ORAL NARRATIVES OF AO-NAGAS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

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Nagas are one among many of the ethnic groups of the North-eastern India that geographically share the borders of four countries- China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan of Asia. They are historically and culturally different from the rest of Indians though they had strong connections established over centuries between the state of Assam and the mainland including Tripura. The physical connection is very narrow and only four percent of the region is contiguous with India where as the remaining ninety six percent of the northeast borders the other countries. They remained isolated on the hill tops and villages often engaged in warfare raids upon the territories of one another till the British besieged them in AD 1882 in the battle of Kohima.

Like any other tribals in India, the Nagas have their own rich cultural heritage preserved in the form of oral traditions and artefacts. The Nagas claim that they had recorded their history on an animal skin which unfortunately was eaten by a dog. Since then, they say that their history and traditions are being preserved in their memories and disseminated orally in the form of songs, myths, tales and other forms of expressive behaviour, their material culture. The Nagas are distinct from the rest of the Indian tribes not only in their origin, languages and appearance but also in their life style patterns. The Nagas are heterogeneous tribes and belong to Mongoloid and Indo Burmese stocks. There are as many as seventeen social groups among the Nagas which were further subdivided into several major clans. These cultural groups from the level of clan to that of a major tribe sustains their distinctiveness in different walks of their tribal lives-traditions, customs, food, religion, social organization, rituals, political and economic organization, functioning of customary law and order-and thus protect their respective identities even amidst the changing world’s scenario.
Nagaland, wherein these tribal groups inhabit is geographically situated in the hilly tracts of North-eastern India emerged as a State on December 1, 1963. Dr. Sarvepalli Radha Krishnan, the then President of India, formally inaugurated it as the 16th State of the Indian Union. Different geographical regions which were previously called after the names of the tribes were brought in the name Nagaland. It is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in North, Assam in West, Manipur in South and Burma (Myanmar) in the East. The state has now eleven districts viz. Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Phek, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto, Peren, Longleng and Kepheri. The Nagas are highly territorial in their identity formations. The seventeen Naga tribes are distributed in different geographical regions. Dimapur District is multi-ethnic settlement wherein different Naga and other tribal groups live. Thus the tribes of Nagas viz: Rongmei (Dimapur), the Angamis, Moa (Memai) and Rengma Nagas (Kohima), the Aos (Mokokchung), the Konyak (Mon), the Chakhesang and the Pochury (Phek), the Sangtam, the Yimchunger, the Khiemungam and the Chang (Tuensang) and the Lothas alias Kyong (Wokha), the Semas (Sumi) (Zunheboto), the Ziliang, the Liangmai and the Kuki (Peren), the Phom (Longleng and Kepheri) are identified with different territorial regions. The region is covered by deep valleys, gorges, winding streams, hills that form the habitat for a rich variety of flora and fauna.

The Ao-Naga is one of the major tribes in Nagaland who had four distinctive dialectic groups viz: Mongsen, Chungli, Changki and Sangpur. However the major dialects of the Ao-Naga are Mongsen and Chungli. Though Mongsen was the main and poetic mode of expression in the past the dialect Chungli had been in use for communication and conversation. It so happened because when American Missionaries came in contact with the Aos, they first stayed in Molungyimsen village where the Aos of that region spoke in Chungli dialect. Then these people picked up the Chungli dialect for communication. Thus advent of missionaries around AD 1872 shifted the spoken dialect from Mongsen to Chungli. Thus Chungli dialect is continued to use for the mode of communication. Again The Ao-Naga tribe itself is not homogenous and is constituted by six major clans which were categorically organised basing on the spoken dialect. The Chungli group incorporated the Pongen, Longkumer and Jamir clans and the Mongsen group included Imchen, Walling and Longchar clans. Nomenclature in the Naga Hills
history presents great difficulties as it is with the other places of North-eastern frontiers. Both the place names and names of the tribes and clans are exceedingly confusing throughout the older writings. The name Naga is an Assamese appellation to the people living to their east which means, the *naked*. Most of the tribe held the names given by the ‘other’ groups of people.

