Chapter 4

The Vernacular Geo-body: Spatial Perspectives and Geographical Knowledge Assemblages

The geo-body is the effect of a particular knowledge assemblage shaped by the historical context of time and space. The previous chapters reflected upon how the colonial power and later on the national state-making project attempted to construct knowledge about the North-east Indian region. In contrast to these two perspectives, looking from a different vantage point there stands another long-standing perspective a sui-generis which runs as a common thread that gets reflected in varieties of knowledge assemblage sustained through cultural practices of the communities for centuries together. Though knowledge systems may differ in their epistemologies, methodologies, logics, cognitive structures or in their socio-economic contexts, a characteristic that they all share is their localness.

This chapter attempts to explore the vernacular conceptions of spatial thinking and practices built through knowledge assemblages of different communities in the North-east Indian region. Informal in nature, these knowledge assemblages exist in local communities and covers a wide range of its members' perceptions of universal phenomena occurring in their immediate environment as well as the social, economic and cultural practices of the people. These are the product of

1The term “assemblage” is used here in a sense as an episteme with technologies added, but which connotes the ad-hoc contingencies of a collage in its capacities to embrace a wide variety of incompatible components; see Felix Guattari Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (London: Continuum, 2004(rpt.))
centuries experience acquired and developed into a spectrum of information, skills and technology. More than localness these knowledge assemblage is located. It is located in specific cultural practices of the communities across the region. In this sense it is both situated and situating. It is situated both in the material and spiritual sphere of the lifeworld of the communities and creates a knowledge space.

These vernacular knowledge assemblage is made up of linked sites, people and activities in a very important and profound sense characterized by messiness that is given a spatial coherence through heterogenous engineering and social strategies. Polysemous in nature they are capable of many possible modes of assemblage and of providing alternative interpretations and meanings wherein it sustains potential sites of resistance. In this context the focus here is to understand the vernacular framework of spatialities of communities in the North-east India by critically examining the knowledge assemblages manifested in their cosmogonies, belief systems, verbal art- the myths, ritual poetry, legends, stories etc. which sews them into an organic unity i.e. the geo-body.

4.1 Cosmogonic Myths and Worldview: The Evolution of the Vernacular Geo-body

According to Tuan there are broadly two principal kinds of mythical space. In the first mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is the spatial component of a worldview, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities. The fuzzy mythical space that surrounds the field of pragmatic activity, to which we do not consciously attend and which is yet necessary for our sense of orientation—of being securely in the world. The second kind of mythical space functions as a component in a world view or cosmology. It is better articulated and more consciously held than mythical space of the first
Broadly speaking, cosmology refers to a set of concepts people have about the universe around them. It comprehends their relationship with nature, and the object of this conceptualization is, to "not to facilitate action, but to advance understanding, to make intelligible the relations that exist between things". People relate to the world outside them and transmit and modify the cosmology of previous generations. As auspicious/inauspicious or a pure/impure status may be ascribed to the various entities of the cosmos depending on the type of power -benevolent or malevolent -they are thought to possess and their relative position in the hierarchy. In this context they become instruments for forecasting or divination.

However, in general, cosmologies are associated with large, stable, and sedentary societies. They are attempts to answer the question of man's place in nature\(^2\). Considering the mobile lifestyle of local communities and everyday cultural practices of the North-east Indian region it is the component of worldview rather than cosmology which gets articulated in nature-society relationship. Myths are an inalienable component of communities' in the North-east India. There are innumerable myths which are related to various aspects of human life in the region. Cosmogonic myths regarding the evolution of universe, world, earth, nature etc. is an important part of the geographical philosophy or rather geo-sophy of the communities in the North-east India which gets reflected in the rich oral culture. This section attempts to explore the conceptualization and organization local community's geo-sophy within the nature-society relationship reflected in the popular

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\(^3\)cited in Tuan seeIbid.,[p. 88]
wisdom in myths.

4.1.1 Plurality in Origin and Evolution

A reflection of the local myths regarding the origin and evolution of earth/universe among communities in North-east India reveals that mostly these myths refers to a variety of elements, some of which are self-existing and others created. The root of the evolution of the vernacular geo-body can be traced back to the creation of elements of different orders. The prevalence of these myths among various communities in Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, refer to water, egg, cloud, rock, wood and the great personage as the self-existing elements of the first order. According to the tradition, from these were created elements of the second order: earth, sky, sun, moon, wind, fire and all living creatures. The third order of elements was then formed: colour, direction, form, smell, etc. The fourth order was attributed to knowledge. A general description of the creation myths summed up in close identification of the elements now follows:

**EGG**

"At first there was nothing but two eggs. They were soft and shone like gold. They did not stay in one place, but went round and round. At last, as they went round, they collided and both eggs broke open. From one came the earth, from the other the sky, her husband. When the sky made love to the earth, every kind of tree and grass and all living creatures came into being".

**WOOD**

"Everything was water - water as far as the eye could see. But above the water rose the tree Teri-Ramula. As time passed a worm was born

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in the tree and it began to eat the Wood. The dust fell into the water, year after year, until slowly, the world was formed. Then, at last, the tree fell to the ground. The bark on the lower side of the trunk became the skin of the world; the bark of the upper side became the skin of the sky. The trunk itself turned into rock. The branches became the hills”.

CLOUD

“At first there was no earth nor sky, but only cloud and mist. From it a woman was born; and since she came from the mist she was a sort of cloud. In time she gave birth to a girl and a boy. They had the appearance of snow. When they grew up they married each other and from them were born a girl called Inga (earth) and a son called Mu (sky). Inga was mud and Mu a cloud. These two also married and had a boy called Imbung (wind). When he was born he blew so strongly that he raised the cloud, his father, into the sky and dried up his mother, the mud. In this way heaven and earth were made.”

WATER

“Before the earth was made, everything was water. There were two brothers who were supreme in the Sky. One day they said to each other, ‘when men are created, how will they live if there is nothing but water in the world?’ There was a lotus flower growing in the sky. The brothers threw this down and immediately the water was covered with flowers. Then they called the winds from the four quarters. The east wind brought white dust and scattered it on the flowers. The west wind blew yellow dust, the south wind red dust and the north wind
black dust. The wind blew the dust round and round and mixed it up together until the earth was formed. This is why the earth is made up of different colours. 

