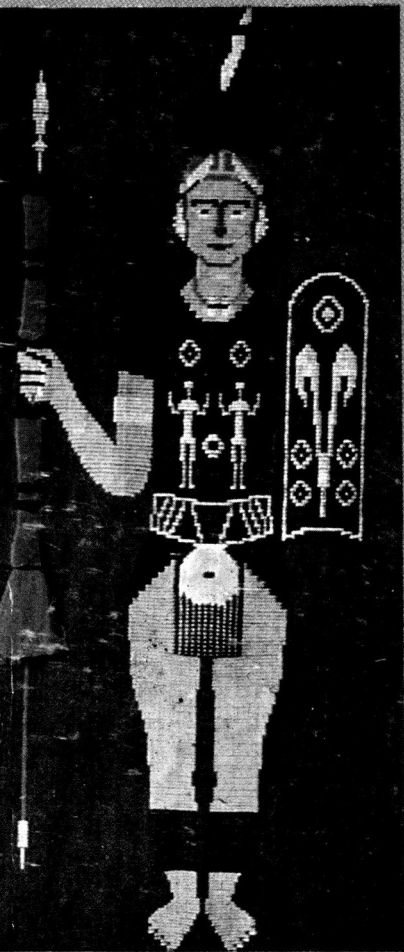


# FOLK-LORES & FOLK-LORE MOTIFS



Dr. B.B. KUMAR

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# FOLK-LORES & FOLK-LORE MOTIFS

(Special Reference to North-East)

Dr. B.B. Kumar



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## About the Book

Folk-lore of any society is an important tool for proper understanding of that society— its past, its traditions, culture and its contacts with others. This is a study of folk-lore of the north east region. The book contains language-wise bibliographies on languages and folk-lores of north east India

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## **About the Author**

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He remained associated with a large number of academic and voluntary bodies from time to time during 22 years, such as founder Secretary, Nagaland Bhasha Parishad, Thinkers Forum, Nagaland, Council for Social Service, Nagaland; Founder President, Educational Society of Nagaland and All Nagaland Govt. College Teachers Association; Vice-President, Family Planning Association of India, Nagaland branch & member of its National Council; Vice-President, Indian Council of Social Service, Nagaland branch; Member, Governing Body, Nagaland Peace Centre & North East India Council of Social Science Research, Shillong; Member, Academic Council, College Developmental Council, Exam Committee and Board of Undergraduate Studies (Chemistry), NEHU Shillong; Chairman, Board of Hindi Studies and Member, Board of Studies for Science for Rural Development, Gandhigram Rural University (Tamil Nadu); etc.

He is author/editor of about 130 books and more than 100 papers and radio talks in Hindi & English. He contributed papers in a large numbers of seminars, books and journals, edited Thinker, quarterly journal for 13 years and Nagaland Special number of journal of Social Research, Ranchi as a guest editor.

He recieved Ganga Sharan Singh award recently for the distinguished work in the field of Hindi propagation.

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## Preface

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Folk-lore of any society is an important tool for proper understanding of that society, its past, its traditions, culture and its contact with others. The North-East India is very rich in its oral literature. Unfortunately, the richness of its folk-lore is only matched by its neglect. Very little work has been done towards the collection, compilation, editing and publication of the folk-lore of this region. The work done in the field of scientific study and analysis is rather negligible.

The book has five chapters including consolidated and language-wise bibliographies on languages and folk-lore of North-East India. I have endeavoured to present brief information about the work-done so far in the field, an appraisal of the folk-lore, theoretical frame of study and the folk-lore frames, types and motifs. However, I am conscious of its limitations, inadequacies and shortcomings. I feel that the book shall be useful inspite of all the shortcomings.

I thank the publisher, Shri Ramesh Kumar for his endeavour in reaching the book to its readers.

**B.B. KUMAR**

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# *Folk-Lore of North-East India :* *An Appraisal*

## **Introduction**

The term "Folk-lore" applies to unwritten, orally transmitted folk-literature of a people. It includes legends, myths, stories, songs, proverbs, wise sayings and lore, patterns of festivals and dances, superstitions and magical formulas.