**Significance of the study**

Prior to the emergence of Nagaland as a state in Indian Union the Nagas had undergone a phase of politico-cultural turmoil during which they struggled hard to survive and sustain their identities among the other turbulent tribes of North-eastern region. Under the British hegemony the political and social life of the Nagas was much disturbed. It is because the Britishers frequently reshuffled the geographical boundaries of the Naga tribes in the name of political reorganisation of colonial administrative domains. They deployed literacy and spread of Christianity as paradigms politico-social integration of the tribes into their colonial regime. At the same time, they condemned Naga religion, culture, and practices, and attributed such acts to the wrath of God. Naga religious rites were forbidden since their animistic socio-religious practices and song traditions appear to be devilish to the Christianity. The Nagas felt that the expansion of Christianity erased their cultural trademarks, political, religious and social institutions and thereby affected the original form and structure of their tribal life.

These developments evoked consciousness among the Naga people who felt that their political and cultural identities are getting lost. Such apprehensions led them to come into conflict with the Britishers during the Colonial period and later with the Indian Government even after the emergence of Independent India in AD 1947. They assert that they had a long cherished history. Nagas claim that their forefathers got migrated from Mongolia in BC 2617 and after migrating across Turkistan, Tibet and Mongolia, they finally arrived in Eastern Yunan Province of China in BC 1385 From China they entered Southeast Asia and thence to their present habitat in BC 1225 Their continuity as a people inhabiting their present lands is an established historical fact. In historical records, the first mention of the Nagas as a people inhabiting their present lands was made by Claudius Ptolemy, the Greek historian and geographer in AD 150. In his records Ptolemy
mentions the Nagas as Nagaloi. They were again mentioned by Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller who spent 15 years in India during the years AD 629-645. Hiuen Tsang visited Kamrup the capital of the Varman King, Bhaskar Varman in AD 643. From Kamrup in Assam, in his accounts “Si-Yu-Ki” he writes about the Nagas saying: The east of this country is bounded by a line of hills so that there is no great city to the kingdom. The frontiers are contiguous to the barbarians of Southwest China. These tribes are in fact akin to those of the Man people in their customs. Besides these records, the Nagas are also mentioned in the Royal chronicles of the Manipur kingdom in records like Chitharol Kumbabu and Ningthourol Kumbabu (AD 663-763 and AD 906-996). They are also mentioned in the chronicles of the Ahom kings who came from upper Burma and the western Unan provinces of China and settled and ruled in Assam for 600 years beginning from the 13th century. Naga resistance against intrusions and raids from these two neighbouring kingdoms and also other kingdoms like the Burmese, Tripuris, Dimashas and the Cachar kingdoms from the 13th century to the 18th centuries are all there in recorded history. As for their encounter with the British in the 19th century and their resistance against British rule for one hundred fifteen years (1832-1947), numerous accounts are found in the British colonial records. It is said that the battles the British fought with the Naga tribes in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries far outnumber all the frontier battles fought with the Indians in the great Indian sub-continent. Even in spite of all these battles, the British were able to subjugate only thirty per cent of actual Naga territory. (The actual Naga ancestral domain would be around 120,000 sq. km). In British colonial accounts, the unconquered 70% territories of the Nagas were recorded as unadministered territories or excluded area. Even in the thirty per cent lands that the British administered, they never laid any claims to the lands they were administering. C.V.Aitchinson in Treaties, Engagements and Sanads clearly mentions that there was no written treaty or agreements have been made with any of the Naga tribes. Also following the submission of the Naga memorandum to the Simon Commission in AD 1929, where the Nagas had refused to be included in the reformed scheme of India, the British Government in recognition of their demands put the Naga Hills under excluded area in the Government of India Act of AD 1935.
These political conditions lead to the evocation of Naga identity as a social construct for incorporating all the tribes only in the early 20th century after the formation of the Naga Club in AD 1918. Even after the grant of Nagaland state by the Government of India, Naga identity still stands amorphous since their long cherished customs and traditions have been thoroughly invaded by modern political system. Historically the Nagas have always been proud of their independence and pristine lifestyle. Under Article 371-A (1) in the Constitution, special constitutional safeguards are provided to protect Naga identity and Naga way of life. The Indian Parliament cannot make any law in respect to religious and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to the Naga customary law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources. From time immemorial, the Nagas have their own democratic polity which consist of the Naga village Council, the Range (Area) council and the Tribal council designed to serve the democratic Naga way of life. These are certain characteristics clearly perceivable from the society’s folklores and narratives distinct of the Nagas which form the bases of their claim for a distinct identity. Their desire to retain those characteristics is apparent in their struggle to indigenise the modern administrative mechanism based on their respective customs and traditions.

