

Indian  
*Folklife*

A Quarterly Newsletter  
from National Folklore Support Centre

Serial No.33  
July 2009



Cover art by: Iris Yingzen

From Antiquity to Modern Naga Folklore

Guest Editor: Temsula Ao



## NATIONAL FOLKLORE SUPPORT CENTRE

National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, registered in Chennai, dedicated to the promotion of Indian folklore research, education, training, networking, and publications. The aim of the Centre is to integrate scholarship with activism, aesthetic appreciation with community development, comparative folklore studies with cultural diversities and identities, dissemination of information with multi-disciplinary dialogues, folklore fieldwork with developmental issues folklore advocacy with public programming events and digital technology with applications to voice the cultures of the marginalised and historically disadvantaged communities. Folklore is a tradition based on any expressive behaviour that brings a group together, creates a convention and commits it to cultural memory. NFSC aims to achieve its goals through cooperative and experimental activities at various levels. NFSC is supported by grants from the Ford Foundation and Tata Education Trust.

### CONTENTS

From Antiquity to Modern .....	3
Kongliang Otsü: An Ao Naga Folk Tale.....	4
Re-interpreting the Myth of Longterok .....	5
The origin of Tiger, Spirit and Humankind: A Mao Naga Myth.....	10
Oral Tradition in contemporary conflict resolution: A Naga perspective .....	11
Remembered Naga Heroes/ Heroines of ohe Legendary Khezhaheno Village of Nagaland .....	14
Appeasement (poem) .....	17
Engendering Public Space in Naga Society: Tradition and Modernity.....	18
Tropics (poem).....	21
NFSC Publications: Music Albums & Video Documentaries .....	22

Cover: Acrylic on Handwoven Nettle Fibre  
by Iris Yingzen.

### STAFF

<i>Secretary to the Director</i> K. Palani Babu	<i>Archivist and Academic Secretary</i> Vinodh Prem Dhas	<i>Administrative Officer</i> A. Sivaraj	<i>Graphic Designer</i> P. Sivasakthivel	<i>Research Fellow (Publication)</i> Seema .M	<i>Research Fellow (Library and Information Resources)</i> S. Radhakrishnan
<i>Programme Officer (Publications and Communication)</i> J. Malarvizhi	<i>Programme Officer (Field Work)</i> Rayson K. Alex	<i>Programme Officer (Technical)</i> Arun Bose	<i>Research Fellows (Field Work)</i> S. Aruvi S. Rajasekar	<i>Research Assistant</i> Manivannan	<i>Support Staff</i> C. Kannan A. Mohana M. Senthilnathan

### INDIAN FOLKLIFE EDITORIAL TEAM

<i>Editor</i> M.D. Muthukumaraswamy	<i>Associate Editors</i> J. Malarvizhi Seema .M	<i>Guest Editor</i> Temsula Ao	<i>Page Layout &amp; Design</i> P. Sivasakthivel
--	---	-----------------------------------	---

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

#### CHAIRMAN

Jyotindra Jain  
*Member Secretary, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,  
C.V. Mess, Janpath, New Delhi*

#### TRUSTEES

Ajay S. Mehta  
*Executive Director, National Foundation for India, India Habitat Centre,  
Zone 4 – A, UG Floor, Lodhi Road, New Delhi*

Ashoke Chatterjee  
*Honorary Advisor, Crafts Council of India, B 1002, Rushin Tower,  
Behind Someshwar Complex, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad – 380015*

N. Bhakthavathsala Reddy  
*Professor, Centre for Comparative Dravidian Literature,  
Dravidian University, Kuppam - 517425*

Dadi D.Pudumjee  
*President, UNIMA International, Director, Ishara Puppet Theatre,  
B2/2211 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi*

Deborah Thiagarajan  
*President, Madras Craft Foundation, Besant Nagar, Chennai*

Molly Kaushal  
*Professor, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,  
C.V. Mess, Janpath, New Delhi*

Munira Sen  
*Director, Common Purpose India, Vasanth Nagar, Bangalore - 560 052*

K. Ramadas  
*Karamballi, Via Santosh Nagar, Udipi 576 102*

Y.A. Sudhakar Reddy  
*Professor and Head, University of Hyderabad,  
Centre for Folk Culture Studies, S.N. School, Hyderabad*

Veenapani Chawla  
*Theatre Director, Adishakti Laboratory for Theater Research, Pondicherry*

### EXECUTIVE TRUSTEE AND DIRECTOR

M.D. Muthukumaraswamy

For our monthly email newsletter on our activities, please write to [info@indianfolklore.org](mailto:info@indianfolklore.org).  
Previous issues of the email newsletters can be accessed at <http://indianfolklore.org/nfscpress>

## From Antiquity to Modern

TEMSULA AO  
prof\_imtitemsula@yahoo.co.in

Folklore study has come a long way from the days of antiquity and has emerged as a discipline in its own right. Not so long ago, it was only an appendage to subjects like history, anthropology, philology and archaeology. Geography too plays an important role in tracing the evolutions of folktales and identifying actual locations from legends and myths. The ramifications of folklore study can now be heard in political discourse and ethnic assertions. Further, folklore or/and cultural studies have now become an integral component of comparative literature in many universities.

Oral tradition, the source of all folklore is now being hailed as the chronicle of human history by providing evidence to the origin of people and their subsequent migrations to their final destinations. Jan Vansina, in his book, *Oral Tradition as History* (1985) says that the 'rules of historical evidence as they apply to oral traditions form a body, a logical train of thought' (from the Preface, p.xiii).

The paper on the Origin Myth of the Aos seems to exemplify this in authenticating certain elements of the traditional myth and at the same time placing that particular culture in a more or less accurate historical-geographical framework.

The other Origin Myth (Mao) addresses the philosophical aspect of myth-making while the short tale of the transformation of a girl into a bird highlights the magical as well as the etiological elements of folktales.

The paper on Naga Heroes can be considered as representing Naga culture at a certain point of history where their world-views came in direct conflict with the so-called 'civilized' notions of bravery and beauty represented by the colonizers.

The relevance of orality and oral cultures is still being debated in a world which has gone beyond mere writing to unimagined realms of scientific innovation. But what good does all this to man on earth if he cannot relate to his fellow beings in a meaningful way?

The paper suggesting oral tradition as a viable alternative to diplomatic sophistry in vexing problems deserves serious consideration. And the last paper trying to trace the root-cause of women's marginalization in rural society like the Nagas to 'tradition', calls for a radical revision of the very foundation on which all other aspects of this particular society stands till today.

Most scholars tend to agree that the oral can never be fully expressed in the written, experience cannot be duplicated into text. Asked if native language and native experience can be translated, Gerald Vizener replied, "Well I don't think it's possible, but I think people ought to intersect themselves in trying to translate it...I think it can be re-imagined and re-expressed and that's my interest." (As quoted in *Writing in the Oral Tradition*, K.M Blaeser 1996, in the Chapter, 'Intersection with the Oral Tradition' p.16.)

The viewpoints expressed in these papers as well as the various paintings of a contemporary artist seem to suggest that folklore in our era is indeed such an intersection. ✨



Iris Yingzen, Lecturer, mother of three and a self-taught artist, she works with oils and acrylic on fabrics and canvas.

## Kongliang Otsü: An Ao Naga Folk Tale

JUNGMAYANGLA LONGKUMER  
Lecturer, Sociology Department,  
NU, Medziphema, Dimapur - 797 112

A long time ago, in the age of dreams and magical times, when the gods and humans resided side by side, there lived a family with two daughters. One day, the parents went to their *jhum* field, leaving the two girls at home. The time of year is understood to be around end July to early August.

"*Tenü* (younger sister), today mother and father have gone to the fields, so today I will clean the rice and prepare the pigs' feed. You go to fetch the water and firewood," the older sister told her younger sister.

The younger sister readily agreed and went to collect firewood. She came laden with the wood and dumping the load on the ground said to her sister, "*Oya* (elder sister), I am hungry, give me something to eat!"

But the older sister, ignoring her plea, sent her to fetch water three more times. When the younger sister filled all the pots and containers with water, it was time to cook food for the evening meal and the older sister set the pot of rice on the fire.

By now, the younger sister was famished and cried out to her elder sister, "*Oya!* I am so hungry, please give me some food!"

The older sister, instead of feeding her starving sibling, told her to open her palm and proceeded to hit her palm with the hot rice ladle.

This was too much for the younger sister who was hungry and tired after so much hard work. Crying loudly, she ran out and huddled in a corner of the '*sünglang*' (bamboo balcony) at the back of the house.

Meanwhile, her parents were on their way home, laden with fresh produce from their field. Their *jhum* field had yielded a bumper crop and the parents were overjoyed that their hard work had been blessed with such abundance. They were eager to meet their daughters and to see their surprise and joy at the food stuff they had brought for them.

However, when they reached home, they found only the older daughter.

"Where is your younger sister?" the mother asked.

"Oh, she is too much; I had to do all the hard work while she has been just loitering around all day. She must be somewhere sitting outside!" the older daughter replied, pretending to be very busy.

The parents rushed out to look for the younger daughter. They knew very well the characters of both their daughters and concluded that the older sister must have done something bad to hurt the younger sister.

They called out to their younger daughter, telling her that they had brought fresh cucumbers, maize and other foodstuff and that she would be given the first choice to eat whatever she wanted. But the younger sister had heard the blatant lies her older sister had told about her and could not bear the injustice of it all. So she climbed the nearest tree and transformed herself into a small bird ("*kongliang*").

The parents looked for her everywhere but she was nowhere to be seen. Finally, when they came near the tall tree, they saw a small bird perched there. It was singing the following song mournfully.

