CHAPTER FIVE

MAKAI AND MOVU

5.1 MAKAI and MOVU

The Maos, individually or as a community are very expressive in their actions and performances. It is said that the Memai were very independent, hard-working, self reliant, brave and fun-loving community. Their love for festivities and cultural activities in their day to day life for generations is a verbally well documented fact. The expressions in performing arts during these social activities are both verbal and non-verbal. It is observed that a performed item has a better qualification for transmitting its essence and meaning to the spectators and audience. This statement is made with the explicit intention of considering two kinds of traditional utterances of the Memai community viz. Makai and Movu. These are two oral non-verbal phonetic renderings which have their own significance and appeal in the cultural life of the Memai. The acts or performances are very expressive and purely oral and they are performed with no lyrics. The absence of a conventional lyric system has been responsible for making scholars to be influenced to regard these sub-genres as meaningless. It is therefore imperative that the performances of the Makai and Movu be observed and minutely witnessed by researchers to appreciate the aesthetics of the performance and understand what these non-verbal phonetic renderings are all about.
There are no verbal expressions in *Makai* and *Movu* and so syntactically it is void in the realm of linguistics. To an outsider this may sound strange but to the Nagas and particularly the *Memai* community it is perfectly normal and understood as an important cultural performance, calling attention to put one’s house in order and to proceed to the next act. It is an exhilarating expression of self and a necessity in the sphere of cultural activity and social milieu. And so when viewed at a deeper level in the realm of semantics, the importance of *Makai* and *Movu* performances connotes semantics in accordance with its usages and context.

Therefore let us look into how and why *Makai* and *Movu* are important or what is its significance or importance in the culture or the social milieu of the *Memai* community.

5.1.1 *Makai* or Ululation

Ululation is defined as ‘an expression of strong emotions’[^84]. Different communities across the world use ululation for different reasons and contexts. Ululation will mean different thing or interpretation to different communities across the world. According to Moshen Subhi a Palestinian performer and song arranger, ululation is incorporated in the wedding song ‘Zaghoreed’. It is an expression of strong emotions and the pure essence of celebration during wedding in some part of the Arab world. At the same time in contrast to the ululation of celebration, it is also a part of the funeral ritual to honour the dead among some Middle East countries. Ululation is also performed in multiples.

[^84]: This citation is missing from the text.
among some of the African tribes and this too is performed as a celebration especially during weddings. Nearer home, in India too ululation is performed in celebratory mould. During wedding ululation is performed to welcome the bride or the groom to their house as a couple, it is also performed during auspicious occasion. In almost all cases ululation is performed by women. For the Memai ululation is performed strictly by men and it is taboo for woman to ululate unlike in other parts of the world.

Ululation could be the equivalent term for Makai. Ululation can at best be described as an attention caller\textsuperscript{85}. The act of Makai is an attention caller to an individual, a group or the general public present within the hearing limit of the performer. This expression of ululation is of very high pitch that a human can produce in an orderly manner\textsuperscript{86}. It also goes without saying that not many people can perform the ululation even after considerable practice bouts.

\textit{Makai} is an important element of the social and cultural usage in the life of the Memai community. It is performed during social get-togethers or during cultural programmes. Elders would often say that only the healthy and the expert in the art should ululate. The contention is that only the healthy can perform ululation as it requires a long stress at very extremely high pitch without breathing or holding the breath for a long time at a go, so health becomes necessary to achieve that and which in a sense shows the exuberance of life of the performer. Only an expert can ululate and at the same time
ululation is not performed by all. Therefore in the given circumstances only
the expert and the healthy persons ululate.

Customarily it is ululation by an individual which starts the *Movu*. Ululation plays a vital part in the performance of the oral non-verbal phonetic
rendering *Movu* when it is performed. This is the one single most important
performance to carry forward the rhythmic *Movu* of the whole group. Often
the elders of the group would ask the whole group to listen attentively to the
ululation so as not to disturb the rhythm of the *Movu* at a later stage by not
catching up his or her part in the performance. Therefore when a person
ululates to start the *Movu* the whole group maintains a studied silence. The
ululation is acknowledged by the whole group with a deep throated sound *zhū*
"ü ü ü", which is the sound of approval by everyone that they are ready for the
*Movu* to be performed. The rhythmic *Movu* of the group starts with different
people taking different parts and it goes on. At the ending part of the *Movu*
one or many individuals ululate to signal the conclusion of the *Movu*. Therefore the ululation acts as a catalyst to begin the *Movu* as well as
signalling the conclusion of the *Movu*.

