

Chapter 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAO NAGA FOLK NARRATIVES

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is an overview of select Mao Naga folk narratives. It will be preceded by a look into the concept of folk narratives, which has now substituted the earlier and commonly used term 'folklore'. In this chapter folklore and folk narratives will be used as interchangeable terms. The associated concepts of folk, folk materials or artefacts, as well as folklore studies and approaches will be looked into before stepping into the study of select Mao Naga folk narratives.

1.2 Folk—origin and meaning

The term 'folk' refers to any group of people who are united by common characteristics such as religion, occupation, ethnicity or geographical location. Thus, one speaks of American folklore, Jewish folklore, (Bronner 56), Indian folklore, and others. Originally, folklore covered a wide range of areas that included traditional songs, tales or narratives, beliefs and superstitions, institutions, customs, costumes, and ornaments used by people who are considered to be backward or less cultured in a society of an advanced society (Boro 18).

Initially, the concept of folk meant only the rural people, especially the poor and illiterate peasants. This was so in the 19th century. Thus, the word folk contrasted with the people in the towns and cities, or the urban populace. Based on the theory of Karl Marx about the working classes, the term folk gradually began to include also the urban proletariat towards the end of the century. Thus, the meaning began to change from being poor and illiterate to belonging to the underclass of society (Bascom, 1954). With the progress in understanding and academics, the concept of folk came to mean a social group sharing common traits, who express their shared identity through clear and distinctive traditions. Hence, without offence to people,

and without relegating them to the lower group in society, academicians freely spoke of tribal folklore, Indian folklore, and so on (Dundes, 1969).

Further progress in understanding was noticed in the 20th century; this was in keeping with new thinking in the social sciences. By the 1960s folk groups meant social groups, which we could see everywhere. It began with the understanding that each individual is, at the same time, part of a multitude of identities and social groups. This meant that the family was the first social group, each family, or at least some families have their unique family folklore. The interconnections of a person increase as a child grows into an individual, its identities increasing due to age, language, ethnicity, and occupation. Each of these social groups, folk groups, has its folklore, and this is "not idle speculation...Decades of fieldwork have demonstrated conclusively that these groups do have their folklore." (Dundes,1980). Therefore, as per this modern understanding, folklore is a function of shared identity within any social group (Bauman,1971).

1.3 Folklore – origin and meaning

The term "*folklore*" coined in 1846 by the Englishman William John Thoms, presented this term as a replacement for the expression "popular antiquities" or "popular literature". The word *lore*, from Old English, means 'instruction', or the knowledge and traditions of a people, or social group usually passed on by word of mouth. Since then, the term folklore has been used to mean the new field that pertains to the folk (Dorson1-2; Abrams and Harpham138).

A broader view of the term folk began to include also the materials or artefacts that could be easily identified with a particular group or people. Thus, folklore began to include all verbal lore and material lore (Wilson, 2006; Dorson 2). Folk artefacts are usually passed along informally, anonymously, and always in multiple variants. So, folklore was no more limited to that which is old or obsolete. The word folk began to be ascribed also to the people of our

century. The folk group is essentially community-based and its lore takes shape and grows in the community, without being dependent on an individual.

Folklore is the totality of cultural expressions and communication that is shared by a particular group of people, culture, or subculture. It includes oral traditions such as tales, myths, legends, proverbs, poems, jokes, rhymes, and other oral traditions. It also includes material culture, such as traditional building styles common to the group, their dress, their monuments, etc. Folklore also encompasses customary laws, explanations for folk beliefs, the forms and rituals of celebrations such as folk dances, folk drama, initiation rites, pseudoscientific lore about weather, plants, and animals, as moral codes, taboos, etc. (Abrams and Harpham 138; Dundes 3). Folklore can include jokes, sayings and expected behaviour of various genres. What distinguishes them is that they are always transmitted informally. Generally, they are learned by observation, imitation, repetition, or correction by other group members. This informal knowledge serves to confirm and reinforce the identity of the group.

Thus, folklore artefacts or folklore expressions are constituted by each or all of these elements. In addition to the meanings ascribed above, folklore also encompasses the transmission of these artefacts from one region to another or from one generation to the next. It must be understood that folklore is not something that can be acquired, but are traditions which are passed on informally from one individual to another, from one generation to the next, either through verbal communication, instruction, or demonstration.¹

Folklore artefacts are commonly classified into three types: material, verbal or customary lore. The material genre includes physical objects; verbal folklore refers to common sayings, expressions, stories, songs, and customary folklore refers to the beliefs and ways of doing things of a group or society.

Some folklorists speak of a fourth subgenre, namely, childlore or children's folklore and games (Opie and Opie, 1969). Each of these genres and their subtypes are intended

to organize and categorize the folklore artefacts; they provide a common vocabulary and consistent labelling for folklorists to communicate with each other.

Folklore serves as a means of passing on the historical societies' cultures to the current generation. India is the home of the origin of many folktales. *Panchatantra* is the oldest collection of folktales of Indian fables believed to have been written about 200 B.C. though some tales must have originated during the period 1500 to 500 B.C during the time of the Rig Veda and the Upanishads. Other voluminous and influential collections that originated in India are *Kathasaritsagara*, *Hitopadesa*, *Vetalapancavimsati*, and the Buddhist *Jatakas* centuries ago before the emergence of folklore interest in the West (Sharma v; Datta 18). The stages of the study of folklore in India can be divided into five periods: the latter half of the 19th century in which Max Muller (1856) made a detailed study on it. The second period was marked by a shift from classical texts to the field collections by Britishers and the Christian missionaries. The third period was mostly by Western scholars and the fourth period in the 1950s by anthropologists and language specialists. The nationalistic movement after independence spurred love and respect for folk traditions, which led to the establishment of folklore programmes in some Universities (Datta 18-19). The folklore of the Indian tribes is extensive and rich. It represents an ecological and cultural perspective on life and the natural world. Each tribe's folklore serves as a thread of unity, continuity, and cultural coherence among the people. Indian tribal folktales were first printed in the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal's magazine in 1774. There has been no going back since then in India. *The Indian Antiquary* was first published in 1886. Local academics started generating their works in regional languages. Its growth and development were aided by the Folklore Association founded in 1957 (Sahay 3). The rise of many scholars who are imbued with the spirit of nationalism is seen in their search for the past through participation, observation, and collection of the life of the people through listening to the stories and the stories being told and retold.

1.4 Folklore studies as a discipline

It is generally accepted that folklore as an autonomous discipline took birth in Europe during the period of romantic nationalism. The credit for this new discipline goes to Johann Gottfried von Herder who, in the 1770s, presented oral traditions or folklore as basically having geographic roots. When Napoleonic France invaded the German states, Herder's approach was adopted by many of his fellow Germans, who systematized the folk traditions of their people, though belonging to different states, and used them as the foundation of nation-building. Smaller nations like Finland, Estonia and Hungary enthusiastically embraced this approach which aided them in strengthening their fight for political independence from their dominant neighbours (Noyes, 2012)

There is also the claim that the new branch of the study of 'folklore' emerged in the 19th century in England and Germany when the scholars of antiquities and philologists began to take a keen interest in the study of tales, songs and other traditions of the so-called lower classes that were orally handed down. Other works like *volkslied*(folksong), *volksseele* (folksoul) and *volks Glaube* (folk belief) were also published by Herder in the late 18th century (Boro18; Medhi 20).

However, another claim asserts that folklore was studied much before the scholarly publication of *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, or the term 'folklore' coined by Thoms. This claim is based on the following works which were collected and published in the 17th century: *Pentamerone* (1634-36) a collection of fifty tales by Gianbattista Basile, *Countess de ma Mere l'Oye* (1695-98) by Charles Perrault, and *Contes des Fees* (1697-98) by Countess d'Aulnoy. There are also translated works such as *Panchatantra* and the *Arabian Nights* among others (Degh 54).

