchal violence, and ultimately restoring female autonomy through the angel's transcendence. It also reflects the moral imagination of Sümi folklore, where gendered betrayal and kinship are interwoven, reinforcing the persistence of matrilineal wisdom and the symbolic potency of mourning through song. The tale of *Atsüsa* reinforces themes of justice, loyalty, and reciprocity, portraying animals especially dogs as moral agents, while affirming human authority and the continued relevance of ritual obligations, thus reflecting Sümi oral traditions that encode ethical values and community responsibilities across generations.

Kasho Papu highlights ancestral authority and harmony with the natural world as guiding forces, portraying leadership rooted in spiritual and seasonal insight. It emphasizes patience and trust over impulse, reinforcing communal values and traditional knowledge systems. *Aghacho Ilhovekeu* features romantic longing and emotional fidelity while subtly critiquing the constraints of traditional marital norms;

it also offers symbolic insight into male transformation, legacy, and the cultural sanctification of love and loss reflecting how Sümi folklore encodes emotional depth and ancestral continuity through mythic form.

Khakhu eno Sheyili critiques patriarchal marital norms by portraying Sheyili's emotional strength, her lack of protection in a patrilocal home, and her eventual assertion of agency through separation and remarriage, highlighting evolving gender roles and the endurance of female autonomy in Sümi oral traditions. The tale *Amüghusu* allegorizes wisdom as a sacred, living presence embodied in the haft and reinforces the moral authority traditionally passed down through oral narratives, highlighting how guidance, discipline, and ethical partnership (especially in marriage) are valued over materialism, pride, or disobedience; it also reflects Christianized values of instruction and moral accountability integrated into Sümi folklore.

Folktales strengthen tribal identity through:

1. Ecological symbolism (hornbill, paddy)
2. Material culture references (feathers, weapons)
3. Nature-linked heritage narratives

Key areas for preservation and study include:

1. Documentation of oral performance techniques
2. Analysis of digital adaptation impacts
3. Intergenerational transmission strategies
4. Comparative studies with neighbouring traditions

These folktales remain vital living texts, not merely as cultural artefacts but as active participants in shaping Sümi Naga identity. Their continued evolution demonstrates the community's resilience in maintaining narrative traditions while creatively adapting to social change. The stories' power lies in their dual capacity to root the community in its past while branching toward its future.

6.4 Socio-cultural themes across Folklore, Folksongs, and Folktales

The table 6.1 outlines how key socio-cultural themes manifest across Sümi folklore, folksongs, and folktales. Folklore emphasizes women's resilience, leadership myths, and identity through ancestral rituals, adapting to Christian influences and digital platforms. Folksongs highlight emotional expression, labor roles, and ecological memory, with Christianization evident in transformed lyrics. Folktales present symbolic critiques of patriarchy, supernatural leadership legitimation, and hybrid moralities reflecting social change. While folklore and folktales address interethnic marriages, folksongs remain less explicit. All three adapt to modern contexts through youth engagement, digital storytelling, and thematic evolution, collectively preserving and reshaping Sümi identity in the face of socio-cultural transitions.

Socio-Cultural Dimension	**Folklore**	**Folksongs**	**Folktales**
Women's Agency(WA)	Resilience in poems; female autonomy in rituals	Emotional expression in love songs; labour role highlighted	Sacrificial love, symbolic resistance, subtle critiques
Leadership Legitimization(LL)	Warrior myths; ancestral legends; clan tales	Indirect; reinforced through songs of communal values	Supernatural validation of leaders; wisdom transmission
Christianization Effects(CE)	Rituals reinterpreted; fading matrilineal traditions	Theological shifts in ritual songs; syncretism	Coexistence of animism and Christian morality in narratives
Digital Storytelling(DS)	Social media folktales; youth adaptations	School adaptations; digital recordings	Platform-based storytelling; changing

			performance traditions
Interethnic Marriages(IM)	Highlighted in alliance stories; metaphorical meaning	Not directly addressed	Rare or symbolic representation through unions
Marriage Norms(MN)	Divorce and remarriage in poems; critique of rigid customs	Love songs challenge roles; work songs reinforce fidelity	Tales critique infidelity; uphold parental authority
Identity Construction(IC)	Ancestral myths; ritual symbolism; festival songs	Agricultural songs encode ecological memory; acoustic space	Nature-linked narratives; hornbill and heritage symbols
Modern Adaptations(MA)	Syncretic rituals; youth reinterpretations	Christianized lyrics; school performances; digital archives	Hybrid moralities; adapted themes and performance shifts

Table 6.1: Socio-cultural themes across Folklore, Folksongs, and Folktales

Radar chart 6.1 visually compares the presence of key socio-cultural themes across Folklore, Folksongs, and Folktales. It clearly shows strengths and differences in how each theme is represented in the three categories.