*"Oyalai süngpeni oang ta  
Oyalai tziütai oang ta  
Aja-asa meki la  
Süngko lidi  
Kongliang ta  
Kongliang ta"*

*(Older sister sent me to fetch firewood  
Older sister sent me to fetch water  
Not once was I giving rice and meat  
Better to live in the trees  
Where am I supposed to stay  
Where am I supposed to stay)*

Repeating this song, the small bird darted from tree to tree and eventually flew off into the thick forests, leaving the parents heartbroken.

*Epilogue:*

Today, when people hear this small bird darting from tree to tree singing the song "*Kongliang, kongliang, kongliang*", they know that it is time to harvest their *jhum* fields. The harvesting of new rice, cucumbers, chilli, maize, gourds, brinjal

and various other vegetables are preceded by this song.

This story has been handed down from generation to generation with the idea that the song is a reminder for the parents to teach their children to love one another. The song "kongliang" (literally: where am I supposed to live?) is a constant lesson for older sisters and brothers to love, care, provide and sacrifice for their younger siblings, so that the younger ones will emulate them and, in turn, treat those younger to them in the same manner. The Aos believe that younger ones must be cherished, protected and taken care of and that the younger ones must be obedient and respectful of those older to them. The older children take on the responsibility of taking care of the younger ones and thus play an important supporting role when the parents are out in the fields the whole day. If there is no love between siblings, the home

cannot be a place of harmony and contentment and, in such cases, we all become homeless. Material wealth (in this case bumper crops) become meaningless when there is no support, sharing, protection and affection among family members, resulting in disintegration of the most important unit in society

In an oral society, such stories were told to children in order to instill in their minds the importance of filial loyalty and love as a strategy for harmonious survival. This and other similar stories can therefore be considered as examples of folklore performing a significant social function.

*Source:*

As told by Mr. T. Molungnenba Ao (86 years old) of Molung village.

Place: Tuli, Mokokchung district, Nagaland

Date: 19.4.2007 ❁

## Re-interpreting the Myth of Longterok

ANUNGLA AIER

Anthropology Department, Director

Women Studies Centre, Nagaland University, Kohima

& TIATOSHI JAMIR

History Department, Nagaland University, Kohima

There are two phratries among the Ao Nagas who are identified by the dialect they speak. One phratry known as 'Mongsen-ür' speaks the Mongsen dialect and the other that speaks the Chongli dialect is known as Chongli-ür. The Ao Naga myth of origin says that their ancestors "sprang up or originated" (Poktet) from six stones at a place called Longterok which is located in Chungliyimti village, Tuensang District, presently inhabited by the Sangtam tribe. In probably one of the earliest documented descriptions of Longterok, Hutton (1986:45) during one of his visit to Longterok in November 1923 observed that only three of the stones were standing and the largest stone identified as the female stone and a small phallus near it was knocked down by a Christian evangelist and the sixth one was seen leaning on a nearby tree. In January 2008, it was found that five roughly shaped megaliths in a slightly leaning position were located about 3 m away from the female stone lying on the ground. Beneath the 'female' stone was an elongated boulder identified as the sixth stone. This myth is so central to the Ao world-view that in Ao folklore, songs, narratives and all other customary practices are traced to Longterok and

the ancestral village called Chungliyimti which was established by the first people there.

### The Myth of Longterok

Though there are some slight variations among the Mongsen and Chongli speaking groups it is popularly accepted that in the beginning three

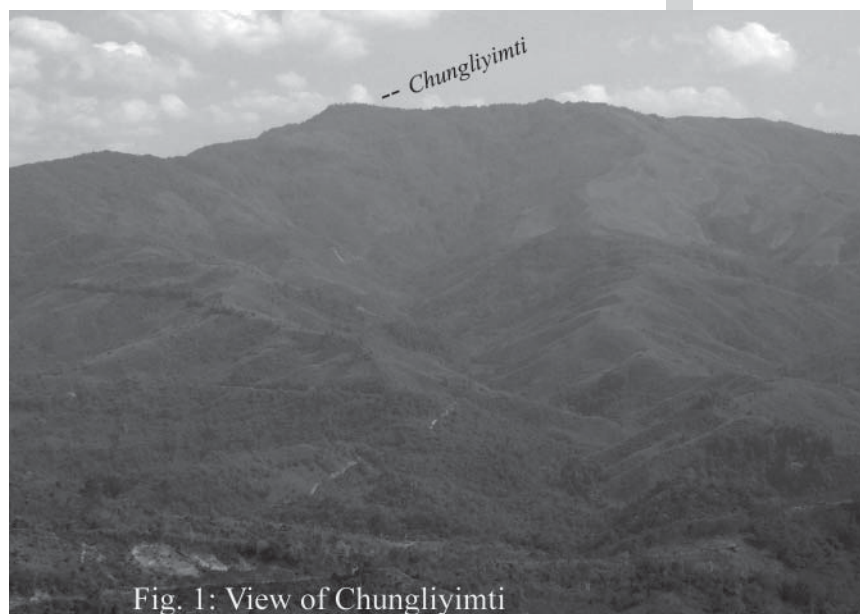


Fig. 1: View of Chungliyimti

ancestors by the name of Tongpok (Pongen clan), Longpok (Longkumer clan) and Longjakrep (Jamir clan) originated from Longterok. They emerged from the stones along with their sisters whose names were Longkupokla/ Lendina Yongmenala and Elongshe, who belonged to these major clans respectively. It is further claimed that Tongpok married Elongshe, Longpok married Longkupokla/ Lendina and Longjakrup married Yongmenzala, thus establishing the practice of clan exogamy which is followed till today. The descendants of these three couples came to be known as the Aos<sup>1</sup>. This version of the narrative associated with the myth of the magical origin of the ancestors from the stones is well documented and widely known<sup>2</sup>.



Fig.2: A partial view of *Longterok*, Chungliiyimti village

Though the myth of origin from Longterok is most deeply entrenched in the folklore of the Ao, it is also seen that that it is not confined to the Ao tribe alone. The Northern Sangtams in particular also associate Chungliiyimti as their ancestral village and the story of Longterok also occupies a very important place in the formation of the six major clan identities of the Northern Sangtams. Similarly, other neighbouring tribes like the Changs and Phoms also have a tradition that links them to Longterok and Chungliiyimti.

The Chang villages of Yangpi, Longra, Litem, and Noksen of the Lower Range also claim their origin from Oungtrok.<sup>3</sup> According to one legendary story of Yangpi village, the forefathers of Yangpi emerged from Oungtrok and founded their institution known as Tzuonger Yimkong and Sangpang Yimkong. From Oungtrok, they migrated to the west across the Dikhu to Longpuyotsu and established their village known

as Longpuyim (near Longmisa) headed by four major clan chiefs of the Longpu, Bampu, Omayo and Rangpong clan.<sup>4</sup> The Phoms also subscribe to Chungliiyimti as a place of dispersal. It is said that in the course of migration, the Phoms separated themselves from the other tribes Yimchunger and Chang at Langa village (in Yimchunger area) and from the Aos at Chungliiyimti from where the Aos went to Longkhumhong and the Phoms to Alisubu and then to 'Yungnyu village' (L. Shaupang, cited in Noklang 2002: 18). It is thus evident that the myth of Longterok and the story of Chungliiyimti as an ancestral site is a common link in the folklore and ethno-historical accounts of Naga tribes cited above.

#### Archaeological evidence from Chungliiyimti (Fig. 1)

Archaeological excavations carried out for three seasons at Chungliiyimti appear to point to a settlement that was inhabited from ancient up to modern times. This observation is borne out by the evidence where cultural artefacts, both early and modern were retrieved from Locality-1 and 2 from different cultural layers. But the lack of convincing evidence of a sterile layer at both Localities suggests continuous settlement without any break. Traces of charcoal and ash at different soil layers (5) to (7) are also indicative of periodic burning of houses which conform to the oral historical sources on frequent village raids and military operations.

Archaeological excavation brought to light seven house plans out of which House 1 was reconstructed to its approximate size. Since all the evidence come from the same bedrock level and layer, it is uncertain whether these structures fall within the same complex or different cultural periods. Although a taxing and expensive affair, along with the cultural materials from a stratified context, comparison of radiocarbon dates from each of these individual houses will help determine the temporality of the residential structures. All the houses excavated were seen to face east with three distinct plans having interior divisions indicating the typical traditional house plan of the Aos, Changs, Phoms and Sangtams. As observed by J. P. Mills (1926), in the Ao tradition of house architecture, it is likely that houses with a semi-circular apse/ plan may denote individuals ascribed with high status. If this holds true for Chungliiyimti, it would mean that variation in house plans and building adornments were principally based on social status.<sup>5</sup>

The tool assemblage from a stratified context (Tr-2/Locality-3) is predominantly lithic with iron sparingly used. From the evidence of a

few unfinished stone celts (both sandstone and phyllite), it would appear that the technique of tool grinding was known to the early inhabitants of Chungliyimti. Previous excavation and the present work have also brought to light evidence of stone celts made chiefly from spillite (a type of igneous rock) where its occurrences are reported from the Naga Ophiolite geological belt bordering Myanmar.

Few extraneous materials collected from the surface as well as from the excavation such as the buff-coloured wheel-made pottery made from kaolin clay typified as 'Ambari ware',<sup>6</sup> beads made from glass, tile, jade, agate, amethyst, carnelian and Poshan, spillite celts and iron tools seem to indicate inter-regional exchange network (Jamir & Vasa 2008: 203). Reported finds of the much valued Chabili from the site also suggests the existence of a rudimentary form of currency in circulation during intra-regional trade with neighbouring villages. Significantly, the use of Chabili among the Aos is well documented by Mills (1926), Goswami (1939) and Bose (1991, 2006), the use of which still exists in the social memory of the present population.

