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Making Sense: Re-imagining *Morung* Culture and Translation of Ao-Naga Folksongs

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Abstract

Various factors represented by the invasion of the British, the influence of American Missionaries, and the liberal education of the Western model have adversely impacted the corpus of the Nagas' rich customs, beliefs, practices, institutions and oral traditions. One such occurrence is the disintegration of the *Morung*, a unique traditional institution of learning that served as the important foundation of the Naga society. Hence, an attempt to re-imagine or re-write the culture of the *Morung*, which was hijacked by the Colonial power, becomes crucial to critique the colonial anthropological translation and provide a different reading drawing lessons from the translation of Ao-Naga folksongs. Here, the folksongs are translated to analyse the Ao-Naga folksongs, trace the historical trajectory and understand the nuances of the songs. It is an attempt to recapture the social-cultural values, history, polity, philosophy, religion and other practices pertaining to this traditional institution. The paper delves into the past lived experience and realities of the *Morung* Culture and present for the receiving audience the uniqueness and the significance of the institution of the Ao-Naga community, its world and the worldview.

Keywords: Oral traditions, Folksongs, Translation, *Morung*, Ao-Nagas

Introduction

The study of literature, society and cultures of various linguistic communities of North-East India could be fascinating for their richness and cultural diversity. Several languages of this area have a rich tradition of folk literature and the trajectory of literature culture of North-East India is unique and distinct from rest of the country. Hence, it is necessary to translate, interpret and publish literatures of languages of this region for a border audience. However, as we know oral literatures of various communities in North-East India are being often translated by others resulting in the construction of the community identity in ways not desired by their members. The anthropological translations generally render these communities as tribal and their practices as barbaric. These terms deployed by the colonial government are strongly problematized and

challenged by the social scientists these days. The Nagas¹ for one are commonly documented through the perspective of anthropological paradigms and consistently judged in scientific circles to the most barbarous races in existence. They were seen as not capable of abstract thinking, their art and artefacts as all primitive and devoid of any aesthetic quality. Hence, a sense of obligation drove the British to morally and materially uplift the Nagas and catch up with the European civilization which was guaranteed and was widely accepted as the 'silent referent.'²

Besides, various factors represented by British invasion, Christian proselytization, and the liberal education of the Western model have adversely impacted the corpus of the Nagas' rich customs, beliefs, practices and oral tradition. One such occurrence is the disintegration of the *Morung*, a unique traditional Educational Institution that served as the important foundation of the society. *Morung* was the cornerstone of the Naga cultural heritage that stood as one of the oldest and strongest means of social control and served as an agency for all round socialization through which the individual acquired knowledge, social skills and values and conformed to the norms and roles required for the integration into a group or community. It was an institution where the system of principles governing morality and acceptable were taught to the community drawn from the rich tradition of oral literatures. It also enforced strict training and discipline like that of a military academy and strict rules and regulation were maintained and severe punishments were given to the lawbreaker. For the Colonial administrator-ethnographers, this indigenous institution executed as a Public School. However, the activities and functions of the *Morung* were quite the opposite. The villagers would go to the field during the day time and the life and activities inside the institution starts from the evening. This institution provided many a coaching process which covered the entire aspects of a man's life and aimed at producing responsible citizens in Naga society where a man was taught history, science, political science, economics, philosophy, religion and military arts of war and techniques of fighting.

But to the British Raj, this institution was a hindrance to their political interest and perceived condescendingly as nothing more than a refuge or asylums for mentally incompetent primitives (Butler 595). The attitudes of the early American Missionaries were no better than the British administrators. They came with a pessimistic attitude to the Naga Hills and saw the *Morung* and its practices as heathenish and deemed the period as Dark Age. So, in order to bring the

¹The history of Naga anthropology is a history of intimate relationship between anthropology and colonial administration. Colonial administrator-ethnographers and American missionaries were central to the emergence and professionalization of ethnology and anthropology in the Naga Hills and in the way Britain envisaged its role in the colony.

²Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his influential work, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?' argues that the Europe claimed to be the universal model of progress, modernity and civilization and thus became the silent referent in the 19th century. In a form of asymmetric ignorance, he argues that colonial subjects were compelled to know Europe while the Europeans were free to ignore Asia, Africa and other parts of the non-western nations.

enlightenment of the civilized world to the forgotten world they abolished the *Morung* practices and several others which they considered as evil and primitive. In this way, it led to the gradual depletion of the *Morung* culture. Perhaps, they did not appreciate the ancient institution because they failed to notice the beautiful and systematic life and order of the *Morung* system. In short, they failed to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy beliefs and practices and as a consequence, destroyed and erased a number of valuable ancient Naga traditions and customs.

Unscripted: Oral Traditions and the Nagas

Nagas' oral tradition³ in its entirety has shaped and nurtured the Naga people for so many generations; it is an intrinsic aspect of the community's literature, history, religion and custom. Their oral societies transmitted their traditional history, origin and migration of the people (tribe, clan, individual, etc.), formation of the village, events of war, peace, festivals and so forth orally through songs, poetry, ballads, prayers, sayings, stories and tales or as public oration when the situation demands. So oral traditions are one way through which the community makes sense of the world in which they live. It is taken as the main source of information to explain how things came to be the way they are in the world, or in some cases, explain how things are supposed to be. The traditions also help to teach the young generations the things they need to know to fit in within their society. Because these traditions developed over generations within the boundaries of a society, they are often unique to that society, and help to define who they are and what they believe in as a people. Thus, the oral traditions of the Nagas differ from those of any other people in the world, and help to keep their identity and practices unique.

For the Ao-Nagas,⁴ their folksongs are an important medium that has preserved and transmitted their culture for generations. There are immense traditional knowledge and wisdom veiled in their folksongs and all notable events of the past are enshrined in the folksongs. Ao-Naga folksongs pregnant with deep meaning reveal the historical, cultural norms and values, rituals, social, religious, political and philosophical aspects of their lives. Thus, without folksongs, the explanation of the Ao-Naga culture and their historical details is unimaginable. As no genre of folklore is devoid of functional values, Ao-Naga Folksongs, of all varieties, have been used by the people in all the crucial moments of life cycle from birth to death. Lullabies, grinding and pounding songs, war songs, devotional songs, wedding songs and festive songs have specific

³Historically, when the first American Missionaries came in contact with the Nagas in the 1870s, the Nagas had no written script. Their sole means of communication was in oral form and they preserved their culture through oral tradition and artefacts. They relied on oral traditions to transmit their history and accumulated experience for generations. The missionaries along with active evangelical works not only introduced Naga languages in the Roman Script but started working towards documenting and producing the oral narratives and other material of the Nagas in the form of writing. Hence, literary historians argue that the impetus for change in Naga society first came from the church, because the history of Christianity in Nagaland is the genesis of literature by the then American missionaries in the 1870s.

⁴ Among the 14 recognised Naga tribes in Nagaland, the Ao-Naga is considered as one of the major tribes.

purposes. Thus, the themes of the Ao-Naga folksongs are all-encompassing. The songs express Ao people's sociocultural values, religious beliefs and experiences.

Ao-Naga tradition also prescribes certain rhythmic songs to suit different occasions. For instance, the song and work go together. The rhythm makes the worker more enthusiastic and generates energy in him/her. Thus, work and entertainment are not alienated in folklore. They are blended together and support each other. Any public lecture, speech, story-telling or casual discussion was supported, at intervals, by songs. A function without song was considered incomplete. Ao cultural songs are short but the whole story is enshrined in the song which can be sung with eight to nine different tunes which are beautiful and rich. Even in a simple song of a few lines, one can find a whole piece of history. Today, there are still sizeable number of middle-aged people, who are the repository of the rich folk culture, still live in remote rural areas. They immensely contribute to the collection of folklores. The stories, folksongs, customs, norms and values, personal experiences of the past are still narrated and expressed through their memories, which is how the past is still kept alive today. Besides, oral tradition still remains an abiding force for the Naga communities which much is still vibrantly alive.