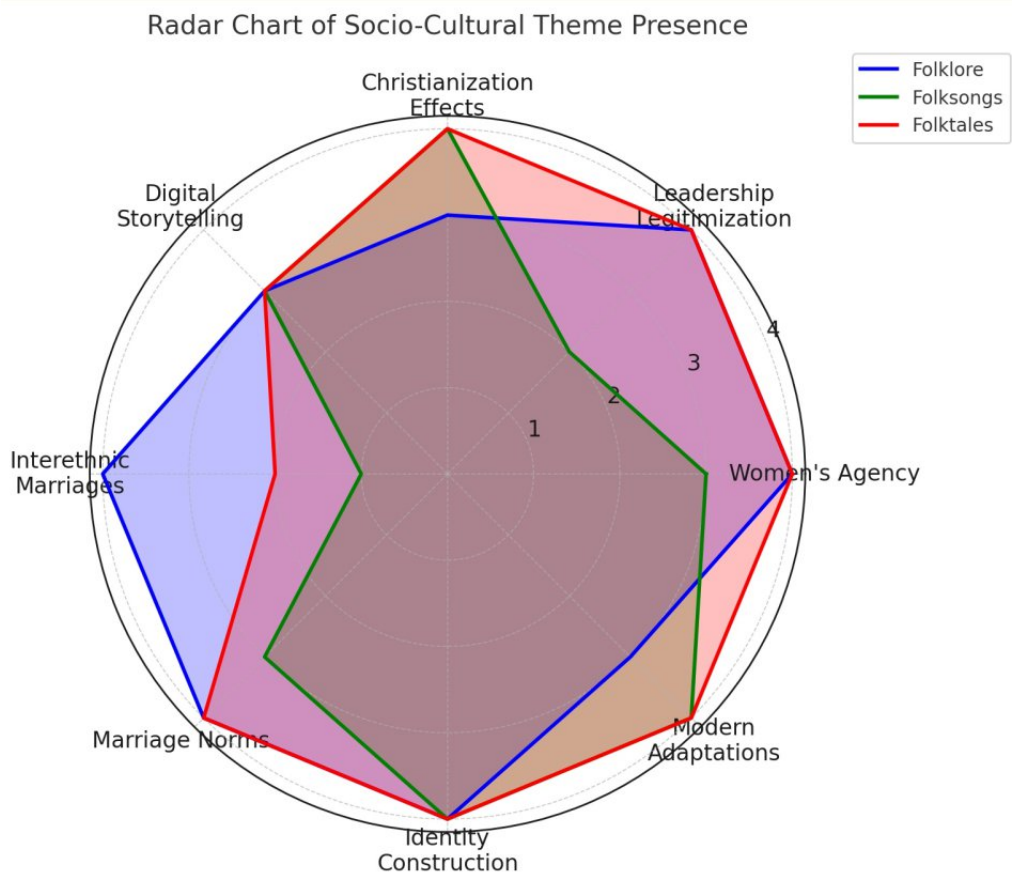

Figure 6.1 Socio-cultural themes across Folklore, Folksongs, and Folktales

The radar chart reveals that Sümi Folklore, Folksongs, and Folktales each play distinct yet overlapping roles in expressing and negotiating socio-cultural themes. Folklore and Folktales consistently score high in Women's Agency, Leadership Legitimization, and Marriage Norms, highlighting their central role in shaping social values and challenging or reinforcing norms. Folktales, in particular, excel in adapting to Christianization and Modern Contexts, often blending traditional narratives with evolving belief systems. Folksongs, while equally strong in Identity Construction and Christianization Effects, are less focused on Leadership and Interethnic Marriages, suggesting their emotional and communal nature over didactic or historical storytelling. Interestingly, all three domains show a balanced, moderate score in Digital Storytelling, indicating a shared but developing space for cultural continuity through modern media. Overall, Folktales appear the most versatile, while

Folklore is foundational and Folksongs emotionally resonant, each complementing the others in preserving and transforming Sümi cultural identity.

