

Oral Literature and Cultural Memory: Mao-Poumai Tribal Folklore of Northeast India

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ABSTRACT: While underling the literature from the broader perspective, the paper shows how cultural memory has unfolded oral literature through folklore. Oral literature generally does not stress on authorship as it is collectively owned and every member of the community has the right to narrate as per one's ability and genius. Narration is essentially based on memory that has been handed down from generation to another since folklore it is not preserved in the form of text. It is imperative to study and analyse folklore to understand the tribal society as folklore constitute the body of cultural memory and cultural knowledge as well as it determines the identity of the tribal. Folklore is anything that includes traditional arts, literature, information, knowledge and practices, which are disseminated through oral or over a long history that constitute part of the behavioural mode of everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

The study of folklore has gained momentum across disciplines particularly in linguistic, history, literature, anthropology, cultural studies, media and communication studies. On the one hand, increased interest in folklore is owing to cultural roots and historical materials, and on the other hand, it is uniquely an important factor of identity formation. Folklore constitutes the source of information and knowledge of a particular group of people where the group has intimately identified with and inherited it as a legacy. This is integral to almost every community since it constitutes the core of its identity. People are identified and known based on their respective folklore. The discourse of identity formation, consciousness of being one and the process of "othering" has its foundation in folklore. Devoid of the tenet of folklore, the historicity of a community is incomplete since the historicity and particularity of a community had its roots in folklore. Identification with

certain legends, relics and myths is common in human society and the understanding of human civilization is constructed from the remnants of folklore.

Literature is not limited to text and published data alone but it includes vast sources available in the form of folklore which is popularly referred as orature (oral literature). Folklore as a form of literature is usually communicated orally, which is stored and preserved in memory. Memory is stocking device of folklore besides archaeological, anthropological and historical evidence. While attempting to underline literature from a broader perspective, the paper shows that cultural memory unveiled the tribal literature through folklore. The emergence of print culture and the growth of modernity does not simply make orature (oral literature) handed down through songs, dances, stories, riddles, beliefs, festivals, etc. redundant but is appropriated and inculcated as the time demands. In this context, Murphy ('78:113) noted that "As with other forms of speech, people use oral literature to

express their ideas, beliefs, and values, and negotiate through their net of social relationships". To study and understand the tribal society, there is no better way than to examine its folklore.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Memory is essentially a part of oral tradition. The device, which has the ability and capacity to store and preserve knowledge, wisdoms, skills and potentialities orally, is memory. Memory is an ideal source that helps to build and constructs identity. As Assmann (2008:109) stated that, "memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level". It is not merely constructed but furnishes from past shared experience that the individuals have had as their collective behaviour. Collective shared experience, which is culturally bound, ignites and generates the idea of memory for future generations. The advancement of human civilization to a cultural centric is not just an outcome of evolutionary process but the product of appropriating the tradition. While theorising and contextualising the concept of cultural memory, the paper follows the formulation of Assmann that "cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity," (Assmann, 2008:110) although the two may not be one and same. Thus, cultural memory is based on "a concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann and Czaplicka, '95:126).

Oral tradition conditioned the cultural memory of the people. Cultural memory, in turn binds and sustains a community thereby maintains stability. Memory as a constituent of oral tradition preserved the pure and true form of traditional knowledge and wisdom for generations to come. Tradition signifies the modality of mediation that binds a society. In today's world of verbalisation and writing, cultural memory can be both in the form of oral and written. In broad sense, cultural memory is defined by Heller as "embodied in objectifications which store meanings in a concentrated manner, meanings shared by a group

of people who take them for granted. These can be texts, such as sacred scrolls, historical chronicles, lyric or epic poetry. They can also be monuments, such as buildings or statues, shared material signs, signals, symbols and allegories as storages of experience, memorabilia erected as reminders. Further on, cultural memory is embodied in regularly repeated and repeatable practices, such as festivals, ceremonies, rites. Finally, cultural memory just like individual memory is linked to places" (Heller, 2001:139). Memory brings forth remembrance that helps continuity of social and cultural life of a community.