Words are not the only means to facilitate communication. There are
other different means through which humans and other living beings interact
with each other. In the olden days, ululation was also deployed as a location
marker for an individual who wants to announce his presence to another man.
There are reasons to believe that in those days, highly specialized forms of
ululation of the location marker were developed which takes terrain, topography and area characteristics into consideration. However, traces of these have been difficult to retain and therefore, impossible to enact in the present time. Ululation acts as a means of communication between two individuals and this is particularly true in the case of individuals when they go hunting for birds and animals in the jungle. There are times when friends go their separate ways and are out of sight, they ululate to let the other know in which direction or how far they have gone apart. The friend who hears the ululation, ululate back to let his friend know that his message is received. Thus ululation also acts as an area or location indicator as well. The friends would know from which direction the ululation is coming or could as well roughly determine the distance between them by the loudness of the ululation or could as well determine whether the ululation is of his friend’s or of another person through the uniqueness as in length and sharpness or the sounding of the ululation. This is possible as voice quality of two people often differs in pitch, sound, the length or the stress of the ululation and the quality of the ululation. Anyone and everyone can ululate but only an expert can at best ululate at very high pitch, yet when it is two individuals ululating to communicate with each other it could be in any form of ululation provided the message is conveyed which in fact is the purpose or the motive.

Ululation is performed as a war-cry especially related to the practice of head-hunting in earlier times. Sudden ululation at the peak of battle is said to cast fear and confusion on the foe. It is said that during war opponents ululate
and counter ululate to rally the spirit of warriors, encourage and motivate comrades, display and demonstrate courage in the face of stiff opposition and danger. On the whole, by ululating an individual imposes his self on the fighting scene showing fearlessness and grit, thus making his presence felt through his ululation. Thus ululation is not just a simple act of customary or traditional utterance but it is much more than that. Ululation in times of combat is a matter of life and death, of loss and victory, of honor and humiliation. It is an effective psychological weapon which when used properly becomes crucial.

Ululation is also a prominent feature in the agrarian practice of the Memai community. It is not surprising to hear someone ululating on his way to the fields. When a person ululates on his way to the field in the morning, this is a message to his fellowmen that it is time to move out of the house and to go for ones’ respective work and that he (the person who ululate) is on his way bound for the field or work. One will find plenty of ululation especially when there are community’s work as well as when there is Chokhro-pfuva kasa. Under this system, an individual may request his clansmen, neighbours or friends and acquaintances to help him perform a particular work which he may not be able to get it done all by him. No wages are paid to the workforce except for food and drinks which are provided free in plenty. During Chokhro-pfuva kasa the people work wholeheartedly with the singing of mada-kave, a category of agrarian work songs and ululation. Ululation and mada-kave have a special effect in lifting the flagging strength and spirit of the tired workforce.
Therefore, *mada-kave* goes on and on for the entire day with occasional breaks in between and periodic ululation lacing it. And ululation by many brings to an end the entire proceedings of *mada-kave* and work, signalling the resting period. This shows the importance of ululation during agrarian work which enjoys fixity of time and place in the duration of the work. This also reveals the functional utility of the act of ululation as well.

All the above elaboration indicates that ‘Ululation’ create space and time within the functional unit of other social activities which may be momentary but significant in that context. The attributes that ululation exhibits is multi-dimensional and so one need to know the functional time and space that ululation creates in the customary social activities of the *Memai*. To understand the semantic propositions that ululation brings along with its purpose and usage is one aspect that one may have to know and understand the *Memai* cultural activities to truly appreciate the significance of ululation. The one dimensional sound with multi-dimensional semantic attributes attached to it also shows the other side of its complexity. That is, when ululation is used as a form of psychological weapon by warriors in times of head-hunting wars. Thus ululation amplifies its utility characteristics in the many social activities of the *Memai* in the context of time and space. Further, ululation that seems to be a meaningless yell on many an occasion rather carries critical contextual importance within the parameters of space and time in the *Memai* cultural life.
5.2 MOVU – HOLLER

5.2.1 Movu - Holler

The different Naga communities have their own signature identity to identify them and for the Memai Movu is one such that identifies them from the rest of the other Nagas. Movu is a new genre, a phonetic rendering of non-verbal sound like the Makai. Movu has no lyrics of any kind. This is a song-like genre performance and it is the tune is performed at different pitch levels or parts, like any other song. Movu is one of the most thrilling and exhilarating performance to witness or to be a part of the performance during festive or socio-cultural gatherings of the community.

