

ORAL LITERATURE OF THE ZELIANGRUANG

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of*

Master of Philosophy

Submitted by:

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled ***Oral Literature of the Zeliangruang***, submitted by **ACHINGLIU KAMEI**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** (M. Phil) of this University, is her original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this University or of any other Univeristy.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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This dissertation entitled ***Oral Literature of the Zeliangruang*** submitted by me to the Center of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi- 110067, for the award of the **Degree of Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.


Signature of Candidate

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*Lovingly dedicated to my
Grandparents (Late) Dimanliu and (Late) Dijinang Kamei
and
to my parents T.P.Achunliu and Tinggem Kamei*

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Chapter- 1

Introduction.

INTRODUCTION

“Folklore, in its broadest sense, is the part of the culture, customs and beliefs of a society that is based on popular tradition. It is produced by the community and is usually transmitted orally or by demonstration.”¹ The term “folklore” encompasses all the artistic genres of folk culture. In popular usage, however, folklore refers almost exclusively to a single aspect of folk art, the oral literary tradition. Folklores or folk narratives are transmitted down from generation to generation by word of mouth of the cultures. They are rich sources of the traditional knowledge and beliefs, having no written language.

In Kapil Kapoor’s words: Folk, oral tradition finds its expressions in the culture of the people - in their religion, myth, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk verses, folk beliefs, folk superstitions, customs, folk drama, folk songs, folk music, folk dance, ballads, folk cults, folk gods and goddesses, rituals, festivals, magic, witchcraft, folk art and craft and a variety of forms or artistic expressions of oral culture or rural and tribal folks or ‘unlettered’ city dwellers that binds man to man. This is folklore, which is the accumulated knowledge of homogeneous people, tied together not only by physical bonds, but also by emotional ones, giving unity and individual distinction.

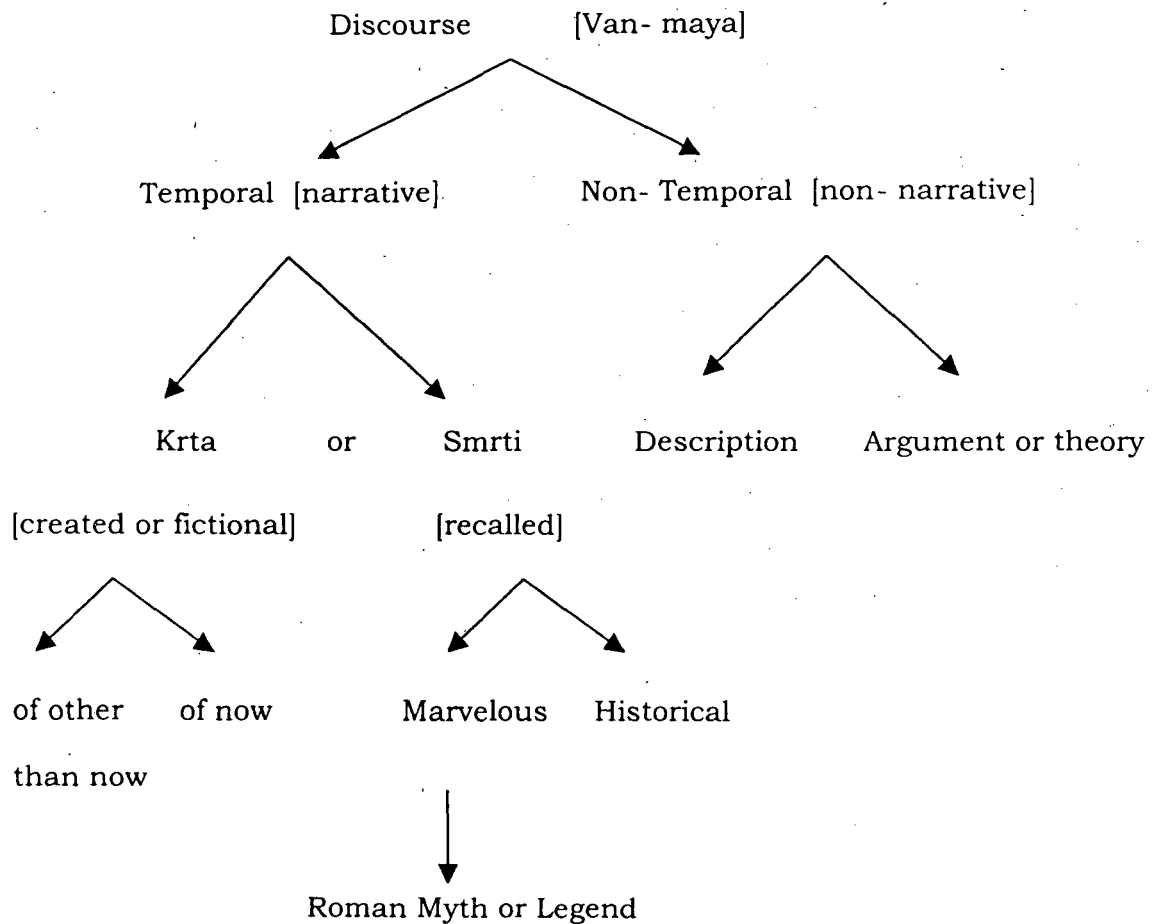
¹Encyclopedia Americana vol.11. Folklore.

It is also perpetuated through children's rhymes and games that are passed on from one generation to another. Each group of people, no matter how small or big, has its own folk narrative. Folk narrative may also be called oral literature and the narrative sometimes shows relative authenticity and sometimes undergoes drastic transformations due to influences of developed techniques and exposure to other cultures. Sometimes there are signs of the skilful manipulations by the storytellers or singers. Or sometimes the narrative becomes less and less important, and occasionally dies out from the oral repertory, because of historic movements or overwhelming foreign influences or just from lack of skilful practitioners of the tradition.

The essence of all folk narratives is oral and subject to their survival in the minds of men, hence there are many devices to aid the memory of the teller. The most common of all is mere repetition. The storyteller has at his disposal a large variety of conventional motifs and episodes and can use them freely.

The term 'folk narratives' seems to suggest a hidden, forgotten and backward culture, whether admired or despised, the folk represents a world different from the centers of power, wealth, progress, industry and intellectual and political activity in the metropolises. Even the most developed literatures have at some point of time had their origin in folklores.

Kapil Kapoor postulates the following totality of discourse in which he group various kinds of narrative positioning them in terms of an Indian theoretical perspective.



He thus isolates five kinds of narrative, [i] Fiction that deals with the present, [ii] Fiction that does not deal with the present, [iii] Romance [iv] Myth or legend and [v] Historical. These are not symmetrically sealed types but interact with each other to form other

kinds of narratives. These narratives are again not force forms and can include other kinds of narratives within them as sub-narratives. What is common between all narratives is the temporality, which is their world. They are by definition about change. Narrative is also a form of retelling of someone's experience. Every community has produced various narratives ranging from the fictional to the marvelous. According to Kapil Kapoor, the Indian cultural tradition seems to express themselves best in the marvelous and the historical narratives².

To contrast this with a western viewpoint we only have to turn to the Encyclopedia Britannica. It defines oral literature as covering both folk narrative and folk song. Other smaller genres as proverbs, riddles, and beliefs or superstition also constitute oral literature. Folk narrative in turn includes "the myth, a semi-sacred adventure of a god or demigod set in the remote past; the Marchen or fairy tale [also wonder tale or magic tale and sometimes just folktale or tale], a pan-European popular fiction with aristocratic characters, magical episodes, and a symmetrical structure; the legend, a believed report often told conversationally and allusively; the saga, a personal, family, or local chronicle of marvelous oral history; the romance, a lengthy, adventure-filled narration with realistic characters; the noodle or numskull tale, relating the comical stupidities of a foolish person or a village of fools; the jest or joke, a

²See Kapil Kapoor, "Theory of the Novel: An Indian view," *The journal of comparative literature* (Cuttack), vol. XV, no. 1 - 2,

short humorous fiction, often obscene and usually climaxed with a punch line; the anecdote, a brief traditional incident concerning a laughable action or saying of a historical personality; the animal-tale, characterized by talking animals with human traits; the cante fable, a story containing songs or rhymes; and still other forms." Similarly, folk song too can have many forms and address many subjects. The crucial differences between the folk song and the folk narrative is that the folk song has to associate text and tune, both melody and text have history.

As the entry in the Encyclopedia puts so successfully, "Oral literature, like written literature but even more pronouncedly, satisfies the desire of mortals to transcend their mundane world." There is constant interaction in oral literature between human being and gods and fairies, between peasants and royalty. A better life is always round the corner- there is more treasure to be won.

This possibility and narrative of social mobility helps in breaking forceful social taboos. Many of the folk answer our perennial questions; "How did the world begin. Who created man, the animals, and the plants? Myths or origin are always ethnocentric; they explain possessing the myth, a chosen people." A familiarity is enforced on a hostile universe, through folktale a people find themselves in their explanation of the world. Their tales give tribal people their sense of identity. Further

folklore helps in education, in socialization of a people. They set out social rules, codes of conducts.

It is remarked that while folklore is stable in its basic content, it is ever changing in the external features. It can travel well and easily but will always change in order to work in newer cities. Folklore is thus continuously modified in its travel and retelling. "Barriers of language, religion and culture offer no obstacles to the movements of folk products."³

Oral narrative is considered to be purely fictional but the line between belief and non belief is thin and vague and it varies from one culture to the other, and even from person to person. It speaks for a people constructing their identity, situating them in their world.

The Zeliangruang people are a Naga tribe living in the states of the North East.⁴ For this dissertation I have collected the stories from the three tribes of Zeliangruang living in Manipur. I have recorded the oral tales of the Zeliangruang and translated them into English in order to study them for their worldview. These are not stories available off the shelf but stories I have gone in search of – to record and translate it. By this study I hope to shed some light on the Zeliangruang cultural ethos, psyche, on their failures and achievements, their ethics and aesthetics.

³ New Encyclopedia Britannica. Vol. 19, Folk Arts.

⁴ See Chapter 3 for more details on Zeliangruang people

The present study will try to create a space for the Zeliangruang folk tales in the mainstream literature.

In tune with Kapil Kapoor's different kinds of narrative, the Zeliangruangs oral narratives could also be put in the same definitions. The Zeliangruangs too have their own marvelous stories. There are stories about the 'Liantuangs' or extraordinarily strong human beings. Sometimes their fates are strange. A Lianguang performs amazing feats: he lifts great boulders [there is still a huge boulder at Rangan of Tamenglong, said to be brought from the forest by him], he uproots trees, fights wild beasts, overcomes armed enemies of the village single handed, champions the cause of the defenceless, and wins for himself praise and renown. The praise of the people goes to his head and he becomes proud and vain. When his fame is at its height, he destroys his reputation by his bad actions. Instead of helping and defending his neighbours as of before, he begins to oppress and plunder, and comes to be regarded as a dreaded person to be avoided. There is no one to check his crimes so the gods intervene and he is struck by plague and punished by death.⁵

Stories about the interaction between animals and men are aplenty in the Zeliangruangs. The animals in the stories take on human behavioural patterns and talk like them. They live together in harmony.

⁵ It is believed that no Lianguangs were ever born again because the gods were angry with them for misuse of their strength.

Stories of marvelous creature are told and their existence is taken for granted. Apart from them [man, bird, animal, semi-divine creatures], supernatural and ill-defined creatures which are much more difficult to visualize, are also common. The Zeliangruang believe in the existence of 'Ram-rah,' a malevolent demon not easily seen who strikes at night. It is believed that if it plucks a strand of hair from one's head, one dies. These demons are also able to create storms. Then there is also 'Rah-ndau-pui,' a creature with its feet turned backwards. Sometimes humans can see it. Fairies or their counterparts are hard to define, for in one place they will appear in full human size and in another as little creatures living underground or in caves. Stories of witches [Inchampej] and devils, or water spirits [dui-rah] and the supernatural guardians of mountains or trees [abut-chaniu-rah] vary from place to place.

In the Zeliangruang folk narration, fables are in abundance, and because of the simplicity in the narration they are very popular with children. The people have many sayings, proverbs, fables and folk songs. The narratives are handed down from generation to generation to entertain and educate them and also perhaps to explain the beauty and wonder of the world that they live in. The stories are actually told by the elders, usually a grandmother or grandfather around a fireplace. Story time is the time to ensure that tradition is kept sacred and alive. This is also a time of togetherness and interaction in the family. This time of

peace and tranquility has now been invaded and taken over by books, computers and televisions.

Folktales still have a strong hold in the life of the Zeliangruangs and their stories are deeply rooted in the psyche of the people. They control the thoughts and attitudes of the people. Education, exposure to scientific theories or Christianity has not been able to uproot the innate beliefs of the people. They function at more than a merely explanatory level since they envelop the lives of the people and affect their daily doings depending on the extent of each individual's acceptance of their true value.

My research is on Folk oral literature of the Zeliangruang. The Zeliangruang culture has rich folklores and legends, but unfortunately those outside the community have not been able to enjoy them. The oral tradition of the Zeliangruang has played a unique role in the life of the people. The tradition of its culture was preserved by oral means, for the art of writing was completely unknown to the ancient Zeliangruang community. Now that the people are exposed to modernity and Christianity, anything that has to do with the ancient or before the coming of Christianity is considered to be of no consequence whatsoever, and discarded, for it is considered to be of pagan origin. As a consequence, the oral literature of the community is dying out. In order

to retain its unique identity, the community must keep in touch with its roots and its literature, even if it only be in the form of oral narratives.

The tribals including the Zeliangruang, are viewed by the outside world as having no specific mind of their own. They are believed to be steeped in superstition, which are thought to be the deciding factors for all their actions. Only through an intimate study and understanding of the folklores, will we be able to erase such notions, which are untrue. The tribes have their own values and their own system of justice. The Zeliangruangs too have their own distinctive body of customs and norms of life. They are governed by a collective mind. To understand the mind of the people and how it works, we need to first understand what factors and beliefs constitute it. In order to do this, what better place than in their oral literature.

Chapter - 2

*Folk Stories & Songs From The
Zeliangruangs*

ATHAMPU AND THE NSIANG TREE

" Today is a taboo day⁶. No one is allowed to cross the village gate. No one is allowed to work today. All the villagers hear this and take heed", cried an elder from a small hillock to the villagers.

Athampu and his family took bath and his wife prepared rice cakes. The children could not wait for the cakes to be baked and crowded around the hearth.

The youngest child cried "give me a small piece." The child with its small hand tugged at the mother's pheisoi.

"Akhang ni, Akhang ni. For me too, for me too ! ", cried the other children in unison. All of them eagerly looked at the cakes.

" Here. Eat these little pieces and wait. Before its prepared, you will eat it all up!" said the mother, giving a little to each child to taste. All this while Athampu was lazing on a rock outside the house, basking in the sun.

When the cakes were done, one of his children came out and announced, " Apaou, come and eat. The cake is ready." And he rushed

⁶ Taboo day or Nei Tingmik or Genna is a day when everyone must stay at home and not do any work outside the village.

back without getting an answer from his father, eager to eat. After waiting for some time when Athampu did not come in his wife came out to call him. "Come in. The cake is ready. It's getting cold." "On days like today, I don't eat food cooked by a woman. Eat all of it."

" Hah! What's wrong with you? Any way I'll leave some for you in the iron pot by the fire," replied his wife and went inside the house. She knew him very well. He would eat later when no one was around.

That night when everybody had gone to sleep, Athampu stealthily got up and went to the kitchen. He looked around. "Good. There's no one". He could not sleep. He was very hungry and the sweet aroma of the rice cake he had smelt during the day could not be shaken off easily. He quietly took the iron pot and went out to the backyard of his house. He sat down and started eating one cake after the other. In no time he finished everything. It was so tasty.

"I must lick the remains from inside the pot. No one will see me."

When he tried to pull out his head from the pot, to his horror, he could not, try as he might. He frantically turned this way and that trying to free himself, when he lost his step and fell down and started rolling. Luckily for him he dashed against a Nsiang tree and that freed him. He was grateful to the tree.

"Nsiang tree, tell me what you want. I'll give you anything you want. Thank you for saving my life. What, you are modest. You are not saying anything. Tomorrow I'll cook the biggest rooster and give it to you. Thank you. Now, good night," so promised Athampu and went home.

In the morning he refused to get up. His wife came in. "What is this I see? Why are you covering your head?"

"I am not well. You all go to the paddy field. I will look after the house," mumbled Athampu from under the sheets. His wife did not insist he get up, for she had discovered all the cakes gone and thought, "He must be feeling embarrassed for eating the cakes," But actually he was bruised all over from his previous night's escapade. His wife and children all left for the paddy field.

Some time later, when he was sure there was nobody at home, he got up. Whistling a tune he went to the chicken coop, "Chiu, chiu, come here, chiu, chiu come here", cooed Athampu at the chickens, throwing some rice around. He selected the biggest rooster and cooked it. Then he took the pot and went to the Nsiang tree.

"Look what I brought for you. You think I will not keep my promise? See I have cooked the biggest rooster as I have promised. Which part do you like?" Athampu asked the tree. There was silence.

"Which part shall I give you? Ah, you are shy. Would you like this?" And then Athampu placed a piece at the foot of the tree. Getting no reply he asked again, "Or would you like this? Or this?" and he placed one piece after another till all the curry was before the tree. Now there were no pieces left in the pot, only the gravy. So he finally said, "All right you want the gravy too?" There was only silence on the part of the tree. "Here I'll pour everything out for you. I am not a stingy guy. After all you saved my life. Eat all you want."

Athampu poured every thing out and returned home. In the evening, returning home, the wife noticed that the biggest rooster was missing. She inquired of her husband, "One who stayed back home, where has the rooster gone? Did the fox or something come?"

"Oh that. You women have sharp eyes. I have cooked it for my friend. He ate everything up. Sorry there's nothing left for us."

"In that case, its alright then. He should eat to his fill,"⁷ said his wife, without realising that her husband's friend was but only an Nsiang tree!

⁷ It is customary to give the choicest parts of the chicken to a guest. A guest will eat the parts he likes most and the left over will be eaten by the family of the host. Even if he has eaten only a little, it is polite of the guest to say that he has eaten so much there must be nothing left for the family. Then the family members will say that there is so much left over there will be enough even for the next day. It is also customary that the guests leave a little rice and curry on the plate to indicate that they have eaten so much that they cannot finish even that little extra bit on their plate

ATHAMPU AND THE TIGER

One evening Athampu was returning home with his Mithun from the grazing grounds. Before they could make it home, it was already dark and so he thought of spending the night atop a tree.

" Hey Mithun, get up on the tree. We'll spend the night there ", said Athampu to his Mithun and slapped hard on its rump. All he got for a reply was a mooing.

"You have four legs and can't even climb a tree? Well in that case you may spend the night down here. I am going to spend the night up on the trees, safe from the wild animals," so said Athampu and climbed the tree.