Memory as a source of literature can be memory of any member in the community. Since human memory is not permanent, therefore there can be some sort of ambiguity. However, scholars argue that oral tradition is relatively stable and functions well. The important point, Severi argues, is that "what makes a representation part of a tradition is, first of all, its form. Shared knowledge is everywhere transmitted following traditional patterns as, for instance, in the form of story or group of stories, untiringly recounted from one generation to another" (Severi, 2002:23). There can be difference in memory of different persons but patterns should be same. The accuracy and precision of the narration is not the actual issue but the information and knowledge that it carries. Story can be folktales, story of festivals, crafts, rituals and so on. Cultural memory that is handed down from ages is thus taken in the form of cultural knowledge and cultural representation. In oral tradition, thus individual narration, to a large extent, contributes towards cultural knowledge. As noted by Severi (2002:24), "it is well-known that in ritual performances, and in particular in the ritual use of language (as, for instance, in chants, spells or other forms of ritual speech) individual improvisation can play an important role". Cultural memory does not always mean memory alone but it can be improvised as well.

The present is defined by the past in the form of cultural memory. Cultural memory therefore defines identity and becomes a shared commonality which shapes the behavioural patterns of the community. As cultural memory and cultural knowledge is handed down from ages, its importance is often taken for granted although it is a media in an oral-tradition

based society where people communicate through interaction. Oral tradition does not stress on authorship but the emphasis is on information since ownership of an oral tradition is based on “collective authorship”. In a relatively oral-tradition based society, thus person’s intellect and wisdom is measured by how best one can narrate and recollect memory. The better one can remember and recollect from his/her memory, the wiser and clever is he/she. A person with feeble memory is considered weedy in knowledge and not wise enough. Till date, vast literature of the tribal society is stored in oral tradition that exists within the realm of memory.

Cultural memory and cultural knowledge gives birth to the notion of folklore. Since the term “folklore”, first coined by William Thoms in 1846, Emrich (’46:355) was used to replace “popular antiquities” and “popular literature”, scholars across disciplines have done commendable works making it a discipline. Initially, Thoms intended to include in the terms like manners, customs, observations, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, riddles, songs, dances and so on, which he called “the lore of the people”. Although the term folklore was coined by Thoms, its systematic definition was stated in the *First Annual Report of the Council of Folklore Society* as “folklore may be said to include all the “culture” of the people which has not been worked into the official religion and history, but which is and has always been of self growth. It represents itself in civilised history by strange and uncouth customs; superstitious associations with animals, birds, flowers, trees, and topographical objects, and with the events of human life; the belief in witchcraft, fairies, and spirits; the traditional ballads and proverbial sayings incident to particular localities; the retention of popular names for hills, streams, caverns, springs, tumuli, fountains, fields, trees, and all such out-of-the-way lore” Folk-Lore Society (1879:4). As the scope and nature of folklore gets wider and fragmented, the assumption that literature presupposes the existence of letters and writings was seriously challenged with phrases such as “unwritten literature” and “oral literature” to trace the origin of literary growth, Long (’74:65). Some scholars even question whether “applied folklore include folk festivals, various folk song and dance ensembles, or folklore festivals” should be considered

as folklore since “folklore in its oral and traditional form is in most cases transmitted orally and serves as shared tradition-based creations of a cultural community” Harvilahti (2003:200).

For Hamilton *et al.* (’90:311), “folklore describes a social group’s traditional expression, practices and beliefs that are preserved and transmitted outside official or institutional structures –most often orally or by demonstration – acquiring variant states in the process”. Folklore in the paper will mean inclusive and comprehensive body of source such as sayings, riddles, dances, songs, festivals and feasts, agricultural practices, handicrafts, woodcrafts, knowledge and skill of constructing houses, terrace fields, bridges, caring and nursing of sickness and diseases, beliefs, which are passing down through oral mode. Every community possessed a shared tradition, which is central to its identity, and it is the folklore of that community.

Folklore can be in the form of verbal expression (stories, poetry, riddles, proverbs, sayings), musical expressions (songs, yelling, music), expression by action (dances, plays, artistic form of rites and rituals) and tangible expression (art in the form of paintings, drawings, carvings, sculptures, pottery, woodcraft, weaving, carpets, costumes, bamboo/cane craft, housing structures and architectural), UNESCO and WIPO (’85). By and large, any form of knowledge and wisdom that is handed down orally or over a long history of past constitute a folklore. Folklore is not necessarily always transmitted orally but it can be in the form of visuals, performances, art, paintings, beliefs and games.

UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

Tribal in the paper refers to the frontier tribes of Mao and Poumai Nagas in India’s northeast, bordering to Myanmar. Other than few villages in Phek District of Nagaland, predominantly the Mao-Poumai have resided in Senapati district¹ of Manipur bordering to Nagaland and Assam though many of them are now spread across India’s cities. The study employed the method of participant observation and follows the technique of textual analysis. The paper underlines the point that literature is not limited to text and written alone but also include orature in the form of folklore that exist in tradition and cultural memory.

FOLKSONG AND DANCE

Besides folksongs and dances are medium of cultural transmission, they are storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. In the absence of written record, tribal history, tradition, skills and arts were preserved in the form of songs and dances, Kaisü (2014:111). In addition to foster qualities such as social concern, fraternity and the likes, they enable the tribal people to develop the taste and appetite for arts and appreciation of those who excel in the field. Their communicative role is also enormous in individual's social development since lesson of decent behaviour and sense of responsibility are painted in songs and dances. Many things for different reasons that failed to find expression through word of mouth are often communicated through them. Dances and songs possess strong communicative and educative meaning that formed a part of the core element of tribal literature. Folksongs and folkdances, indeed, are intensely connected with everyday life that reveals the tribal identity, its worldviews, and ways of life, which are also important sources of its literature.

Mao-Poumai folkdances usually flow along with yell and cry as the dancers follow the tune. It is closely associated with socio-economic, political, cultural and religious life of the tribal people. It embodies not only the back-breaking and meticulous agricultural activities but also creativity, skill, imagination, philosophy and art of warfare. Besides strong artistic skill and imaginative idea, dance represents the symbolic value of the community, its culture, tradition and civilization. It represents the identity of the people, their sharedness and commonality. Mao-Poumai folk dance is usually performed in group and the steps are thematically synced with different melodies of merry making and expression. It is rhythmically moved along with music and typically follows the sequence of its pattern in synchronized manner comprising of both the sexes. The war dance is the most common one. Besides occasions such as village gatherings, *merit of feast*, disputes and feuds, welcoming guests and dignitaries, dance is traditionally performed during *chüthuni* (festival that commemorates a successful year and pleading for another prosperous year).

Folksongs of the Mao-Poumai are broadly categorised into *lochu*, *shüingha doulo*, *doulo*,

engholo, *shungolo* and *loru*. Besides, there are various *onghu*/rhyme, yelling and ballads expressed in varied forms of tune. Almost every agricultural activity has its distinct *onghu*/rhyme with 3 basic voice types – *soprano*, *tenor* and bass, which are tunefully and melodiously executed as the work progresses. The rhyme helps the people to focus the work while releasing hardship and burden as they performed the task. There is also a particular melody for pulling monumental stones, dragging *opa* (grinder) (flatten and smoothed wood trunk for grinding), carrying *chüso* (a long and large wood log that connect the house from front to hind), *ote* (main pillar of the house) and so on. They can pull their strength and weight together along with the momentum of the melody. There is also *oru nghu* (war cry), which in the past the village-folks collectively pronounced as they go for war/head-hunting. The cry infuses the zeal, passion and dedication for the cause. Though head-hunting is now a thing of the past, *oru nghu* (war cry) constitutes the folklore, which is performed as per the suitability. Another distinct and remarkable music is *okro kolo* (melancholic wail), which is recited and expressed by elderly women on demised of a person. Something this is sorrowful and painful that cannot be expressed in words is often converted into melancholic wall, which is expressed in the form of poetry.

Relatively deeper in meaning and philosophical in terms of text folksong is called *lochu*, which is not commonly, sung as other types. Most *lochu* also can be narrated in the form of story. Following are instances of *lochu*:

ANCESTRY & PROSPERITY

Ho-e he makrie dzü heno ohrü kario pekotsüo hriüprae
Ede kotsü meio neshi shie modo shie
Ona kali mono pfothuno mikrü kola-la mala-e süe
Ona kali mono pfothuno shüingha mozhu-la mala-e süe
Ona kali mono pfothuno shüpfö mahra la mala-e süe
Lasü komo vaheno okhro inghode shathu pedu piva
timoha?
Peva moli-e ohrü soto mei tali kohrü
Lene lene-e tozhe kohru-e lo ohrü soto leshe pfoli kohrü!

