CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Folksong

Folk song comes to be established amongst the people through the ingenuity of the simple folks. The folk songs ruminates the essence of living of simple folks and bringing into focus the rudimentary philosophy of their way of life. The basic events of life that they have experienced or faced are thus engaged to conjure them into the form of folk songs to keep alive memories that could be relived in these songs by the future generations. Folk song shows the emotions and the spontaneity in the way the people of that generation characterizes themselves. Folk song bears testimony of the past. Events like war, relationship of the community, seasons, rites and rituals, belief system, moral norms, occupational behaviour, leisure times, or the total cultural and social milieu of the people are preserved and kept alive in the form of this genre of oral tradition. Folk song thus flourished amongst the rural folk as it was the product of a less classy community or in other words folk song was kept alive with the simple rustic people as it was their own unsophisticated product best known by them. Folk songs are very valuable ethnological material as they open windows on traits of individual personality and the value-system of a society to the outside world other than their own. This is what folk song is to a folk community.
Oral poetry or folk songs invariably lead us to some truths that are inextricably bound up with what the folks have encountered in their life. That is how the basic relatedness of the world that surround man of that time finds its way into their psyche and later formed into words and thus expressed out in the form of what we call the oral poetry or folk song. Therefore composing of folk songs is also about understanding the reality of life at the time the songs are been composed by the folks. Folk songs or oral poetries are thus byproducts of the thought-process of human rationality of the past that is passed on from generation to generations through word of mouth.

Folk songs can be multi-dimensional in its meaning. In trying to understand the meaning of the folk songs, it is important to note that meaning in folk songs is basically cultural dependant. One needs to have a fair knowledge of the basic rudiment of the cultural fabrics of that community upon which the folk song dwells upon. One has to take into account the cultural aspects of the folks before venturing into the song to cull out any possible meaning of the folk songs through cultural or aesthetic interpretations. As and when the culture of the folk is given due importance, the task of cultural interpretation of the songs would be a lot easier. This would also go a long way in deconstructing the song meaningfully and giving further impetus to aesthetic interpretation which would amplify to the better understanding of the song in general.
There is an intrinsic connection between music and emotions. Often emotions stem from listening to the music. But one cannot astutely talk about emotions. The meaningful power of music is such that even without much emotional affirmation, music can present emotions in such a way that it would appear to be woven into the very fabric of the medium itself. Therefore the embedded warmth of a song that is expressed in the music can in no way be aspired or planned. It is just indispensable, it is that which makes a piece of music comes alive and gives it the quality of an impassioned utterance.

1.2 Definition of Folk song

There has not been a defined distinction between folk song and folk music. Neither has any scholar authoritatively defined a folk song. Scholars in the field of studying or collecting the folk songs have taken these two entities as one whole entity. Folk song collectors like Alan Lomax, Cecil Sharp, Bruno Nuttl and others have not made a clear distinction between the folk song and folk music. But Maud Karpeles in his book The Foundation of Folk Song, writes; ‘Fortunately, intuition is not all that is left to us. Still, if musical folklore is a science, experience shows that it is a subject to sudden caprices and its delineation is very hard to fix.’ Thus Maud Karpeles quote what the International Folk music Council adopted as the definition of folk music after long discussion at Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1954:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of transmission. The factors that
shape the traditions are; i) continuity which links the present with the past; ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

This definition that can be applied to music or folk song has evolved from the simple beginnings in a community uninfluenced by other form of music or song. The definition can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.

1.3 The Mao Folk song

The Mao sings:

‘Olo hi soli-e itsii hole mo

Olo hi soli-e mozho zii mo

Ziimo lokoso ochu kapemai lephro no jii e-mai’

Translation

‘You will not lost your power of thinking, if you sing

Nothing goes in waste, if you sing

Who sing and who speak are knowledgeable and broad minded O! Man’

This song encourages one to sing or rather encourages one to learn to sing. The song is titled as Olo hi Soli-e which literally means ‘If You Sing’.
This song is sung in a dueling situation by either of the individual or group. When a situation arises and in situation when one of the party are lost for words or are not able to conjure up a dueling verse this song is sang to ridicule the other group. The song gives the message that if one learns to sing, he will not lost anything but develop his power of thinking. Nothing goes in waste or in vain in learning to sing. People who learn to sing develops their singing repertoire as well as their ability to speak well, which means they become intellectually developed and more knowledgeable. People who sing well can speak well, their reasoning and wit develops thus making them knowledgeable and broad minded. Therefore one should be always encouraged to learn how to sing.

The Maos has a very rich repository of folk music and folksongs that come naturally to them. Singing of folksong is a norm and an integral part of the community and regarded as an authentic and authoritative medium of communication which often reflects to their past and their culture. The Mao love for music is reflected in the different thematic songs they possess. They have uncanny sense of employing nature surrounding them as metaphors to enrich their meanings. Some of their songs were directed to their foes and some of them are sheer boast, of their prowess and exploits which they sing mainly during revelry in festivals.

The subject of this study is on the *The poetry and Lore of the Mao-Naga Folksong*, the traditional songs of unknown authorship, transmitted
orally, originating from the beliefs and customs of the folk. The Mao-Naga community has several types of folk songs which are sung on different occasions, in connection with different purposes. Folk song forms a particular mode of oral tradition that contributes towards maintaining the history of the people. Folk songs used to play a vital role of regenerating the society in times of difficulties. They also find a special place in festive gatherings, religious ceremonies and other special occasions. Therefore, the role of folk songs in tribal communities occupies a position of great importance.