In the middle of the night a tiger came prowling. Athampu looked down and called out, " Who goes there? Whose dog are you? Did your master not give you anything to eat?"

The tiger was startled. " Who would call a tiger a dog?" May be it was a monster. It got frightened and dashed into the jungle never to be heard of again.

ATHAMPU AND BITTER CURRY

There was once a festival in Athampu's village. All the villagers celebrated it in great spirit eating and drinking. A variety of mouth watering dishes were prepared. There was a dish Athampu particularly liked very much. He asked the langdi-meinun, the chefs for the day, "How do you prepare this dish?" The langdimei, just to tease him, told him, "just before a cow defecates, put in your hand in the cow's anus and take a little of the dung and put it in the curry."

"That easy?" asked Athampu with an incredulous look on his face.

"Yes. Try it," chorused the langdimeinun

Athampu, the simpleton that he was, believed what he was told. So the next week he thought he would cook the dish he had liked so much. He went out and waited behind a cow. He waited for a long while before the cow defecated. After a long wait the cow began to strain. Quickly Athampu thrust his hand inside the cow's anus. Startled, the cow's anus suddenly closed and started to run with Athampu's hand inside! Athampu did not know what to do and cried out to his wife for help.

"Athampui, help me, help me!"

There was a huge wood pile on Athampu's path.

His wife shouted back, "Athampu le, thingmui jam tio, catch hold of the wood! "

"Athampui le, jam tang lak 'ge , I cannot reach it !" replied Athampu.

"Athampu le, thingmui jam tio !"

Athampui le, jam tang lak ge !" shouted back Athampu and went flying past the house, behind the cow.

ATHAMPU AND THE THORN

One day Athampu went to his paddy field. After he had taken his midday lunch, his lungdak, he was disturbed by a bug flying above his head. He suddenly remembered his wife telling him, "Bring something for your children, even if its only an insect,...." So he started chasing the bug. He fixed his eye only on the bug and didn't see where he was going. He chased through the bushes and rocky patches. Suddenly his feet touched thin air and down he went crashing to the bottom of a steep hill.

He did not know for how long he had lain on top of the rock. His dao was some distance away from him. While he had been lying in a semi-conscious state a wind had started to blow. The wind was chilly. When he touched his ears, it was ice cold so he thought he must be dead from the fall and he started to cry. Nearby, a thorny bush was also swaying in the wind. One branch blew across him and scratched his ear sharply, drawing blood. He sat up in pain and realised he was not dead !

"My ear feels hot. I am alive! This must be a miracle thorn. I'll cut a branch of this bush and take home for further use", thought Athampu.

When he reached home, he proudly showed it to his wife and said," Look what I brought home. This is a branch that could raise the dead. I was dead but this branch brought me back to life. If there is any one who

would like to be brought back to life, get in touch with me". He then went into his house to hide his new found tool.

The harvest season came and went. Everybody in the village could now do with some rest. They visited each other and chatted for long hours and indulged in leisure activities. One afternoon two youths from the neighbouring village came looking for Athampu.

When they met Athampu, they said, "We come from the next village. We have a villager who is dying. Please come with us and bring him back to life. He must have surely died while we were on the way".

" You have come to the right man. Only I know how to raise the dead. I'll take my tool". So Athampu put the thorny branch in his siampai⁸ and left for the next village.

When they reached the sick man's house there were many people. He could hear someone crying. He cleared everybody from the room of the sick man, closed the door and began his work. He scratched hard on the man's ears. Blood trickled down to the floor. The man was so much in pain, he sat up on his bed and cried. Actually it was from not eating anything the man had become very weak and had lost consciousness. But now he was rudely brought back to consciousness by the pain.

⁸ A basket made of cane for the menfolk.

Athampu called the people he had shoed outside to come in and see for themselves that the man has been brought back to life.

Seeing the man sitting up on his bed, the people were very happy. The relatives of the man were so grateful they presented Athampu a big Mithun. Athampu went home with a song in his heart.

ATHAMPU AND THE BASKET OF SALT

Salt was a very valuable commodity in the olden days. People traveled for days on end to get it. So they were stored in safe, secret places with utmost care. This is the story of Athampu and his foolish attempts to keep his family's basket of salt safe from thieves and robbers.

Athampu and his family lived in a certain village with his many children. One day his wife called out to Athampu and informed him, " we have no more salt. You must go and get salt for our family. You barter for it with some of these clothes." She packed some clothes and handed it to him, along with his napduam, to eat on the way.

So, off he went on his mission. After some weeks he returned home with a big basket of salt. All his children and wife came out to greet him..

" Look, look apu has come back ! " yelled the first-born to the other siblings. His hair was all matted together and his pants were held up by a rope.

⁹ Salt was very valuable, since the people lived in areas very far from the sea shores. They had to go to distant places for days to get it. A person having a lot of salt was considered to be a rich man. Salt was so expensive it was even exchanged for people. People so exchanged had to serve out the family for years to pay back the price of the salt borrowed.

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" And he has brought back a basket of salt ! " cried another as he ran out.

" Today we will have salt with rice. I am already hungry ". cried the little girl , at which every body smiled. Everybody was in a festive mood. All the family members had a sumptuous meal that evening.

That night, Athampu and his wife talked far into the night about the basket of salt. His wife finally said, " You must go out tomorrow early in the morning and hide the basket where no one else can find it. You must hide it in a dark, cool place ".

" Yes, yes. I am also thinking on the same lines. Now stop talking. I have to think of the right place to hide it".

" You have to do it soon ".

" As you have suggested , I will go out tomorrow and hide it well," replied Athampu.

The next morning, his wife and the older children left for the paddy field at the first light of dawn. Athampu got up, wrapped the basket of salt with a cloth, lest his neighbours saw and went out to hide it. He took great pains not to be seen, taking the most unbeaten track to the outskirts of the village. He reached a banyan like tree and climbed to the

top and hung his precious basket. He then climbed down and looked up to make sure it was not easily seen.

"Well it should be there, near that thick foliage... yes, it's there. It took some time even for me to locate it. Other people will never know ", thought Athampu. Then it suddenly hit him, " Wait a minute. What if the birds and ants find it? They will eat up all the salt! I can never let that happen." So up he went again and brought down the basket. He went a little farther into the jungle and chanced upon dark cave.

"Oh great. How lucky for me to find this cave. Nobody knows of this place. This will be the hiding place for my basket of salt. This is the safest place. I won't be able to find it myself," thought Athampu, peering inside the dark cave. So he went inside and placed his treasure in the darkest corner of the cave: He was very happy with what he had done and with a smile on his face went towards his house. On the way he again thought of the hiding place and the possibilities of it being found or of being eaten by some animals. Then he stopped abruptly and rushed back to the cave. He was scolding himself, "How stupid could one be. Why didn't I realise it before? Of course the rats ! They love dark places and will eat up all the salt!". He then picked up his basket and walked out of the cave.

He wandered around for some time and finally came to a stream. By now he was tired and so rested for some time. He started looking

around him. His eyes rested on a nook of the stream where there were many boulders of rocks. The water was still and deep. So he thought that this was the best place to hide his basket of salt. He placed the basket on his head so as not to wet it and waded into the water to that particular corner he had spotted earlier. When he reached it he slowly lowered the basket of salt into the water and lodged it firmly near a big rock.

" There. It will be safe now. No cunning rats, birds or any other animals or humans will be able to spot that. Now my mind will find peace", said Athampu to himself and went home, very pleased. By then it was almost sunset and the rest of his family members had returned home from the fields. His wife asked Athampu, " where have you hidden our basket? Were you able to find a safe place to hide it ?.

" Yes. Nobody will be able to find it ." Athampu again thought about the hiding place and smiled.

" Tell me, where is it ?"

" It's a secret ".

"Tell me. I am your wife", insisted his wife.

" You women cannot be trusted. You people talk too much. If I tell you it won't be a secret any more", replied Athampu. So the wife was a

little put off for the moment but was pleased Athampu could keep a secret and she surmised the hiding place must be very safe. Many months went by and the festival season was approaching. One fine day the wife said, "Athampu, Go and fetch our basket of salt. We have many rituals to perform and the celebrations are coming closer. And also only a little of salt is left at home".

"All right. Bring me my dao"¹⁰

When Athampu reached the stream, he waded to the spot where he had hidden his basket of salt. He reached down under the water and brought out the basket. He peered inside to make sure the salt was still there. He was horrified when he saw what was inside or at what was not! He exclaimed in great anger and shock, "Bui Sumeituang! What is this! You little shrimp. You have eaten up all my salt. Now I will punish you by eating you!" The foolish Athampu did not realise that all his salt had dissolved in the water!

The still furious Athampu reached home. Only his eldest daughter was home. He called her and said, "Here, with this shrimp cook a 'gan huaigan'¹¹, we will all eat it".

¹⁰ Dao is a curved knife with broad head and with beautifully made handle and owned by every male member of a family.

¹¹ 'Gan huai gan' is a typical curry of the people made of pounded rice which is cooked into a fine paste, along with meat and many ingredients. It's a very tasty preparation. But only with one tiny shrimp, its not going to be tasty. That too without salt!

When he returned home, the wife started preparing for the evening meal. Athampu informed her, "Wash and take rest. We have already prepared the meal. You only have to sit down and enjoy the food." His wife thought, "Since he has brought home the basket of salt, he must have prepared chicken. Oh well. This is a special occasion."

Then when all have gathered for the meal, Athampu announced, "Listen, all of you. If you happen to have the shrimp, then pass it on to me. Now you can start eating."

A little later one of his younger sons called out, "Look, look, here's the tiny shrimp. I found it," and he popped it into his mouth.

At that, Athampu jumped up and went to his son. He caught hold of him and forced open his son's mouth and took out the tiny shrimp, and said, "Since this shrimp is the thief who has eaten all my salt, I must eat it. This will be the punishment for the shrimp. Look how red it is. It is ashamed for having eaten all that salt by itself." And Athampu ate the shrimp while his whole family watched him.

ATHAMPU'S MISADVENTURE

Athampu, the simpleton, was now known far and wide for his power of bringing back the dead to life. He was respected by his villagers.

One evening someone came looking for Athampu. The stranger on meeting him said, "Apou, I come from the village which is two days journey away. A man is dead there. We have heard about your powers and have come to ask your help".

"I am only willing to help (may be I will get another Mithun) You sit and enjoy the tea while I get ready." said Athampu filled with self satisfaction and swelling over with pride.

Athampu went inside the hut. He put his thorny branch inside his siampai and with the stranger from the next village started out on their journey.

After two days, late in the afternoon they reached the village of the dead man. The villagers were eagerly waiting for them. One of the village elders said."Oh, have you come?"

" Please sit down and have tea first. You must be tired after your journey," said the host of the house.

"Let me attend to your son. That is my mission. Take me to him."

"Well, if you insist. Come this way. He lies in this room¹²," the host said and led Athampu to the room where the body was. There were many relatives also inside the room.¹³

As soon as Athampu entered the room he requested them, "All of you must go out for some time. I have to be alone with him. I cannot perform my task well in front of other people." Athampu spoke like a man full of confidence with a serious look on his face.

All the people quietened and left. Now he was all alone with the body. He took out the thorny branch and scratched the dead man's left ear. Nothing happened. He scratched again. Still nothing. Then he went to the right side and scratched the right ear. Nothing happened. He scratched again in exasperation but still nothing happened. By now the dead man's ears were in shreds. A long time had elapsed so those who were waiting outside got impatient and started knocking on the door. Some of them enquired,

"What's taking you so long?"

¹² It is customary for the people to visit the seriously ill. There would be visitors round the clock. They would come to visit bringing along with them rice, tea leaves, vegetables, sugar etc. When some one is about to die, all those who hear the news would come to pay their regards and to sympathise with the family members.

¹³ The dead body is not taken out in the open but kept inside the room after he / she has died. The body is taken out only at the time of burial.

"Is everything alright ?" asked another.

Some banged on the door and shouted, "Open up ! Open up !"

At last Athampu opened the door and stormed out angrily.

"Your son does not want to get up".

"But why should he? He's dead!" said the host's wife.

" I have tried my best. He must have something to hide. He is very disobedient. He is ashamed to see you. Just let him be. Don't wake him up, " Athampu shouted to the parents. While they were in a confused state of mind, he made good his escape.

Athampu reached his village after two days of gruelling journey, without a mithun. His wife and the villagers were sorely disappointed. But something worse awaited him. His mithun had not returned since the last two days. It could not be found and he came to the conclusion that the neighbouring villagers must have stolen it.

One night he woke up his wife. " Get up, get up, I have to leave in the night to go look for our Mithun. I will check every stable in the neighbouring villages. Prepare for me my lunch packet."

Athampu with his lunch packet reached the next village in the middle of the night. A tiger was lurking in the village and sensed a human right away. A baby was crying in a house nearby. The parents

tried to calm the baby but it did not stop crying. Then the parents out of exasperation said, " Tuanro is waiting outside the house to take away crying babies. Stop crying. Aren't you afraid?" The baby stopped crying immediately as if it understood.

The tiger crouching outside thought that the man must be called Tuanro, a strong one. Athampu, in the meantime thought that the dark shape near the bush must be his lost Mithun and he lunged forward to catch it. The tiger was too terrified to make a move . Athampu took out the Guairiang and tied the tiger without realising what it was. He then pulled the rope and started walking. The tiger, too frightened to make a dash to free itself, followed meekly behind. By now the moon came out and lighted their path. Athampu's dao glittered in the moonlight. The tiger licked it and instantly blood oozed out profusely. The tiger thought that this Tuanro's body must be full of sharp spikes and was even more terrified.

They walked on and on till it was early dawn. They now approached the river of Athampu's village. Before crossing the river, Athampu stopped to have a drink and also wanted his Mithun to do likewise. Without turning his head, he commanded, " Drink up, from now on its going to be a steep climb," and then turned around. He saw a huge tiger tied to his rope and standing close to him. In shock and terror Athampu screamed at the top of his lungs which in turn startled the tiger. The tiger made a dash into the nearest thicket. The horrified Athampu also ran all the way home.

ASO and MISARUNG

GUPUIBUNG

One day Aso and Misarung decided to go fishing in the Barak river. They met an old lady and brought her home and treated her as their own mother. They had not caught any fish and had vegetable soup for dinner. The old lady love them well as her own. She sometimes was hard to understand though . She told them to do some strange things without explaining why.

Next year at the time of cultivation their adopted mother forbade Aso and Misarung to throw stones in the southern direction of their paddy field. Aso did not think twice about it and went about doing his work. But Misurang was a simpleton, a curious one at that and he wanted to find out what would happen if he did what the old woman told him not to do. So one day, he went by himself and threw stones in the southern direction. Suddenly, there was an uproar and out came a mad god called " chirabuan ". He came rushing towards Misarung and challenged him to a duel. There ensued a fight and Misarung mauled the mad god badly. The mad god begged for mercy and offered to give up his special pearls called " Gupuibung ". If this gupuibung, a kind of small round thing like a marble or pearl , is swallowed he would never

feel hungry again. As soon as Misarung got hold of it, he swallowed it and was never hungry again.

The change in Misarung could not but be noticed by his friend Aso. However, even after much cajoling, Misarung would not divulge his secret. Aso, shy as usual, thought of a plan to trick Misarung to find out his secret. One evening, it was getting dark inside the room. Aso placed a slippery vine, Luikhum Nui, on the door step. When Misarung returned home, unsuspecting of what lay in wait for him stepped inside the door and fell down instantly with a loud thud. And out fell the gupuibung from his mouth. Seeing this, Aso shouted, " Hey ! So this is your secret ! How long do you think you can hide it ? you selfish little wretch of a friend. Ah ! what kind of a friend indeed. Never share anything with me. Give me that".

" It's me who fought for it, I am going to keep it for my self. I risked my life for it. I always share my things with you. But this, I won't . If you want to have yours, go fight the demon yourself, retorted Misarung, moving away from Aso who was trying to snatch the "Gupuibung " from him .

Thus there ensued a heated quarrel between the two friends when at last the " mother " had to intervene. She decided to break the pearl into two and give half the pearl to each of them. But as soon as she split the pearl on a mortar it broke into two, " plink " and one half flew away to the north and other half to the south never to be found again. So in their foolishness and greed, both lost a very rare treasure.

ASO AND MICHARUNG

REARING A COW

Once upon a time there lived two brothers called Aso and Micharung. Aso was the elder brother and he was very clever, while the younger brother Micharung was a simpleton. One day they decided to own a cow together. So they bought a cow from the market and brought it home. Now that they have a cow, there was this question of who will look after the cow.

So Aso asked Micharung his brother, which portion of the cow he will tend to either the head or the rear end. Micharung said the rear end, for he thought that getting to feed for the cow was hard work and involved money. It came to pass that they agreed on it and Aso feeds the cow while his brother cleans the cow dung. More than nine months passed this way, when one day Micharung seeing that his brother just comes and feeds the cow and goes away, thought it to be an easy job and that he had been given the hard part. So he asked Aso to change duties, to which Aso agreed. Micharung was very happy with his new position of feeding the cow. Only he was not aware that the cow was about to give birth to a calf.

One day, when the calf finally arrived, Aso claimed that since it came from the rear side it is his alone and the milk also is his. Micharung could not say anything. Aso enjoyed the milk to his satisfaction.

ASO AND MICHARUNG

RADAUPI'S DRUMSTICKS

One day , Aso wanted to have a feast. He needed drumsticks to add to the meal he was going to prepare for the feast. Down the road, at the end of the village lived a " Radaupui " and her brood (a kind of poltergeist) . In her garden there were plenty of drumsticks but if Aso asked her for it he would be obliged to give her some of the meat in return. He was not willing to do that. So in the middle of the night when the wind was blowing, he cut the drumsticks and carried it home. With it he prepared a very tasty dish and had a great feast with his family and neighbours.

Micharung also wanted to perform the same feast for his family and neighbours. When he asked Aso how he got the drumsticks from the " Radaupui ", Aso told him he gave some meat to her. Micharung the simpleton, believed him and went and asked Radaupui if she could give him some of her drumsticks in exchange for some meat. At which she agreed on one condition, that she be invited to the feast. Micharung agreed and took as much as he could carry. On the day of the feast, the Radaupui came and ate half of the food, after which he told Micharung to go fetch her little darlings to partake of the meal. So Micharung went to her house and called the little ones to come out from under the bed.

But all they could say was "Bung-Bung Baa-Baa" and not budge from their hiding place. Whenever Micharung called out to them, they would say "Bung-Bung Baa Baa ". After a long time Micharung got angry and killed them all. He was afraid to go back to his house and he fled the village to live in another one.

THE FOOLISH MASTER

In the days when man and animal lived together, there lived a widower in a village who lived with a dog and a pig. During the night the man slept on the bed while the animals slept around the hearth. The man was the master of the other two and ordered them around.