ROCK

"At first there was nothing, nothing at all, but rocks and water. The first living beings were the rocks, but they were not as rocks are now: they were soft and could move about. From the rocks, a female rock was born. She married another rock and her first child was the fish. Then she gave birth to the big frog, and then the little frog, and then to the land frog. After that she gave birth to the insect which lives in water and then to another fish. Then she left her husband and went to the sky-village among the stars, where she married and had many children, and when she had borne them all, she died. The children prepared rice-beer for her funeral. When the millet was ready and they poured water over it, a great cloud arose, and from the cloud was born the *mithun*. The *mithun* dug a great pit with his horns, and when water poured into the pit, dry land appeared. After this the rocks became hard as they are today."

Similarly, there are other popular myths of origin and evolution of among the Khasis of Meghalaya. These myths prevalent in various forms and relates to the evolution of Hynniewtrep i.e. the original habitat of the Seven Clans from which the present Kasi communities have evolved. The myth goes like this:

"Nothing but vast emptiness reigned over the earth in the beginning. Then *U Blei* brought into being the first of god's many creations-

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7From Sherkupen myth regarding evolution earth in Elwin, *op. cit.*; p. 8
8From Minyong myth in Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 18
Ramew, the mother earth and her husband, the patron of god of villages. The two lived happily for sometime. There was only one thing that plagued their mind- the thought of children. They wanted children, wanted them badly, for life without them was terribly lonely and monotonous. They prayed to U Blei, the give of life, their creator, and implored him to bless them with a child or tow so their line could continue. After many such entreaties, their wish was granted. God gave them five children of greater power and accomplishments- five children whom the world has come to call by the elemental forces.

The sun was their first daughter followed by their only son, the moon, and three daughters- water, wind and fire. Ramew was delighted to see her children grow and prosper. She was particularly happy to see how they kept themselves busy, reshaping the world into a pleasant land, giving life to all trees and beautiful flowers everywhere. And yet amidst such plenty and peace, there seemed to be something missing. She felt there is no right that such loveliness go unattended and uncared for. So Ramew turned to U Blei and beseeched him to bless her once more, this time with someone to look over her vast beautiful gardens. U Blei understood Ramew's yearnings. U Blei summoned the biggest council ever of all heaven to elect the future caretakers of the earth. After days of careful deliberations, he declared that seven of sixteen clans living in heaven should descend to till the earth, to populate the wilderness, to rule and govern and be the crown of all creation. From then on, the seven clans were known as the Hynniew Trep, the seven huts, or seven families. They would later become the ancestors of the seven sub tribes of Khasi race: the Khnriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Maram, Lyngngam and the extinct Diko.9

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9A story retold by Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih, "The Seven Clans," in Fresh Fictions: Folk
According to Khasi worldview, U Blei is the supreme being and occupies the topmost position. Within this, U Blei is the Creator, the Protector and the Provider God of the Khasi. He is formless and is unidentifiable with any form of animate or inanimate object in nature. His abode is up and above the land from where the man stays and is referred to as “Ka Dwar U Blei”. “Ka Dwar U Blei” is not only the abode of supreme being but also the abode of all the dead ancestors of the Khasi people. One can say that the “Ka Dwar U Blei” refers to the other world. The rules that prescribes in this realm envelopes Ka Hukum. Khasis believe that it is the “Ka Hukum”10 which is personified as the creator who made Ka Rameu.11 Ka Hukum also created the heavenly bodies -the sun, moon, and stars which rest on “U Mawsiang Bngeng”12 and mariang (nature), water (um), fire (ding), air (lyer), which stand on “U Mawsiang Khyndew”13. The whole universe operates according to the universal law of “Ka Nongkhukun”14 and everything runs according to their appointed course15. Ka Hukum is the manifestation of Ka Hok which means righteousness. The moral concepts of Ka Hok16 and Ka Sang17 are central to Khasi worldview.18

10the commandment or law...according to the myth of Hynniewtrep in the days when righteousness prevailed there was a tree which served as ladder to the original sixteen families for their communication between heaven and earth. This tree grew on top of U Lum Sohpetbneng -the navel peak of the heaven which is the centre of the world. This tree formed the golden bridge ensuring physical contact between man and god till the time when transgression became the order of the day and this bridge gave way. Thus destroying the communication link between heaven and earth

11the earth/terra firma
12heavenly slab/stone
13earthly slab/stone
14the law giver
16the righteous ways of living or the prescribed modes of behaviour
17the prescribed modes of behaviour
Below “Ka Dwar U Blei” lies both Ka Pyrthei\(^{19}\) and Ka Meiramew\(^{20}\). The two concepts of Ka Pyrthei and Ka Meiramew are like two legs of a man which give support to his body and without it man can neither stand nor walk\(^{21}\). Briefly speaking the concept of Ka Pyrthei in totality signifies the visible realities in the sky above and them and the world around them. It is composed of many elements Khyndew (Earth), Um (Water), Lyer (Wind), Ding (Fire). The celestial regimes are associated with light while the earth is related to smell and darkness\(^{22}\). In other words it signifies a living system and reality which has within it many other systems or relation. At times, the Khasis use to say “Ka Pyrthei kuba pyllum” which means that the world is round. This is a geographical expression which means that Ka Pyrthei is round in shape. The Khasis have the notion that Ka Pyrthei is one of the heavenly bodies which became livable in the course of time\(^{23}\).

On the other hand Ramew\(^{24}\) in Khasis is Meiramew\(^{25}\). Khasis believe that Ka Meiramew is a co-creator who plays an important role in the process of bringing out the world of objects into existence. In this context Ka Meiramew is next to the U Blei in relation to creation\(^{26}\). For the Khasis Ka Meiramew is not just the earth in a geological sense but a living entity which has a cosmic soul. Ka Meiramew is personified as a female being who has a soul. The concept of Ka Meiramew in the traditional Khasi thought refers to a metaphysical principle of matter. It is also understood as the productive principle and substratum of Ka Pyrthei. Ka Meiramew is the source of power from which the things of the world

\(^{19}\)the world

\(^{20}\)Mother Earth

\(^{21}\)Reeston Gabriel Myrthong, Ka Pyrthei (World) and Ka Meiramew (Mother Earth) In Traditional Khasi Thought (Ph. D. diss.), North Eastern Hill Areas University, Shillong: Department of Philosophy, School of Humanities and Education, 2004, p. 12.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 47.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 23.

\(^{24}\)the earth/terra firma

\(^{25}\)mother earth

\(^{26}\)Myrthong, op. cit., p.25.
are produced. In other words it signifies it as the material principle. In this context it is also understood as a primary creatrix as in some Khasi thoughts it is viewed as the primordial element out which Sun, Moon, Water, Fire etc. have originated.

