

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This research study began with the statement of the research objectives and research questions. The concluding chapter claims and verifies that these objectives have been achieved and that the research questions were answered. The study began with a presentation of memory studies that came into prominence towards the middle of the last century. The Mao Naga folk narratives employed mnemonic devices that aided easy remembering and transmission of the folk traditions across generations.

This research study had the specific objective of studying the folk narratives of the Mao Naga tribes of Manipur. What is particular to the Mao Nagas, as also to most of the Naga tribes, is that they have been primarily an oral society up to the recent past; in fact, their language script was introduced towards the first quarter of the nineteenth century as mentioned in chapter three. Nonetheless, they had a rich repertoire of narratives, connected with their origins and migration and with their customs, traditions and culture.

In going through the research objectives and research questions, five specific themes have been arrived at in conclusion. These are a) the Mao Naga folk narratives can be considered as a cultural memory; b) the folk narratives have helped in the formation of the Mao Naga identity; c) the folk narratives also have certain mnemonic devices that have helped in their preservation for generations; d) the folk narratives communicate values and memories; and e) folk narratives need to be collected, analysed, interpreted and preserved scientifically for the future generations.

The folk narratives as discussed in Chapter One cannot be classified according to the ATU. Hence, local classification is made in this study based on the common themes.

The Western classification of folktales cannot be used in the Mao Naga folk tales since the Mao Naga folktales classification has not been done because of the oral nature of folktales. The folktales of the Mao Nagas have not been scientifically studied. In a society like the Mao Nagas where orality dominates, there are different versions of the same tales as discussed in Chapter One. Since it is handed down orally, it is dynamic and continue to evolve with time. The socio-cultural context in which the European tales originated is different from the socio-cultural context of the Mao Naga folktales. As a result, the values, beliefs and practices of the Mao Nagas may not reflect the European values, beliefs and practices. It may be suggested that the scholars from within the society could begin to collect and classify them in line with the national and international classifications of the folktales. It is believed that the earliest printed collection of folktales was *Edemeiko Bvii* (Folk Stories in Mao) Volume I (no year) (Salao, N) and *Idemei Ko bvii* (Folk Stories in Mao) Volume II, 1993 by the same author (published as Saleo, N.)

The folk narratives of the Mao Nagas serve as a form of cultural memory that upholds the people's history, values, and identity over generations. They are fundamental to the formation of their cultural identity. It plays a crucial role in the construction of cultural memory and acts as a storehouse for preserving this aspect of the memory of the people. The folk narratives of the Mao Nagas can be considered as cultural memory because they preserve the rich values and experiences of the past. Erll (2011) refers to collective memory as cultural memory. Cultural memory is collectively transmitted by individuals who belong to the group. Colletive memory and cultural memory can be compared to a continuous flow of water, one leading to the other. These narratives, in their varied forms, communicate the collective experiences of the past; this transmission is effectuated by carriers of memory belonging to the group. Narratives educate the people. Since narratives carry values, cultural values are enforced, and these help the younger generations to keep themselves connected with the past.

The Mao Naga folk narratives serve as mirrors that reflect different dimensions of the people's lives. They reflect human experiences that communicate human values and beliefs. The narratives of Kholia and Shiikache portray that wars and conflicts were not uncommon in the past. To bring about reconciliation between the groups *Asoto* (the peace treaty) was celebrated between the warring groups. Another important value is that of sharing, done by the rich through *Zhoso mozii* (the feast of merit). It was a feast the wealthy family would throw for the villagers. In the story of Kateini and Kajiini, Kateini and her husband celebrated the feast of merit. The Feast of Merit was a social celebration wherein abundance was shared with everyone; it would have resulted in the lessening of one's material property, but it brought him honour and fame, as the name itself indicates – the feast of merit – bringing to the individual and his family a good name and social status. The market economy of the present does not encourage such sharing and social celebration.

Most of the narratives deal with the lives of ordinary men and women engaged in agriculture and its related activities. Thus, one can conclude that their economy depended on agriculture. The themes of sustainability and ecological imbalances are found in the narratives. Narratives celebrate nature that nurtures, protects, heals and provides human needs. It also presents nature as a destroyer as seen in Chakhepfo's story (chapter one). The agricultural economy gradually gives way to the industrial.