The man cut down the trees of the forest and burnt them, clearing a patch for his jhum. When his part of the work was done, the man now called the dog and the pig.

"Both of you must go to the jhum in the morning and plough the field. You must work hard and finish it tomorrow itself."

"But master, one day is too little a time. We need atleast two days to do the job thoroughly," protested the pig. At which the dog pitched in, "Yes".

"You lazy oafs," roared the master. The animals meekly turned away and went about doing their odd jobs in the house.

The next day the dog and the pig left for the field. As soon as they reached the field the dog headed straight for the 'laupo'¹⁴ to rest. The pig

¹⁴ In all the jhums there are one or more loupo, which is a make shift hut. Sometimes the farmers have to spend the night on their fields to look out for wild animals that destroy their fields. The paddy fields are too far from the village for the farmers to move to and fro every day in the busy seasons of weeding and harvesting. So they have provisions stored in hut for the duration of their stay.

called out, "Dog, you had better come back. We must start work early so as to finish in time".

" I am tired. I must rest for a while. Work if you must," shot back the dog. The loyal pig started his work right away and forgot all about the dog. In the meanwhile the dog had fallen fast asleep inside the hut. Early in the afternoon the pig stopped to take his lunch and entered the jhum hut. To his great consternation he found the dog still sleeping.

"Hey! You. Get up. I haven't taken even a short rest all this time and look at you sleeping away half the day. Get up. You must also work," shouted the pig angrily, his face and body all pink from working hard in the sun and also because of his anger.

Without even making the effort to sit up the dog retorted with a sneer, "Apuilai,¹⁵ you are as foolish as your father and your grand fathers before you. You work and I will be given the praise for it. Just you wait and see!" Then he went back to his dog's dreams.

The sun was beginning to set in the distant horizon and the pig had by now finished his work. He returned to the hut to collect his things. The dog with a sly smile on his face announced, "You will see how smart I am once we get home". Tired and fed up of the dog's haughtiness,

¹⁵ Apuilai is an expression of exclamation. It can also be used when we want to put down someone.

the pig turned his back on the dog and went home. As soon as the pig left for home, the dog rushed towards the field. He ran this way and that up and down, criss-crossing the entire length and breadth of the field covering it with his footprints. He continued till the paw marks of the pig was completely replaced with his own.

In the mean while the pig had just reached home. "Where is the dog?," enquired the master on seeing only the pig.

"The lazy dog slept through the day and he's still sleeping."

"Didn't he do any work?"

"No. Not only was he lazy he called me names and insulted my forefathers."

Both the master and the pig turned at the sound of heavy breathing. They saw the dog with his tongue hanging out from exhaustion and looking up with a weary face.

"Why did you come so late? What did you do during the day?," asked the master, a bit surprised to see him so tired.

"I had to finish ploughing the field before sun down."

"But the pig said you did not do any work!"

"Ah! you believed him, didn't you? He did nothing but laze around the whole day!"

"That's not what he said," the master now said, a bit confused as to whose word he should believe. The cunning dog then slowly said in a tired voice, as if he really did not care, "Let me just rest and have some water. It does not matter who did the work. The work was done. That's what matters. I am overcome with hunger. You will see for yourself when you go to the paddy field tomorrow." He then turned into the house looking very hurt and dejected. All this while the pig was a silent on-looker. He was too numb and shocked by the dog's behaviour to defend himself. He did not sleep the whole night, wondering what the dog was up to. The dog seemed to know what he was doing. "What has he done in the field to convince the master that it was him who did the work?" Think as he might he could not figure it out.

The next morning the master commanded the animals to stay home while he went to inspect the field. When he reached the field he was very angry to find only the foot prints of the dog. As soon as he returned he called the dog and the pig. "I have seen it all for myself. There is no denying that the dog has done all the work...."

"But, its me..." interrupted the pig.

"Not butts, you lazy pig. There was only the dogs foot prints and none of yours in the field!", cried the master angrily.

"So that's how I've been cheated!", said the pig. The foolish master did not realise what had taken place. He declared, "Since you (pig) have cheated me and lied to me, from now on you will sleep in the sty and eat unhusked paddy. Stale food will be good enough for you". Then he turned to the dog and lovingly said, "I have seen your foot prints in the field. You have done a good work. You have been faithful. From now on you will eat what I eat and will go wherever I go."

So this is how the dog has come to be man's best friend.

THE MAN AND THE TIGER

Once upon a time there lived a tiger, who was the king of the jungle. He made friends with a man called Haeumeipu. One day the tiger asked his friend, " Haeumeipu , I would like to invite you to come to my home."

" Alright, I will come alone if you say so " when the two came close to the tiger's home, Haeumeipu was asked to hide. " Haeumeipu, you go behind that bush and hide, for the other tigers may want to eat you ".

" Oh king tiger, what did you bring home with you today ? asked the other tigers.

" I brought along with me Haeumeipu, but beware, he came with a terrible creature called ' toti "'.

" We are not afraid. "The tigers eagerly started looking for the man, wanting to eat him. They could smell him so close. Haeumeipu looked around for escape route and saw a dried empty gourd," Mubung" and picking it up blew air into it, producing a sound " To.....tee tooo. teee.." On hearing this, the tigers ran away. The king tiger was impressed with his friend's presence of mind.

One day they went into the jungle to collect fruits . " Haeumeipu, you climb up the tree and pick the fruits."

" What will you do ?."

" I will collect the fruits and put all of it inside the bamboo."

" Well, give me a push."

" Pluck all you want, but do not pluck the biggest one in the middle, " warned the tiger.

" Why ? "

" Just do as I say and no harm will come to you ". After plucking a lot of fruits from the tree, Haeumeipu was curious what would happen if he plucked the fruit, and as soon as he did so, he cried out, " Ouch ! Ouch ! . the whole tree has turned into thorns ! "

" I told you so ! you are lucky you are not dead. Put the fruit quickly in its place again." As soon as he did so the whole tree became normal again. He climbed down all shaken up but without any bruises.

The tiger collected the fruits and put them all inside a hollow piece of bamboo. Haeumeipu was amazed to see that but did not ask the tiger how he managed to put so many fruits into such a small piece of bamboo. He was asked to carry the bamboo. After walking a distance he pretended to fall, making all the fruits spill out. The tiger put it all back into the container. He did it so expertly with deft hands that Haeumeipu

missed the trick. Haeumeipu did it again and this time he learned how to do it.

The tiger and Haeumeipu lived together happily for a few years. Normally when they went hunting it was the tiger who killed the prey. Once Haeumeipu was asked to do the killing. He felt ashamed to say that he did not know how to. After a chase the tiger found out that his friend had not killed any animals. "You have not killed anything. It is time you did. "

" Yes. It is time. I threw my spear at an animal. I am not sure whether I killed it or not. I am unable to trace my spear."

" Let's look for it together ."

" No, No, its no problem. I will look for it myself."

After some searching, the tiger exclaimed, " Ah ! here it is lodged in the cleft of a rock. I will pull it out," but the tiger could not pull out the spear. He thought to himself that the man must indeed be very strong, Only he did not know that Haeumeipu had imbedded his spear into the cleft. The tiger felt scared to rebuke his friend.

Another day, the tiger dragged in a huge prey. "My friend tiger, let's eat roasted meat today." "That will be a change. Lets roast it and

eat." "We will need fire. Run towards the star in the western sky and get the fire."

Instantly the Tiger was off like the wind. He ran across hill after hill till he became exhausted and returned. In the meanwhile, Haeumeipu started a fire by rubbing two stones together. He hid the fire a little distance away. The tiger asked the man to go get the fire, for he was not able to. His friend went behind a hillock and came back with the fire. The Tiger thought, "How great the man is! I ran such a long distance but could not find it, while he found only in a very short time." They then enjoyed roasted meat. However, Haeumeipu got tired of the Tiger's company, having to share everything with him. So, he said, "Friend, open your mouth and close your eyes."

"For what?"

"Just do as I say."

"Okay."

And the Tiger opened wide his mouth. Haeumeipu threw a piece of hot coal into his friend's mouth. The Tiger screamed in pain and ran into his cave wild with anger but he could do nothing, for he was in great pain. The man took all the meat and went home.

For many days the Tiger nursed his wound inside the cave. One day a cat ambled by and asked him, "O King Tiger, how are you?"

"I am not all that well."

"What happened?"

"It's a long story," and he related all that had happened. The cat vowed to take revenge.

The cat went to the man's place. She planned to create a din while killing his chickens so he would come out of his home, thus giving her an opportunity to kill him. But Haeumeipu got wise to the plan and yelled out from inside his home, "Leave the place immediately. Otherwise I will throw poison at you and kill you." "Poison to kill me?" sneered the cat. So the man threw sticky and smelly paste made from some grains. The cat thought the husk that got stuck on him to be worms eating him alive. So he ran back to the Tiger in defeat.

A few days passed by and a cobra slithered by the cave of the Tiger. On hearing his tale of woe, he promised to take revenge. He planned to strike the man from above when he came out the door. This time too the man got wise to the cobra's plan. Haeumeipu placed chilly powder inside the hollow of a bamboo. When he saw the cobra coming towards his house he started talking to himself, "There is a mouse trapped inside the bamboo. I wish some cobra would come and eat it

up." On hearing this, the cobra could not resist the temptation of sumptuous meal, So he crawled inside the bamboo. As soon as he was inside, Haeumeipu blocked the open end of the bamboo and started shaking it vigorously. The shaking went on till the cobra could bear it no longer. "Haeumeipu, please stop the shaking. I am choking to my death."

"Choke and die, you evil cobra."

"Please have mercy on me. If you let me go, I will never come near your house again," So Haeumeipu let the cobra out. The cobra's eyes were blood red because of the chilly powder. This was how the cobra got its red eyes. The cobra went back to the tiger and reported its failure.

By now the Tiger's tongue was healed, as well as his fear. He decided to take revenge on Haeumeipu himself. He asked Haeumeipu which route he takes when he returns from the field.

"Aban lamming me, along lammeng me?" Asked the tiger, meaning " are you coming back through the valley or the hill ?." Haeumeipu replied , " through the valley ". And he returned home through the hill. So the Tiger, who laid in wait for him in the valley did not succeed in killing Haeumeipu. Like this it went on for a long time. One day the tiger hid in the way where Haeumeipu returned home carrying a big bundle of canes. The Tiger asked the man, " Why are ^{you} carrying the bundle of canes?"

"Don't you know that there is a war on? As my wife and children are not able to run to safety, I am going to tie them up in a safe place."

"Please don't leave me behind. I am your friend. Please tie me up also," begged the foolish Tiger.

"Find a tree big and strong enough to hold you."

"This tree is strong enough."

So Haeumeipu tightly tied the Tiger to the tree and severely beat the Tiger. The other animals who had been terrorised by the Tiger in the past also took part in the beating. Then they all left him to die.

Along came the cat after some time,

"Cat, cat, please untie me."

"Why should I?"

"Because we are of the same kind."

When the cat set the Tiger free, he tried to eat her. But she escaped and ran into the cave where she had hidden her chickens. The Tiger caught the tail of the cat which was outside the cave.

"Hey tiger, that's not my tail, but the root of the tree."

The Tiger let go of it and caught the root of the tree, thinking it to be the cat's tail. The cat then started eating the chicken noisily. The Tiger on hearing the noise asked, "Cat, what are you eating inside that made so much noise?"

"I am eating my own knee."

"Let me also eat my knee," thought the Tiger as he was very hungry. The foolish Tiger ate his own knee and from the wound, he died eventually.

ASO AND MICHARUNG:

THE PADDY FIELD

Aso and Micharung once owned a paddy field each. They worked day and night on their fields. When it was time to weed his field, Aso came to realise that his field was not as fertile as that of Micharung, so he requested Micharung to exchange their fields. Aso, as usual, was full of cunning and made elaborate plans to convince Micharung to agree to the exchange.

One sunny day, Aso called out, "Micharung, let's go and inspect our paddy fields."

"Okay, just give me a moment to take my axe and knife."

Then they left for their fields. When Micharung's field could be seen from a top a hillock, Aso suggested they rest there and inspect the field from afar. He did this so that the quality of the paddy he had sown did not show well. And when it was his turn he took Micharung directly to his field and made him bend down and look closely so he could not take notice of the quality of the paddy field as a whole. The plants looked healthy enough, so Micharung agreed to the exchange.

When the fields were harvested, Micharung realised that he had been had. His field yielded very little. He was very angry and swore to himself that he would take revenge. He wracked his brain to come up with a novel idea to cheat Aso, but he could not think of any plan. Finally, he hit upon a plan to get back at Aso.

So, after all the harvesting was above he placed his produce from the field on top of bales of straws. He then asked Aso, "would you like to exchange your produce with mine? Look how huge the mound is! This year I am favoured with a rich harvest, thanks to you."

"Oh, you don't have to be so generous with me, I am glad to have helped you. " So saying Aso made a closer inspection, just in case by some fluke of nature Micharung was really favoured with a rich harvest. But when he poked around with a stick he saw that beneath were straws. So he refused to agree to the exchange. Once again Aso had the better of Micharung.

LADDER TO THE MOON

There lived a rich man who had seven sons and seven daughters. In due course of time he married off the daughters and had seven sons-in-law. After each of the sons had taken for themselves a wife, the rich man had seven daughters-in-law. The villagers congratulated him and praised him. He became very proud.

The rich man now began to put on airs. He ordered the villagers around, " You do this work for me" or "go to such and such house and run errands for me."

" Such a pompous person. Who does he think he is ordering us around?" fumed the villagers but they could do nothing about it.

One day the rich man announced, "You are to start work tomorrow early in the morning. You will build a ladder which will reach the moon."

"But what are we going to eat? Building such a ladder will take years and years, " piped one thin man at the back of the crowd.

"Don't you know I am rich? I will provide the food while the work is going on. When the work is completed, I will climb to the moon and be the king there".

The helpless villagers started the work. The hard workers, the lazy ones, the poor ones, the thieves and the ones in between jobs all joined in the work. There was great commotion. It was like a celebration of some kind.

A few weeks into the work, a man on top of the ladder shouted to the ones below, " Pass me a rope".

" What? Say that again".

" A rope, a rope ! you deaf oafs. ' Adai ne'" came the hurled abuse from the ones on the top. One very hot tempered villager at the bottom cut off the rope that held the poles together. Down came the ladder. Most of the villagers working below were crushed to death. The lucky few who survived left the village for good.

To this day there are descendants of the survivors of that fateful day.

THE BOY WHO TURNED INTO A HORNBILL

Once upon a time there lived in a village a boy whose mother died when he was but a small child. After a few years his father married again. His step mother was a very beautiful woman. She used to love him before she had a son of her own. But after her own son was born, she neglected him and treated him cruelly. He worked from dawn till dusk like a slave in his own house. He never got enough food. Even the little he got was stale and mixed with rat's droppings. His father could do nothing for him as he was a henpecked husband. There was never even a word of comfort. The boy never complained about the hard work he was made to do or the lack of food. The stepmother for no apparent reason beat him severely now and then. At night he used to cry to sleep. He wished his mother had not left him so early. Whenever he saw the birds flying freely he used to cry out, "O happy birds, I wish I could fly too. Make me a tail and wings to fly away."

By now the boy had grown up to be a young man and he worked in the fields among other young people. When it was time for them to have lunch he went up on a raised platform to eat by himself. Usually everybody opened their lunch packet in front of others and share their food. But since the poor boy did not do so he was thought to be arrogant and proud by his male friends. But there was a girl who suspected his lunch must be very little for the boy used to finish eating quickly. One

day she secretly climbed up the raised platform to see what kind of food he was eating. She was appalled to see that it was not only stale without any curry but was mixed with rat's droppings! The boy was picking up the rice with the porcupine's quill. She quietly went away, feeling very saddened by what she saw. She did not tell any one for their friends would have asked him why. And he would have died of shame.

As time passed by the girl and the boy fell in love. Yet he would never tell her anything about himself. One day he asked her, "Would you do me a favour?"

"You know you only have to ask."

"Will you kindly give me one of your white shawls?

The one striped by a black line?"

"Yes I will, if you tell me why."

"If you love me, you would have given without asking why."

"Okay, Okay, I'll give you the shawl."

"Now that I know you really love me and care for me, I will tell you my life's story," said the boy and related to her every thing about himself. Then he tied the shawl around his shoulders and climbed up a very tall tree.

"What are you doing? Come back. You might fall," cried the girl after him. He paid no heed to her and climbed further still. Then he shouted back at her,

"Tell me my beloved, what do I look like?"

"You look very handsome to me. Come down."

He climbed some more and shouted back at her, "Tell me my beloved, what do I look like?"

"You look very handsome to me. Come down."

At that he climbed still further. Then he again shouted back at her

"Tell me my beloved, what do I look like?"

By now he has almost reached the top of the tree and with the white shawl around him he looked like a white bird. So the girl replied, "You look like a white bird, come back." Instead of climbing down he looked at her with tear-laden eyes and told her that as much as he loved her, they had no future together due to their unfortunate circumstances. It was impossible for them to marry. Then he bade her goodbye. "Be good and forget me. Marry a rich man who will love and cherish you. I promise I will come back and repay you for your kindness and love on your first child's victory festival. " So saying, he put a gourd in his mouth. He was suddenly transformed into a hornbill and flew away.

The girl grieved for her lost love for years. But as time passed she married a rich man of the village. Her eldest son got married and she had many grandchildren. Her eldest son one day celebrated "banrudungmei," the rich man's festival. On the festival day all the villagers were invited and they came in their best attires. The helpers, old and young, began to pound the rice to make beer to the rhythm of drumbeats. Every one sang and danced and ate. The feast was going full swing. Around midday, a flock of hornbills flew over the merry makers. After encircling the house two three times, one of them landed on the roof of the house.

Everyone looked at the big beautiful hornbill. But they did not know why it was there. Only one person knew why the hornbill visited them. It was the girl who once loved him in his human form. When the hostess of the celebration came out and saw him, the hornbill took off and was joined by the other hornbills. They flew over them once more and this time the one which had landed on the roof dropped one of its tail feathers. It landed right on top of the head of the eldest son. He looked very handsome in his new head decoration.¹⁶ On seeing this, the step mother asked the hornbill, "Who are you?" A voice from within the step - mother ordered her to close her eyes and open her mouth. And when she did, the hornbill sprayed its droppings into her mouth and

¹⁶From the time the hornbill dropped its tail feather for the son of the lady and decorated his head, the hornbill's feather is used to decorate the head of the male dancers.

broke her throat and she died.

In spite of what had happened to the step-mother, the villagers were happy and sang songs :

Kiu-maiyangpui tiangdiga

Rengdi Kiubung bamme,

Kiumainai runga sangkhe,

Rikhang kapang khangliu thiu makchiu,

Sai ha kam nachiu

Mailung makge.

(See the Hornbill pecking on the center pillar to make its nest

Let us sing and dance the whole night

For we may not last till tomorrow

It breaks our hearts to know that

The youths will be gone before their time.)