Reflecting back on the these creation narratives as discussed above one interesting aspect which is found common among the cosmogonic myths in the North-east India is the absence of “universality” in terms of sources of evolution. Unlike under the Indian theory of material evolution which restricts the evolution of the universe in terms of the nine tattvas (elements) -air (vayu), water(jal), fire(tejas),sky (akasa), kala (time), direction (dika), atma (soul), manas (mind) and earth (prithvi). The material evolution is described as different cosmogonic myths finds its origin in quite different elements which may be a rock or an egg as we have seen in the origin narratives of the communities in Arunachal to an extent that it is “nothingness” /“vaccum”/ “emptiness” from which the universe/earth/world has evolved as we have seen in the case of Khasis. Wood, for instance, is not an element in the classical texts, but finds a place in oral myths of the North-east India. Interestingly, wood is one of the five elements in Chinese tradition.

In the local cosmogonic myths the present environment is considered to be the result of a evolutionary process unlike mainstream religious philosophy which treats the environment as an outright creation of God. In local cosmogonic myths there are multiple concepts which are interrelated rather than forming a concrete “divine design” under which the material universe/world has evolved. In such vision of the phenomenal reality there is no single creator of the universe. Here the present material environment is the effect of a multiple and simultaneous process.

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27 Ibid., p. 81.
28 Saraswati, op. cit., p. 34.
For example there are creators for each specific element: Nili and Nipu\(^{29}\), who were without form, made the earth and the sky respectively\(^{30}\). So any universality is denied in such process of creation as each element has been created differently.

### 4.1.2 The Humanized Body Landscape

The epic centre of the cosmogonic myths of North-east India is the human beings itself rather than description about cosmic beings. Here the cosmic beings take shape of humans itself. Man is the crucial and central term in the astral cosmos. He contains within him the distillation of the whole astral system. In many myths about evolution of the material universe/earth there are mentions about "great personage" and analogy is drawn between the evolution of human body as well as the material environ which surround us. For illustration let us consider an Apa Tani myth:

> "At first Kujum-Chantu, the earth, was like a human being. She had a head, arms and legs, and an enormous fat belly. The original human beings lived on the surface of her belly. One day it occurred to her that if she ever got up and walked about, everyone would fall off and be killed; so she died of her own accord. Every part of her body became a part of the world, and her eyes turned into the sun and the moon."\(^{31}\)

In the above myth the primal being from which the material universe/earth evolved is imagined in the form of an human being. Similarly, the theory of origin of creation of the world among the Marams of Manipur circles around the great

\(^{29}\)In Apa Tani myth the two worlds similar, even in conjugal and occupational contexts. In the world of the dead called Neli, every woman returns to her first husband, but those who died unmarried may there marry and beget children. Life in Neli is similar to life on this earth: people cultivate and work, and ultimately they die once more and go to another land of the dead.

\(^{30}\)from Idu Mishmi myth in Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 9

personage of the first man and woman. According to Maram myth Peramhaba\textsuperscript{32} created heaven and earth but being flat, heaven could not cover up, the latter being bigger in size. The heavens requested the earth to fold itself till it was full spherical. After having been full covered up by heaven, the earth now requested to let it free to loosen up so as to enable it to spread out as it was before. But heaven did not agree with the earth. Thus heaven and earth were created and joined together at the horizon. As earth folded, hills and valleys were formed\textsuperscript{33}.

Most of the communities in the North-east do not seem to have a strategic notion of the fivefold constitution of the human body. Different tribes speak differently of the various elements responsible for man's origin. Man has descended from the union of the earth and sky, who are regarded as wife and husband\textsuperscript{34}. Humankind is traced to the marriage between the daughter of the Sky-God and a spirit on Earth\textsuperscript{35}. The sun makes images of a man and woman from clay and puts a breath of life into them. The daughter of the lord of sky gave birth to a lump of flesh which was neither living nor dead. She dried it by the fire, and it soon burst open and bits of it scattered about the world and turned into human beings\textsuperscript{36}. In the beginning there was a great tree, from the berry of which grew a flower; out of this flower came a pair of human beings, the first man and woman\textsuperscript{37}. The first human beings came out of a gourd\textsuperscript{38}. Many of the first men and women came out of the tusk of an elephant\textsuperscript{39}. Khasi myths also reflects the unity of life\textsuperscript{40}. In this concept there is no division between different forms of life since all are inclusive.

\textsuperscript{32}the supreme being
\textsuperscript{33}see the section "Maram Cosmogony" in Joseph Athickal, The Marams: A Socio-Cultural Study (Ph.D. diss.), Manipur University, Imphal: Department of History, School of Social Sciences, 1989, p. 32
\textsuperscript{34}from Minyong myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 18
\textsuperscript{35}from Nocte myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 18
\textsuperscript{36}from Sherdukpen myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 19
\textsuperscript{37}from Singpho myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 20
\textsuperscript{38}from Singpho myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 20
\textsuperscript{39}from Mishmi myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 21
\textsuperscript{40}ka jingam ka long shityli, that is all things are one
under the one "body"\textsuperscript{41} and all are equally subjected to \textit{Ka Hok} and \textit{Ka Hukum} Bleit\textsuperscript{42}. There are also stories of how the first human race was destroyed and a new race created. Seven suns destroyed humankind for its iniquity; then, after the world has been washed clean by rain, it was re-peopled with a new race\textsuperscript{43}. The first men were destroyed by fire and flood, and only one man and woman were saved; from them modern humanity has descended. The world was destroyed by flood and the tribe descended from a girl who was impregnated by the wind\textsuperscript{44}.

Here the human body is the that part of the material universe which is known most intimately by communities itself. It is not only the condition for experiencing the world, but also an accessible object whose properties one can always observe. Here the human body does not represent any hierarchically organized schema as it is reflected particularly in mainstream Hindu mythology which ultimately forms the basis for the origin of caste system. In these, rather, it is infused with values that are the result of emotion-laden physiological functions and of intimate social experiences. The earth is the human body writ large. This makes it easy for traditional thought to comprehend the earth. However, microcosmic theory relates not only the earth but the stars and the planets to the human body. This analogy between human beings is integrative in nature rather forming a structural basis for differentiation and disintegration.

