

# **THE SEMIOTIC UNIVERSE OF NAGA FOLK TALES**

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled **The Semiotic Universe of Naga Folk Tales** submitted by **Lemtila Alinger** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Master of Philosophy** is her original work according to the best of our knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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TO MY PARENTS

*Ajak Atema Kanga Pelar*

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## PREFACE

Much of what is known of Naga culture and tradition today goes back to recorded materials that span about 150 years. The inaccessibility of the terrain coupled with the fact that the Nagas had no script of their own, explains the absence of a written history until recently. The American missionary influence brought the Roman script in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Despite many debilitating factors, the rich culture of the Nagas have been preserved and retained. The presence of institutions called Morungs, in the past, have been instrumental in passing on the oral tradition of the Nagas from one generation to the next. The folk tales and rituals which have evolved over ages of the people's existence and transformation, has crystallised the essence of the community.

The concept 'Naga' is a general appellation but undefined in the particular. This is because there are several Naga languages but no one Naga language. The multiplicity of languages and dialects enrich the culture but has also differentiated it to tribal units. Each tribe (more than sixteen in number) distinguishes itself from its neighbour through language, social organisation, ornamentation and so on. This is to say that within the larger framework there are innumerable variations. The apparent uniformity among the tribes is their acknowledgement of several common cultural indices, that signify similar concepts through their presence or absence.

This study addresses one aspect of this inexhaustible universe of signification.

The attempt of this study is to understand the significative universe of the Nagas through their communication of desire and response to conflicts, at the ideational level, in the tales. The narratives are analysed within the parameters of the human condition, which has a certain universality in its existential capacity. Parallel readings of culture and tradition only sharpen its crystallisation. The antecedents of social history present in the narratives are taken as point of departure for our study, since the tales are recognised as pure conceptual constructs. This kind of reading is differentiated from the interpretation of folk tales as 'historical science', which is limited in its scope.

The semiotic approach considers each tale as an individual discourse with an overall semiologic pattern. By a systematic process of decomposition and reconstruction, new insights into the cultural psyche is generated. The tales serve as a key to the past as well as the present since they are condensations of historical, mythical and synchronic discourses.

The study of Naga folk tales so far has been more inclined towards collection and dealing with the formal aspects, except for a notable body of work emerging out of the comparative study between the old animistic system and the Christian tradition. The early collection and recordings of Naga customs and folklore has much to be attributed to the efforts of

British administrators like J.H.Hutton and J.P. Mills, who produced seminal works covering several tribes. Hutton wrote monographs on the Angami and Sema tribes, and Mills, on the Ao, Lotha and Rengma tribes. C.V. Fürer Haimendorf, the German anthropologist focussed on the Konyak Nagas and the American missionary W.C. Smith worked among the Aos. The Nagas themselves and other Indians started collecting and recording much later, about three decades ago.

The primary material for this study is a text called the *Folk Tales from Nagaland, Part I&II*, published by the Directorate of Art and Culture, Kohima, Nagaland (1989). It contains more than 100 stories from different tribes of Nagaland, translated into English from their respective languages.

The study is extended over four chapters. The first chapter presents a general framework under which the stories are to be analysed. The semiotic theory of language and its application to folk narratives is briefly presented. The basis of the interpretation is the word-sign, which fails to contain the fluidity of ideas. The signifier therefore reveals not the whole idea but traces of it. In conjunction with other signifiers unconsciously embedded, structures of significance can be revealed or generated.

The second chapter presents the Naga view through an exploration of its cosmology and social systems. It is shown how the Naga conceptual universe has evolved out of the community's experience in the physical world. The conceptual systems, in turn, are seen to direct the dynamism of



the culture through the creation of myths, rituals and socially sanctioned practises. It shows how the whole cultural fabric is held together by man's perceived schemas.

In the third chapter is the analyses of the representative tales of the three universes-Animal, Spirit, Human- of the Naga folk tales. All the tales are representations of the human condition but depicted through different typologies. The degree of freedom accorded to the imagination by each category proportions the crystallisation of abstract ideas. The cultural context sharpens the significance. The entire exercise reveals in the ideational level, the community's desires of itself in the world.

The fourth chapter is an elaboration as well as a purview of the three significant universes of the Naga folk tales . Brief analyses of five stories each, in every category, substantiate the propositions of the third chapter. The stories are condensations of their originals from the primary text.

## 1 THE SEMIOTICS OF FOLK TALES

The semiotic universe is a universe of signs where nature is transformed into culture through a community's attribution of ideas to forms. Our basis of understanding the universe of sign is in accordance with the linguistic theory propounded by Sussure, much earlier by Abelard, and later further developed by French semioticians and structuralists.

The sign is dependent upon a signifier to mark its identity, and a signified which is the idea or meaning. The relation between the two components is arbitrary in nature. Therefore the significance created out of such a relation is at best approximate and can never be taken as 'the' true meaning. Language, a meta level of signs, suffers from the same effects. It is possible to have as many levels of interpretation as there are ideas emanating from the constituting units. The imperfect nature of the signifying system cannot therefore totally express an idea.

The ideas of a society makes its culture. The ideas are embodied and communicated through the structures of relationship in the society. The communication system has languages of different forms like painting, gestures, hieroglyphics, or the more conventional word based form,

which are employed to construct or re-construct structures. However it is the latter form which best represents the composite ideas that exist in communication. This is because the sign words are condensed and abbreviated forms of ideas. They provide an anchor, however fleeting, for the ephemeral multiplicity of ideas. In communication we depend upon the correlation of ideas carried forth by the rapport between the signs. Several strings of signs, as in propositions, re-enforce the prominent strains of a discourse.

Folk tales come under the genre of folklore. Like ritual and beliefs, folk tales perpetrate the cultural identity of a community, its values and ideas. At the obvious level, folk tales are endorsed by the society that created them. At a deeper level, they trace the various discourses that shape and condition the community at their existential plane.

Folk tales are narrated in two forms; the oral and the written. The method of delivery and emphasis of each is different. The oral form depends much on gestures and memory to describe and sustain the ideas, whereas in the written form, the concrete nature of words provide the necessary pause to reflect and recognise the thought process. The words are subjected to a variety of combinations to formulate the object of discourse from a vast universe of signification. For any systematic

analysis of oral stories, therefore, transcription becomes a necessity. The tales considered for our study are not only transcribed but they also suffer from the effects of translation, from the Naga languages to English.

Translation occurs at the ideational level, by " combining, with the signs of a language, the ideas, which are related with the signs of another language."<sup>1</sup> An attempt is made to make the closest possible interpretation in translation, but the inadequacy of the sign system implies that there are already several layers of refraction, each with the text that is being analysed. This is the bane of all analyses based on the sign system and yet without this the progress of understanding is limited.

The nature of folk tales reveal the high intellectual activity that marks its creation. The tales ignore the parameters of reality, and in fluid movement in space and time, the situation and characters are imaginatively constructed. Images created in abstraction transcend the tangible world. Fantastic and surrealistic images of supernatural, the animate and the inanimate beings are found in the tales. These beings

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<sup>1</sup> H.S.Gill, *The Semiotics of Creative Process in Language and Literature* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1983), p.55.

interact with each other at a uniform level, speaking and conjugating. The ability to imagine systems show the agility of the human mind. The intellect attempts to understand observable phenomena, like the myths of creation which explain the reason behind occurrences in the physical world. About the role of imagination in human existence, Wallace Chafe says, that it "allows to exceed the limitations of particular sense impressions, interpreting them as manifestation of more encompassing schemes that allows us to recognise, have expectations about, and act on our surroundings in flexible and complex ways."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that science tries to resolve through data, what folk tales do through imagination, and yet many times, the systematic approach of science is based on an assumed premise of observation, which becomes a myth.

Folk tales acquire the status of myths having travelled through space and time progressively evolving into highly crystallised ideas. The simple narratives of folk tales are in fact the very condensed forms of abstractions. The presence of images in the matrix of the narrative, which are "frozen" adds to the timeless quality of the tales. The images are frozen and they lie dormant as their ideological references become obsolete. They are activated through their juxtapositions and relations

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness and Time* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.9.

with new ensembles of significance, thus churning out a multiplicity of meanings.

The quality of myths is at once lucid as well as complex. Lucid because as Barthes puts it, the premise on which the narrative stands is 'naturalised', or as if it were a fact.<sup>3</sup> Whereas, it is this layer which holds the key to complex relations of significance. The ambiguity of myths and folk tales is because of this nature of construction. Therefore myths are to be seen from the semiological point of view. To read them from the perspective of ideology is to make the same fallacy of the ideological systems that try to dominate and direct meaning.

According to the deconstructionist theory, a body can exist only as an opposite to the 'other.' The 'other' is apparent even as its shadow. Nancy Glazener, in her understanding of the 'carnavalesque' in the novel, also applicable to reading of folk tales, talks about two kinds of subversion. The 'essentialist' understanding which is a direct subversion of the dominantly held ideas in a context; and the 'reflexive' reading which serves as the 'other' to the dominant discourse, as a threatening

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<sup>3</sup> R.Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Selected Writings*, With an introduction by Susan Sontag (Great Britain: Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1982; Fontana Pocket Readers, 1983), p.132.

projection of the lack in their own identities.<sup>4</sup> The first kind of reading becomes irrelevant after a period of time, since social structures are always in flux. The nature of folk tales takes it beyond the essentialist interpretation to the reflexive kind, where the subjective point of view and the 'other' of it are variables. The high reflexivity of myths resist a hegemonic wholeness. Semiotically this can be explained because the system defies total purity. It works against such pure forms like mathematical equations which acquire a definiteness of unalterable meaning. Here myths appear to be snuffed out at last with no interpretation possible. However, they resurface again as they draw strength from the resilience of the signifier.<sup>5</sup>

In psychoanalytic terms, dreams, myths and folk tales are of the same category. Dream is interpreted as an individual myth and myth is a social dream, an equation, ushered in by the findings of Freud and Jung. Our focus is on myths as social dream but we cannot study them without being aware that each individual dream contributes to the construction of the social myth. Jung talks about the individual psyche as a coagulation of the "collective conscious" of mankind, including communities, from time unrecorded. The 'archetypes' that surface in dream or mythic

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<sup>4</sup> N.Glazener, "Dialogic Subversion," in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Great Britain: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.115.

<sup>5</sup> R.Barthes, *Selected Writings*, p.120.

motifs, show the continuity of the community's complex ideas, its desires and dreams since its inception. These images, he says, point to the realities of the soul as they are not created consciously.<sup>6</sup> Lacan's postulation of the parallel existence of the unconscious and language implies the closeness of the theory of language and psychoanalysis. In a literary analysis the mind or psyche in construction cannot be ignored.

The method of analysis of the folk tales undertakes a close reading of the contours that delineate the discourse. The text is understood to have a certain order since it is bound by a priori knowledge of the discursive rules and categories.<sup>7</sup> The path of the discourse is marked by several points of control and restraint, which circumscribe the conditions that created it.

Interpretation involves a clash of structures of the text, with the analyst's own. The resultant discourse is an appropriation of the two, and an entirely new discourse, which encompasses all the dimension synchronic historical and mythological in contact. There is no simple interpretation

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<sup>6</sup> C.G.Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G.Jung*, vol.2, trans. R.F.C.Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p.345.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Foucault, *In Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* trans. Anonymous (London: Tavistock, 1970), xi; quoted in Robert Young, *Untying the Text: A Post Structuralist Reader* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.10.



of any text. As Barthes says “each text is in some sort its own model, that each text, in other words, must be treated in its difference.”<sup>8</sup>

The study understands knowledge as ‘archaeological’, or ideas existing in layers of signification. In order to intellectually analyse the stories there are three ways by which the different layers are explored. The first step is to follow the semantic universe in the syntactic, linear order of the narrative. The sequence of events are important to form units according to the immanent ideas. The second reading considers conceptual opposites in paradigmatic relations. By back and forth movements and juxtapositions between elements of different units, new angles to ideas are created, in psychical associations. The third reading situates the text in a cultural context. The analysis derives a depth of insight by addressing the human discourse through the dialectics of a cultural system. The analysis arrives at a holistic picture of the universe of the Nagas in their folk tales.

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<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, “A Conversation With Roland Barthes”, *Signs of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics*, (1971); ed. S.Heath, C. MacCabe and C. Prendergast (Cambridge: Granta, 1971), p.44; quoted in R.Young, *Untying the Text*, p.7.