The Mao-Naga community has a rich tradition of folksongs. *Opfu-Opelo* literally means ‘father–grandfather song’ which implies that they are songs of the forefathers. The songs are composed and sung about a wide range of cultural practices, which includes themes on head-hunting, tragic circumstances and other related subjects. In the absence of any written documents of the past, the origin of the Nagas in general and the Mao-Naga tribe in particular, have been traced on the basis of folksongs and folklore. The folksongs are put into different categories in accordance with their specific purpose and occasion. Folksongs are accorded a position of importance in serving as a template to the ways of the community. In other words, folksongs bear testimony to the legacy and larger cultural attributes of the valour and courage, of love affairs, honour and in praise of the man of consequence. In fact, the entire life cycle is traced through songs and chants. Therefore, songs are the common outlet for the people, whether during festive occasions,
religious ceremonies, funeral, or simply during common gatherings, or while engaged in agrarian work, songs are a common feature in all of them.

1.4 Oral Literature and Verbal Arts

The term ‘Folklore’ was first coined by William J. Thoms, a British antiquarian in 1846. In his letter, published in the Athenaeum, he recommended the use of a good Saxon compound Folk-Lore meaning “the Lore of the people” to replace all cumbersome and even slightly misleading terminologies. W. J. Thoms further urges readers of the Athenaeum to collect examples of those “manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs etc.” many of which “assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them” (Athenaeum, No 982, 1846: 862-863).

Folklore is commonly considered as the lore of the uneducated rural folk by many. Folklorists have made attempts to define the term ‘folklore’. Attempts to define folklore by many scholars have contributed much to the domain of folkloristics. But one has to take into account that the term folklore is comparatively a new creation, nonetheless ‘folklore is as old as mankind’ (Handoo 2001:1). It has to be noted that materials of folklore had been collected and studied long before W.J. Thoms coined the term, under various description such as ‘Popular antiquities’ or ‘Popular literatures’. Herder, a German National had used terms such as Volkslied (folksong), Volksseele, (folk soul), and Volksglaube (folk belief) in the late eighteen century (Dundes 1985:5). The Grimm brothers published the first volume of their famous
Kinder und Housmarchen in 1812 which was recognized by W.J. Thoms himself and which is often used as evidence by Western scholars to trace the growth of folkloristic studies. Scholarly collections of folklore materials were also done in Asia, particularly India where works such as the Kathāsaritsāgar, Pañcatantra or Jātaka (Handoo 2001:6) are believed to be much older than many folklore collections in the West and even older than the Grimm’s collection.

William J. Thoms was very much influenced by the Grimm brothers of Germany and this can be seen in his remarks on the Grimm brothers:

“......until some James Grimm shall arise who shall do for the Mythology of the British Island the good service which that profound antiquary and philologist has accomplished for the Mythology of Germany. The present century has scarcely produced a more remarkable book, imperfect as its learned author confesses it to be, than the second edition of the “Deutsche Mythologie” and, what is it? - a mass of minute facts, many of which, when separately considered, appear trifling and insignificant - but, when taken in connection with the system in to which his master-mind has woven them, assume a value that he who first recorded them never dreamed of attributing to them.” (Athenaeum. No. 982 (August 22, 1846) pp. 862-863).
When William J. Thoms coined the term folklore, he seems to be very clear about what constitutes folklore. His words and phrases such as ‘manners, customs, neglected customs, fading legends, fragmentary ballads’ and others do give us a picture about what folklore meant to him and his awareness of folklore which was closely tied to currents of romanticism and nationalism (Dundes 1985: 4).

After twenty-two years of coining the term Folklore (1846) by W. J. Thoms, ‘the British Folklore Society’ was established in 1878, with W.J. Thoms as its first director. The American folklore society which was formed ten years later in 1888, followed the English model, and while it did not offer any definition on the term folklore, the objectives were given as “the study of folklore in general and in particular the collection and publication of the folklore of North America” (North American Journal of Folklore 1898, 11: 302). By the last decade of the nineteen century, many national folklore societies had been formed in Europe.

Definitions of folklore are many and varied. According to the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, there are twenty-one definitions of folklore offered by different folklorists. The difficulties experienced in defining folklore are real and legitimate. This is because Folklore as a new field of inquiry is straddled between Humanities and Social sciences.
The term folk appear to be confusing and misleading. Because in the 19th century the term folk was defined as:

“They group of people (the peasants, non-literate or illiterate or rural people) who constituted the lower stratum of the society”
(Dundes 1978: 2).

If this definition is accepted then one would have to conclude that one day folklore would disappear as soon as the peasant society ceased to exist. If we accepted the above definition then we can say that the urban dwellers are not folks, and as such they have no folklore. But in the true sense folklore is still continuing in all societies. This is because folklore is not static but subject to change and continuity.