It is most intimately reflected in the creation narratives of communities in the North-east India. A significant aspect of these myths is that it reflects no real distinctions between man, animal and spirit. A woman gives birth to twins, of whom one is human and the other a tiger; animals talk and often behave like men; of two brothers, one is the father of mankind and the other the father of spirits. There are many stories of marriage of human beings with gods, spirits,

\textsuperscript{41}Kawei Ka Metbah, that is one big body
\textsuperscript{42}War, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{43}from Nocte myth in Elwin, \textit{op. cit.},p. 50
\textsuperscript{44}from Nocte myth in Elwin, \textit{op. cit.},p. 52
animals, as well as leaves, trees and, sometimes, even fire. Man is not unique even in the possession of knowledge. Primordial knowledge came to him from birds and animals. The knowledge of ritual is revelatory. The priests of all creatures were born at the beginning of creation. The implication of these myths is that the universal knowability lies with what could be called the "Cosmic Intelligence", symbolized in the myth of the Cosmic Egg.

As seen in most of the myths of communities of the North-east India is characterized by viewing the environment as either humanity’s parents\(^{45}\) or siblings\(^{46}\). Here humanity is seen as as one of many brothers of environmental family. No distinction is being made between the creature and the creator. The early phases of creation were characterized by total integration of all that came into being. Everything that has been created has its own life, and hence there was no ontological difference between man and non-man. The truth of the unity of all experience and the harmony of all existence is expressed through the mythic confirmation of the relation between various elements of nature: the earth and sky are a divine couple and universal parents. Fire and whirlwind are brothers just as water and mist are brothers. But water and fire have always been enemies. Wind is the friend of fire against water and he fights the rain and drives it before him. The main

The main driving force behind the material environment is the interaction of human relationships, through fighting, loving, revenging and struggles for dominance between various personified environmental elements. Man’s kinship with the earth and sky is reaffirmed by the eschatological belief that patterns of life on earth are the same as in heaven. Man lives on earth in the company of good and evil spirits, above whom rises the majestic figure of the sun-moon, Doini-Polo. The sun-moon was created after the *wignus*\(^{47}\) and, according to some traditions, later even than mankind. Water is believed to be under the control of the spirit;

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\(^{45}\)for e.g. sky and earth

\(^{46}\)tree, ocean and so on

\(^{47}\)spirits
some dwell in streams and rivers; others are in the sky, making the world hot or
cold, sending or restraining rain, snow and hail; they can be influenced by the
shamans. Rituals are performed to avert drought and excessive rain. There is a
general belief that early in history, fire took refuge in a stone or a tree. Men got
fire from various animals: owl, monkey, crow, bat and others. Although it was
known that fire could be disastrous, either deliberately or by accident, many tribes
believed in the fire-spirit -a spirit whose body is full of fire. He lives in the sky
and wherever he sees evil he comes down and destroys it. There are protection
rituals of various kinds. If a house catches fire the people leave a charm in a bowl
of rice-beer and throw it at the house along with earth hurriedly collected from
the grave and some black dye which is used to colour their cloth. It is believed
that these objects drive away the spirits who cause the fire.

From the reading of these myths three different conceptions can be articulated:
(i) Man is not unique in his origin, not even in the possession of knowledge; (ii)
there is no ontological difference between man, animal and spirit; and (iii) there
is no distinction between the creature and the creator. From these, it may be
deduced that all elements, things and beings, are an organic part of the cosmos.
Every element performs the same paradigmatic act of creation, preservation and
destruction. The order of the cosmos is dependent on the harmonious functioning
of all elements. Local perceptions about universe/earth/world have not only a
vision of this reality - they also live up to it. The Ongees are a good example.

According to Idu Mishmi myth the Ongees and spirits live on the same island.
There are good spirits and bad spirits. When bad spirits are attracted to the living
Ongees, they come and take away the Ongees. This act is known as death caused
by enegetebe. Since good spirits do not have lower jawbones, they depend on
the Ongees to provide them food. During negotiation, the good spirits convince

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\[48\text{from Idu Mishmi myth inElwin, op. cit., p. 29}\]
\[49\text{to be embraced and taken away}\]
the bad ones to let the *Ongees* live so that they may provide a continuous supply of food which all spirits may share. Bad spirits agree to the negotiation since the good spirits provide them with *maonale*, which good spirits alone are capable of making or directing the *Ongees* in making them. This relationship between spirits and *Ongees* is also the basis for seasonal translocation among the *Ongees*. Since the spirits and the *Ongees* depend on the island for food, the potential encounter with spirits who can cause death makes it necessary for *Ongees* and spirits to be on the same island but in different parts. *Ongees* explain:

"In each season spirits along with winds come from a particular direction. When they leave other spirits come in from a different side and it is a different season. When spirits come to the sea, then we move to the forest for hunting pigs. When spirits come to the forest we all go to the sea for hunting turtle. Spirits and *Ongees* both have to be on this island, sky and sea around. But the place where the spirits are feeding is the place in which *Ongees* should not hunt and gather. If the two are in the same place then all the *Ongees* will be taken away by the spirits to the sky and sea . . . by letting the spirits in a place in a season we get more plants, more animals and more children . . . *Ongees* and spirits hunt and gather in the same *injube*[^50], but in different *nanchugey*[^51]. Many *nanchugey* in the land, sea and sky make one big *injube* in which we along with animals, plants and spirits live. The medium of interaction between the *Ongees* and the spirit world is the smell[^52]. It is the smell that keeps the *Ongees* on the island and the spirits in the sky and the sea."[^53]

[^50]: space
[^51]: place
[^52]: kept in the ancestral bone, which the Ongees wear as an ornament
[^53]: from Idu Mishmi myth in Elwin, op. cit., p. 29
The Ongees' awareness of the cosmic order is consistent with the cosmogonic myths of the Arunachal tribes. To conclude, every element has a form, a location, a function, and a dependent relation with other elements. Water is the first element, from which all elements originate and to which all return. The earth and sky form a universal principle of creation, both concrete and abstract, expressed by such kinship terms as husband and wife. Wind and fire are brothers; and fire and water are enemies. Together they perform the function of creation and dissolution. In such a configuration of elements, the dissolution of the earth, sky, wind and fire into water is not to be considered as disorder. For, water is the first principle of cosmic order. The forces of nature are set into a mutually creative harmony. There is no intrinsic disorder in nature. Hence the oral cultures in their wisdom have made a final reconciliation with nature.

4.2 Working Upon Space: Spatial Strategies of Production and Reproduction

The social construction of landscape is multi-layered in nature in the North-east Indian region. There are multiple ways through which local communities in North-east articulate their immediate relationship with the landscape, territory and place and these multiple articulations eventually forms the hallmark of their identity within their society. These are produced through processes as characterized by 'sedimentation' the old being sedimented below the new in the minds of individuals' multi-faceted in that they are subjected to plethora of meanings depending on the particular historically and politically situated positions of the interpreter. Many of the principles for negotiating such landscapes are related to the ways in which the social identities of people are articulated with those of places.