## 2 THE CONCEPTUAL UNIVERSE OF THE NAGAS

A conceptual system is evolved, in a context, out of complex relationships and activities with the general environment. The perceived notions that constitute the system are acquired, "In part through their participation in a culture, in part through a lifetime of trying to deal effectively with experiences, and doubtless in part through patterns that have become wired into the human nervous system."<sup>1</sup>

The epistemology of conceptual discourses of the Nagas is based on an understanding of the spatio-temporal dimension in its cyclic movements. The rhythm of nature and the soil marks its history. Man participates in the marking of time along with the earth cycle through agricultural activities, which is his main stay. The concept of cyclic time is evolved.<sup>2</sup> It effects and conditions his relationships with nature and the society. One such concept is the idea of renewal and regeneration. The sense of recurrence in such a concept makes him understand the dynamic communion of life and nature. The

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<sup>1</sup> Chafe, *Discourse*, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> A.Wati Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview and Modernity* (Jorhat, Assam: N.Limala Lkr, Eastern Theological College, 1995), p.88.

fragmentary view of existence is rejected for a holistic and accommodating oneness.

We have posited that out of the experiential world conceptual discourses are created. The intellect acts by an "ability to relate and crystallise observations to a more encompassing and more stable imagined schema, within which the observation has a natural place."<sup>3</sup> The perceived patterns or schemas become the basis on which the society sets its codes, which in turn directs the dynamism of culture. The codes themselves justify their imposition - the belief system rationalises the concept of an unpredictable and incomprehensible universe, the myths and rituals reinforce this view. Social life and relationships are drawn out of an ethical system that is in congruence with the belief system as well as with the pragmatic idea of securing his biological (personal) and social (collective) survival. A self contained order is evident from an overlapping of the belief system, the ethical system and the pragmatics of the society.

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<sup>3</sup> Chafe, *Discourse*, p.9.

We can attempt at understanding the Naga cosmology through a study of their social structures and also their beliefs and values. The folk tales express statements of value or reasons for why things are the way they are. The nature of the tales themselves support the functional role of mythifying the conceptual.

### **Naga Cosmology**

The belief system can be said to be concerned with the expressions of the values of a society, which safeguards them by endowing them with divine sanction. The Nagas acknowledged supernatural beings as the powers that controlled nature and his life. The functional theory of the origins of religion considers religion as a mechanism by which certain ends are achieved. Malinowski propounds the effects of religion as cathartic,<sup>4</sup> to purge the human mind of its stress and strain. In upset states of existence, religion brings about a re-adjustment between man and the supernatural. Radcliff Brown focuses on the adherence of the members of the community, out of dependence on religion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> B.Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Boston and Glencoe, Ill., 1948); in D.N.Majumdar and T.N.Madan, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* (Noida: Mayoor Paperbacks, 1985), p.135.

<sup>5</sup> A.R.Radcliff Brown, *Function and Structure in Primitive Society* (London: Cohen and West, 1952), Chapter VIII; in D.N.Majumdar and T.N.Madan, *Social Anthropology*, p.135.

2.1. For the majority of the Naga tribes there is a High God at the apex of all powers. He is the creator of the universe, a benevolent figure, who sustains nature and all its inhabitants. He manifests himself through nature. The mystery, beauty, power and all aspects of nature are attributed to this god. The worship of the objects of nature are therefore not a worship in themselves but of the high god. Natural and the supernatural unite in the objects and elements of creation thus holding the cosmos in a sacred commune.

In several myths of creation, it says god created all things. In a Chang Naga story man emerges from a hole in the earth. A bottomless pit is opened for a limited period after which it is closed for eternity. All other living creatures also come out of this hole. The story says that this was a "senseless" age of innocence, all living beings in their natal stage co-existing in harmony. There was no differentiation and no sense of good and evil.<sup>6</sup>

The situation points to a time in creation when all living beings emerged and lived together. There was no sense of primacy of any

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<sup>6</sup> "The Story of Creation," in *Folk Tales from Nagaland, Part I & II*, (Kohima, Nagaland: The Directorate of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland, 1989), p.151.

one member of the created. The statement "God created all things" covers a whole universe of animate and inanimate objects. The earth from which the creatures emerged is also created by God. Some tribes like the Aos, believe that they originated from stones called "Lungterok" (six stones). The belief has a connection to the earth, earth which is the mother and home of all creations. In ritual, before the planting of seeds in the field, an invocation is made to the High God to bless the crops. Earth, in conjunction with the High God gives life and sustenance to all that live in it.

The attitude of reverence and accountability to the High God, and responsibility towards mother earth, brings out of its dialectics a moral and ethical system that circumscribes the boundaries of the culture. The moral system extends to the whole of creation. All the creatures sustained by the earth are held in a brotherhood. Therefore in the story we find the tiger, the spirit, and man live together in a family.

There is an inextricable bond between all the members of the physical world, though each might differ according to strength, size and ability. The stories which illustrate dependency on each other are

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common, man and rat are shown to be equally reliant upon each other. It is the small rat which brings the first paddy plant to man, from the centre of the lake. The pact made between the two is a share for the rat during the harvest. Man forgets to keep the rat's share at the specified time but later he invites the rat to share his paddy at home and in the fields.<sup>7</sup>

The ethical system dictates that man and nature look after each other. Man as his societal function takes charge of the spaces by forming administrative units to oversee its proper maintenance. The land belongs to the High God and it bequeaths an identity to the people.

The significance of the High God to the Naga is not only in the evolution of the ethical system or as the source and sustainer of life, he intervenes to demarcate hierarchy among his creations. He balances their exercise of power so that no one kind might become overtly dominant over the other.

The story is told about "How and why elephant's eyes became small." The time is during creation, everything is in its nascent state. The elephant's eyes are as big as his whole body, which makes

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<sup>7</sup> "Origin of Paddy Plant," in *Folk Tales*, p.196.

his field of vision very vast. Therefore the things he sees are very small and faint. The creator asks him to train his eyes at man and tell him what he sees. He answers that man looks like an ant walking on earth. The creator adjusts and makes the elephant's eyes smaller until such time as man appears like a giant, like a tree standing in it's way. Thus the elephant's eyes look small today.<sup>8</sup>

The huge strength of the elephant coupled with its once big eyes would have made it dangerous and invincible among the animals. The creator wisely balances its power so that it will be able to co-exist with other creatures. The man and elephant are compared. Man is small in strength, weak in physical attributes but through the final adjustment of the elephant's eyes he is seen to be "as big as a tree". It also reveals the creator's desire to put man above the elephant, in the rung of hierarchy. The conceptual construct of man through the eyes of the elephant is actually the desire of man to be seen in that configuration. A thin layer of tension underlines this equation of power because the elephant might one day overcome its delusion. The importance of God in compartmentalising objects of nature and creating hierarchies is in effect objectifying them in relation to man.

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<sup>8</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.209.



The creation myths already presented, and most other tales on the same theme pre-suppose a united world where all creatures lived and mingled together. However, this concept does not explain the state of the physical world which is divided and contentious. There should be an explanation so that the former myth of brotherhood be kept alive and effective. The stories themselves find a basis for this fact without letting the earlier myth fall. The explanation is this that the 'now' is a result of the fallout of pacts made between the creatures. The feeling of unity is still present but maturity has made them loose their innocence. This transitional thought is found in a story –

The tiger, leader of a group, and man strike an agreement that whoever invents fire would be allowed to burn or cook the others and relish their flesh. Prior to this, man and animals lived together. They preserved and ate food dried in the sun. This competition is won by man as he learns to make fire by causing friction between split wood. The tiger does not succeed even with the same method as it does not possess the ability to hold the instruments in the right place. The tiger escapes and both lose the power to understand each other's language. Similarly other stories narrate how man and monkey, and

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man and wolves, lived together but separated because they transgressed each other's physical as well as psychic spaces.<sup>9</sup>

2.2 In the Naga pantheon, subsidiary to the High God, are supernatural beings at different levels of hierarchy. These smaller gods comfortably fit into the system. Between a benevolent High God and a brotherhood of nature, the gods account for the channelising of negative or positive energy to the people. They actively participate in the day to day activities of the people and hence become powerful deities, sometimes more feared than the High God, who is pictured as remote and non-interfering. Fear, then, is the basis of the Naga's relationship with the lesser spirits. Constant efforts, rituals and sacrifices are arranged to appease them. Broadly, there are three level of supernatural beings. The High God, as has been mentioned earlier, followed by the Sky God or spirit who is believed to play the role of advisor to the village shaman (Lotha tribe). At the third rung are many earth spirits-spirits of fruitfulness, game, household, malevolence and so on.<sup>10</sup> This heirarchy or gradation of power is implied in a story.

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<sup>9</sup> "Invention of Fire," in *Folk Tales*, p.47.

<sup>10</sup> Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas* (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp.83-84.

God is the creator and when he created the goddess and man he gave them powerful eyes, besides other gifts. Man with his keen eyes always picked up fight with the devil because he could detect the presence of the devil much before the devil could know. Because of this the devil could have no free movement in the world. God took note and exchanged man's keen eyes with that of the dog's. Harmony was restored and the goddess received a higher status than man, as God desired it.<sup>11</sup> The hierarchy stands at God, the creator; the goddess and other powers; man and devil, who have the ability to harm each other when in contact; and lastly, the dog, at a lower category.

Each tribe recognised and gave importance to particular deities according to the socio-political set up of their respective communities. For the hierarchical Konyaks, the chief is the most powerful, hence the High God is the most important. The Angamis with a democratic form of government deified the lower spirits, and the Lothas, who had a form of government in between, gave importance to the Sky God.<sup>12</sup> The experiential concepts of power is transposed to an appropriation of the conceptual one.

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<sup>11</sup> "How Man's Eyes Changed into Dog's Eyes," in *Folk Tales*, p.35.

There are many stories which have a common theme of the gods conjugating and intermingling with humans. The product of their union usually mark upheavals in human society. Their union ends in death, violence, or separation, but never acceptance, which is a clear meandering away from what is not possible in the tangible world.

We have seen earlier that a conceptual cause is created to explain the nature of human - animal relations in the real world. Similarly, human - spirit relations explain nature's upheavals in human history. The disturbance arises out of the inability of the spirit and the mortal to live together. Attempts at conjugal relationships always end in failure, a realisation of the incompatibility between a created idea and tangible person.

In the story of Momola, a young girl, falls in love with a handsome young man who visits her only during nights. He proposes to her and she accepts but begins to doubt his identity as to why he cannot visit her during the day. By an intrigue, the father and daughter traces the path the young man takes as he leaves the girl. It is later found out that he is the river deity and she can never marry him. The spirit causes a flood to occur which rages on for forty days,

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<sup>12</sup> Jacobs, *Nagas*, p.83.

submerging everything. Only with the pushing of Momola into the waters does the storm subside and peace restored.<sup>13</sup>

The intense anger of the river deity causes the flood. The unnatural death of the girl subsides it. Until she is given to the river the spirit does not relent. In another story, the lover is a tree spirit who when found out is destroyed by felling the tree. But before it dies a chink of wood pierces the beloved's eyes killing her. Contact with the spirit god provokes what is beyond the ordinary. A time of abstinence and rituals, *genna*, is observed for unnatural death in most tribes.<sup>14</sup> It is taken positively when the concept is applied to the objects of utility in nature. For example the excellent quality of a bamboo called "Longmi," famed for its strength, in one story is said to have sprung up from the grave of a woman, called Sosangmenla, who in her young age disappeared to live with the spirits and returned an old woman. The bamboo butt, it is told, was brought by the angels who performed her funerary rites.<sup>15</sup>

**2.3** There is no other concept important to the Naga as the concept of fertility. Fertility would be understood in terms of productivity, plenty and the life giving. In other words, it is a quality that can be

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<sup>13</sup> "The Devil and Momola," in *Folk Tales*, p.35.

<sup>14</sup> J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1937), pp.284-286.

<sup>15</sup> "Sosangmenla and her Angel Lover," in *Folk Tales*, p.138.

transformed into material culture. The possessing of this quality attributes high status to the individual. Though fertility can be manifested in wealth - crops, livestock - it is not necessarily the goods but the life force the individual possesses which is considered auspicious. It is like contacting the very quality of the creator. The individual who has it is able to spread it around his family and his village. Fertility as an umbrella concept covers the Naga's whole existence, through activities like agriculture, martial prowess, sex, feasting and death. Specially related to this idea are the gods and spirits, who do not affect the people directly but have powers to affect the cyclical flow of fertility.

Since the concept can be gauged only through manifest material culture, much emphasis is laid on ritually expressing it. Some socially sanctioned methods of expressing the power of fertility, are:

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*Feast of Merit:* An individual with surplus grain could invite the whole village for a feast. In a lifetime a person could give such feasts throughout, in a series, according to the stipulated order. Signifying his act of merit, he would be eligible to wear certain socially recognised clothing or ornament. With the participation of the whole

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community, in a symbolic act of channelising fertility, stone monoliths, often phallic in shape, or even a male-female pair would be raised in a strategic area of production like rice fields, '*Morung*' unit, or the earth. Some tribes would erect large wooden or stone forked post called 'genna' posts for the same reason.<sup>16</sup>

**Head Hunting:** In most cases head-taking in Naga feud killings are seen to be conspicuously impersonal, says Julian Jacob in *The Nagas*. It was a demonstration of their potency and central to the concept of fertility. A story highlights two reason of head taking.