6.5 Summary of Findings

The comparative study of Sümi folklore, folksongs, and folktales reveals that all three oral traditions play crucial roles in preserving and negotiating socio-cultural values:

1. Women's Agency is strongly depicted across all three, particularly in folklore and folktales, where women's resilience, emotional depth, and subtle forms of resistance are prominent.
2. Leadership Legitimization is most explicit in folklore and folktales through ancestral and supernatural validation, while folksongs support leadership more subtly via communal values.
3. Christianization Effects are evident in all three forms, leading to syncretic traditions that blend Christian theology with indigenous practices.
4. Digital Storytelling is emerging as a key mode of transmission, particularly among youth, though it risks loss of performance details.
5. Interethnic Marriages are significantly represented in folklore as metaphors for diplomacy, but are minimally addressed in folksongs and only symbolically in folktales.
6. Marriage Norms are consistently explored, with all three offering critiques or reimaginings of traditional roles and customs.
7. Identity Construction remains a foundational theme, with ecological, ancestral, and symbolic references shaping Sümi cultural consciousness.
8. Modern Adaptations are actively transforming all three genres, ensuring relevance while negotiating authenticity.

Together, these findings emphasize that Sümi oral traditions are living, adaptive cultural mechanisms that continue to reflect and shape the community's evolving identity in the face of modernization, religious transformation, and digitalization.

6.6 Revisiting Research Questions

1. Folktales *Anishe Xamunu* and songs *Ixeu Nikujo le* reveal a duality: women are framed as both nurturing figures and resilient agents. Work songs *(Thisho le*) document their labour, while poems subtly critique patriarchal norms.
2. Authority is legitimized through supernatural validation *(Kasho Papu* tale) and ancestral wisdom, yet hunting songs (*Ishe ishi nana*) and digital retellings reflect youth-driven challenges to static hierarchies.

Matrilineal rituals have eroded but persist syncretically: harvest songs retain animist melodies, and folktales (*Amüghusu*) blend moral binaries. Female ritual roles now operate in hybridized spaces.

3. Social media adaptations increase accessibility but flatten oral performance subtleties. Youth-curated content (e.g., hip-hop folklore blends) renegotiate tribal identity, risking dilution of ecological symbolism (hornbill, paddy).
4. Folktales that involve intertribal relationships or marriage alliances often function as metaphors for diplomacy and cultural negotiation. Their modern retellings reflect changing social contexts and aspirations for unity among diverse Naga communities.
5. Love songs prescribe fidelity but folktales like *(Khaulipu eno Tsuipu*) critique inflexible norms. Proverbs and divorce narratives (*Inakha eno Ghonili*) reveal an undercurrent of gendered dissent.

6.7 Key Contributions of this Research

This study makes several significant contributions to the fields of folklore studies, indigenous cultural preservation, and gender and social dynamics in Northeast India. Ultimately, it provides the first comprehensive socio-cultural analysis of Sümi folktales and folksongs, addressing a critical gap in Naga scholarship. The research documents endangered oral narratives such as *Anishe Xamunu* and *Kasho Papu*, as well as traditional folk songs like *Ixeu Nikujo le* and *Aghixu le,* which are increasingly at risk due to the influences of Christianization and modernization. These materials highlight unique Sümi cultural markers, including ecological

symbolism (such as the hornbill and paddy) and elements of material culture (like feathers and traditional weapons) deeply rooted in the folklore.

A significant contribution of the research lies in its exploration of gender dynamics and women's agency within Sümi oral traditions. It reveals the dual portrayal of women, showcasing them as both preservers of cultural heritage, such as *Inakha eno Ghonili*, and as subversive, autonomous figures, exemplified by *Anishe Xamunu*. The study also documents the significant labour roles played by women through work songs like Thisho le, thus offering a counter-narrative to historically male-dominated accounts. Furthermore, it analyzes how Christianization disrupted matrilineal rituals, while also leading to the development of syncretic cultural expressions, particularly visible in contemporary festival performances.

In examining the themes of leadership, authority, and social order, the research shows how Sümi folktales often legitimize leadership through supernatural validation as seen in the tale of Kasho Papu and promote meritocratic ideals. It also identifies how modern adaptations and digital retellings reflect youth-driven challenges to traditional authority. Stories of intertribal marriage are interpreted as historical tools for diplomacy and negotiation, offering deeper insights into the cultural strategies used to maintain peace and social unity.