English Translation

Great forefather once lived at *makhel*.
 Is a bad idea of the forefathers?

To learn the language of the Meteis and *mayangs*, one child started education,
 To equip the language of the Angami and Lotha, the other begun learning,
 To acquaint the language of *shüpfomei* (Mao and Poumai) and Maram, another child started,
 Is not war an outcome of communication gap?
 To any community trade relation can be built without head-hunting;
 To all mankind let's build trade relation with love and peace.

Zhozhüo

*Chukro meina ozhi narie o-pfoto kali hrie zhozhüo to
 Zhozhüo mono kolo zhuo adei muko pfomu lua mono chusa
 Zhozhüo mono kolo zhu oho hodzü ongha kazhi ko pfomu
 lua mono lochoji
 Zhozhüo khramei ozhe-mazhe otu-tholo movou
 Movou komole zhe-mazhe otu-tholo movou kario sii
 zhozhüo
 Zhozhüo khramei okekoro sowo oru sho
 Rusho komole kekoro sowo rusho kario sii zhozhüo
 Zhozhüo shupene pfonta chiüdzü duno ta athu koko tiwo
 Mei –akrie mei-adzü doeno doesü, zhozhüo sii-e!*

English Translation

Zhozhüo is a lovable gorgeous eldest son of a fellow.
 Dreamt what a dream on the night of *Zhozhüo*'s birth?
 So happen that by dreaming a beautiful cock.
 Shot-put, long-jump, high-jump played by *Zhozhüo*'s peer;
Zhozhüo first played before none of his peer does.
 Head-hunting/war begun while securing the compound and gates by *Zhozhüo*'s fellows;
Zhozhüo first set the war process before none of his fellow started.
 While marching towards an open space of *Zhozhüo*'s neighbour,
Zhozhüo is smarter, more magnificent and grand amongst all.

The above folksongs (*lochu*) are dramatic, metaphysical and philosophical in nature while aspiring and encouraging for a greater height by overcoming the drawbacks. The first song talks about the origin, settlement and process of civilisation. It didn't specify the origin of their forefathers but categorically noted their settlement. While giving tributes to the forefathers for their foresightedness and wisdom, the song briefs the idea of learning and how it unfolds. It strongly communicates the value and importance of learning and education. While lamenting the consequences of war/head-hunting, the

song explained that ignorance and illiterate was responsible for it. The song expresses the view that knowledge and wisdom can heal anti-social elements and destructive activities including war and conflicts. It conveys the idea that education is necessary for societal growth. Further, the song acknowledged that knowledge is imperative to promote both humanity and economically interdependent world. Such a world is possible with rational understanding and love for humankind.

The second song communicates that to seek for honour and prestige through fair competition was an ideal desired through all ages. Depending on situation and needs, mode and nature of competition varies but constitute part of human civilization. While dealing on the sorts of competition in those days, the song stresses on how one needs to be prepared to face the challenges while seeking for honour. The song communicates the rational and logic that competition is not easy. The only way to be successful in competition is to give the best without taking chances. It philosophises and romanticises a person who would be excelling in every affair. Such a person is rare but perhaps not impossible with dedicated hard-work and commitment, if not across the societies, atleast among the peers. The song advocates that one should strive for the best to achieve the goal with sincerity and dedication.

Another type of song is *shünggha doulo*. Most *shügha dulo* are accompanied with dance, which is usually sung after or in between the dance. Tune such as *ho-e*, *hwe-e* and yelling are regular in every interval since usually dance has various steps. This type of folksong does not strictly follow text and content but depends on context and situation, it can be composed so long as the pattern is maintained. It is usually sung in group and some of its instances are:

FRATERNITY & UNITY Shiingha Dulo

*Ho-e ezho chiüthu adei koso chiüthue?
 Ho-e ezho chiüthu asa chovo chiüthue
 Ho-e ememei sü hahe no adzü choe, hahe no adzü bue
 Ho-e ememei sü adei vano adzü? adei vano vubue?
 Ho-e ememei sü shüji leto vuchoe, shüji leto vubue
 Ho-e ememei sü okre kali sole, okre kazhi sole
 Ho-e kanakoyi kokhei kolo pele, kokhei kolo pele
 Ho-e kanako chu ano chakri leshe, ano chakri leshe,
 Ho-e kanako chu zhiowo bu leshe, chowo bu leshe*

Ho-e ezho theno okre kazhi sole, okre kazhi sole
Ho-e ezho theno aba abo leshe, aba abo leshe
Ho-e ezho heno okhei sü sole mo, okhei sü sole mo
Ho-e kalino kaliye mocho peda, kali mocho peda
A-ho-e-e-a!

English Translation

Today, what day is this?
 This is the day of joy and gay.
 Assemble here; congregate here, *ememei* (Maos);
 Assemble for what? Congregate for what? *ememei* (Maos)!
 Assemble for discoursing; congregate for discoursing,
ememei (Maos).
 Vouch for unity; vouch for oneness, *ememei* (Maos).
 Forgive and forget; let's bury the hatchet.
 Listen to one another; pay attention to each other.
 Obey one another; let's abide by each other.
 Builds healthy bond; from henceforth strengthens fraternity.
 Helps one another; assists each other from henceforth.
 Not the end; today shall not be the end.
 Remembers one another; let's uphold each other.

KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM *Shiingha Dulo*

Ho-e ezho chiüthu adei koso chiüthue?
Ho-e ezho chiüthu asa chovo chiüthue
Ho-e ememei sü hahe no adzü choe, hahe no adzü bue
Ho-e ememei sü adei vano adzü, adei vano vubue?
Hoe-e ememei sü itsü modo leto, kosü modo leto
Ho-e itsü kosü meino modo peletu vue, mosü peletu vue
Ho-e omei thopfü shekrelo chakrelo, shekrelo anolo
Ho-e kosü meino kape sü cho leshe, kapesü zhe leshe
Ho-e kosü meido sü modo leshe, sü mola leshe
Ho-e kosü mei kei sü modo leshe, sü mola leshe
Ho-e kosü sü pfo vo kazhi soleshe, vo kajii soleshe
Ho-e kosü sü pfo kaji koso sole, kaji koso sole
Ho-e kosü sü pfo meipe motu mozhuo, meipe mala mohriü
Ho-e ezho heno okhei sü sole mo, okhei sü sole mo
Ho-e kalino kaliye mocho leda, kali mocho leda
A-ho-e-e-a!

English Translation

Today, what day is this?
 This is the day of joy and gay.
 Assemble here; gather together here, *ememei* (Maos),
 Assemble for what? Congregate for what? *ememei* (Maos)!
 To gain wisdom; to acquire knowledge, *ememei* (Maos),
 Come to teach; knowledgeable and educated are,
 Listen carefully; pay attentively, everybody,
 Do as instructed; follow as imparted,
 Learn from them; cultivate the knowledge,
 Inculcate the ideas; learn their techniques.

Do noble works; do good works with knowledge and wisdom.
 Do mighty and great, let's do excellent works with intellect.
 Excel above everyone; let your knowledge thrives above all.
 Not the end; today shall not be the end!
 Remembers one another, let's care for each other.

The above *shüingha dulo* are usually sung during village/community gathering. The songs focus that unity is strength and for the society/community to develop, evolving a rational understanding through discourse is imperative. They show that healthy discourse is an ideal mode to minimise distrust and for promoting the bond of oneness. The songs reveal that village-republic is not dictatorial but function based on discourse and collectivity. The first song described that the objective of gathering is for discoursing while informing that it is the day to celebrate. Amidst celebration, it is the time to understand each other through discourse for a better tomorrow. Times to forge unity while acknowledging each other error at the same time appealing to uphold one another. The next song elaborated that acquiring knowledge is a moment to rejoice and celebrate. Hunt for knowledge and wisdom is very much part of the Mao-Poumai tradition even during the oral days. While giving red-carpet welcome to the dignitaries, it exhorts to pay attention to what they are saying, who are of intellectual repute. The song enthrals of the need to follow what they impart and learn from them. Knowledge and wisdom should be used for a better future. While challenging to make an utmost use of the expertise, the songs advocate that one should strive for the best by not hurting others. The songs also draw the point that in tribal philosophy, collectivism and individualism goes hand in hand.