A young man, Yentsao, and a beautiful girl are betrothed . One day she fails to meet him at the appointed place. He searches for her at her home but finding her still missing returns to the same place. Returning he finds there her headless corpse. He proceeds in great anger and hatred to the enemy's village to find the attacker. He finds that his beloved's head is being mourned by an elder of the dormitory (*morung*), weeping over wasted beauty. The headman warns the whole village that a revenge attack should be expected that same night because the head they brought was of a girl of renowned beauty. Yentsao casts a spell on the people in the

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<sup>16</sup> Jacobs, *Nagas*, pp.118-119.

dormitory by the use of a certain charm which would frighten them. He enters unobstructed and reclaims his lover's head and also cuts off the taker's. Revenge completed, he cries aloud and goes in sorrow crossing the mountain till he reaches his own village. He hands over the heads to his maternal uncle who welcomes him and also allows him to marry one of his beautiful daughters.<sup>17</sup>

In this story the man who takes the woman's head does it out of compulsion, since the rule was that anyone could be a victim if they crossed paths with an enemy head – hunting team. His only other motive would be to win glory, which is contrasted with the blackness of a pre-mediated act of murder. The man weeps not for a wrong deed but in regret of lost beauty. There is no feeling of guilt. The whole village supports him by defending his act that night. The second instance of head taking, by Yentsao, is retaliatory in nature. It is a natural consequence of the first incident and expected by the takers, since every victim is situated within a set of human relationships.

The tale reiterates the myth that the taking of heads would enhance the productivity of the village. The act of killing transformed life

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<sup>17</sup> "Yentsao's Revenge on his Beloved's Death," in *Folk Tales*, p.226.



into death and the very life that was taken appears to be transposed to the individual head taker and the village at large. Taking heads would be a tacit requirement for marriage, and also a passage for greater involvement in social activities. As in the story above, Yentsao having revenged his beloved's death and bringing back the man's head, adds to his credit all the connotations of taking a head. He is 'allowed' to marry one of his cousins.

The physical reality and conceptual opposition of life and death adds dynamicity to the Naga universe of signification. Just as in head taking, the disposing of the biological dead is not an end in itself. It is symbolically linked to agricultural birth. In some tribes, between the sowing of seeds and harvest, some parts of the dead body eg. skull, are retained and placed in phallic stone cists, which is then placed on the ground.<sup>18</sup> This appears to channelise the fertility of the deceased to be regenerated.

***Sexual Prowess:*** Sexual prowess is considered a positive force that brings the individual in contact with fertility. The society acknowledges the person's sexual prowess by signifying his high status through specific ornaments and other objects of material

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<sup>18</sup> J.H.Hutton, *Report on Naga Hills* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1986), p.41.

culture. On his death small stones or reeds along side the grave, would mark the number of lovers he had while alive. For the woman, the contact with fertility depended not on the number of lovers but on her physical capacity to produce. There is a story of Kirumbe, a handsome and rich young man, who comes of age to marry. He does not fall in love with any girl from his village so his parents sent him out to the neighbouring villages to look for a wife for himself who would look like a fruit called "Kadoci". The parents advise him to choose a girl who is as fresh and good to look at, like the fruit.

In all the social activities promoting the myth of fertility the transformation from natural objects to cultural symbols is not merely a function. The transformations are acknowledged in sacred ritual as they pass from material to the cultural world. Before any important event like conducting the feast of merit, or going on a head taking expedition, there is oblation, and invocation of the spirits. According to the direction of the oracle the activity is either pursued or suspended. During the period of feasting or head hunting the participants are allowed to enter into communion with the power of fertility. The host of the feast undergoes months of the strictest abstinence before and after the occasion. The warriors in a successful expedition go through another ritual to be reincorporated into

ordinary society. The social acts divine sanction to guarantee its continuance. The rituals and the significance associated with them encourage emulation and healthy competition among its members.

**2.4** In all forms of society, the individual and the community exist in some quality of equation. It is an important theme for the analysis of the tales, since the nature of interaction and relation between the individual and the society direct his response to existential situations. In the Naga context, when a child is born into a household, he is already a member of a clan. The child is named by the father's clan in most cases, or by the parents after a desired quality they might want the child to have. An illegitimate child could be claimed by the clan of the man who presented a brass plate to the mother's father. Hence the 'social paternity' of a child becomes more important than the 'biological paternity'.<sup>19</sup>

With claimants at large it is rare for a child not to belong to at least a clan or the other functional units like age-groups, 'morungs', classes, which would provide further social mooring to the individual. From a very young age the child is incorporated into work gangs of the same age group, which also becomes his social sphere

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<sup>19</sup> Jacobs, Nagas, pp.53-55.

even as he matures. As early as 6 - 12 years (in some communities) the groups graduate into 'morungs'. They usually leave the 'morung' after marriage, which would be most preferable if the couple belonged to the same clan.

The sense of belonging is ingrained in the cultural psyche all through an individual's existence. The community exerts tremendous influence over the individual. Social errands are dealt with harshly. Violation of social codes result in ostracisation and even death. However, within the culturally sanctioned areas there is infinite space for the individual to carve a niche for himself, for in such a set up any advancement towards social utility is encouraged. For the individual male, a form of social advancement is marriage because most of the ceremonial feasts and rituals that confer status depend on a man having a wife.

The conceptual system of the Nagas hold their universe together. The concepts developed through contact with the experiential world are empowered with the divine sanction to mythify the objects of culture. The cosmology of the Nagas and the entire ethical and value system evolving out of it, defines and directs his relation with the environment. Folk tales and rituals embody the ideas that sustain as

well as generate transformation of their world. Socially sanctioned practices like feast of merit, head hunting, sexual prowess and others, that promote and preserve culture, in turn objectify and enforce the concepts that uphold a distinctive culture.

### 3 THE THREE UNIVERSES

Four stories have been considered for analysis. The first is an introductory story that presents the universe of Naga folk tales. The other three are the representations of the categories under which the majority of the stories align themselves.

There are three headings under which we have differentiated the Naga universe :

The Animal Universe.

The Spirit Universe.

The Human Universe.

The tales fall under one or more of these categories; typologically. With each category we are dealing with different paradigms of power and existence, as it affects the tribal mind. That is why when these worlds intersect there are a variety of situations that evolve, which offer insights into the continuous struggles of communities to come to terms with their existence.

These stories are human narratives. They are the product of the intellect that encompasses and imagines observed phenomena. The physical environment and the spirit world greatly affected the existence of the Nagas. The stories attempt to understand their situation, to address and ultimately assign a place to their desires and fears.

Whether they are animals or spirit beings, these entities evoke a sense of desire in man because they embody the heights of unattainability and the depths of mystery, of things lacking in man. Extraordinary feats of action are possible only in the realm of imaginaire, which is a manifestation of desire.

Therefore, the endings of the stories show pictures of failed human worlds. When human characters in the stories enter other world two things can happen : they either leave the human world which could not solve their problem or, they return abruptly from the other worlds, shedding their extraneous associations. It shows a defeated return to the mundane world of man. However, the world of man should necessarily be a failed one because without failure there is no situation of lack. Only in lack there is mobility to create through imagination.

### **Presentation and Analysis: 1**

The introductory story of the Naga Universe considers a situation that encompasses all three categories - Animal, Spirit, Human. It is called "Three Brothers."<sup>1</sup>

The tiger, man and devil are taken to represent the three universes. Their individual characteristics depicted in their relationship to

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<sup>1</sup> *Folk Tales*, p. 7. Refer to appendix I

each other and to their mother, reveals a discourse on the categorisation of the three domains. Between the opposing forces of unity and separation, as experienced by the family, the dialectics of the story is drawn.

3.1.1 The narrative is divided into thematic units in the syntacmatic order.

The introductory unit underlines the unity of the family, under the guardianship of their mother, who is old and weak. As opposed to the dead and dying parent, the energy of the three grown up sons is here a contrast.

The second unit characterises each individual entity, their natures revealed by their attitude towards their mother. The tiger weakens and tires her because he makes her play with him all day. In other words, she is made to play at his whims. There is an underlying sense of threat here. The Spirit is "unkind" to her, which would imply dissatisfaction and even annoyance. The spirit is not benevolent or sympathetic to her. Only with man she is happy. Perhaps because he empathises with her totally, physically as well as psychologically. There is no tension in this relationship, it is one of equanimity.

The third unit is significant because it is at this juncture that the mother dies. On the day of her passing away the spirit and man connive to send the tiger away to the field, knowing that it has an evil design to feed on her flesh. The death of the mother pronounces the death of their unity. There is a mutual consensus on



living separately. Man, being the youngest, is bequeathed the parental house, a patronising gesture. The other two brothers leave for the far off forests.

The last unit shows the interaction of the tiger and man and the outcome of their meetings. The tiger returns to his old home time and again because the desire to eat his mother's flesh is not quenched. The desire is now transposed to man, as a substitute. The threat is of the order of annihilation of man's very existence. The man outwits the tiger a first time and a second time, finally, to consolidate his living space, separate from the tiger. Even though the tiger returns again the man already has a secret to drive him away, which is a psychological victory.

3.1.2 The opening situation pictures the older parental order passing away. The new order taking its place is based on the establishment of a new system of relationships. It distinguishes itself by its individuality, opposed to the old order of unity.

The family is held together by the memory of an absent father, a hint of a great power but who is of no grave consequence at the moment, and an incapacitated mother. The mother is the centre and the neutral space that holds the family. However, even her influence is now minimal. She is a shadow of her earlier stronger self, she cannot perform any task independently and requires her sons to attend to her. There is a semblance of unity however weak, at this juncture.

But when she dies, their point of unity is removed. Their attention is now upon each other. There is foreshadowing of trouble in their staying together.

Perhaps anticipating the same, they mutually consent to move out to separate spaces acknowledging a necessity. There is conflict at the level of personality but not competition for space. The implication is that if brotherly relation is to be maintained, it is possible only in a consented separation.

The separation is however not final. Their mutual agreement to separate leaves room to return. The tiger reappears every now and then to their parental home. The relationship is complex because they desire to commune together and yet it would destroy the other. The tiger returns in remembrance and in desire to eat his mother's flesh, and later even man's flesh, an act of consuming or subsuming the other in total possession, a move towards unity, though in violence. But this can be achieved only in the annihilation of the other.

The relatedness of the three universes is emphasised but their inevitable separation is necessitated. Their distinction lies in the difference that drives the brothers from each other. Their individual levels of desire and fear act at cross purposes in the narrative.

The human discourse places man at the centre of the universe. Man, who is an extension of the mother, inherits the parental home. It is significant that all action proceeds from this central place.

The man relates with the devil at an emotional level. The third unit shows the devil conniving with man against the tiger. The man and devil deny the tiger physical desecration of their mother. It shows an understanding at the level of the spirit. Earlier on in the second unit the devil is 'unkind' to their mother implying a dissatisfaction at the same level. The devil's attempts at caring for the mother only incurs antagonism. The spirit universe is therefore connected to, as well as separated from the human universe at a metaphysical level.

On the other hand, the man and the tiger share a conflicting existence at the physical level. The man fears for his life because the tiger threatens to devour him, just as it did his mother. The tiger tires the mother, which points to a physical debilitation. The animal universe reflects the threat to man's physical being. In the story the man tries to overcome the physical threat by mental effort. The man introduces a race competition which appears to be a physical game, but is won by a clever use of his mind. The arrow finds its mark at the finishing point. Only in the mind can there be an acceptance of the arrow as man. The tiger fails to understand the significance behind man's reason. The man has to come to the tiger's level to beat him in the physical sense. Fire and the loud noise of the trumpet defeats the tiger finally. The animal universe is the physical component of man's conflicts.

This story is not only a human discourse but it belongs to a cultural context. Like cultural narratives it reflects the desire and values of a community. It is a dialectical intervention between the reality of a tribal society, living in superstitions and threat to life from all quarters, and its desires to transcend the forces of oppression.

The hierarchy that is evident in the story, among the sons, is one that affects a tribal community in the physical sense. The tiger, who is the eldest, symbolises danger of the highest order threatening life and property. The spirit, here a devil, is a lesser threat, perhaps because in the cosmology of the Nagas, these spirits can be appeased and even monopolised to one's advantage. Man is at the lowest rung because he is predictable. He is also the point of reference in the story.

Besides, the three offsprings already mentioned, the parents are the representations of the High God, who is the regulator of all forms of life, and the earth mother. The father in the story is dead, which is true to the idea of an absentee father that is perceived through the social treatment of the deity. The contrast between the role of the earth as co-sustainer, and the present situation of dependence, marks a shift in the perception of earth's role. Earth is subdued, the three entities have taken over the reins of control.