It was discussed in the previous section on mythical space that different communities' articulations of ordering and re-ordering space in an ensemble of local
narratives trying to reach the universal in a limited sense. It provides a reflection of geo-sophical basis as how communities view space at a mental level. Besides these another important aspect related to space is that every community lives in a constructed environment- a built space. Performance is an immensely important act carried out in everyday and the grand activities of life which provides important clues to the spatialities of societies in the region. An understanding of the principles through which local communities articulates their immediate surrounding posses immense significance to have an insights to the local ways doing and acting upon space. This section provides a glimpse of the multiple strategies that people employ to construct/reconstruct or to produce/reproduce space in the North-east India. It is seen that the basic conceptual principles of land system is similar in most of the local communities in the region. Although, a full discussion of all the practices is itself an herculean task, the following section will attempt to provide a glimpse of the underlying principles specially highlighting with the cases of two local communities the Khasis and the Nagas.

4.2.1 Family, Kinship and the Spatial Structure

In all the local communities of North-east India land and it management is central to the organization of the society. Hence the use of land its ownership underlie all aspects of social life. The patterns land-use and notions of personal identity are closely linked to the social constructions of landscape of the locality. The structural basis on which this social construction of landscape rests is 'kinship'. Kinship in general sense not only defines the networks of human relationship but more specially it determines the spatial coordinates which gets reflected in innumerable ways the local landscape is structured and restructured. The basis for decision-making regarding land holding, usage, management and inheritance of land is closely linked with the social and kinship structure of the group see below given Figure 4.1.
Within various categories of kinship relationships "clan" plays a major role in defining the relationship between territory and people. Clan relates to both to language group and moiety and since a person's clan is determined by affiliation to particular tracts of country. Therefore, people of a clan belong to same language group and moiety. Clan is both patrilineal as well as matrilineal where land is the common ground, so to speak between the human members of the clan and the ancestral powers that gave the land its form.

To highlight how clan plays a major role in defining the territorial organization and reorganization among the communities in the North-east India the Khasis can be cited as an example. The concept of Kur is an expression of the underlying kinship system which itself is related to the basic structural organization of Khasi society. Kur is basic and cardinal principles of Khasi society where the popular saying is "tip kur, tip kha". It appears to be the most essential aspects of everyday social interactions. It connotes an elaborate code of conduct which makes up the major part of Khasi identity. Speaking a common language, living in the land of "The Seven Huts", and "knowing ki kur and ki kha" are considered the


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three fundamentals of common ethnic identity.57

Among the Khasis, descent is uniformly matrilineal and the smallest unit of the clan division can be designated on the dual institutions of the “kpoh”58 and the “iing”. The Khasi term “kpoh” is usually used for domestic unit tracing descent from one great-grandmother. It is a religious or ritual unit which unites its members in a common sentiment tracing descent to a common ancestress. The Khasi “kpoh” containing all descendants of three or more generations tracing to one great-grandmother or more generations, where it happens, remains an ideal type. The most important functional unit, however, is the “iing”59. While “kpoh” sometimes include two or more “iings” by direct extension of the line, the more frequent type is the household unit comprising wife, her husband, their children, wife’s unmarried sisters and brothers-including sometimes widowed and divorced.

In structural and functional term, the “iing” emerges as the most significant unit of kinship. Etymologically the word “iing”, refers both to the dwelling unit and members of the immediate who are descendent from a common ancestress. According to this conception “iing” is not only a residential unit within which the mundane task of production, reproduction and consumption task are affected, it is also the centre of the family rituals from which non-kin members (i.e. non-consanguineous) are excluded60. Premised on the principle of the ritual unity of the sibling group, the “iing” rests on the cooperation of the youngest daughter/sisters61 who inherits the property and the oldest brother who exercises control

58literally means 'womb' in Khasi language
61referred to as ka khadduh among the Khasis

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and authority over the affair of the “iing”. A man after death cannot find a resting place in the family tomb\textsuperscript{62} of his wife’s house. Bones and ashes must be transferred to his house of origin i.e. his mother’s house. In other words, the religious association of the house of origin leaves no doubt as to where one should look for his roots, and is thus one device to resolve with minimal strain the conflicting demands of the family of orientation and procreation.

The Khasi household unit or “iing” is exceptional in view of the fact that spouses of the members of the same “iing”, even when co-resident are actually excluded from the “iing”. The in-marrying affine, or more specifically the sister’s husband, occupies peripheral position in the ritual life of the “iing”. The principle of the ritual unity of the sibling group exclude’s the husband from the wife’s “iing”, as ritually he belongs to his own natal “iings” along with his sisters and her children. But the uncle plays and major role in the rituals of the “iing”. As a mother’s brother (u kni), he is the jural head of his natal family; he controls the ancestral property and acts as the counsellor and guide of sister and her children in religious and all other matters of the household. While the Khasis subscribes to the uxorilocal residence, in practice it is primarily the youngest daughter who conforms to this norm. The ultimogeniture pattern of inheritance allows those without inheritance rights to break away from the parental household to set up independent resident of their own.

It is a striking feature of Khasi society that the typical pattern of Khasi migration involves a single family, not a group of Kur(clan). As a result of this process, a locality or village is equally important than matrilineal descent group. Khasi villages are not single-clan growth\textsuperscript{63} which was also corroborated by the observance of Japanese anthropologist Che Nakane reflected in the following passage:

“A minor Kur (clan) is also scattered over many villages, though it

\textsuperscript{62}stone repository


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shows more concentration than the major one. Consequently a village may be composed of small segments of more than a dozen different Kurs.\textsuperscript{64}

Due again to the heterogenous character of the Khasi village, the practice of endogamy on the village level has tendency to grow illustrating the exclusive little community aspect of Khasi village. In this regard Nakane who conducted her field investigation on the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills once again observes:

"Through the predominant practice of endogamy on the level of the village, the small segments (fond on a level of a household or a group of few households) of various different Kurs clustered in a village are linked by affinal relations with each other, by which (they) altogether, form a well nit social organization of a village community."\textsuperscript{65}

The little community character of the Khasis has shaped the formation of the village community where the clan is relegated to a secondary formation which forms the "secondary endogamous area" which is regulated by village endogamy. It provides equal emphasis of village loyalty as well as clan loyalty which is reflected in the system of inheritance of land. Clan relationship regulates much in the sphere of ownership of private land i.e. \textit{Ri Raid}\textsuperscript{66} land than the \textit{Ry Kynti} land which is community owned land. Here the communal land is usually in the possession of the village community as a whole.