Till today the ~~people~~ believe that the beautiful colour of the hornbill is the colour of the shawl which was taken away by that unfortunate boy

from his beloved and also its beautiful beak is that of the Gourd, "Mubung."

There is also a dance called 'Rangdai-lam' that (Hornbill's dance) commemorates the dance of the hornbills as they flew over the house of the lady who once loved the poor boy. In this dance the male dancers put hornbill feathers on their head as a reminder of that incident.

THE WOMAN AND THE DEMONESS

(MEICHANGLU AND CHAGAIMEIPUI)

There once lived in a village a " Meichanglu", and a "Chagaimepui", a woman and a demoness. They were neighbours. The Chagaimepui lived in the guise of a human being, so nobody suspected any thing. But since she had strange likings for some kind of food and some strange ways, everybody avoided her. She and her woman neighbour had a daughter each. While the child of the woman was beautiful and fair, the child of the demoness was dark and ugly.

One day, after repeated requests from the demoness to go with her and search for crabs in the paddy field for their daughters, the woman agreed. In the field the woman earnestly searched for the crabs and filled her " Kampha".¹⁷ When her " Kampha " was full, she called out to the demoness and asked if they could return home. The demoness replied, "Not yet, Not yet. Just one more crab for my beautiful daughters. " In fact she was not catching any crabs but snakes, which she put in her "Kampha". After some time the woman called out again, " Come let's return home. My daughter must be hungry and worried."

¹⁷ Kampha is a kind of a basket used as a basket for collecting crabs and snails.

" Not yet, not yet. Just one more crab for my beautiful daughter," replied the demoness. And she put in another snake in her " Kampha". After repeatedly calling out to her demoness friend, the woman really got ready to return home as the sun was setting between the mountains. Then the demoness agreed to go home with the woman.

As they hurried towards their homes, the demoness noticed a beautiful flower high up on a tree and she requested the woman to go up and get it for her.

"It is getting late and the sun is almost set. We have to reach home before sun down. Let us hurry home. I'll get you the flower another time," said the woman, who could climb trees.

" You have no heart. Don't you have a daughter of your own? If I could climb, I could easily get you that flower for your daughter."

At this the woman taking pity on the demoness, set her 'Kampha' down near a rock and climbed the tree. Seeing this opportunity, the demoness opened her kampha full of snakes and let them out on the tree to kill the woman. She took the 'Kampha' which was full of crabs and hurried home.

Seeing the demoness coming home, the beautiful daughter of the woman enquired, "Oh! Good mother, what has happened to my mother? Its getting dark and I have been waiting for her for a long time."

" Your greedy mother kept on searching for crabs even when her kampha was full, "replied the demoness and took out one crab and threw it to the girl, saying "shui, agampe na Khang," meaning "Here! For the daughter of the greedy woman."

Before the girl could take the crab, the demoness caught hold of her and poured boiling water over her and killed her. She and her daughter ate her to their fill.

In the meanwhile, by some miracle, the woman escaped the snakes and came home to find her daughter nowhere. She called and called but there was no sign of her anywhere. Finally with a heavy heart she went to the demoness' house to enquire about her daughter's whereabouts. The demoness pretended not to know and pretended to feel sorry for her. She gave her a bowl of curry saying it was the crab curry she had prepared. When the woman opened the bowl, she instantly knew that it was her daughter and heart-broken, she poured the whole content into her garden.

Days, weeks and months passed by and there was the most beautiful flower in the world in the spot where the curry was poured. The woman knew it to be her daughter in the form of a flower and guarded it day and night. The demoness was filled with rage and envy but she could do nothing about it. She thought, "Why should this woman, who is poor

and ugly, have the most beautiful flower in the world?" She also wanted to grow a flower like that but did not know how to.

One day it came to pass that the king of the land heard about the most beautiful flower and desired to have it. He sent his troops to ask the old and poor woman to give it to him. But the messenger along with the troops came back and reported that it was not to be plucked and given away for it was like a daughter to the old lady. The king was perplexed to hear about this. He thought of going there to see this wonder for himself.

On the day the king came to see the flower, the woman had gone to the field, leaving the flower unguarded. The demoness rushed out of her house on seeing the king and bowed to him.

"Your majesty! What can I do, your humble servant, Tell me." The king got down from his horse and requested to have a look at the most beautiful flower in the world. The scheming demoness thought of an idea and took the king to the flower, as if it was her own. When the king asked her to have it, she eagerly plucked it and presented it to him. The king was quite surprised for getting it quite easily. But all that matter was that he got the flower for himself.

Back in the palace, the king fell in love with the flower, for it was from a human being and at that a very beautiful one, too. So he put the flower near his bed. At night the flower turned into a very beautiful

woman, like a princess. So the next day he got married with her and all the kingdom rejoiced and told and retold about the amazing story, of how a flower turned into a beautiful lady. When the story reached the demoness and the woman, they knew exactly what might have happened.

The demoness rushed inside, killed her daughter, cooked her and poured the whole contents into her garden, thinking it also would grow into a beautiful flower. But alas! Out grew a very black and ugly flower. No body even wanted to look at it twice. In the meantime, the flower-turned-lady, now a queen, told the whole story to the king. So along with his retinue they went to the house of the woman. On seeing them, the woman rushed out and embraced her daughter with tears of joy. The demoness, knowing that her game was up, tried to escape but was too late, for the guards caught up with her and was put to death.

The woman, on the other hand was invited by the king to come and live in his palace. It was said that the flower princess was so fair and translucent that what she swallowed could be seen passing through her throat! She was the most beautiful queen the land had ever had. They lived happily ever after.

AMANG'S FEAST

A long long time ago there lived in a certain village a couple with their little daughter. Years passed by but they did not have any more children. They wanted to have a son, so they prayed to god to bless them with one. They continued with their prayers and offerings¹⁸ for a long time without getting any answer. They had almost given up hope when one night the husband had a dream. The one who called himself the great grandfather said in the dream, "I am satisfied with your prayers and offerings. Your prayer has been answered and soon your wife will give birth to a son." The father then woke up and nudged his wife "Wife, Wife. Wake up. I had a wonderful dream. We will soon have a son."¹⁹

"Ah! My, My! Apuilei, Apuilei! Husband. What did you say? A son? Are you sure? I am so happy. I can hardly wait to see my son. But wait! What shall we call him?"

We must think of a good name for God has given him to us." They thought hard about it and finally settled on the name "Amang" meaning 'my dream'

¹⁸ Before the Zelangrangs embraced Christianity, they paid homage to gods by sacrificing blood of the best animals and the best of the harvests. The sacrificial animals were first washed clean.

¹⁹ To have a son is considered a special blessing, couples having only daughters are ashamed to have their say in the community. The future is secured only with a son for the son will look after the parents in their old age. All the properties of the parents are also given to the youngest son.

In due course of time a healthy baby boy was born to them. The ecstatic parents did all they could to give him all the comforts. Amang grew up strong and fast. The father reveled in the thought that one day his son would succeed him and the bloodline would continue and his name would not be erased.

"I will not be now remembered as the one who was not able to sire a son. I will no longer be made fun of by my fellow villagers". This kind of thoughts would be upper most in his mind and it kept the father happy and secure. Whenever he went to work in the field he told his daughter to look after her brother well.

Thus a few years passed by and one day the father suddenly died, leaving little Amang, his daughter and their mother. The mother pined for her lost husband and died within the year itself. The children were orphaned and left to fend for themselves in the cruel wide world. But some benevolent elders of the village set aside a portion of their lands and cleared it for the orphans to cultivate crops.²⁰ But Amang and his sister had troubles, for the birds pecked the seeds as soon as they sowed them in the fields. So Amang would get up at the cock's first crow and go

²⁰ It is taught by the wise elders to love, have sympathy and to take pity on orphans but most often they are objects of ridicule and seen as parasites on society, for it is believed that they are the sign of god's displeasure with that family.

to the field and stay there till sunset, taking a break only to eat his meager napduam, the lunch packet his sister made for him. Gradually the healthy robust boy became weak and gaunt.

One day, as usual, Amang was tending to his chores in the field when he was overcome with exhaustion and hunger. He laid himself down on a rock to rest and waited for his sister to bring him his napduam. He fell asleep. In his dream his father came and said, "My son Amang, you will one day be the richest man in a village. Do as I say, take a strand of hair from your sister's head and set a trap in the field. A pigeon will get ensnared, cut open the dead pigeon and you will find grains of paddy in the bird's gizzard. Sow the paddy as seedlings in your field and all your problems will be over," so saying the father left. Soon after the boy got up and found his sister with his lunch packet, waiting for him to wake up.²¹ Amang related his dream to his sister and they decided to do as instructed.

Amang and his sister set the trap and exactly as their father had said, a pigeon was caught in the trap. Amang, filled with amazement opened the dead bird and lo and behold there were grains inside the bird. They took the grains and sowed the grains in the field. They waited anxiously for the seeds to sprout. To their surprise, instead of rice

²¹ Daughters in a family play a pivotal role in a household's welfare. It is believed that only with their blessings will a family be rich and prosperous. Their curses are said to be very effective.

plants, a tangle of gourd vines sprouted and covered the entire field. Amang and his sister did the normal weeding of the field, when it was harvesting time they plucked all the huge matured gourds and filled their barn with them. One day the sister accidentally broke one of the gourds. When she saw what spilled out from it, she screamed, " Aieh! Brother! Brother! Come quick and see what I have discovered. It's amazing! It's wonderful! Oh ! apuilei, apuilei ! Come immediately. You got to see this with your own eyes to believe. " There was such a lot of screaming and jumping that Amang was afraid something bad must have happened to his sister. But when he arrived at the scene, to his delight and surprise, he found grains of paddy spilled from the gourd. So with enthusiasm they broke all the gourds and soon their Saem, their barn, was filled with ripe paddy. In their zeal to finish the work they even forgot to eat. Now Amang became a very rich man in the village. He was now someone to be reckoned with.

Amang, his immediate need to work for food taken care of, now thought about other issues that needed to be taken care of. He thought that it was time to collect the "Rouman ", the price of bone, of his paternal aunts who were married off to other villages before he was born. He had two aunts and so he got ready to set out and visit their homes and ask the bone prices of his aunts. Amang packed cooked meat, rice and rice beer in his Siampai, his favourite basket, in preparation for his long journey. Having done that, he set out and finally reached the village

where his Kaneih alaumei, younger aunt, lived. Standing on the door step of his Kaneih's house, he cried out, " Hoy ! Akai kiu, mei bam dai ? Is there any body home ?"

" Who is out there ? " yelled a voice from inside the house.

" It is me, Amang. I come looking for my aunt."

" Amang, my brothers son, who was orphaned, died a long time ago. So you cannot be Amang. There is no other Amang". Replied the voice from inside. So sad and disappointed, Amang returned home with a heavy heart.

After a few weeks, Amang set out for the house of his older aunt. This time round, he had no meat to cook and at the same time he was afraid he might not be welcome there too. So, he took with him only cooked bones with little shreds of flesh on them. He also took along with him rice beer. These were to be given to his aunt's husband. Upon reaching the village he enquired for his aunt's house. When he finally found the house he called out, "Aeih, Akai kiu, mei bam dai? Is there anyone home?" Immediately a door opened and an elderly woman came out. "Come in, come in. Have a seat and have rice beer, " said the good lady of the house.

After he was seated, he told the lady that he was Amang, the son of her older brother. She was filled with joy to see him. It was still early

afternoon and her husband was yet to return from the fields. The aunt checked the siampai of her nephew and in it found the napduam of bones with little flesh on them. The rice beer was also very light. Her family was well to do and she feared that on seeing these, her husband might have a bad impression of Amang. So she threw them away and filled the siampai with well cooked meat and thick, well-brewed rice beer. After that, she sat down with Amang and they had a talk.

"Amang, my dear boy, what brought you here?" enquired his aunt.

"Tell it all to your aunt."

"My dear aunt, I am here to ask for your rouman".

"Well if that is the case, my husband, your 'nangpou' will offer you a Mithun or paddy or land or other valuable things as my rouman. You should not accept these things but ask for the rope that is used to tie the mithun, the 'guoichang riang'.

"But aunt, why should I ask for such an old rope when I could accept better things?"

"Don't be a fool. It is not an ordinary rope. When you cut it into tiny pieces and drop it into a lake of salt water where the mithuns drink, small grasshopper like insects will appear on the surface of the lake. These insects will continue to grow until they become big and strong Mithuns" explained his aunt.

"Oh this is just wonderful"

"But be careful how you go about your request. You have to bargain hard for it. Your uncle will not part with it all that easily," warned the aunt.

In the evening, the master of the house returned. His wife introduced Amang to him and when they were seated, she opened the siampai of her nephew and placed before her husband the meat and the rice beer. He ate it with relish and complimented Amang on their exquisite taste. Then they exchanged pleasantries before coming to the reason why Amang was visiting them, as was the ways of the people.

In the morning, after a fitful rest, Amang told his aunt's husband, 'Kapou', that he came for his aunt's rouman.

"Well then take a mithun as the rouman," offered his uncle.

"Apou, what will a poor orphan like me do with a mithun? If I own it, the villagers will laugh at me."

"In that case, it will be good for you if I give you a piece of land."

"Dear uncle, I will not be able to look after it for I have no one to help me."

"Then what will you have? What else can I offer you?" asked the uncle in exasperation.

"If you will be kind enough to an orphan, I would like to have the guaichang riang," Amang cleverly said. He further said that he would see the rope as a token of his uncle's love and respect for his wife's family. But his uncle would not part with the rope. Amang requested, demanded and did all sort of things but to no avail. So he finally threatened he would take his aunt back. Even at this his uncle would not concede to his wish.

So Amang informed his aunt that early next morning they must depart for his village. The aunt, on hearing that her husband had given Amang permission to take her back, got very angry and rushed out to confront her husband.

" I have been living with you for as many years as I can remember. I have looked after you, given you sons and daughters and bore the brunt of your mother's tongue. Now my beauty is gone, my strength and my youthfulness gone, and now after all these years of faithfulness, you want to send me back to my home. If your rope is more important to you than me, you are welcome to it. I will leave in the morning with my nephew." So saying, the aunt stormed back into her room. Her husband did not know what to say or do. That night he could not sleep a wink. He tossed and turned on his bed. He was in a dilemma. Finally, in the wee hours of the morning, he decided to part with his magic rope, for as important and precious as it might be to him, his wife was more precious

than the magic rope. So at the break of day he parted with the rope with a heavy heart. Amang and his aunt were elated with the outcome of things.

After the morning meal, Amang took leave of his aunt's family and tucking away the rope on his waistband, started for his village. His aunt saw him off till the 'raengkat,' the village gate. Then just before they parted, his aunt reminded him on what he must do, with care. As soon as he reached home, Amang cut up the rope into tiny pieces and dropped them in the lake in the outskirts of the village. Sure enough, many tiny insect-like creatures began to appear on the lake's surface. After a few weeks they grew as big as pigs and after a few months, they matured into huge mithuns and began to graze on the mountain-side.

Then Amang went off into the mountain and came back to his village, herding the Mithuns. Seeing this the villagers were wonder-struck. They ran helter-skelter as the big herd of guaichang trotted into the village. This scene was the talk of the village for many weeks. Everybody now knows who Amang is—the one who own lots of big Mithuns.²² He became very influential. Gone were the days of hunger and shame. He even took for himself a god's daughter called Singdonliu for his wife.

²² In those days wealth was indicated by the number of cattle and the amount of rice one possessed.

Amang one day declared that he would celebrate the rich man's festival. In this festival a huge house was usually built. Amang started work on the house and all the villagers pitched in. Many animals lost their lives for a just cause. Amang bore all the expenses. With great enthusiasm and vigour the villagers helped build the houses and in no time at all it was completed. Now Amang invited his aunts, all the villagers and all the creatures of the land.²³

For the great feast, all creatures, big and small began to groom and beautify themselves. Two friends, the rat and the bird, decided to do each other up for the big day when all would see them. The rat painstakingly groomed the bird's plumage and the long tail beautifully. It took a long time for the bird to make up the rat's tail. The countdown for the great celebration had begun. The beating drum began to sound louder and louder. The bird could stand the suspense no longer and in its impatience it carelessly rolled the tail of the rat making a very poor finish, making it look like a twig and flew off for the feast. The rat was so angry and from that day onwards the fast friends became enemies and are so even to this day. And also it is in this way that the rat got such an ugly tail.

All creatures of the land came for the grand feast with their gifts and the host began to give names to all the creatures. Amang's younger

²³ In those days creatures (animals and man) lived in congenial bliss. Animals could talk like the human beings.

aunt came as invited and she brought with her rice water instead of beer. The 'langdimei', the chefs for the day, poured out the liquid on the ground making rushing sound "diaau" and "buk,buk,buk" out of the jar. The cicada heard this sound and liked it. He asked Amang to name him "diaau-diaau-buk-buk." And it was so named.

By now all creatures had entered the house and taken their places one by one. The turn of the wild hare and the bad smelling skunk came and as they entered everybody began to say "shoos, shoos". The wild hare pointed a finger at his friend and said that it was his smell. The embarrassed skunk left the place vowing to teach the hare a lesson. How he took his revenge is another story.

The ceremony began and all joined in the festivities. They drank wine and sang songs. When the dance began, even the gods came to witness it and they sat on the rafter of the house. They composed songs and sang along with all the creatures of the land. Everybody had its fill except for the tiger. He was not given any raw meat.

The following morning after the feast, Amang called his aunts and gave them each a 'Kaluang,' a basket full of meat. In the basket of the younger aunt he placed fleshy portions of meat on top of the bones. For his elder aunt he put good meat under the bones. On seeing this, his elder aunt felt hurt, but did not say anything. Both the aunts set out for their respective villages. As foreseen by Amang, as soon as they set out,

the tiger started following them. The younger aunt threw the fleshy meat towards the tiger. The tiger ate it up quickly and caught up with her and killed her. The tiger chased the older aunt also. She threw the bones to the tiger and when the tiger was busy chewing it, she ran all the way to her home. She realized that Amang had cleverly planned her escape.

Amang was now the richest man in the village. His father's promise to him in the dream had come true.

INCHAMPEI THE OGRE

It was dark outside. The only light was the streak of lightening now and then. The thunder roared ceaselessly like a hungry lion. The rain never let up. There was a flood in the backyard and the drains were full. Inside the room there were three places where the water dripped from the roof into the bowls. "Drip, drip, drip," came the drops. It was freezing cold, even inside. Everybody gathered round the fireplace and huddled together in the dark. The flickering of the fire cast weird shadows on the walls. It was the kind of night you don't feel like sleeping in your bed alone.

An old lady sitting in the corner of the room was requested by the little ones to tell them stories, for little children loved to hear stories.