3.1.3 In Naga parlance, the "senseless" age of innocence is a utopian unity of all members of the natural world. The disintegration of this order bring separation, and differences. The new order is emphasised as a reality in the story. Despite the

acknowledgement of this reality the story lends itself to support the continuance of brotherhood among the entities. This would be required to sustain the semblance of order in the Naga universe because it is on the basis of brotherhood the universe is preserved and protected. The integration of the family is an attempt to bring accountability through the myth.

Fear is experienced at various levels by the Naga. The physical threat comes from the wild that surround him or the metaphysical spirits. In the story the tiger dominates the thoughts of man causing much worry and anguish. Symbolically considered the tiger dominates mother nature and everything that lives in it including man.

The end of the story brings man's victory over the tiger, the end of the tiger's psychological and physical domination. In effect this is a statement against the forces of oppression and control. It is as much to imply that fear of the spirits, a category of the belief system, which is used to rationalise the unpredictable universe is turning its face towards those who created this concept. In its extremity it would create a terror filled world burdened by a tradition of propitiation. The tiger and the spirit symbolise all that is fear inducing to the tribal mind. The story reveals a community's desire to come to terms with fear.

The answer seems to be within themselves. Man searches his mind to tackle the menace of the tiger. He has to first come out of the

overwhelming influence of fear and then defeat it by imposing control over the object which caused it.

The way to be free of fear is not to find another being, spirit or concept, to be its solution, but to encompass the unknown by attempts at understanding its nature. The desire of the society to exist is by resisting its negation by paralyzing forces. This is a new line of progress for the community.

The story portrays the Nagas' attempt at understanding his existential condition, which is in conflict with the physical and spiritual universes. The narratives are the attempts at controlling these universes. They are drawn on the theme of conflict between one or all of the universes; only the responses vary. The following tales are sites of active appropriation and reconstitution of the cultural perceptions.

The tales of the animal universe are usually based on known facts from the physical world. Its proximity with the human universe gives man knowledge of its members. Based on this knowledge, which implies man's control over it, new areas of abstractions are explored. Therefore also the animal stories can exist independent of human interaction. However, as in the story, the spirit is distanced and isolated from man's universe. It symbolises a gap in comprehension and a control by the spirit universe over man. Therefore, the stories dealing with this universe are either embroiled in conflict or is marked by a silence.

## **Presentation and Analysis: 2**

Typologically the story "The Battle between the Birds and Creatures"<sup>2</sup> is taken from tales of the **animal universe**. As its title suggests, the primary issue is war or conflict, both at the physical and psychic level. Animals and birds have their own hierarchy in the physical world. The eagle has been known to be able to kill snakes. Upon this fact a human narrative has been built and given a context. The narrative works through labyrinths of personal and collective conflicts.

3.2.1 The story starts at status quo, an equanimical friendship of the lizard and the tailor bird, each belonging to a particular community.

Before long the status quo is broken by the bird. The bird breaks off a twig and playfully lifts the lizard's stomach upwards, which is unnatural to it as it crawls on its stomach. It destabilises the lizard. The lizard is angered that the joke has gone too far and challenges the bird to a fight. From a personal ground the challenge is extended to each other's community. They both agree on a date for a war involving both communities.

Even among the same community there is a hierarchy according to strength and size. The birds choose the hornbill, the eagle and a smaller cousin of the hornbill. In this order, to be pitted against the reptiles' choice of the python and king cobra.

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<sup>2</sup> *Folk Tales* p.218. Refer to appendix. II.

On the basis of its size the hornbill is asked by the eagle to fight the strongest opponent, the python. But it refuses fearing the huge size of the python. The next chance is given to the smaller hornbill to fight the cobra. But this again is refused. There is much evaluation of strength and size between the communities until the nearest equation is arrived at. The eagle is the mean between the two birds, not as big as the hornbill but bigger than its smaller cousin. Facing the cobra the eagle relies on its own strength as much on the support of its cheering group. Similarly the cobra is cheered along by the other group. Finally it is the eagle who wins after a long battle, it flies away with its prey.

The triumph of the eagle is a victory for the whole bird community. the corpse of the cobra is shared among its members. The birds derive their identity from painting themselves with the blood and gall of the corpse. The minivet is red because it rubbed itself in the blood, the crow is black having touched the gall and since the ruby-throat was late, only a little of the blood remaining is smeared on its chin.

3.2.2        The opening situation portrays a calm that is shattered by the violation of norms by the bird. By exposing the vulnerability of the lizard, the bird creates an imbalance in their relationship. The reaction is a challenge by the lizard in an effort to regain its respectability or at least to satisfy its ego.



As the relationship has soured there is no possibility of ever returning to its original equation. The moment has passed and the seed of difference has already been sown. For the lizard, the war has to be fought whether it wins or loses. The latent tension has to be vented out. The physical war fought between the crawlers and the birds is actually a manifestation of a mental state. The reason that sparks off the war is the insult of the lizard by the bird. The community, is provoked to act on the lizard's behalf. The conflict is already taken and understood at an abstract level before it breaks out into war.

After a long drawn war the crawling creatures lose but there is a sense of rest at having given an answer . At one level, the story is a celebration of war, the means to the formation of a new identity. Only after arriving at a new configuration can there be a renewed equation of relationship, between the tailor birds and the lizard, between the crawling creatures and the bird community.

The destabilising nature of conflicts not only bring about a new equation of relationship vis-à-vis the other, it also reveals the constituting self. The bird community projects itself through the leadership of the hornbills and the eagle. In the process of the conflict with the other there is a reconstitution within the ranks of the birds. Because the hornbills do not live up to their position and expectation, the hierarchy of the projected self of the bird community is also reconstituted.

However, the fact remains that this new equation is also susceptible to change. The eagle did not fight the python, nor the python fight the hornbill. The unpredictable factors in other combinations give rise to the possibility of the other equations of power. The victory or loss of the group is a momentary one and need not be for good. The dynamic nature of conflicts and new equations in relationship that keep evolving is an inherent concept of existence. The very nature of existence is transformation and change. Conflict is the high point that decides the next structure of progress. Then war becomes the very metaphor for existence. The impersonal nature of war and its approach to resolving personal issues point to the requirement of a mode for social release.

3.2.3 At the contextual level, war was a socially sanctioned activity among the Nagas. It was fought for abstract principles of identity, glory and for acquiring life force, that would bring prosperity to the village. In a paradoxical manner war is connected to the dynamic process of renewal of the community. The necessity of confrontation is to continually assess their value of life. War and community life are inextricably linked together. The story highlights this aspect and further goes on to address the intricacies related to it. War is a collective venture, an activity that fosters oneness. In war, the community cannot afford to have differences towards its objective. War, in that sense, becomes the community's vehicle for cohesion as well as change. The whole community of the lizards as well as the birds, irrespective of their status, gather to fight the war.

Despite the collective nature of war, the individual has much to do with it. It calls for the individual to assert itself in the event of a war or conflict. The eagle among all the birds stands out different from the rest. The hornbills having refused to take the risk, mingle with the spectators. By way of a cultural reference, the hornbill is considered most important among the birds, "the Ang (king) of the birds", because its feathers are worn as ornaments to signify status.

The question that becomes evident from this contextual reading is the nature of status and the way it is acquired. Status is 'achieved' by those who have fought or have been a part of war, have taken heads and have risked their lives. Status is 'inherited' by the member of a family or clan, who have made 'mithun' sacrifices or have given 'feasts of merit' out of their wealth. The contrast between the hornbill and the eagle shows the difference between the two modes. The eagle asserts itself on behalf of the community and brings victory for the others. The hornbill, on the other hand symbolises inherited glory. The egalitarian or the hierarchical attainments are either way enriching to the society because when these examples of excellence are emulated, the competition ensures productivity. However, in the story, the eagle's action is celebrated and is seen to be more desirable. The hornbills are subordinated through their inaction. Their personal status is immaterial at this point.

The identity of a community is shaped by its internal as well as its external dynamicity. The internal force is maintained by an intensive

movement of resources and interaction between its members. The external dynamics incorporates new materials, or identities, that generates changes in the internal structure. A balance of both is required to be maintained for the society to progress. By speaking for one level of desirability, that of the external dynamics, the story seems to be analysing the nature of intensive internal competition, which might in its extremity cause cultural inflation and deadening of the community.

The message encapsulated in the story is volatile and political, since the discourse emanates from the same community that practices it. The question of status and its ramifications needs be asked through a less obvious mode, removed from its immediate human context. The animal universe becomes a field of imaginary constructs for the inherent cultural and human discourses.

### **Presentation and Analysis: 3**

3.3.1        The story opens with the situation of an orphan boy, neglected and ill treated by the society, having no one to protect or to help him. To prove himself and the society, he has to transcend his situation, go through a rite-of-passage, and achieve the

extraordinary. "The Orphan"<sup>3</sup> belongs to the type of fairy tales, and is classified under the **spirit universe** of Naga Cosmology.

The first unit in the syntacmatic order concentrates on the orphan's desire to become famous by his deeds. He enters the social world empty, as the son whose parents are dead. He has to find resources from within himself to make a name and be accepted. In no time he digs a 'rare' kind of well, which fulfills his desire- he becomes well known in all the village.

The next movement of the narrative works against the orphan. The clear water of the well is polluted by some agency, which soils his image. He is charged with the action because the well belongs to him. In reaction to this the orphan lies in wait for the culprits. They are angels with magical head gears that help them to fly in and out. Mustering courage and thinking upon revenge he manages to catch one of the angels by hiding its head gear. His revenge is complete, and the image recovered.

Upto now the orphan was only thinking of recovering his image. But on capture of the angel, who is found to be female, his desire to have her as his wife is overwhelming. This would also add another dimension to his status in the social recognition as the angel accedes to his request of marriage. However, the request is veiled power because she is physically captive to him. At the level of her being, he does not possess her. Instead she possesses him.

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<sup>3</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.42. Refer to appendix III.

The angel becomes restless and unhappy with the worldly life. They have two children and yet she cannot forget her heavenly abode. Out of desperation the angel finds out the place where her husband has kept the head-gear. There is no mention of regret over leaving the husband, who is away from home, but she hesitates to leave the children. She sends a rope and pulls them up to heaven.

That she possessed him is evident by the way he wonders in despair, with the disappearance of his wife and children. One day he unloads his misery to a crow who agrees to take him to heaven for a favour, to paint him black. Hope in the form of a crow takes the orphan to heaven, where he is warmly received by his wife.

Unlike the angel, he quickly adapts to their culture. He becomes like one of them, having nothing to yearn for on earth. However he earns the jealousy of the other angels by trespassing their monopoly of killing lizards. For this reason he is carried down to earth one night as he sleeps.

3.3.2 In a social environment one is born into a system that assigns places to individuals before they realise this for themselves. The orphan boy is already named as according to the image the society has of him. It is his desire therefore to forge a new image, an image that he has of himself under a particular name, different from the one the society perceives.

The well is a symbol of his new image, and a contribution to the good of society. In it he finds satisfaction and the fame he so

desires. The self image that he wants others to recognise is finally acknowledged. The angels come down to bathe in the well, an extraordinary honour to his name. Not only on earth but even in heaven the boy is known. It further enhances his image.

The orphan's capture of the angel - woman strikes off his desire at another level, to possess her. Until now he only has a good name. At the level of his personal being he desires a reciprocatory relationship that recognises his ego. Possession entails a desire to have the other in its power, and a deep need to be linked to the other. By marrying her he fulfills his need of belonging to another. Moreover, she encapsulates the extraordinary, the quality he longs for to make himself famous.

The sudden disappearance of the angel woman brings the orphan back to his original status, at the brink of no-existence. His hold over her is like the object (head gear) that is temporarily hidden and easily taken away. The attachment is only one sided. He loses everything -his family, identity and all that he desired.

But he does not give up on his lost ideals. He continues with his quest for the former kind of situation, wandering all over searching for his family. The search takes him away from the human world to be united with his family in heaven. The orphan recovers all that he desires once again, but in a different place from earth. This is the high point of the fulfillment of his desires.

The act of his killing the lizard in heaven is similar to his earthly achievements of making the well and marrying the angel which are movements of his lot. Killing the lizard places him at par with the gods, or the extraordinary. However, similar to the previous occasions where the well is sullied, and the angel woman abandons him, the heavenly beings reject his achievements. From one attempt to the other the orphan's efforts at integrating with the extraordinary increases. Simultaneous and contrary to this movement there is a gap widening to separate the ordinary from the extraordinary.

Coming back to earth the orphan has traversed full circle. When he wakes up he would find himself on earth. Though there is no progress made from the first situation because at every point he has met failure, the mind has experienced different contours of existential situations. In pursuit of the image that he desires to constitute of himself the intellect creates various possibilities with an acute sense of urgency.

3.3.3 The story is a recognition of an individual statement against society's all subsuming nature. It is significant that the protagonist is an orphan pitted against the society. Both in essence are opposites. The orphan is an empty signifier, whereas the society, the creator of signification.