Translation and Cultural Significance of Ao-Naga Folksongs

Translation is not merely a linguistic activity but it is also a cultural one. The act of translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Juliane House emphasises on the importance of culture in translation studies who states that:

Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meanings of linguistics items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistics items are used. (House 11)

As Frantz Fanon puts it '...to speak language is to take on a world, a culture' (Fanon 38), language cannot be isolated from the world or culture within which it is rooted, and so, translation is not simply as a matter of matching sentences in abstract nor restricted to transporting words, sentences and texts from one language to another alone. Rather, the translator must attend to the contexts (Language: a world, a culture) from which these words arise and which they, necessarily, evoke and express (Dingwaney and Maier 3). Since translation and culture are so interrelated, the translator cannot ignore the cultural elements in a text which adds to the role of the translator as a transcultural mediator. Also, as the concept of culture is fundamental to any approach to translation, understanding its implications in the study of translation is important. Here, the concept of culture is not discussed in depth but the most conventional definition of culture is understood as:

.....not only in the narrower sense of man's advanced intellectual development as reflected in the arts, but also in the broader anthropological sense of all socially conditioned aspects of human life, as a totality of knowledge, proficiency and perception. Culture has thus to do with common factual knowledge, usually including political institutions, education, history and current affairs as well as religion and customs. (Ginter 27)

Translation is also recognized as an act of culture-specific communication. As language and culture are inextricably intertwined, the most difficult challenge for a translator is to translate or render concepts and words rooted in culture in a way that ensures the conveyance of proper meaning. In the complexity of translating cultures, the items which proved particularly untranslatable in translation, are known as 'culture-specific items.' According to S. Tobias, such items are the 'linguistic items that cause problems for translation due to differences in cultural understanding...proper nouns, objects, institutions, customs, expressions and concepts embodied in the ST that do not exist in the culture of the TL readership or would be perceived differently' (Tobias 27). Since culture-specific terms are deeply rooted in culture translator are required to have both communicative language and cross-cultural competencies. A translator is also required to work towards capturing the socio-cultural meaning in cross-cultural encounters and contribute to the transfer of knowledge across cultures and to cultural development as well (Calvo and Gomez 2-3).

In this paper, I attempted to present the working translations of Ao-Naga folksongs and discuss in brief the problems of cultural aspects and cultural differences that pose a great challenge to a translator in cross-cultural communication between two worlds and world views constituted in two languages, in this case the Ao-Naga⁵ and the English. In the process of the translation, Ao-Naga folksongs presented many untranslatable culture-specific terms that presented the geographic, historic and socio-cultural values and experience of the community. Hence, the translator has to do the translation with sensitivity to the community values at a given point in time in history.

The meanings in the folksongs are indirectly implied rather than lucidly expressed and contain lots of expressions with undeniable stylistic values and devices. The technical features of the Ao-Naga folksongs include oral composition using formulaic or poetic words and phrases, figures of sound and figures of speech. These compositions are enshrined with deep meanings and connotations representing rich culture, symbolic world and serves as a medium through which

⁵ The Aos are composed of four linguistic groups representing *Mongsen*, *Chungli*, *Changki* and *Sangpur*. However, the major Ao-Naga languages are *Mongsen* and *Chungli*. Mongsen was the accepted literary language and original of which *Chungli* is the by product. Though *Mongsen* was the main and poetic language in the past, today *Chungli* is used as the common written language because when American Missionaries came to the Ao area, they first stopped at *Molungyimsen* village where *Chungli* was spoken. Thus, they picked up *Chungli* for communication purpose and introduced writings in this dialect. However, all the text of the folksongs used for this study is transliterated in *Mongsen* but provided only the English translated version.

individuals or groups express their otherwise suppressed feelings and views. The Ao-Naga folksongs often start by a way of ululating although it has no contribution in the contents of the lyrical construction *per se*. But it acts as a form of communication to express certain emotions such as grief, misery, happiness and so forth. Other technical devices such as instrumental music, dancing, dramatization and work accompany the singing. Specific application of these technical elements make Ao-Naga folksongs unique, but in many respects, transliterating and translating texts of folksongs strip them of some of these technical features associated with live oral performance, especially the sounds of music, musical instruments, dances and the dramas. Thus, Ao-Nagas folksongs are more intended for a listening audience than for a reading audience.