The term was coined by William J. Thomas (1803-1885) in 1846 to denote either the above mentioned collected materials or the systematic scientific analysis of the materials collected. Earlier collectors of folk-lore did substantial and pioneering service to the society, although they often produced formless compilations and paid slight attention to the geographical provenance of specific materials and lumped together the folk-tales, folk-songs, proverbs etc. of various communities of far away places together. Even those, who tried to classify folk-lore, ignored the geographical, ethnological and cultural factors. In 12 volumes of "The Golden Bough" of Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941), the major categories are topical. "The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings", "Taboo and the Perils of the Soul", "Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild", "The Scapegoat", The Fire Festivals of Europe and Doctrine of the External Soul. The last two volumes dealing specifically with European topics have other topics like natives of Borneo, Australian natives and Eskimo scattered on the pages. Thus, tales or customs superficially alike, are grouped together regardless the area of origin basing on the assumption of universal human mentality.

Sir George Laurence Gomme (1853-1960) in "The Hand book of Folk-lore" divided folk-lore in four categories:

1. Traditional narratives : Folk-tales, hero-tales, ballads and songs, place-legends.
2. Traditional Customs : Local customs, Festival customs, Ceremonial customs, Games.
3. Superstitions & Beliefs : Witch-craft, astrology, superstitions, practices and fancies.
4. Folk-speech : Popular sayings, popular nomenclature, proverbs, jungle rhymes, riddles.

This classification also does not take into a count geographical factors.

North-East India has immense cultural and linguistic diversity and very rich in its folk-lore — both in quantity and quality. However, the collection work done so far is not at all satisfactory. The meagre collection and scanty scientific analysis are real challenges for folk-lorists in this part of the country. Assamese, Meithei, Khasi and Tripuri folk-lore have been published in the original language as well as in English and Hindi translations. Folk-lore of other languages have mostly been published in English.

A brief survey of published folk-lore of North East India is given below. The detailed account is given in the Bibliography.

### **Assamese Folk-lore**

Asamiya Patantarmala ba jejuna by Gopal Chandra Das, Phulkonwar (Dibrugarh, 1903), Monikonwar (Dibrugarh, 1903) and Tatirjuna (undated) by Bhadrasen Bara and Burhi-aur Sadhu (Howrah, 1911), Kahadeuta Aru Natilora (Calcutta, 1912) and Junuka (Gauhati, 2nd 1953). by Lakshminath Bezbarua are some of the earliest publications in Assamese. Dak Purushar Jiwani (Awahon. Vol.I, Calcutta, 1930) by Sonaram Choudhury, Sandhiyar Sadhu (Gauhati, 1961) by Atul Chandra Barua, Dak Charit (Agency Co. Dibrugarh, undated), Asamiya Sadhu (Jorhat, 1941), Barpeta, (1962), by Arjunchandra Das, Mor Desar

Sadhukatha (Jorhat, 1939) by Shri Ramchandra Das, Sadhukathar Puthi (Gauhati, 1941) by Prasannakumar Deka, Assam Desar Sadhu (Calcutta, 1955, 62) by Praphulla Datta Goshwami Monikonwar by Haliram Hazarika, Kankhowa (Jorhat 1944) by Shridhar Kandali, Bhekuli Biya (Bhattacharya Co. Dibrugarh, undated) Tentan (Barpeta, undated) and Siyal Pandit (Barpeta, undated), Nichukani (Calcutta, 1916) by Jogeshchandra Tamuli and Maniram Devan (Gauhati, 1950) by Benudhar Sharma need special mention.

Biyanam (Jorhat, 1948) by Annada Devi Barkataki, Kanrupiya Biyar Geet (Kamarkuchi, 1945) by Prasannachandra Barua, Barphukanar Geet (Gauhati, 1924,51) by Surjakumar Bhuyan, Janagabharur Geet (Jorhat, 1925) by Rupeshwar Dutta, Bara Mahar Tera Geet (New Delhi, 1962) by Praphulladatta Goshwami, Baramahi Aru Bilap Geet (Gauhati, 1958) by Phanindra Kalita, Asamiya Lokgeet Sangrah (Jorhat, 1960) by Jogeshchandra Tamuli and Prachin Asamiya Geet Sankalan (Part I, Jorhat, 1953) by Pravindranath Barua have the collections of various kinds of Assamese folk-songs. Other important publications in Assamese language are Jagarani (Shillong, 1945) by Kirtinath Sharma Bardalai, Bohagi (Jorhat, 1923,1949, Shillong, 1963) by Nakulchandra Bhuyan, Phakara (Barpeta, 1927) by Kantiram Burhabhakat, Phakara Jojana (Gauhati, 1941) by Shriramchandra Das, Namati Ai (Dibrugarh, 1948, 8th ed.) by Dibakar Duara etc. and many articles published in different volumes of different Assamese News-papers and magazines such as Jayanti, Ramdhenu, Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika etc.