Began the old lady, "Many, Many years ago, I don't remember how many years ago, there lived two friends who were hunters. They used to be very skilled hunters who traveled far and wide. One day in the winter they set out on a hunting trip. As soon as they entered the jungle, they found footprints that looked like to be a big wild boar's. So they followed the prints and it led them farther and farther into the jungle. After some time they rested and ate their napduam, the lunch packet prepared for them by their respective mothers. After they had eaten and rested they set out once again in search of the wild boar. After some time one of

them said, "My friend, let's return home. This is a futile search. Instead of finding the wild boar, we are going further and further into the woods."

"Oh don't be such a coward. We have come this far. Let's go a little farther into the jungle. We surely will be rewarded."

"Friend, I am afraid that this jungle is believed to be inhabited by Inchampeï, the terrible ogre. They say she can take on any form she likes. What if we come across her? What if the boar we are looking for...."

"Forget it. Don't be such a wet blanket."

Thus they argued back and forth and went deeper and deeper into the jungle when they finally lost their way. The sun was setting. The sky was a deep orange. Chilling wind was beginning to pierce through them. One of them climbed a very tall tree to look for direction to their village. From the top of the tree he saw in the distance a small hut with smoke curling up on the roof. He climbed down and went towards the house. His friend has a queasy feeling in his stomach as if something is not right.

Finally when they reached the hut it was already dark. They peeped in through the door to see an old lady blowing the fire, with her back turned to them.

"Apei, Apei, grandmother, grandmother. We are two weary hunters needing shelter for the night. May we spend the night as your guests?" inquired the braver one.

"Come in, come in, my sons. It is very rare I have visitors out here. Be my guests for the night. Make yourselves at home. This afternoon two bees flew into the house, telling me two visitors will come. So I have cooked for you," the old lady said, without turning her head. The hunter took a step to enter when his friend held him back and whisper, " I have a terrible feeling about this place. Let's go away quickly! She knew we are coming. She said she has cooked for us!"

"Oh don't be such a baby! She is only being very polite! Nothing is going to happen. Look, after all she's only an old lady." The first hunter whispered back harshly and went in. The other hunter followed hesitantly into the hut. They sat themselves down and rested.

Soon after, the old lady laid out plates for the evening. She never once showed her face to the hunters. When the cautious hunter bent down to eat, a shiver ran down his spine. It was not rice they have been served. It was moss and the meat still had blood on it and it did not look like animal meat! He tried to tell his friend by sign language, since they were too close to the old lady he could not even whisper, let alone talk. But his friend looked perplexed and started eating with great relish. To him, it looked like plain rice and curry.

After the meal, the old lady said, "My grandsons, go to sleep. You must be very tired after your long day. You have to get up early tomorrow to be on your way. I'll sit near the fire for a while longer, for my old bones are tired of sleeping."

The one who had eaten the food went to sleep immediately but the other one could not sleep at all. He lay still with both eyes wide open. He tried to nudge his friend awake. He pulled his hair, twisted his fingers and even bit his arm but he remained fast asleep like a log. After some time the old woman called out, "My grandsons, are you asleep yet?"

"No grandmother, we have not yet."

"Sleep, sleep. You are tired. Rest well," the old woman said with a smile and a wicked glimmer in her eyes, but the hunter could not see this for her face was turned towards the wall. It was around midnight now. The ogre in the form of the old woman called out again, "My grandsons, are you asleep yet?"

"No grandmother, we have not yet for the bugs keep biting us."

"Sleep, sleep. You are tired. Rest well," again said the ogre and chuckled to herself.

Hearing this laughter, the hunter who was awake tried for the last time to wake his friend and when he failed he stealthily moved towards

the door to escape. Hearing him move, the ogre turned around. For an instant, before he fled the hunter saw her face. Her teeth were sharp and long and bared like that of a wolf and her eyes were two large orbs of light and her lips were blood red! Her skin was very pale and all wrinkled up! The hunter fled like the wind for his life. He heard the ogre cursing after him, "You cunning human. You are lucky this time."

The ogre then turned to the sleeping hunter and severed his head from his body and sucked all the blood. Then she gouged out his stomach and his entrails were all over the floor. She made a feast out of him. She laughed with a laughter that sounded like the cackling of a fire.

The hunter who escaped reached his village as the morning dawned.

The little children near the fire had not made a move all this time. When the story was over, the old, old lady in the corner telling the story turned round to face them. They could see her face in the dim light of the fire. There was a blood curdling horrified scream in unison.

CHUAINUNA

Once upon a time lived a very beautiful young girl with her widowed mother. The widow took great care of her. Whenever she had to go out leaving Chuainuna, she instructed her thus, " Chuainuna, don't open the door to anyone. When I come back , I will knock three times on the door and sing:

Chuainu, Chuainu

Rangbang Chuainu

Kamang khou tei kalung pin."

Everyday her mother would sing the song two to three times in front of her and then go about her work. On her return she would knock thrice on the door and sing the song. Chuainuna would recognise her mother's voice and let her in.

One day a very hungry tiger knocked on the door two times and sang in a big booming voice,

" Chuainu, Chuainu

Rangbang Chuainu

Kamang khou tei kalung pin."

So Chuainuna bolted the door further and said, " I know you are not my mother". The tiger wondered how she knew that it was not her mother. The tiger went away dejected. Chuainuna and her mother was safe for the time being, but not for long, for the tiger returned.

It hid in the nearby bushes and waited for Chuainuna's mother to return. Late in the evening, the widow returned home. She knocked three times and sang the song sweetly in a soft melodious voice and the door was opened by her daughter. The tiger heard how the song was sung and practised it for days.

One day the tiger waited for the widow to leave home. Some time after the widow had left home, the tiger came and knocked on the door thrice and sang the song as sweetly as the widow. Chuainuna called out , " Why are you home early, mother ?"

" Because I left something behind, my dear, " replied the tiger in the voice of the widow. Chuainuna, thinking that it was her mother, opened the door. He tiger pounced on Chuainuna and killed her and ate her up.

By evening the widow returned home to find the door wide open. She instantly knew something was wrong. She rushed into find a ghastly sight. Bones of Chuainuna were strewn all over the place. Eventually the

widow died out of grief. When she died she went to Taruairam,²⁴ to Chuainuna, her husband and other relatives who have gone before. They were happily reunited.

²⁴ Taruairam means land of the dead. The Zeliangruangs believe that after death one goes not to heaven but to Taruairam.

THE GOD'S SON-IN-LAW

There once lived in a village seven brothers. All the brothers were happily married, except for the youngest one. Their inkauh kai,²⁵ joint family, was the most popular in the village. They had many family members. The parents and married brothers thought that it would be for the good of the village if the youngest brother married a god's daughter in order to free the village from all sorts of sufferings.

One day the eldest brother advised the youngest brother, "You must choose for yourself one of god's daughters."

"How?"

"When the god's daughters bathe in the stream, you must pick up the clothes of one of them without looking at her face and run straight home."

"What if I look at her face?"

"Now just do what I say"

"Yes brother."

²⁵ 'Inkauh-kai' (joint family) In Zeliangruang society, joint family system is a common practice. The people believe in this system because in such system the family is harmonious. It is more economical as earning members are more. There's someone to look after the small children and the safety of the family members is more assured, from wild animals and enemies. This is why people think twice about challenging a family that has many brothers.

Accordingly, one day the youngest brother went to the stream where the god's daughters used to bathe and hid behind a bush. Taking off their clothes, the god's daughters went to the stream to bathe. The youngest brother rushed in and blindly taking one bundle of clothes, started running towards home.

At the sudden sound the celestial ladies turned to see what the commotion was about. Seeing that it was her clothes the young man had made off with, one of the daughters screamed and ran after him.

"How dare you steal my clothes?" shouted the daughter. Getting no response, the pursuer changed her tactic and cajoled him in sweet voice to return her clothes. "Good man, return my clothes. You have no use for them. It will only gather dust. Please give back my clothes."

The young man's heart skipped a beat at hearing such a melodious voice. He turned and looked at her. Suddenly the lady grabbed her clothes and disappeared. Crestfallen, the young man returned home only to be rebuked and scolded.

The young man got another chance and this time round he was successful. The youngest daughter of god chased the young man up to his house. As soon as she entered the house she lost all her godly powers. The parents started arranging for the marriage ritual. The god's

daughter agreed to it on one condition, that there would be no more deaths and sufferings in the village, once she married the boy.

"Okay, let that be so," agreed the parents and the villagers. Time passed by and the couple had many sons and daughters born to them. There was general well being in the village.

The village priests lost their power to control the village since there were no sufferings and no sacrifices to be made. So they plotted to kill the god's daughter. One day when the husband went to the field the villagers, urged and threatened by the priests, came and surrounded the house. Finding no escape through the door, the god's daughter escaped through the roof.

On his return the father asked his children, "What has happened? Where has your mother gone? Why is the baby crying?"

"All the villagers came to kill mother."

"What? How could it be?"

Silence followed. All the children looked at each other.

"Tell me what happened," urged the father. He did not know what to make of it. He has a feeling that what he was about to hear would be terrible.

"Mother went out through the roof. She has left behind a cup of water for you to drink in case you want to follow her. For baby she left her breasts wrapped in cotton clothes in the container," related the eldest child who saw it all happen.

The young man drank the water and rushed out in search of his wife. On his way he met a flock of birds caught in a trap.

"Young man, please help us," said the birds to the man.

"I am in a hurry. I have no time to stop, though I would like to help you."

"Remember a good deed comes back full round."

"Alright, little birds. I'll set you free." And the young man set them free.

The grateful birds promised to help him in return for his kindness. He continued on his quest for his wife. A little further on, he met some clouds, which had lost their direction. The clouds requested, "Young man, Young man, please help us. We have lost our direction."

"I am in hurry. I have no time to stop, though I would like to help you."

"Remember a good deed never goes in vain."

"Alright, I'll help you. You go in that direction," the young man instructed them, pointing his finger towards the north.

"Thank you, when in need call us," said the grateful clouds and went on their way. A little further on, the young man came across a snake caught in a trap.

"Young man, Young man, please help me," cried the snake.

"I am in a hurry. I have no time to stop, though I would like to help you."

"You'll be thankful you helped me. Stop a moment and help."

"Alright, alright. There. That should set you free," said the young man and set the snake free.

"Thank you. Call me when you need me. I'll be there," said the snake and happily went on his way.

Finally the young man now reached his destination. But Alas! He has become as small as an ant and felt shy to enter his father-in-law's place. When he was hesitating whether to go in or not a maidservant of god came out to fetch water. He approached her and asked, "Why does a god need water?"

"He needs the water to purify his daughter as she was once married to a human being," replied the maid haughtily.

The young man was depressed and was at his wits end what to do next to stop the purification, when suddenly he hit upon an idea. He flicked the ring left behind by his wife into the water pitcher.

After filling the water vessel, the maid tried to lift it, but could not. On pouring out the water, she found the ring at the bottom of the pitcher. The maid took the ring to the god's daughter. The daughter was very happy to learn that her husband had come looking for her. She went out, brought him inside and hid him in the hope that her husband would regain his normal size in a few days. She requested her father, "please wait for a few days before you perform the purification."

"Five days. If your husband does not turn up by then, I will go ahead with the purification."

The young man luckily regained his normal size within five days and approached his father-in-law.

"Your highness, allow me to take back my wife."

"First you have to perform a task."

"I'll do anything you say."

The god scattered a basket full of 'katink', the tiny black beans, on the ground and asked him to collect all the beans without leaving behind a single bean. The young man was in despair for it was an impossible

task for him. He sat down and cried. Suddenly he remembered the birds he had set free. As soon as he thought of them they appeared from now where and performed the task for him.

"Your highness the task is completed. Now allow me to take my wife with me, " The young man jubilantly asked the god.

"No, you may not. One katink seed is missing," said the god on inspecting the basket given to him. He looked fierce.

On finding himself in a fix, the young man called back the birds to help him out. On returning, one bird confessed that it had taken one seed for her child, and returned the katink seed.

On successful completion of the task, the god now set before the young man another task.

"You have to go to a distant mountain and bring back a huge stone," ordered the god. So the young man this time straightaway called the clouds. In no time the clouds fetched the stone for him. Then he went to the god and asked again, "Your highness, now that I have brought you the stone, allow me to take back my wife."

"No you may not, for I have yet another task for you to perform," boomed out the god.

"But your majesty. I have done what you have asked me to. You have given your word," protested the young man, his head bent down.

"Bring a plantain leaf without a single scratch mark on its surface. Only then will I allow you to have your wife back."

The young man had no choice but to call the snake to help him out of his predicament. After the snake brought the leaf as instructed, the god changed his mind again and gave another task. The young man was to empty a tumbler full of water with a stick before sunset. The young man tried his best but was not able to empty the tumbler. The sun was about to set and the tumbler is still half full. Taking pity on him, his wife tilted the tumbler and emptied it of its contents. Thus the last condition was fulfilled and he was allowed to take his wife back to his home. They lived happily ever after. .

KAMANGPU, THE TIGER

Once upon a time there lived three sisters. The youngest was the most beautiful and the cleverest. The sisters had a big patch of garden they used to work on. An old lady helped them out every now and then.

There was a Kamangpu, a tiger who lived nearby, who had designs of marrying the youngest sister. He continually tried to take the youngest sister away forcibly. One day while the old, old lady and the youngest sister were tending the garden the Kamangpu appeared from the bushes nearby.

"Today you must come with me and be my wife. Your skin is as soft as the moon beam and it must taste very sweet," said the tiger in his fiercest voice to the girl. The tiger was trying to impress her but it only made the girl shrink a little farther away. The old lady working nearby came to the girl's rescue.

"If you want to taste her flesh, I shall pinch off a small piece and give it to you," said the old lady and pretended to pull at the girl's skin. But actually she quickly plucked a panthau-inkhumei, bitter brinjal, and offered it to Kamangpu. On finding that it tasted very bitter, Kamangpu rushed to the river to have a drink. The old lady and the young girl had a good laugh at Kamangpu's expense.

Kamangpu was very angry and hurt. One day he tried again. He went right up to the girls house and growled, "If you do not agree to be my wife, I'll kill all of your sisters. Now which of the two would you like?" The sisters panicked and screamed in fear. They tried to close the door and windows.

"Closing the door and windows will not help you, for I'll be here night and day. When you venture out for food or water or to relieve yourselves at night, I'll kill and eat you," roared the angry Kamangpu. The youngest sister, at the mention of water, thought of an idea. She went to the kitchen and quickly punched holes on the wooden jar. She then called out, "Alright, alright, I'll marry you on one condition."

"What is that? asked the tiger eagerly.

"You must agree to it first."

"Tell me. I am listening'

"You must go to the river and fetch water from the pot I'll give you. Only when you come back with the pot full of water, I'll marry you."

"Bring the pot quickly. That's very easy," roared back the tiger.

With the pot Kamangpu went to the river to fetch water. As soon as he raised the pot from the river after filling it, the water quickly seeped out through the holes. Since he was near-sighted he did not realise that

there were holes on the pot. He filled the pot with water and started towards the girls' house. No sooner had he taken a few steps than all the water seeped away. He did this again and again.

In the meanwhile, the sisters packed what ever was needed and went away to another village.

THE YOUNGEST SON

Long, long ago there lived in a village a well-to-do man who had the power to turn himself into a tiger whenever he willed. In another village not very far away, there also lived a couple that had six strong handsome sons. The couple longed for a daughter and prayed diligently to god to grant them a daughter. God told the father that his wife would give birth to a god's son. This son would take revenge on the family's enemy. The father was not happy and thinking that his wife will be heart broken to have another son, kept this information secret from her.

One day the couple's mithun went astray and did not return home for days together. "Wife, I am going in search of our cattle. Look after the children well when I am gone."

"Don't go. You could send one of our older sons. They can do the job," said the wife.

"This might take days. Our sons are a little too young to wander far. I better go."

"Then I shall prepare for your lunch packet," so saying, the wife went and prepared the lunch for her husband and sent him reluctantly on his way.

The father traveled many days and finally reached the man-tiger's village. On the outskirts of the village a big tiger killed him. Everybody in the village knew that it was the work of the man-tiger. He used to kill other people also. But nobody dared say anything for they were afraid.

When the promised son was born to the now widowed mother, something phenomenal happened. There was lightning and thunder without any rain. But the villagers and the widow did not know that it was because the son of god was born as a human being.

Time passed by and by now the first son had come of age to avenge his father's death. The widow prepared for him his 'napduam' and with her permission he set out for the task at hand. The first son reached the village of the man-tiger. He came to the house of his enemy and was warmly welcomed. The man-tiger treated his guest well. After they had finished the dinner, they went to sleep. In the middle of the night the first son woke up to the sound of his host saying, "Intiangbule tu tho, tu tho, O white-ants, eat up, eat up." Then the white-ants started eating the bow of the first son. But he was not aware that the white-ants were eating away his bow. When dawn broke the first son heard the rooster crow, "Gin thei, Kaipou ring, the guest will die, the host will live." After hearing this, the guest could not go back to sleep. He wondered in what way the host would try to kill him.

In the morning the host said to his wife, "Kill the rooster. Its crowing is not good. We will make a good meal out of it." It indeed turned out to be a tasty meal for all of them. After eating it heartily, the guest and the host set out together. It was the duty of the host to see off his guest. After walking some distance the man-tiger told his companion to go ahead while he relieved himself behind a thicket. After a few minutes a big tiger appeared and jumped on the son. The first son pulled his bow in an attempt to shoot at the tiger, but the bow broke and the tiger seized him by the neck and killed him.

The widow and the brothers came to know about it and they planned how to take revenge on the man-tiger. In the same way, the remaining five brothers met the same fate as their eldest brother at the hands of the man-tiger. Now the youngest son was the only hope. When he reached adulthood his mother one day called him near her. She said, "My last and youngest son, before you were even born, your father was killed by the man-tiger from the next village. All your elder brothers were also killed when they tried to avenge your father's death. Now you must take revenge for their death."

"Yes my mother. I must fulfill my duty. I am bound to do so by my love and respect for them."

"I will prepare for you your lunch packet. You must set out on your mission immediately."

"I shall prepare a bow and some arrows."

The youngest son set out for the man-tiger's village by a different route. When he reached his enemy's house, he was warmly received and treated to a sumptuous meal. In the middle of the night he heard some one say, "O white-ants, eat up, eat up." "O master I have a toothache, I have a toothache". After some time, the rooster crowed, "The host will die, the guest will live!" In the morning the host said, "Wife, kill the rooster and make a meal of it. Its crowing is bad." The wife did as was told to her. After the meal the youngest son set about to go on his journey, but the host made not a move to see him off. The guest said, "Dear Kaibangpou le, my host, aren't you going to see me off?"

"My son, I am a bit under the weather. Excuse me. I shall stay behind, you go ahead."

"But host, it is only polite of you. See me off and show me the way."

"You go straight and you shall reach the village gate. You will not miss it."

"Please. I'd rather you show me the way your self."