The story in its mediation, at the contextual level, underlines with greater poignancy the existential condition of alienation and the opposing desire of communion.



The framework of the story is a whole network of community relationships. In the Naga context, however, the orphan is not without support. There are a graduation of units in the system - clans, 'morung' units, village - that own him. In that sense, he is not less than anyone else because from early childhood he would already have his work gangs with whom he would socialise. The role of the family is much reduced and is superceded by the other integrating factors of society.

Against this background of apparent permanence, of being related to one unit or the other, the story focusses on his existential feeling of being orphaned. The village and the system owns him but he does not own them. In a family there is mutual affection. He reaches out to the village family but it requires only his services and ability to make a useful well. They respond not to him but to his contribution. His situation is paradoxical because the society owns him, and yet rejects him because he does not have a family. The emotional bankruptcy of the system is magnified because a family is founded on emotional ties, not on intellectual factors like reason.

His marriage to the angel is a projection of his desire to have a family of his own. Unfortunately, their condition of conjugation is not stable because the angel is coerced to live on earth. Their response to each other is therefore not mutual. Ultimately, this family unit also breaks down.

In the last instance the orphan makes another attempt to unite with his family. Though it failed, he has already experienced the

satisfaction of being within the bonds of a family while on earth. He pursues the angel and his children to heaven. He is restored to his family and his desire is complete. Unlike their experience on earth, which was fraught with uncertainties, (the angel was never satisfied living in a different world), in heaven there is no problem. The orphan adapts himself so well with the society of the gods that he is considered as one of them. Unlike on earth where the family could not participate in the society, in heaven the man has been recognised. He is able to hunt like the gods and participate in their activities. In every sense the orphan has at last found the ideal family-individual and family- society situation.

Now since he has been brought back to earth involuntarily, it implies that he cannot be a part of the world of his desire. He would still long for his family but there is no place, either on earth or in heaven, where they can all live together. The realisation is of the impossibility of the desire.

The story reveals the attitude of the society to identify individuals according to socially constructed systems. According to the context the orphan is owned by the society and yet he desires to have a relation with it by passing the structures. He desires mutual recognition and emotional bonding. The story is an effort at crossing the barrier between the ideal kind of familial situation and the reality of the Naga situation, which seems to be proficient in recognising social ownership of its members by nomenclature but lacking in the principle requirement of human bonding.

The story ends with an unsettling predicament. The orphan boy having experienced the ultimate, and yet with the knowledge that it can only be temporary. However, the frustration of an aborted desire would always urge him to hope to find a way out of his banal existence, which is reflective of the human existence.

#### **Presentation and Analysis: 4**

"The Tragic End of Beau and Manlong"<sup>4</sup> is a tale that traces the complex human situation of incest. Incest is entirely a sociological issue, uncommon to the animal world or the spirit world. The tale is therefore categorised under the type of the **human universe**. Through the weaving of intense human emotions and violent pronouncements the story reveals the struggles in the creation of a cultural consciousness.

3.4.1 The first unit of the narrative brings into focus the background of the protagonist, Beau . He is the son of a couple from Namsang village and an elder brother of Manlong. Both the son and the daughter have attained the marriageable age. This is the principle cause that produces movement in the narrative. Being the elder, Beau approaches the maidens of the village for marriage. Unfortunately, everyone he approaches refuses. A sense of

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<sup>4</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.93. Refer to appendix IV.

impatience and frustration sets in, since all his friends have married. He mellows down to sadness and loneliness over the years.

Finally, to fill the gap in his life, Beau decides to use external means. He goes to Assam and procures a powerful medicine which he smears on his 'dao' handle. The medicine would charm any girl on touching it. Keeping it in a corner and warning all in the house not to touch the article he goes out. At this juncture we see a man pushed to the limits by social pressures.

With no evil intent or any motive his curious sister, Manlong, violates the warning. She falls victim to the powerful charm and begins to exhibit unsisterly tendencies towards Beau. That she did not know the reason or power behind the warning, places both individuals in a complex situation.

The third thematic unit constitutes the main crisis of the narrative. Under the influence of the charm Manlong is driven to act contrary to what she knows about illicit relationships. The more she restrains, the intensity of her desire increases. Her will plays second fiddle to the powerful emotions evoked by the charm. Her mind and emotions bifurcate. The efforts of parents and relations to stop her 'abnormal' actions too fail. She starts to openly act as her brother's lover now. Beau tries to cure her but finally gives in and starts reciprocating. He is consumed by her voracious desire.

The fourth thematic unit underlines social retribution of the highest order. There is no mercy, the punishment is death. Each is killed visible to the other and their corpses put to fire, an act of refining

the corruption that threatens the society. The parents and relations give up and the village takes over.

The last unit, the final movement of the tale, is in a manner of an epilogue. It is significant because in one descriptive imagery the whole mood of the tale changes. The pair is burnt in different places, yet the smoke which rise above the village mingles into one.

3.4.2 The human condition in the story is marked by the intricacies of relationships between individuals, and the shades of grey that mark the extremes of black and white. Tracing the psychic context in the story, Beau's mental voyage across conflicting situations serve to illustrate the complexities of human situations.

It takes Beau's friends to point to him what he is missing and in response to this he develops a desire to marry. He makes conscious attempts at finding a girl to marry which is met with disappointment. Seeing that he cannot do this on his own, and to save himself from further embarrassment he goes out of his way to find an aid. Procuring the medicine does not call for social censure, not even the result under normal conditions if it were meant for some other woman.

Yet when Manlong touches the 'dao', an extension of Beau, smeared with the kind of charm he would have liked to exude, the accident and its consequences far outweigh the circumstances. If there is any conscious act on her part it is of touching the 'dao'. There is no acute struggle as she changes personality since she is not aware when she has become "senseless".

Beau makes active efforts to cure Manlong from the effect of the charm. At the same time he resists her advances, two opposed actions, which take their toll. Beau is wrecked with guilt on seeing Manlong's fate and helpless not being able to alleviate the situation. Before long Beau's mental and emotional faculties are spent. Under the influence of the charm Manlong's power becomes aggressive, while Beau, on the defensive and resisting, finally surrenders himself to the over powerful force.

Unlike Manlong, Beau gives up his will to resist. He is conscious as his will begins to give way. The onslaught of opposing forces finally break down the barrier of consciousness that he too becomes "senseless and overcome with intense love for his own sister". As long as it was only Manlong who was acting out of the ordinary, the family and relatives intervened. But as soon as Beau follows suit the whole village descends on the couple.

Beau's action is not merely an instance of a change of mind. There are complex internal structures of emotion that lead him to act in this manner. Since the power of the charm took over, the equation of relationship shared between Beau and Manlong has changed altogether. Manlong acquires a totally new personality, different from her sisterly self. Torn between the past and the present, between sister and lover, Beau also acquires a vacillating personality, as shifting as the circumstance. His role playing between the two selves of a split personality that he perceives in Manlong, reaches a point of saturation. He stops to act against the

powerful feelings conjured within himself. The force of the charm takes over and with it all forms of social censure. Beau gives in to the person and the moment, the moment being of the lover and the loved.

Given the circumstances, they are perceived as different individuals by each other, in which state they are not Manlong and Beau anymore to themselves, less brother and sister. Their action is not condemnatory in this configuration because their psychic states are totally changed. The society recognises the former configuration of brother and sister but fails to acknowledge the changed situation under the influence of the charm.

The relationship is irrevocable and is one driven by a power greater than themselves. The individuals under the sentence are motiveless of the crime they have been accused of. The society's refusal to acknowledge the role of the external force makes the issue one-sided and culminates in the execution of the couple. The nature of the execution is a strong statement by the society of its refusal to compromise with its laws. In a purifying act the slain bodies of Beau and Manlong are set on fire.

The story portrays a typical human situation based within a community. The law is on one side and desire on the other. The law has its own logical end; to preserve and prosper society. The individual desire runs counter to it at every turn. Freudian explanation on the origin of taboos take on the oedipal interpretation. The taboos arise out of a clash of desire and reason,

a 'desire of' what should not be done and a simultaneous 'realization' that such a thing should not be done.

Beau encapsulates both the social and the individual desires at his conscious and unconscious levels. The pressure of the society is intense, so much so that the culprit himself becomes the chastiser. The inner turmoil causes him to condemn himself. The unconscious and sub-conscious on the other hand drives him to act like a man, sans strictures. The result is a kind of neurosis that accelerates all his pent up emotions resulting in his "senselessness."

In the context of the Naga society there is a tilt towards a certain extremity. The law becomes all important and punishment is severe because the social groups are small. The smaller the group the greater is the control to consolidate. The harsh indictment of the incestuous perpetrators echo the community's own fears. The story presents a delicate situation where the rigidity of the law is questioned. An incestuous relationship out of an accident, without any motive, cannot be judged by the same said law. It points to the failure of the law to fully comprehend the intricacies of the complex human situation.

The ending gives away a statement of recognition of this perspective. The smoke from the pyres unite in the sky. Out of reach of social jurisdiction the couple is vindicated. The story is a mediation in the social condition. However, it has not totally refrained from its right to control its members. On earth this union cannot take place. Only in the imagination the union is acknowledged.



#### 4 TYPOLOGICAL CATEGORISATION

The human discourse is presented through different typological modes in the semiotic universe of the Naga folk tales. At the obvious level is the sociological *universe of man*. Complex issues of the human conditions, the realities of the human world, like the meaning of life, death, suffering, is dealt poignantly by human characters. The depths of human emotion is realised through an inter-subjective understanding of their expressed situation. Within this type are tales which have man turning into some object in nature. It is significant that the transformation is a consequence of human conflict. The stories are bereft of superfluities. They progress dynamically from one situation to another, barring only the deepest of thoughts and emotions.

The physical world of the animals is one over which the Naga has a fair understanding. The knowledge of their habits and characteristics gives the basis for the scope of their application at the ideational level. Through analogies and metaphors the different aspects of the human conditions is implicated. The *animal universe* in the tales is a vibrant and interactive world. The abstracted human issues are transposed to the animal universe, which helps to objectively consider them. The

animal universe becomes an objective mode of exploring the human subjective.

The *spirit universe* is conceptual. Spirits are understood only through their effects in the physical world. In the Naga cosmology, the spirits are understood in terms of power and its related aspects like fear and reverence. In the tales, the gods are anthropomorphic and can also take the form of bodies they inhabit, like trees, rivers and rock. Though the spirits manifest themselves through matter, their essence is untethered by any physical object. The flexibility of this universe gives free rein to explore all that is not possible or visible in the physical world.

At all three levels the emphases of the tales vary. The human-universe narratives are prominent by their reference to the inward depths of the existential situation of man, and the response to the ethical and moral questions particular to man. The animal universe addresses wide ranging issues of the human condition according to the themes. The imagination is stretched as far as their natures can accommodate, and from there, generate new angles to the discourses. Among the three modes, the spirit universe reaches the highest level of crystallization of thought due to its fluidity. There are no constraints and no end to possibilities. The most abstract of thoughts are qualified by abstract images.

Some of the stories do not have clear cut demarcation of their type. It could be a combination of two or all three universes. In such a case the most prominent and focused mode is considered. Five stories each for every category have been presented to explicate the points made.

#### **4.1 The Human Universe**

The individual is not only conditioned by his existential situation but by set patterns of human relations. The human universe is considered on this basis that he has to deal with the parameters of sociological codes. The depth of struggle and desire is brought out in the human stories.

The human response to his condition is highly creative. It could be an act of desperation leading to death or an elusive escape. The unpredictability of his response gives rise to the profoundest of themes and the lightest of stories. The stories expose the vantage point of the human situation that creates discourses.

The themes explored are based on the intricacies of human relationships like love, rejection, acceptance, mistrust, suspicion, circumscribed by an overall social context. The theme of death is conspicuously echoed in the human universe, death as opposed to life. Death is not just the physical experience but the social death of rejection, isolation and alienation. It serves as a device in the tales to usher in new worlds or effecting changes.

Every action is an individual assertion and a dialectic between the law and desire. The 'I' is always threatened to be subsumed or alienated by the other. The stories that have been considered grapple with these issues. The human world is presented through a mode that can best represent these intricacies.

#### **4.1.1. Longkongla<sup>1</sup>**

The story is of a widow called Longkongla. She wishes upon a feather, from the hornbill that flies overhead, as she weaves her cloth. The wish is granted. The feather is found lying on a warp. She picks it up with excitement and keeps it carefully in a basket. However, to her disappointment, the feather turns to stone and later to a hollowed bamboo vessel with a hole in the base. Having

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<sup>1</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.1.

no use for it she throws it away at some corner. The bamboo vessel transfigures into a lovely male child in the night.

She brings up the child, Pongdang, who grows up, gets married and has a male offspring called Tsungpi. Tsungpi becomes famous among the girls of the village which makes the other men jealous. On a fishing expedition he is pounded to death along with the fish poison (bark of a tree) in the basket. His friend at the other end of the stream, waiting for the fish to surface, instead finds Tsungpi's toe. He takes this to Longkongla who swears to take revenge.