Folk-tales of Assam (Howrah, 1911, 1962) by J. Baruah had translations from the collection of folk-tales by Lakshminath Bejbarua. Assamese Proverbs (Shillong, 1895) by PRT Gurdon and the publication with same title by P.C. Barua (Gauhati, 1962), Bihu songs of Assam (Gauhati, 1957) and Ballads and Tales of Assam (Gauhati, 1960) by Praphulladatta Goshwami are important publications. Numerous articles on Assamese folk-lore have been

published in different issues of Folklore, Man in India, Eastern Anthropologist, Triveni etc.

Three Ahom folk-tales by E.T.E. Lambart were published in Man in India Vol. XXVI (1946).

### **Folk-lore of Bodo tribes**

Bodo, Dimasa etc of Assam, Garos of Meghalaya and Tripuris of Tripura speak languages of the same group. Bodos, Dimasas and Tripuris are mostly Hindus, whereas most of the Garos, who are matriarchal like Khasis, have embraced Christianity.

“Folk-songs of the Bodos by Mohini Mohan Brahm was published by Gauhati University in 1960. Boro Folk songs on love by P.C. Bhattacharya was published in Indian Folk-lore (II/I) in 1957. Bodo Kacharir Jana-Sahitya by Bhabendra Narzari (Gauhati, 1957) and Janajatiya Sadhu by B.N. Shastri (Jorhat, 1962) are important publications in Assamese language. Kachari Ballads and Folksongs by Praphulladatta Goshwami (The Hindustan Standard, Oct. 14, 1945) give important information about Kachari folk-lore.

Tripurar Rupkatha by S. Chakravarti has Tripuri folk-tales in Bengali Kereng Kathama by Kumar & Chakravarty (Nagaland Bhasha Parishad, Kohima) has selected Tripuri folk-tales in Devanagari script with meaning in Hindi. Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore has published English translation of Tripuri folk-tales.

“Folk-tales of the Garos” by Dewan Singh Rongmuthu was published by Gauhati University in 1960. Playfair’s monograph on Garos have also a chapter on folk-lore.

### **Mikirs**

Lokasadhu (Mikir) by Rajkumar Swarganand was published by Publication Board, Gauhati in 1960. Lyall’s monograph on Mikirs has also a chapter on folk-lore.

### **Tea Garden Tribes**

Santals, Mundas, Kharias, Hos etc. from Bihar, M.P. Orissa and W. Bengal have settled in North East India as Tea-garden labourers. Their folk-lore entries and works on their languages have extensively entered into the Bibliography in the last chapter.

### **Meithei**

Hudson's monograph on Meithei has separate chapter on Meithei folk-lore. Manipuri Lok-Kathaen (in Hindi, Imphal, 1988) by Nintamba and others, Khambathoibi by Kalachand (in Hindi, Imphal 1963) etc. and numerous articles in the pages of Indian Anthropologist, Folk-lore, Indian Folk-lore etc. are worth mentioning (Please see bibliography).

### **Arunachal Pradesh**

"Myths of North-East Frontier of India" (NEFA administration, Shillong, 1958, 1968) and "A New Book on Tribal Fiction" (Shillong 1970) by Verrier Elvin are classic publications. The latter includes the folk-tales of Adis, Khamtis, Singphos, Sherdukpens and Buddhist stories from Yang Sang Chu Valley. Arunachal Administration has done Commendable job by publishing many more useful books in this field. (Please see bibliography).

### **Kuki-Chin Tribes/Mizo**

Folk-tales of the Lushais and their neighbours (folk-lore. XX 1909) by John Shakespear is perhaps the earliest work on Mizo folk-tales. N.E. Parry's monograph on "Lakhers" have collection of their folk-lore also. Nagaland Bhasha Parishad has published folk-tales of Paite and Kuki with Devanagari transliteration and meaning in Hindi.