Globalisation is another factor that awakened identity consciousness. It is a socio-economic phenomenon that transformed the entire world into a global village and merged the spatio-temporal boundaries of the universe. It stirs up awareness with regard to homogeneity versus heterogeneity. In the wake of globalisation, the Nagas felt the need to revive their tradition for the identity of their own and keep up their conventional heterogeneity amidst the homogeneity under Christian identity. The impact of globalization is most felt in the area of indigenous cultural products. The Nagas are apprehending that the artisans may modify or redesign the artefacts to keep pace with the global markets which may sometime distort or invert the traditional ideology embedded within the cultural product. In otherwords, the identities embodied in cultural products will thus be eliminated for greater marketability. Such de-identification of local cultures for global recognition would inevitably lead to a hybridization of identities in cultural artefacts. Hybridization implies the consumption of original features that results in a new
product. This inverse process of de-identification begins from the extrinsic domain of visible ethnic identifiers. But this cannot be dismissed as an isolated phenomenon because the extrinsic markers are an extension of the intrinsic identities. The loss of the visible distinctions in cultural products will eventually deplete much of the lore and history of the people so that a time will come when the product will account for writing a “de-humanized” history for the people. As already the cultures of North East India are facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization, people are scared that the globalization would eventually reduce their cultural ‘identity’ to ‘anonymity’.

The Ao-Nagas, being the major sub-tribe of the Nagas of North Eastern Hill tribes share the same ideology with regard to their identity formations. The Ao are also known as Hatigurians. Hatiguri is a place located between the Mariani and Titapar, situated about 30 Km from Tzurang river towards Assam. Most of the Ao villages have alternate names given by the Assamese people. When the Britishers entered the Ao country from the plains, Merangkong was known as Naogaon and Mopongchuket as Molodubia, and so on, Naogaon and Molodubia being the Assamese names for these villages. Once established in the Ao country, the British officers began to ask the names of villages yet further in the interior and were naturally told the Ao names. Thus the Tuesang, a big village of the Changs for years was known by its Ao name of Mojungjami "the village of wicked men". It is because the Changs were the hereditary enemies of the Aos. Most of the names of the Naga tribes were given by the others.

Such apprehension in every sphere of life currently empowers them to reassert their identity in all spheres of life.

Nature and scope of study

In the light of above discussion the present thesis entitled Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity broadly proposes to study the oral traditions, especially the oral narratives (personal and folk) told by men and women in different cultural contexts on different issues of their society to show how the community constructed their identity, their ‘self’ in their renditions through the ages. Like any other oral society, the Ao-Nagas prevail upon their lore, the verbal and non verbal expressive behaviour deposited in the mnemonics of the people which is learnt and transmitted orally through
the generations. The lore embodies the knowledge, beliefs and the institutions that guided
the people and communities to retain their identities, their ‘selves’ from erosion and
invasion despite changes in time and space. Their folk (oral) lore is a rich source for
reconstructing their histories and encompasses a wide variety of genres- folk narratives,
songs, proverbs, riddles, performing arts like music, dances, drama, painting, arts and an
extensive material culture- which establish the distinctiveness and identity among the
other tribal communities in Nagaland. Further the study brings forth the change and
continuity of Ao-Naga culture as constructed in their folklore. The thesis examines the
notion of identity as conceived by the Nagas in general and the Ao-Nagas in particular.
The study shows whether the Ao-Nagas ‘what they think of identity’ is really lost or still
stands as ‘core’ of their life-style patterns in the contemporary changing dimensions of
their worldview. The issues of related to these aspects are proposed to discuss in the light
of latest theoretical discourses on identity and methodological implications of narrative
inquiry.

The thesis brings forth the socio-religious nuisances of Ao-Naga folk life as
reflected in their ritual processes and practices in pre and post Christian times to
understand changes and continuity in their new identity formations.

The study proposes to develop Indigenous models of ritual process in tribal
societies to demonstrate how the rites performed on different ritual contexts and the
material culture associated with them would mark the identity of these communities in
the changed contexts. This research also sheds light on social organisation and politico-
economic life of the community in the pre and post Christian contexts to show structural
continuities and variations in identity formations.

Geographical area of study

The geographical distribution of the Ao region is bounded by the Tzula River;
Sangtam, Chang and Phom tribes on the East; the Lotha tribes, the Assam plains on the
west; Konyak tribe in the north and the Sema tribe in the south. The entire Ao territory is
divided into six ranges (Tsükong), each having a name comprising of several villages.
The ranges run parallel to one another and are called: the Ongpangkong, the
Langpangkong, the Asetkong, the Changkikong, the Japukong, the Tsurangkong.