According to Jones and Georges the word folklore:

“… denotes expressive forms, processes, and behaviours that we customarily learn, teach and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions and judge to be traditional. They are based on known precedents or models, and because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, belief, and feeling”
(Georges & Jones 1995:1).
But most are in agreement with Alan Dundes who contend that the term folk can refer to;

“… any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is - it could be a common occupation, language or religion - but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. In theory a group must consist of at least two persons, but generally, most groups consist of many individuals. A member of the group may not know all other members, but he will probably know the common core of traditions belonging to the group, traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity” (Dundes 1978:7).

Lore refers to wisdom, teaching, education and knowledge.

The contribution of Thoms through his coinage of the term folklore had two important consequences all over the world. Firstly it led to the founding of an academic discipline known as Folklore in many part of the globe. And secondly it generated a long and unending controversy about the definition and about what should or should not be included in the discipline of Folklore.
It is a historical fact that the area of inquiry in folklore has been found to be overlapping, repetitive and duplicitous in the sense that the same cultural phenomenon has been studied by different disciplines and at times in identical manner. This in turn led to the controversies regarding the boundaries of each area of inquiry. For example since both literary scholars representing the discipline of literature and folklorists studied folk literature, sometimes on similar line and sometime in different ways, folklore studies began to be considered as part of the literary studies therefore denying it the status of a separate discipline which has its own distinct characteristics. In the same way when a folklorist studies a physical artifact of culture, anthropologists started behaving exactly in the same manner like the literary scholars in the case of text based folk literature.

Since the beginning of the scholarly studies of Folklore in the early nineteen century, folklorists have been aware that the phenomena they study are integral parts of a complex of creation and conventions which are fundamental to the existence, perpetuation, and survival of the human as a social being. This complex of interrelated behaviours of man serve as a base for what is commonly known as culture. Folklore has been conceived as cultural phenomena long before Edward B. Tylor’s definition of the word culture in 1871. Culture is defined by Tylor as that “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1924: 1). Even the early Greek writers such as Hesiod and Herodotus knew that the
myths they characterized were not instinctive phenomena, but rather they are aware they are stories that individual human beings create and other subsequently learn, repeat and live by. The Grimm’s brothers had indicated that their collection of German legends (Deutsche Sagen 2. Vols. 1816-1818) were part of the larger whole that embodied and revealed the character of a nation. This is reflected in their foreword to the Deutsche Sagen Volume I, 1816:

“We recommend our book to devotees of German poesie, history and language and hope that it will become to all as purely German fare. For it is our firm belief that nothing is as edifying or as likely to bring more joy than the products of the fatherland. Indeed an apparently insignificant, self occasioning discovery and endeavour in the study of our own indigenous culture can in the end bring more fruit than the most brilliant discovery and cultivation of foreign fields.” (Ward 1981:11)

Throughout the history of folklore as a discipline, it has been observed that those were the pioneers in the documentation and study of folklore then were also pioneering students of culture. By 1871 the year, Edward Tylor gave his famous definition of Culture and Anthropology subsequently emerged as an academic discipline with culture as its central construct, folklorists had, for more than fifty years been trying to conceive examples of folklore as aspects of culture. Folklorists have also been aware that folklore is related to other
aspects of cultures of which they are a part. Therefore folklore serves as an important source of cultural knowledge and understanding. The varied definitions of folklore by different scholars, not only define the folkloric phenomenon, but also try to list the genres that make this phenomenon. But this gives rise to controversies and debate that centre on the problem trying to draw a line between Cultural Anthropology and Folkloristics. In the academic circles both Anthropology and Folklore, there was at least one thing on which all by and large seems to agree, i.e. folk literature or verbal art. Scholars seemed to agree that folk literature is a separate area of inquiry and falls under Folklore. But when Folklore scholars tried to include material culture, social folk customs and performing art which generally fall under folklife, the controversies became more obvious. Scholars were suspected that both the students of Folklore and Cultural Anthropology in the end might be studying the same subject matter with identical theoretical perspective and methodology and this might lead to the achieving of similar results. But W.H. Goodenough put an end to such speculations by saying:

“The separation of cultural anthropology and folklife study ... is not a reflection of an intrinsic difference in their respective subject matter: rather is a reflection on how Euro-American scholars have identified themselves with the peoples whose customs and cultures they study. Anthropology- because of its early interest in human evolution and because of its early concentration on people with hunting and horticultural
economies, on the mistaken assumption that they were fossilized relics of a general past human state- has come to be associated popularly with the study of the so called primitive peoples. But the designation primitive hardly fits the people who produced the civilization of Central and South America, of West Africa and the Orient. Consequently Anthropology has come to be viewed more recently as the study of non-Western peoples. The disciplines of Rural Sociology and Folklore in the United States and Folklife in Europe, on the other hand, dealt with Western peoples. There is nothing wrong with such a division of labour on practical grounds. What has been wrong is the false pretention by some that it represented a basic difference in the kinds of phenomenon studied, an assumption following from an ethnocentric conceit of the sort expressed in the idea ‘the White man’s burden.” (Yoder 1976: 19)

The revolution that occurred in the Folklore discipline in the 1970s was unprecedented. It involved radical redefining the academic discipline of folklore. There is a change in the perception of folklore. Many folklorists started advocated that folklore is not only about the past. It is about the now and the happening. This in turn led to the emergence of Contemporary or Urban Folklore e.g. urban legends, jokes, place lore, playing the dozen, yo’mama jokes and rap, occupational lore, etc. and modern technology lore.
Richard M Dorson has outlined four broad sectors of Folklore and Folk life studies; they are:

1) Oral Literature
2) Material Culture
3) Social Folk Customs
4) Performing Arts

1.4.1 Oral Literature

Oral literature is also called verbal art or expressive literature. They are spoken, sung and voiced of traditional utterances. Traditionally this sector is known as folk literature. Oral narratives like myth, legends, folktales, jokes anecdotes, proverbs, riddles, charms etc fall under this sector. Each of these forms will have many sub genre depending on the culture in which these genres are found. Oral or folk poetry is another subdivision of oral literature.