### **Khasi**

Gordon's monograph on Khasis have a chapter on Khasi folk-lore. "Folk-tales of Khasi" by Mrs. Rafy (n.d.), Khasi Folk-lore (1914) by Robert John, Khasi Fables and Folk-tales

(Calcutta, 1971) and Folk-music of the Khasis by Lily S. Anderson are important publications of the language, apart from different articles in numerous journals.

### **Naga Folk-lore**

Nagas are rich in their folk-literature. Unfortunately, very less work has been done towards the compilation and study of their folk-lore and there is every danger that the vast treasure of their folk literature will vanish with the passing away of the old generation.

### **Earlier Works**

T.C. Hudson published "Some Naga Customs and Superstitions" in 1910 (Folk-lore, vol. 21 pp. 269-312). J.H. Hutton published "Folk-tales and Folk-songs of the Angami and Sema Nagas" in his two monographs. Different parts of books were devoted for the same. Similarly J.P. Mills devoted part five of his monographs on the Ao Nagas, Rengma Nagas and Lotha Nagas for the folk-songs and folk-tales. Folk-tales of the Angami Nagas were also published by J.H. Hutton in the different volumes of the Folk-lore. (1914, 1915, 1922). He also published "Molola:- A Chang Naga Folk-story" regarding the relation between a man and his sister's son in Man of India in 1922 and "Two Angami Naga songs" in the same Journal in 1943. Hutton published "Folk-tales from the Naga Hills of Assam" in Folk-lore' (June 1923). J.P. Mills also published "Folk-story in Lotha Naga", and "An Ao Naga Song", "Two Rengma Naga Songs", "A Lotha Naga Song" and "The Story of Shamvali" a Chang Naga Folk-tale in different volumes of the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, "Man in India". Folk-tales from the Naga Hills" and "Ten Folk-stories in Sema Nagas" by C.R. Pawsey were published in Folk-lore (in 1922) and Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal (1939) respectively. "The Caterpillar Boy and Lotha Naga Folk-lore" by Sarat Chandra Mitra was published in the Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society in 1928. "Ao Naga Folk-tales" by William Charlson Smith was published in Folk-lore in 1929. "The Role of the Songs in

Konyak Culture" by Christoph Von Furer Haimendorf (Man in India in 1943), "Songs of the Nagas" (Social Welfare, 1959) and "Songs of the Naga Hills" by H.E. Kauffmann need mention. Thus, very little work has been done in this direction in the past.

### Recent Works

Folk-tales from Nagaland by P.K. Battacharjee (Ed.) published by Naga Institute of Culture, Kohima in 1971 and Naga Folk-tales by R. Luikham (Select Books. New Delhi, 1983) have been published recently. Verrier Elwin has included some Naga Myths, specially that of Arunachal Pradesh in his "Myths of NEFA".

Tangkhul Naga Folk-Literature by S.Arokianathan has the collection of Tangkhul Naga folk-tales, folk-songs and proverbs. It is published by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore (1982).

### A Rich Treasure

Needless to say that Nagas had rich treasure of folk-literature. A lot has already been lost, but a vast treasure may still be saved if timely endeavour is done. J.P. Mills wrote in his monograph on "The Ao Naga" in 1926 "Another generation and hardly memory will remain of the stories and songs which the Aos have handed down from father to son for untold ages. What care the well-oiled youths of the Impore Mission Training School for the foolish traditions of their ignorant heathen fore-bears? To bury the past is the tendency of the semi-educated generation which is growing up. Christians never join in the old songs, they are definitely forbidden to do so. I believe a number of Ao stories have been recorded by Mr. H.G. Dennehy, I.C.S., who acted as Sub-Divisional Officer in Mokokchung for a year, but the book is not used in Mission school. The past is being allowed to die. But the old men still tell the old stories".

Naga tribes had dormitories called Morung. The Morungs used to be the vital centres around which the Naga folk-lore flourished. The decline of morung institution has effected adversely the Naga folk-lore.

The folk-tales also reflect back-ground of the people, their mind, character, religion, culture, superstition and taboos. Many folk-tales and myths are woven around them. This was more true in the case of Nagas. Thus, their folk-literature was rooted in their tradition and acculturation has brought a setback for the same.