The study of folklore developed among European scholars because they were focusing on contrasting tradition with modernity, and the need to showcase the glorious past to other

countries bordering Europe (Medhi 20) and the people's desire to preserve their national heritage resulted in the study of the history of folklore from different perspectives. Therefore, it focused on the oral folklore of the rural peasant populations, considered as the depository of the past that existed within the lower strata of society (Noyes, 2012). Germany, Finland, Denmark and Norway made major contributions to the rise in national significance by gathering folktales, folklore and ballads. The best example is the Grimms brothers who, infused with romanticism and nationalism, and equipped with the popular historical reconstruction methodology, gathered folktales and legends to preserve something Teutonic or ur-German, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The earliest works referring to folklore were published by them. They used the term *Volkskunde* (folklore) to denote a new branch of study. They collected and published *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (Children and household tales) in 1812. It is the best known, but not the only, collection of verbal folklore of the European peasantry of that time. The German word *Volksmärchen* is translated as "folktale". This marked the beginning of a significant period in folktales, and it continued throughout the 19th century and aligned the fledgling discipline of folkloristics with literature and mythology (Zumwalt and Dundes, 1988). The Grimms brothers collected and reinterpreted the folklore they gathered. Oral tales are still being altered today in the children's literature genre when reconstructed and reconstituted stories that follow written rather than oral patterns are passed off as authentic folktales (Bronner 56; Medhi 20). Jacob Grimms has made a distinction between the magic tale (*Märchen*) and the legend. Both forms speak of human culture and attitude. The former refers to tales that seek an escape from reality while the latter faces the facts of the reality of life (Degh 58-59).

From 1960 onwards, the study of folklore resulted in an unforeseen expansion of the concept of folk, to include folk groups that had previously been overlooked and ignored, e.g.,

women's folklore from their perspectives, non-traditional families, occupational groups, and families or groups involved in the production of folk items for generations.

When the U.S. Congress passed the American Folklife Preservation Act (Public Law 94-201) in January 1976, folkloristics in the United States came of age. ("Public Law 94-201"). With the increasing theoretical sophistication of the social sciences, it has become evident that folklore is a naturally occurring and necessary component of any social group; it is indeed all around us. "Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories" (Sims and Stephens 2). Folklore is not necessarily old or antiquated; it continues to be created and transmitted and, in any group, its basic purpose is to differentiate themselves from others and to define their own identity as distinct from the others.

1.5 Folklore analysis – methods and schools

Different methods and schools have greatly shaped the study of folklore. This section will explore significant theories and approaches in folklore study. Theorists in folklore and folk narratives offer different lenses through which one can see the reflections of the society, its values, beliefs and customs. One such method is the Finnish historical-geographical method. This is used by comparative folklorists to reconstruct the history of a complex tale, song or other folklore items. This theory presupposes that folklore evolves from a historical event within a geographical situation. It tries to do away with the generalization about the origin and meaning of folktales by a careful examination of the meaning of each tale. This theory holds the view that a tale that has been found in variants must have originated in one place. The "wave-like" diffusion of the tale will be affected as it travels across to different places. They argue that in the 15th and 16th centuries, European colonizers carried tales with them to North and South America and Africa, and these tales are now found on these continents. However, one does not find the folktales of the Africans or the American Indians among the European peasants. Hence, the conclusion that the many tales spread widely are believed to have

originated in India and Western Europe. They are also believed to have reached Asia Minor and other European regions as well. Through the collection of these variant tales, the comparative folklorists analyse the plots into traits and study the frequency of occurrence of each trait, mark the geographical distribution, and in this way find the oldest version of the tales (Dorson 7-8).

A first objection to this method is the argument that in an oral society, it is difficult to ascertain the date of the origin of the tales. Stith Thompson clears this difficulty through a narrative confined to North American Indian tribes, “The Star Husband Tale” by using the Finnish theory of the wave-like diffusion of tales. He concluded that the tale must have originated from the Central Plains before the 18th century. Much before the Finnish theorists, Archer Taylor, an American folklorist opined that this method had also been practised by eminent folklore scholars like Child and Friedrich Ranke, among others (Dorson 9-11).

Theodor Benfey, the founder of historical-comparatives folktale research made a study on *Panchatantra*, the 5th-century Indic collection of fables. He linked oral tales to literary origins. He analysed the variants in the tales and his migration theory concluded that tales came to Europe through the Arab traders in Spain and to the Byzantine Empire by the Levantine traders. The Mongolian invasion also helped oral tales to spread to Eastern Europe (Degh 56). Theodor Benfey, as mentioned by Handoo, centred his attention on the problems of diffusion and migration of folklore. He added to the historical importance of folklore theories in the 19th century, the presence of similar folklore across the globe and unrelated cultures could be explained with the help of historical factors such as the migration of people (qtd in Marak 4-5). This method gave more importance to form considered to be the criterion to trace the original form and travel route of tales or any other folklore items.

The theory is not without criticism. According to critics like Reidar Christiansen of Norway and Laurits Bodker of Denmark, the Finnish method reduces the tale to statistical

abstracts, summaries, symbols, tables and maps, neglecting the aesthetic and stylistic elements and the role of the narrator. Whatever the criticism, there is no doubt that one of the major contributions of the Finnish folklorists is the presence of variants in the tales (Dorson 9). The differences that we find in variants of the same folktale could be due to the fact the memory is not static, and the narratives are subject to reconstruction and interpretation with time.

A second theory, the functional theory, examines how folklore functions in a society. The functional theory makes use of anthropology, sociology and literary studies to understand the social dynamics of folklore. Ruth Benedict, in her work, *Zuni mythology* (1935), propounded the functional use of folklore. She claimed that the tribal narratives reflect the ethnography of the culture. She illustrated how folklore validates culture by the use of fantasy and diverts it from reality. William Bascom regarded the verbal arts of folklore as the creative compositions of a functioning society as dynamic, integrated and central components of culture. He further examined the various functions of folklore like riddles that sharpen wits, satirical songs that help to release hostilities, etc. (Dorson 20-21).

Another theory, the psychoanalytical theory, was influenced by Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. According to this theory, myths and folktales substitute sexual symbolism for the 19th century symbolism of heavenly phenomena. Freud's theory mainly concentrates on dreams. It attempts to translate and interpret dreams from the unconscious mind. Freud depended on myths and fairy tales, taboos and jests, and superstitious practices to support his exploration of the subconscious mind (Dorson 25-26).

C.J. Jung who parted ways with Sigmund Freud in 1913 set up analytical psychology in Switzerland. He rejected the name and sexual symbolism of the psychoanalysis school; yet there are many things in common between these two schools. They considered folktales as an integral part of their discipline and interpreted myths and fairy tales using symbolism (Dorson 31-32).

The next theory is that of structuralism, founded by Vladimir Propp, an adherent of Russian formalism. He analysed the collection of Russian fairy tales by Afanasyev. He was not satisfied with the classification of folktales by *dramatis personae* such as Antti Aarne because a devil, dragon, giant, or bear could perform the same actions. He concluded that though the actions remain constant, the *personae* change. Finally, Propp listed thirty-one functions in the structure of Russian fairy tales. This study resulted in his seminal work *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928. In it, he outlines the structural analyses of Russian fairy tales (Dorson 34)

1.6 The Functions of Folklore

Having identified folk artefacts, the professional folklorists strove to understand the *significance* of these beliefs, customs and objects for the group (Schreiter, 2015). Folklore carries a very strong significance for a particular society or group, or else it would not have been passed along unless it had some continued relevance within the group. Nevertheless, it is evident that they gradually assume different shades of meanings, especially the folk artefacts, such as celebrations and festivals.

Folklore serves a double function, namely, internal and external. Internally or within the group the folklore of a people expresses their common identity as in an initiation ceremony for new members. Externally, or in front of the other groups, they manifest what differentiates them from the outsiders, like a folk dance performed in the presence of other groups. Based on these internal and external functions, social scientists can start with a particular group to study its folklore, or begin with the folklore and use it to identify the social group (Bauman, 1971)

William Bascom, the well-known folklorist and anthropologist, speaks of "four functions of folklore", as given below (Bascom 290-295).

- a) Folklore lets people escape from repressions imposed upon them by society.
- b) Folklore validates culture, justifying its rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them.

- c) Folklore is a pedagogic device that reinforces morals and values and builds wit.
- d) Folklore is a means of applying social pressure and exercising social control.