All these aspects imply not only a major responsibility for the translator but make translation exceptionally challenging in producing the English version that would do justice to the original meaning. Thus, responding to the acute awareness of the futility of the notion of equivalence, the translator concedes that a full translation is a myth. While Eugene Nida notably proposed that the usage of footnotes illuminates the cultural differences when closest approximation cannot be found, his method also fulfils at least two functions i.e., it provides supplementary information and calls attention to the original's discrepancies. Thus, to retain the socio-cultural ethos of the source text in the translated text, this paper delivers an elaborate and additional information, by way of footnote in the translation. Here, the usage of footnotes is indispensable in re-presenting the cultural insights of the *Morung* that are incorporated tightly in the language of the Ao-Naga folksongs. It also explain for the target audience many of the important contents of the source text.

Tejaswini Niranjana in *Siting Translation* (1995) took up the formidable task of inquiry into the theory and the practice of translation in the context of Western imperialism and colonialism. According to her, translation is no longer used to indicate an inter-lingual practice but to name an entire problematic. Situating translation in the postcolonial context, she criticizes Orientalist texts for being imperialist and ethnocentric and situated the violence of translation as a strategic means for representing the 'otherness' to the European reading audiences. Thus, Niranjana attempted to break new ground by locating the problematic of translation as a 'significant site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity' (Niranjana 84-85). She calls for a mission to turn translation into something that Europe's erstwhile colonized peoples can use effectively to decolonize their cultures. She argues for translations which can be termed as acts of resistance when practiced by natives that results in doing their own ethnography, a kind of citation and re-writing (Niranjana 172).

Hence, an attempt to re-imagine or re-write the culture of the *Morung*, which was hijacked by the Colonial power, becomes crucial to critique the colonial anthropological translation and provide a different reading from the community. As the Ao-Nagas believe that the soul of the community is expressed in their folklore, the paper centers on re-writing the *Morung* and recapture the social-cultural values, history, polity, philosophy, religion and other practices pertaining to this

institution. The paper delves into the past lived experience and realities of the *Morung* Culture drawing lessons from the translation and reading of the Ao-Naga folksongs and juxtaposed them against the Colonial narratives. Here, the folksongs are translated to analyze the Ao-Naga folksongs, trace the historical trajectory and understand the nuances of the songs. It is also an attempt to present for the receiving audience the uniqueness and the significance of the *Morung* of Ao-Naga community, its world and the worldview. Thus, translation problems are not merely solving the structural problems of the two languages involved but it is rather political. Here, the central issue is related to ways in which translators engage with the community while representing their cultural forms.

***Morung*: An Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Ao-Nagas**

In Ao language, *Morung* is the other name for *ariju*. The word *morung* contributed by the outsiders was derived from the Assamese word meaning a big tree drum. In the ancient period, it was mandatory for the Ao-Nagas to keep a huge drum craved out of trunks of big trees called *sungkong*⁶ near the *ariju* or bachelor's dormitory and accordingly the Assamese named the institution as *morung*. E.W. Clark (120-121) and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (34) also stated in their works that the term *morung* was of Assamese origin. However, the generally accepted Assamese word *morung* fails to convey the full meaning and scope of the term *ariju*. Since it was a unique traditional institution of learning and the foundation of Ao-Naga culture, a single equivalent word is not available in English to explain the concept and philosophy behind the word *ariju*. Therefore, it would be best to refrain from using the Assamese word to avoid distorting the authentic meaning and functions of *ariju*. Similar institutions, like Ao-Naga *ariju*, were also established among the neighboring Naga tribes such as Lotha, Konyak, Phom, Chang and Yimchunger.

The first established historical village of the Ao-Nagas was *Chungliymti* wherein the first phase of socio-cultural refinement took place. After this village was founded, the ancestors built an *ariju* which was called the *Senden Ariju*. According to the oral tradition, the Ao-Nagas lived in this village for many years approximately from A.D. 100-1025 before abandoning it. During the settlement, sizeable population and households increased. It is still situated in the beautiful eastern side of *Mokokchung*⁷town which the Sangtam-Nagas presently occupy. Here is a folksong sung by the men folks honoring and exalting the *ariju* when it was established in the Village:

⁶*Sungkong* means log drum which is a huge wooden gong. It is hollowed from a great forest tree with a *dao* with the help of fire.

⁷*Mokokchung* is a district in the State of Nagaland which is both the headquarters and the homes of the Aos.

Oh! My Unger⁸riju

Where the first sunrise of the eastern valley shines upon

Standing strong and magnificent.