### Classification of Naga Folk-lore

None has attempted to classify the Naga Folk-lore. The classification and the systematic study should follow the broad based compilation. Unfortunately, the latter has not yet been done. The systematic study of the folk-lore needs the data in the form of the collection of large number of folk-songs and folk-tales etc.

The folk-lore of the Nagas may be classified according to the area of diffusion which may be the following :

1. The folk-literature which is shared by more than one tribe as for example, the Kezakenoma legend of the origin of the Nagas is shared by Angamis, Semas, Lothas, Rengmas and Maos with slight modification.
2. The Folk-lore of the particular tribe.
3. Village based folk-lore.

Apart from the folk-tales and folk-songs common to the tribe, every village has a body of traditions which tell of the origin of a clan and deeds of their ancestors recited at the great festivals. The folk-songs and folk-tales may be studied separately.

The folk-tales and folk-songs may also be classified according to the themes and motifs. A thorough study of the folk-lore is essential for the same. The legends and myths may be classified together. This may include the folk-tales related to their beliefs, superstitions, taboos and totems also.

We have folk-tales about the great deed of men and women, tales of cunningness and that of the ill-behaviour of the step-mother. Such folk-tales of secular nature may be sub-classified into several categories.

There are large number of folk-tales about animals and birds. Some such folk-tales have taken the form of legends. Angamis, as for example address the tiger as "Udzurie-u" (elder brother) and have a legend of common origin of men and the tiger. Many such tales provide basis for totemism, although such stories are very less in number.

### Writing and the Oral Traditions

Many tribes have legends according to which they were given the art of writing by God. But while they were provided skin for writing purpose the plains-men were provided the stone. They ate the skin and lost the art of writing while the plains-men retained it. Such stories are mostly found among Adis, Mishmis and the Nagas.

### Some Legends of Origin

There are numerous legends and folk-tales about the origin of the people of Nagaland and other hill areas of North East India. Some of such legends and folk-tales are the following:

Ao Naga tradition states that their ancestors come out of the earth from six stones i.e. lungterok (lung = stone, terok = six) of Chungliyimti village, which is, now a Sangtam village on the right bank of river Dikhu opposite to Longsa village. Out of the six stones, three were males and others females. One of the female stones is said to be the source of Pongen and Lungkam phratries while a male stone is claimed to be the source of Chami phratry of the Aos. Wozukumru clan has a different legend of origin and does not claim its origin from Lungterok. Phom Nagas also claim their origin from lungterok.

According to Ao legend, the ancestors of Aos, Semas and Changs emerged from Lungterok. However, Semas and Changs do not agree to this legend of their origin.

According to Angami legend, ancestors of Angamis, Semas and Lothas were brothers. They lived with their parents in Kezakenoma village, which is nowadays a Kheja Naga village. The three brothers used to spread paddy in

turns on a big flat stone, in which a spirit used to inhabit and as a result of that, the paddy used to become double in load. One day the brothers could not decide as to whose turn it was and started fighting bitterly. The parents become frightened as they anticipated blood-shed. They broke eggs on the stone and set that on fire. The spirit came out as the stone burst with thunderous sound and the stone lost all the virtues. The three brothers then left the place and went in three directions. The parents remained there and become the ancestors of the Kheja tribe, This legend of the dispersion from Kezakenoma stone is told by Semas, Lothas, Rengmas and Maos with slight modification.

Yet, there is another Angami story of origin of Angami, Mao, Maram and Kacha Nagas. According to that there was a lake from which three men emerged. The first who later on become the ancestor of the Maos and Marams went southwards. The second man went to the west and he became the ancestor of the Kacha Nagas. The third one, who become the ancestor of the Angamis, did not go anywhere and settled there.

There is a stone slab just below the new township of Tsemenyu. They say that certain section of Rengmas, Semas and Lothas once stayed there.

There are two divisions of the Angamis, namely, Kepazoma and Kepepfuma. The legend says that they descended from two brothers who came out of the earth. Some point towards the Maikel stone as the place of the happening. Angamis do not specify the place. According to them the prints of hands, feet and knees of the two ancestors may be found in front of the hole from where they emerged. The Angamis point towards Mao and the country beyond, as the place of their origin. The words from the priest of Mao and Mekroma (Maikel) villages are necessary for fixing the dates of the regular village festivals in Angami area.