Besides the wheel-made variety, trading in hand-made pottery is further known by the presence of a few uncommon pottery types such as the perforated ware,<sup>7</sup> the 'wash' type, and the appliqué and punctated types. However, until further chemical studies are done on the ceramic mineral composition using principal techniques like X-ray diffraction, atomic absorption spectrometry (AAS) and X-ray fluorescence (XRF), a conclusive picture of trading pattern is far from complete. As for the site chronology, out of the six charcoal samples which are under laboratory process at the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow, only one sample is presently analysed, assigning a date of 980-1061 A.D.<sup>8</sup>

### Reinterpretation of the myth of Longterok

The narration of Ao tradition typically follows "having originated at Longterok." Consequently, the term 'poktet' (origin) is interpreted in a literal manner and for generations the Aos claimed that they originated from these stones. Nevertheless, following the concept of myth as a symbolic representation of the past, a reinterpretation of the term 'origin/poktet' as given in the myth of Longterok needs to be subjected to a logical analysis.

Another Ao tradition says that after living in Chungliyimti for many generations, they crossed the river Tzüla<sup>9</sup> by making a cane suspension bridge over it.<sup>10</sup> This is further validated by the following statement: "In the

oral tradition of Chungliyimti and the Sangtam tribe, it is said that the six stones were erected by the ancestors in memory of the six clans who migrated from this village."<sup>11</sup> As Imchen (1990: 35) points out, 'the oral narratives of the Ao Mongsen group say that in the village of Chungliyimti, there were six ancestral grand fathers—Chongli ancestors: Tongpok, Longpok, and Longjkrüp and the Mongsen ancestors Tsüngremchang, Longchenti, and Longmetang. From these ancestors were descended the Ao tribe.'<sup>12</sup> Imchen further mentions that in Chungliyimti village were six Unger and six Tir, each set (one Unger and one Tir)<sup>13</sup> representing one of the six clans. Thereby, in the village of Chungliyimti was raised the Longterok (six stones) in memory of them.<sup>14</sup> Results of the excavation from Longterok reveal numerous post-holes near Longterok (Fig. 3) together with



Fig.3: Evidence of post holes from Longterok

used river pebbles, grinding stones and basket-impressed and vertical-band pottery designs (Fig. 4). That this area too formed an extension of a house structure preceding the megalith erection is amply verified by the archaeological evidence. Such evidences may also further our understanding of the folklore of Longterok.

The Ao migration story goes on to say that after they crossed to the other side of the river Tsüla, the suspension bridge was cut down to prevent others from crossing over. So those remaining members on the other side of the river had to take a detour which in Ao dialect is "Mürra." This explanation of the narrative is normally cited to validate why the Aos call the tribes living across the Tzüla as Mürir, meaning "those who went taking a detour". Conversely, the Aos were given the name "Ao-er" which means "those who went". This narrative is found among the Aos and also among those tribes living across the river Tzüla. The origin

myth of Longterok which says that the Aos emerged from these stones, when viewed in association with this narrative about the origin of the name 'Ao', the myth of originating from the stones makes a symbolic sense as the distinct identity of the Aos appears to have emerged only in association with the event of crossing the river Tzüla. The myth of origin (poktetba) from Longterok when considered from the standpoint of a separate Ao identity formation distinct from those they had left behind, may be re-interpreted as symbolizing their new identity as 'Ao' and not necessarily in its literal sense. Seen from this vantage, the myth of Longterok



Fig.4: Pottery design of vertical, checkered and basket impressed types from Longterok area.

may also be considered as a metaphor for representing past events. The mythical elements of the narrative lend a quality of sacredness to the story, thereby reinforcing and augmenting the collective identity of all those who subscribe to it and locate their ancestry in this myth of origin (Aier 2008: 172).

With reference to these stories, one may question the apparent linkage between the myth of Longterok and the archaeological record of Chungliyimti. Since folk knowledge is 'mouthed' down from generation to generation through centuries, the inaccuracies in oral literature are obvious as they are dependent on human memory alone. One cannot, however, ignore the importance of this form of folk knowledge. Put into an integrative context, a meaningful dialogue with the past can be established. What the archaeology of Chungliyimti can lend to this myth is the antiquity of the oral tradition of Chungliyimti, thus providing a context to the

origin myth of Longterok. The archaeological evidence like the settlement pattern, house plans, prominent features in the landscape that corresponds to legendary stories, numerous potsherds both hand-made and wheel-made and the tools used, lend some insight into the socio-cultural, technological and economic life of the people who once lived around the site. The debate on this is on-going, but what the oral tradition and archaeology about Longterok have proven with a certain degree of finality is that Longterok is the corner-stone of the Origin Myth of the Aos. Further, legends of migration associated with Longterok and Chungliyimti woven around real historical events are preserved in the collective memory of the people through their oral tradition, which has been the repository of the people's social and cultural philosophy from their hoary past.

### References

- Aier, A. *A Study on Naga Oral Narratives, Origin Myths and Early Settlement*. Unpublished Project Report: Anthropological Society of Nagaland, 2008.
- Ao Temsula *The Ao Naga Oral tradition*, Baroda: Bhasha Publications, 1999.
- Bose, S.K. "Trade and Currency of the Medieval Nagas", *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, Vol. LIII, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Ao Nagas and their Medium of Exchange", in *Society and Economy in North-East India Vol. 2*, Fozail Ahmad Qadri (ed.). New Delhi: Regency Publications
- Gazin-Schwartz, A & Cornelius Holtorf. "As Long as Ever I've Known It...: On folklore and archaeology", in *Archaeology and Folklore*, Amy Gazin-Schwartz & Cornelius Holtorf (eds.). London and New York: Routledge, 1999, pp.3-25.
- Goswami, S.C. "Jābilee or the Naga Coin", *Journal of Assam Research Society*, Vol.VII, 1939.
- Hutton, J. H. *Diaries of Two Tours in the Unadministered Area East of Naga Hills*. Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986.
- Imchen, P. *Ao Mongsen Lipok*. Mokokchung: Mongsen Mongdang, 1990.
- Jamir, N. Talitemjen & A. Lanunungsang. *Ao Naga Society and Culture*. Lumami: Nagaland University Tribal Research Centre, 2005.
- Jamir, T & Ditamülü Vasa. *An Archaeological Investigation at Chungliyimti, Tuensang District*. Unpublished Project Report: Anthropological Society of Nagaland, 2008.

Longchar, Purtongzük. *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas*. Dimapur: Published by the author, 2002.

Mills J.P. *The Ao Nagas*. London: Mac Millan & Co. Ltd., 1926.

Noklang, C. Amop. *Phom Day: A Basis for Peace in Nagaland*. Mokokchung: Tribal Development & Communication Centre, 2002.

Noksang, M.P. "Declaration of Kongsang Nomenclature Programme: A Brief History of Yangpi (Kongsang) Village", in *Yangpi Village (Research Works 1962-1999)*. Yangpi Citizen Union, 1999, pp. 56-57.

Sharma, T.C. "Excavation at Ambari, Guwahati: Its Problems and Prospects", in *Proceedings of North East India History Association, 10th Session*, 1989. pp. 21-24.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Imkongakum-76 yrs; Temjenzungba-82 yrs Tatar, Jongpongwati-79 yrs, Village Council Chairman, Ungma village, Oct 2007.

<sup>2</sup> T. Ao pp. pp79; Jamir and Lanunungsang ,pp.24; Talitemjen Jamir pp.1

<sup>3</sup> Information gathered from Mr. Among Chang, age-56 yrs; Deputy Director, Dept. of Art & Culture, based on his field notes collected during his visit from 1st -3rd July, 1980 in the villages listed above

<sup>4</sup> Declaration of Kongsang Nomenclature Programme titled "A Brief Story of Yangpi (Kongsang) Village" read by Mr. M. P. Nokshang; Compiled and Edited by Y. Among, Secretary, Yangpi Citizen Union, 18th May, 1999 published in *Yangpi Village (Research Works 1962-1999)*, pp. 56-57

<sup>5</sup> Due to the marked elevation around the residential area thus resulting in greater slope wash, the claim made on wealth differentiation in the absence

of convincing associated cultural materials was unattainable

<sup>6</sup> Reported from the early historic site of Ambari dated to 7th - 8th Cent. A.D, the 'Ambari ware' is found in association with the Chinese celadon ware (Sharma 1989:23).

<sup>7</sup> The widespread occurrence of handmade pottery bearing perforation and appliqués among the Konyak Nagas has been well documented by Ditamülü Vasa

<sup>8</sup> Palaeobotanical studies on some of the ash and soil sediments from the large oval pits and cultural layers are also currently undertaken by Dr. Anil Pokharia from the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow

<sup>9</sup> Also commonly known to others as Dikhu, the river lies in the boundary of the present Ao and Sangtam territory

<sup>10</sup> There are some opinions among the Aos that the crossing of river by making a suspension bridge may be with reference to Chindwin or Irrawady. If this be the case, the validity of this tradition which clearly mentions the name of the river as Tzūla is questionable. Hotingse of Chungliyimti village also differs on this point saying that the oral narratives clearly points to the details of where the bridge stood and claims further that he can precisely show the place where the great crossing took place.

<sup>11</sup> Excerpt of interview with Hotingse Sangtam, Chungliyimti village, Feb 2008

<sup>12</sup> Translation of the original text written in vernacular. Interview with Mr. Hotingse Sangtam, Head G.B of present Chungliyimti village in February 2008, and with the village elders of Mopunchuket village in Octob 2007 also revealed the same narrative.

<sup>13</sup> Unger refers to the Titular head of the council of elders and Tir refers to the elders who constitute the council known as Putu Menden in the traditional structure of Ao polity.