There are two varieties of Movu that is performed by the Memai community namely Shinga-nhü and Ime-nhü. Shinga-nhü literally means Movu with the sound performed similitude to that of the neighbouring Shinga people. The Shinga-nhü performance of the Movu is slow rhythm and the stress of the holler is shorter in beats and slow paced. This slowness of the whole process of hollering allows the performers to catch up more easily on the performance. The Ime-nhü meaning the Movu of the Memai style is normally faster in pace and harder to catch up. Therefore the performance itself is more lively but at the same time more prone to mistakes. According to the belief of the Memai people once a Movu get started with the ululation and the first note of the Movu is struck it cannot be stopped till the completion of the whole process of a proper hollering with all the parts of the Movu going on for at least a good duration of five to ten minutes. Therefore
the Movu of the Memai community is very pleasant to witness with ululation by an individual beginning the holler and with multiple or many ululation closing the whole process of hollering amidst gunfire.

There is no institution that teaches the art of performing the Movu formally. Movu is a performance which is rarely taught but one get to know it by taking part or by being part of the group that practices it. The people experience exhilarating joy participating in it. It is one of those expressions of the vibrant lifestyle of the Memai community.

To perform a Movu what is usually required is for the crowd to pick up the different parts of the rendering by different persons as leaders of the packs. When people gather to perform the Movu, a single person ululate signaling or calling attention to the gathering to begin the Movu. When the person ululates to start the Movu the crowd responds to it with a deep throated sound of zhü ü ü ü. The person who performed the first ululation ululates once again. From here the rhythmic Movu of the group begins with different people taking different parts and it goes on. In the Movu a set of sound pattern is adhered to in its performance. The Movu continues for some period, and when Movu is closing to the end, the momentum of the Movu goes faster and faster and people start ululating by the dozens and the Movu concludes with multi ululation and often with interspersed gunshots as guns are fired into the air.
Sample:

By one person – *(Ululation)*

By the whole group – Zhì ǜ ǜ ǜ ǜ …

2 Person – ā - oh …

Children and women – āh …

2 Person – ā - oh …

Children and women – āh …

By elderly man or in group – ā - hò or hoi

This hollering goes on for a good length of time and concludes with a lot of ululation and gunfire into the air.

These are the different parts taken up by different people at different times in the process of performing the *Movu*. Looking at the sample given above the performance presents a seemingly simple rendering but in reality the performance is beset with complexity depending on the flow of the performance and the maintenance of which are very important. One slight
mistake from the starters would break up the whole performance. The start has to be perfect to carry forward the flow of the *Movu* which has to be sustained through the middle to the end. Only then will the pleasure of listening to the rendering be obtained.

*Movu* is performed at different places and time. Social gatherings provide the most common platform and opportunity for the *Movu* to be performed. The social gathering could be of the whole community coming together for a festive occasion or a social cause. During this type of gathering *Movu* could be performed to generate a feeling of camaraderie and instill a sense of being and belonging to the community.

During community works as well as when there is *Chokhro-pfuva kasa* - where an individual seek the help of his clansman, neighbours or well wishers to help him out in a particular work which he may not be able to do it all by himself – the people on their way to the field and when they are returning from the field are inclined to perform the *Movu*. This performance in fact starts from the place of work when the work is done or when the work closes for the day. Once the tools are packed and they are ready to head back home, the *Movu* begins. The *Movu* goes on for a good duration as the distance covered during this work trip is also usually considerably long. There are occasional breaks in between the place of work and the village to enable the workers to catch their breath and to rest for some time. After few minutes of rest they pick up the *Movu* and resume their journey. This goes on till they
reach their locality where all the Movu comes to a stop and a round of rice-beer concludes the day. The Movu is performed to de-stress the work force after a tiring day of punishing labour. On the other hand Movu in fact signifies that a community service has been performed for the common good or towards the benefit of a needy member of the community, words are not uttered but through their performance the message is indirectly conveyed to the others who may not have known the reason for the performance of the Movu.