Language is intrinsic to any cultural identity including the Mao Naga identity. With the help of language, the folk narratives are disseminated to the younger generations. In this way, The folk narratives of the Mao Naga are promoted through the language. Therefore, language is a means to convey, interpret and construct the past both in the oral and written forms. The Mao Naga language thus acts in preserving as well as constructing the cultural memory of the people.

With the written script introduced only since the third decade of the twentieth century, the oral traditions play a significant role in the dissemination of knowledge and information about the past. One of the most important institutions in the Mao oral community that acted as the centre of learning and governance was the *morung* (youth dormitory), where the youth received instructions about life. However, with the introduction of modern education through missionary education in the 1920s, the written has now been privileged over the verbal. Gradually, the significance of the *morung* has also declined with modern institutions of learning have replaced it. With its promise of a surer and brighter future for the individual and family, modern institutions hold greater attraction for individuals and societies than their allegiance to their traditions and customs. Thus, education, training, and formation came to be imparted in the educational institutions which gradually resulted in the death knell of the *morung*. The disappearance of the *morung* would mean the loss of space for the young people for freedom, and informal interaction since it was replaced by a more structured environment like the educational institutions and church. The shift reflects the move from freedom, informal interactive space of the *morung* with structured and regulated environments. The *morung* tales became the text and history that is imparted to the younger generation in these structures. Educational institutions and churches represent society's desire to educate young people in ways that conform to society. Thus, modern education and the new faith became the cultural identity of the people.

The shift from the agricultural to the industrial and the technological and scientific lifestyle resulted in the interruption and then the gap in the transmission of oral narratives and their implied teaching of values to the younger generation within the conducive set-up of a *morung*. This has had a major negative impact on the transmission of the narratives of the Mao Nagas since the *morung* was the primary social context in which this took place. The absence of the *morung* thus resulted in the decrease or the complete disappearance of the normal settings

where the narrator and the audience would be present for the narration and transmission to take place. The negative impact is more on the oral narratives than on the cultural life of the Mao Nagas.

As indicated in Chapter Three, the stone monoliths commemorating the celebration of the Feast of Merit are preserved even up to now. Community festivals like *Saleni* and *Chiithuni* as mentioned in some folk narratives are celebrated to this day though not without change. The traditional feasts are based on the agricultural cycle. It is interesting to note that though the majority of the people have embraced Christianity, the traditional feasts and *gennas* are still celebrated and practised by them. It needs to be pointed out that reconstructive nature is seen in the celebration, in the sense that more than drinking and eating, the feasts are organised at the village levels and efforts are made to keep alive the spirit of the ancestors through re-enacting, singing, displaying traditional tools and crafts, and dance among others as discussed in chapter two. The celebration of such feasts reinforces local identity and collective consciousness is instilled in the younger generations.

Other socio-cultural aspects of the Mao Nagas have been affected by the onslaught of progress. While the negative effects of modern times are visible concerning the socio-cultural life of the people, their positive contributions are also there. Scientific and technical progress makes it possible to preserve for ages all available Mao Naga folk narratives through print and electronic media. The surviving elders who are the lone guardians of these narratives can now survive in the digital form for generations to come, making it possible for everyone, and not only the younger generation of the Mao Nagas, to view and listen to these narratives, and understand and appreciate the cultural wealth and heritage of Mao Nagas and come to know of their traditional identity and practices.

Yet another positive effect of scientific and technical progress is the involvement of educational institutions and centres to preserve and promote the local narratives, history, and

culture of the Naga tribal communities. This research study itself is one such example. This is all the more laudable when the scholars are from within the tribal society itself. This is a manifestation of the innate desire the people have to preserve and promote their culture. In the process, evidence and methods are collected, categorized, and preserved for future generations by writers and scholars. Besides the books and articles, a celebration of culture is also held, the latest being the Makhel Heritage Conclave by the Mao Students Union on the occasion of the 88th Anniversary and Conference with the theme, *Rethinking Our Heritage* from 27th to 31st December 2021.