FOLKTALE

Folk story is another important component of the tribal folk literature. Stories are major storehouse of knowledge for the tribal people. Through storytelling and narratives, people are educated and thereby gained wisdom. Besides upholding the past memory, story is a source of strength, encouragement and hope that hardship is not exceptional and there are better days ahead for a humble and truthful. Story also taught of the need to be kind and gentle towards the poor,

downtrodden and weak. The moral and philosophy of the story is not limited to the past alone but also to inculcate knowledge while exhorting to desist from unhealthy activities. Folk stories of the Mao-Poumai are varied and many. Few stories are narrated below.

Story of Bunio and Koshuni

Once upon a time, there lived a young man named *Bunio* who grew up along with a pretty woman *Koshuni*. As time goes by, they fell in love. They thought that they cannot live apart. They mutually decided to get married regardless of the consequences. However, their parents objected. Knowing the parents' position, their romantic bond became stronger. They were ready to keep their lives at stake and so they decided to leap into the lake as an ideal option to be together. Since decided, on an appointed day, they were by the side of *konü* lake. To reaffirm the decision, they agreed to jump at once and tied their hair together. While calling to jump, *Bunio* betrayed his beloved by cutting the hair with a knife but *Koshuni's* jumped. After the unceremonious incident, with broken heart as *Bunio* returned back towards his home, on the way, he saw a male and a female *Liseto* (name of a small bird where there is believed that it can unfold human fortune) chirping repetitively to each other, while signalling a bad fortune for him. After listening the chirping of *Liseto*, *Bunio* get disturbed and thought, even when uncultured birds do not ditch their beloved, who am I do deceived my sweetheart and returning back alone? Besides being dejected, he thought that even if he goes back, life will not be the same anymore since he will be charged; so he returned and jumped. As a sign, two bamboos sprouted from the lake symbolising them. However, the bamboos sprouted separately and were not intertwined. This was taken as a sign that they were separated since they had not jumped together.

Moral and Context of the Story

The story stresses the point that in the philosophy and beliefs of the Mao-Poumai, there is strong tradition that calls for sincerity in every conduct of life. It is easy to be dishonest in the eyes of man but the nature will have its own way. The story indicates that the Mao-Poumai have strong attachment to the forces of nature in their religious domain. Story of

these sorts is the information and knowledge that taught of how to be honest. The story suggests that to conceal the mistake is not easy. Somewhere somehow truth shall reveal even through unnatural way. Similarly, the story informs that love is blind is true for all ages. To fell in love is natural but not necessarily made for each other. It shows that how deep is the love, it is rarely absolute. The story noted that true love never fails but is rare to find. It also indicates their religious belief in life after death and stresses the point that being honest is imperative as it determines the next life as well.

Story of Ashia

Long ago, a pretty sweet girl *Ashia* lived with her parents, who had a step-mother. Often, her step-mother treated her badly but she rarely revealed instead pretended as if things were fine. Though father knows he is helpless since he loves his wife. On a particular occasion, when *Ashia's* villagers celebrated *saleni* (festival celebrated for successful rice-transplantation and invoking the blessings of Almighty for a bountiful harvest), she went with her peer to hunt *olo* (sort of traditional shampoo/*hrülo modzü* made from wild plant/herb) from the wood.² As they passed through the forest, she noticed a healthy and greeny *olo bu* (shampoo lants) budding by the side of the lake. She tried hard to pluck and as she tweaked, her bracelet fell into the lake. She was heartbroken but somehow consoled by her peers. With pain and the thought of what will be the reaction of her mother, she returns. Once returned, she informed her parents about the incident. Initially, father consoled her, "don't worry. Can't I get another for you?" However, the attitude of the mother was just opposite. She furiously scolded with all kinds of harsh and dirty words. She reproved by saying how it's possible that the bracelet fell while tweaking? "I can't believe it! You must have given to your beloved." Time and again she rebukes like this.