"Well, well, I will," reluctantly agreed the host. When they reached the outskirts of the village, the youngest son turned around and faced the

host. He suddenly asked, "How did you kill my father and my six brothers?"

"You will be frightened to know."

"Just show me how," demanded the youngest son.

"Okay, go ahead."

As the youngest son went down the path, a huge tiger was standing in the middle, ready to pounce on him. He quickly got hold of his bow and arrow and aimed straight at the tiger's heart.

"If I am the son of god, let this arrow hit the heart of the killer of my father and my brothers," so saying he let go of the arrow and it killed the man-tiger. Carefully and cautiously he came and stood in front of the still body of the tiger, not knowing what to do. Then, suddenly a grasshopper flew by. "grasshopper, grasshopper, wait a minute. Please go inside the tiger's body and check whether it is really dead or not. I shall give you the middle fang of the tiger for your trouble," said the youngest son. The grasshopper went in and came out. "Your tiger is as dead as can be. Now give me my fees."

"Here you are. This is a reward for the service rendered," so saying the youngest son cut off the tiger's fang and handed it to the grasshopper. The grasshopper then flew off. It is said that it was from

that day onwards all the grasshoppers got their little fangs that resembled the tiger's.

The youngest son chopped off the head of the tiger and headed towards home. During his absence his mother anxiously waited for his return. The village boys teased her by knocking on the door and running away. As soon as the widow open the door thinking it must be her son returning home, there was no one. This went on many times when finally she was very angry and tired. She decided not to open the door again.

Late at night there was a knock on the door again. It was her youngest son. He called out, "Mother, Mother, open the door. I have avenged my father and my brothers. I have brought back the head of the tiger who killed my father and my brothers."

"I know your cruel intentions. Go away. I am tired of your heartless pranks. My son is dead. He will never come back. I will not open the door for you," yelled the widow, thinking it must be the village boys, up to their tricks again.

"Since you are not going to open the door for me, I am hanging the head of the tiger on this door post. When you come out, be careful. You might get startled at the sight of it and die. Now I am leaving to go back to my father, God." So saying, he disappeared as a lightning flash.

In the early morning, the widow got up from bed and without thinking, opened the door. She already had forgotten about the previous night's happenings. She suddenly came face to face with the tiger's head and fell down dead on the ground from the shock.

FRIEND OF THE LEPER

Once upon a time there lived a man happily with his wife and children. He was a good man loved dearly by his family and villagers. He was ever ready to do a good turn to anybody needing his help. He felt sick one day. Nobody knew the cause of his sickness. In the initial stages, his wife and children took great care of him and offered sacrifices for his speedy recovery. After some time it was discovered that he had unfortunately contracted the dreaded leprosy. Then things turned from bad to worse for him. Everybody abandoned him, even by his own family. His family built for him a separate hut with a small window through which water and food was served to him.

Despite the precautions taken by the family, the villagers considered him to be an increasingly serious threat to their health. The elders of the village one day approached the family and complained, "We have deep sympathy for him. We are sorry this has to happen but it is not only for us we are talking. It is also for you, who stay near him at all times. Let sense prevail. Let him go to the forest, since he has an incurable disease. Tell him never to return."²⁶

²⁶ Leprosy in those days was dreaded since there was no cure, no medicine and no hospital facilities were available. The lepers usually hid their disease as long as possible and then when it was publicly known, they were sent away to the forest or to the village gate, 'Rang-bang.'

The family was persuaded since they themselves were tired of taking care of him. They decided to obey the elders and the voice of reason. So one day they took the poor man to the jungle and left him there among wild animals. Luckily for him he still had a faithful friend. This friend brought him food and clothes at night. The leper whispered to his friend, "My dear friend, you should stop visiting me. If the elders find out there will be trouble for you."

"No, no, don't say such things. Kabam thai makge. I am your friend. You can count on me when no one cares for you."

The friend was one day able to complete building a hut for his friend. He continued visiting him on a regular basis. One day, little boys from the village came hunting for small birds near the hut of the leper. They saw the leper and reported the matter to the villagers.

After this it became all the more difficult for the friend to visit the leper. One day the leper had wonderful news for his friend.

"Listen to what I have to say to you tonight. Look at my hand," and the leper thrust out his right hand for his friend to inspect. There was twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. The friend peered at him and exclaimed in disbelief. "Oh my god. What happened? There are no more marks on it. Your hands are cured!"

"Yes. Isn't it a miracle?"

" I don't believe it. My eyes must be playing tricks." The friend went and sat near him." I'll tell you. One day a lizard was disturbing me and I kept shooving it off..."

"And it peed on you and..." interrupted the friend.

"Don't cut me off. Just listen. The lizard kept pestering me till I lost my temper and struck its tail with a stick. The creature crept towards a plant and chewed its leaf and spat on the injured tail with its juice. Something amazing happened then...."

"The tail healed!" injected the friend again.

"Yes. Right before my very eyes it healed!"

"So you did like wise?"

"Yes. I rubbed the leaves and applied it on my hand, thinking there was nothing to lose. I had this terrible pain but the next day I found I was completely healed where I had applied the juice of the leaves," recounted the leper excitedly.

"So why don't you apply it on the other parts of your body?" asked the friend anxiously.

"Oh, the pain was terrible. I cannot bring myself to apply it again.

"Show me the leaves."

"For what?"

"Just show me, will you?"

The leper pointed out the leaves to his friend. The friend plucked it, made a paste of it and then tied his leper friend to a pillar and applied the paste all over his body. The leper's screaming was like the mooing of a cow, for it was very painful.

"If you want to be cured you have to bear it," said his friend and rubbed and rubbed. He left him tied to the pillar that night. He was afraid his friend might wash it off to relieve himself from the pain.

When the friend visited the next morning he found his leper friend was completely healed from the dreaded disease. He rushed towards him and embraced him, pillar and all. Then he untied him. He wanted right away to bring his friend back to the village but that could not be. First they had to perform the purification rite for he had been banished to the forest.²⁷ Then he had to wait for the New Year's celebrations to be over before he could return to his village to lead a normal life.

The leper now cured of his dreaded disease came secretly to the village and performed tasks for the villagers like cleaning their water

²⁷ A person once ex-communicated or exiled outside the village has to perform rites before he is accepted back. The village priests performed the rites and rituals. For the sacrificial animals, the family or friend could contribute. Other reasons for exile are when a person commits murder or marries within the same clan. In case of murder the murderer and sometimes the whole family will be exiled forever from the village, called "Kaphun-Phukmei" literally meaning uprooting.

points, sweeping the streets and splitting woods for the two dormitories etc. The villagers soon came to realise he was completely healed and so accepted him back into their fold after performing the rites. During his stay in the forest his wife had married another so he got himself a new wife who was his friend's sister and thereafter lived happily ever after.

ROUKHAENG

" Roukhaeng! Go and fetch water. Quickly! Its already dawn and you are sleeping like a fat pig. Don't I feed you, clothed you? You, lazy son of a demoness!" cried the shrill voce of his stepmother. Every morning, even before the crowing of the cock, the shouting and nagging of the stepmother would be heard. All the villagers heard her and they used to pity Roukhaeng.

In the days when his mother, who gave birth to him, was alive, Roukhaeng and his sister used to live in peace and harmony. They got all the love and care. But unfortunately their mother died early and soon after, his sister got married to a rich man from another village, and went to live there. So he got no chance to meet her. Anyway, he was not allowed to go and meet his sister. In due course of time he lost contact with her completely. Roukhaeng's father, being lonely after his wife's death and thinking his son needed a mother to look after him got married again to a beautiful girl. But beauty is all she had. She was cruel and did not have a heart made of gold. All she cared about was her well being. She went out of her way to torture and make life miserable for Roukhaeng. It was said that cruel things she did to Roukhaeng was so horrifying that it was too terrible even to be retold.

One day the stepmother sent Roukhaeng to fetch water as usual. He was given seven "duikhu," water containers, made of bamboo.²⁸ A little boy like him was able to carry only three at a time.

"Step-mother, please be kind and let me carry only three "duikhu", for the water hole is very far away and I have to go down the mountain and climb up the steps again. The path is so narrow, sometimes the vines and creepers overturn my "inko."²⁹ So I have to go and fetch water all over again," pleaded Roukhaeng of his mother. At this, the stepmother flew into a rage and beat him with a big cane, which she used to keep up at the "inrap", a kind of a rack without stands, suspended above the fireplace. The stepmother shouted, " I made you carry only seven and you tell me its too heavy? How dare you talk back to me, you orphan, unlovable, ugly monkey. You eat double of what I eat. You have eaten up all our stored rice and you say you are not able to carry even seven "duikhu"? She went on and on abusing, and called names not even sparing her husband, Roukhaeng's father.

Roukhaeng, in the end could not but go to fetch the water with tears in his eyes and with a wounded heart. On the way he spoke to himself, "O! Sweet mother, real mother, who have given birth to me, had you been here you never would have done this to me, would you?"

²⁸ Water container in which the ~~nodes~~ inside of a bamboo were cut to make it one long tube.

²⁹ A basket used for carrying the duikhus.

If only you were alive. If only you could see me now, your heart would break."

"Oh! My sister who have married far away, where are you?"

While at his home, his stepmother had worked herself up to such a fury that she had a cruel plan for her stepson. She cleaned the floor very well and placed a kind of a very slippery leaf, "luikhum-nui," so that Roukhaeng would slip and fall and have her revenge on the little hapless boy for talking back to her. When Roukhaeng returned home with the water he asked his stepmother, "Puinau-puidai", to help him with the duikhu. But she pretended as if she was busy inside the room. So Roukhaeng stepped inside the door and as soon as his feet touched the floor he fell down with a crash and broke all his duikhu and spilled all the water. So naturally his 'puinau-puidai' beat him black and blue and let him go without food for the rest of the day.

Even on the other days all he got to eat was a little of the previous day's left over and sometimes stale ones, even which dogs would not eat. She and her husband would eat the choicest of meals. His father knew about all of these things but was secretly afraid of his second wife. So he bore it all.

Life went on like that for Roukhaeng without a moment's respite from his cruel stepmother. Now, he had grown up to be a very handsome

young man, despite the stepmother's cruel treatment. One day the stepmother "puinau-puidai" wanted him for herself and caught hold of his cloth and said, "anei inrei kho!, Let's sleep together." Roukhaeng was horrified and pulled away and ran away, leaving behind his cloth. When her husband returned from the field, the evil and cunning woman told him that Roukhaeng behaved inappropriately with her and tried to steal her chastity. She showed him the cloth Roukhaeng left behind. She insisted that Roukhaeng should be taken to the field and killed. The father doubted her but being a weak man could do nothing but obey her. So the next day he called Roukhaeng and together they set off for the field. They went on and on and on. At last Roukhaeng was told to wait while his father answered the call of nature. But this was only a ruse to lose his son. He quietly took Roukhaeng's cloth, smeared it with blood and went back home.

In the mean while, Roukhaeng waited for his father to return but he did not. He knew that he was meant to be killed, for he had overheard his stepmother plotting and scheming. When he had told his father about the whole incident, he had not wanted to believe, so what could Roukhaeng do except go away? He ate his lunch, "napduam", his father had left behind and with a broken heart went away, aimlessly without knowing where he was going. All the time he cried out for his father "apoau', father, father, don't leave me. I am your son. Believe me. Don't

forsake me, 'apoau', apoau." His father heard him cry in the distance and walked quickly back home, lest he repent.

After a few days of walking aimlessly, Roukhaeng reached a village. He came to a big house and sought work. The lady of the house was very good and kind and gave him work. He did all sorts of work - pounded rice, fetched water and firewood, cooked, washed clothes, fed the pigs and chickens and looked after the children. One day, early in the morning, when he was pounding rice on a wooden mortar called "paan" with wooden pestle, he sang a song.

"Apui jaan 'Hemeiliu'

Achai jaan 'Hemeiliu'

Anam jaan 'Hebamme'

'Roukhaeng' ajaane."

" 'So and so' is my mother's name

'So and so' is my sister's name

'So and so' is my village

'Roukhaeng' is my name."

When the rich lady of the house heard this she instantly realised that this was her brother whom she had not seen for years. She rushed

out of the house and embraced Roukhaeng, saying "Brother, brother." Roukhaeng was amazed at this behaviour but the sister explained to him that she was his sister who got married and went away to another village. Both of them cried with joy and happiness at finding each other again. He was not allowed to work again and made to live like the real brother of the owner of a house.

Roukhaeng's sister searched and found a very beautiful maiden as his bride. Their parents were also invited to the wedding. The father came to know of the real story from his daughter. So when they went back to their village from their son's wedding, he cursed his wife and made her take off her clothes. The skin of her back was rubbed with a piece of "seangthing,"³⁰ When he was done with her, he forced her to carry the same kind of wood in a basket on her back to punish her for all of her wrong doings. She carried the wood and went down the road till she turned a bend and then threw away the wood and uttered "Hugh" and she was never seen after that.

Roukhaeng lived with his new bride and they lived happily and richly ever after.

³⁰ A kind of very prickly wood that makes the skin itchy on contact

MAGIANAPU AND NRUMLIUS

There once lived a boy who was left ~~on~~ orphan. His great paternal aunt looked after him. But unfortunately she too died soon afterwards and the boy lived all by himself. Some of the kindhearted neighbours now and then helped him out in his paddy field. He sometimes exchanged his labour, worked for others and in turn others would work for him. He hardly joined any village gatherings or activities. He was a strong boy but never participated in any competition.³¹ He has nothing to offer the villagers. He was also a very shy guy, especially in front of the girls.

Lonely years went by until Magianapu, the orphan, reached a marriageable age. One afternoon, he was resting in his laupo, when he spotted three girls walking towards his hut. He could not take away his gaze from the beautiful girls. When they reached him, one of them said, "We are Nrumlius. If you marry my eldest sister, you will become a rich man."

"How....how can I, an...an orphan marry a god's daughter?" stammered Magianapu.

³¹ Only the well to do participate in any competition, for the winner has to give a party. It is the custom of the people that instead of getting any prize, the winner has to offer rice-beer and meat.

"If you marry me you will have the power to ride on tigers and eagles. You will also have the power to create storm and thunder." Seeing the hesitation and fright in the young man, the eldest sister further promised, "You will also have the power to be invisible anytime you choose to, and also have the power to transform yourself into any animal of your choice for hours at a stretch."

"I have no desire to possess the powers. I am but a poor boy," answered Magianapu. "Also I could never marry a Nrumliu," added Magianapu as an after thought. "We will come back some other day, for the sun is setting. We must go," so promised the sisters and flew back to their abode. Magianapu was not at all excited about the incident and went home as usual in the evening.

A few weeks had gone by after the incident, Magianapu had not given further thought to it since then. So he was very startled to see the three Nrumlius one evening in his back yard, riding on a huge tiger. Seeing the terrified expression, the eldest sister said to Magianapu, "Don't be afraid. Touch the tiger. It will not harm you."

"No, no."

"Just try. Go on, touch it. It's as meek as a lamb." The eldest sister patted and smoothed the tiger's back. The tiger looked mild and

friendly to him now, so he timidly reached out a finger towards the tiger and lightly touched it.

"Stay here while we talk," then ordered Nrumlius to the tiger.

Nrumliu led Magianapu into the house and stayed with him. When he felt drowsy and closed his eyes she changed her form. When he opened his eyes she changed back. In this manner she stayed with him the whole night till dawn. Then in the wee hours of the morning she mounted the tiger and went away, saying that she will be back.

Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months without any sign of the Nrumlius and Magianapu had given up hope of ever seeing them again, when one night bats came flying into his house and alighted on the rafter of the house. Then they changed into Nrumlius. One of them said, "We are thirsty."

"Here is the water."

After giving them the water, the young man, overcome with tiredness from working in the jhum, started to nod. Suddenly he remembered that they used to change their forms while he was asleep. Seeing him struggling thus, one of the Nrumlius pointed towards him and said, "Sisters, we better go away today. We will have to come back another time." And all of them flew away again as bats.

Rainy season had come and gone. It would soon be harvesting season. The villagers repaired the bridges and cleaned the inthak bam, so they could rest well on their journeys. Youths of the village also had plans to liven up the 'Khangchius',³² their dormitories. Magianapu was also involved in the activities and did not have time to think about the Nrumlius. The village girls were also there. One day Magianapu went to the Jhum. On the way a flock of parrots flew past him and landed on a tree. After some time the two Nrumlius who used to visit him entered the laupo. Suddenly he could see them no more, only hear them talking to each other. He heard one of them say, "Let there be a storm." Instantly there was storm raging only inside the hut. Outside everything was sunny and there was not the slightest breeze. Then he heard again, "Let there be calm." And everything returned to normal. Some time later, Magianapu could see the two sisters sitting and giggling. The sisters tried in vain to help the young man in his work and then flew away, promising that they would visit after harvest.

All the villagers had by now harvested their fields. Their barns were full and it was a time of rejoicing and merry-making. They drank rice beer and sang songs and the young men and women danced to the beat of the drum. The old talked about their prime years and the yield they

³² Khangchiu is the boys' dormitory. Once a person reached adolescence they are sent to khangchiu to live there and learn the ways of the people along with other boys. All the unmarried males stayed in the Khangchiu. Even two, three years after the marriage, if they wish, they could stay. Now there would be one ngan-kapi a leader to look after the Khangchiu. In like manner, there are dormitories also for the girls.

got from their fields. At night the villagers sat around bonfires soaking in the moonbeams.

One such night, before the moon rose, the Nrumlius appeared at Magianapu's house once again. The eldest daughter once again asked him to marry her. At which the young man replied again, "I am but a poor boy. I could never marry a Nrumliu. I am not impressed with the powers you have. I want a human wife and have human children and grand children. If you would really like to marry me you must relinquished all your powers and become human, and do human work till we die."

"Don't you see I loved you dearly all this time? If you marry me you will be the envy of the villagers. You will become rich..."

"I hear that the god-wives makes their husbands blind or turn them into lepers so other women would not love them or so they could see no other women," said Magianapu. The Nrumliu got very angry and tried to kill him but the other Nrumliu restrained her. "You must not lose your temper. After all he is not fit for you. Let us go away." The Nrumlius then disappeared never to torment the man again.

The following year Magianapu married a beautiful girl from his village and thus could enter taruai-ram³³ after his death.

³³ Taruai-ram is the land of the dead. After a person died, he has to cross 'Tanungdui' a river that separates the land of the living from the dead. Once you cross this river you can never return to the land of the living. And no living being is allowed to enter especially if they are virgins. For the virgin to enter taruai-ram, he/she has to be defiled first.

SONGS

1. Mahenthuipiw lui [Mahenthui's father's songs]

Kasaitura ngourowe Mahenthuibou nangdi tatlo;

I lungkin ne nang do mananglo biuwe.

Maikhen kakhi, maigian kabi hinase akycheng-e nang simakmah?

I niu maikhen khih maigiang bijiu tat karon

Kareng dinken sangmainiu siye.