The character of ownership of land is intimately related to pattern of Khasi migration involving discrete lineage groups or domestic groups of different Kurs. Usually the earliest settlers demarcated certain advantageous areas by right of being founders. Understandably, the areas initially demarcated by families of

\textsuperscript{64}Chie Nakane, \textit{Garo and Khasi: A Comparative Study in Matrilinodal Systems} (Mouton De Gruyter, 1967).

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66}private land which is to be purchased and provides individual ownership to families
the founder clans were later claimed as their *Ri Kyntis*. The rest of the land around an original settlement was converted into *Ri Raid* of the village community. The conception of group solidarity complements clan solidarity in relative terms extends also the community land called *Ri Raid*. The right to enclose community land for the purpose of building house and cultivation cannot be claimed by an outsider who never belonged to the village. This right is also extended to a man who returns to his mother’s village after marriage. He can exercise his right to cultivate the common land there.

The character of ownership of land is intimately related to pattern of Khasi migration involving discrete lineage groups or domestic groups of different Kurs. Usually the earliest settlers demarcated certain advantageous areas by right of being founders. Understandably, the areas initially demarcated by families of the founder clans were later claimed as their *Ri Kyntis*. The rest of the land around an original settlement was converted into *Ri Raid* of the village community. The conception of group solidarity complements clan solidarity in relative terms extends also the community land called *Ri Raid*. The right to enclose community land for the purpose of building house and cultivation cannot be claimed by an outsider who never belonged to the village. This right is also extended to a man who returns to his mother’s village after marriage. He can exercise his right to cultivate the common land there.

Like the Khasis clan also plays significant role in the spatial organization of the village among the Nagas. Often among the Nagas *khel* is usually the dominant organizational unit. Having its genesis in the Assamese language, a *khel* may be defined more or less a distinct-spatially speaking-and by and large, self-sufficient-economically and socially speaking- unit of a village. A *khel* is structurally formed by clans which are further segmented into lineages. The minimal and minor lineage does lose its importance and even its identity. The clan is generally the unit of exogamy although there are examples of endogamy among in the largest clans.
Among the Konyak, Lotha and Angami exogamy is extended beyond the clan to include groups of clans (phratries), or entire village sections. This emergence of larger village unit is critical for the political and economic independence of the smaller lineage segments which may lose all their former functions. Village sections are supposedly under the control of the chief whose power stems from the fact that he is a landowner. It is probably best to qualify this. It seems likely that formation of a village section is no more than the formation of a headman-plus-following. Clan plays the central role in the management of land and internal politics. The Ao’s have a tradition that all the chiefs come from one clan, but they are not themselves hierarchically organized. Ranking is established by the action of the independent minor or minimal lineages that are capable of concentrating wealth in their hands. With the strengthening of the clan structure lineages ultimately disappears and segmentary structure gives way to the egalitarian clan.

Among the Lothas clans is the major land-owner and individuals can only hold land within the confines of the larger unit. That is if there are no heirs, the land reverts to the clan for eventual redistribution. The Angamis, who are often singled for their property rights in terraced fields are no different from the Semas in this respect. Land titles are transferable, but they are inherited equally so that property tends to be continually redistributed within the larger clan. With the increased size of lineal unit, political manoeuvre becomes very difficult. The feast of merit cycle which is a traditional means to attain prestige but it cannot be transformed into ranked affinal relations. There are wealthy men in every village but their wealth is dispersed in inheritance and the most that can be achieved is a large measure of influence within a single generation.

In most of the local communities in North-east, the sacred founder of the clan draws immense power in the spatial organization of the village. He is the

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mediator between the community, the supernatural world and the personification of the village in its relation to the forces pervading nature and human life. In such mediation, the ancestors play a major role who are considered as the real proprietors of the land. They need to be propitiated through a series of tribute system which carries different shades among different communities. These tributes are often made in the forms of sacrifices in order to sustain the economic and religious cycles reproduction. Man’s relation to nature here is one of dependence to the supernatural. The relations between men are of a different order, however, since at first there is no dependency but rather reciprocity. As the local founder of the clan is identified with the ancestor of the whole community, the chiefly lineage comes to represent the community as a whole, and being closest to the local deity, he becomes the mediator between the community and the highest spirits.

In the North-east India among the local communities, social identity is constructed and reconstructed in relationship to their territory and ancestral associations, as people live and move through their landscapes. Clan territories are covered by pathways taken by ancestral beings during the dreaming, the physical features of the land being attributed to their actions. The rubric, however, endured less well as other aspects of personal identity to land; information to clan is not as well known as other aspects of social identity. For example, children and younger people are often unaware of their clan affiliation though they may know their moiety, sub-section and language groups to which they belong. In addition, information about clan affiliation of adults can often be obtained only directly from the person involved. An integral process of growing up is that each community member learning their unique complex relationships to their territory. As people move through their land, not only do they learn about themselves, and their particular rights and responsibilities in this land-based scheme. In the cosmos of local communities the flow of power is from inherently powerful ancestral beings to the land, imbued with a potency given to it by the actions of past people.
and ancestors; and to living people, who have the facility to call upon the power and authority that is inherent in both the land and the ancestral beings.

4.2.2 The Living Landscape: Performance and Rituals

A common conception among the local communities is that the conceptualization of contemporary landscape as redolent with meaning which is imbued with spiritual values guided by ancestral power and presence. The contemporary landscape is not 'regarded as dead illustrations' of mythical events but having a living power with direct relevance to the present. Myths are accepted on faith, they are taught to be believed, and rituals are designed for such an acceptance. From this perspective traversing the land is something that needs to be constantly negotiated; it is necessary that people be aware of how they are interacting with, how their actions may impinge upon, what are essentially living landscapes, landscapes capable of retribution for misdeeds as well as munificence see below given in figure 4.2.

Local communities in North-east India share commonness in terms of culture of erecting megaliths associated with the cult of ancestors and fertility generation. For instance among the Khasis the Mother Earth cult draws immense significance in a matrilineal society. The basis for ancestor cult is the commemoration of the dead and the culture of erecting megaliths is intimately associated with. The ritual use of wine, sacrifice is common in commemoration of ancestors, and megalithic erections are all part of the Khasi rituals. They have a feeling that their land and herds were theirs only because their ancestors had owned them - a feeling which lies at the root of the ancestor cult. Among the Khasis land is regarded as belonging to the Earth, a female principle, but it also belonged to ancestors. The megaliths imply a powerful sense of respect for ancestors and possibly a way to keep them close to kinsmen and descendants for the help that they could give.