The
scope of the field work is limited to the regions Longkhum village, Ungma village, Mopongchuket village, Changtongya village and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts. All these settlements are populated by Ao-Nagas wherein the other Naga tribes also share the environment.

Survey of Literature

The survey of literature is done in three broad areas. They are: (i) Folk Narrative Research and identity (ii) Status of knowledge on Ao-Naga community (iii) Field methodology and data processing.

Lacunae in previous researches:

So far the researches conducted on the Nagas in general and Ao-Naga in particular, accepted that their rich cultural heritage and identity are preserved in their oral traditions (folklore). But different genres of their folklore are not methodically collected, analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the people who had produced them. Most of the researches depended on the Administrative records, field reports of the anthropologists and other such sources which did not reveal the soul of the community-how it struggled through the ages to carve its own niche i.e., the cultural identity ever since the historical formations. Though some works focused on rituals, folknarratives and songs they are highly descriptive and interpreted more from the researcher’s viewpoint. The content of the lore is given importance rather than the cultural context of their renditions. Some works are compilation of folklore genres meant for archival purpose. The rituals are though graphically described, they are not analysed in the light of latest discourses on cultural semiotics and ritual theories. Almost all works express the fear that the literacy, Christianity and globalization are threats to their personal and community identities; and one must save their culture from erosion. They warn the younger generation that they should protect their rich heritage by preserving in audio-visual forms and print media. The research works are not suggesting measures to save the heterogeneity of community from homogeneity caused by the above three factors. The methodology used by the colonial writers was primarily based on exploration and fieldwork and secondly the methods that they used were survey methods, observation and participant observation methods with the objective of trying to show how it really was.
Therefore this literature has only description. Their writings became the sources for post-colonial writers on the Nagas. However their writings were more or less a descriptive affair or information on the Naga culture, traditions and the life of the people. So folklore of the Nagas was not explored and is not taken into consideration for the study about the Nagas. Writings were not perceived from oral tradition or from the folk perspective.

Now the survey of literature emerges the following questions: The Nagas, especially the Ao-Nagas really lost their identity. Whether literacy erased their oracy? Whether Christianity could completely wipe off the animistic thinking, ritual practices, social organization, and gender construction of Ao-Nagas? Whether Indian administration could replace native village organization, customary law and traditional economy? Could the globalization erode Ao-identities?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that:

- Nagas had a long cherished history and culture hoarded in their oral traditions. Their frequent involvement in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and displacement of their political/geographical domains by Britishers and Indian Government could not disturb the functioning of their traditional village councils. The customary law still prevails. The agricultural practices are still tribal but follow some technological advancement.

- The introduction of literacy and advent of Christianity though condemned some democratic ways with regard to spousal selections (Morung system-dormitory), the rest of the patriarchal social organisation related to the institutions of marriage, kinship, law, customs etc, are being continued with some changes coming up in the passage of time.

- Though most of the Ao-Nagas took to the Christianity, their animistic belief system still gets reflected in their symbolic ritual practices observed during several socio-religious celebration in the contemporary times.

- At the outset it appears that Ao-Nagas are losing identity because of globalisation. If the deep structures of different aspects of their folk life as reflected in their oral narratives are analysed and interpreted from the perspectives of the community, they reveal change and continuity of Ao-naga identities through the ages.

Aims and objectives

Basing on the hypotheses made above, the thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* advocates the following aims and objectives.
• To collect different genres of Ao-Naga folklore- folk narratives (mythology, folktales) proverbs, riddles folksongs, beliefs, and religion, ritual practices and personal narratives / life stories of the narrators in the field.

• To analyse the folknarratives from structuralist and poststructuralist perspective for establishing how the folknarrative typology and structures could reflect the social hierarchies in at different realms of folklife. The Proppian, Levistraussian and Derridian philosophies are being evaluated in this context.

• To show how the people in oral societies construct and sustain their identities through the generations in their folknarrative tradition and other genres of folklore.

• To analyse the ritual life of the Ao-Naga community of the past and present and evolve indigenous models which are quite different from the models put forward by Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.

• To study different walks of the lives like social organizations, religion and rituals, agriculture, economy, administration etc. and their ethnic cultural practices that mark their identity as reflected in their oral narratives. And also to establish the changes and continuities of Ao-Naga identities in pre and post Christian era in the wake of globalisation.