<sup>14</sup> See also Longchar,2002, pp59-60, *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas* where he too refers to the narrative. ❀



## INDIAN FOLKLORE RESEARCH JOURNAL

Volume 5 Number 8

### ARTICLES

The Girl in the Rock—A Telangana Tale and Vasistha's Retelling  
— KATIKANENI VIMALA, DAVID SHULMAN

Make That Sesame on Rice, Please! Appetites of the Dead in Hinduism  
—DAVID M KNIPE

The Rajasthani Epic of Pābūjī: A Preliminary Ethnopoetic Analysis  
—HEDA JASON

Children's oral literature and modern mass media in India with special reference to gradual transformation in West Bengal —LOPAMUDRA MAITRA

American Public Folklore - History, Issues, Challenges —ROBERT BARON

Collective Memory and Reconstruction of Ho History —Asoka Kumar Sen

Serpent God Worship Ritual in Kerala —SURESH KUMAR CHATTOTHAYIL

# The origin of Tiger, Spirit and Humankind: A Mao Naga Myth

DR. X.P. MAO  
Department of Philosophy,  
NEHU, Shillong-22

According to this Mao-Naga myth, Tiger, Spirit and Humankind(man) were three brothers who came into existence through the miraculous union between the already existing first woman and the clouds of the sky. How the first human being, that is, the woman came into existence is not explained but her existence is taken for granted. This is perhaps because the earth is already there and its origin cannot be fully explained. The woman represents the reproductive power of nature. The first woman's name was called Dziilimosiuro which approximately means the 'purest water' or 'crystal clear water'. One day, she was resting under a tree with her legs wide apart, at a place called Makhriifii or Makhel which is supposed to be the last halting place on the migration route of the Tengimie (Angami, Chakhesung, Mao and Poumei) and their closely allied Naga tribes. This place is in the present Mao Naga country. Suddenly a cluster of clouds came over her and some drops of liquid came down over her private part and she became pregnant. Subsequently she gave birth to a Tiger, Spirit and Man or human being.

By the time the three children became adults, their mother was quite old and sick. So the three brothers took turns to look after their ailing mother. When the Tiger looked after her, the mother used to become sicker with anxiety and her worry seemed to be intensified. The reason for this was that the Tiger used to touch the mother's body to identify the fleshy, good muscles which he could eat after her death. During the turn of the Spirit, the mother used to become more feverish and develop acute headaches. The mother felt at ease and relaxed only when the Man looked after her because he tended his mother with great care and concern.

Before their mother's death, there was a dispute among the three brothers as to who should inherit her land. When the quarrels became more frequent and threatened to result in violence, the mother decided that something had to be done in order to settle the dispute. So she devised a contest among them. For this purpose, she created a ball-like grass at a distance and said that the three brothers were to race for it. And the one who touched the ball-like grass first would inherit the mothers'

land. The Man being the youngest and a good fellow, his mother instructed him to make a bow and arrow to shoot at the grass target as she knew that he could not compete with the powers of the Tiger and Spirit in such a race. The Man following his mother's instruction succeeded in touching the grass target first by firing the arrow and finally inherited his mother's land. The Tiger in disgust went to the thick jungles and the Spirit disappeared in the far south (Kashiipii). Thus the three brothers parted ways forever. Incidentally, this myth is also prevalent among the neighbouring Angami and Chakesang Nagas.

Myth-making is one of the primary and basic functions of human beings. Mythology reflects the socio-economic, cultural and historical conditions of the community or society. Creation of myth is creation of meaning, and there can be many levels of meanings. Obviously there cannot be any competition between science and mythology. James Frazer argues that human beings think alike. Analysis of myths, folklores, folktales etc. reveals the universal structure of human being. Even I. Kant argues that basic forms of human thought are similar. The above myth represents evolution rather than the creation of Adam & Eve of Judao-Christian-Islamic world-view.

Tiger and Man representing the animal kingdom and Spirit representing the supernatural realm are shown as all related, since they are born of a common mother. Participating in the competition is quite natural as they are brothers. In attempting to decipher the meaning of the myth, the question of truth and falsity does not arise. The tiger wanting to eat the mother after her death is perhaps the reflection of the poverty-ridden society at that time. The woman represents reproductive energy. Her name signifying pure water, being fertilized by a cluster of clouds is perhaps a metaphor of the union between the sky God father and the receptive earth mother from which all things have originated. This is perhaps like the Chinese Yin & Yan principles of female and male or like the Indian principles of Purusha and Prakriti.

A variant of this myth is also prevalent in Ao-Naga folklore. ✽

# Oral Tradition in contemporary conflict resolution: A Naga perspective

LANUSASHI LONGKUMER  
Reader, History Department,  
NU, Lumami, Mokokchung

In the ancient pre-literate world of tribal societies, oral tradition played the dominant role as the chronicles of history, source of knowledge and wisdom which guided and influenced the people in all aspects of their lives. Naga culture and oral history flourished without any written script of their own<sup>1</sup>. Yet they had an effective medium of communication and records that have been preserved for many centuries through the oral tradition based on deep-rooted and time-tested foundations. Any oral narrative of traditional history, origin and migration of the people (tribe, clan, individual, etc.), formation of the village, events of war, peace, festivals and so on are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another through songs, poetry, ballads, prayers, sayings, stories and tales or as public oration when the situation demands. Through such means youngsters were trained not only to learn but to master them.

This tradition is so vital for the Nagas that it goes much beyond their culture. Indeed, the very history of the Naga people, their religion and entire social life is shaped by their oral tradition. In the socio-cultural and political life of the Nagas, oral narration was, and still is, a powerful weapon to prove or disprove, substantiate and support any dispute/claims or for resolving any dispute or conflict. It is instrumental in peace negotiation or to conduct truce in times of war or confrontation.

Pledges and promises made between two conflicting parties ensuing after peaceful negotiations were highly respected and honoured. Any violation of such pledges was considered not only as an insult and offence but cowardly, invoking wrath for vengeance and invariably resulting in more conflict.

Even the names of persons are important in the oral tradition because they are commemorative not only of persons of exceptional courage and bravery but also to distinct clans which are eventually identified as owners of specific land holdings. These circumstances and evidences help substantiate legitimate claims of ownership in disputes regarding land and boundaries. After the presentation of evidence in such cases, there is a last and final act of swearing or oath-taking which involves eating a morsel of earth

invoking divine intervention for a just solution. Generally it is a priest who stipulates the waiting period for receiving God's judgment because it is believed that the guilty oath-taker will suffer a great misfortune, either instantaneous death, loss of wealth or a calamity in the family or that of a relative.

Oral tradition has thus played a pivotal role not only in intra-village conflict situations but also for maintaining cordial relations among the different Naga tribes and with the neighbouring communities in the North East region of India. For instance, a dispute over 'Tsula' river water between Yachem village of Phom tribe and Changtongya village of Ao tribe started in 1919 leading to serious confrontation including armed conflict. There were several unsuccessful attempts by the British administration to resolve the problem. Ultimately, a lasting solution was arrived at in 1955 only when both the conflicting parties came to an understanding to resolve their differences through the traditional methods of oath-taking and honouring the words of resolution.

With the neighboring Manipuris, the relations of the Nagas were anything but friendly, often interrupted by raids and hostilities from both sides. But such temporary disruption of neighbourly relations was always restored through negotiations and dialogue. There is a legend in the oral tradition about the younger brother of a Tangkhul Naga chief of Hundung village who became the Raja of Manipur. It is no wonder therefore that the coronation of the Raja of Manipur is never complete without the presence and blessing of the Nagas<sup>2</sup>.

Another example of the oral tradition documenting trans-border friendship with other tribes is regarding the Ahoms of neighbouring Assam. The Nagas' contact with the Ahoms



Hope  
Acrylic on Handwoven Nettle Fibre  
by Iris Yingzen

began as early as the 13th century A.D.<sup>3</sup>. The initial contacts were marred by strong feelings of hostility on both sides. For quite sometime the hostilities continued, but these skirmishes never resulted in the subjugation of either one by the other. Many historians agree that the Ahom-Naga relationship was a blend of hostility and friendliness. Geographical proximity and economic exigencies has made them inevitably dependent on each other. Besides, there were other factors. In times of trouble in the Ahom kingdom, the Ahoms and their rulers fell back on

the friendly Nagas for help. For instance, an Ahom king named Godadhor once fled his kingdom and took shelter in the Naga territory<sup>4</sup>. The fugitive prince Godapani and his two sons were hidden in the Naga hills (1685). King Godadhor Singho married Watlong, daughter of a Konyak Naga chief (Wakching). Another Naga damsel Sentichila also got married to an Ahom king. Such alliances further strengthened the relationship between the Nagas and the Ahoms. Another remarkable instance according to the oral tradition is that of a Naga boy who was raised by an Ahom king (Borahi) as his own son and was later made the Barphukan (Viceroy) of Guwahati<sup>5</sup>.

Even after the advent of British colonial rule, the people in the plains of Assam continued to pay 'tax' to 23 Naga villages in the form of annual customary tribute for using their land. At the same time, Nagas were completely dependent on Assam

for salt and other economic exigencies. Though there were occasional conflicts, the Naga-Ahom relationship remained generally cordial with great respect for each other. Their relationship was guided by high values enshrined in the oral tradition.

The advent of colonial rule brought along new culture, policy and regulations, almost completely replacing the existing systems. Foremost, in furtherance of their economic interests and administrative convenience, the different Naga tribes and their land were placed under the administrative cloak of the existing kingdoms such as Assam and Manipur. Subsequently, vast tracts of Naga territories were transferred to Assam in 1901, 1903, 1923, etc.<sup>6</sup>, for purposes of opening tea gardens and maintaining forests as

buffer zones between Assam and Naga territory. By mid-1800s, colonial planters from outside the region were settled in the foothills. They were ignorant of the historical facts and the good traditional relationship that existed between the Nagas and Ahoms.