Chaken ting tiniu sown wangmataila, ari gikawangbonai;

I niu Mahenthuipiw tu pouping-e pamun sjiu.

Chamai kai dindi ngamlak pingjiu wang nuangnoh

Natu runlu biu-e; mainah paky soujiu sanglam wang kalubori hasatne.

Chapiubondi kaguang sin nkaijiu,

I tuhniu khangnah longjiu alun kasanlih.

Chawa teng lin, kadih kyliw kalondiak makjiu lungboture

Wah kahinkhiu khengchia I niu thinwanglusai;

Shenchang diat thiula, kadin kadinbo kyra tatbaitalage

A nah chiuwuirengliw ken silusai maniujiu akyga riwlo.

Akhenra kaki sisangtura ka nguteng makge.

I chari giluh tapih ju kawi kuang pon karonkum;

Sang nam machang riginoh, chakhun lungri gichia

I kakhiang kahum I machan jam mataila,

Mariajiu hunoh I chaliu makge kasa lung khungtu pasai nangra
chaliujutle.

Nang karing ting dunne, kareng lin lam nang bigutle

Akhen kakhiw meng toulo nang atu macham kanisai.
Along pom thiu kasunai pi-ngouniye natu.
Tasang maipiw tura simak aram mainah asun hah.
Naky maijeng di aronnang jengtu ngamlak;
Pasai masuang gutara dinron tingkum khat nia bamdih kariu we.
Mathiu niu thinwang zan chiajutle.
Kachiwra dintu agu katamra kambilakge
Katamra kamka kin suang adiu wide shingpon lungkhai.
Chakiw buih gouhara rajiu manujuu meng din wanglo.
Mahiang tadui phiangjiu anianiu aniang jutle.
Apuiyo bungka khaibamlo phenih niyuteng makge
Masuangh nih niyulijiu haji nang tatrailo, I tatna lui-e.
Makia mara kabai kazuangkum jiu,
Paiwangjiu anih gou, abentah charelujiu
Atah, anah, athoi khungjiu nang charitu gih.
Nang likanitu gainoh tiu thoibijiu khatlam I phut lakge chiulo.
I kariu bouh dung inga kakhiyu pon I sut nejiu I rangbambiu;
Kamown kha kamsatle kasara maning the-e
Kawih ronna bamdunjiu Aneih yo nang ringbam lu
Napum gah wiji atu dinne.
Maiky komjiu maitu makhenjiu lounghoh.
I thiwrih lam rangjiu awan jengmai then kam nalo.
I chari gih kawangbo nai hulonjiu,
Maring min kawangbonai mathat mataih nkhave;
Along pomchang lujiu kawang bonai ahuh kamdin,alui thiumangdi

Maky khoumainah chwa kamanang thiumakjiu lungbotu akin railuiye.

Mahenthuiw lui. [Mahenthui's father's song]

This is the song of Mahenthui's father, which he sang while advising his son. It reflects on his life.

A man is great if he helps the needy, protects people from disaster and brings together separated lovers. Such a man's fame spreads far and wide. I have lived my life well in helping others. I am adept in warfare, as well as in debate. People would say I could outtalk a hundred debaters.

One should love and be loyal to one's land. Those who forsake their land for greed and materialistic gains end up with discontentment. They are rootless and lose their peace of mind. You should stay where you belong, in your birthplace. Like the leaves of the tree in autumn, let the old be replaced by the powerful young. If only I could be young again, I would live like the Shenchang Python, dignified in his dealings with mankind. I still have so many unfulfilled desires. I would give my protection to any one who needed it, even if they be my enemy. I would die for him. I took care not to kill the innocent. Even when I brought back heads, I saw that I killed only the evildoers.

It is a virtue to be brave and courageous. Never be rash and short tempered. One should accept the good as well as the bad life. One should

learn to be a graceful loser. If one only look's after one's interest, then one does not have the right to be called a man. By being self-centered, we earn the displeasure of others and harm ourselves.

So far as I know there is no one here who can challenge me. I am not speaking of the lands I have not visited. Unless you pursue only the good, I shall always be superior to you. You should do only noble deeds to be better than me. I have no power in me to talk about the future and what it will bring. I am talking only about my past. If I am to be compared with the others, I am as high as the top of the tree from the ground. I am always the victor in the contests with the wild mithun. I enjoy the company of my friends and the beauty of nature. I never ask for fashionable clothes from my mother, for I want to be attractive as a human being and not just in looks only. Only in victory do I wear my beautiful dress. I bless my children to bring the evildoer's head, to win the hand of those they love and to acquire the biggest barn, so as to provide food to the poor.

Always remember a wrong done to others is never forgotten but always brings repercussions. I advice my aunts to instill in their children to work for the benefit of their fellow beings. Even when I am really angry to my enemies, I try to catch them alive and teach them a lesson so they never will harm others in future. Treat all mankind equally with the common principle of right living.

Lunghonbuibou lui [Lunghonbuibou's song] [1]

Tura chakin nam khaniu atu mageng,

Sangpiw kyjibam jengbin kawangjiu.

Alungchun, I khung bam lulakne.

Sutenge Maipuijiuliu niu wang asuang ga,

Kaujiu I wng maikai ponron makge saira

Azan kaline; lunghonbuibou jiu talakge.

Mainah pamun tamwi Ningkammang lumbam kawimai

Lunghon kinkiu mai si raiwang jiu.

Kasamai lunghon kinjiu mainiura;

Nahmai kawitu tasang din Ahuh ken chiajiu

Kalung than maijiu-e, akyluang chakuwi;

Shingdih rihgen karai toukamih.

Gahben bang chakhua-chareng bon kani kum,

Tasang maipiw minmeng matai thinlijiu kaliwang.

Hai katu soujiu sanglam mikamengmai hiujiu kinlo tiu.

Chawe kawi mahojiu pabam tamjiu, sang peng kammine.

Kiyu mara kinne didu majaijiu kapne, kadih ting malang,

Sanf-dhingkhong maity liang thiuwang, ari maruang liang maipiu diu-e.

Kin khat lungsu jiu aliu kin wi, thenjiu lonlulakge

Anga kaussi makge, aky thiu maku luthen Iniu maningjiu thiu-e.

Dah raren tingkou pengtiniu binron meng.

Aram liang ngou kadailo nang niu kungmei pui

Wang kiu kara lungchun se I benmeng,

Aliou ken dinsujiu kapni-e nangyo
Sang shing khonlanm wang railo natham kajing ton
Mon kabai kum reliu nabèn pjiu sai wang nob, natham kakhung se jiye.

Maipuijiulu tu ramting riga karia tingnai reliw sangkhen thi
karaliw niu;

Reliw sngkhen thi karaliw niu;

Chala bam kamjiu , insoinai bam-ka-indounai
Niu inpou chiakhe reliu anai khat tu gai jihlu buiye.
Mathiu thon mai tu kaliang rouwe reliwo.
Marai tu sujiu wiliang- linage.

Sosai, amarai liutu akep lujiu sainiye

Tiubijiu nanky jengniu, singkhon lam peng khaijiu,

Reliu amarainiu wang wangjiu inda kentou maning toulujiu;

Marai liw makge souniu huilo

Maipuijiuliw aliu niu hui dilulam meng

Apon khai makjiu marai tham kakit jiu wiye.

Saye rampen marai kathiuliw alam gutjiu nuirumjiu

Rikjang nangdi malanlo tiu kasunai mailanchia

I chari rangjiu jiping-e tuijiu kasunai

Riliw pui patmakhaye mainah kawi asiye

Kamarai liw alitu chakhun lung rengbungnah,

Kai bam didu lamaraitu lianglakge.

Thaijiyu cheng sera chaken charen lonwangra,

Maraihai wiji; dah, charuih mao langsem thinlu

Ahuh meng sangmai manlengpui, amilam kawangliwtu chalungsi.

Lunghonbuibou'song

I am not swayed either by flattery or by wealth. False words can give you a false sense of well being as when one is in love. The only pride you should have is when people remember us after death. I always praise nature's beauty, the birds, the animals, the forest and the trees. I can never understand why people leave their land. Girls who marry strangers and those who leave your land, don't you come back when in trouble. No person who goes away to strange land remembers to work for his land. Just as I love my Maipuijuiliu, I love my land. My love for her is all consuming. Likewise I love my country. I do not notice her limitations. We should work for our countries now, when we have the time. Otherwise the generations that follow us will not forgive us. When you and your neighbours are enemies, you never sleep in peace. So we should love all mankind and nature. We should preserve our nature for the future mankind.

Lunghonbuibou lui [Lunghonbuibou's song] [2]

Chakin chankyri kaminkum piyubon kadane;
Liwchew ky ronsujiu Ahuh liw wiye.
Chareng bum sum ruangsus amarai talakge.
Idi charahmai khang suang wi,
Anai mathenjiu tatah siah, tachi adiang
Mainiu sitenge; manu; Lunthonbuibou
Nakhuan tasijiu saye.
Ira wah kata maniyu kasu npuimai;
Nchiang mai liwtu maniyu kasuniu wiye.
Kating thyuwe mathiyu thonne.
Napum gen kjai nabom ponsu maidiu kawina-ge.
Sih kakhung liw Rengdiy juang kakhang kum;
Ahuh, pamarai tu tiujiu rikhang pachun wiye.
Tamiu jiu doumang liwchew rasi
Nabom raihwang tiwjiu humme.
Maky khoumai chawang rasi raih tiw kanikum me.
Mathiu rasih tu simak ge, aliura chakha
Juanjiu khatan biye, rikhangbou piura,
Ajai khonjiu nang matha hakum sua
Rikhang kanga padu wisu,
Min making mijiu raih tiw mak kumsua
Rikhang maipiwra palung chun kahum maira;
Puih mai genkhai pachun tan, papum tankinjiu simakge.

Tathi-kabakra akhuan manuan jiu jeiyé.
Manubora, insiuh nasih katanbo Zuihnah niu hem baluwe.
Khat mazatle khat riye, kasia pabank dungjiu
Madunraino maipui mai jengniu kengjiu we
Iluma chang lulakge; wah katahna I liwi thuiwang
Chakin tyu lukum pasit khuijiu kabambo I thin bamme.
Dah meng thin wang lubiu-we,
Charah malajiu, I chaky kadhang ling wang lumak daye.
Mano yo insoina niu wangtiniu ring thengra simakge.

Lunghonbuibou Song [2]

This is a song of a young man in search of a girl to marry. He is a handsome youth and must find the best girl from the ladies dormitory.

When I take a girl out in courtship she complains that my voice is too loud. "Hush, Don't talk too loud, for others will hear". And when I pull her towards me, I cry out in mock anger that it's her bangles that make more noise. Even when we have lots of time, it seems too little. In order to express her beauty, lots of words are needed. Her breasts and her body leave me senseless. Her beauty resembles the beauty of the hornbill. I am happy only when I am in her company. I long for the night so I can visit her in the dormitory. I am happy with my girl who is like a foreign princess. But you, other young man, you are always after what is

out of your reach. While fishing, you wait on shore without going into the water, hoping for the fish to come to you. In my case, I catch the best because I enter the pond and catch them from the middle.

These men who waits on the shore for the fish to come to them are like the birds who waits for the 'tasiangsi' to ripen, in vain,[for the seed never ripens].

If we have the determination we can get what we want. What is beyond our reach, we should not seek. Like an insect we may work on a hard nut to crack for years, but to what avail? We should never set ourselves on accomplishing an impossible task. As Liangmei warriors we have to accomplish a lot. The success of everything depends on God. We should do something before we die, rather than sitting idle.

Lunghonbuibou Lui [Lunghonbuibou's song][3]

Chawa kata tu inde lenglo tiujiu Apiw niu maniujiu,
Kachang tu dinkhai noh along khailin khung jiu matailai,
Tiu jiu dinjiu, I niu ponkara diu-e.
Dah charah chanm akhentu shut.
Chahen ponkaren mai ngouniu wejiu dintu
Mailung karoubo kannu I niu-Apow-Ape bamlamsu
Din ngamroujiu khangkhat pacham sasu;
Alung khailin khungjiusoukhenjiu lunglo
Nachem jengniu chapi pang, maiky ,mailu kuikamne.
Nang niu maniyuh nihjiuma. Khang nia leng jiu.
Tathuwang mataila, mainiu ren kabitu
Majai roujiu mai sang shingdon mairamme.
Chaken ting shangre sinrajiu kamao gomtan wang
Pakhah hinatu gomkamlu; Marilu shingdi katuwe kasunai kumchai,
Dejiu kha aset sane lo.
Mainah lungsira, rikhang papum chaga khung kasatu biwangne
Phaimiw kakhung khuga maniulo; awan jengmai nah lunges.
I rikhangmai lui thiumeng ri kau
Phungjeng mainah seniu nakynaujiu nganra chaliw pingdaiye.
Aheng niu kath in kaliang dah majai-wanjiu wang dibam kasunai
Atu tathuang doulo ari kara I niu mara jiu bidi.
Amik rak tanjiu meng gikawang naise,
Akyjeng khai kawang gutsu tadui niu namlujiu

Chaly mainiu chakin wang, thiwhu phen wangbujiu
Pakang jamjiu naiyo pqzan kasi rianne
Charah chenge nangditu manjiu hanilo.
Naky maibon su katiwbo kense najeng luwilojiu.
Nagu bon kasi jung lungsira
I rikhangbo lui thiu ting chariu ngen,
Mai sang pacham khengrow sang dinrou jiu talakge.
Wang kenjiu I ringmathen tutan nia ngoumak saira,
I kalang then lakge.

Lunghonbuibou's song [3]

Life teaches that greed for anything harms oneself by destroying one's peace of mind. Abduction of another's wife may thrill us momentarily but destroys the peace of society. The misdeeds will always haunt us. Uncontrolled temper and rash action destroys the peace of the land. People kill each other. We should respect and abide by the morals of our own society. The loss of morality upset the society like a storm . We should have courage to pursue the right cause so that the evil can be destroyed.

As a warrior we must face reality. We must strive to do good for the society. In the battlefield I swirl my dao like the bird 'majai'. It is only at those who have the audacity to challenge me that I yell at and chop off their heads. When I return home with their heads, my village is buzzing

with visitors like a running brook. Whenever I go hunting I bring back the best meat. People never tire of praising when one performs outstanding deeds. One's fame spreads far and wide and thousands of people will talk about one's good deeds in the years to come. I wish to live long, at least long enough to see two generations of my descendents.

Chapter -3

Reading the world of the Zeliangruangs

READING THE WORLD OF THE

ZELIANGRUANGS

The Zeliangruangs are a people who live in the three states of Manipur, Assam, and Nagaland. However, they inhabit a compact and contiguous territory which lies between 93° E and 94° E longitude and 25° 40' N and 24° N latitude approximately. The total area of the Zeliangruang inhabited land is about 12,000 sq. kms. The following is the area they inhabit in the three states:-

Nagaland

1. The Peren Sub-Division of Nagaland and parts of the Dimapur Sub-Division.

Assam

1. The part of Cachar District between Jiri River in the East and Digaly River in the West.
2. Areas of the North and Cachar Hills of Assam which are historically and geographically Zeliangrong areas including Haflong Town [Kunjung Ram]
- 3 Bhubon Hills from the foot hills in the west and 24 ° 30'N latitude.

Manipur

1. Tamenglong District.
2. Sadar Hills Sub- Division of Senapati District
3. Eleven villages in the West Circle of Senapati District.
4. Northern portion of Hengleep Sub- Division of Churachanpur District with 24° 3' N latitude as parallel line forming the southern boundary.
5. Jiribam Sub- Division of Imphal District between Bhubon Hills and Tamenglong District.³⁴

The term 'Zeliangruang' is an acronym formed by the words 'Ze', 'Liang' and 'Rong' representing tribal names Zemei or Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei . Historically, The Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei have regarded themselves as a single ethno-culture entity, with their common legends of origin and other factors. The people believe that Ramtinkabin in the North district of Manipur, is the place of birth of the Zeliangruang people. This place is named after a big stone Ramtinkabin. The people believed that their ancestors used to live there in olden days. Those who came out first were a couple, their three sons and one daughter. The

³⁴ See Dichamang Pamei, Liberty to Captives [A 2 BCC platinum jubilee publication] which gives the details.

Zemei being the eldest son lived with his descendants around the Ramtinkabin. These descendants gradually spread throughout the central valley and in the hills of Manipur, Nagaland and North Cachar hills of Assam. The Liangmei moved towards the Northern slopes of the original place and settled down in the present Peren, Jaluke and Medzephima blocks of Nagaland. The Zeliang is the official name of the Zeme and Liangmei people in Nagaland. Some scholars have regarded these people as the last group of migrants from South-east Asia.

The Zeliang Naga live primarily in the South-Western part of Kohima District. This area is bounded in the north and east by the Agami territory, in the south by Manipur state and in the west by North Cachar Hills and the Karbi Anglong districts of Assam.

In Manipur, 'Kabui' and Kacha Naga' are recognized Scheduled Tribes, the Kabuis of Manipur are also called Rongmei. The Kacha Naga as a tribe, consists of three sub-tribes as follows – the Zemis, the Liangmeis and the Rongmei [also known as Kabui]. The first two groups speak the same language but with a little variation in accent and the last group speaks a different one though there is a good number of words akin to the first two. According to the Zeme Naga of North Cachar Hills all these groups belong to the same stock but later clan-wise migration had to take place to different parts in search of fertile lands for cultivation. In olden times the Angamis carried on raids against the

Zemes who had to migrate further and further away from their original place of settlement till they come down to the Barail range in North Cachar Hills. Thus scattered and separated by economical, political and social forces they had to live in different geographical units like North Cachar Hills, Manipur and Nagaland. In spite of the different geographical situations in which they are placed, the social customs and manners of these sub-tribes are almost the same.³⁵

How and where from the Kacha Nagas came before reaching the present abode is still a mystery. The tradition goes that their ancestor came from the direction of Japromo in Nagaland and spread towards the south. They have been connected with the headhunters of the Malay and the races of the Southern Sea on the one hand and traced back to China on the other.³⁶ The origin and migration of the people are shrouded in mystery due to the absence of written documents or chronicles. However, it may be mentioned that their oral tradition, folk stories, folk songs, lullabies and children's games, etc., give some hints on their origin. In one of such folk songs, the children play singing the following song -

“Sinluang, Sinluang, nap-bih-ruh tio, tio ,
Nap-bih-ruh tio,tio, Nap-bih-ruh tio,tio...”

³⁵ People of India. Nagaland vol. XXXIV. The Naga Communities Anthropological Survey of India, Seagull Books Calcutta

³⁶ Dr. S.T. Das Life Style of Indian Tribes: [location Practice] Vol.1., [Gian Publishing House], Delhi.