Thus, we see that folklore serves as a mental liberation for the people, justification for their personal, religious, social, and civil lifestyle, values and practices, measure and standard of their morals and values, and even of their entertainment or enjoyment; and the means of social control and pressure on the individuals so that they conform to the social standards, in this way maintaining a common way of living and being as members of the group. All these are ultimately contributing to knowing, understanding and maintaining a distinct and common identity of the particular group.

In the light of these above functions of folklore, this research now steps into the realm of an analysis of the principal Mao Naga folk tales to classify them according to the established standards and the degree to which they serve to identify and sustain the Mao Nagas as being distinct from the other Naga tribes.

1.7 Mao Naga folklore as cultural memory

The Mao Naga folk narratives illustrate the multifaceted role of folklore in society, reflecting its diverse functions as mentioned above based on the functions of folklore identified by Bascom. These folk narratives serve as a vivid repository of cultural memory. The beliefs, ideals and historical experiences are reflected in the cultural memory. They act not only as a remembrance but also construct and produce cultural memory; they not only serve as a means of escape and entertainment from the boredom and constraints of daily life but also play an important role in validating the cultural beliefs and practices of the Mao Naga society.

Understanding the meaning of folklore as the totality of cultural expressions and communication that is shared by a particular group of people, culture, or subculture, which also includes oral traditions such as tales, myths, legends, proverbs, poems, jokes, rhymes, and other oral traditions, we look at the Mao Naga folk narratives from the perspectives of the

theory and approaches used by folklorists. Some available publications on the folk narratives have been given below for our perusal.

Idemeiko Bvii (Folk Stories in Mao) Vol. I (no year) by N. Salao, *Idemeiko Bvii* (Folk Stories in Mao) Vol. II (1993) by N. Saleo, *Mao Folk Story* (2021) by Kaihrii Sani, and *Folktales from the Mao Naga Hills* (2021) by Eloni Kricho are collections of the Mao Naga folk stories. They limit themselves to giving the details of the narrations, without using any theories and approaches of folklore, or any analysis of these folktales.

There are a few other publications on the Mao Nagas. They are *Maola Chashila: Ai Vue* (2016) by A. Kholi which is a book of poems composed by the writer. It was meant to serve as a text book and so there is no application of folklore theory. *The Mao Naga: An Ethnography Study* (2010) by R.K. Singh and Lorho Maheo is an ethnographic study of the Mao Nagas. *Socio-Cultural History of Shiipfomei Naga Tribe* (2010) by William Nepuni presents an exhaustive account of the socio-cultural history of the Shiipfomei Naga Tribe. It deals with oral traditions, socio-cultural, socio-religious, socio-politics, and socio-economic life of the people. It also unearths their culture through dance, music, folktales, folksongs, etc. *Socio-Cultural and Religious Life of the Mao Naga Tribe* (2008) by M. Daniel uses the philosophical perspective to study the Mao concept of life.

The analyses of these works show that so far, no works related to folklore and memory on the Mao Naga narratives as cultural memory have been undertaken. Hence this present research contributes significantly to the field of folklore by addressing the gap in the study of Mao Naga narratives as cultural memory, offering insights into how these narratives function within society and across generations.

Below is a song of admiration by the lady for her beloved. She compares him to the moonlight that shines brightly. It serves as a powerful tool that releases mental tension and, at

the same time, provides a sense of comfort and connection. It further offers a temporary escape from the stress of daily life and boosts one's spirit.

<i>Khrojii khrova kapi zhohi</i>	the light of full moon night
<i>Okhro no vao hokhe ikhruo no vao sato</i>	Is it the moon that is shining or the bachelors?
<i>Khrojii khrova kapi zhohi</i>	the light of the full moon tonight
<i>Okhro no va mo ikhruo no vao siito</i>	It's not the moon that is shining but the bachelors
<i>Vazhii kochu^l</i>	it's shining brightly

The act of remembering, telling and retelling fosters a sense of belonging. It brings people together and helps to maintain continuity and identity among themselves. This is very much true of the Mao Naga society. The common folklore unites and binds them together as a tribe distinct from the others.

Folklore plays a significant role in validating and justifying certain cultural practices and rituals. In the narratives, we find certain dos and don'ts. The best example is the narrative on *Akajii Ye Ariijii*. It presents a taboo - that women are not allowed to take part in head-hunting (chopping off the head as a trophy of war) expeditions. The narrative describes how two young men Akajii and Ariijii agreed to a duel. The day was fixed and when the appointed day came, Ariijii was killed by Akajii with the help of his accomplice. Saddened by his death, Kapeini, his sister, resolved that she would take revenge on Akajii since the other male members of the family or the village refused to avenge the death of Ariijii, though head hunting was reserved only for the men.

The narratives serve as syllabi to teach and instruct people. The values of hard work, honesty, fidelity, and other such values are imparted through it. In most of the folk narratives, whether mixed with supernatural elements or not, the people were seen to be engaged in agricultural activities for their sustenance. They worked hard on the soil. The Mao Nagas who lived within the small geographical area in the Northern District of Manipur depend on the land

for their livelihood even today. They cultivate all kinds of vegetables that suit the weather and the soil.

The Mao Naga folk narratives such as *Choro Ko*, *Thoduo Ko*, *Shiipfow Ko* (Salao 10-15, 45-52), *Moronato Kahei Ko*, *Moronato kali Ko*, *Orameipfii monokolo ko* (Saleo 18-22, 35-47), *Morona ye Oramei pfii* (Neli 48-50) describe agriculture and the related activities of the people. These narratives provide an insight into their agricultural life: tilling the ground, planting and harvesting, and the religious and social life of the people. The Mao Naga begins the year with the celebration of *Chiithuni*, which is celebrated for five days after the harvest. Their festivals are all related to agriculture. They provide relaxation after the heavy work in the field. The narratives of *Kajiini and Katini* in Eloni Kricho and *Kateini Ko* (Salao 1-9) take place in the context of *Chiithuni*. Folk narratives like *Chakepfo Kahrrio Ko*, and *Kholiru Ko* (Salao 1-9, 16-27, 33-38) celebrate the end of the plantation. The agricultural feast celebrated soon after the plantation in July is termed *Saleni*. Celebrations of such feasts keep them connected to the land (nature) and promote social communion. Besides the agricultural feasts, the people in the olden days celebrated the Peace Treaty Feast. It was the custom of the people to organize a Peace Treaty Feast with the warring villages/tribes. The observation of rituals and ceremonies is a part and parcel of their lives. In *Shiikache Ko* (Salao 52-71), one such celebration was organized between his original village and his adopted village. Before consuming his food, Shiikache performed the ceremony of offering wine and rice to the ancestors.

A narrative like *Hriio Ko* (Saleo 54-59) highlights the importance of cooperation and mutual aid. The daughter of Hriio went with her friends for *ava* (taking turns to help in each other's field) before her disappearance while returning home with her friends from the field.

Narratives of this sort instruct the younger generation to understand, treasure and appreciate their rich cultural and agricultural heritage. The folk narratives act as didactic tools,

reinforcing values and fostering wit and creativity among the people. Through the celebrations of community feasts and observation of cultural norms, it exerts social pressure ensuring that people adhere to social rules. In short, the Mao folk narratives embody a rich tapestry of cultural validation, moral values and social control. It serves as a repository for the collective memory of the people.

A good number of folk narratives have been collected and published by different writers, and studied by scholars, and the count continues. It is also noticed that different writers have the same story with different titles, even with slight changes in the narrative, yet the core remains the same and serves the same purpose. The Mao Nagas maintain them all under various labels, for they serve a purpose. However, for this research study, based on the functions of the folklore narratives, they are categorized in the following manner: a) those which serve as the justification for their personal, religious, social and civil lifestyle, values, and practices; b) those which serve as a mental liberation for the people; c) those which can be considered as the measure and standard of their morals and values, and even of their entertainment or enjoyment; and d) those which are the means of social control and pressure on the individuals and the Mao Naga society as a whole.