1.4.2 Material Culture

Material culture which is also known as Physical folklore concerns with the study of techniques, skills of the folk in building their homes, making clothes, preparing food, tools and implements etc. This aspect of folklore is visible rather than aural.

1.4.3 Social Folk Customs

This is another branch of folklore which is very close to material culture. It studies the festivals and celebrations involving the participation of
the folk in large numbers. These festivals and celebrations may be either religious or secular. Folk religion and folk medicine also fall under social folk customs.

1.4.4 Performing Folk Art

This last sector of folklore and folk life concerns itself primarily with traditional music, dance and drama.

1.5 Demographic and Cultural Profile of the Mao

1.5.1 Land and People

The Indian Union consists of four main group of race, namely the Austro-Asiatic, the Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, and the Tibeto-Burman. North-east India is inhabited by the Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman groups of people. Tibeto-Burman speakers form the major chunk of the population in the region. The Tibeto-Burman group is further classified into different other groups and sub-groups making it a myriad of language and culture which makes the north-east region a golden trove for folklore and linguistic research today. The region is inhabited by more than a hundred and more indigenous communities inhabiting 2.1% of the Indian geographical landscape and making up 3.1% of the population of India. Different communities are clubbed together under different nomenclature based on their cultural practices and social affinities like food habits, linguistic affinities and other similar folk ways of life. The proximity of communities allows much linguistic assimilation and acculturation that makes the understanding of the
communities baffling. Therefore the diversity that exists within this part of the
country is just amazing. Researchers from different fields have been trying to
unveil the many unique features of language and culture of the region, yet the
tangible and intangible features are so spacious many areas remains to be
covered.

Manipur the land of many exotics was described as ‘Switzerland of
India’ by Lord Irwin during his lordship during the colonial period. And
Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of Independent India called it as
‘Jewel of the East’. True, Manipur has an incredible beautiful landscape and is
generously endowed with undulating hills, valley, forests, clear blue lakes, the
flora and fauna and other natural beauties that is abound in the state. It is one
of the seven sister states of northeast India. Manipur is bounded by Nagaland
in the north, Mizoram in the south, Assam in the west, and by the
neighbouring country of Myanmar in the east and the south-east. Manipur was
 accorded the status of a Union Territory in 1956, and Statehood on January 21,
1972 with Imphal as its capital. Manipur has land topography of 22,327 sq.
km. It is divided into two physical divisions of hills and valley. Since time
immemorial, the valley is inhabited by the Meiteis and the hills are the
traditional homes of different indigenous communities. Today the valley is
divided into four administrative districts of Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal
West and Thoubal. And the hills are divided into five administrative districts
of Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul. The hills
cover an area of 20,089 sq. km. i.e. about \(\frac{3}{4}\)th of the total land area of the state and are the home of 33 Scheduled communities.

*Mao* is an ethno-linguistic term referring to the *Memai* people and their language. The different communities residing in many parts of north-east India are labeled names which are contrary to the names the particular community identifies themselves. It is no different with the Maos as well. The community is officially known as Mao, but the community identify themselves with their indigenous term in their own language ‘Memai’. Mao or *Memai* is a major Naga community inhabiting the hilly terrain along the foothills of Mt. Esū on Japfü mountain range of Senapati district, in the northern part of Manipur. The community is recognized as a scheduled tribe by the Indian Union and the state of Manipur. The Maos neighbours like the Angamis who calls them ‘Sovoma’, Rengmas and Chakhesangs in the north, the Marams who calls them ‘Momai’ and Zemes in the west, and the Poumais who calls them ‘Momai’ and the Tangkhuls in the east and the Meiteis in the south. The community has a population of 58,212 speakers (Census on Population of Communities Hill House Tax in Senapati district 1999-2002; conducted by the District Information Centre, Senapati), distributed in twenty-five villages.

Reference on Mao in the written literature of earlier period can be seen in G.A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II: (451-461),* (1903-28) as Sopvomā or Māo Nāgā. Hutton (1969) use the term Memi in
reference to the Mao. Memi can be construed as been derived from Memeo supposedly the progenitor of the Maos. Hodson (1911) uses Mao and Sopvoma in reference to the Mao people. The term might be a derivation from Shipfumai (sang in folk songs) which is a combination of Shipfuo, considered to be the progenitor of the Mao and Poumai and mai meaning people. In later period writers like Marrison (1967) and J.P. Mill (1937) and others use the term Mao to infer the people as well as the language.