The song means Sinluang, give me food to eat. It is possible that this shows the condition of the people living in the place called Sinluang or Sinlung in the South-Western China during those days. The people faced hardship due to food scarcity. They were cultivators practicing jhum or shifting cultivation.

On the basis of language, their [Zeliangruang] origin is assigned by Sir G. Grierson to the second wave of immigration that of the Tibeto-Burma, from the traditional cradle of the Indo-Chinese race in North Western China between the upper water of the Yangtse-Kiang and the Ho-ang- ho rivers. Sir George Gierson classed the Kacha^{Naga} language in the Naga-Bodo group.³⁷

The Zeliangruang people bear Mongoloid looks. They are well built with heights ranging from 5 to 6 feet. The colour of the skin varies from extremely fair to dark brown. Majority of the people have black and straight hair while in some cases it is curly and wooly. Eyes are brown and black. Normally hair on chest and face is sparse.

The people practice jhum cultivation. The main crops are paddy and maize. Other crops consist of arum, chilly, beans, sesame, spices and cotton. Sticky rice with very good smell and taste is also grown. Some cultivators have switched over to terrace or wet cultivation.

³⁷ see J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, 1992, pp.352,6.

Cottage industries like weaving, wood and bamboo craft, blacksmithy and pottery are the main industries. The women are expert weavers and it is the most important and commonest industry. Though the methods and implements used are primitive, very beautiful clothes are made. The loin looms are still in wide use because of its handiness, convenience and low cost. The cost of clothes woven from loin looms is high, for the cost of production in terms of labour, time and designs are very high. This method is not economical but retains its originality.

Wood and bamboo crafts, black smithy and pottery are the industries exclusively manned by men folk. The implements used are Dao, axe and adz. Articles produced are wooden platters, wooden bowls, wooden bed planks, wooden rice-beer cups, wooden pestles, wooden shuttles, wooden handles for dao, axe, hoe, adz and spear, etc. Articles made from bamboo are used for every day work in the field and in the household.

Black smithy is another important industry. The daos, hoes, axes, etc., are made and repaired by the blacksmith. In the olden times earthen pottery was common. But this industry is being abandoned as pots of better qualities are available.

The dress of a male Zeliangruang consist of a piece of rectangular cloth used for covering the private parts, tied to the waist with a string. The women wear 'pheisuai', like a wraparound, which is

confined round the waist by a sash called 'bungkam'. Another piece of cloth, 'ngangkhak phei,' is used to cover the chest/breast. All these clothes have vibrant colour schemes and beautiful pattern woven into the fabric. Although women use a piece of cloth called 'Pitin' to cover their hair, 'Samtu', a hair band made of hair is used by old women to bind their hairs. Many other dresses are used in festivals and for dancing.

Weapons in common use are the spear, dao, bow, arrow and shield. The shield is decorated with plumes of colourful birds like toucan's feathers and pendent tassels of cock's feathers.

Small boys and girls have their hair shaved off. Grown up males cut their hair round and part in the middle. Grown up girls wear their hair long at the back and cut short at the front. Married women part their hair in the middle and tie it at the back.

The main games are high jump, long jump, shot put, draughts and 'Gah toumei'. 'Gah toumei' is played with the seed of a creeper. The children play the top. 'Goih alaimei', bull chasing is done during a festival. 'Goihpih' or 'Gokpi kajapmei', catching a pig's or a bull's head suspended from the rafter of the house, is also associated with the festival of the village and feast of 'Kaisu-dongdaimei'[festival of merits] of individuals. In the Zeliangruang ways there is no prize for the winner other than praise and blessing. The winner in any game will have to pay

the villagers in cash or kind and to those who have praised or blessed the winner.

Hunting is a pastime, as well as livelihood for the people. Dogs help in the hunt. When a big animal is killed, the hind thigh is reserved for the killer of the game. The sirloin is the share of the weapon's owner, in case the weapon is hired. The head is the share of the killer and can not be eaten by women [The practice is not observed anymore]. The one who draws blood on the animal first has the right over the game even if some other kills the game later. If the animal is killed in the land of other village, that village has a claim to the share of the game.

Fishing is a very common pastime for the people. On some particular day, the whole village does community fishing. Poisonous creepers are also used to catch fish.

Rice is the main food of the people. All domesticated animals are for food-fowls, cows, mithuns, buffaloes. They also eat snail, edible frogs, lobsters, prawns, crabs, wild birds, etc. Horse, Rat, Crow, etc., are not eaten. Bamboo shoot is an important item of food. It is eaten after boiling, roasting, dried or fermented['thunbin' and 'thunkhiang']. All sorts of vegetables, creepers and roots are used for food.

One of the most popular drink before the coming of Christianity is the rice beer. Tea and coffee are also popular. Variety of fruits and nuts, pupae of bees and honey are also important food items.

Zeliangruang festivals are connected with their agricultural activities. One of the important festivals is 'Ganh Ngai'. This festival is observed after harvest during the month of October. Horn blowing is the main part of the festival. It is an important and significant festival for the people. "According to a legend they [Zeliangruang] originated from a cave blocked by a stone which was later removed by a mithun".³⁸ Mithuns³⁹ are used by the people for sacrifice but not for manual labour. 'Nahnu roumei', piercing of the child's ear and 'theih kanoimei,' to do final rites to the dead, are also performed during this festival. 'Katoi Ngai', the sesame festival, is celebrated in November. 'Chakaak Ngai' is observed in December. This festival has two parts. The first is 'Ringh- Ngai' – ceremony for the welfare of the living and 'buh jammei' [prayer for the protection of children] and 'Simun Tungmei', [to put up the head of the dog on a spike] is performed to ward off evil spirits. The second part of Chakaak Ngai is to collect stones as memorial to the departed souls of the family. 'Chaga Ngai' or 'Rih Ngai' [festival of war] is celebrated by the men of the village. Women are not allowed to take part. No strangers are

³⁸ Horam M. *People of India. Manipur*, Vol. XXXI. Anthropological Survey of India (Seagull books Calcutta, 1998)

³⁹ Mithun found in these parts has golden horns with of spot of white on its forehead and is now found in the wild. It is also called the Indian Bison.

allowed to take part in this festival. The men will take no food cooked by women during the festival. Fresh fire made is known as 'Mai-lapmei' [fire making]. 'Raang kaapmei' [shooting at an effigy of a warrior made of soft wood] is an interesting feature of this festival. 'Laophunsuat' [sowing of seeds] is celebrated in the month of March-April to invoke the gods to grant prosperity. The invocation ceremony is known as 'Napphunraang'. "Guhdui Ngai" [festival of ginger juice] is a festival observed in April. 'Ginger juice' is actually a preparation of chicken and ginger. This festival is to ensure good health. 'Khaam Ngaai' is a festival held to clear the paths leading to the paddy fields. Festivals that are arranged by the dormitories are 'Merimei' and 'Matuimei', which are festivals for the youths. Another dormitories festival is 'Malanmei', literally meaning eating, sleeping and rest. The young men able to afford this will participate. There are also feasts. of Merit like 'Banruhmei', 'Buinung dungmei', 'Kaidoumei' and 'Kaisumei' by the wealthy.

The Zeliangruang society is a patriarchal society interwoven by clans. There are three main clans. Each clan is an exogamous unit and a man cannot marry his father's brother's daughter or mother's sister's daughter, because parallel cousins are regarded as brothers and sisters, and marriage with any one of them is unthinkable. However, marriage with mother's brother's daughter is allowed and preferred. Marriage with father's sister's daughter is not permissible. Among the Zeliangruangs

polygamy is very rare and polyandry is not known. Child marriage is not practised. A widow is allowed to remarry if she so wishes. There are different kinds of marriage. There is no dowry system but there is bride price. Divorce is not common among the people. In the society, joint family system is a common practice.

Each Zeliangruang village has a 'Nampou' [village founder] and the senior village priest, who has secular function as adviser on custom. 'Tingkuh Kiakja' is the junior Assistant Priest. 'Banhzas' are elderly people of the village representing all the clans of the village who maintain orderliness in the village.

The 'Pei' or village council is the apex body of the village administration. Tingkuh is the head of the Pei. Women are not represented in Pei. The elderly people from every household of the village are part of the Pei. The decision of the Pei is final.

The Zeliangruangs are religious people. Theirs is a primal religion. Spirits plays an important role in their religion. There are good as well as bad spirits. Some of the spirits known to people are 'Imbiuh ra' [Malevolent spirit] , 'Ra gai', [Benevolent spirit]. 'Bambu ra' [Tutelary spirit], a guardian spirit of village, Asuang [Stone fetish], erected in the village to be their benevolent spirit. The people believe in one supreme God whom they call Ragwang, Tingwang or Rikarua. The relationship of

this one supreme God with the people is one of love and reverence and not of fear.

The spirits of the dead are respected. Dreams and visions play an important role in the society. There is a priest of dreams, 'Mung muh.' There are innumerable rites and rituals. The people do not have clear concept of Heaven. Once a person dies he goes to land of dead, Taro ram or Kthiron or Tarui ram or heruime ram.

The story I have collected can be grouped into various categories. The series of stories of Athampu fall into the category of the noodle or num-skull tale, which relates the comical stupidities of a foolish person, Athampu. The village, which tried to construct a ladder to reach the moon and the character of Micharung from 'Aso and Micharung' series, also falls into this category. In many of the stories like the 'Man-Tiger', 'Magianapu' and Nrumlius' and 'The Feast of Amang', the animals have human traits and can be classified into the animal tales. 'Magianapu and Nrumlius', 'Meichanglu and Chagaimeipui', 'The Seven Sons' and 'the Feast of Amang' could be classified into the category of the myth, wonder tale and supernatural stories. 'The Two Friends' is a mix of legend, romance and magic tale. The folk songs I have included address many varied subjects such as morality, individual's achievements, suggestions or advice on how to behave in a society and

how to deal with enemy. They also address romantic love, a young man's song sung when in search of a girl to marry.

"The Feast of Amang" tells of the days when mutual love, respect and interaction existed between humans, animals and divine forces. The animals live in harmony with the humans. All the animals of the land were invited for the feast. Even the gods came.

The story shows a golden period where an orphan was not ridiculed and exploited. We see in the story that the elders of his society help Amang. In the Zeliangruang community there are two kinds of orphans. "Inrunah," is an orphan who has lost one of his parents, and "Inruiritnah" is one who has lost both the parents. In the former case, it is not a shameful state but in the latter case it is something to be ashamed of, though it is not his fault. Such an orphan cannot take part in important activities. In order to be accepted by the villagers, he has to become rich or perform feats of bravery. A sad reality is that unlike Amang, most of them live a wretched life and die poor. In case of Amang, he was respected and served by the whole village, not by heredity^{but} by dint of his proven ability.

The Zeliangruang people believe that the descendent of a good man reap the benefit of the good deeds till the seventh generation. They will be blessed. But if a person is bad and does evil to his fellow beings, his household and his descendents will come to misfortune. There will be

lots of deaths in the household. Such a household is known as "Kai tarau simei".

Amang stories prove that though an orphan, and that too an 'inruinritnah', by dint of hard work and with a little divine help, one can rise in life. His celebration of the feast and the construction of the house is very significant. The celebration Amang performed is 'Banruh Makiumei', one of the two feasts of Merit. The feast is performed when a villager becomes wealthy and is able to foot the bill for the feast. All villagers will take part in it. Containers of rice beer, about 20ft long, hollowed out of blocks of wood are brought from the jungle. The containers are placed in front of the house and are filled with rice beer on the day of the feast. All invited for feast will be served with the rice beer. Anybody passing the house, even if they are strangers, will be served. This continues for many days. Singing and dancing will go on night and day. A dance item has to be performed by the wife of the host, called "Jouh puan pat mei". In this dance the wife holds a rice beer cistern of gourd with both hands in front of her waist and dances with young dancers. While doing so she pours the rice beer out the cistern. She should not make any false step in the entire dance. It is believed that evil will befall the entire family if she commits a mistake.

Not only does Amang give a feast, he also builds a house of Merit, 'Kai sumei'. The house is called 'Kaitarang'. The front of the house

is very high and slopes sharply down at the rear, almost touching the ground. At the porch, skulls of animals like the buffalo and the mithun are hung from the rafters of the house. Over the lintel of the doorway, figures of men and animals are drawn in charcoal and red mud. On the eight day of the feast, 'Meipuithiulon', the boy and the girl selected for the purpose by the dormitory will fetch water from the water point reserved for menfolk, "Nganmei Duipang". "Kalou-dui" the sacred water, thus fetched is used to wash the faces of "tarangpou" and "tarangpei", the host and the wife respectively. Then the water will be used to wash hands and feet and poured into a brass plate. He and his wife are then escorted into their room and have to abstain from sexual relations for a month. After the period of abstention, their first relationship should not be at home but in the jungle. This is strictly followed lest bad luck or else bad death or other evils befall upon the family.

These rites and rituals should not be relegated only to superstitions of the people. They demonstrate and reinforce the values of the people, e.g., becoming rich is the ultimate objective but the people should also have strong character and integrity. The husband and wife rediscover each other again in the midst of nature after the period of abstinence. To be always in touch with nature is important to the people of the Zeliangruang.

It is not wrong to seek revenge. Amang takes revenge on his younger aunt for having slighted him. In the story of 'Roukhang,' the father finally takes revenge on his wife for ill-treating Roukhang by sending her away. The revenge taken by Amang on his aunt seems a bit severe but it is accepted that she got what she deserved. After all, Amang, though a rich man is only a human being with his own weaknesses.

Every man has the right to life and he is justified in fighting to safeguard it. This right gives great power to the individual for resisting wicked plans which attempt to destroy his life. Where one is weak or unable to stand up for oneself or is no longer able to, the sons or kith and kin can take revenge for him. In the case of the 'Youngest Son', all the brothers tried to avenge their wronged father but failed in their mission. Where humans cannot achieve justice, the gods give them a hand, like the son of a god born into the family for the sole purpose of avenging the good man and bringing an end to the evil ways of the Man - Tiger.

A woman in Zeliangruang society enjoys more power and privileges than women of other communities. She plays an important part in the family. She is one of the bread earners and though the husband is the head of the family, the wife's suggestion and proposals in important matters are taken. The 'Rouman' Amang went to collect is one

of the three bride prices, the other two being 'Mandu' which is paid after her death and 'Maigong man', which is a widow's price. Those persons involved in sharing the bride price are responsible for the welfare of the bride in future. If the wife is unfaithful to the husband, the bride price will be returned and the husband has the right to send her back to her family and take another wife. If the wronged husband takes fines from the man who has had an affair with his wife, then the man [who has an illegal affair with the wife] is free to take her for his wife if he wants to. By taking a fine, the husband has relinquished his right over the wife. If the husband wants the woman to be still his wife despite her unfaithfulness, then he has to forgive the wrongdoer and not take any fine from him. If the husband is unfaithful, the woman's family could take the matter to the village Pei or settle the matter outside the Pei. He has to pay fine by forfeiture of cultivable land or pond, etc.

This system of bride price has good points. It keeps the marriage bond alive throughout the lifetime of the couple and even after their death. The kinship system is strengthened and the society is kept cohesive by this system.

There are, like in every society, good and evil women. The stepmother in 'Roukhang', the aunt in 'Amang's Feast', and the stepmother in 'The Boy Who Turned Into a Hornbill' are examples of evil and unjust women. They do not respect the individual and the right of

their stepsons and nephew and show disregard for their husbands and brothers. In the end they get what they rightly deserved.

Examples of good and selfless women are also found in plenty. The elder aunt in 'Amang's Feast' selflessly gives out the information about the mithun's rope so as to make life for her nephew better. Roukhang's sister is kindness personified and the foster mother of Micharung and Aso love them as her own.

There is no caste or class system among the Zeliangruang society. A boy from a rich family can marry a poor girl and vice versa. Amang gets for himself a god's daughter. "God's Son-in-law" also is another story about a man who marries a god's daughter. Each individual is judged not by his lineage, but by what he is.

The stories of Aso and Micharung give a delightful insight into the people's love for wisdom. There is a constant battle of wits between the two characters. Aso always wins. It also sheds light on the fact that conflict can be solved not only by superhuman powers or great physical valour but also by mental prowess and wisdom. Aso is wise but also sometimes considered to be cunning and conniving. Nevertheless, he is very popular figure in contemporary Zeliangruang society. There is even a club of intellectuals, named after him, called 'Aso Club.'

Chapter - 4

Problems of Translation and Conclusion

SOME PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION AND

CONCLUSION

“Since folklore bore the mark of the spoken rather than the printed word, it is very difficult to recapture its spirit in translation”.⁴⁰

Translating the folklores of the Zeliangruang is no easy task. There is the linguistic untranslatability due to differences between two languages, that is the Zeliangruang language and the language of translation, English. During the course of translating stories I have tried to translate idiom by idiom but sometimes it is impossible to do so. For example the Zeliangruang exclamation Apui leih!, when in literal translation means ‘My mother’s buttock’ has to be translated as ‘Oh my God !’ The exclamation ‘Chrin Chara ye’ has to be rendered to just “Amazing”. ‘Charin mei’ means amazing but for the word ‘Chara ye’ there is no word in English that corresponds to it. Sometimes it is necessary to add words not in the original to conform to the idiom of one’s own tongue. When a phrase like “Kamang kai nimei na” as translated into ‘child to be eaten by a tiger’, it is less emphatic. So words are to make the intention of the speaker more pronounced- ‘your child doomed to be eaten by a tiger’ gives the right tone.

⁴⁰ Daniel J, Boorstin, American Folklore, Chicago.

I have tried to translate in such a way that the structure of the source language is preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the target language structure will be seriously distorted. I have always kept in mind what the whole sense is, that I have to render of a given work.

While doing my field work, collecting and recording the stories, I had to take along with me a translator, for I speak only Ruangmei, and not the other two Zeliangruang dialects, Zemei and Liangmei. Also there is the problem of not being able to refer to any other work since there is no similar work in printed form.

Due to limited time I was only able to collect, record and translate a few stories and folk songs, which in itself gives a picture but an incomplete one, of the Zeliangruang community and their literature. There is so much more to be done. Given the opportunity, I would like to do more research on the Zeliangruangs folk oral tradition. The proverbs, riddles, folk superstitions, songs in folk dance and ritualistic prayers are left unexplored.

I would also like to study the impact of Christianity on the literature and belief of the people. Some of the folk tales are similar in nature to the mainstream Indian folk tales and seem to have traces of outside influence. It would be interesting to study why and how this is so. In this present dissertation, I was able to concentrate only on the Zeliangruangs

living in Manipur. I would like to further study the differences, if any, found in the folk literature of the Zeliangruang living in the other two states, i.e. Assam and Nagaland.

This present work is not without its shortcomings. It is, I acknowledge, a very brief and incomplete account of the oral literature, but it is my humble hope that this literary venture will keep alive the flame of folklores of the Zeliangruang and would be, even if little, of some use for the future scholars interested in such studies. As a Zeliangruang, it means the world to me.

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