She kills a pig and invites all the children of the village for a feast. Once they are inside, she shuts the door from the outside and sets fire to the house. Only two children escape who are covered by the pounding table. The villagers come to know about her deed when they return in evening from the fields. The villagers go to kill her but she outwits them by placing slippery mats around her. As they lie fallen on the ground, she kills them all with her weaving sword.

Deed done she prays to God to take her up as she cannot stand the vicious world around her. The God grants her request on one condition that she must not look down to earth once she holds the cord that is let down. While she is being taken up the sound of her animals; dogs, pigs, cows, cocks and hens, urge her to look down

with deep sentiments. She realises that they will be taken by others so she furiously shouts for them to be turned into wild animals and birds. No sooner does she finish saying this, the cord is snapped and she falls to the sea and dies.

The story is of a valiant woman who struggles against her societal and existential world to choose to live on earth than escape. Longkongla is a lonely widow marginalised by society. All she wishes for is a hornbill feather to wear to her nephew's feast, which indicates her desire to be socially recognised. However the feather undergoes changes. From a valuable object it becomes first a stone and a useless vessel. Its final transformation into a baby boy undermines her desire for status. The permanence of human bonding is juxtaposed against an ephemeral concept of status. She enjoys the closeness of a family through her son and later, her grandson.

The death of Longkongla's grandson is an attack on her own self, her dreams. Ironically the reason for his death is what the society lauds. His fame is his undoing. She lashes out against the hypocrisy and viciousness of the system in just a vicious move. It brings out violence without restraint. There is utter chaos and the law is overrun. With nothing to look forward to, she cries to God to deliver her from the vicious world.

The story is of a fulfilled wish which helps the widow to lead a meaningful life, anchored to a village. But the world deprives her by killing her grandson. Her position at the end is of one having seen both sides of life. When she calls upon God she is warned that she will fall to the ground if she looks down as she is taken up to heaven. The warning does not fully register because she is not anxious to escape from the world and death is not a threat to her. Till her last breath her worldly attachments beckon her. She chooses to respond to them than worry about dying or imagining a heavenly abode. They are more real to her than death or heaven.

#### 4.1.2. The Story of Salunaru<sup>2</sup>

The story of two lovers, Rangtsung and Salunaru. Unable to face the constant quarrels, Rangtsung plots to kill her. While on a trip to the stream to gather bamboo shoots for pickling, they climbed steep slopes. As he supports her by his "dao" belt, on to which she has held on, he cuts it off. She rolls down the cliff and dies. He says nothing of this to anyone. However, after months of her disappearance, the parents find her bones at the bottom of the cliff, all covered with fungus. They hold Rangtsung to be responsible for her death so they invite him to a meal of the same fungus. Only when his stomach swells enormously does he realise that he has been found out. He calls the boys of the "morung" to

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<sup>2</sup> J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, pp.316-317.

jump on his huge belly as he lies on his back. What finally kills him is a reed from the roof of the "morung" that pierces his stomach.

The situation is of a satiated love relationship. Rangtsung cannot forgive Salunaru for the quarrels anymore. The frustration is the culmination of several small rifts between them which has reached a climax. Rangtsung finally plots to kill her. Even before her physical death, she has died for him.

The quarrels engender a poor image of the 'other' and a consequent loathing of the self develops for having being depreciated. To escape from the onslaught of self depreciation, the ego develops narcissistic tendencies. Rangtsung kills the girl to be free of her and to preserve his self. It is a relief for him because he feels no remorse of guilt for having done such a thing. His only fear is to be found out, so that he may not be punished.

However, the social responsibility of such an act overtakes him. The fungus, symbolic of the noxious nature of the deed, is served to Rungtsung by the girl's parents. His stomach bulges out as a testimony of his guilt. He does not repent, instead he calls on the boys to push it down. It is finally a reed from the ceiling that kills Rungtsung, a form of divine retribution.

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Rangtsung tries to liberate himself but he ends up facing a bigger conscience of society. An annihilistic solution to the human situation only destroys him. If he had lost his will to argue or quarrel anymore with Salunaru, so had he also stopped to adjust. His recourse to murder is an escape from reality. The story talks about a world where there can be no freedom from the other. Struggle is the counterpart of living.

#### **4.1.3. The Beautiful Girl who Turned into Anishe Flower.<sup>3</sup>**

The story is of the love of a rich and beautiful girl, Nisheli, and her paramour Pheo, from an ignoble lineage. Their desire to marry is obstructed by family and society. Their plan to elope is thwarted by the lustful designs of an old man who overhears their plot and arrives as a pretender in the night, before the boy. She follows the old man who guides her from a distance, through the village and outside their territory. As lights dawns so does the knowledge that she has been cheated and lured into a trap. She refuses to marry him so he binds her to a big tree and kills her brutally. Her blood changes into a beautiful flowering creeper around the tree. After the period of heart break, one day while out hunting in the jungle Pheo and his friends stand beneath the

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<sup>3</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.82.

flowers to protect themselves from the heavy rains. He remains dry while the rest get wet. Noticing this he cuts off some flowers to wear them on his ear. When he wakes up from a revelatory dream of his beloved, he finds real blood stains on his ear and spear that cut the flowers. Pheo dies of a broken heart and is reunited with his beloved in the land of death.

There is already a resolution of conflict at the very beginning. The couple has already decided to live together in spite of opposition from their families. It is the old man who thwarts their attempt at achieving a realistic desire by a clever move of deception.

Nisheli is put to death by the old man because he is cornered by his own thoughts. He cannot convince her to marry him. The frustration of rejection by the girl is only one factor. To forcefully take her away would be an encumbrance and a liability to his life. If he wished to go back and live graciously in society, he would have to get rid of her quietly. He cannot let her live because in her living is his death. The flower is a testimony of the tragedy that takes place.

Pheo dies of a broken heart. His desire is not caused by a desire to escape the world but by the extreme sadness of the tragedy. If his desire is to escape the world, he would have died when Nisheli

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disappeared in the first place, instead he is back on his feet with his friends hunting in the jungles. That he would meet her in another world is a matter of consequence.

The story is placed in an imaginative human universe where human desire and conflict intersect each other to reveal the inevitable human condition. There is no indictment or revenge in the end. It is a statement of the human saga.

#### **4.1.4. Herielung who Turned into a Hornbill.<sup>4</sup>**

The illtreatment of Herielung by his stepmother drives him into the company of two girls, who admire him. They go to the field together to work on each other's field. However, he never shares his lunch with them because his stepmother mixes rat stool with his rice. He keeps a quill in his hair to sort rice from stool. One day the girls find his secret and put in their own rice in the packet. He feels ashamed that they have come to know of his state.

In the evening, he requests the girls to give him their colourful dresses so that he can imitate the hornbill. Leaving them, he climbs up a tall tree and turns into a hornbill. He tells that he would return to the village one day among a flock of hornbills and the

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<sup>4</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.132.

biggest would be him. He would then drop his best two feathers to them. It happens as foretold. His stepmother, also watching, wishes for a feather but the hornbill drops its stool into her open mouth. From that day the hornbill is forbidden to fly across Benreu village.

The story deals with crisis of dehumanization of the boy by his stepmother. While the girls praise him he is treated with contempt at home. His lunch mixed with rat stool is the ultimate insult to his person. The discrepancy between his real wounded self and the façade of cheerfulness he maintains tears him apart before long. He suffers humiliation whom he is found out.

He denies his humanity when he decides to transform into a hornbill and escape the ill treatment of his mother and the ridicule of the girls. The hornbill subverts his earlier position. Now he is venerated and people wait for a flock to pass over their village. He acquires a status that defeats the very humanity of his step-mother, by dropping a stool into her mouth.

The story is an indictment of the human, and the values that hold the concept together.

#### 4.1.5. The Story of Aviachukla<sup>5</sup>

A rich girl, called Aviachukla, and a poor girl love the same man. He takes time to decide which he would marry. All three are of the same age group and work in the fields together. Aviachukla, in order to persuade the man, that she would be an economical wife, eats only two or three grains of rice and drinks much water. But when she gets home she would eat an enormous meal. The man suspects this and peeps through the wall during a meal time, keeping a tally by stones and husks. Later he shows this and ask the girls what they think of someone who ate so much. The rich girl denies that such a thing is possible but the poor girl says that she could eat so much. The man grows to love the poor girl more and sleeps with her. Aviachukla in jealousy burns the poor girls hair a she sleeps. She taunts and insults her at every opportunity. She composes a song insulting her. When the girl cannot return the same because she is not clever enough the man makes up a song so insulting that Aviachukla's mouth is stopped forever. The man marries the poor girl in the end.

The story is built around the the myth of poor honest girl and rich-jealous friend. This is also a value based story of a community that

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<sup>5</sup> J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, pp.321-322.

advocates the prudence of a woman in multiplying wealth. However this becomes the secondary theme because the man chooses between the two girls the one who speaks the truth. When it comes to economics, both the women would eventually cost him the same, one having declared that she can consume as much as the other. Clearly Aviachukla is more clever and enterprising of the two, making every opportunity work for her. It means more to her to be married to the man than the other girls because she strives to gain him while the other is passive. However, she is a negative example.

The man is choosing the honest and passive women privileges a certain ethic over economics. It speaks of a qualitative preference of a way of life than its mere logistics. The desire of man pertains to the meaning and quality of life than its other aspects.

#### **4.2. THE ANIMAL UNIVERSE.**

Most animal stories of the folk tradition are built around similar themes. This is because the abstracted qualities of the animals, based on their appearance or habits, correspond to similar perception of the world.

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However, the particularity of contexts emphasise certain animals or birds according to their importance to the community. They feature conspicuously in a numbers of tales. In the Naga context, the tiger, the dog and the hornbill, are the chief examples. The tiger has an equal status with man because of its might and ferocity; the dog is recognised because of its closeness and loyalty to him; the hornbill signifies status.

The variety of animals life gives scope to a wider application of the human condition in the tales. Many animal tales are in the form of explanations of the state of nature or about the creation of nature. The method of presenting a tale is highly characteristic. The imagination builds upon the framework of the reverse of what is evidenced in nature. This is why also the endings are neatly constituted. The themes explored at the manifest level are usually value based explanation or subversion, and the delineation of hierarchy. They correspond to the constantly changing nature of the psychic universe. Man's desire to imagine systems in the animal universe bring human issues to a higher level of intellection evolving new structures of significance.

#### **4.2.1. The Pig and the Dog.<sup>6</sup>**

A pig and dog are kept by a man. One day the master orders them both to go and work in the fields. The pig faithfully stomps about

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<sup>6</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.213.

the field throughout the day while the dog sleeps lazily. In the evening, as the pig leaves exhausted, the dog wakes up and puts his print all over effacing the pig's print. The dog catches up with the pig and reaches home. At home both the pig and the dog claim to have worked the whole day. To find out the truth the master pays a visit to the field the next day. He finds only the dog's marks. The master calls the pig a liar and condemns him to live outside the house from then on.

The story is subversion of the myth of the faithful dog. The dog is presented as cunning and dishonest while the pig is the faithful one among the two. It is a myth that overthrows a standing myth therefore it is highly reflexive. The man judges the pig and the dog on the basis of observation. The tale questions the very basis of this understanding because the dog undoes the work of the pig when the man is not present. The relative nature of truth is also explored. Truth is accepted only from the man's perspective. The pig's truth is nullified by the observed truth. The untruth of the dog influences man to accept its explanation.



#### 4.2.2. Bat and Animals.<sup>7</sup>

A war is declared between all the animals and all the birds in the world. Only the bat remains neutral. When the birds request him to join them he claims to be an animal, and when the animals ask him to take their side he tells them that he is a bird. He would like to join the victorious party. Unfortunately for the bat, the two parties arrive at a peaceful settlement without any blood-shed. Neither the birds nor the animals accept him. They instead threaten to kill him. Helpless, he escapes. The bat is ashamed. Since then bats never show their faces during the day.

The story speaks against neutrality. The backdrop is the war of the birds and the animals. The bat has to make a decision to join either of the groups. His non-committal stand saves him from immediate participation in war, but fuels a war in him long after the actual war is settled. In the end both parties arrive at a peaceful settlement and he is not at liberty to choose any group. Since neither group accepts him he removes himself from their presence. He faces antagonism from both quarters for all times to come.

The pathos of the story works at making a choice or taking a stand. At every point in the life of an individual, it is a decision that gives

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<sup>7</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.55.

impetus to progress. The bat could have chosen one side and could have been counted not only a bat but an animal or bird. Decisions involve risk but not taking the risk is of graver consequence. To reject to take a stand is a rejection of identity, of rights and life as a whole.