1.5.2 The Origin

Mythology plays an important part in the life of indigenous communities. Every community has a version or versions of myth of origin. On the whole myth of origin plays an important role in the beliefs of these communities, their way of life, ritualistic practices, and their social and cultural life. Myth of origin conveys a community’s sense of its particular identity and describes the original ordering of the universe. Therefore it is no different for the Maos that they have their own version of Origin or what is popularly known as Creation myth. Myth is etiological in nature and so is the Mao’s Origin myth. The Maos have their place of origin at Makhraifü or Makhrai Rabu also known as Makhel today. The place is talked and sung about to this day (In our current study, the folksong entitled Makhrai Hrüi is been studied in chapter -2).

The origin of the Mao community is shrouded in mystery and remains untraced as there are no written records. An oral narrative, in fact, a myth
ascribes to the origin of the community to one Dzüliamosüro, a mystical woman. The tale relates that in the beginning were the flat earth and the green sky. A divine woman named Dzüliamosüro inhabited the earth. She roamed about the whole earth. On one such sojourn she felt very tired and laid to rest beneath a large banyan tree. And as she lay resting, a big mass of cloud engulfed her and droplets of water dripped into her vagina and thus the woman conceived. She bore three offspring namely Ora (God), who is the eldest, Okhe (Tiger), the middle and Omai (man) the youngest. The siblings lived a happy contended family life at the place of their birth with their mother and this place came to be known as Makhrai Rabu or Makhraifü, presently known as Makhel in Memai land. Thus the Mao community traced their progenitor to this mythical woman Dzüliamosüro and the place of their origin to Makhraifü or Makhrai Rabu.

1.5.3 Migration and Settlement

It is believed that the Maos originated from Makhrai Rabu and from here they relocated to other surrounding settlements. This is also true of other Naga communities who claim to have departed from where the Chütebu-keje (big wild pear tree) stands today. This tree marked the dispersals of different Naga communities from this spot. But it also more importantly signifies the oneness of the Nagas. A practice by communities who trace their origin to Makhrai Rabu is that when branches of this tree breaks or fall, a genna (a restrictive observation) is observed from one village to another as long as the news traverses to the extent of Pishu Kazhe even if it be after a month or so.
The Mao community makes their settlements on the upper reaches of mountain. This is from the strategic point of warfare as one could see enemies approaching from a distance. However, life is hard since vegetation and paddy cultivation is done chiefly along the river bank which is far from human settlement and the time of harvest, paddy is to be brought home climbing ranges of hills. Despite the hard life a Mao would continue to opt for similar location for his safety. This Hutton clearly understood and thus stated, “This site, though generally in a position highly defensible if not impregnable from the point of view of Naga warfare” (1921: 43). Each village has one main gate and other secondary gates depending on the position of the village. The surrounding is fortified with sharp-pointed bamboo stakes varied in sizes and lengths. The approaches to the village are often uphill paths through narrow lanes devised for one single person to walk at a time. This path leads up to the main gate of the village. The gate is built with an embankment on both sides and closed with a strong and heavy wood hewn out of a single tree.

1.5.4 Language and Linguistic Affinity

Mao belongs to the Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Language classification showing language family affiliation following different classifications right from Grierson (1904) till Bradley (1997) shows that Mao belongs to the Naga group of languages. The first school in the Mao area was said to have been established at ‘Kopo’ in the 1920s which sowed the seed of education in the Mao country. The first group of scholars who took to formal education was thus in the first part of the 20th century. Later the
language was reduced to the written orthography by adopting the Roman script.

Classification of Naga languages was first attempted by Nathan Brown (Marrison 1967: 19). However it was G. A. Grierson who first gave an extensive study on the Naga languages in 1903. He and Konow placed the Mao under the Nāgā-Kuki sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Later this classification was questioned by scholars but later the same scholars found that Mao has close affinity to the Western Nāgā languages consisting of Angāmi, Sema, Rengma and Kezhāma. Marrison (1967), improving over Grierson’s classification gave a more descriptive study of Naga languages and placed Mao under Angami sub-branch of languages which consists of Angami (Khonoma), Angami (Kohima), Chokri, Kezhama, Mao and Sema. Hodson and Hutton following Grierson’s classification put the language under the Nāgā-Kuki group of languages. Hutton further goes on to say that “…the linguistic grouping of the Naga tribes does not seem to be absolutely conterminous with what may be styled their racial grouping, as the Memi (Mao) are in every respect but that of language very intimately allied to the other Angami tribes”. Paul Benedict (1972) puts Mao under the Southern Naga group of the Kuki-Naga branch. Though different scholars might have placed the Mao language under different sub-groups, even so the language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of family.
1.6. Community Life

The Maos have a very vibrant community life which can be seen in their day to day social-cultural life. The social-cultural life of the people revolves around the year in a cyclic manner. The social festivals and the work nature of the community open the door to the community’s way of life on a day to day basis.

Maos have very closely knit family ties. Once a son or a daughter gets married he or she leaves the parental home to set up one’s own new home and hearth. The parents and relatives of the newlywed couple help out in setting up the new home till the couples are ably independent and on their own.

The social bond or attachment in the people develops because of reason of security and other basic necessities which could benefit out of living together as a community. The goodness and integrity of the community is giving priority over individual benefits. Every member has the moral and social obligation to the welfare of the community. Different aspect of their lives either in working, feasting and even in performing rites and rituals is carried out as a community. This is best manifested in the cooperative system of working together like *Ava Kochu* and *Chokhroh pfuva kasa* which help them to develop a sense of oneness of the community. In this kind of work few individual forms a group to work in each other’s field or work on rotational basis. This group normally consists of boys and girls from their respective
dormitories. Such group works help bring them together for work and celebrate work and share meat and rice beer.

