CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Garo (A·chik) folk narratives have a rich legacy. There are so many elements and patterns which form the narrative of the folk literature of the Garos. Most of these narratives are in oral form and they continue to survive down the generations being alive only through oral renditions and community memories. Interestingly, these narratives have significantly shaped and governed the cultural consciousness of the A·chiks. The A·chiks, being a community with intimate proximity to nature and its mystical manifestations, invented a rich heritage of folklore and narratives by aligning the mystical as well as the innocent with the experiential comprehension of their immediate reality into the folk narratives that matured with time into abiding community beliefs.

The term ‘Folklore’ was first suggested by a British antiquarian, William Thoms, in 1846. He realized that scholarly work on materials of folklore was being carried on under various names such as “Popular Antiquities” or “Popular Literature” and therefore needed to be categorised with single label to designate this important area of enquiry. He, therefore, suggested “a good Saxon Compound Folk – Lore – the lore of the people” to replace all other
somewhat cumbersome terms, in a letter to the *Athenaeum* (see Jawaharlal Handoo, 2000, 1).

Handoo, however, observes that folklore had been studied with scholarly interest long before Thoms coined the term. Though Thoms coined this term, but he did not give a definition of folklore. But he certainly had some kind of specific view of folklore in mind. His words and phrases such as “manners”, “customs”, “neglected customs”, “fading legends”, “fragmentary ballads”, etc., do present a clear picture of his increasing awareness of folklore which was “closely associated with nineteenth century intellectual currents of romanticism and nationalism” (Dundes, 1965, p.v).

While defining folklore, Handoo observes that there is no common framework to categorise folklore of various cultures. This has been the guiding principle for collection, classification, indexing, archiving and, above all, interpretations and analyses of folklore data all over the world. Some cultures may be rich in terms of some genre as the *marchen* (folktale) is a strong genre of Indo-European cultures owing to various geo-cultural factors. Handoo mentions how various types of changed or transformed *marchen* can be found among the American Indians, South and Central African cultures and in Asia (see Handoo, 2000, 10).

However, despite these characteristics of genres and the analytical categories, folklore has been defined differently by
different scholars. These definitions not only try to define the folkloric phenomenon, but also try to list the genres of which this phenomenon is made of. Naturally, the weaknesses inherent in these definitions gave rise to controversies, and these, as expected, centred on the same old problem, that is, the problem of trying to draw line between cultural anthropology and folklore studies. Within these definitions, and outside them in the wider academic circles – both of anthropology and of folklore – there was at least one thing on which, by and large, all seemed to agree, and that is folk literature or to use William R. Bascom’s term “verbal art” (1955, 245-52). Scholars generally seem to be in agreement that verbal art or folk literature is folklore and is a separate area of inquiry, different from cultural anthropology.

Abrams in his A Glossary of Literary Terms writes that folklore has been the collective name applied to “sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals” which are handed down mostly orally and not necessarily in written form. According to him folklore includes legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes; pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants, and animals; customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama performed on holidays or at communal gatherings’ (Abrams, 2008, 104-105).
Bess Lomax Hawes says:

Folklore is an unfinished profession, a profession within which there are still many areas of argument and conflict, a profession within which individuals still have serious choices to make. And just as the individual folklorist is required—by virtue to his membership within the profession—to balance out the conflicting essentials of his work, so too is the discipline of folklore itself (qtd. in Handoo, *et al.*, 1999, 1).

Handoo in his *Theoretical Essays in Indian Folklore* elaborates the theory and practice of folklore. He opines that Grimms of Germany, known as the founding fathers of folklore studies, had interests both in folklore and languages. Their interest in folklore remained, for some time, subordinate to their linguistic (philological) investigations, which, strictly speaking, has not concerned itself with the problems of meaning. In fact, the paradigm of philology is essentially a paradigm of reconstruction, and has remained heavily loaded with European ethnocentrism. Even after the release from this subordination, the main concern of Grimms’ (particularly by Jacob’s) effort was to collect parallels and try to reconstruct the original forms of folklore items. This demanded a reasonable collection of data and particularly rich and fascinating fairy tales. Thus Grimms finally ended up as the greatest collector of folktales. Grimms’ efforts laid the foundation of a new discipline and certainly a theoretical framework which eventually was picked up by Max Muller and European contemporaries. Though Max Muller did not deviate that Grimm’s methodology yet he added
folkloristic dimensions to the philological model and took as Handoo put it, “beyond the objective of reconstruction into the realm of meaning” (see Handoo, 2000, 45).

Handoo also mentions how Theoder Benfey, an Indologist like Max Muller, centred his attention on the problems of diffusion and migration of folklore. He gradually enfolded the field of theory and methodology of folklore scholarship. Benfey added one more historically important dimension to the folklore theories of the nineteenth century: those similarities of folklore items across the continents and unrelated cultures could now be explained with the help of historical factors such as migration and the resultant borrowing. Benfey’s theoretical contribution was a natural by-product of a larger theoretical bias: that the source of all folktales of the world was India, which, however was never proved. Benfey’s theory of borrowing might have indirectly contributed to the fresh thinking on atomistic bias in folklore theory (Handoo, ibid, 47).