Oh! The majestic platform where verdicts are passed

My riju has been erected like the king's statue

Oh! Imbosemra-janger⁹

Here the mango¹⁰ of enemies are gathered

the judgment place

No one can surpass this riju.

Context: The men folk of the village describe their *ariju* as the centre where all the reputed leaders of the village gathered. They compare their *ariju* to a King's statue who is all powerful and mighty. They extol the importance of their *ariju's* majestic platform where all the important discussions and decisions were made and due judgments were also given to the lawbreakers. They also proudly sing of their enemies' head that was hung and displayed in the *ariju*.

The membership of the *ariju* was extended to all the male members irrespective of their status and all the young men were entitled to become bonafide members of the institution only after attaining the age of 12 to 14 years. The age of entry into this prestigious institution earns the status of a man. The history and role of the *ariju* as an institution was important for the Ao-Nagas because the overall function of the *ariju* was closely interlinked to the cultural, social, moral, economic and religious life of the Naga community. The overall activities of the *ariju* were directly

⁸Unger meaning the leaders in the village.

⁹Imbosemra-jangeris a term referring to men from all walks of lives. It is often used to address men in the village especially when gathered for important events.

¹⁰The term describes the head of the enemy that has been decapitated and preserved the skulls for various reasons. Decapitation was practiced in the Naga Hills which has given them a widespread notoriety in the colonial documentary records and in the neighboring valleys. In fact no tribe has a more established reputation for headhunting than the Nagas. Among the Nagas in the ancient period, the practice of decapitation has extensively been established as a custom in the process of history and those that have the highest number of heads often had extremely fierce reputations. It was an aspect of their life, intrinsically linked to cosmology, agriculture, human fertility and religious power. It was for defense and proofs of manhood and spirituality. In many headhunting societies; skulls represented the most powerful magic in the world and vital transfusions of energy. Thus, it was commonly believed that the soul lives in the head and taking an enemy's head would take its skills, strength, and power and therefore weakens the enemy's entire community. This practice has a long history as a supremely effective weapon and the more one could procure the heads, the more the status of the tribe as a whole increased because of the added bonus of helping to threaten existing or future enemies.

or indirectly related to the welfare of the Ao-Naga community where occupational works were executed as well as matters concerning their livelihood were discussed; a cradle of the social and cultural life of the Nagas. It functioned as a village guard house and a centre where strategy, planning and discussions of taking *mangko* affairs occupied an important place. Most importantly the policy to establish diplomatic relations or friendship with neighboring villages was discussed here. Its etymology, *Ar* meaning enemy and *ju* meaning to talk or to watch, clearly articulates its meaning (Ao 12). *Ariju* also literally mean a watch place of enemy and it served as a nerve centre and a secure place to discuss the dates, locations and strategy of a raid and thereby gain *mangko*. Thus, an institution like this was very important for the security of the village state where young people by turns stayed alert and vigilant especially throughout the night, guarding the village against any invader or in readiness for battle.

Observing the *ariju* system as the nerve centre of discussing the practice of taking heads, the British government prohibited the Nagas from going to the *ariju* in order to eliminate the headhunting custom (Sema 70). The British government introduced new changes in the Naga traditional village council system by appointing *Gaonburas* (village elders) and *Dobashis* (interpreters) who acted as the British agents in helping the government in the implication and application of their indirect political rule over the Nagas. Since the government has introduced a new system of political structure, the government began to demolish the *ariju* system in order to maintain their political stability among the savages. As a result, the prohibition of headhunting and the dismantling of the *ariju* tremendously impacted the social, political and religious practices of the Ao-Naga community. The decay of such old institutions, involves for any tribal group, is a loss of pride for their past tradition. The suppression or neglect of such traditional institutions has done irreparable damage to the tribal culture. It has led to the disintegration of their cultural values and heritage (Pongener 85).

Life in *ariju* was not only confined to strict military trainings and punishment but folklore, folksongs, family management, matrimonial relations, rituals, ceremony, skills related to artefacts, art of speech and so forth were taught. It was a centre filled with merrymaking, recreation and the experience of *Tsuki* and their love stories were narrated with great excitement and interest. *Tsuki* was a separate female socio-cultural institution. *Tsuki* means garden and the members of this institution were called *Tsukir* referring to the members of a small garden of beautiful flowers. In Ao tradition, *naro* which means flower denotes young girl, therefore, whenever one talks about *Tsuki*, it refers to the young girls/flowers protected in the well-fenced garden/*tsuki* where socialization and education took place under a qualified matron, *Tsükibutsüla* (Lanunungsang and Talitemjen 101).