Akajii Ye Ariijii (Salao 27-32) the tale of Akajii and Ariijii presents two taboos applicable to the Mao Naga women, namely that they are not allowed to take part in head-hunting expeditions and that they are not permitted to enter the village carrying the head of the victim. This narrative is about two young men who had agreed to showcase their strength. On the day fixed, however, Ariijii was killed by Akajii with the help of his accomplices. Upset at this murder of Ariijii, Kapeini, his sister, took revenge on Akajii and, through a clever stratagem, beheaded Akajii and brought his head to her village. At the village gate, she called her brothers to come and carry into the village the head of their enemy. They all refused, except

the youngest brother who, by carrying the head into the village, apparently received the glory for taking revenge for the treacherous death of their brother.

Kozhow ko (Saleo 30-34) – the tale of Kozhow is another tale that speaks of the custom of headhunting, and also as a sign of revenge and vindication. In this particular narrative, the girlfriend of Kozhow slipped while escaping from their enemies; so, he had to abandon her to save himself; the enemy naturally cut off her head and celebrated at night for their success. Kozhow, in the meanwhile, narrated the entire incident to her relatives and vowed that he would avenge her death; and that is what he precisely did. He quietly slipped into the company of the enemy who was celebrating their conquest; in the thick of night, when all were asleep, he slew them all and managed to recover the head of his girlfriend and returned home gloriously. This narration also points to the code of honour that was prevalent among the ancestors of the Mao Nagas – avenging the unhappy death of a dear one. Treachery and trickery also appear to have been accepted by them in their dealings, especially with their enemies.

The myth about *Dziiliamosiia*² can be considered the primary or foundational folklore of the Mao Nagas. It is about how human life originated at *Makhel* (a historical village inhabited by the Mao Nagas). *Dziiliamosiia* the ancestress, while sitting under the banyan tree (*Mara Bu*), conceived mysteriously by the overshadowing of the spirit of god in the form of a cloud. She gave birth to three sons - *Okhe* (Tiger), *Ora* (god), and *Omei* (man). She had other descendants: Chutowo³, the father of Meities, Alapha⁴ the father of Kolamei or Mayang and *Khephio*, the father of the Nagas. In the beginning, they lived together, but as their numbers increased, they had to disperse to different parts of the region as we find them now (Ashuli 54).

This myth is found in their oral traditions and it plays an important role in preserving the migratory history of the people. Being oral, it has different versions but all point to the fact that Makhel was, once upon a time, a place of their migration and, according to some narratives, their place of origin. Vansina's seminal work⁵ stressed the importance of reconstructing the

historical narratives in societies without written records which are subjected to changes and distortions with time, and yet it offers valuable insights into the historical realities of the people. Vansina, quoting Feder, distinguishes between first-hand (eyewitness report) and second-hand (unknown authors) traditions. The second-hand source consists of rumours, historical proverbs, pithy sayings, and another group of sources referring to the events or happenings of the remote past. This he called a “folk tradition or oral tradition” (Vansina 4). In oral tradition, the authors are unknown as it is not first-hand information. But in no way can an oral tradition be regarded less as since “pre-literate people have highly developed powers of memory, and hand down their traditions in a form suitable for oral transmission...” (4). Down the centuries, the traditions of the past have been orally passed from one generation to the next. Over the years it has become stabilised and handed down in a form suitable for transmission.

This brief analysis leads us to the concepts of cultural and collective memories. Cultural memory is described as how the society’s past is preserved, remembered, and shared collectively through various cultural practices, cultural artefacts, rituals, monuments, and other forms of media and shapes in the formation of their identity (Bommas vii). Many of these are incorporated into the folk narratives. The Mao folk narratives thus provide a picture of their past, a shared understanding of the past and that helps to shape collective identities.

Jan Assmann defines the concepts of cultural memory as a long-term memory that spans up to 3,000 years and communicative memory which is limited to 80-100 years⁶. Erll argued that cultural memory is maintained and interpreted by trained specialists. “Its objects are mythical events from a distant past”⁷. The Mao Naga narratives serve as cultural memory because they have been transmitted orally for many generations embodying themes such as values, struggles, triumphs, etc. Folk narratives evoke a shared past and create a collective memory. In the folk narratives are embedded values, beliefs, history, and the socio-cultural life of the people, fostering a sense of belonging, and continuity. In this way, the folk narratives of

the Mao Nagas act as mnemonic devices that preserve and disseminate the collective identity of the people.

Cultural memory plays a crucial role in shaping how societies understand their history, interpret their present circumstances, and envision their future. Assmann's work has been influential in the fields of cultural studies, anthropology, history and sociology, providing a framework for understanding how memory functions within societies and across generations. Assmann argued that narratives play an important role in the construction and transmission of cultural memory⁸. It provides a framework to understand how memory functions. Maurice Halbwachs in "On Collective Memory" argued that an individual memory depends on the social environment of which one is part". Both Assmann and Halbwachs use the presentist approach to study how the past is continually constructed and shaped by the concerns of the present. Halbwachs argues "that the beliefs, interests, and aspirations of the present shape the various views of the past as they are manifested respectively in every historical epoch" (Halbwachs 25). In the same way, Assmann argues that memory cannot preserve the past as it was and thus continuously undergoes changes according to the needs of the present. The best example is the reconstruction of the narrative of Jesus' memory by the way of the cross and resurrection (Assmann 26-27). In this way, every society constructs and reconstructs using past narratives to form their identities. Cultural memory and collective memory will be dealt with at length in chapter two of this research paper.

The presence of similar tales across the world is due to the migration of people from one place to another over the ages, carrying with them stories wherever they went. It could also be that, since the transmission was done orally; an item of folklore could change while transmitting depending on the individual's needs and the social context, the audience (Bronner 58), and the political situation of the time in which it was narrated. Micke Bal argued that memory makes one different in a different context (qtd in Olick 50). It is intriguing to observe

how the stories that have been altered are still being told and reconstructed. Many of them are being preserved for posterity in more permanent forms like printing, digital recording, etc. Shared narratives are in evidence among different Naga tribes, especially among the Mao Nagas, Paomai Nagas, Angami Nagas, and a few others, though with some variations. This is because many of them shared common ancestors or are believed to have migrated from the same place. Thus, the Rengma, Sumi, Chakhesang, Angami and Zeliang Nagas have common tales adapted to their situations and places (Aier 46-55). The presence of similar narratives among the different tribes is due to their migration and there are no barriers in the path of the narratives being transmitted from one place to another, or from one tribe to another. One such example is the myth of *Dziiliamosiia* among the Mao Nagas, Poumai Naga, and Angami Nagas. In the different versions of the myth of *Dziiliamosiia*, the historic place Makhel⁹ is found.

Even among the Mao Nagas themselves, there are variations in the narratives, A few examples of the variations that we find among the Mao folk narratives collected and preserved by scholars and writers hailing from different Mao Naga villages are cited, yet the kernel of the narratives remains the same. An analysis of this sort makes things clearer to all.

- a. *Dziiliamosiia* (Nepuni, 2010), *Dziiliamosiia* (Kricho, 2021) and *Dziilia Mosiia* (Mao, 2021), and *Dzuli-Mostiro* (Ashuli, 1981).
- b. *Kateini Ko* (Salao no year), *Kajini and Katini* (Kricho, 2021), and *Miss. Katini Story* (Mao, 2021).
- c. *Choro Ko* (Salao, 1983), *Chobohu Choro* (Kricho, 2021) and *Mr Nekhini Chorow Story* (Mao, 2021).
- d. *Akajii Ye Ariji Ko* (Salao no year), *The Revenge taken by Kapaini* (Kricho, 2021) and *Mr. Ariji and Mr. Akajii Story* (Mao, 2021).

- e. *Chakepfo Kahrio Ko* by N. Salao, *Chake Meipfo Chara: The man who challenged the Sun, the Rain and the Landslide* by Eloni Kricho, and *Mr. Chakepfo Kahreo Story* by Kaihrii Sani Mao.

In the last narrative on *Chakepfo Kahrio Ko*, differences are noticed not only in the title and the spellings but in the content too. The story by N. Salao, written in the Mao language, has a longer version with more details, while the other authors' works of the same story are shorter and are written in the English language. A close study reveals that the core is similar in all the stories. This is an example of how narratives and traditions while being handed down, undergo construction, reconstruction and interpretations through telling and retelling. That is why Linde and Halbwachs argue that the past is not preserved as it was, for the past is not remembered as it was but it is the reconstruction of the narratives according to the period (Linde1; Halbwachs 40). This is also because folk narratives were orally narrated and their existence floats in an unlimited number of variants. This is seen in the above select titles of the same narratives.