In Chapter Three we saw how folk narratives play a significant role in the construction of the Mao Naga identity. The shared common narratives help the people to understand and construct their identity, thus giving meaning to them and strengthening the bond of communion and union-based common values and beliefs that are handed down from generation to generation. Some markers of identity are language, geographical location, dresses, common laws and customs.

The presence of specific geographical locations and names of places and rivers like Makhel, Tobufii, Shajouba, and the river *Chuherii, Isii pfoki* (*Isii* mountain) as discussed in Chapters Three and Four assert the fact that the people are closely connected to the land thus adding authenticity to the narratives. As can be seen in the narratives, it is said that they came from somewhere as indicated in Chapter Four 4.3.2.1 the second line of the verse, “*Ochii kosoyi*” and moved to the present habitat and settled it for a long period. Being an oral community, there is no mention of the specific period in which they moved to this place. Whatever may be the theories, they considered themselves natives of the place, the original settlers of the land. The myth of *Dziiliamosiia* (chapter two) is considered the foundational myth of their origin.

As deliberated in Chapter Four, the Mao Naga narratives are seen to use common mnemonic devices. It has been argued how literary-mnemonic devices function as an aid to remembering the narratives. Besides aiding in remembering, it creates special effects as most of the folk narratives are presented in a very pictorial way. It also uses imagination and fantasies as ingredients to create a lasting effect on the audience. It is observed that the Mao folk narratives, especially the verse, employed repetitions as one important device that helps to remember.

While discussing the subject of mnemonic devices in the study of folk narratives, Erll and Assmann's theories have been applied. Erll (2011) talks about the crucial role of the mnemonic community in the preservation of the past, while Assmann speaks of specific human carriers of cultural memory like shamans, bards, griots, priests, etc. In the Mao Naga society, the elders, parents, other knowledgeable persons in the society, and the owners of the *morungs* (youth dormitory) act as "human carriers" (Assmann, 1992) of cultural memory. For the Mao Naga, the *morungs* were educational centres in the past. It has been replaced by modern educational institutions.

The presence of monuments and historical objects as discussed in chapters three and four served as mnemonic devices that aid in remembering the past and help to construct the Mao Naga identity. They hold much significance for the cultural identity of the Mao Nagas. A good number of them are still found and preserved in the region where the Mao Nagas live, especially at Makhel village and its adjoining areas. Thus, we see that not only the narratives but monuments, and objects of historical importance too play a very crucial role in constructing the identity of the people as cultural memory.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

The Mao Naga narratives contain rich values of the socio-cultural life of the people. They reflect the collective memory and values of their society. Some works have been

published on the Mao Nagas from different perspectives, but there is still more to be done to explore the rich culture of the people. Since they were an oral community, many things have been modified greatly or even lost while being handed down. The Mao scholars could conduct more research to arrive at a consensus as to the probable original narration and explain the modifications that have crept into them in time.

Further, research on the analysis, mnemonics devices, and a critical interpretation of the Mao Folk narratives could be encouraged. This will provide insight into the beliefs, values, and experiences of the narratives' creator.

Encourage the promotion and preservation of folk narratives through workshops, seminars, exhibitions, symposiums, publications, etc. This will ensure the preservation of the narratives for future generations. So too, customary laws and practices, as well as social, religious, and political practices could be systematically promoted and upheld.

The Mao Naga narratives offer evidence of the ability to maintain cultural memory. Through it, the people have transmitted the rich fabric of their collective experiences and worldviews - a history of origin, migration, customs, and values. It acts as a repository for knowledge and a living testament that moulds people's identity and memories. The folk narratives of the Mao Nagas are powerful tools for preserving and transmitting cultural memory.

5.3 Conclusion

Cultural memory is not static, it is dynamic and ever-evolving and so each time it is narrated, it is not only recalling the events but also it interprets, and undergoes continuous reconstruction of its meanings. Stories that are repeatedly told are imbued with cultural significance. In the past transmission depended solely on the human memory, narratives that are not transmitted have disappeared. Whatever is preserved and transmitted has helped to

reconstruct the identity of the Mao Nagas. It guarantees their continuation and significant transmission to the next generations