The Finnish or historic-geographic method placed much emphasis on form which was considered as the sole criterion for achieving the objective of tracing the original form and travel routes of a tale or any other item of folklore. It certainly emphasized mathematical accuracy in analytical procedures thus minimizing the chances of imaginative speculation which was being applied in an unrestrained manner in folklore scholarship. This method also
inspired the creation of valuable folk narrative lexicons such as the *Type Index* and the *Motif Index*, and also opened up the possibilities of the use of computers in folklore studies (Thompson, 1955-58, 6 vols). Modern structuralists seem to have borrowed at least the language of analysis from the *Finnish* method despite the strange irony that structuralism in folklore studies was born as a reaction to *Finnish* methodology and diachronic studies (Propp, 1928, 15).

Structuralism in folklore was born out of Russian Formalist thought and as a reaction to *Finnish* methodology and diachronic studies. Vladimir Propp was one of the major proponents of *Russian Formalism* that had short period of development. Through the publication of *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) he became the first structural folklorist. The original Russian version of Propp’s work was published in 1928, but it remained unknown to the English speaking world for almost thirty years. The Formalist School was officially condemned from within and with no communication with the outside world. Threatened by these crises, Propp himself had to abandon Formalism and morphological analysis in order to devote himself to historical and comparative research on the relationship between oral literature and myth, rites and institutions.

Propp’s method of measuring the morphological elements of fairy tales and ignoring the content and context can be
compared with that brand of linguistic structuralism which paid attention exclusively to the rules which governed the construction of statements, and in the process Formalism lost sight of the fact that “no language exists in which vocabulary can be deduced from the syntax”. The study of any linguistic system requires the combined effort of a grammarian and the philologist. “Thus for oral tradition” writes Levi-Strauss, “morphology is sterile unless ethnographic observation, direct or indirect, comes to fertilize it” (qtd. in Handoo, 2000, 50).

Scholars of structural analysis, drawing inspiration from the French anthropological school and nourished by the experiments of Levi-Strauss with American Indian mythology, separated itself completely from Formalism. They claim to have made the discovery of the mythological truth in the unity of concrete and the abstract. Form is defined in contrast to content; however, they also claimed that structure had no content. According to Strauss, “it is the content comprehended in a logical organization which is conceived of as a property of reality”. These scholars therefore believe that the Proppian analysis deals with form alone whereas Levi-Straussian structuralism takes care of both form and content. Besides, Propp’s morphological analysis is based on Russian fairy tales (märchen) alone while Strauss is trying to uncover the realm of the myths. Propp does not alter the “syntax” of the tale; in other words, he attempts to decipher its morphology
(functions of the characters) and the combinations as it is “given” by the informant. Levi-Strauss on the other hand, believes that the content of a myth narrative comprehended in a logical organization cannot and should not lie on the given structure and therefore needs “re-arrangement” by reducing the structural components to meaningful paradigms.

Levi-Strauss draws heavily upon the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussare, Trobetskoy and Roman Jakobson. His firm belief in Freudian concepts that “genuine meaning lies behind the apparent one”, that “no meaning has to be accepted at its face value”, that the “true meaning... is not that of which men are aware”, and that “conscious data are always erroneous or illusory”, clearly shows that he looks at “conscious meaning” something outside the scope of his structural analysis (Fenichel, 1945). The structural analysis of Levi Strauss tells, how myths are created at the unconscious level, but it does not tell us why they survive, and are remembered and believed by human societies irrespective of the changes that have occurred to mankind. It would seem that his structural analysis is more concerned about the uniform biological functioning of the human mind rather than the logical working of the human societies. His formulations have certainly added a new dimension to folkloristic research, that is, it has enhanced the depths of “savage mind” (1962).
The psychoanalytical school was influenced by the extraordinary writings of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Their explorations were mainly based on dreams and their dreamers. With the help of the dream, psychologists always attempt translating the dreams from the unconscious fantasy to a conscious meaningful symbolic phenomenon. A dream is largely an abstract experience of an individual. The myth on the other hand, is invariably shared by collective psyche of the ethnic group, sometimes by all the members of a culture or even a nation (Handoo, 2000, 54). The problem of genre and the generic qualities and the relationship between the genres have been completely ignored by the folklorists who follow psychoanalytic method.

**Folklore and Oral History**

James Morrison once famously said, “All societies have a history and all history begins as oral” (Morrison, 1998). It offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history. With complete reliance on the written document, the paradigm of history becomes inevitably a prisoner of the idiosyncratic written testimony that has been created to survive. But spoken word would be evanescent, it is fluid, dynamic, like a river in which thoughts and experiences are presented as a spontaneous process connected by grammatical structures (Handoo et al, 1999, 4). In contrast, the written word is
static; it fixes thoughts and experiences as products. The distance in dialogical process has enough possibilities for false presentations and distortions. One must also keep in mind that the paradigms of written history and written literature have coexisted. It is not surprising to see the aspects of written history influencing many other important aspects (art, architecture, dress, cuisine, etc) of a culture by virtue of the hegemony of the writing system.

One must also remember that writing is not merely a tool, a medium through which we manifest our thoughts. It is a practice that alters human consciousness. It is a different way of perceiving the world and conducting the affairs of the world.

Historians claim that history is an ongoing dialogue between the present and the past to understand the future. When the past is presented falsely, it automatically influences the present and plans equally a false future. The historians, who are guided by the concept of chronology, must be aware of the sequence of cause and effect – otherwise, the historical analysis is faulty.

