4.1 **ONHÜ KONHÜ**

Songs are the common outlet for the Memai people. They are fond of singing and this is shown in the types of songs that they reproduce at different platforms and contexts. The songs could be of varied themes and different genres. There are songs that have pre-set lyrics and another genre that does not have a pre-set lyrics which again are verbal or non-verbal.

4.1.1 **Onhü konhü**

The genre of songs that we are engaged in this chapter is ‘on the spot compositions’ during different functional activities that are undertaken by the people. One of the most prominent of this genre is the Onhü konhü which again is divided into two varieties with the first being oral non-verbal phonetic rendering and the second, oral verbal rendering.

The Memai are mostly agriculturist, one may find the Mao people in different professions yet at heart there is still an element of the cultivator in him/her. So it is not surprising that different work songs are used and sung in the community. Why are the Onhü konhü performed or what is its importance? The Onhü are basically work songs. The Onhü is performed to enliven the people who are at work, it also brings people together and creates a bond of camaraderie amongst the people and creates a sense of collective feeling and
accomplishment after the work. Elders often remind the younger generation that during work if one does not perform Onhū the work is not properly done at its best and people tend to be lazy and the work do not get accomplished. It is not that everyone can perform the Onhū but person who are good at it perform the Onhū and the work force follow up with the work.

4.1.2 Non-verbal Onhū konhū

The oral non-verbal phonetic rendering is onomatopoeic in nature. The rendering of Onhū, be it the verbal or the non-verbal, takes place during the course of some form of work. Onhū performance is not agriculture-centric. Apart from being performed during agricultural work it is also performed on other occasions like Otu kosü or dragging of monolith, Okho kotsü or fishing trip, Oru nhū during war and during Asoto or signing of peace treaty.

4.1.3 Otu kosü nhū

In the past Otu kosü or dragging of the monolith normally takes place when a man hosts the feast of merit. There are several stages in hosting the feast of merit and erecting a monolith in one’s honour is one such stage. Normally a stone is identified and selected, than preparations are made to bring home the stone. Food and rice-beer is prepared, creeper ropes are gathered, and a wooden toboggan is made ready to drag home the stone. An auspicious day is named and the people are informed. The stone is loaded on to the toboggan, an individual ululates and the crowd responds by saying zhīū. This is repeated for the second time and every male present takes a hold of the
rope and the dragging of the stone begins. The first two or four who takes the end of the rope leads the *Onhū* and start the *Onhū* as shown below;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One person</td>
<td>(Ululate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First two/four at the tip of the rope</td>
<td><em>Holeloho</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two/four in the middle of the rope</td>
<td><em>Holekohoe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and female</td>
<td><em>Ahn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the other adult participants</td>
<td><em>Houm</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dragging of the stone and the *Onhū* goes on hand in hand till the immediate vicinity of the village and when nearing the spot of where to leave the stone the *Onhū* gathers pace and becomes faster and faster and the *Onhū* changes into;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The adult participants</td>
<td><em>Houhoum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and female</td>
<td><em>Ahn</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the stone is brought to the spot and of complete rest the *Onhū* conclude:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every participants yelling</td>
<td><em>Hou ... houm</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>(Ululate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is how the non-verbal phonetic rendering of *Otu kosü nhü* is performed during the dragging of the stone to erect the monolith for the host of the feast of merit.

### 4.1.4 *Okho kotsü nhü*

In the past there were times of community fishing expeditions. A day is fixed and the whole community joins for fishing. During this expedition, from the village to the water body of fishing and from the spot of fishing back to the village the people goes performs the holler. The holler performed during this fishing trip is known as the *Okho kotsü nhü*.

### 4.1.5 *Oru nhü*

The Nagas in general and the Memai in particular are known to be head-hunters in the long past. Head-hunting was commonly practice a fact which has been well documented in colonial monographs. War skirmishes were a common feature among the communities or within the community. Inter-village feuds were common to the people and on this occasion the victorious side performs the holler as the return to their village, and this performance is known as the *Oru nhü*.