The research also closely investigates the impacts of Christianization and modernization on Sümi folklore. It traces the presence of religious syncretism in work songs and folktales, such as *Amüghusu*, where animist and Christian elements are shown to coexist. Moreover, it assesses how digital storytelling platforms contribute both to the preservation of oral narratives and to the flattening of their expressive subtleties. Generational shifts in the transmission of folklore are also examined, highlighting the transition from traditional oral sharing to more modern modes such as school textbooks and social media.

Methodologically, this study proposes community-based and ethical approaches, highlighting the value of indigenous-led documentation and non-extractive research. It makes a strong case for indigenous-led research to avoid extractive academic

practices, advocating for more ethical and collaborative approaches. The research proposes decolonized archiving techniques, including the use of audiovisual recordings and commentaries from community elders, to ensure authenticity and cultural integrity. It demonstrates how folklore functions both as a repository of cultural memory and as a living, evolving practice within Sümi society.

Finally, the study outlines several practical applications. It provides policy recommendations for incorporating Sümi folklore into Nagaland's formal education system, ensuring that younger generations engage with their cultural heritage. The research also calls for community-based preservation efforts to support intergenerational knowledge transfer. Moreover, it offers a valuable framework for the study of other indigenous oral traditions that face similar threats, thereby contributing to the broader global discourse on cultural preservation and indigenous knowledge systems.

6.8 Suggestions for Further Research

Further study or exploration could involve:

1. Comparative studies: A comparative analysis with other Naga tribes or Northeast Indian communities could deepen our understanding of regional folklore patterns and cultural ideas.
2. Gender and subaltern voices: Future research could focus more specifically on women's oral narratives, songs sung by widows or labourers, and other subaltern voices that often remain unexplored, since this research had been done focussing on the common people instead of a particular gender.
3. Translation and Archiving: Creating bilingual or trilingual anthologies of Sümi folktales and songs can help preserve the oral tradition and make it accessible to wider audiences, both academic and community based.

6.9 Final Observations

Folk literature, as this study has displayed, is an evolving cultural expression not to be curated in museums or libraries. It is a living tradition that breathes through memory, performance and everyday language. The folk tradition of the Sümi Nagas highlighted remarkable capacity for endurance, adaptation and meaning making across generation.

In the act of listening to stories, singing songs and retelling tales, the Sümi community reaffirms its connection to its roots, even as it engages with the modern world. These narratives offer more than entertainment. They are tools for cultural survival, ethical inquiry, and deep connection.

As scholars, educators, and community members, our role is not only to study these traditions but to respect, preserve, participate in them. For in the songs of the elders and the tales of the fireside, there stands a world still waiting to be heard. Cultural heritage is a vital part of our collective identity, and its preservation is essential for future generations. By engaging with these traditions, we can uncover hidden narratives, cultural diversity and foster cross cultural understanding. Moreover, we can learn from indigenous perspectives, challenge our own biases, and develop empathy and compassion for people from diverse backgrounds.

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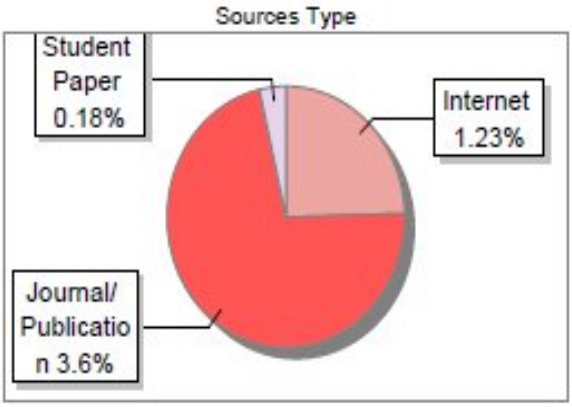

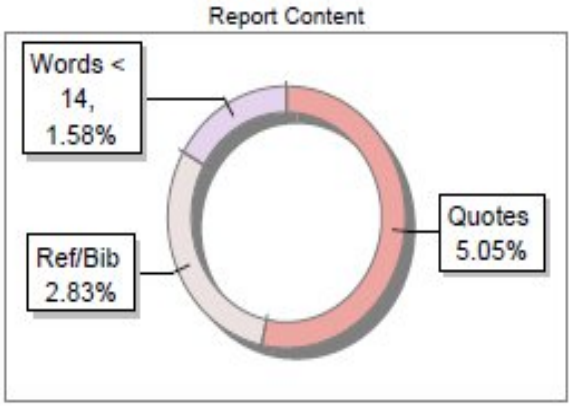

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