The historical documentation of the kings, palaces and their life styles has been, it would seem, the ultimate goal of history writing in India and elsewhere but when extending to the tribal situations, the documented referent is missing, as tribal people have no written texts, no written history and no palaces.
A folk epic, strictly speaking, is not history, but its underlying metaphor. If interpreted accurately and trusted, it can tell us about the real history of an ethnic group, a speech community or even a region. Other genres of folklore which scholars discard as “false” or “exaggerated” can be useful in tracing the history of the tribe. The tribal people did not develop the kind of social structure, caste system and its hierarchies, or the feudalism we generally notice among the non-tribal population of India. So the ethnographic facts should be measured by tribal standards which certainly are oral and free from constraints and the hegemony of written metaphors.

II

Richard M. Dorson in his book, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (1972) has outlined four broad sectors of folklore and folklife studies. These are:

a) Oral literature

b) Material culture

c) Social folk custom, and

d) Performing folk arts

Oral Literature
Folk narratives include many other categories of oral lore. Oral literatures, called verbal art of expressive literature, are “spoken, sung, and voiced forms of traditional utterances” (Dorson, 1972, 2). Oral narrative has its own manifold distinctions like myth, fairy tale or marchen, romantic tale or novella, religious tale, folktale, legend, animal tale, anecdote, joke, numskull tale etc.

A major sub-division of folk narrative is oral poetry or folk poetry. This too has its own family of related forms. For example, Handoo says that folk epics, ballads, folksongs, lullabies, work songs and songs associated with ritual and rites (Samskaras), such as birth, marriage and death are commonly found in almost all parts of India.

Proverbs and riddles are also important parts of oral literature and they are highly structured set forms of oral literary forms. Unlike prose narrative forms and oral poetry, proverbs and riddles do not show much multiple existences. Proverbs and proverbial expressions have formed an inseparable part of the written literatures throughout the world; riddles have stayed in the folk life and functions as important devices of imparting knowledge about cultural semantics, folk logic and the culturally ethical behaviour the younger members of societies are to follow.

Folk Speech, as Dorson observes, “Embraces the local and regional turns of phrase that deviate from the standard
language" (qtd. in Handoo, 2000, 14), which is usually taught in schools in an informal manner. One of the main characteristics of folk speech is that it is more restricted to oral circulation. He further observes that these words or expressions may be taboo words or expressions. They may be a kind of passive vocabulary. Moreover, these characteristics of folk speech are not only limited to vocabulary but they exist at the level of grammar, idiom and phonetics as well. For example, slang in this respect is folk speech. Besides these major forms of oral literatures, there are other minor forms which also fall under the above sector. These are chants, prayers, laments, cries and even hollers.

**Material Culture**

In contrast to verbal art or oral folklore, physical folklore generally is called material culture. According to Dorson:

Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art (qtd. in Handoo, 2000, 14).

This aspect of folklore and folklife is visible rather than aural. Material culture is concerned with the issues like how tradition-oriented societies construct their homes following the traditional norms of folk housing, how people make their clothes,
prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth’s bounty, fashion their tools and implements and design their furniture and utensil, etc.

One of the most interesting and fascinating aspects of material culture of India is its arts and crafts. These arts have followed a definite continuity in the history of folk arts of this country. Yet these art forms have not received the attention they deserve and are still in a state of utter neglect. Many of our prestigious old museums and archives do not have a corner for these traditional art forms. It is only recently that some attention has been given to preserve these forms of art. Folk arts and crafts, as is well known, are objects of material culture that simultaneously give pleasure and serve some political, social and economic end.

According to Glassie:

If a pleasure-giving function predominates it is called craft ... the interior of a house is designed primarily to be used and its function may be classed primarily as economic; its exterior is designed primarily to be seen, and its function may be classed as primarily as aesthetic (Glassie, 1972, 153-280).

Social Folk Customs
Another important area of folklore and folklife studies, very close to material culture, is the field of social customs. It emphasises more on group interaction and individual skills and performances as secondary. Investigations in this area are more centred on the family and community observances of the people living in the villages, tribal belts and even the industrial areas of Indian cities. Of particular importance are the rites of passage connected with birth, initiation, marriage, death and similar rites. Oral literature is constituted by the songs, tales and the aspects associated with the rites and the social folk customs by studying the social custom and ritualistic observances.

Similarly, Handoo observes that the ritual and custom associated with the festivals, such as Holi, Dipavali in northern and central India, Durga Puja in the east and south, Gauri-Ganapati in the west coast, Pongal and Onam in Deep South and hundreds of similar festivals also form an important segment of Social Folk Customs. These festivals, just like the folk rites, may have literary as well as ritualistic aspect. Most of these festivals in our country seem to be embedded with agricultural activity and, therefore, follow a calendrical cycle. There are thousands of little customs and ritualistic practices being observed by Indian village folks for the sake of rains, agricultural prosperity and for warding off natural calamities such as floods, famines, etc.
The religious aspect of social folk customs in India is multidimensional and highly complex. The processes of intense acculturation and the survival of indigenous cultural traits can be seen in the Bhutta and Teyyam worship in the south-west coastal India. Many tribal groups do not maintain close contacts with the firmly established mainstream religious practices but the maintenance of indigenous modes of worship have been preserved carefully. Similar indigenous traits are also prevalent in the worship of Bathou by the Bodos, Mastan; Joka and other deities by the Koch Rajbongsis.