When she can't tolerate the reproaches anymore, she responded, you grew up as young woman and so my father as young man. Did you ever share your affair with bracelet? Furious with rage, mother responded: "we do share our affairs with bracelet like any other. Such things are nothing unusual in youth days." Deeply hurt and forlorn, she finally pleaded her father

to accompany her to the lake the following day. She had a sleepless night and could not even wait for the cock crow. Once the first cock crow, she wake him. Before anybody could notice, their journey started as she took him to the lake. Reaching the spot where the bracelet slipped she pointed the *olo bu* (shampoo plant) to him. After which she expressed: “wonder lake! If you are really wondered and wicked, blow the bracelet out and consume me instead.” Instantly, wave of a forceful wind blew over the lake. The ridge and swell wave blew the bracelet out while she has drowned. The devastated and helpless father asked her to come back while pleading even to show her face one last time. While wiping her face with hands, she arose and said: “warned beforehand but pays no heed. It is too late.” And she directed him to go home before the warriors start prowling while telling him to make alive the bracelet with his tears and give to his wife.

Moral and Context of the Story

Broadly, the story attempts to define and conceptualise three distinct characters. In triangular characters, *Ashia* represents suffering and truth. It demonstrates pain and difficulties of a step-daughter. Rarely, a step-child had a happy life. Far from support and encouragement, what the child needs the most, a step-child gets the bitter one. For a step-child to have a normal life is almost unthinkable. It's beyond one's comprehension of how difficult and tough is the life of a step-child.

Truth hardly dies although it takes time to unfold. The story shows that when all human disposals run out, the Nature still stands by your side. Something which is beyond human comprehension ultimately gives birth to religion and supernatural. When there is cyclic refusal to acknowledge the truth, the only option left is something related to supernatural.

For any woman, to become a step-mother is unfortunate. Besides few exceptional ones, rarely does she care for a step-child like her biological ones. It is natural since there is no blood bond between them. The story reveals that natural love and affection between them remain a matter of convenience. It is always a struggle of what a mother should be. There is a continuous struggle between reality and expectation, so is the reason to blame. Even a noble

step-mother (perhaps better than a biological mother) is considered unworthy on account of societal experiences.

As husband and father, the complaints about the child must be indescribable is what the story indicates. He is caught in between either to support his wife or a child. He was the only real and possible bridge between the mother and a child. But as human there is always a limitation. The story suggests that one can rarely love two persons equally. Being loved is great, but the greatest tragedy of love is partial. When love is not balanced, and often it is not, extreme consequence is common. For no fault of a child, forging another marriage has already sown the seed of family discord.

RIDDLE AND ADAGE

Riddles, adages and proverbs also together constitute the core source of tribal literature. These are rich, matchless and unparalleled oral literature, passing down since ages. Out of various riddles and sayings, some few that are directed to alcohol abuse are examined.

For instance, a popular riddle goes:

Kori kali nukolo dzüo, odo lopra kali hukolo ko zhipue
(To construct a plot of terrace field is far better than to block a river.)

When contextualised within the context of alcohol abuse, the riddle means, instead of mounting one's belly with gallons of wine to cultivate a healthy habit is far better. For Mao-Poumai, drinking rice-beer is social and traditional but not to abuse. The riddle suggests that they drink rice-beer for bodily requirements and not for amusement and intoxication. To block a river is indeed difficult but to construct the terrace field is requirement. It indicates that to mend unhealthy habit is not easy and therefore before it becomes uncontrollable better be cautious.

A saying also goes:

chü makra pfo bu chüno
(Taboo to keeps on drinking).

This is a frequently quoted saying while reprimanding an abuser. The word taboo in Mao-Poumai's usage and terminology means *chüno*. *Chüno* not only implies forbidden but something that an individual should morally be responsible for. It is an

act of moral accountability and manifestation of self-restraint. Moral self-responsibility is a core component of *chiüno* rather than social restriction alone. The violation of the norm of *chiüno* besides attracting wrath of the community is an act that amounts to disobeying god.³ Honouring the norms of *chiüno* is an act of religious life.

INVOKE RITUAL

As per tradition, for any act of invoking blessing and gracing, occasion begins with an utterance:

Ora ye thou, ochü madai he apfo-e, oji mashe he apfü-e, Oh! ekhra-mahra, enapu-kapemata, ememe, singha-mozüo eh shüpfoli kohrü raku kokule!