#### **4.2.3. The Wildboar and the Tiger.<sup>8</sup>**

The wildboar and the tiger are friends. However just to ascertain the position between each other, the boar challenges the tiger to a fight. After a mutual agreement they decide to meet after six days, with their own deuces of protection. The tiger winds canes around himself while the wildboar smears clay on his body. On the appointed day they fight fiercely until all their defenses are down. The wildboar kills the tiger, proving himself physically stronger. Overwhelmed with victory, the wildboar sets off for home when on the way a small bamboo laughs at him. In hot haste he pulls the bamboo down and starts to chew it. His tongue is cut off and he dies. Meanwhile another tiger happens to pass by the same way. He sees the dead boar and eats it up. Ever since then tigers eat wildboars.

The desire for competition implies a need to constantly change and evolve, to be always becoming the elusive being. The boar challenges

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<sup>8</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.53.

and wins the match of physical strength by defeating the tiger. But his encounter with the bamboo tests his new mental reflection. At his disadvantage, the boar employs his strength to subdue the small bamboo. The harder he chews in anger, the more he cuts, and finally dies. The failure of the boar to relate his own image, with the image, the other has of him, brings his downfall. He pictures himself more than what he is. In the end, it is the defeated tiger who eats up the once victorious boar.

As soon as the boar loses his equanimity, the victory is already lost. It is the being with a reflective mind who is the eventual victor.

#### **4.2.4. The Dog's Search for the Greatest and Strongest Master.<sup>9</sup>**

The dog is in search of a suitable protector and therefore changes one master after the other. One day the dog asks God to tell him who is the greatest and the strongest animal on earth. God names the elephant. The dog goes to live with the elephant but in the night as it barks in fear of the wind, the elephant is annoyed. It tells the dog to stop barking as the tiger would come to find them. The dog thinks that the tiger and not the elephant might be greater. He goes to live with the tiger. In the same manner at night when it barks the tiger speaks of the spirit who would find them if the dog

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<sup>9</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.164.

continues to do so. The dog now goes to the spirit. However the spirit too reacts in the same way and tells the dog that man would kill them both including all the animals in the vicinity. The dog finally goes to man who agrees to keep him. When it barks in the night the man encourages the dog to bark more. From that day the dog knows that man is the strongest and the greatest in the world.

The desire of man to consolidate his position in the universe is seen in the story. The order of hierarchy from the dog's perspective is placed at man, spirit, tiger and elephant. It even bypasses God's judgement of the elephant at the highest rung, by validating it by the dog's response. The object of fear for the dog is the wind and its movement at night. All the other animals in their individual capacities have different level of fear. The elephant fears the tiger, the tiger fears the spirit and the spirit fears man. However there are loopholes in the ordering of the hierarchy. The elephant fears the tiger but does not mention the spirit or man. Similarly for the other animals too. The tiger is afraid of the spirit but not man.

By building up such a myth, man is in a position to grasp and control his situation. The dog is a 'reliable' view point from which to verify his position, by virtue of its apparent objectivity.

#### **4.2.5. How Tigers came on this Earth.<sup>10</sup>**

A family has two children. The eldest is a daughter and the younger a son. They are hardworking and are a joy to their parents. However as they grow older, the son acquires a habit of scratching his sister's legs with his sharp nails. She is frightened. The girl tells their mother and refuses to go with him anywhere anymore. The mother devices a trick by which to keep the boy busy. She give her son the water carrier with holes at the base, and to her daughter the good ones, and sends them along to fetch water. The girl returns promptly but her brother is left filling up the riddled vessel. At the end of the day, a crow perches on a tree nearby and tells the boy to check his vessel. He boils with rage when he finds out the truth and goes home in a fury. He asks his mother to let him suckle her breast if she wants him to be pacified. He tears one of her breast and escapes to the jungle never to return home, in time he changes into a tiger.

The story comes under the category of the myths of creation. Through a discourse on the tiger several levels of significance are simultaneously built up. The tiger in the tale is a transformation of man. He is the younger of the two children, who are also contrasted at the level of gender.

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<sup>10</sup> *Folk Tales*, p. 45.

Placing the tiger as the younger of the two, determines the desire of the community to relegate the tiger below the human being. It contains the overwhelming power of the tiger. However man is represented as a female, which in the patriarchal context of the society, would subvert the power of position, man has over the tiger. The balance is maintained precariously.

The attitude of the mother is based towards the girl. Both mother and daughter separate themselves from the boy. The final rift comes with the boy tearing off its mother's breast in a symbolic gesture. The boy by sucking his mother's breast is taken to a time in his infancy when she nourished and protected him. His desire to return to that state of relationship is no longer possible. The disjunction between that time and the present is emphasized. The feeling is that he has been wronged. He moves away from his real home to the forest for succour and eventually turns into a tiger.

The feelings evoke mixed reactions. There is sympathy because he has lost his place among the humans for his strangeness. The tiger also signifies danger as is evident from the way it threatens his sister. The very concepts that make the tiger endearing and awe inspiring are those that segregate him. By qualifying the tiger as once a human being the Naga can claim knowledge of his universe.

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### 4.3. The Spirit Universe

The spirit universe is a realm of the unknown. It is understood only in terms of power and the extraordinary, based on the effects perceived in nature. The relationship of the Naga with the spirit is based in fear and apprehension, of whether disaster or blessing would follow, depending on the spirits' disposition. Since the role of the spirit is ambiguous, the scope of its interaction in the tales is reduced even though the crystallisation of thought takes place at the highest level.

There are two categories of spirits found interacting with man; the sky gods or angels, and the earth spirits. The High God is mentioned only in the creation myths. For the spirits to interact with corporal beings, they take upon material forms. The gods are anthropomorphic and conjugate with man. The earth spirits live in trees, rock and rivers.

The spirits-human stories always start with a lack or disturbance. Contact with the spirits promise the ideal. However there is much apprehension at the meeting of the two domains. The outcome of the contact or search always end in the separation of the two worlds. Intermittent relationships take place but a clear demarcation is evident in order to realistically present it. Upon separation by force, the spirits can at best be removed from their place of residence while their human counterparts perish or disappear from the face of the earth. The spirit

world is powerful and alienating. The images correspond to how they are perceived, they are both gods of bounty as well as grotesque and violent.

#### **4.3.1. The Fairy Husband<sup>11</sup>**

A man has nine sons and a daughter. The girl tells her parents that since she would like to marry, they should draw liquor against the settlement of her marriage. She had been told by a fairy that he would marry her. However her parents do not believe her. One day she informs her family that she would leave the same night after dinner. Surely in the morning the parents miss her but find several goats tied together as a present for having taken the girl.

After a month the girl, now the fairy's wife, brings her son to her parents house. All nine brothers dandle the baby and just as it leaves the hands of the youngest, the baby dies. The girl cries. Just then there is fire in the heavens in a big star. The girl tells them that she has to go as her parents-in-law have come to fetch her. She applies a medicinal charm to her child nostrils and before she leaves tells her mother not to look at her as she goes up. If she does, her mother would never see her again in her life.

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<sup>11</sup> J.H.Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, pp.331-332.



But her mother does not obey her request and looks on. The fairy himself comes down in a red glow and takes away his wife and child. Her mother, because she disobeyed, will never see her again.

The background of the girl induces her to willfully follow her fairy husband. She is of a family of ten, an only daughter of complacent parents. Even her wish to marry fall on deaf ears. When she leaves one evening, there is no description of regret on the part of anyone in the family.

In remembrance of her family and humanity, the girl returns home for a visit only after a month. While she is on earth, she behaves like her old self. When her baby dies she cries. But as soon as she is summoned up to heaven she composes herself and makes the baby come to life. The mortal world is contrasted with the heavenly world, where there is no lack. The strong ties she shares with her husband and in-laws are foil to her earthly familial relationship.

In spite of the ideal situation in heaven, the girl still longs to see her family time and again. Her human nature is deprived of its attachment in earth. The story ends with a note of sadness because she has been

banished from earth. Her mother is once again careless about her instruction, and watches her daughter as she leaves.

The girl's first move is out of a desire to find acceptance. The other option, heaven, is a total contrast to her earthly existence. However it does not give her freedom to be who she is. She is condemned to live in heaven because of the unchanging attitude of her family on earth. The story underlines the disjunction between the desire of an individual and the apathy of her world.

#### **4.3.2. Paninenla and the Water Spirit<sup>12</sup>**

During the Mongyu festival of the Phom people a poor family go to collect plantain leaves from the jungle. A handsome man accosts them. He falls in love with the beautiful daughter and she too reciprocates. As an advance gift for the hand of the daughter, the man presents her father with bundle of leaves which turn into a big fish.

Every night the man visits their house. The parents finally consent to the marriage noting his good manners. After the marriage the daughter never visits her parents. However, one festival day she arrives with a small fish at her parents house. While she is away

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<sup>12</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.96.

visiting relatives, her mother, thinking the fish, a present, cooks and eats it.

When the girl returns she becomes furious. However she is able to find a small bone from which the small fish is formed again. The parents are amazed to learn that a human being can have a fish for a child. They decide to find and so they accompany their daughter as she leaves often the feast. Pretending to go back they hide nearby and secretly follow her. As she reaches the river, their son-in-law, with full dress of a rich warrior, comes to receive them. Taking the presents all three submerge into the river. The sight frightens the parents. The villagers are told. They then try to poison the river with all kinds of spices. But none work until a fruit is presented to the children of the water spirit who eat of it and die. The same fruits are used to kill the other fishes including the woman, who is found dead. From that day onwards the Phom people poison the water with the same fruit.

Paninenla is taken up with the handsome man who approaches a poor girl like her. She and her parents are won over by his good manners. Her marriage to him takes her away from her family spatially as well as emotionally. For a long time there is no word from her until the festival day. When she visits home she hides from her family the nature of her

life, and the fact that the little fish is her son. She has completely adjusted with her new way of life, even alienating the human world.

The strangeness of Paninenla's child and her husband from the river, drives the parents to separate them, however the power of the spirit husband protects their union. The efforts to destroy them by force do not have any effect. It is only by an accident, the gift of a fruit, which is able to kill the sons. The discovery finally separates the river god from his wife and children in their death. The contact with the spirit and its subduing brings secret knowledge and a positive blessing to the people. The secret of their union is finally broken by the fruit. The story traces the desire of the people to understand the mystery which protects and sustains the river and its inhabitants.

#### **4.3.3. The Beautiful Damsel<sup>13</sup>**

A beautiful damsel lives in a village. So reputed is her beauty that she has an endless number of suitors from her village. But she rejects them all on the ground of poverty, as her parents wants her to marry a wealthy person. The angels too hear of her and court her time and again. A particularly handsome angel begs her to marry him. His beauty moves her heart and she tells him that she would surely marry him if her parents do not object.

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<sup>13</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.5.

The angel is poor but he knows that to win her parent's consent he has to bluff them. He describes himself as a rich man to them, that he has a beautiful decorated house in heaven and that he never uses any utensil twice. The parents are overjoyed and readily agrees to his proposal.

After the marriage the couple set out walking for months together, halting at places for rest and food but never reaching home. She finds out that he has lied. By the end of a couple of years of wandering they have two children. However the affection for her children does not restore peace in her heart. One night while her husband and children are fast asleep, she starts for her own village. With much tears and pity the parents receive her. Not long after she marries a man of her own village and lives happily.

The desire of the girl and her parents is much too high to be fulfilled by anyone in the village. Only a supernatural agent could do it. Incidentally, the girl meets a deceitful angel who turns out to be just as ordinary as any man. Her dreams are shattered and she has to start all over again. The children born out of an illusionary marriage does not help in sustaining the relationship. She is happy only with a man of her own kind, from her village. The second marriage she contracts is without condition, devoid of any unrealistic expectation. Her life even now is no different from the

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one with the angel, because the angel lived like a man too. Only, it is not based on a delusion. It has destroyed her illusions. The story speaks negatively of unrealistic desires or ideals in the human world. In the end the girl returns to her own village rejecting the offer of a fallen heaven.

#### **4.3.4. Two Brothers and their Encounter with the Devil<sup>14</sup>**

Two brothers hunt together everyday. They make pit-traps in the forest. One day a reindeer is caught but cannot be pulled out by just the two of them. So they go back to the village and inform their relatives about it. Next morning when they all reach the place only a small deer is found. The relatives get angry thinking they have lied. However, they leave with the small deer.

The next day a big reindeer is caught again in one of the traps. This time they decide to watch. A devil appears from the big forest and takes the reindeer out. It makes it live again saying that no one should kill it because it is his 'mithun' (a prized animal) in his forest. The brothers quickly catch the devil before it can leave. They ask the devil why he is depriving them of their food. The devil is then led to the village but it pleads to be left alone, and that everything in the forest would be theirs for sparing him. The brothers heed to the devil's wish and in return are blessed. The

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<sup>14</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.178.

villagers are now convinced of the brothers' experience, seeing their prosperity.