The post-colonial era in the Naga civilization saw a more perplexing situation under the new administrative arrangements of India and Myanmar. The Nagas were left in a precarious position virtually under the shadow of military rule from both India and Myanmar. Not only did the rights and privileges of the Nagas become uncertain, but their cultural and oral traditions were seriously altered and undermined by new Acts and laws imposed upon them. For instance, in the event of any dispute between persons/parties, traditionally, it was settled in the village court of law but the introduction of Indian Penal Code under the new legal system it gave opportunities to the losing parties to seek the legal court of justice. Besides substantial financial implications and manipulation by influential people, natural justice based on tradition and custom was denied. Not only that, such practices greatly undermined traditional forms of village government creating confusion and disunity among the people.

Today, the conflict situation at the border is exacerbated by the arrival of new settlers (migrants) from mainland India and Bangladesh whose sole intention is to occupy space disregarding traditional historical ownership. This situation is fueled by politicians with selfish interests who try to gain political mileage out of the conflict situation.

The on-going Indo-Naga political conflict can be attributed to the failure of modern diplomacy. After a continued conflict with India on one hand, and Myanmar on the other for more than half a century the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the government of India entered into a ceasefire agreement and are presently engaged in political dialogue for the past 11 years. Even after 65 rounds of talks and negotiations within the modern democratic framework, no substantial headway acceptable to both parties has been arrived at.

The unsettled political issues between the Nagas and Government of India not only hamper the development of the region but is also contributing to the instability of the entire North East region of India. The fact remains that all the economic packages and developmental programs have failed to resolve the long-standing conflicts. Looking at the present predicament and the manner in which it is dealt with, modern



Hope  
Acrylic on Handwoven Nettle Fibre  
by Iris Yingzen

diplomacies, accords, and agreements do not seem to offer any viable solution. What is needed is a process of confidence-building as a prelude to any conflict resolution. The oral tradition with its time-tested distinct values of transparency, honesty and truth may serve as an alternative to resolve the vexing problems of the North-East if resorted to with a belief in its efficacy of delivering justice. Adherence to commitments given through words in the pre-literate days seems to have worked better than sophisticated written undertakings which have failed to resolve conflicts resulting in senseless bloodshed and animosity. In all these maneuvers what seems to be lacking is spirit of commitment for just solutions to problems. Perhaps, present-day mediators have a lot to learn from the oral tradition - especially the human aspects of political negotiations in order that all men may live in peace with each other. The essence of any tradition is adaptable to our modern contexts and is therefore still relevant.

### References

- Ao, Temsula. *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. Baroda: Bhasha Research and Publication Centre.
- Horam, M., *Social and Cultural Life of Nagas*. New Delhi: Low price Publications, 1992.
- Longkumer, Lanusashi, The Geopolitical dimensions of Naga nationalism and integration, Seminar on integration of Naga homeland, Zonal Council Hall, Kohima, October 14-15, 2004.
- Mills, J.P., *The Ao Nagas*. London: 1973.
- Reid, Robert, *History of Frontier Areas Bordering Assam*. Delhi: 1942.
- Sanyu Visier, *A History of Nagas and Nagaland (Dynamics of oral tradition in village formation)*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1996.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Nagas are a distinct group of indigenous peoples, a Tibeto-Burman speaking mongoloid stock. The Nagas numbering over 3.5 million people inhabit a vast contiguous tract of about 120000 sq km. it occupy a strategic meeting point of China, India and Myanmar approximately between 24° to 28° N latitude and 93° to 97° E longitude, thereby making the region geopolitically a buffer region between the South and South East Asia. Under the present arrangements carried out by the British, about 40 percent of the Naga inhabited area falls under Burma (Myanmar) and the rest 60 percent falls within India. Further arbitrary division of the Naga people and land into the state of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur was carried out in post independence

India by the Government of India. The Naga region today is considered as one of the most conflict prone region by the State of India and Myanmar for the history of Naga resistance and political movement for independence. Presently, the Naga insurgents and the government of India are engaged in ceasefire and political negotiations for the past 11 years.

<sup>2</sup> Shimray, R.R; *Origin and culture of Nagas*, Somsok Publishers, New Delhi-21, 1986, p.33.

<sup>3</sup> Ao, M.Alemchiba; *A brief historical account of Nagaland*, Naga Institute of culture, Kohima, 1970, p.31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.33

<sup>6</sup> A brief historical sequence of Nagaland-Assam border affairs, compiled by Committee of Border affairs of Nagaland, Government of Nagaland, Kohima, p.4. ❁



Harvest Dance  
Acrylic on Handwoven Nettle Fibre  
by Iris Yingzen



Harvest Dance  
Acrylic on Handwoven Nettle Fibre  
by Iris Yingzen

# Remembered Naga Heroes/ Heroines of the Legendary Khezhaheno Village of Nagaland

DR LUCY ZEHOL

Department of Anthropology,  
North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya

When speaking of remembered heroes from the past, we generally find that the images of warriors as well as the great head-hunters come to the minds of the people in this legendary Naga village. Leadership was often attained when a person was able to show his courage and prowess by counting the heads taken. Some people including the colonialist writers considered the Naga head hunters as 'uncivilized' or extremely 'barbarous', creating an image of horror. Head hunting was not senseless killing of the enemy but a tradition connected with the tribal principles of heroism, justice, honour, pride, and recognition, and the victim's head was a trophy of honour and bravery. Among all Naga groups, the average of female beauty was considered extremely low, even being described as 'exceptionally ugly' by the colonists in their monographs. However, for the Nagas their women described as heroines, were not only known for their external physical beauty but for their special spiritual powers as well. Special mention may be made of the role women played as *demi* (negotiator) between warring villages. Profiles of some heroes/heroines from the remembered past of the village of Khezhaheno are presented here:

**Tiyilhou:** A champion in taking the heads of his enemies, Tiyilhou's bravery echoed in and around the village. Even during broad day light, he would dare to venture into enemy turf and return back with the victims' heads as a trophy. In memory of this great warrior, a monolith was erected and to this day the monolith proudly stands.

**Azo:** Standing tall at a height of uncharacteristic eight feet, Azo was referred to as a man with gigantic stature. He was so tall that he could even place his elbow on the village gate and would often blow his horn. He is believed to have gone riding on a huge buffalo for collecting tax. People paid tax with a currency called *sheh*. Villagers revered and respected Azo. He left people in awe. Even neighboring villagers paid tribute to him in cash or kind for gaining his favour. His eminent stature in village matters automatically made him a very capable leader.



Azo was also a warrior. He is referred to as one of the greatest warriors that ever lived. He was fearless. He wrestled bears and tigers with bare hands and was practically invincible. People believed that the secret of his strength was derived from the large amount of food he consumed. He would eat three times a day. Each meal comprised of a piglet, a huge rooster and a kilogram of rice. He owned the area of Ezako, with paddy fields and woodlands measuring approximately six acres. He died of poisoning by enemies.

A formidable terror to his foes, Tiyilhou dared venture into his enemies' turf even in broad day light and returned with heads as trophy.



Standing tall at eight feet height, Azo place his elbows on the village gate and blew his horn.



Mr. Vilalhou Noudi

**Kajüso:** Kajüso and a companion were great warriors (*yikrü*) after Tiyilhou and Azo. There was an occasion when the two barged into the

Azo moved around on the back of a huge buffalo to collect taxes.



Mr. Vilalhou Noudi

neighboring enemy's village and returned with seven baskets of slain heads. Together they revenged the Mao warriors who had destroyed their paddy fields and killed men and women of different ages in their absence. To confuse his enemies, it is said that he would move out of an enemy village by walking with his toes pointing towards the enemy village.

**Kolade:** Kolade was known for his prowess with the spear. A great son of the soil, he is said to have defeated the greatest Mao warriors with just a spear. Upon returning to his village with the prized victim's head, he was accorded great honour and accolades.

**Solhou Sova:** Sova was brave and unpredictable. His popularity spread like wild fire in and around the village. Even neighbouring villages were frightened of him. It was believed that he possessed a special ability to remain out of sight even in close proximity and he could kill and collect the victim's head from this proximity. He was so skilful in his moves that they even said, 'neither an eagle nor a tiger could hide but Sova would'. Whenever news of his arrival reached enemy villages, they would immediately station their best warriors at strategic points around the village. There was a time when he was caught unaware by his enemies but he managed to survive by pretending to be dead.

On another occasion, he was overpowered by Mao warriors. To ensure that he was dead, they pierced a spear through his mouth. But he suddenly jumped up and made his escape by climbing the tallest tree. It is said that he would treat his wounds with the burnt feathers of a huge rooster that he had feasted on. Sova was believed to be invincible and people had full faith that he could escape death. Unfortunately, one day while returning from the field, he was ambushed and killed by his enemies.

**Pfhüza:** Known for his sportsmanship, Pfhüza was another great warrior. He defeated the wrestlers of neighboring villages.

**Pirha:** He was considered a great warrior. On one occasion, enemies came and attacked the village. The villagers in desperation requested him to save the village. Unfortunately, his mother had died that day and he asked the villagers to wait till he buried his mother. After he buried her, he rushed to the enemy camp with a rice pestle. Due to his prowess, the enemies were compelled to retreat from Khezshakeno.

#### Beautiful and outstanding women

**Kovie-o:** Kovie-o radiated the kind of beauty that was discussed from one generation to the other. She was so beautiful that people



Khachülo Zehol

remembered and talked about her splendour for seven generations.

**Akule D/o Ravo:** She was gorgeous and said that while visiting Kohima, the rich man's son asked for her hand in marriage.

**Dze-o:** A special woman, Dze-o, was believed to be close to the heart of the creator. She was believed to possess some supernatural power in foretelling.

**Tarünie-o:** Tarünie-o was a foreteller. She foretold the future of the village. Prior to her death, she told the villagers, that, in case of drought, they should come to her grave and sing:

*"Tarü dzedze  
Ishe no no, Eshé no no  
Solhuo le medzüsa pha bou"*

Belief was that, when the villagers came and sang the song, the heavens would open wide and pour down rain.