The Maos follows the patriarchal family system. The father is the head of the family and as such the offspring takes the surname of the father. As the system of family is patriarchal the ownership of ancestral property goes to the youngest male child generally. Yet, of late this trend is changing and often the family’s property is been divided amongst the children – both male and female - by their parents. The marriage systems of the Maos are well defined. There are arranged marriages, love marriage, love-arranged marriage and in the past even forced marriage is also talked about in the tales and songs of the community. But today this trend is hardly known.

1.6.1 Dormitory System

The Maos practised bachelors’ and maidens’ dormitory system known as Khruchüzü for the boys and Lochüzü for the girls in the pre-literate period. The dormitory is usually hosted by an elderly man for the male and by an elderly woman for the female, persons who are well versed in all spheres of life. It is in the dormitory that the youngsters are taught the skills of life in the furious tribal world. Lives in the dormitory starts after the male child undergo the ritual of initiation. And for the female child it is after the girl attains puberty that she enters the dormitory life. It is in the dormitory the young people were taught to take responsibilities and be leaders of tomorrow. It is in the dormitories where informal education of life takes place. Therefore it is
The dormitory or institution serves as the cultural cradle hub for the Maos, where songs, dance and lore of different hues are passed on from generation to generation by the elder raconteur. Folksongs are composed, taught and sang at the institution, the different dances are enacted and taught and oral narrative the backbone of every society pertaining to their past is narrated and inculcated night after night. One factor in considering to the appointment of an elder as the institution keeper is his adeptness or expertise in oral narratives of the community. Thus, different genres of oral narratives or verbal arts are disseminated to the youngsters through the memory in spoken language from the mouth of the elder raconteur day after day, month after month and year after year. This is how the oral tradition of the people was kept alive through this institution for the past many centuries. In the institution, riddling, wise sayings and proverbs goes on stirring the minds of the young ones in whose memory this verbal treasures are etched away forever. And it is not presumptuous to say that some day one of this youngster would take the place of the old keeper and pass the lore of the community to the next generation. This is how the oral tradition of the village and the community thrived for ages through this institution.
1.6.2 Head Hunting

The culture of head hunting is a practice that dates back to early period. The culture of head hunting has made the Nagas famous or rather infamous to the outside world. The Maos are known for their brevity and action oriented acts, courage, bravado and also for their ferocity. Head hunting was known to have been practiced by the Maos. Accounts of head hunting are immortalized in the folksongs and lore of the community.

1.6.3 Fishing and Hunting

The Maos living in the hilly terrains are by nature good fisherman and natural hunters in their own way. The community does not live by the side of the sea or ocean. Yet their sense of survival and want allows them to make the best use of what is accessible to them that is rivers and streams which are there aplenty in their hilly land. There is also the fishing festival called ‘Beluni’, where the people go for fishing on a specific day. The community also has group fishing using the bark of a specific tree which is mashed into the river water which intoxicates the fish and the people are able to collect them. Often fishing has little to do with commercial purpose but basically for personal consumption.

1.6.4 Hunting

Hunting is another socially important activity for the community. There is a day set aside for community hunting, where every kill of the animal is shared by all the participants in the hunt, the person who gets the first strike
of the animal is gets the head. The chief of the village a leg, the hunting dog a
good lump of meat and so on. There are also individual or group hunting, but
the allotment of the head and the leg is all the same.

1.6.5 Bird Hunting

The Maos also have a day where the whole man folks of the village
undertake to catch birds. On this day the chase begin early in the morning. No
catapult or gun or bird lime is used in this hunt. The people catch the bird with
bare hand or strike them with sticks and bamboo poles. The catch is never
consumed but brought to the village chief’s house, tied on a bamboo pole and
set up on the front of the house for the rest of the year.

1.7 Material Culture of the Mao

Material culture of the community is another aspect which further
enhances the identity of the community. The materials which is specific to the
community and which has evolves over the years along with the community
are mostly the agricultural implements and household articles. The bamboo
mats, the hoes, the motor and pestle, the barns, the kegs and the wooden plates
are some of the materials that are endemic to the Maos in particular.

1.7.1 House Construction

The Mao’s houses are generally simple and spacious. The house
structure is made of wooden pillars, bamboo splits, knitted and covered with
thatch. The houses are usually constructed during the dry season. The
indigenous houses of the Maos differ in small measures. The main pillar of the house ‘ote’ is made of a huge and long trunk of a tree to support the whole structure of the house. The most common setting of the house which is based on their belief is that the front of the house should face towards the east. The house usually consists of three different compartments, the portico, on top of which a stage can be constructed for the dormitory, the granary room, which also doubles up as cattle room and the kitchen which doubles up as the bedroom for the family. The house has two doors, the main entrance in the front and the backdoor, which is a small and low one and not always used.

The village chief’s house is much bigger and more decorative than the individual houses. It is designed with carved skull, heads of buffaloes and bulls, tigers and other design. An individual house on the other hand is usually simple yet decoration with curve structure can be added to those persons who had performed the feast of merit.