Wars at different levels were fought between individuals or clans or villages or different tribes. The wars were for revenge or for head-hunting or for any other reason. It is tenable that these wars go on for long period at times, but war was not the means to end the war but interestingly there are
platforms for reconciliation at different levels to end the war. In most cases of reconciliation between different villages and tribes peace reconciliations and settlements for the Memai is carried out in the vernacular month of Khrana and ultimately conclude with what is known as Asoto that is to rest and feast, after taking the oath of peace by the men with spear in hand for the Memai. This final act of agreement not to continue the war or to end the war is celebrated with a feast hosted by one of the village or tribe concern and reciprocated in the same manner the following year. The village that makes its way to the other village for the celebration performs the war holler on their way and also does the same on their return as well. This performance of the holler on this occasion is known as the Asoto nhü.

The holler performed during the Okho kotsü, Oru and Asoto are known as Okho kotsü nhü, Oru nhü and Asoto nhü. This is so taking into account the context of the performance of the Onhü. There are slight variations in the tune of how the Onhü is performed depending on the context stated above. The performance of the Onhü in this context is non-verbal rendering interspersed with occasional ululation.

**4.1.6 Verbal Onhü konhü**

The Memai are hard working by nature. Irrespective of the generations of the past or the present, the Memai are always engaged in some work and this makes them self sufficient and self reliant economically. Even today 75% of the Memai populations are engaged in agrarian sectors and they are well
advanced in their agricultural practices. Therefore as the Memai are long associated with the agrarian sectors for many generations it is not surprising to find that different types of *Onhü konhü* are generated amongst the Memai community.

No doubt the non-verbal *Onhü konhü* is very interesting but when one gets to listen and witness the verbal *Onhü konhü*, the actual testament of pure verbal art and aesthetics is witnessed in the form of ‘on the spot compositions’ or what one may call the ‘spur of the moment’ in the context of ‘here and now’ situation. The verbal *Onhü konhü* does not follow any preset lyrics and with hardly any pre-conceived idea, and to quote the great English Romantic poet William Wordsworth, it is the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings …’ that set apart the verbal *Onhü konhü* from other genres of the Mao folk songs.

It is said that in the past individuals who are expert in *Onhü* are hired during *Chokhro-pfuva kasa*; that is when an individual seek help from relatives, friends and well wishers to help out in a particular work which he is unable to accomplish it himself. During this type of work some will not work seriously, others being lazy, some going about without working and so on. So, experts in the *Onhü* practice performed in such a manner that those who are lazy are chided and admonished whereas those who work hard are praised and encouraged. The performer acts as a deterrent to people, who are not serious in the work but rather participating in the work for the sake of food and drinks.
Thus the performer acts as a guiding factor to the entire workforce and creating social awareness that work is important and not the person they are working for. Even the person who hosts the work also comes into focus, often on the quality and quantity of the refreshment served. During this type of work, there are times when the food and drink runs short or becomes surplus, the songs are created to reflect this situation and the host earns ridicule or praise, according to the generosity or parsimony displayed in treating the workers.

The performer could also add different facets of the work into his repertoire and conjure up words of encouragement to the work force by cracking jokes, giving direction to the work, asking the people to continue with the work or to stop for a moment of rest, to have a drink of rice-beer or stop the work for lunch and anything that will keep the workforce occupied for the entire duration of the work. This is how work of different nature is accomplished without realizing the enormity of the task at hand or the physical strain that one endures throughout the work. Therefore during this common goodwill work the accomplishment of the work also largely depend on the Onhü performer.