**Kevechü-o, Zonie-o and Zode-o:**

Women were born with special powers that were not just limited to external physical appearance. Nyiepi-o, the spirit associated with wealth and riches was believed to be possessed by some fortunate women. It was believed that if a woman owned nyiepi-o, her family would be very rich and was referred to as;

*"Nou-u ki mi nyiepi-o mepfe-e chüta"*  
(Your family looks as if you own Nyiepi-o)

Very few blessed women could see nyiepi-o, the spirit. Those who claimed to have seen nyiepi-o were Kevechü-o W/o Tirilhou Pfüdzü and Zonie-o W/o Michirodzü. Zode-o W/o Chepuyie owned nyiepi-o and she was believed to have the gift of drawing milk from her thumb.

**Demi (Mediator):** Women also played a significant role as mediators called 'demi' during head hunting days. It was rare to find a villager volunteering to act as mediator between two warring villages. On such situations, women played a commendable role as negotiator and mediator. They mediated and initiated for peace between the warring villages. Besides their diplomatic role, *Demis* were also the only ones who could carry the head of a slain victim to the bereaved family of enemy villages. Their role was so important that it was tabooed for warring villages to slay or kill a *Demi* (*Demi pi-o yie kü nyü*). It was through their role that ushered in between the warring villages. Some of the *Demis* who are remembered to this day are:

**Kaponie-o :** She mediated between Khezhakeno and Mao-Maram villages.

Sova was believed to have a special ability to remain invisible to his enemies that enable him to easily kill and collect enemies' heads.



Mr. Vilalhou Noudi

**Tarünie-o :** She mediated between Khezhakeno and Poumai villages.

**She-o :** She mediated between Khezhakeno and Lanumi or Nenumi (i.e., Poumai) villages.

### Conclusion

In the wake of Christianity which has brought education and modernization in Nagaland, the people's history and tradition contained in folklore are being marginalized and almost pushed to the brink of extinction.

This collection of short narratives of exploits and accomplishment

of Naga heroes (warriors) and heroines and their legends are descriptions of the ideal Man and the ideal Woman of the Nagas in the pre-colonial era. The heroines in the narratives are idealized and they serve as an example of virtue, to be emulated. It is a matter of great pride, the

Women played a special role as negotiator and mediator. They acted as spokespersons known as 'Demi' who mediate for peace between warring village



Mr. Vilalhou Noudi

highest form of honour to be praised in songs and narratives. The most interesting thing is that the Naga cultures seem to have a balance between focus on Men and on Women that cannot be said for many other cultures. To prevent electronic

media to eclipse communities that are based on oral tradition, the new generation needs to be sensitized through the documentations of such tales and other means. This is a humble attempt towards it. ❁

# Appeasement

Temsula Ao

The poem is based on the ancient practice of some Naga tribes who captured people from conquered villages and kept them as slaves. Such persons were offered as sacrifices to gods and also as price for heads taken illegally from other villages.

It is a fateful day  
For the desperate village  
As its elders meet to select  
A fitting sacrifice at Lijaba's\* altar.

The robust and haughty elders  
Of happier times now appear  
Mean and frightened as they ponder  
On the customary appeasement.

Young field-goers avert their eyes,  
As they pass the Onger's\* house  
Lest they too catch the elders' note  
And are counted among the doomed.

Inside the house the mood is somber  
As the wizened old men huddle  
Around the central hearth and eye  
The group of slaves cowering in a corner.

It all began when life-giving rains  
Stayed away for many seasons  
And the deprived land sickened and died  
Even the birds and beasts fled  
The barren un-yielding earth.

In desperation the elders consulted  
The village arasentsur\*, who  
After deep reflection had proclaimed,  
"Lijaba is angry, and must be appeased  
With human blood, any human blood,  
Do not delay, lest his anger consume all".

So the elders herd these bonded creatures  
Into the circle of fear  
To designate one among them  
As the token of communal conciliation.

They have to select  
An unblemished specimen  
Whose blood would spill  
To assuage Lijaba's anger  
And quench his bloody thirst  
So that his benevolence once again  
Renews the ailing arid land.

After solemn deliberation  
The elders turn around,  
Their eyes converging  
On a comely maiden  
Sitting apart, stricken in face,  
Terror numbing her limbs  
As she reads her fate in their gaze.

The Onger anxious to be certain  
Once more enquires,  
"Are we sure she is a virgin?"  
The maiden hearing this, is emboldened,  
And directs a brazen stare at an elder.

Who sits with bowed head, not daring  
To meet the eyes now appealing  
For reprieve in recompense  
For that summer day  
When he had had his way.

The elders read the truth  
In the terrified eyes  
And are compelled  
To try again,  
They once more survey  
The shivering slaves  
To choose one  
Who must be clearly blameless.

The ultimate choice is a boy of ten  
 Unsullied, pure, and now damned  
 For his untarnished chastity.

All the elders save one  
 Solemnly march out  
 Leading the terror-stricken youth,  
 Dressed in ceremonial regalia

To die in the deep woods  
 As the surrogate sacrifice  
 For sins uncommitted  
 By his innocent self.

The man with the drooping head  
 Sits alone by the cooling hearth  
 While the relieved slaves slink out  
 Led by the reprieved maid  
 Salvaged by an old man's lust.

Left alone on abandoned ground,  
 The dejected elder  
 Gathers a fistful of ash  
 To deface his esteemed self  
 Enacting a private atonement  
 For a summer day's madness.

\*Lijaba: Ao-Naga 'Tsunghrem' or God, believed to be the Creator and giver of blessings to mankind.

\*Onger: The Chief of the 'Putu Menden' or Village Council among the Aos.

\*Arasentsur: Ao-Naga word for a soothsayer

This poem has been published as part of the book *Songs From The Other Life in 2007* by Grasswork Books, Pune.

## Engendering Public Space in Naga Society: Tradition and Modernity

TOSHIMENLA JAMIR  
 Lecturer, Sociology Department,  
 NU, Lumami, Mokokchung

The focus on women in tribal societies, fueled by the emergent interest on women's issues the world over, is very recent. Today, developments and change in tribal societies, particularly the change in the mode of living reflected in the change from swidden (Jhum) to settled agriculture and the subsequent shift from communal and collective ownership of land to private ownership have led to a critical examination of the idea of tribal society as an egalitarian one. Emerging studies show that of the forms of inequality in tribal society in its traditional setting, gender inequality is perceived as being most pervasive (Xaxa, 2004:354). Naga society is no exception. Like many other tribal societies, the Nagas have a patriarchal social structure that is characterized by the notion of male superiority. The unbalanced gender relations in tribal societies like the Nagas' is made possible by a rigid dichotomy between the private and the public spheres represented by home and the domestic affairs in the former, and the outside world of governance and decision-making in the latter. This paper seeks to address the issue of Naga women trying to create a domain

for themselves in the public sphere through a plethora of women's organizations within the patriarchal social setting.

### Naga women in traditional setting

Tradition and customary law play a pivotal role in determining gender equations in Naga society. Historically the public image of Naga society has been a male one, women's role being largely confined to the private sphere. While the public and political sphere remains a male domain, women are responsible for looking after the domestic affairs where they are indeed the 'mistresses' of the house. This is often interpreted as 'freedom' by many outsiders. The flip side however, is that such a social arrangement severely restricts the mobility of women in the public/political and social spheres rendering them politically incapable and even ignorant of many civic issues that concern them. A recent study shows that despite the much touted 'freedom' in the domestic sphere, when it comes to taking major decisions, the husband or father has the last say in the matter (Jamir, 2005).

The socio-cultural system that systematically excludes women from the mainstream, keeping them less able and denied equal opportunities is based on and strengthened by the values embodied in patriarchy, the traditional power structure that operates at the core of Naga society, i.e. the village. The traditional governing system of the Nagas is either chieftainship, under the Village Council or a selected council of elders. Only males have the right to chieftainship while memberships in village councils are on the basis of clan, which only males can represent. Further, a common traditional feature of most Naga tribes, i.e. the annual citizens' conference, comprises only the men folk of the village. Women are not allowed to participate in such traditional gatherings as if only the men are 'citizens', and can exercise their rights to decision-making and shaping the polity of the society. Till date, calls for 'public' meetings elicit response only from men with women generally shying away from them. It can be argued that the perception that only males constitute the 'public' is a logical outcome of the customary practices of female exclusion from traditional meetings and decision making institutions.

The dichotomy of spheres based on sex may have been justified as a necessary division of labor in the early evolution of Naga society characterized by frequent raids and wars, but the system has long outlived its relevance in the contemporary era with its focus on human rights and social justice for all. As John Stuart Mill argued in 1869 in his essay 'The Subjection of Women', the question today is whether women must be forced to follow what is perceived as their natural vocation, that is, home and family, often called the private sphere, or should be seen, in both private and public life, as the equal partners of men.

### **Creating spaces for themselves**

Traditionally in Naga society, women performed one function outside the home: as arbitrators in times of conflict. They played the role of peace-makers for instance, in the pitched battles between their village of birth and the village they married into. They would enter the battlefield holding up a long Y-shaped stick, and try to stop the war. Since they were related to both parties by blood and through marriage, neither side could harm them (Shimreicon, 2000). Today, the women's organizations in Nagaland are somehow continuing this tradition through new forms.

Almost every Naga tribe has a women's organization. Some of the prominent women's organizations are Naga Mothers Association

(NMA), Watsü Mungdang (WM), Naga Women's Union (NWU), Angami Women Organization (AWO), Sumi Totimi Hoho (STH), Naga Women Hoho (NWH). While some of these organizations like the Watsü Mungdang arose primarily as a socio-cultural organization with the backing of the Church, others were organized as a response to certain specific events. For instance, the Sumi Totimi Hoho was formed in 1983 after a rape incident when the women decided to join forces to tackle such crimes and safeguard their rights. Except for the NMA, NWU, and the NWH, which are not tribe-based organizations, the other women organizations in the state are representative of their respective tribes and operate within their community.