1.7.2 Basketry

Basketry has been known as a trade in the past. The usage of different kinds and size of basket and other accessories are known to the community. Baskets are weaved out of cane and bamboo slits. Usages of baskets are varied in nature, some are used to carry things, and some are used to store things while some are used during rituals.

1.7.3 Weaving
Mao community was not known to grow cotton. But their ingenuity does not allow them to stop there. The barks of fibrous plants are processed and refined into fine thread like materials to use in the weaving of cloths. The Maos use the loin-loom for their weaving. The motif on the cloths is myriad and of different hues, different cloths are weaved for different set of people and for different achievements or purposes. Often the artistic and imaginative and creative minds of the Mao ladies are expressed in the beautiful motifs the weave on the cloths.

1.7.4 Carving

Carving as an art is carried out by man in the most creative manner. Carving amongst the Mao is often found on the village-gate, the house walls and also on the plates and bowls carvings of wood. Motif of head, animals, birds and others are often found on the walls of houses. Often beautiful plates of different sizes are found as piece of artistic works in the homes of the Maos. The legged plates are prized possessions of the Maos. Carving is an age old trade followed by the Maos as a hobby to meet the need of the house but never known for commercial purposes.

1.8 Agriculture

The Maos are by nature hard-working and are a very advanced group of agrarian community. The community has a robust economy which is based on agriculture and with very little dependency from outside for their livelihood. Their day-to-day food products and other basic necessity is self
produced. Their daily need is self-sustained and their surplus products are exported to other neighboring communities allowing them to earn some hard-cash on a daily basis. The Maos are very enterprising and on the whole have good knowledge of the many farming practices throughout the year. Today different types of tillers and implements have replaced the indigenous implements, usages of which were physically strenuous.

1.8.1 Jhum Cultivation

Jhum cultivation which was practised by the Maos in the past is a bygone activity. One of the reasons for abandoning jhum cultivation is that of more labour and little produced and the toll it takes on the land and the cultivators.

1.8.2 Wet and Terrace Cultivation

These are the most common form of cultivation amongst the Mao community today. Today the people have adopted wet and terraced cultivations on a large scale. This cultivation is basically for paddy cultivation as well as for growing vegetables. And paddy is cultivated in summer. Different varieties of paddy are the most common product of the Maos. And vegetables such as potatoes, cabbage, squash and different pulses, lentils are grown to meet their needs. Today the increase in the mouth to feed has turned the terrace fields into cash-crop farmland before the onset of summer.
1.9 Festival

Festivals of the Mao community are known for their festive celebration. Every festival is accompanied by feasting which practically consists of rice-beer, meat and different varieties of dishes. It is also marked by adornment of colourful attires and traditional ornaments giving an air of glamour and liveliness. Every festival is celebrated on the onset or at the completion of a particular agrarian stage. Besides the joviality, festivals are accompanied by series of rites and rituals performed by the Chief of the village. Every festival is a thanksgiving ceremony for the blessings they received in the bygone days, and a call for supplication to god for their future. The most important of the festivals are, ‘Chithuni, Chijuni, Saleni, and Onuni’.

1.9.1 Chithuni

The Chithuni festival is the first festival in a calendar year for the Maos. It is celebrated in the month of Chithuni, the first month of the year. It is celebrated for five days starting on the 25th day of the vernacular month of the community. It is a New Year celebration of a thanksgiving for the past year and for the bountiful harvest. It is also a festival supplicating to the supreme God praying for favourable climatic condition for agricultural activities in the year.

The first day of the festival on the 25th of the month is called Nisha. On this day cows and buffalos are slaughtered for the feast and bread is baked. On the 26th day of the month is the big feast day, and on this day dogs, pigs and
chickens are slaughtered for the feast. On the 27th day of the month the girls who are married in that cyclic year are given a grand send off by the parents and brothers and relatives. On this day girls married off within the village visit their parental home with their husband where they are fed with the choicest of food and rice-beer. Girls who are married off to other villages come to their parental home the previous evening where they are given the best of treatment. On their going back the couple are given gifts of a basket of paddy which the girl carry and other gifts of meat and rice-beer by relatives and friends from the same dormitory to the couple’s home. The 28th and 29th days are for feast and merriment and where different indigenous games are competed by both males and females. Games like Khetsii kakhe and Kaka kaka are played by the females. Whereas games like Dziithe kada, Kotsii kozii and Osii kaka are played by the males. Wrestling, shot-put and others are also played. Every night throughout the five days festival, youths from the village gather at different central locations to have a fellowship over rice-beer drinks and meat dishes. Everyone bring their own share of rice-beer and dishes but everything is shared by the group. This is how bond of friendship and camaraderie among different section of the people gets strengthened. On the last day of the festival, members of the community would adorn themselves with traditional attires and track up the hill-top.¹ There they would perform rituals and also conduct long-jump competition for the man and dance competition for the woman folks. The Chithuni festival is the biggest of festivals of the Mao community.
1.9.2 Chūjūni

The Chūjūni festival is celebrated on the 27th of the local month $Pfozū$. The Chūjūni meaning ‘feast of the earth’ is celebrated with great amount of eating and drinking. During this festival people consume lot of meat and rice-beer in order to physically prepare for the upcoming plantation season. During this festival cowherds and their family are fed by the owners of cattle. And if there happens to be failure of proper rain, elders of the village carrying agricultural implements gather in the courtyard of the village and simulate cultivation and asked god to send rain so that the people can cultivate. In the early hour of of on the day of the festival males come out of the house and curse the thieves, cheats and people who are thought to be the scourge of the community. The cursing is done believing that life of individuals who indulge in these vices would be shortened.