What is important in the context of our present discourse is the connection between myth and ritual with the preponderance of rituals and worship directed
Figure 4.2: The Network of Mediation between Ancestors, Territory and Supreme Beings


towards Mother Earth and ancestors through prayer libation, and sacrifice. These in turn, have a correspondence with megalithic culture. In many of myths narrated there are few important points to be noted: a Supreme God chose commandments from the basis of religion; a God who can be approached only through the Earth Mother, by prayer libation and sacrifice: preservation of the bones of the dead. All these have relevance in the most important ritual cum-festival of Jaintya Hills, Behdie'nkhlam. This is performed after the sowing of seeds to ward off plague and pestilence and to ensure good harvests. The rites are also directed towards venerating ancestors. Significantly, two myths rite myth of U Lakfierh and that of Saw Kpoh -are chanted as part of the Behdie'nkhlam. These myths are chanted while rites are performed to venerate the four sisters and the first chief. The stone deities who guard the four corners of Jowai are also worshipped. Rites such

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68 referred to as niam among the Khasi
as cleaning the clan cemetery, bringing in the khnong tree mint building sacred chariots in the shape of lintel tombs, are performed in different phases in the month preceding the final three-day ritual-cum-festival. The ritual is, therefore, decisively directed towards the veneration of ancestors.

The rites performed during Pomblang of the Khasi Hills also point in the same direction. This is celebrated to invoke the blessings of the God of Shillong the first mother of the syiem clan and the first maternal uncle through prayer, libation, and sacrifice of goats. Pomblang rites are also performed to ensure rain and good harvests and to eradicate epidemics and famines. The matrilineal system of the Khasis demands that the rites be performed by both the Syiem and his sister. The syiem prays are for guidance from the ancestors. Veneration of ancestors is therefore a major element of the Khasl-Jaintia religion, and is raised to the height of a cult. The Khasis believe that the dead, freed from earthly bondage (Ka ruh shong bynda) are somehow elevated to a supernatural status, capable of materially aiding mortals at times of crisis. A Khasi will not embark upon any project without invoking the blessings of his ancestral spirits.

This cult has a definite bearing on megalithic culture. In all the important community rituals such as Behdiennkhlam and Pomblang prayers, libations, and sacrifices are offered to ancestors. At the family level also, rites are performed to venerate the dead. Stones are erected in the performance of these rites. After cremation, bone-chips are picked up, collected in a piece of cloth, and taken to a spot where a small chamber of stone called mawshieng is erected. The bones are transferred to a clay pot and placed inside this chamber. Later the bundle is taken to the clan ossuaries called mawbak. Halfway to the place where the

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69 specially performed during the Nongkrem festival
70 referred to as U Blei Shillong in Khasi myths
71 referred to as Lei Long Syiem in Khasi myths
72 referred to as U Suidnia in Khasi myths
74 referred to as Ka Syiem Sad in Khasi myths

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mawbah stands are three pairs of monoliths behind two dolmens - one for male and the other of the female relatives. These are called mawkjat and serve as the resting places for the spirits of the departed souls.

The monoliths, called mawbnyna can be divided into two major categories, mawniam and mawnam. Erection of mawniam is essentially a religious activity as the name itself suggests: maw means “stone” and niam means “religion”. Mawnam on the other hand, are merely memorial stones and have no religious bearing. Mawkjat is a sub-category of mawniam. There are also other subcategories such as mawniam ‘thymmai, and mawklim. Generally, the erection of mawniam follows a set pattern: three vertical stones and one horizontal and flat (dolmen). The middle one of the three vertical stones is called mawknie and other two are called mawpyrsa. The dolmen is called mawkiaw. These stones are erected in fulfilling the customary obligations of performing the prescribed rites with prayer, libation, and sacrifice to appease the spirit of the dead.

Ancestor cult is the basis of the Khasi-Jaintia megalithic culture. The ancestors may be either known through specified steps of filiation or they may be mythical beings such as those seen in the myth of Saw Kpoh of the Jaintia Hills. It is extremely difficult to determine whether these mythical beings are essentially mythical or were living beings at one point of time and got their mythical character through oral tradition. In either case, religious beliefs and ritual practices signify the importance of the cult both at the family and community level. And, since ritual practices show such distinct features as prayer, libation, and sacrifice, they can be regarded as acts of worship. It is a customary obligation that the dead receive ritual attention in prescribed ways including the erection of stones such as mawniam.

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75 stones for unnatural death
76 stones for adultery
77 uncle stone
78 stones for maternal nephews
79 ancestress stone
These practices point out that ancestors are not outside the moral and social universe of the descendants. They are an integral part of it, committed to it, though not in a human sense. Thus, many ritual activities are directed towards them, especially in the case of the earliest communal ancestors as it is observed in the Jaintia Behdienklam and the Khasi Pomblang. The same principle operates in the practice of preservation of the bones of the dead in family and clan ossuaries, mawshieng and mawbah respectively, the erection of the mawshieng, the attention to the dead by performing rites as is seen in Behdienkhlam, especially the practice of cleaning the clan ossuaries during the festival, and in Pomblang when libation and sacrifices are offered to the earliest of ancestors or the well being of the living. There is furthermore evidence that when things go well, it is attributed to ancestral benevolence as seen in the thanksgiving during Pomblang of the Khasi Hills. These ‘communion rites’, beginning with the offering of food to the dead and ending with stone-erecting, are an essential part of the socio-religious life of agricultural communities.

Similar practices are also common among the Nagas. One of the most noticeable features of an Angamis khel territory is the “village gates”80 which marks the village landscape. These are strong thick wooden doors made out of one piece of solid wood. Each Kharu is engraved with motifs, symbolizing an increase in the population of the Khel and of the mithuns. Every gate has a name, derived from its position or the one who took the charge of construction in the past. These gates are not simply massive plank of wood, prepared from the bole of tree, but carry on it an ordered arrangement of certain motifs, which are made on a gate before it is attached to the wooden frame. Engraved on this gates, these motifs remain the same for all the Angami villages, although, individually some of the motifs may be attributed more importance and expression than others. There are similarities between the motifs as well as particularity of certain symbols used

80known as Kharu
among the Nagas. Gate symbolism remaining the same, differences between Naga gate lie in configurational placement of their motifs. These differences are not only inter-Naga but even within the Angamis they are conspicuous.