**Performing Folk Arts**

According to Handoo, the fourth and the last sector of folklore and folklife studies may be designated as the Performing Folk Arts. This sector primarily concerns traditional music, dance and drama. According to this school, all items of folklore, when delivered are performed. However, performance here in its traditional sense strictly means the conscious presentation of these arts – dance, drama, folk music, etc. by individuals or groups who carry these art forms from one generation to another.

One of the most important areas of this sector is the traditional music, which is passed on from one person to another by
and is performed from memory rather than through written or printed musical score. Folk dance, folk drama, dance-drama, oral poetry, ritual and prayers always carry some element of music in them.

The traditional musical instruments are also of equal importance. Musical instruments are embedded with respective musical form. A particular kind of folk music is at times identified by its instrument. The area of Indian folk dances is very vast. Most of the time folk music and folk dances go together and share many important characteristics. Folk drama is another important field in the performing folk arts sector. Drama of any sort calls for the play world by the players generally through the use of masks, costumes, and a special area for playing. The traditions of Indian folk drama are very ancient and rooted in Indian religion and ritual. Most of the forms of Indian folk drama are associated with ritual and festival and have close affinity with music and dance.

Many fascinating forms of Indian music and dance are, however, linked with what now being labelled as dance-drama and recognized as such as a kind of a new genre on the assumption that it contains the elements of both the dance and the drama. The elements of dance and music are inseparable part of Indian folk drama.

III
A narrative or story is a construct created in a suitable format (written, spoken, poetry, prose, mages, song, theatre or dance) that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines *narrative fiction* as ‘the narration of a succession of fictional events’. Many today take “narrative” to mean “a mode of knowledge” or a “cognitive scheme” by which we perceive and interpret the world. Such a view does not necessarily stem from narratology. It can be seen as rooted in the etymology of “narrative”, originating in the Sanskrit *gna* and coming into English via the Latin *gnarus*, indicating the “signifiers associated with the passing on of knowledge by one who knows” (Rimmon-Kenan, 2006, 14).

The term “narrative” suggests the existence of competing “truths”, each carrying persuasion for the group upholding it. Moreover, as Kenan points out, it implies that each version is not a neutral account of events, but an attempt to naturalize an ideological stance (2006, 12).

Kenan points out those narrative versions are not ideologically neutral; however they attempt to neutralize it. The term “narrative” was used to designate at least two different concepts: what the Russian Formalists called “*fabula*”, i.e., the abstracted events in the order of their presumed “occurrence”, and
what they called “sjuzet”, i.e., the organization of these events in the text. In the sense of “fabula”, narrative is medium-independent, though narratologists disagree on whether it should be seen as raw material for textual elaboration or as a construct, abstracted from the text. Be it as it may, “narrative” in this sense was “always already” open to shaping in different media. As early as 1966, Barthes said in his *Introduction to the structural analysis of narrative*:

Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed among different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting [...]stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation (Engl. transl. 1977, 79).

Roland Barthes, one of the most significant narrative theorists, broadens the realm of narrative theory by employing the methods of structural linguists. He places narratives at the level of discourse arguing that “narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives (1977, 79).

Whereas ‘narrative’ as *fabula* is medium-independent and hence amenable to shaping in different media. “Narrative” as
sjuzet was originally conceived as language-bound and therefore found its way into other disciplines concerned with verbal articulation. However, narrative as sjuzet was originally understood as artistic composition. However, in other disciplines it is seen as a ‘composition’ or ‘organization’ without the qualifier ‘artistic’. Thus, Hayden White distinguishes between annals, chronicles, and narrative history as manifestations of degrees of narrative organization. The organizing features, he enumerates, being “a central subject”, “well marked beginning, middle, and end”, “peripeteia”, an “identifiable narrative voice”, “coherence”, “closure”, and “the impulse to moralize reality” (1981). People are fascinated with narratives, because in them “reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, but never experience” (White, 1981, 20). Coherence also plays a central role in Peter Brooks’ description of the psychoanalyst’s re-shaping of the fragmentary stories presented by analysands: “First of all, the psychoanalyst is ever concerned with the stories told by his patients, who are patients precisely because of the weakness of the narrative discourses that they present: the incoherence, inconsistency, and lack of explanatory force in the way they tell their lives” (Peter Brooks, 1994, 47). And again, this time explicitly in terms of fabula and sjuzet, in his discussion of Law’s Stories: “The courtroom lawyer’s task would seem to be to take an
often fragmentary and confusing *fabula* and turn it into a seamless, convincing *sjuzet*” (Rimmon-Kenan, 2006, 14).

There have also been attempts to define *narrative* in terms of a *communicative* framework. The term *narration* has also been defined in terms of *communication*. In the communicative framework, a narrative is viewed in terms of a *transaction* which has an *addresser, addressee* and a *message* (Rimmon-Kenan, 2009, 2).

In the spirit of Genette's distinction between 'histoire', 'recit' and 'narration' (1972, 71-6), Rimmon-Kenan labels these aspects as 'story', 'text' and 'narration' respectively. 'Story' designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order together with the participants in these events. Whereas 'story' is a succession of events, 'text' is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. The act or process of production is the third aspect – 'narration'. Narration can be considered as both real and fictional. Within the text, communication involves a fictional narrator transmitting a narrative to a fictional narratee. It is only through the text that he or she acquires knowledge of the story and of the narration (Rimmon-Kenan 2009, 3-4).