Only an elderly female can be the *Tsükibutsüla* of the *Tsüki*. The matrons could be the wife of a well-known rich man or a *nokinketer*¹¹ who is regarded highly in the village by virtue of his contribution to the society. The position of *Tsükibutsüla* was also taken up by an ordinary widow having good command in her control and moral discipline. She played multiple important roles as a guardian and protector of the unmarried women. She also acts as an advisor and a consultant. It was under the direct control and decision of the matron as to who would become a member of the institution in terms of age, clan affiliation and so forth. The main function of the *Tsükibutsüla* was to train the members and shaping them into real womanhood by educating them on the dignity of labor such as weaving, spinning and the art of cultivation. They were strictly taught to maintain the dignity of woman in terms of family norms, socio-cultural activities to find proper placement in the society. It was also the job of the matron to initiate the process of courtship between partners and to act as a go by to bridge the gap between daughters and their parents.

The *Tsüki* was the meeting place of the unmarried boys and girls after their tiresome works in the field. It was their joyous moment where they exchanged their views and expressed their love particularly through songs. This is a love song sung by a young man who has a deep affection for the woman he loves. He praises her beautiful looks and wishing her to be his soul mate forever:

Lovely maiden, arise from the bed and sit magnificently
Your legs add beauty to the legs of the wooden cot
You and I walking together
 is beautiful.
After a bath in the river,
Your silky hair gathered on one side
Looks finest on you.
Your mouth is red
as though you have chewed a *kio*¹² of the *tsü matsünger*¹³

¹¹In the Ao-Naga society, the most prominent people were the warriors, and among the warriors, the *Nokinketer* were considered a cut above the rest. They were defined as good warriors, distinguished in war for success in procuring enemy heads. *Nok* meaning *dao* (hatchet with a long blade carved in wooden handle) and *keter* meaning possessor that culturally meant a warrior using a *dao* with much power and valor. Thus, *Nokinketer* with the power of the *nok* as the vanguard brought security, prestige, honor and prosperity to the society.

¹²*Kio* is the equivalent term of *Paan* in Hindi. It is a preparation combining betel leaf with areca nut and sometimes also with tobacco. It is believed to help in digestion of curried foods and also act as mouth fresheners. When *Paanis* chewed, a red food dye inside it makes the mouth red.

¹³*Tsü matsüngeris* is a term used by the Aos to refer to the non Nagas in India.

You look beautiful going about the village.

When I see you,

My pomegranate!

I cannot leave

But only wish for us to get married.

There is another responsive love song where the man sings the first paragraph praising the beauty of the woman he loves that she was the most beautiful flower in the eyes of the *yarang*.¹⁴ He compares her to the Rhododendron of *tsungliyimti*.¹⁵ The second paragraph is sung by the woman who equally reciprocates his affections, singing that his *kubangjang*¹⁶ looks the best on him and he captures her heart for eternity:

You may not be beautiful in the villagers' eyes

Yet in my eyes,

You are the most beautiful orchid blooming in the sunshine

A beautiful orchid on the pathway,

The Rhododendron of *tsungliyimti*.

The villagers may say that *kubangjang* does not suit you

How can it not suit you?

Young winner!

You, who wear the *changsen*,¹⁷

is the handsomest of all!

Yes, right from my childhood,

in my eyes,

You are the only one.

¹⁴*Yarang* refers to a smart young man.

¹⁵*Yimti* means a village and *Tsungliis* is a local name of a colony in *LongkhumYimti*. The girl who is addressed in the song is from this locality.

¹⁶*Kubangjang* was the ancient Ao man's hairstyle. *Kubang* was the hair on a man's head cut off square right around the head at base of skulls as is the Ao man's custom. *Kunangjang* was the thick lower edge of hair on an Ao man's head. *Kubangjang* literally means eaves of *Kubang*.

¹⁷*Changsen* is an Ao-Naga traditional leg gloves worn by males on special occasion of festivity. It is worn between the ankles and knees.