When the male folk of a locality or the village go hunting much is expected from them by the people back home by ways of game killed or captured. On the return the male folk from the hunting expedition come back with Movu on their lips. This is especially so when they bring home a good number of game. The Movu used on these occasions are loud and lasting. In this situation the hunters when they reach the village, place the animals in the middle of the village and the hunters go on encircling the game and continue to perform the Movu for a long time. This Movu is an expression of joy to feast on the meat of the animals and gamesmanship of having made several kills.

Movu is also associated with stone-dragging for the man of consequence or for that matter when a stone is to be erected in commemoration for an occasion. On the day of the stone dragging ceremony, the male folk dressed in their traditional attires or costumes with spear, gun or machete in hand go to the place from where the stone is to be dragged. Once
The people are assembled they began the Movu with an ululation. As the stone is dragged along by the people, the Movu continues with occasional break to catch breath and rest. Once they are rested the Movu starts all over again as the men continue to drag the stone as well. The role of Movu is crucial when dragging a big stone. The pulling of the stone will have to match the rhythm of the Movu by all who has a hand on the rope\textsuperscript{90}. It is this rhythm of the Movu which allows the pullers to drag the stone at one pace and rhythm at a time. It is also believed that a stone can be lulled to sleep by the rhythmic sound of the Movu and this facilitates the movement of the stone. It implies that the pullers will concentrate on the rhythm of the Movu and not think of the energy sapping task of dragging the huge stone.

The mountain-tracking event locally known as Pfoki kapra of the Memai is observed with great festivity. On this day even people who have migrated to other parts of the country trace their roots back to their place of origin and be with their love and dear ones for the day. The day is fixed by the Chiefs of the two regions inhabited by the Memai community. The day may thus differ between the two regions based on how the Chief of a particular region trace the moon\textsuperscript{91}. The mountain-tracking event takes place in the post-harvest festival called Chitthuni, which is celebrated for a week. This is one event which takes place once in a year and the people especially the youths look forward to celebrate it attired in all their traditional colourful dress and costumes. Both male and female go tracking in one big group to a particular mountain and where rituals are performed and folk games like long jump and
Oshu-atu\textsuperscript{92} for male and Kade\textsuperscript{93} for female are competed. On this occasion the Movu begins from a place called Asofü within the village. The people from the farthest corner of the village join in with the others, and different localities join in and the crowd swells in number to go for the mountain-tracking. The people are usually dressed in traditional fineries and the men with guns, spears and machetes in hand and the women with their back-basket load with refreshment makes the sight a delightfully pleasing pleasure for the eyes. The Movu start with ululation and different persons picks up different parts of the Movu and they go forth towards the mountain. The Movu goes on with occasional breaks for rest but soon after the Movu pick up again till they crowd reaches the peak of the mountain. When the rituals are performed, the games competed and the various activities done, descent from the peak of the mountain begins. Descent too is accompanied by Movu, again with occasional breaks and rest. Often the downward journey is difficult yet the Movu is never stopped abruptly. The Movu comes to an end at the place where it all began in the morning.

There are certain beliefs that are associated with the performance of the Movu. When the Movu is not performed in a proper manner or when Movu comes to an abrupt end without completing its full cycle there is bound to be trouble within that year in the village. Often epidemics break out in the village and many precious lives are lost. Thus often elders scold the younger generation when Movu is performed badly or improperly.
The above description of *Movu* tells us its different usages and utility, its importance and at various stages its capacity to coordinate the social activities of the *Memai* at different point of time. *Movu* is a performance which needs patience, coordination and liveliness to perform. It is an exhibition of the social exuberance and the exhilarating life that the *Memai* people live.

Though *Makai* and *Movu* in many ways differ from the usual types of songs it has a standing of its own in the social milieu of the *Memai* people. The implicit and explicit significance that mark the performance and practice is a telling commentary on the socio-cultural life of the people. Thus the genre which is devoid of lyrics, an oral yet non-verbal phonetic-rendering sure adds a dimension to the different performing arts in the sphere of folklore genre.

**References**