• To suggest the measures for retaining the cultural identities of the Ao-Nagas in the changing scenario.

Methodology

Methods can be defined as the procedures and techniques characteristic of a particular discipline or field of knowledge or a way of doing something, especially a systematic way; implies an orderly logical arrangement. Methodology refers to more than a simple set of methods; rather it refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie a particular study. The first step in methodology is collection of data. Data is organized information. It can be numbers, words, measurements, observations or even just descriptions of things. The data is collected from primary and secondary sources, but the information gathered from both these sources gets merged in the research process.

Primary sources

The prime source of the study is the data gathered from the field work. The Ao culture is rooted in their folklore traditions transmitted orally through out the generations since they have no written source. The study focuses on the oral narratives as the major source of study. Oral narratives are highly dynamic genres embodying the essence of
culture; how it is being experienced, represented and transmitted to the other generations. Narratives are stories that have been shared in everywhere in human culture as a mode of communication, education, preservation of culture and to instil knowledge and values. Hence the people adapt narratives to contour and conceptualize their experiences to render in the form of stories which are nothing than their experiential expressions. The oral narratives broadly include folknarratives (myths, folktales etc) metanarratives (narratives on narratives), personal narratives, life experience narratives and auto ethnographies of the informants in the field. Men, women and children from different socio-economic statuses and age groups were primary resource persons in the field study. Oral narratives on the traditional rituals and practices are collected from the older people who witnessed three generations. The data on the life cycle (childbirth, puberty, marriage and death) rituals and politico-cultural/religious rites is collected in the form of oral narratives. The contemporary rituals are collected in the context of celebrations.

The material culture associated in the folklife of the Ao-Nagas is also collected from the dwellings of the people. The other folklore genres of the community are also collected. The field work is done in around the villages Longkhum, Ungma Mopongchuket and Changtongya and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts.

Secondary Sources

The published or unpublished written data related to the topic of research constitutes the secondary source material. Besides the research works that were already analysed above in the survey of literature, administrative records of the British and Indian government and village reports form the source material.

Methods

Research methods are classified into quantitative and qualitative.

**Quantitative research** is defined as that which explains a “phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods, particularly statistics.” It contains the data gathered from structured research methods such as survey, questionnaires, checklists and experimentation.
(i) **Quantitative methods** are generally works towards documenting subject attributes expressed in quantity, extent, or strength, as well as guaranteeing—among other things—objectivity, accuracy, validity and reliability. Their purpose is to measure variables and to produce figures which will allow judgements as to the status of the variables in question, which in turn will allow further processing, and comparisons and permit replicability.\textsuperscript{xvi} Survey method is a quantitative method. Before entering into the field, the survey method was applied. I acquainted fully with the literature on the area and its people to supply information, study the geography, weather conditions, and locations before entering into the field and attempted to reach the local people who may assist with the research. Survey method is a non-experimental, descriptive research method or a fact-finding study.\textsuperscript{xvii} Survey method helps to organize data into meaningful components that can assist in understanding the human condition on many levels. In a sense it is a shorthand method of gaining information from a subset of the entire group studied. Survey method is always conducted in a natural setting; it is a field study.

In order to get informations from the field using the above methods, different techniques like focus group discussions, interviews, informal discourses on different issues of the research topic with the communities are appropriated. Focus group discussions are conducted with the members of the councils and elders of the folk groups on different issues on religion, rituals, social norms, customary law etc. In the directive and non-directive interviews, the questions used are open ended which gave scope to the researcher to understand the perspective of the community. After field work, transliteration of data and transfer of data from audio through script is done which is called transcription. A researcher can employ multiple methods.