The historical-geographical method in a way gave birth to the creation of folk narrative lexicons: *Type Index* and *Motif Index* (qtd in Marak 5). To establish international versions of tales, folklorists made indices and variants of the tales. The first attempt was made by J.G. von Hahn in 1864 but this did not work well. It was in 1910 that the first comprehensive, logical type 'index' of folktales was catalogued by Antti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist, in *Verzeichnis der Marchentypen*. Folktales were classified into 'tale types' based on the classification of the Finnish archive collection, Danish collections of Svend and Grundtvig, and the Grimms tales. It was expanded by the American, Stith Thompson, in 1928 and 1960 editions, thus providing a common framework for the classification of folk narratives across the globe and they came to be known as Aarne-Thompson (AT) types of folktales. About 2499 tales have been collected and classified under four categories- animal tales (AT 1-200), ordinary folktales (AT 300-

1199), jokes and anecdotes (AT1200-2399), and unclassified tales (AT 2400- 2499) (Medhi 21-22; Degh 60).

The Mao Nagas folktales are rich with cultural heritage and wisdom. The tales of the Mao Nagas may be categorized according to the following themes: moral, romantic, historical, and supernatural, as also those dealing with tricksters, tales of brave men and women warriors, orphans, animals, the relationship between man and nature, stepmothers, social life, and women's role in the family and society, the forces of nature, etc. (Salao n.y; Mao, 2021; Kricho vii; Saleo, 1993), reflecting their deep connection with their environment and socio-cultural beliefs.

Since they were an oral society, the tales were disseminated orally over the years. The folk narratives were preserved through telling and retelling over the years. Since the tales contain traditions and values, they not only serve to entertain but, more importantly, educate them about the knowledge of the past. The folk narratives offer a rich cultural identity of the tribe. Diving into the folk narratives of the Mao Nagas reveals how storytelling acts as a powerful mnemonic device in preserving and transmitting their collective memory and values. Thus, the narratives act as what Assmann calls the “connective structure”¹⁰ by constructing a shared history, shared identity, values and ideas. Folk narratives are an important medium through which the past has been handed down to the younger generations in an oral society such as the Mao Naga tribe. The preservation of folk narratives is possible because of the power of memory. What is handed down and shared are the products of community acts of remembrance that have been disseminated through the “sites of memory” such as stories, monuments, wise sayings, and objects that bear historical importance, in this way creating “institutionalized historiography” (Erll and Rigney 112) to carry forward the rich culture and traditions to future generations. A more detailed study of this is presented in chapter three of this research paper.

The folk narratives of the Mao Nagas are a storehouse of cultural heritage and traditions that enable one to understand the tribe's identity. They also reflect their worldview and values. They are a mixture and blend of characters from the mythical past, all human protagonists. They also reflect their social-economic life, occupation, and relationship with nature. They entertain and, at the same time, educate and teach values and a sense of solidarity among others. In the narratives are found characters engaged in ordinary daily activities, also characters who are endowed with extraordinary gifts and who encounter supernatural challenges as tests of their courage. In short, we will discover how the folk narratives offer insights into the life of the tribe.

An accurate classification of the narratives of the Mao Nagas is not possible since they were orally handed down and as a result, we find variations in them; the narrator might adjust the telling of the narratives to suit his audience according to the socio-political conditions of the time in which the folk narrative was once again activated. The same narratives are found in prose and poetry. However, the essence of the narratives remains the same. There are elements in the narratives that are found in more than one tale type which makes it difficult to correctly place them under proper classification. Linda Degh opined that though folk narratives may change; they are rooted in the social environment. They have no final form and they become stiff and freeze when they are no longer told and shared, but they vary, merge, and blend as long as they are told (59).

1.8 Select Mao Naga Folk Narratives

In the absence of local classification Aarne–Thompson (AT) and Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index (ATU Index) have been used to a certain extent, but the Mao Naga folk narratives cannot be exactly classified under AT and ATU. Some tales do not fit in the tale type category because they are specific only to the local storytelling traditions, while some tales overlap or can fit into more than one tale type. The analysis or examination of the folk narratives will also

highlight their thematic diversity and cultural significance. This section also depicts the variant nature of folk narratives being orally handed and the role of memory dynamics over time.

1.8.1 The myth of the classification of the human race

The Mao Naga narrative about the classification of the human race (AT 1130-1199) examines how the human race was classified. According to this classification, *Omei hriipra lo kari riku mei yi sii no Eddemei hrii tto pe sii* (the earliest human race, known as the ancestor race), had distinctive physical features. One group of people had a pelvic cavity from which the urine passed. They were called women. Another group had a penile code through which the urine passes and they were called men. Women and men comprise humankind (*omei hrii*). They lived as complementary mates (Mao 22). The complexion and appearance helped the people to distinguish themselves from each other. Some of them were big, tall and rough. They looked like ravens. They are known as the *Rasho Mei Hrii* (*rashomei race*). This could be referring to the black race, while *Chore Mei Hrii* (spotted race) were thin, tall, and had two mixed colours. They are known as the fair race. Some of them were short, stout, and had many different colours like the rainbow known as *Choro Mei Hrii* (mixed coloured) called the pale race (23). The Mao Nagas probably belong to this group of mixed-coloured race. The Mao Nagas are short in stature and fair in complexion¹⁰.

1.8.2 Folktales involving supernatural beings and their interventions

Belief in the supernatural, in good and bad spirits, in the possibility of communication between human beings and supernatural beings, and the human life and supernatural life being practically similar, appears to have been prevalent among the ancestors of the Mao Nagas. Several folktales deal with supernatural beings, and their relating to humans – both as help and also as a challenge. The supernatural beings do not seem to have inspired any awe or reverence; instead, they are treated as belonging to another realm.

Oramei pfii monokolo (Saleo 39-47) is the story of a marriage to a goddess, in which the goddess is captured and becomes the wife of a man. He hides her dresses so that she will not escape back to heaven. Her children showed her where their father had hidden her dresses, and thus she escaped to her former home. The man succeeds in reaching her and the children, spends his days doing the chores that the father-in-law had set for him, and finally returns to earth, carrying seeds for crops that would not be destroyed even by hailstones.

Morona ye Oramei Pfii (Neli 48-50) is the tale of an orphan and a goddess. It revolves around two young inexperienced orphans who toiled hard for their survival. When their crops were destroyed by the wild boar, the elder brother went in search of the animal and happened to reach the kingdom of the gods, where he was captivated by the beauty of a goddess, and she too fell in love with him. When the lovers expressed their desire to marry each other, the father of the girl put the orphan on hard trials. The orphan fulfilled all these impossible tasks with the help of his lady love. Finally, after the completion of all the tasks, he left for the earth with his wife where, through her magical power, she multiplied food and drink, nursed the dying younger brother, and fed the whole village. This surprised the villagers who had earlier belittled the brothers due to their poverty.

Kholia Ko (Salao 33-38) is the story of Kholia whose stepmother forced her father to abandon her in the forest. She, however, was guided and saved by a voice which resulted in her finding shelter and a new and better life. The tale speaks about the higher powers that come to the aid of the poor and the just.

Moronato kahei ko (Saleo 18-22) or the tale of two orphans speaks of the dead parents of the orphans who would come at night to complete the fieldwork for them since the children were young and inexperienced. The orphans finally discovered that it was their dead parents who worked at night on their farm. They decided to go to their parents' abode by holding onto

their dresses. The boy managed to hold on to the dress of his father while the girl did not. The tale unfolds what life in the other world was like and the activities that the dead engaged in.

Mr Kahreo, the tale of *Kahreo*, revolves around the hero, *Kahreo*, whose birth signalled strange happenings on the earth (Mao 33-36). He challenged and outdid nature (the rain and the deer) in many competitions. But the hero met his end when he was defeated by the landslide which ripped his body apart. His sad fate was attributed to his over-confidence and because he had failed to worship god before his challenge to the landslide (Kricho 15-17). His soul went down to the world of the dead. (F81) It also contains elements of the situation in the next world as imagined by the people, similar to certain ancient Greek tales that speak of the journey of the soul to the world of the dead (F152.0.1) whose gates are guarded by monsters (cf.F152.0.1).