The brothers' profession of hunting brings them in contact with the spirit of the forest. Their roles are at cross purposes. While the spirit protects big game as its prized possession, the brothers hunt them for their livelihood. It is a misfortune for the brothers when the spirit sets the trapped animals free. The brothers desire to improve their situation and prove their word to the villagers. This impels them to catch the culprit.

The brothers' entry into the forest is already a transgression of the spirit territory. The spirits capture shows domination by the brothers. In return for its freedom, the spirit promises blessings. In the spirit's physical absence is prosperity, in its presence, only a cause of their misfortune. Their spaces are necessarily separated for the flow of blessing. Separation is a theme echoed in the spirit-man interaction. Only in separation is a realisation of the community's belief, of the power of the spirit to bless man, as much as man's role to make it real.

#### **4.3.5. The Widower and the Goddess<sup>15</sup>**

A widower maintains a beautiful flowers garden in the hope of attracting young girls who would want to have flowers. To his

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<sup>15</sup> *Folk Tales*, p.61.

He is scared but acts normally when they meet each other. To his utter surprise he sees a mithun's leg in her hands. That evening she cooks the leg and offers it to her husband who pretends to eat it by chewing on some pieces of earthen pot. He alerts his neighbours about the incidents. However they are too late to save his life because the next morning the villagers spy her feasting on the man. They surround the house to kill her but she disappears in a mass of dark cloud.

The widower is lonely. He desires for companionship. Better than his wish, he succeeds to persuade the goddess to live with him. He is relieved off his responsibility to work because the goddess produces everything by magic. The goddess controls the fertility in the fields of the villagers too. For sometime his dream is undisturbed.

There is no cause for want anymore. He lives his desire. The status quo is however destabilised when he discovers the true nature of the goddess. The recognition jolts him from his stupor. Now he desires to kill her, his ideal, with the help of his neighbours. The heavenly being is transformed into an image of horror, the very opposite of what he had desired or imagined. The anticlimax of the tale is his death at the hands of the goddess. Behind the supernatural experience is its alienating and terrorizing dangers. The story starts on a positive note but ends with a



warning. There is no real achievement of desire in the other. The effect is momentary if at all. The graver issue is that the power of the other could subsume man's dreams and desires by a domination of his world. There is a bifurcation of the two worlds, the goddess having to leave earth. In essence both worlds encapsulate irreconcilable differences.

## Appendix I

### Three Brothers

In times past, tiger, devil and man were brothers who all lived peacefully together. Amongst them tiger was the eldest, next the devil and the man youngest. The tiger was called the elder brother. Their father died when they were young. The mother was aged and needed someone to attend to her always. One of the brothers, therefore, had to stay home everyday turn by turn. On the days the tiger stayed, the mother got tired and became weak because the tiger made her play with him throughout the day, and when the devil stayed she was unhappy as the devil was unkind to her. She was happy only when the man stayed with her.

The tiger was ferocious of all. He even nourished an evil design to feed on his mother's flesh. So he longed for her death. The devil and the man knew this. After some days, the mother fell seriously ill. There was no hope of her recovery. One day her condition became very serious. As the man and devil as told were aware of the tiger's ill motive, they sent him off to the field on that day on some pretexts or other. Soon after he left, the mother breathed her last. They buried her under the hearth. The tiger returned in the evening. He did not see the mother. So he inquired about her whereabouts. But the other brothers refused to disclose anything.

Soon after they decided not stay together anymore. Then the question of dividing parental house came. After long discussion they decide that the man should stay there as he was the youngest. The other two brothers went away to the far off forests. But the tiger even then could not forget the desire of eating his mother's flesh. So he returned home before long and asked the man, "Where is the mother?" As before the man refused to tell anything when he threatened to devour him. The man though weak was cleverer than the tiger. He devised a trick and asked the tiger to have a race competition. They fixed up a target. It was agreed that he who touched the target first would be the winner and have the right to remain in the house. The tiger was confident of winning the race. He knew not what a trick would be played upon by his brother. The competition began. The man instead of running

shot the target with an arrow before the tiger could reach there and thus proclaimed himself to be the winner. The tiger went away disappointed.

After a couple of days the tiger came again and asked the same old question, "Where is mother?". The man was annoyed but afraid of the tiger. He, however, turned the topic and said, "Well brother, what are you afraid of most?" "Fire and Trumpet", replied the tiger. The man kept quiet. As the tiger was tired he fell asleep soon. The man then tied up a mat on his tail and set fire on it. The tiger woke up. He was horrified and ran away towards the jungle and never returned. To drive the tiger further he blew his trumpet also. And from that day, it is said, the tiger began to live in the forest and men in villages.

## **Appendix II**

### **The Battle Between the Birds and Creatures**

The lizard and the tailorbird were good friends. One day, while they were roaming together the bird broke of a twig and playfully lifted the lizard and they started to quarrel. Then, the lizard challenged the bird. "I will call all the creatures that crawl on the earth and fight with you birds." "If that is the case I too will call the birds of the sky and fight you", replied the bird. Both agreed and thus fixed a date for a war between the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.

As the day approached the earth crawling brought the python and king cobra as their leader, while the birds chose the eagle and the horn-bill as their leader. The eagle said to the hornbill, "you are the biggest among us, so, go down and carry of the python." But the hornbill refused telling that, the python was bigger than he was, and the fight would be uneven, so saying the hornbill refused to go down. The eagle then asked another smaller kind of hornbill to go down and fight the cobra but it is also refused saying that the cobra was bigger than him and he would be no match for a fight. Having declined by both the birds the eagle decided to go down itself for the fight. The cobra and eagle started fighting. During the fight, when the eagle seem to be losing the birds cried aloud, but when it appear to be getting the upper hand the birds chirped excitedly. The crawling creatures did the same. After a very long fight king cobra lost, and the eagle flew away with its prey. The birds of the air were declared the victor.

The eagle in triumph then brought the corpse of the cobra and all the birds divided the flesh. In great jubilation, the minivet rubbed itself in the blood and that is why the minivet became red. The crow rubbed itself in the gall that is why it becomes black. The ruby-throat was late, there was no more meat left for it but a little blood remained, with which it smeared on its chin. That is why it got a red mark on its chin. As a result of that incident, it is said that the birds so named bore their peculiar identity even today.

### **Appendix III**

#### **The Orphan**

This is a tale of the olden days when orphans were neglected and ill-treated by the society. In those days there lived an orphan at an unknown village who cherished the desire of becoming famous by his deeds whatsoever. Consequently he resolved to dig a well of rare kind which he did in no time. The villagers started drawing water from that well. But none knew as to who had dug such a nice well. Even the housewives were curious to inquire the name of the person from each other wherever they met. At last everybody came to know the truth. Instantly the orphan became so popular that his name was on every lip.

As time goes, the news about the well reached even upto the angels. Since then they too came down from the heaven every morning before the villagers woke up. They used to have bath in the well and then went away unnoticed polluting the water thus. This continued for sometime. One day some people of the village charged the orphan for pollution of the water as he was the owner who would guard the well. The orphan felt ashamed at his, he decided to detect the culprit by any means.

Next morning he hastened to the well and kept on watching and awaiting secretly there. A few minutes later he noticed some angels of both sexes were coming down flying. The angels had head-gears by means of which they could fly.

However, the orphan saw them plunging into the well after putting off their head-gears. Immediately he thought of preventing them. But he was scared. He therefore, did not tell them anything and went home running. On reaching home the orphan regained courage and thought, "I must take revenge upon those angels". So on the following morning he went down to the well again and hid himself in a bush nearby. As usual the angels came down, put off their headgears, and were busy taking bath. Meanwhile the orphan steadily took away a headgear belonging to one of the female angels. After bath the angels got out of the well and began to put on their respective head-gears while they found one of their

head-gears missing. They searched for it vigorously but all in vain. They were helpless. As it was getting late they bade goodbye tearfully to their unfortunate companion whose headgear was missing and flew away soon. The orphan then came out, seized an angel, brought her to his home and asked her to marry him. She too agreed for she had no way out to escape. Soon after they got wedded. In course of time two children were born to them. But the Angel gradually became unhappy and tired of the worldly life. She often thought of returning to her heavenly abode. But it was impossible for her to fly up without the head-gear which her husband was keeping secretly. One day while her husband was away from the home, she casually asked her children, "Dear children! can you tell me as to which side of the house your daddy keeps on looking before he goes out every day?" "Mummy", replied the children "Daddy looks on towards our fowl house always". This aroused her suspicion. She then immediately rushed to the fowlhouse and to her utter surprise found the head-gear lying there. At once she decided to fly above to her home. But she was hesitating for the children whom she loved dearly. She, however, thought out a plan to take them with her and revealed all about it to them. The children agreed upon gladly. Soon after she flew up. On reaching the heaven, as planned, she dropped down a long rope which the children caught hold of tightly and thus she pulled them up to the heaven.

On returning home in the evening the orphan found neither his wife nor the children. He inquired their whereabouts from the villagers but in vain. He was wandering about in total despair. Then one day he met a crow who was then not black. He disclosed everything to that crow promising that if the latter could take him to place of his family he would paint the bird black. The crow agreed upon and on a chosen day they set out for the heaven as planned. After a long journey they safely reached their destination. The angel was surprised to see her husband but received him warmly and they were happy. The crow was, however, sent back to the world duly painted black as promised.

Before long, the orphan acquired the habit of hunting like the angels. One day he killed a lizard. This caused much surprise and dissatisfaction to the angels. Because killing of lizards was, prior that day, the monopoly of the angels. They were, therefore, jealous of

seeing a man acquiring the heavenly trait. No doubt the wife of the orphan was very much glad at her husband's success.

However, the angels then conspired to send the man down to the earth. So one night they invited the orphan to visit a girl along with them. The orphan accepted the invitation and accompanied them. At mid-night the orphan fell asleep there. The angel, as pre-planned, carried him down to the earth and then flew up again.

## Appendix IV

### The Tragic End of Beau and Manlong

Long ago in the land of the Phoms of Namsang village, there was a small family having a son and a daughter named Beau and Manlong. Of the two Beau was the elder. Both of them grew up and attained marriageable age. Now, Beau being the elder brother first approached the village maidens and proposed for marriage but all of them refused. It made him sad, because, his intimate friends had all got married whereas he was compelled to remain single. As the years tolled by, loneliness and sadness gripped him and life seemed to be empty and dull for him. However, one fine day, he decided to use love charms to influence and attract the girls so that he too can get married. Having planned it, Beau went down to Assam and procured a powerful medicine with which he would charm any girl he wanted to marry. Beau started making a dao handed on which he smeared the medicine. Then he cautiously kept it in a corner of the house floor and warned all the family members to keep away from dao, and went out from home. As soon as he left he left the house, Manlong, his younger sister, was curious and wanted to know why it was forbidden to touch the dao. But then, as ill luck would have it, the moment she touched the dao she suddenly became senseless. Now, the love charm had affected her so immensely that she could not help herself falling in love with her own brother which was forbidden of their social custom.

Therefore, being aware of the terrible consequences, Manlong tried her best to stop herself from being attracted to her brother but it was in vain. Because, the more she tried to restrain herself, she was all the more dragged towards Beau. The efficacy of the love charm was indispensable as nothing could prevent it from influencing her. The parents and relatives also exerted their utmost influence, often resorting to even harsh beating. However, it was futile. In course of time, Manlong became quite unaware of what she was doing and shamelessly exhibited love for her brother as wife would to her husband. Now, Beau, her brother was utterly helpless and his attempt to remove the charm from his sister also failed. As a result he too became senseless and was overcome with intense love for his own sister. The infuriated parents and relatives were quite ashamed and they resorted to all



possible means to separate Beau and Manlong from the illegal union. Yet the two were inseparable. It became a public a public nuisance and the villagers were astonished and angered by the usual incestuous affair. They got so enraged as it disturbed the peaceful social fabric and customary practice of the people. Perhaps, the brother and sister becoming husband and wife was so repulsive and intolerable that the villagers, finding no alternative decided to punished them severely. One day after taking the decision, Beau was brought from one side of the gate while Manlong was brought from one opposite direction. Then without allowing them to meet, both of them were done to death and their corpse were put into the fire which was deliberately set for the purpose. Thus, the incestuous lovers were punished by the villagers. This act was perpetrated, so that, no such illegal union took place in their community in future.

The story has it for posterity that though Beau and Manlong were burnt to death in different places yet, the smokes which rose above the village mingled into one. So, the people believed that though the lovers were bodily separated yet their spirits met in the sky and were united into one, never to be parted again till eternity.

The song that accompanies the story is translated as :

During the time of Beau and Manlong,  
She touched the elder brother's dao  
Which was requested not to touch  
Powerful medicine mixed and  
smeared on elder brother's dao.  
Burnt up with fire in different village gates  
After splitting their dead bodies.  
Flying up together in the sky with stars  
Though burnt up in different places

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