(ii) **Qualitative methods**: van Mannen considers qualitative research as a best umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. The qualitative researchers are concerned with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the precise meaning to persons of phenomena occurring in the normal social contexts and are typically preoccupied with complexity, authenticity, contextualisation, shared subjectivity of researcher and researched and minimization of illusion \textsuperscript{xviii}. The qualitative methods
include observation, ethnography, postmodern-ethnography (dialogical method) and narrative inquiry.

a. Observation method is used in obtaining data by direct observation, looking from the outside in and describing the site as the researcher sees it. There are Participant Observer and Non-participant Observer. Participant Observer has the advantage to participate and observe what is going around and feel the experience the actual role which the researchers assume. Non-Participant Observer may be able to view the situation with an objectivity of which participant would have robbed him/her and as he/she is not in the centre of the action but may be able to take notes, view the entire kaleidoscope of activities and perhaps even be able to use a tape recorder to obtain a full report of the audio aspects of the event.

b. Ethnography is an experience labeled as the fieldwork method and then writes accounts of the culture, emphasizing descriptive detail. It is to be closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture. Ethnographic method in short is the graphic study of culture of the races. Ethnography (Greek ethnos = people and graphein = writing) is a genre of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies. Ethnography presents the results of a holistic research method founded on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each other. It is the process of describing a culture or way of life from a folk people’s point of view. Another name for it is field research. The ethnographer usually cultivates close relationships with “informants” who can provide specific information on aspects of cultural life. While detailed written notes are the mainstay of fieldwork. Even tape recorders and cameras are also used. So the ethnographic method involves observation and note taking.

c. Post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality. Clifford Geertz’s concept of ‘thick description’ has influenced academic disciplines. Postmodern ethnographers are interested in understanding how this form perpetuates certain relations of power and domination. Postmodern ethnographers are examples of narrative forms and
new ways of telling. Postmodern ethnography springs from methodological reflection within the cultural theory of postmodernism that transposed its principles into ethnographic practice. According to postmodern ethnographers, objectivity and impartiality are not features of the ethnographer’s interpretative work, but fictions promoted through rhetorical strategies of textual type known as the ‘poetics and politics of writing’. These ethnographers believe that instead of understanding the other more fully, what fieldworkers should do is gain a fuller understanding of themselves, by uncovering their prejudices, ideology and tacit knowledge.

d. Narrative inquiry an ‘inquiry in to the narrative’ is another method used to analyse and interpret the oral narratives in the thesis. Narratives are stories which are told in ordered sequence of events that is combined with verbal communication to make sense of what one experience, and also with different characters that communicate a message artistically. It focuses particularly on people’s lives and lived experiences and the process of gathering information/data for the purpose of research through storytelling where the researcher writes/records a narrative of the experience. The person who narrates the story is the primary sources for the narrative enquiry. The lives of the people are consists of stories. Narrative in essence is the stories of lives and the stories of the lives of others and it is open to interpretation. This interpretation develops through relationship of researcher and the respondent or story teller and listener. Narratives are basically consisting of a narrator who shared what happened or tells a story to others by means of conversation or communication through utterances. Production of narratives is a dialogical process between self of the narrator and the researcher. Hence the narratives and other data collected in the field is a product of employing the Dialogical method, which is reflexive, self emanating and emergent. It produces ‘a corpus of thick data’ produced ‘dialogically’ by the ethnographer and the informant thereby merging the boundaries between the subject/object and researcher/informant. Self-reflective knowledge comes from the discussion from both sides. Dialogical method helps the researcher to know the reality of the human beings. Both fieldworker and informant begin with little or nothing in terms of shared experience but when they engage in dialogue with each other they starts to experience the activities going on around them. Narratives research directs a study and gathers information to help bring out the appropriate
objective research tools, and can be used as the single evaluation of a real-life problem. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience.

The study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methods and data collected had been cross checked with the other source materials. Such process is known as method of “triangulation” which is essential while interpreting them from the perspective of the community. Triangulation refers to the use of several methods in answering the research question. Deniz describes four forms of triangulation:

(I) Data triangulation which consists collection of data through multiple source sampling strategies involving different people, time and locations.

(II) Investigator triangulation that refers to the use of more than one in gathering data

(III) Theoretical triangulation in which the research relies on more than one theoretical position in interpreting data.

(IV) Methodological triangulation that refers to the use of more than one method of gathering data. Deniz calls attention to the ’with-in method’ (using varieties of the same method) and ‘between method’ (using contrasting methods) triangulation.

Chapterisation

This thesis is divided into Eight chapters.

The first chapter is Introduction which gives a brief preamble to the study of Naga, especially Ao-naga culture and identity. The chapter deals with significance of the research topic, its nature and scope and survey of previous literature, hypothesis aims and objectives. The chapter also gives an account of the methodology followed in the research process.