Hriio ko (Saleo 54-59) describes how a god forced Hriio to promise his yet-to-be-born daughter in marriage to him. The promise was made and a daughter was born to Hriio. However, he did not fulfil the promise he had made to the god earlier. Therefore, when the daughter was old enough, she was kidnapped by the god. Some years later, she came back to see her parents, but with her appearance changed. When she returned to her world, her mother accompanied her. She stayed with her for some days and when she returned, she was given a special gift of three precious stones in a box. With the presence of the three precious stones in their house, things changed, for they brought wealth to the family. They became rich and led a happy and prosperous life thereafter.

Choziina Kali Ko (Salao 38-41) is a story about a family which had an only son. The visit of some men (evil spirits) resulted in the death of the boy within a few days. Deeply saddened, the father set out to avenge the death of his beloved son. He was helped by some women (spirits) who guided him to the exact house where he would find the body of his son. They also instructed him about what to do and how to return home safely. He did as was directed and succeeded in killing the spirit who had taken his son's life. However, contrary to

what he had been advised, his curiosity led him to turn back as he was crossing the village gate and he was immediately killed by the evil spirit who had chased him.

The following indications can be derived from an analysis of these tales. The tale of Morona and Oramei highlights the cultivation of millet, the wealthy families feeding the whole village or hosting the Feast of Merit. Those who hosted the Feast of Merit gained social status (Nepuni 122). The story of Moronato is a pointer to the belief of the Mao Nagas that the dead might visit their family members. It also speaks about the belief of the Mao Nagas in the bond between the dead and the living. The spirits of the dead take care of and protect their progeny from the attack of the evil ones (Mao 2). This is not a mere theoretical belief but manifested in their custom of remembering the dead during all the festivities. Thus, before the members of a family or group consume their food, a portion of it is also offered to the dead by placing them at their graves or pouring them onto the ground.

1.8.3 Folktales with a focus on cruel stepmothers

Almost every culture in the world has a story or two about cruel stepmothers (Williams 255; Thompson 127). The stepmothers in *Snow White* (ATU 709) and *Cinderella* (ATU510A) are the root of all the pain for the oppressed heroines. Most folktales portray the stepmothers as evil women or seductresses who lure the men to themselves while treating their helpless offspring very despicably. The stepmothers are shown to be vile and harsh.

The persecuted heroine (510A) as a ubiquitous pattern is found also in the Mao Naga stepmother tales. There are parallels between the Cinderella stories and this one in that both revolve around a gentle and defenceless victim of persecution. Beyond this fundamental theme, there are other ways in which the Mao stories under review diverge from the Cinderella tales. For example, there isn't a magical guardian to aid the heroine in triumphing at the end, nor is there a turning point that shows her actual value. The conclusion of the Mao tales has a highly

important element. The Mao Naga fairy tales have a happy ending, unlike Charles Perrault's *Cinderella*.

There are four principal narratives about vicious stepmothers, all of which, aside from the main story content, give details of the Mao Naga society, their customs and practices. These are; a) *Kateini Ko* (Salao 1-9) – the tale of Kateini, b) *Kholia Ko* (Salao 33-38)– the tale of Kholia, c) *Choro Ko* (Salao 10-13) or the tale of Choro, and d) *Kholiru Ko* (Salao 42-45) or the tale of Kholiru. Presented below are the summaries of the four Mao Naga tales, followed by an analysis of the themes and their cultural implications for the Mao Nagas.

Kateini Ko is the tale of Kateini, whose father remarried after the death of her mother. Her stepmother mistreats her by putting her on a demanding work schedule. She has a step-sister, Kajiini, who adores her. Kateini performed faithfully her duties as any good daughter would. The story reaches its zenith when Kateini, much to her stepmother's dismay, wins a competition during *pfoki kapra* (climbing the mountain) (see pages 81 and 111 for details) through the quiet help of her father. As a consequence of this victory, Kateini receives more abuse from her stepmother, which prompts her to run away to her aunt in Viswema.

Later, she marries a wealthy man. One day Kateini's husband invites her father to an *ozhoso*, or Feast of Merit. As directed by Kateini, her father approaches Kateini's spouse to request as a gift the best cow. Even though the cow provides Kateini luck, it turns out to be the reason for the stepmother's end when she trips over its dung and meets her death.

Kholia Ko is quite similar to the tale of Kateini. Kholia's father remarries after the death of her mother. Even before they are married, he is forced by his would-be wife, to agree that he would abandon his daughter; and he does so, leaving her alone in the middle of a jungle. An old wealthy man saves her, and he subsequently marries her to his only son. One day, Kholia suggested to her husband that their village and her father's village have an *Aso Koto* or feast of peace treaty. Her father is allowed to spend time with her. Following a meal of the finest

cuisine, she discloses to her father who she is and reminds him of how he had abandoned her in the forest to be consumed by the wild animals. He feels so full of regret and shame. He passes away as soon as he gets back home.

Choro Ko falls into the same category as the two stories above, the only difference being that the victim is a young son. The stepmother turns out to be a cruel person who forces him to work hard looking after their field and even starves him. One day, his stepsisters visit him and bring him some delicious meal that they had prepared just for him. After the meal, Choro transforms himself into an *oro* (a kind of bird) by creating wings and a tail from his sisters' clothing. He promises to see them on the third day, and he takes off. On the third day, he gives his father and step-sisters nice feathers, but he blinds his stepmother with his *obu* (droppings).

The fourth tale in this category is *Kholiru Ko*. Kholiru's harsh stepmother forces her to work so hard that she never has a chance to interact with her friends. Once, when she was attempting to pluck *olo* (a plant-based slippery plant, its fibre was used to make dresses in the olden days) by the side of the lake her bracelets fell into the water. *Kholiru* is extremely hurt when her stepmother accuses her of giving her bangles to her lover. She takes her father to the lake, where she prays to the lake god in an attempt to establish her innocence. She offers herself in exchange and asks him to return the bracelets. When the lake god returns the bangles, Kholiru dives into the lake as promised. She asks her father to take the bangles home right away to his spouse. She also tells him that he would see her reflection on the bangles before giving them to the stepmother. When he gets home, her father tosses the bracelets at his wife, striking her in the knee. The wound from the bangles kills the stepmother.

These tales, though with their diverse cultural boundaries, have some typical characters. The role of the stepmother is one example. The stepmother is the classic example of a cruel lady devoid of any compassion (Dainton 94; Williams 255). Like in the Cinderella tale, the

stepmother in the Mao Naga tales is shown as being cruel. The settings are familiar locales like the forests, paddy fields, lakes and villages. This sense of familiarity lends authenticity to the tales. Narratives with recognizable settings tend to hold greater credibility for the audience (Kazhiia and Khiangte 249; Vatuk and Vatuk 26).

Events recounted in the first and second tales, namely, the feast of *Aso Koto* (Peace Treaty) and *ozhoso* (The Feast of Merit), were once an integral component of the way of life of the Mao Nagas. The Feast of Merit was a status ceremony performed in the olden days by couples, who could have a monolith stone erected in their memory. The hard-earned wealth of the couple is shared with the whole village.



Fig.1. Monoliths erected at Pfongho of Punanamei village, Manipur, to honour those who hosted the Feast of Merit (photographed during the field study, 31.12.2021)

Monoliths are erected in their names to sustain the memory for future generations. Even though they no longer hold these feasts, their remnants can still be found in certain areas.



Fig.2. *Khwehu* (Memorial stone of the Feast of Merit of the Angamis) at Khonoma Village, Nagaland (Photographed during the field study, 9.10.2024)

There are however some important feasts that continue to be held to the present day, like the *Saleni*, a community feast held after plantation, usually in the month of July, and *Chiithuni*, a post-harvest feast held between December – January period.