(Revered be to god, crystal blue sky my father, open flat earth my mother,

May the soul of the makhan, Maram, lepaona, kapemata, memei, Angami and Lotha of all shüpfö descendants be united).

It symbolises that one should pay attention to worship god while seeking his help. It also shows that Mao-Poumai are religious people and worship comprises an important place in their social life. Besides, the invocation brings forth the memory and fraternity of those migrated from *makhel*.⁴ To have a glimpse of migrating tradition amongst the Nagas tribes, the Zeliangrong tradition (comprises of Zemei, Laingmei, Rongmei and Inpui) state that they migrated from *makhel to makuilongdi* (Mao and Zeliangrong village name respectively) from where they dispersed again, Kabui ('95:31). Tangkhuls point to *makhel* as their ancestral place wherefrom they move towards the east. However, this tradition is not conclusive, because another tradition says that the Tangkhuls are from Somra track, Horam ('75:31). Mao, Maram, Poumai, Thangal, Angami and Chakhesang tribes have accepted the *makhelian* tradition. For northern tribes, the Semas point towards the south as their ancestral home. They relate themselves to the legend of *khezakhenoma*⁵ stone in tune with the Lothas, Hutton ('21:5). The Lothas tradition claimed that they emerged from a hole near the miraculous stone of *khezakhenoma*. Yet, another tradition claims that common ancestor of Lotha, Sangtam, Sema and Rengma migrated somewhere near Mao, Mills ('22:3). In the Rengma dialect, *khezakhenoma* is *kheizonyei*. Some Naga tribes might have assembled and

dispersed at *khezakhenoma* after grand dispersal from *makhel*.

Another invoking ritual, which the village chief would pronounce as representative and custodial of the village:

Ashu! Ashu!

Ora ye thou, ochü madai he apfo-e oji mashe he apfü-e,

Oto ko khowe, omei ko khowe

Shührü koku kule, Ovo koku kule

Kakra tho katei tho alule vuo.

(Revered be to god, crystal blue sky my father, open flat earth my mother,

Soliciting wealth, soliciting human

That of spider web, that of crab's egg

Gather at my field of both black and white grains.)

Since agriculture is central to their livelihood accordingly, most rituals and festivals are sequenced and scheduled. This invocation is held during *saleni/lounü* (a festival), celebrated to mark the end of rice-transplantation while pleading for a bountiful harvest. On the main feast (*neji*), the village chief would pronounce the noted invocation in the wee hours. It signifies how they have acquired knowledge from animals and desired their production to be productive as that of spider web and crab's egg. Besides, it manifests that tribal religious act is not limited to worship alone but also making appeal though it is not founded by any prophet or based on sacred text.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that folklore is a vital source of tribal literature that connects the present with the past. Folklore in the form of dances, songs, folkstories, riddles, sayings, rituals and the likes contain strong educative meaning, knowledge and wisdom, and they constitute the core component of tribal identity, history and culture. To study and understand the tribal society, examining and analysing its folklore is imperative. While defining identity, folklore builds strong linkages with culture, traditions, and ways of life, which are sources to understand the tribal and their culture. While refreshing the memory, folklore upholds continuity. Further, the analysis shows that orature (oral literature) does not stress on authorship but the emphasis is on information and communicative meaning. It is collectively owned and every member

of the tribe has the right to narrate as per one's memory and genius. However, there is a popular believe that it is taboo (*chüno*) to narrate wrongfully, which constrains them to share the opinion until one is sure of the stories or songs as he/she will be accountable of what has been narrated.

NOTES

1. It means undivided district, which was once called north district, Manipur, now is bifurcated into Senapati and Kangpokpi.
2. In olden days when soap and shampoo was unknown, people washed their hair with *olo/hrülo modzü*- a natural shampoo made from particular plant/herb.
3. To live a life of god fearing and socially respectable person, one is expected to follow and abide the rule of *chüno*.
4. Name of a village in Mao region where various Naga tribes believed that their ancestors had migrated from this village.
5. *Khezakhenoma* is a Chekhesang village of Nagaland, one of the nearest villages to the Mao and Poumai Naga tribes.

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