One of the first instances where the women bodies of Nagaland effectively influenced public policy was in the movement against liquor. Under the initiative of the Nagaland Baptist Council of Churches, the different women's organizations in the state headed by the NMA, pressurized the state Government to pass the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Bill in 1994.

However, it is in their role as mediators for peace that Naga women's organizations rose to prominence. A brief look at the Naga Mothers Association and Watsü Mungdang throws light on how women in Naga society are somehow carving out space in the predominantly male preserves of public life through their peace agenda. The NMA came into existence with the aim of upholding womanhood, to serve as a channel of communication for Naga women's interests and welfare, and to fight against social evils prevailing in the state. From its very inception, the NMA has been fighting for the cause of peace. In October 1994, NMA formed a peace team to help stabilize the deteriorating political situation as a result of the conflict between the Armed forces of India and the 'National Workers' of the Naga national movement, fighting for Naga independence. With the theme "Shed No More Blood", the NMA initiated dialogues with the 'Undergrounds' and the Indian Government to achieve this goal. Naga women have also tried to advocate the notion of neutrality in the concept of motherhood in order to facilitate their intervention in the conflict situation.

Once the Cease-fire Agreement came into force in 1997 between the Indian Government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), the NMA was in the forefront of strengthening the peace process.

The Watsü Mungdang is an Ao-Naga socio-cultural organization formed with the objective of recreating interest in traditional socio-cultural

values and to help women maintain their socio-cultural identity and promote self-reliance. Its activities were initially directed at aiding families with no male members or who had no resources. Gradually, it gravitated into issues of women's rights. Recognizing that the traditional practice of patrilineal inheritance threatens the physical security of many women, some of whom are rendered destitute upon the death of their husband or father, a long standing demand of the organization is for equitable distribution of the parental property amongst all children irrespective of sex.

From 1994 onwards, the WM appropriated a new role for itself by mediating between the people and the Army during conflict situations. When there have been indiscriminate arrests by the Armed forces, they put pressure on them to release innocent civilians. In cases of rape and sexual harassment against civilians by the army, the WM file cases against the security forces. They also carry out relief work during calamities, man-made or otherwise. Likewise, the other tribal women's organizations are actively involved in raising their voice against violence in society, particularly gender-based violence. Their main objectives now are safeguarding the rights of women, besides mediating between warring factions or groups in any conflict situation.

Naga women's organizations have over the years evolved from being mere socio-cultural organizations into political entities, capable of negotiating for space in the institutionalized political process through calls for peace and efforts to stop violence in the society. The activities of the NMA and the WM highlight the ways in which Naga women have appropriated a public role which hitherto was denied to them. However, there is a lack of proper networking among the different tribal women's organizations whose interactions and associations are often constrained by parochial tribal considerations. There is a need for better coordination and concerted effort, if Naga women are to challenge the traditional hierarchies and ideologies that kept them subordinated and out of the mainstream of governance.

#### **Concluding remarks: The way forward**

While women in Naga society have made great strides in almost every field, their traditional role has remained largely unchanged. The fact of the matter is that despite an apparent veneer of 'modernization' in the urban areas, all Nagas still derive their identity from a village which constitutes their focal reference point. Notwithstanding the differences in lifestyles of the people, all share a common heritage of customary law encompassing the critical concerns

of inheritance and laws of governance which determines the gender roles. As long as the customary laws and traditional power structure remain unaltered, it is unlikely that there would be any substantial change for women in the fabric of Naga society. It is worth noting that the cultural practice of gender marginalization and exclusion from decision making bodies have impacted negatively on their political socialization. After more than fifty years of the modern democratic electoral system, no woman has succeeded in entering the hallowed portals of the State Assembly. There were few attempts but the women lost miserably in the male-dominated elections.

While modern education and related developments are gradually awakening a feminist consciousness amongst many Naga women who are trying to work for meaningful change, the goal remains elusive in the face of patriarchal obstacles. Along with the educational, economic and other social attainments of the women, a concomitant social consciousness in the Naga males regarding gender stereotypes is a pre-requisite for gender equity. The state government can also help initiate positive changes in existing customary practices particularly with regard to traditional governance and the hereditary system. It is pertinent to point out that Article 5 of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women hold governments responsible for taking steps to modify practices based on stereotypes about women's role as well as beliefs about women's inferiority (Chatterjee, 2005:86). The inaction of the state government in this regard is a matter of grave concern today to for Naga women. Any attempt in this direction would mean undoing the very foundation on which Naga society stood for generations. How responsive would an all-male legislature be in engaging with the demands of the Naga women for distributive justice? The various organizations have made some progress but it will be awhile before patriarchal mind-sets relent.

#### *References*

- Ao, Tajen, *Naga Customary laws*. Mokokchung: 1980.
- Bhuyan, B.C., *The Tribal Women*. New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1993.
- Chatterjee, Mohini, *Women's Human Rights*. Jaipur: Aavishkar Publishers, 2005.
- Haimendorf, Von Christoph, *The Naked Nagas* London: Methuen & Co., 1939.
- Horam, M., *Naga Polity*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1975.

- Jamir, Toshimenla, *Political consciousness and participation of Naga women: A Sociological enquiry* (Ph.D Thesis), Lumami, 2005.
- Manchanda, Rita, ed., *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publication India Pvt. Ltd, 2001.
- Sharma, R.C., *Gender Profile of Nagaland*. New Delhi: UNESCO, 2001.
- Shashi, S.S., *The Tribal Women of India*. New Delhi: Swadesh Prasad Singhal, 1978.
- Shimreichon, Luithui, *Women for Peace in Nagalim*. New Delhi: NPMHR Publication, Winter 2000-2001.
- Xaxa, Virginius, *Women and Gender in the study of Tribes in India*, Indian Journal of Gender Studies, Vol.11, No.3, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2004.
- Zehol, Lucy, ed., *Women in Naga Society*. New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998. ✽

## Trophies\*

BY TEMSULA AO

\* Refers to the ancient Naga practice of chopping off the heads of slain enemies in warfare and bringing them home as trophies, for public display at a central place. Head-takers were considered to be heroes and such warriors earned the right to wear special ornaments and give Feasts of Merit to the entire village as a mark of their elevated status in society.

It is one of those crazy nights yet again;  
the air is rent by blood-curdling yells  
of the warriors come home  
with enemy heads which will hang  
from the skull-tree in the village field

The heads will sway gently  
with unseeing eyes, and hair  
matted by their own blood,  
and standing below them  
the warriors will hurl insults  
at the gory trophies and caper wildly  
shrieking with the madness of new wine

But the merry-making will only worsen  
the fatigue of warfare, overcoming  
the weary, blood-caked warriors;  
they will soon shuffle about, too weary  
to sing and dance and will collapse  
in ungainly heaps in drunken stupor,  
and at first cock-crow  
will stumble unsteadily home.

These men, the father  
of my child among them,  
are an absurd lot,  
rejoicing over some ugly  
severed heads, stupidly unmindful  
about marauding animals  
devastating standing crops  
and threatening women and children.

All they seem to ever care for  
is the glory in bringing home  
an enemy head to prove  
that they are heroes  
while the home-fires often go unlit.

I've witnessed this sorry spectacle  
countless times and shared the misery  
with other women whose husbands too  
indulge in such meaningless heroics.

I do not know what  
the other women think  
but I can no longer  
remain silent about  
this senseless pursuit  
after vain glory  
and vacuous reward.

This dawn when he staggers in  
I shall ignore him and  
pinch my sleeping child  
to make him cry  
and when he asks me why

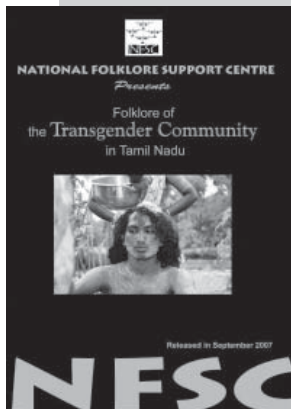
I shall confront him and say,  
'You may rejoice over your bloody trophies  
but enemy heads will never fill  
my child's empty belly,  
nor quench my need for a body  
untainted by another's blood  
to douse the heat of summer  
and ignite the cold of winter

and if you do not heed me  
I may soon return to my parents  
a widow and your son  
the orphan of an irresponsible father'

This poem has been published as part of the  
book *Songs From The Other Life* in 2007 by  
Grasswork Books, Pune.

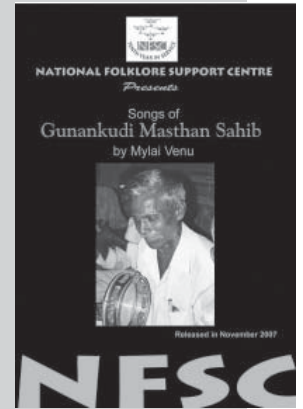
## NFSC Publications: Music Albums & Video Documentaries

### Folklore of the Transgender Community in Tamilnadu



Edited out of a year long field documentation carried out by NFSC researchers and collaborators from the transgendered community, this documentary depicts the life cycle ceremonies of transgendered persons in Tamilnadu, India. Starting with adoption and initiation in the form of milk pouring ceremony after the fortieth day of the surgery, the documentary presents the community gathering in Koovagam village, (Villupuram District, Tamilnadu) for marriage with the God Aravan and widowhood and return to the society after his beheading in Mahabharata festival. Apart from interviews with the transgendered persons, the documentary includes excerpts from traditional epic singing in praise of God Aravan.