Many of the practices found embedded within the narratives tell of the people's worldviews which form the cultural identity of the Mao Naga. The traditional marriage customs, as mentioned in the narratives, are still prevalent today. For instance, the custom of a man marrying another woman after the death of his wife (evident in all four tales), and that too to a widow with children of her own (seen in *Kateini Ko* and *Choro Ko*) is still practiced though not very commonly nowadays. Some of the practices like holding *Zhoso* (feast of merit) and *Asokoto* (peace treaty) are no longer observed, they are nevertheless part of the people's cultural memory and it is through this memory that the people construct their identity and history.

1.8.4 Narratives of love and romance

Love stories are common and popular, and attract audiences and viewers. They are genuine expressions of a man for a woman and vice versa. But there are also occasions when

these feelings go beyond and bring misery and a tragic end to the lovers. Among such Mao Naga narratives, there are two that have taken everyone's fancy for their very emotional setting. Exploration of love and romance in *Bunio ye koshoni ko* (Saleo 1-2) – the tale of Bunio and Koshoni, and *Shiipfow Ko* (Salao 45-52)- the tale of Shiipfow will highlight their role in reflecting and shaping social values.

Bunio ye Koshoni ko or the tale of Bunio and Koshoni can be categorised under the tale type ATU 425. In this type of tale, the lovers finally face a tragic end. It also bears resemblance to the Paomai *The Coward Lover* (Punii 137), the story of *Chinasangba and Itiven* and the Liangmei *A Tragic Love Story* (Chowdhury 141-142), and *The Two Lovers* (Thou 13). The Mao Naga tale narrates the life of two young lovers – Bunio and Koshoni (Saleo 1-2) who could not join together in matrimony due to opposition from their parents. So, they decided to end their lives by jumping into a pond. They went to a pond, tied their hair together, and were about to jump into the pond. However, Bunio suddenly cut off his hair, while Koshoni jumped into the pond and died. The birds mocked Bunio for his cowardice. He realized his mistake, felt truly sorry, and repented. He went back and jumped into the pond to be united with his beloved. Two bamboo plants sprouted in this particular place but grew facing different directions, unlike most ballad traditions where the twining branches grew together from the grave of the lovers (Thompson 256). The implication was that since they failed to jump together, they remained separated even in death.

Shiipfow Ko, the tale of Shiipfow, is another sad love tale where the lovers cannot be joined in matrimony due to the jealousy of the community. After the death of Shiipfow's father, he and his mother went to live in her ancestral village. In that village, there lived a beautiful girl named Pforeni, close to their house. The widowed mother of Shiipfow wished that her son could marry Pforeni and so acted as a temptress to win her for him. Certainly, Pforeni too had

feelings for Shiipfow. Through a clever stratagem, Shiipfow's mother arranged for Pforeni to sleep with him in their house, but cunningly also saved her from dishonour.

Days passed by and their love for each other became intense. It reached a stage when they could not live without each other. But the villagers were jealous of their relationship. Therefore, Shiipfow decided to go back to his father's village. When this news was told to Pforeni, she felt sad. She persuaded him not to go back. But Shiipfow would not go back on his decision. So, Pforeni would tie onto his hand a *siiko* (a kind of dress men wore on their legs) so that the noise of *siiko* would wake her up when he got up to leave. But one night when Pforeni was deep asleep Shiipfow woke up, took out the *siiko* one by one, put them in Pforeni's hand, and left for his village. Though Pforeni took his dress and some food and ran after him, he knew that turning back at the sound of her voice would weaken his resolve. So, he kept on going, though she kept on calling to him, at least to take his sash and the food. And thus, they separated.

The tale also narrates how their feelings for each other continue to burn strong even after many years. There were natural things that reminded them of each other, like a bee flying around Shiipfow carrying a thread that seemed to be like the thread used by Pforeni, or like his dog which happened to reach the place of Pforeni while accompanying his master on a hunt. Looking for his dog, Shiipfow too reached Pforeni's place and finally recognised her. Though they could spend some time together and reminisce about their earlier times together, he had to go back to his village because of the social pressure that they were both aware of.

These two tales highlight the importance of the public image of the family for the Mao Nagas and the uniqueness of marriage. All aspects, like the moral life of the families, the characters of both the girl and the boy, and the property to be given to both at the time of marriage, are to be sorted out before a marriage can be agreed to by both the families (Nepuni 84-85).

A close analysis of the tales seems to reflect that due to social barriers, the lovers could not be united in marriage. Marriage is a sacred rite and a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. Therefore, care was taken by looking into their dreams for signs. If the dream was good, they began the process of negotiation for marriage, since marriages were mostly arranged. One of the most important aspects they look into is the character formation of both the man and the woman (Nepuni 82, 84). Marriage in the olden days involved a long process. The tale of Bunio and Koshoni seems to go against the custom of that period and the strange behaviour of both lovers when only arranged marriage was acceptable. Surprisingly, the tale does not even hint at the reason why the lovers could not get married, leaving the hearers to understand that a strong taboo prevented them from living as husband and wife.

1.8.5 Folk narratives for entertainment or narratives of imagination

Some stories in the Mao Naga folklore repertoire easily fall into the category of entertaining or imaginative stories. They do not have any particular lesson to convey to the audience; nevertheless, many useful morals can be gained from them. *Mr Chakepfo Kahreo Story* (Mao 13-17), *Morona kali ko* (Saleo 35-38) and *Mache ko* (Saleo 48-53) are three such Mao Naga folktales.

Mr Chakepfo Kahreo (sic's) Story narrates a hero who is portrayed as a very strong and brave person who was able to kill the fierce animals that the villages dreaded. He killed a tiger and a snake that used to kill and eat children and cattle and had consequently become a terror to the villagers. The narrative describes his adventure in killing the snake that disturbed Zhonamai village.

This tale reflects the strength, determination, and intelligence of the man and his wisdom. It also brings home to the listeners that their forefathers must have lived in constant conflict with animals and reptiles that were not friendly to man, but which could be conquered through cunningness and wisdom.

Morona kali ko is the tale of an orphan. He is a lazy boy who possesses much common sense and wisdom. Though lazy, he desired to live a happy life. He tried to please gods and men in his conduct. His only wealth was the cups and plates made of leaves. He attempted to and succeeded in luring the king's daughter to be his wife through his shrewdness and cunningness. He spoke to her about his house made of glass from where he could see the stars and the moon; about his plates and cups of gold which, after each meal, he would throw away. The king's daughter was taken up by his story and so she reported everything to her father; the king gave her his consent to marry the orphan. The princess came to know the true picture of the orphan only after her marriage, and nothing could be done to escape from that situation. However, the good behaviour and the gentlemanly nature of her husband caught the attention of the king who provided all that was needed for a decent living. The struggle he underwent when no one pitied him was crowned with riches and wealth after his marriage to the king's daughter (Saleo 35-38).

Mache ko narrates the story of a lazy boy who lives by stealing the tiffin of other children. The first part of this story will be narrated in the next section, where his dog saves him after both of them are buried alive. The second part of the tale narrates how the villagers were angry and also frightened when they came to know how Mache had escaped death. So, they again decided to kill him; but he quietly escaped to another village where the people had no holes in their anus. These people were longing to discharge solid waste from their bodies. Mache promised to help them and asked for a bull as payment for his services. He asked all to gather in front of an empty barn (*obe*—a specially designed big bamboo basket used to store paddy). Making hot the sharp end of an iron he began to poke the anus of the people and then pushed them inside the barn and locked its door. When the villagers opened the door, they saw the others lying there dying. They ran after Mache with knives and spears. When he saw what the people were about to do, he climbed up a big tree and hid himself. As the people were

reaching the tree, it began to drizzle, and they took shelter under the tree. At that moment, Mache began to urinate on them. This tricked the villagers into believing that it was going to rain heavily and they returned to their village. Mache then got down from the tree, took the bull, and went back to his village.

There is nothing positive to be gained from these stories, except to tickle one's imagination and laugh at the foolishness of certain people and admire the smartness and intelligence of others, even of the lazy ones who manage to survive, thanks to their cunning. However, one has to admire the Mao Naga ancestors for their openness to the funny aspects of life.