The replacement of gate or the construction of new gate undergoes several rituals and processes among the Angamis. The desire to erect new gates or replace the existing ones is a collective process which is first initiated through a secret meeting of the *khel* members, occupying differential (in terms of age), political and legal (Gaon Bura or Runu Kru), or magico religious (Kemovo, Zhevo, Tsakro, Lidepfu) positions. The decision, taken collectively, and esoterically, is gradually communicated to other members of the *khel*, but since the Angamis are patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal, the matters of crucial socio-political and spiritual importance remain confined to males unlike the Khasis that we have discussed above.\(^81\)

Erection of a new gate generally takes place after the festival of *Sekrengi* which falls on the second day after the full moon of the month of *Kezei*\(^82\) or of the month of *Kera*\(^83\). It takes about one to three months for the final installation of a gate from the time decision is take. Selection of a heavy-trunked tree, from which the gate is to be carved out, inaugurates the long-drawn out processes of construction, pulling and installation of gates. A quasi group of *khel* members consisting of the righteous people\(^84\) who have performed the ‘four great social gennas’, other elders (Phicumia, Runakru and Kruta), and two boys -in the range ten to twelve years, who have never had sexual intercourse (celibate; phousemia) is entrusted pertaining to the replacement of gates, the two houses who may be from any lineage of the *khel*, occupy a very significant place.

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81 this account is adopted from S Marwha and Vinay Srivastava, “Khel Gate and Social Structure: A Study of Their Relationship and A Note on the Place of Material Culture in Anthropology,” in Subhadra Mitra Channa (ed.), *Nagaland: A Contemporary Ethnography* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 1992). p. 75-87
82 traditional Angami month equivalent to the month of February
83 traditional Angami month equivalent to the month of March
84 referred to as *miathomia* among the Angamis

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Out of a number of boys who may come up to the specifications of age and celibacy, having those the best, impressive and also the most auspicious names are selected rituals. A gate, measuring on an average eight to nine feet in length, three to three and half feet in breadth and three to four inches in thickness is made from the plank of just one bole. The task of selecting a tree of such a girth is entrusted to a group generally consisting of ten people. They go to the forest to select the best mego - a kind of tree - from which the new gate would be carved. Once selected the site and location of the tree would not be disclosed to others. The young celibate boys who accompany the tree selection team are required to dream that night, and if the dreams are unfavourable, the tree on the probation is rejected and the quasi-group starts anew to select another tree with the physical prerequisites. Before felling the tree, the celibates touch it with some common leaves in presence of the ritual specialties of the khel, and then, to start with, three strong and powerful men nicks slightly with axes.

The carvings (or decorations) on the plank are made by male only. Those who know carving and can replicate the patterns of the old gates, volunteer their services. Although there may be around twenty people present at the site of carving, generally six or seven persons begin on the work on the plank together. First of all the trunk is shaped into a plank; and this done in the forest, right at the place where the tree was felled. In terms of configuration, the new gate is a replica of the one it replaces. The motifs drawn on it have timelessly remained the same. Each gate is an apotheosization of the khel structure and apotothegmatically expresses the achievements of the khel people in spiritual and chivalrous terms. Along with a generality of the patterns of a gate, it is also reflection of the social reality prevalent in the khel at the time of its construction. For the erection of the gate again an auspicious day is selected and genna is performed before doing it. Since the time taken for dragging the gate depends on the distance it has to cover, the

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85 referred to as mequoim in Angami dialect
dragging party adjusts its time accordingly. The arrival of the gate is an occasion of great celebrations and to mark it, rice beer is lavishly offered to all.

Each khel has its own gates which spatially as well as symbolically mark its unity, and therefore, the task of gate construction is undertaken by the khel members. For dragging it to the khel from the site of its construction, besides the khel people, all of those who belong to the khel of the village and the khels in alliance are invited. Merrymaking and jocund celebrations go on for couple of days in which identity of the khel disappears in a larger identity of the Angami Nagas. At times the installation on to the wooden frame, no outsider- that is to say, not living in that khel -is supposed to remain outside that khel. The khel identity which disappeared in the ‘vast of ocean of conscience collective’ returns to its earlier state. Gate pulling is a solemn occasion for rejuvenating and cementing relations of khel with others of the village which it has enduring alliance.

In brief, the chapter reflects on the various aspects and process of knowledge assemblages in the North-east India. From the examination and analysis of various oral narratives that includes myths, folktales and spatial practices it is found that the vernacular geo-body integrative linked through an organic relationship of intentionality between the conscious projects and imaginative geographies that has given shape to the subjective and material experiences in the frame of different individual ethnic communities in the North-east India. As understood from the analysis of narratives of cosmogonic myths that the geo-sophy reflected in those defies any sort of common criteria of “universal” rationality. Rather than being guided by an definitive epistemological trajectory, the “messy” spatialized perspective on the origin of the material universe/world/earth is riddled with the culturally mediated experiential constructions which seeks to find its own harmony and meanings. As found from the reading of cosmogonic myths the principle elements that defines the constitution of their world view is contingent unlike the “five elements” of the dominant societies. Similarly, it provides reflection to the
inseparation between the "organic" and "in-organic" as every element/sphere is considered to be as an "organic whole".

Similarly, at the material level, the interpretation of various performance of rituals of various ethnic communities provides clues to constitutive lifeworld that are built through a heterogenous components, people, practices and places that are organically linked by social strategies and technical devices of 'heterogeneous engineering'. Ethnic communities in the North-east India have developed a knowledge tradition dependent on the articulation of their material surrounding based on modes of patterning especially the genealogical that bases on the kinship system. Here ethnic communities use a formalized recursive representation of kinship as the major integrative standardized form of knowledge in much the same way the formalized recursion of tallying—number—constitutes an integrative standardized from of knowledge.

The kinship system built around clanship which unlimited process of recursion that enables all things to be named and related and thus imposes an order on the social and natural world that gives it coherence and value. It provides the framework within which social obligations with regard to life, death, marriage and land can be negotiated. The other mode of patterning is provided by performance rituals related the stories, myths or dreamings that relate the creation of the landscape by the ancestral beings in a variety of ways including song, dance, story telling etc. The clan system and orality together constitute a knowledge network that allows for everything to be connected linking the spiritual sphere of ancestors, persons, places and ceremonies performed through ceremonies and social exchanges so that potentially everything can be known and given value and significance. Thus, the vernacular geo-body can be considered as the effect laden body of these conceptions and practices that are produced and reproduced through a process of assembling, standardizing, transmitting and utilizing geographical knowledge at the local scale which marked by contingency and change.