Tzvetan Todorov (1969) coined the term ‘narratology’ for the structuralist analysis of any given narrative into its constituent parts to determine their function(s) and relationships.
For these purposes, the story is what is narrated usually with chronological order of themes, motives and plot lines, or what is sometimes called ‘natural chronology’. The minute there is more than one character, events may become simultaneous and the story is often multilinear rather than unilinear.\footnote{2}

The main types of discrepancy between story-order and text-order called ‘\textit{anachronies}’ (Genette, 1972, 265) which are traditionally known as ‘flash-back’ or ‘retrospection’ on the one hand and ‘foreshadowing’ or ‘anticipation’ on the other. Genette also uses the term ‘\textit{analepsis}’ and ‘\textit{prolepsis}’. An \textit{analepsis} is a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told a prolepsis is a narration of a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned (Genette, 1972, 90).

According to Genette (1972), \textit{Analepsis} provide past information either about the character, event or story-line mentioned at that point in the text (‘homodiegetic analepsis’) or about another character, event, or story-line (‘heterodiegetic analepsis’). \textit{Prolepses} are much less frequent than \textit{analepses}\footnote{3}; they can refer either to the same character, event, or story-line figuring at that point in the text (homodiegetic) or to another character, event, or story-line (heterodiegetic). They can like \textit{analepses}, cover either a period beyond the end of the first narrative (external), or a period anterior
to it but posterior to the point at which it is narrated (internal), or combine both (mixed) (Rimmon-Kenan, 2009, 49).

A narrative can be sociologically defined. However, the features or factors must be of sociological consequence, reflect social patterns, or are activated by social factors.

Aside from the sociological definition, narrative has also been cognitively defined, but the factors are looked at from a psychological perspective. In a sense, every aspect of narrative, and narrative as a whole, cannot be understood or even sensed unless they have been cognitively processed. So the cognitive approach is implicit in narrative studies, even if it is not always systematically brought to the surface in the analysis of narrative.

Much valuable research on narrative has been done by literary scholars. However, there is no such a thing as a literary definition of narrative. It does seem to be the case that definitions of narrative in literature could easily be applied to spheres outside literature. Thus an absolute distinction between literature and other spheres of human activity, even if one concentrates on what appears to be a specifically ‘literary’ concept such as narrative, cannot be made.

The human element in narrative is important. We can say here that narrative must have a human (or human-like) agent
who must do something, or something must be done to him or her. Even stories involving animals or inanimate objects have characters which act like, or have features of, human beings. The human factor can be regarded as a paradigmatic core feature of narrative.

Movement is also essential to narrative. A static description cannot be a narrative. Thus verbs of movement are more essential to narrative than verbs which describe states. At a more informal level, we can view what are sometimes called dynamic verbs (i.e. verbs which describe physical activity) as being essential to narrative.

There are some scholars who claim that the storyteller is necessary for a narrative. But the storyteller and its importance need further specification, as there are some stories which do not have a well-defined storyteller, and there may be several storytellers in a narrative.

Ross Murfin and Supiya M. Roy say that a narrative may be a story or a telling of a story, or an account of a situation or event. The narratives may be fictional or true; they may be written in either prose or verse. (2003, 287).

Livia Polanyi the author of the book Telling the American Story (1991) defines narrative as
Stories and past time reports are specific, affirmative, past time narratives which tell about a series of events which took place at specific unique moments in a unique past time world.

Anna – Leena Siikala a folklorist and an anthropologist of religion defines narrative in the following manner:

A narrative is embarked on either in reply to some external stimulus, such as request from the audience, or so that the narrator may express something he considers important, amusing or otherwise worth telling. The performance of a narrative is a logical, goal-oriented act carried out in a state of interaction. The narrator may aim to entertain, to teach, to warn or to criticize his listener. He may also tell his story as a proof of something, as an example, or merely to satisfy the listener's wishes. At the same time he may try to attract attention, to find amusing expressions or to enter into intensive interaction with the listener. Whatever the narrator’s goals or intentions, they always effect both the choice of narrative and the mode of performance” (See in Handoo, et al, 1999, 137).

Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* defines a narrative as containing on actor and a narrator as:

A narrative text is a text in which an agent relates a narrative. A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors… (Bal, 1985, 8).

According to Abbott narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes, its understanding of time” and the ability to manage time “fluidly” within a narrative allows “events themselves to create the order of time” (Abbott 2002, 3).
Seymour Chatman’s (1978) main contribution to the theory of narrative is *Story and Discourse*. He explains that story is the content of narrative (the what) and the discourse is form of narrative (the how). According to the author the structuralist theory of narrative states that narrative (text and structure) has two parts. The first part, the story, consists of the content (the chain of events) and the existents (the characters and the items of setting). The second part, the discourse, is the means by which the content is expressed (Chatman, 1978, 478).

Roman Jakobson *On Realism in Art* (1921) argues that literature does not exist as a separate entity. He and many other semioticians prefer the view that all texts, whether spoken or written, are the same except that some authors encode their texts with distinctive literary qualities that distinguish them from other forms of discourse. Nevertheless, there is a clear trend to address literary narrative forms as separable from other forms. This is first seen in *Russian* Formalism through Victor Shklovsky’s analysis of the relationship between composition and style, and through the works of Vlmimir Propp who analyzed the plots used in traditional folktales and identified their distinct functional components. This trend continues in the work of the Prague School and of French scholars such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. It leads to a structural analysis of narrative and an increasingly influential body of modern works that raises important epistemological as well
as ontological questions: as to how a narrative is manifested as art, in cinema, theatre, or literature and how poetry, short stories and novels are evolved in their respective genres as well as it raises the question as to what a text is? What role does it have in the context of culture?