1.8.6 Narratives centred on animals

There are a few folk narratives that speak of the important role of certain animals in the lives of the people. These narratives are short and their central characters are the animals. These narratives can be categorised as tale types in ATU 300-749. *Osi ko* (Saleo 23-26) - the tale of the dog, *Shiipfow Ko* - the tale of Shiipfow, and *Mache ko* - the tale of Mache are the tales that belong to this category and are narrated below.

Osi ko is a tale that narrates the relationship between dogs and men. In the beginning, the dog was a companion of the other animals. Surprisingly, the bigger animals, especially the elephant and the tiger disliked his continuous barking, for it would help the human beings to come and attack them, and they rejected him. At this, the dog finally decided to go and request the man to allow him to stay with him. The man was glad to have the dog and was happy with its barking habit. Whenever the dog would bark, they would encourage and appreciate him for warning them through his barking; so he was happy to live with them. Thus, the dogs became the most faithful companion of men.

Shiipfow Ko, the tale of Shiipfow, has already been narrated, as a story of romance and love. In the second part of this tale, it is the dog of Shiipfow who, while on a hunt with his

master, happens to land up in the paddy field where Pforeni (the love of Shiipfow) was working. Shiipfow followed the footprints of the dog and reached that paddy field. When he and Pforeni recognized each other, they were delighted and spent some time together and then left each other for their homes. Certainly, the dog is not the central figure in this story; nevertheless, it plays a vital role in its logical and happy conclusion.

Mache ko, the narrative on *Mache*, may fall under the category of the tale type (ATU 300 -749). It involves the cleverness of the trickster and ends with how animals help in fulfilling a mission. In this tale, a dog acts as a great helper who rescues Mache from death after being buried alive. Mache would steal the food of the children during the day by sneaking into the houses of the villagers when their parents were in their fields. When the parents came to know of this habit of Mache, they decided to do away with him. He agreed to their decision, but he requested that they would bury his dog along with him. After they were buried alive together, the dog clawed his way out of the mud, making a tunnel, and saved him. The dog thus became his rescuer (Saleo 48-53).

In many Mao narratives, we find dogs as the most helpful domesticated animal for human beings. The other animals like the wild boar and bears are also presented as being helpful to human beings. In the Mao narratives, the dog serves as a helpful companion to man. These narratives also describe the close relationship that exists between man and the animal world. Of all the animals, the dogs are considered as the most faithful companion to man, and the tiger is considered as an elder brother to man, and so respected and revered. In the myth on *Dziiliamosiia*, the tiger finds a special place. The narratives speak of a special bond between man and the tiger, indicative also of their friendly relationship with the whole of nature.

1.8.7 Folktales of miscellaneous themes

Among the numerous folktales of the Mao Nagas, one comes across tales that defy classification or even fall under a unique one. Two such narratives are *Thoduo Ko* (Salao 13-15) and *Oru koho ko* (Saleo 27-29), the former being the tale of an orphan and the latter of war.

Thoduo Ko, the tale of Thoduo, narrates that his parents died when he was very small. His elder sister Cholidania was married off to a man in a faraway village. Therefore, he did not know the whereabouts of his sister. The relations of Thoduo, wanting to take away his property sold him to a stranger who later sold him to the Cholidania's (his blood sister) family. It became a blessing in disguise because it was here that one day, while Cholidania was working in the field, Thoduo, carrying her baby on his back, walked along the river bank, singing a song comparing his life to a lonely water bird he had seen. He wished to join his parents in the next world and his sister whom he did not know. On hearing the song, Cholidania was curious to find out details about him and his family. Finally, she understood that Thoduo was none other than her blood brother whom the relations had sold to a stranger because they wanted to appropriate the family property. The sufferings of Thoduo thus came to an end.

Oru koho ko (Saleo 27-29) or the Tale of War (ATU 641) highlights the reality of conflict and resolution. The Mao Naga narratives tell of the celebration of the peace accord between villages leading one to presume that they used to fight each other. The causes for fighting could be due to land disputes, revenge and competition for hunting grounds (Mao 3), etc., among the villages. Reconciliation among the warring villages was brought about by the celebrations of a peace treaty. This is evidenced in the narrative of *Shiikache Ko* (Shiikache story), in which the peace treaty was organized between the village of Chani and the original village of Shiikache (Mao 3-4); in *Kholia Ko*, the story of Kholia, a peace treaty was organized between her village and her husband's village (Mao 44). The guardians of the law and the elders, in all wisdom, understood that only peace would bring about peace and friendship. In

this way, the peace treaty or accord feast was organized between the villages, and peace was restored.

Unlike *Shiikache Ko* (Salao 52-71), and *Kholia Ko*, *Oru koho ko* ends on a sad note. When the villagers went to attack another village and returned home after the completion of their task, one of them was left behind. The narrative describes the sad plight of this man who was left to wander along in the forest by himself; he went off his mind due to the trauma of being left alone. When at last he reached his village, it was too late to bring him back to his normal sense and he met his end by overeating.

1.9 Conclusion

Memory plays an important role in unfolding the past through the available narratives. In the absence of written literature, people depended on their memory and material culture to know and preserve the events of the past and transmit them to the next generation. This handing down was done by the parents and elders in the families and youth dormitories in the bygone days. The spoken narratives served as literary texts while the material narrative was composed of geographical location, historical places, monuments, objects and symbols. Exploring the folk narratives, we also find a number of them similar to that of some other Naga tribes. As pointed out in the paper, this could be because the Nagas had a common ancestor and a common history.

Oral history serves as a crucial bridge to understanding the rich tapestry of Mao Naga folk narratives, particularly their migration stories. These narratives, passed down through generations, offer invaluable insights into the Mao Naga people's experiences, values, and historical movements. By documenting and analysing these oral accounts, historians and ethnographers can preserve the nuances of Mao Naga migration stories, which reflect broader themes of adaptation, resilience and cultural identity. This oral tradition not only enriches our

comprehension of Mao Nagas' past but also highlights the dynamic interplay between storytelling and historical memory within the community.

The rich folk narratives of the Mao Nagas portray their unique beliefs and traditions. These narratives provide us with knowledge of the lives of the ancestors, their occupations, and social life; in short, their view of themselves and the world. Many of the narratives are localized and specified with the names of places, persons, occupations and activities that add weight to the narratives.

There is an abundant use of supernatural elements in the narratives. In these stories when human aid ran short, supernatural elements were present to right the wrong. There cannot be any scientific proof of their authenticity, though one cannot deny the probability that divine assistance comes to the rescue of human beings in different forms and ways.

Women in the tales of the stepmothers are projected as being cruel towards the stepchildren. If their good deeds were highlighted, the tales would end on a lighter note. The purpose of the narrative is not for mere enjoyment but to teach and instruct. As Christy opines, the Grimms increased the violence in their tales to make them more instructive and educative (William 259). Similarly, the cruelty of stepmothers in the tales under study is exaggerated to the point that they are stripped of all human compassion. The fathers in these tales are silent spectators. They did not speak out against the injustice done to their children. In *Kateini Ko*, *Kholia Ko*, and *Kholiru Ko* they seemed to have a little sympathy but that cannot be justified since they were passive actors. They could represent a society that remains indifferent to social injustice.

It is observed that the prose narratives are simple and their language is understandable to ordinary people. They are, in a way, a reflection of the lives of the ancient people. Rooted in the social environment, the stories are connected to group or individual attitudes. In other words, narratives provide information about the economic, cultural, religious and social life

and the values of the forefathers of the Mao Nagas. The past will live on in the minds and hearts of the people because it will continue to be handed through the narratives that are preserved in the memory of people. These narratives become cultural memory.

Notes

1. Contributed by late Pfokho Kapesa, Punanamei village
2. Dziiliamosiia is also spelt as Dziiliamosiia, DziiliaMosiia and DzuliMostiro by different writers and authors.
3. Chiituwo is also spelt as MrTutuo, Chutowo, Tsutou
4. Asiipfo Alapha is also spelt as Mr Alapha, Alapha
5. *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, 1972
6. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, 2011.
7. *Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies*, 2011
8. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, 2011.
9. Makhel is spelt as Mekrima, Meikhel, Makhramai, MaikelandMakhriifii
10. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, 2011.
11. Ashikho, A. *Interview*. Conducted by Rose Mary Kazhiia, 30 Dec 2020