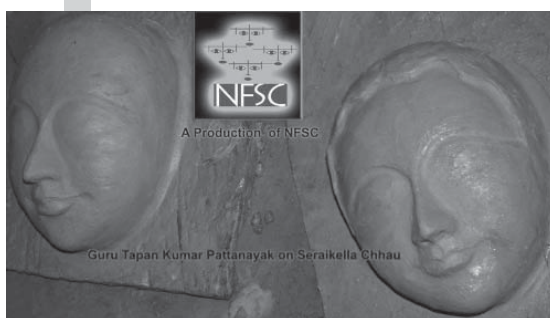
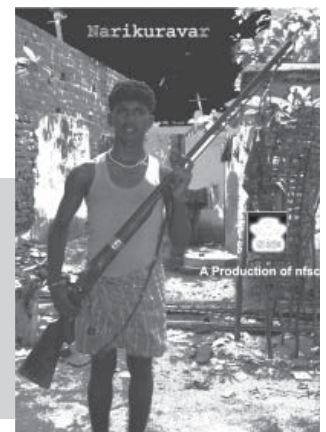
### Songs of Gunankudi Masthan Sahib



Gunankudi Masthan Sahib compositions are considered to be the source for folk songs genre known as "Gaana songs" sung in the streets of Chennai today. This folk music album is a result of a year long research and documentation project 'Intangible Cultural heritage of the Marginalised in Chennai City' carried out by NFSC with the collaboration of V.Ramakrishnan. The songs were sung by the famous exponent of the Gunankudi Masthan Sahib tradition Mylai Venu and his team.

"The following documentaries were produced for Digital Community Archives established and run by National Folklore Support Centre at six locations. They are not available for sale yet. However, those interested in viewing these may write in to us to request a copy. The number of documentaries listed here are only indicative of the collections that are being built at the locations. The catalogue of available archival materials will be soon published in our website and also in the subsequent issues of Indian Folklife."

**Narikuravar:** This is an introductory documentary film on a South Indian Gypsy community called Narikuravar, settled in Villupuram. The 20-minute film was produced by National Folklore Support Center (NFSC), Chennai, as part of the project of Narikuravar Digital Community Archive funded by TATA Education Trust. The film titled "Narikuravar" is cinematographed and edited by S.Rajasekar and scripted by Rayson K. Alex.

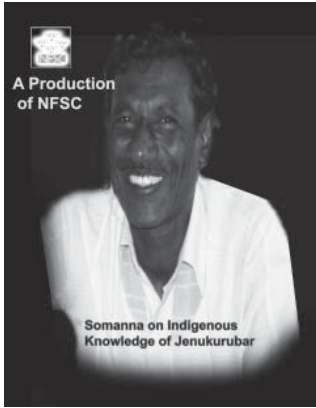


### Guru Tapan Kumar Pattanayak on Seraikella

**Chhau:** Guru Tapan Kumar Pattanayak, in this 10-minute interview film, speaks on Seraikella Chhau. The film directed by S.Rajasekar and Rayson K. Alex, introduces the techniques, history and performance clips of Chhau. The documentary is uploaded in youtube.com as two parts. Part of Seraikella Chhau digital community archive funded by the Tata Education Trust.

**Jenukurubar:** Jenukurubar are a tribal community living in Nagarhole forest, Mysore. The term "Jenu" signifies honey and "Kurubar" stands for clan. Jenukurubar are honey-gatherers. They are also elephant trainers. Like other tribal communities like Kaadukurubar, Jenukurubar are the original inhabitants of the forest-regions of the Western Ghats and other places of South India. The 35-minute video documentary gives a glimpse of the life, culture, ritualistic practises and art forms of Jenukurubar. This is an introductory documentary done as part of the Community Digital Archive Project of Jenukurubar, funded by TATA Education Trust.





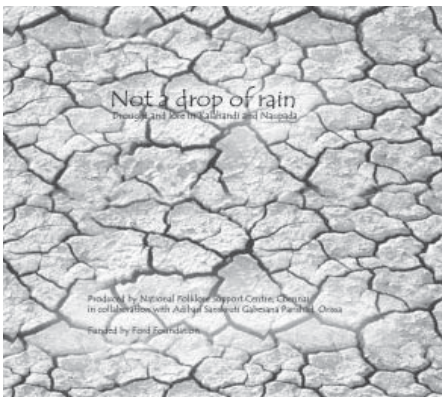
**Somanna on Indigenous Knowledge of Jenukurubar:** Somanna is a treasure-house of knowledge on the lifestyle and culture of the indigenous community called Jenukurubar. He shares the wisdom of the community during his visit to the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), Chennai, on 21st and 22nd November, 2008. This is a 20-minute documentary produced by NFSC as part of its initiative to create a Jenukuruba Digital Archive at HD Kote, Mysore, a project funded by TATA Education Trust.

### Nilaparajathu "What the River Nila Said":

Documentary video on folklore of Nila river in Kerala. It focuses on the association of communities living in the banks of river Nila and the river. It narrates their experiences and memories relating to the river. The documentary focuses on the past and present status of the river, art forms relating to the river and the landscapes mainly kurinji, mullai and neytal, according to Tamil tinai tradition, along the shores of Nila.

Script - U.A. Manoj. Cinematography - S.Rajasekar, Rayson K. Alex, U.A. Manoj, Sujil Kumar. Translation - Rayson K. Alex, Malarvizhi J. Research - Ani (Mannarkkad), U.A. Manoj (Attappady), Santhosh VS (Attappady), Vidhubala (Attappady), Ummer (Tirur), Sujil Kumar (Arangottukara), Pradeep (Arangottukara).

This documentary is initiated by Rayson K. Alex and S. Rajasekar and is produced by National Folklore Support Centre, in collaboration with Vayali Folklore Group, funded by the Ford Foundation.

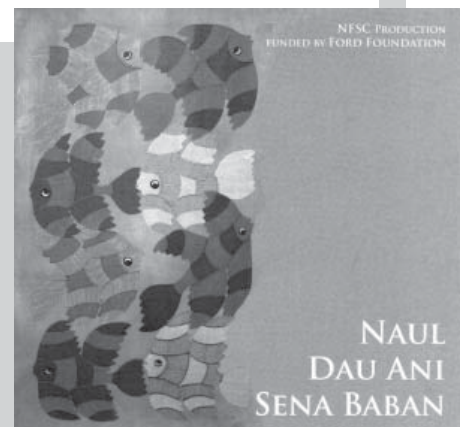


### Not a drop of rain: Drought and lore in Kalahandi and

**Naupada:** In this 30-minute video documentary Arun Bose converses with Mahendra Kumar Mishra and a tribal elder on repeated droughts and their representations in the verbal arts prevalent in the district of Kalahandi and Naupada in Orissa. Interspersed with actual documentation done in the field this video documentary presents a case for building digital community archives for fragile and poor tribal communities. This video documentary is part of the archive that is set up at the village, Sinapali, Orissa in collaboration with Adivasi Gana Parishad, funded by the Ford Foundation.

### Naul Dau Ani Sena Baban—Me, My Father and My

**Grandfather:** Documentary video on Gonds of Madhya Pradesh focuses on the narratives and memories of loss of language and culture. The 30 minute-documentary titled "Naul, Dau ani Sena Baban" (Me, My father and my grandfather) talks about various aspects of the Gond community in M.P. like their relationship with nature, occupation, education system, games, dressing, ornamentation, gender equality, Mauha preparation, dance and the problems they face with the forest acts etc. The whole video an interjunction of the days of Verier Elwin with that of the present. The documentary acts as an introduction to the culture and lifestyle of the Gonds of this age.) — Conceived and executed by Muthukumar & Aruvi in collaboration with Jatan Trust, Pipparia, funded by the Ford Foundation.



**Kalamezhuthupaattu:** A 20-minute documentary on Kalamezhuthupaattu, a traditional art form of Pulluva Community in Kerala. It brings to light the meaning of Kalam, the way it is made, the colours used in the making of it, the musical instruments that accompany it and other materials used in the art form. This documentary is initiated by Abraham N. James and Rayson K. Alex, for the Nila Community Digital Archive at Arangottukara.

Produced by National Folklore Support Centre, Chennai, in collaboration with Vayali Folklore Group, Kerala, funded by the Ford Foundation.



**Chaakkaadupaattu:** The documentary titled "Chaakkaadupaattu" reveals the importance of documenting folklore from the communities that field workers of Digital Community Archive have begun working with. Cherupurathu Chaathakkutty, a folk musician has sung a portion of Chaakkaadupaattu (song sung during death ceremony in Paraya and Pakkanaar Communities), called "Guru Vandanam." Chaakkaadupaattu is a beautiful and elaborate description of the life of Paraya Community living in Valluvanad. Chaathakkutty, a 90 year old man, has written down this song from memory in 250 pages, and has explained the way it is sung, the meaning of the song and also the musical instruments used in the performance. The 15-minute video documentary captures some beautiful shots from the banks of river Nila, from which the communities have evolved its culture. The documentary is scripted by Prameela Kallur, photographs by Sujil Kumar, voice-over by S.Sujatha and conceived by Abraham N. James and Rayson K. Alex.

### Learning from Jenukurubar:

"Jenukurubar live close to nature."

"This is an alternative ecological lifestyle capable of changing the perspectives of the modern people."

"This was an occasion to evaluate how close we live with nature."

"What are our attitudes towards nature – is something that I learned."

These are the responses of "ecoliterature"

M.A. students who visited Jenukuruba Digital Archive and settlements of Jenukurubar, as part of the requirement of their course at Madras Christian College. The group was supervised by Dr.Nirmal Selvamony, Reader in English, Madras Christian College. The camera which moved behind the students, captured their interaction with Jenukurubar, their concerns about the people, the strategies used by the students to get materials from the people, the responses of the people to strangers from the city and the changes in the perspectives of the students. The 21-minute documentary video was initiated by Rayson K. Alex, as part of the Jenukuruba Community Digital Archive project funded by Tata Education Trust.