For general purposes in Semiotics and Literary Theory, a "narrative" is accepted as a story or part of a story. It may be in spoken, written or in imagined form, and it will have one or more points of view representing some or all the participants or observers. The Garos like most of the triabl communities have a rich store house of oral texts – stories, songs, riddles, etc. but can they essentially be part of literay narrative?

Whatever the form, the content may concern real-world people and events. This is termed personal experience narrative. When the content is fictional, different conventions apply.

Everyday narration and narratives serve important functions in the normal management of everyday life. Encounters with foreign countries and cultural differences, with “strange habits” and “alien behaviors”, exotic food ways and table manners, incomprehensible norms and values, are such experiences, and we may surmise that for the management of such intercultural experiences narration and narratives play a significant role: on the individual level, they may function, for example, as parts of
intercultural interactions, as stories about strange events that help the narrator accommodate to cultural differences, or as example for teaching others how to interact with strangers or partners from another country. On the collective level, narratives may function as stabilizers of identities or as makers of ethnic or cultural boundaries (Klaus Roth, 118).

According to Klaus Roth, it can be summarized, that narratives play a role in and for intercultural communication in that they are as narrated by (i) representation of a culture, (ii) reveal the image of other cultures, (iii) play a role in the actual communicative acts between people from different cultures, (iv) are used for the communication about culture contacts and conflicts, and (v) play a role in the teaching of intercultural competence (Klaus Roth, 118).

These five ideas are inter-related and interdependent. The narratives differ, however, in two important dimensions: they function either as collective, general narratives or in real intercultural encounters, and they function on different levels of cultural awareness or reflection—from the unreflected telling stories to the skilful and highly reflected use of narratives for ideological, artistic or didactic purposes (Klaus Roth, 119).
Narratives as Expressions or Representations of Cultures:

Narratives are “culture-laden”. Folktales and legends, jests and jokes, proverbs etc are expressions or representations of the culture world view values, customs, institutions and history. The stories thus provide clues for better understanding of people and culture (Klaus Roth, 120).

Narratives can also represent a culture in various other ways. Volksseele or the search for the “soul of the people” in the folk poetry that began in the late 18th century initiated the exercise of collecting and studying of fairy tales, legends, myths, songs and ballads in many countries. This search was linked to nationalism as well. This exercise had nation building, nationalism, and “invention of traditions” of “treasury of folklore”. Thus the very exercise of returning the folk became the integral part of nation building agenda (Klaus Roth, 120).

Folklores are expressions of the culture and reflective of the self image of the community as they even can be seen as the makers of the self image of the community. Tales and legends, and songs were collected, edited and archived because they were perceived as representations (and presentations) of national identity, as poetic expression of the essence of one’s own ethnic group or nation, as visible expressions of one’s “national character” (Klaus Roth, 120).
**Narratives as Perceptions of Other Cultures:** Narratives about other groups or cultures express either the collective historical experience with, or the perception of, “other” cultures, either in negative, hostile terms, or in friendly and positive terms. Experiences of other people can happen through war, colonization, trade, travel, geographical proximity, or multinational or multicultural experience. These knowledge about other cultures as Handoo would call, also define boundaries between groups (Handoo, et al, 1999, 121).

Folktales and legends, riddles and anecdotes, jokes, slurs and mockery about ethnic groups as well as derogatory names and nick-names of other peoples can perpetuate prejudices, hatred and enmities between peoples. They can even jeopardize intercultural communications. Since they are accepted as cultural expressions they can, on the other hand also mitigate tensions and help to adapt to and get used to cultural differences (Klaus Roth, 121).

Handoo mentions about narratives in culture contact situations, culture contact stories, and critical incidents about didactic tools and narratives crossing cultural boundaries.
Narratives as Units in Cultural Contact Situations: Cultural contact stories are individual or collective narrative renderings of intercultural interactions, usually of surprising, critical, unexpected or unexplainable experiences and conflicts. Cultural contact stories can be viewed as a way of talking about cultural differences or intercultural interactions which help bridging cultural gaps between communities (Klaus Roth, 124).

Culture Contact Stories: The cultural contact stories are marked by tendencies toward episodization, legendary, and towards traditionalization. In other words, they tend to focus and elaborate on impressive or extreme or spectacular elements thereby enhancing differences.

“Critical Incidents” as Didactic Tools is the ability to manage cultural diversity, communicate and interact successfully other cultures which is called intercultural competence. The “critical incidents” are an indispensable didactic tool because they make use of the basic human activity of learning from examples and by imitation (Handoo et al, 1999, 126).
Managing Crossing Cultural Boundaries: Managing diversity is a major issue in our world which tears down borders, creates new multinational states and has established global relations. Cultural contact stories have both the potentialities of greater inter cultural understanding and the vulnerabilities of inter cultural anxieties.

Functions of Narrative:

The basic purpose of narrative is to entertain, to gain and hold a readers’ interest. However, narratives can also be written to teach or inform, to change attitudes / social opinions, e.g. soap operas and television dramas that are used to raise topical issues.

Bascom points out that “In non-literate societies ... it is important to learn myths and legends because they contain information that is believed to be true” (Bascom, 1972). He observes how in African societies folktlaes are regarded important for education. Folk narratives have immense educational value in all societies, especially in the ones where tradition is prevalent like in India.