The second chapter, An Overview of Ao-Naga Cultural Life describes in brief the Ao-Naga Folklife to situate the community’s identities in their expressive behaviour. The chapter describes geography, environment and people of Nagaland in general and Mokokchung district, the land of Aos in detail. The cultural life of the Ao-Nagas that encompass social structure, economic activities, political life customary law, religion, rituals, dress, musical instruments, material culture and ethno medical practices etc., are discussed in brief.
The third chapter Origin and Dispersal of Nagas: A Folkloric Perspective defines the nature and scope of Ao-Nagas’ Folklife and interprets it from the perspectives of identity formations, both in their personal and community domains. The chapter analyses and interprets the mythical tradition of the Nagas and the AO-nagas to throw new light on their origins and migratory patterns through the ages.

The fourth chapter, On Ao-Naga Narrative typology and structure: Metaphors of Identity focuses on (i) how the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas (both in personal and folk) endure their core strands of identity in their tale motifs, and (ii) how the structure of the oral narratives mirror the social stratification and cultural values of the Ao-Nagas. The folknarratives in this chapter are analysed on the paradigms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic structural models and processed through the Derridian post structural hermeneutical discourse and theory of narrative inquiry.

The fifth Social organisation: Reflections in Folklore analyses the folktales, personal narratives and proverbs told by men and women of different age groups to interpret how Ao-Nagas organised their patriarchal society revolving round the institutions of marriage and kinships. The chapter further focuses on how the masculinity and femininity are constructed upon men and women in Ao-Naga society and explains the gender roles and relations in family system. The role of customary law in regulation of social life is also explained.

The sixth chapter, Life Cycle Ceremonies as Cultural Metaphor discusses in general how the rituals celebrated by the Ao-Naga people in different socio-cultural contexts stand as the metaphors of their cultural identities at personal level, as the members of their respective family/clan groups level (collective), among other clans of the Naga society. The definition and theoretical dimension of the rituals in general and life cycle ceremonies in particular are discussed. The ritual process of the ‘life cycle ceremonies’- birth, puberty, marriage and death’ of the Ao-Naga are analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the community. The ritual events celebrated in each life cycle ceremony are studied to show how they metaphorically represent the cultural components of their respective families and clan groups. Further the chapter develops indigenous models of life cycle ceremonies of the AO-Nagas which are quite distinct.
from the models developed in the west and other tribal society of the world. The life cycle ceremonies are explained not only as the metaphors of their personal identity, but as the loci changing identities from one threshold to the other in one’s life course.

The seventh chapter, Communal Rites as Markers of identity focuses on the rituals that demand the communal participation of the AO-Nagas. The communal rites are depicted as the paradigms of socialisation and markers of Aos’ identity. The intricacies socio-political and religious intricacies of Ao culture are explained how the communal rituals involve social groups as a whole to process their changing identities. The ritual process of social, economic religious and political rituals of the Aos is analysed. Indigenous ritual models of different communal rites which mark different dimensions of Aos identity are developed.

The eighth chapter, Conclusion is a brief summery of all the chapters along with findings. It is observed that the Ao-Naga community is a distinct folklore community which draws its strength by willful play of verbal and non-verbal genres of folklore in every day life through which it construct its identity despite the onslaught of modernity and globalisation.

Endnotes:

3 Nagaland in the 20th century was severed through a treacherous betrayal by the British Government. Burma was gifted with half, and the other half fell under Indian dominion. Those areas that fell under Indian Territory were further subdivided into four fragments, namely - Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Thus, within the Indian Territory, large chunks of Naga lands and Naga people were put into three other states against the wishes of the Nagas. This was done to reduce the Naga political issue to the smallest possible geographical area. The present Indian State of Nagaland is comprised of only 16,557 sq. kms with a population of hardly over two million people. Kaka Iralu.D. “The Fifty Four-Year Indo-Naga Conflict: A Question of Internal Indian Ethnic Conflict or a Conflict between Two Nations” Paper presented in National Seminar on Resolving Ethnic Conflicts in North East India. Guwahati, Assam, November 11-12, 2002.
5 Claudis Ptolemy, Geographia, V11, Patis, E, Champion, 1925, (ii) p.18.
The famous Ao-Naga shawl called “Mangkotepsu” is male attire but these days one sees that jackets made out of it have become unisex and are sold at tourist spots with its lore and history totally ignored. Other handicrafts, dance forms are also being manipulated to ‘fit’ into the required mould. Temsula Ao, “Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective”, in Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India, A quarterly newsletter Folklife from National Folklore Support Centre, Serial No.22 July 2006, pp. 6-7