However, the activities in the *ariju* and *tsuki* are characterized derogatorily in the colonial narratives. W.C. Smith misconstrued the sexual morality of the members of the *tsuki* in his writings:

Adult marriage only is in vogue, but, prior to wedlock, the girls are allowed to great freedom. It is said that Naga brides who are entitled to wear the “orange blossom of virginity” on the wedding day are very rare. The girls sleep by twos or threes in separate houses or in the houses of widows, where they are visited nightly by their lovers. (Smith 57)

Smith distorted the sanctity of the *tsuki*. The girls sleeping platform in the *tsuki* was situated in the attic and to reach it they had to climb up a log ladder. This was done mainly to discourage the opposite sex to court them in the dormitory. Even married women were prohibited from climbing the ladder and for the men folks to do so were considered as an absolute taboo. The *tsuki* sleeping platforms were strict sanctuaries for chastity. Even rice pounding table kept below were consecrated to avoid any sexual acts or immoral behavior committing upon it because to do so would cause failure in food supply during harvest. The visits to the *tsuki* were strictly for social interaction and the men were strictly prohibited from entering into it in the absence of the matron. No *ariju* men would sleep in *tsuki* because it was considered to be a great shame (Lanunungsang and Talitemjen 108).

Since folklore encompassed the everyday life of the Aos, *Ariju* and *tsuki* served as the musical hub where they learned folktales, folksongs, and dances and also learned to make varieties of musical instruments like bamboo flutes, stringed instruments made of hair and so forth. *Ariju* was the main centre for hosting ceremonies and festivals especially when *mangko* was procured. This is a song eulogizing the remarkable *Ariju* standing tall in the village:

The first rays of the valley's sunrise
Shine through the *Atsung*¹⁸*ariju*'s six doors.
Imbosemra-janger, who filled the *suapotitsüngjen*¹⁹
with thousands of enemies heads
are honoring and celebrating.

Context: A song sung by the men folk in honour of their *Atsungariju*. They sing that the first sunray shines through the six doors of the *ariju*. They declare with gusto that the

¹⁸*Atsung* is the name of the Ao-Naga clan of *Longkhum* Village.

¹⁹A place inside the *Ariju* where the *mangko* were offered/kept.

suapotitsüingjen was filled with thousands of *mangko*. And they were celebrating their bravery and accomplishment.

The leading traditional institutions of learning and the foundations of Naga culture were a really microcosm of the village and its people. It could be best explained in terms of a modern University or military headquarters because of its function, nature of training and propagation of ideas. It can be argued that Naga Society had no formal learning institution before the advent of modern schools and colleges. However, it occupies a unique place as a learning centre in Naga society that was operative at all stages of human life and very much in the interest of the cohesion of village communities. It served as an agent and centre of socialization and a perfect learning institution. The learning institutions, the beautiful songs and literatures of Nagas are the signs of maturity of their civilization and culture. They may not and need not pertain in accordance with the standards of the West. They are different and that difference has to be respected. Hence, it would be erroneous to say that the Nagas were just a mass of incompetent savage tribes who had no idea about law and order and received no education prior to the British occupation and contact with the missionaries or before the introduction of modern education.

As discussed the soul of the people lives in their poetry and by soul it means identity. Nagas always believed that the corpus of their rich customs, beliefs, practices, institutions and oral tradition are the primary roots of the tree of their racial identity. They express the soul of their people and represent an integrated and holistic approach to the culture of the people who for generations have lived in the morality of a verbal dimension. And without their ancestral identity, all political slogans of identity would be like a tall golden statue with feet of clay. Hence, the process of exchanging the treasures of culture and folklore should not be a mere age-old tradition of the oral form. But a sense of urgency and a feeling of sincerity should be revived among the Nagas to learn more of their ancient ways of life and practices like the *Ariju* culture, before time caused any more diffusion and loss of the lore. In the recent time, research scholars and government funded projects have been supporting the revitalization process, supplemented by writing, recording, translating, filming and with all possible methods of available documentation. As a result, preserving the folk culture is ensured and able to articulate and re-represent their identity drawing from the rich oral traditions of the community. As Naga folksongs are still understudied, it is therefore important that more studies in folk music applying multi-disciplinary approaches such as anthropology, sociology, history, religion and literature in the study of Naga folksongs would be invaluable.

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