Functions as social authority, social control and cultural continuity are more intimately connected with myths; these are nonetheless brought into play often through other narrative genres like legends and tales. As far back as 1926 Malinowski had
emphasized the importance of the myth as sacred stories to social patterns of behavior, to ritual, to religion, and to “practical guides”. According to Malinowski myths strengthen traditions and endow it with greater values (See Bascom, 1972).

Folklore also functions as an “escape mechanism”, as Handoo points out, “revealing man’s frustrations and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon him by society... (and) from the conditions of his geographical environment and also from his biological limitations” have been found to be active through all the narratives of different genres available in different regions and communities of India which, we are sure, can exemplify this intriguing function of folklore most convincingly. The functions of different genres of folklore, including narrative genres, have undergone modifications and transformations of various kinds. In some cases the functions of particular genres have been suitably adjusted to serve changed situations while in others they have been consciously put to new kinds of use or made to serve new kinds of needs.

Barbara Hardy made a hyperbolic claim for the narrative structure of most of our activities, she writes “We dream in narrative, day dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip,
learn, hate and love by narrative” (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan, 2006, 12).

The present study is an attempt to make enquiry of the folk narratives of the A·chiks, the functions they have been serving and the greater cultural implications they carry. In terms of the so called developmental or modernising interventions are concerned, the A·chik society has largely remained traditional rather than ‘modern’, the common A·chik folk has retained the century old intimacy with their tribal life-world, have the world of their folk narrative provides critical dues to the cultural hinterland of the community, their belief system, social structure, rituals and their implications, as well as their spiritual and ethical world view.

IV

The word ‘myth’ is derived from the Greek word muthos which literally means a tale or something one utters, in a wide range of senses: a statement, a story, the plot of a play. The word ‘mythology’ in English denotes either the study of myths, or their content, or a particular set of myths. Malinowski differentiates myth from legend and fairy-tale and so according to him legends were told and believed as if they were history but they do not
contain any miraculous or sacred element. Fairy-tales narrate miraculous happenings but are not in any way linked with ritual, they belong to the realm of entertainment. For him, myth, on the other hand

is a statement of a higher and a more important truth, of primeval reality, which is still regarded as the pattern and foundation of primitive life (Malinowski, 1967, 305).

Man desires to know and reach the ultimate being and ultimate knowledge. Undoubtedly, with the advent of science and the scientific method mythology has been rejected as the product of superstitious and primitive minds. Of late there is growing interest in the significance of the nature and role of myth in human life and history. Claude Lévi Strauss, in his *Myth and Meaning* (1978) profoundly brings to light the insights of myth in order to understand and have much appreciation of ‘myth in the life of human person and history. Strauss points out that since the birth of knowledge, myth has been an integral part of human life. Besides, he mentions that myths get thought in man ‘unbeknownst’ to him (1978, 3). Myth describes a lived experience, for it says exactly how one perceives one’s own relation to his / her work. Currently, most of the things of the past are already bygone. Levi Strauss emphasizes that now there is a greater realization and so science is making an all out effort to reintegrate them in the field of scientific
explanation. Hence, myth and science should go hand in hand in this world (Levi Strauss, 1978).

Myth and Profane Stories

R. W. Firth found out that it is not easy to separate the sacred stories (myths) from the profane ones. Some tales are sacred clearly and explicitly, for they deal with supernatural beings, powerful spirits, and it is dangerous to tell them in any other than the prescribed way; but at the same time we notice that the same supernatural beings appear also in fairy-tales or entertainment stories. We can indicate a characteristic by which myths can be distinguished from other tales; sacredness and a close connection with ritual.

Dhavamony (1973) opines that in societies where myths are still alive and meaningful, the people carefully distinguish myths from true stories, fables and false stories. He makes an elaborate observation of myths. The special circumstance in which myths are told or taught brings out again the difference between myths and fables or false stories. Tribal people communicate the knowledge of myths only to the initiated whereas legends and other tales are recited before the uninitiated. Generally the elders during their isolation in the bush communicate the myths to the initiated,
which forms part of the initiation ritual. But legends and tales can be recited anywhere and at any time. Both myths and legends narrate histories, i.e., a series of events that took place in a distant and fabulous past. But the actors in the myths are generally gods and supernatural beings; actors in the legends and tales are heroes or miraculous animals. Though the contents of both types of stories, myths and legends, are of the everyday world, myths are considered to affect the people directly and to have altered the human condition as such, while legends and tales have not altered, the human condition as such, although they have caused changes in the world in a limited way (1973, 139).

Myths narrate how one state of affairs became another; how an unpeopled world became populated; how chaos became cosmos; how immortals became mortal; how the seasons came to replace a climate without seasons; how the original unity of mankind became a plurality of tribes or nations and so on. Myths, in brief, tell us not only about the origin of the world, of animals, of plants and of man but also the primordial events as a result of which man finds himself in a situation such as he finds himself in at the present time, mortal, sexed, organized in society, forced to work to live and to live according to a set of norms. Besides the cosmogony and anthropogony, other events belonging to mythical times occurred, on account of which man is affected and becomes what he is today. Namely, if a certain tribe lives on fishing it is because in
mythical times a supernatural being taught its ancestors to catch and cook fish (see Dhavamony, 1973, 139).