A sample of verbal Onhü konhü is shown below;

One performer male/female: \textit{Anon ho lu} (bend down)

Everybody: \textit{O-ha}
One performer male/female: *Sote solu* (do your best)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Sote moli* (if you do not try)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Baile modu* (we will not stop)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Chari modo* (not thirsty)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Mozü modo* (not hungry)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Arü shu da* (do not look around)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Odji tonhü* (smell the mud/ground)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Sütto moli* (if not like that)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Chulo hrodo* (will not complete)

Everybody: *O-ha*

One performer male/female: *Ahrele do* (will feel ashamed)

Everybody: *O-ha*

A one liner song by an individual goes on uplifting the spirit of the entire workforce. The more interesting aspect is that everyone takes part in the verbal *Onhü konhü* with a common resounding ‘*O-ha*’ after every line is been
sang. The verbal *Onhū konhū* can thus go on and on in the same strain. This goes on and on for the entire day with occasional break in between and the periodic ululation lacing it. And ululation by many brings to an end the entire proceeding of the work and the signal for a rest.

The beauty of this *Onhū konhū* is the simple bucolic intelligence that is displayed in the song. The song begins by asking everyone to bend that is to start the work. The performer asked the work force to give their best and not if they do not give their best they will not stop as their work will remain unaccomplished. He says they shall not be thirsty or hungry meaning the work will not suffer for want of food and drink as the food and the rice-beer is there and whosoever is thirsty or hungry should eat and drink. They should not be wandering around but concentrate on the work and continue to do work. The performer also ask the work force to smell the ground, here the language is metaphorical and not literal, here smelling the ground means to look to the ground and continue doing the work and not wander about or be lazy. The song ends by saying that after the food and drink if the work is not accomplished it will be a shame for all the work force and so everyone should work hard.

4.2 *MADA KAVE*

4.2.1 *Mada kave*

*Mada kave* literally means ‘to lie and tag’; *mada kave* is very much a part of the *Onhū konhū*. It is in the course of the work that *Onhū* performance
is done and the kind of expertise and exposition by the performer of the Onhū is such one gets carried away and immersed oneself in the performance and work, is known as mada amayi.

Verbal dueling is another feature during Chokhro-pfuva kasa. The duel songs can be of one line, or two, a stanza or a number of verses that would be the source for different types of message that is communicated to the hearer. It is not the melody or the rhyme but the content of the lyrics that is important. The duel is not an argument or quarrel nor speech or war of words but dueling is through songs. These songs are usually sung in two groups. The beauty of mada kave is that, if the first group sings in appreciation of the second group, the second group humbles itself and more praise is heaped on the first group. In the same manner if the first group sings insults or demeans the second group, the second group chooses more insults and is cast on the first group. In most times duel Songs are used to flatter, cajole and tempt the others.

During the course of the work, work may become monotonous thereby making the people lazy. In such case the group is divided into two equal groups comprising both male and female and the dueling begins. And the interesting part is that everybody takes part in the duel with a common resounding ‘o-ha’ after every a line is been sang. Here is a sample of a song duel between two groups in the course of the work.
Group - I

Leader male/female: Sote luda (try hard)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Sote moli (if you don’t try)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Kruni ledo (others will laugh at us)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Bahro kolu (let your hand be heavy)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Maiye raishu (don’t be like others)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Monhü shuda (don’t be lazy)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Aria shuda (don’t escape)
The rest of the group: O-ha

Group – II

Leader male/female: Mada shuda (don’t lie)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Sote modu (did not try hard)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Aphevi da (you are lazy)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Ichikhrumai (my male colleague)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Vatta hro na (cannot compete)
The rest of the group: O-ha
Leader male/female: Ahre sama (it’s a shame)
The rest of the group: O-ha

Here in the verbal dueling song between the groups, the first group says, ‘try hard, if you don’t try others will laugh at you; here the word ‘others’ is referred to the other group, and ‘heavy hand’ means ‘to work hard’. The leader goes on to say that they should not be like the other group who are lazy and are delinquent.

The second group retaliates by saying that, what the first group says about their group is nothing but lies. And that they did not even try to work hard and that they are lazy and conclude by saying that it is a shame that they cannot compete in the work.

The above sample is an example of song dueling in the course of the work. Such dueling takes place to improve the work and also have fun by belittling each other. It is not done with any intention of hurting one another but are rather fun squabbles between the groups at work.
4.3 References