1.9.3 Saleni

*Saleni* is celebrated for five days in the month of Sale of the lunar calendar. The festival sets in on the 28th day of the month till the 02nd of the Rolie month. This festival comes in right after the transplantation of paddy is over. This is a festival which is celebrated to compensate the energy lost during the process of transplantation of the paddy. This period is considered as one of the most strenuous times of the year in their agrarian cycle.

It is during this festival that *Macha Kozū* or ‘ritual of initiation’ is performed for the male child. This is one of the most important rituals in the
stages of life of a male child. During the performing of this ritual the father or the master of ceremonies and the boy does not eat along with other members of the family, they set up a new hearth and cook their food by themselves and eat by themselves. During this ritual he partakers consume only chicken and no other meat is consumed.

1.9.4 Onuni

Onuni is celebrated on the 28th day of the Onu month of the lunar calendar. Unlike the aforementioned three festivals Onuni festival is low keyed comparatively. It does not have the usual grandeur of a feast. The importance of this festival is the observation of different rites that is important for the welfare of the village.

In the present times, the onset of Christianity has brought about the celebration of Christmas and Easter in the community.

1.10 Religion

Religion in the pre-Christian era for the Mao community was the worship of the Supreme God, which is an indigenous religion - (which is still followed by some of the people). In every culture, there exists a practice of communicating with what is considered as a power superior to man. This practice results from a complex system of beliefs, ideas, and values sanctioned by members of the community. The practice of supplication and propitiation through rites and rituals establishes into religion which is known as Pfupe
Chüna meaning ‘forefather’s religion’. They believe in the existence of a Supreme God called Oramai. They also believe in the existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits. The benevolent spirits are considered as good and helpful whereas the malevolent spirits are evil and destructive to human, cause sickness and suffering and therefore need to be appeased through sacrifices and offerings.

1.10.1 Rites of passage

Rites of passage in the Mao community are many. This actual scheme of ritualizing a person at a particular phase to initiate him to the next phase is what we mean by rite of passage. The rites and rituals of the Mao community are based on their beliefs. The rites and rituals of the community evolve around the life cycle of man, the agricultural cycle or a war and upon their beliefs in the Supreme Being and the good and evil spirits. The ethnic communities in their sense of belief perform rituals for different purposes. Life begins with pregnancy, birth, naming ceremony, adolescent/puberty, marriage, death, calamities, observance of feast and festivals, genna, house warming, agrarian based rituals, and even at point of eating and drinking and others the tribal have a rite that is performed. The rite of passage is a ceremony or an event that marks an important stage in someone’s life. In a broad sense of the term it connotes the progression of social life of a person that is phase structured to mark by different rites as life goes on.
1.11 Aim and Objective

The present study is on the folk song of the Mao community. The objective of this study is to textually document the folksongs and to categorised them as per their thematic contents. The study also meant to analyse the documented data from the guiding aspects of translation, semantics and aesthetics. The mentioned parameters are faithfully adhered to and the data was analysed exhaustively to cull out the imbued significance in the folksongs. The study was analytical in nature. The study of this nature on folk song is the first of its kind in the Mao community. This in turn could help in the further development of folklore in the community.

1.12 Statement of the Problem

Folk songs form a particular mode of oral tradition that contributes towards maintaining the history of the people. Folk songs used to play a vital role of regenerating the society in times of war and calamities. They also find a special place in festive gatherings, religious ceremonies and other occasions. Therefore, the role of folk songs in tribal societies occupies a position of great importance. The Mao community is undergoing a stage of transition due to the influence of western culture thus causing a neglect of the ethos of traditional culture and the oral tradition. No effort or little effort has been made to retrieve, document or disseminate this wealth of material. Today there are very few accomplished folk singers who are capable of rendering the folk songs in their complete form. While some are good in a particular genre, others are good in another. Therefore, there is an absence of cohesive knowledge about
the tradition of singing. Folk songs are still sung occasionally, yet to comprehend the text of the songs is a difficult one. The help of knowledgeable elders for the purpose of interpretation is required, yet that too is few and the knowhow limited. Till date not a single booklet on the different genres of folk song exist in the community and the situation may not change much in the near future.

1.13 Methodology

The methodology applied in this study involved collecting of data through primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data collection was through fieldwork and data was collected from performers. Personal interaction with performers and knowledgeable elders of the community were the source for extra inputs to the song texts.

The source of secondary data collection employed by the scholar was gathering of information from secondary sources. Published books, journals, newspapers, magazines and seminar papers served as the main sources for secondary data. Visitations to different libraries by the scholar helped in widening the knowledge on the subject. The libraries the scholar visited during the course of the study are North-Eastern Hill University Central Library, North Eastern Council Library, State Central Library, Shillong, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Culture Library, Indian council of Social Sciences, Shillong, Sahitya Akademi Library, Kolkata, Ethnographic Museum, Jhodpur,
Central Institute of Indian Languages Library and Indian Institute of Advanced Study library.

1.14 References


Mao, K. Nipuni. 2010. *Rites of Passage in North East India*. Shillong: DBCIC.