For the primitive man myths are of primary importance. By living the myths by means of the rituals, the religious man is able to imitate and reproduce the divine beings and their activities, to commune with the divine by symbolically participating in the original state of beings as created and ordained by the divine and supernatural beings. To know the myths is to learn the secret of the origin of things, to enter into living relation with the origin of things, to be able to reproduce the original order of things when they gradually degenerate or to make it reappear when they disappear (Eliade, 1969, vol.15, 1134-35).

**Reality of Myths**

The reality of myths is explained differently by different authors. Social anthropologist, Malinowski holds that myth as it exists in a savage society is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is an active force in the life of the primitives. By reality of the myths, Malinowski intended to say that myths are charters of extant social institutions (see Dhavamony, 1973, 142). For Gustav Carl Jung, the primitive society does not invent myths but experiences them (142). For Mircea Eliade, myths are always
recitals of creations; they tell how something was accomplished, began to be (Mircea Eliade, 1959, 95). Hence, myths imply the ontology and speak only of realities; namely what really happened. Eliade means by reality of the myth the sacred reality, the sacred which alone is pre-eminently real; the sacred presents itself as something wholly other than the real, really real, saturated with being, endowed with power. It is a sacred history; hence to relate it means to reveal a mystery. The sacred realm is revealed in the myths; but for the myths they are inaccessible to us (Turner, 577-78).

Myth and ritual re-create in profane time what is true eternally in the sacred reality. To live in the myth is to live out the creative power that is the foundation of existence. Myths cannot be reduced to giving information about something even about the divine beings or primordial events. Myths reveal the sacred and manifest its power. Man by reciting the myth not only learns something but becomes something. In other words, myths by being told manifest sacred power. Hence, we understand why myths are treated so sacredly, guarded so secretly, recited so solemnly, only in ritual and only by the initiands or by the initiated.

Myths and legends are traditional verbal materials passed on orally rather than in written form through generations. They form an essential part of the A·chiks. The A·chiks have
developed a rich store of folklore; not the least among numerous myths are those connected with rivers and the physical features of the lands they settled in. Archetypes occur in different times and places in myth, literature, folklore and rituals. Myths make a larger part of the thematic content of their oral narratives and poetry. Myths serve to explain the intentions and actions of supernatural beings. Most myths are concerned with religion, which involve rituals and prescribed forms of sacred ceremonies. Some of the recurring myths that have strong presence in the cultured narratives of the A·chiks are associated with Balpakram, the rivers, the spirits, the mountains, the ideas of reincarnations, the whirlpools etc.

The A·chik animists are very religious and god-fearing people. They believe that all physical ailments, accidents and unnatural deaths are due to the wrath of one or the other malevolent spirits. Therefore, sacrifices of animals and birds must be offered to the deities to appease them as well as to invoke their blessings (Milton Sangma, 1981, 233). Myths have got existential functions for man. The indispensable function which myth fulfills in primitive culture is to express, enhance and codify belief, to safeguard and enforce morality to vouch for the efficiency of the ritual and to contain practical rules for the guidance of man. Thus myth is a force that helps to maintain society itself. Myth and religion as a whole continue to play an important part in social life. Myths do not reflect the totality of social structure as myth is
always selective but myths do convey a certain meaning for the religious man, besides providing a charter for social action and religious belief.

In A·chik indigenous religion too myths play an important role. The function of myths is neither explanatory nor symbolic. It is a statement of an extraordinary event, the occurrence of which had once and for all established the social order of a tribe or some of its economic pursuits, its arts and crafts, of its religious or magical beliefs and ceremonies.

It is the traditional handing down of stories and folk songs, of riddles and puzzles, of dramatic games and dances, depicting their failure and success, the importance of religion and magic, of totems and taboos, or of disciplines and customs, the roles or work and games, of hunger and work, of tribal sentiments and aspirations from generation to generation.

Myths preserve the past of the communities, record the rise and fall of kingdoms and serve as a significant storehouse of community history. It reflects people and also brings in solidarity, continuity and consistency in a cultural group. Myths definitely help in preserving cultures and religion.
End Notes

1 The origin of the name Garo is a conjecture. Different views are expressed on the meaning of the word, ‘Garo’. The tribe itself is known to outsiders as ‘Garo’ but the Garos call themselves, ‘A∙chik’ or ‘hill men’. There are two theories on this point. The first suggests the word to be corrupted from ‘Gara’ to ‘Garo’. It could also be a corrupt form of one of the sub-tribes of the Garos, ‘Gara-Ganching’. Another theory is that ‘Garo’ is either a development of ‘Dura’ or a corruption of it. The educated Garos of today like to call themselves only as A∙chik rather than by their divisional names. (Julius Marak 2000, 4-5).

2 Strict linear chronology, then, is neither natural nor an actual characteristic of most stories. It is a conventional ‘norm’ which has become as widespread as to replace the actual multilinear temporarily of the story and acquire a pseudo-natural status. Casualty can either be implied by chronology or gain an explicit status in its own right (Rimmon-Kenan, 2009, 17).

3 Both these analepsis, though one is homodiegetic and one heterodiegetic, evoke past which precedes the starting point of the first narrative and hence they are ‘external analepses’. Other analepses may conjure up a past which ‘occurred’ after the starting point of the first narrative but is either repeated analeptically or narrated for the first time at a point in the text later than the place where it is ‘due’ is known as ‘internal analepses’.

Works Cited