Semas point towards Japvo mountain and Swemi village as the place from where they sprang. Rengmas similarly point towards Mao. They say that they originated from Khuemphen. Mao Naga legend connects them with the plains of Manipur.

The Zemi Nagas point towards Japvo mountain as their original place. Their legend says that they were created in the land of Fum. Tangsa Nagas of Tirap believe their origin from Masoi Sinrapum hill, somewhere towards East. Chang Nagas say that they come from East. The very name of the tribe Chang means East in their language.

Khiemnungan Nagas of Wui village, situated on the western slope of Patkai range in Noklak area of Nagaland, have a legend of their origin, which says that the parents of their ancestors, who were brother and sister came down from the sky on that place. Clan endogamy, which is a rare thing among the tribes of North East India is practiced in the village of Wui only and not in other Khiemnungan villages, who treat it as an act of incest.

Wancho Nagas have a legend of destruction of the world by a great flood. After that a girl became pregnant by the wind and gave birth to the ancestor of the tribe.

Hutton has mentioned a legend under the head "Durbar of Mekrima". According to the story, god known as Jillmasa had connection with a cloud and as result of that god, tiger, and three others namely Asapu, Tuthoh and Kepi were born. Asapu and Tuthoh went to the valleys of Brahmaputra and Manipur respectively. Kepi stayed there. The three became the ancestors of Mayangs (Indians), Meitheis (Manipuris) and Haus (Nagas) respectively.

An Angami story says that man, tiger and spirit were brothers. According to this, the Nagas and the plainsmen are the descendants of two brothers and their followers, who used Chombu and Chemu trees to lighten their paths. The former gave light for several days and not the latter. Thus, most of the people followed the brother using chombu tree for blazing the path and went to the plains. The ancestor of the Nagas was the second brother.

According to an Angami legend Nagas and Teprima (Indians) are the descendants of Ukepenopfu and her long bearded husband, who was living in a vessel. He had long moustache and beard reaching down to his feet and was very wise, He imparted all of his knowledge and wisdom to

the younger son, who become the ancestor of Teprimas (Indians). The elder brother (i.e. the ancestor of the Nagas) was frightened to see him and ran away and thus remained poor in knowledge and wisdom.

An Angami story says how men wanted to construct a tower upto heaven so that to meet their ancestor, Ukepnoifu, and how she made them to speak different languages and thus the idea of construction of tower was abandoned.

According to another Angami story there was an attempt to build a ladder upto the heaven by powerful chief of a particular country and his vast army.

We have also the legends of totemistic origin of the tribes and clans. Hutton has mentioned the fertilisation of women by the rising sun, the setting sun, the hornbill's feather and hulluk respectively leading to the legendary totemistic origin of clans.

According to the Wancho legend, a girl was fertilised by the wind and the tribe originated. This happened after the world was destroyed by the flood.

Many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh such as, Mishmis, Khamtis, Bangnis and Noctes have their myths of origin. They have also the myths of origin of Bengalis, Assamese, Tibetans, Burmese and British and several myths of the origin of man. According to myths of Arunachal Pradesh, Noctes were the forefathers of British and Wanchos of Assamese. Yet another myth traces the origin of British from Monkey.

Arunachal Pradesh, specially the central region, is very rich in myths of origin. There are myths of origin of different animals, birds and insects, such as, horse, pig, bear, elephant, dog, mithun, monkey, tiger, yak, rat, snake, fish, leeches, frog, hornets, cock, duck, bee and cricket; human organs such as teeth, eye and fingers, natural objects and phenomena, such as rivers, Brahmaputra, Lohit river, trees, seed, tea, brinjal, chillies, cotton, ginger, onion, millet, plantain, chestnut tree, bamboo, leaves, flowers, grass,

poison, sky, stars, mountain, wind, fire, lightening, hail and rain and other things and activities, such as iron, implements, death, disease, marriage, cultivation, trade, sacrifice, pig sacrifice, human sacrifice and head-hunting, weeping and singing.

There are myths about the origin of world. Kabuis believe that all the living beings were created by Dampapai (creator-mother). Khasis trace their origin though gods from heaven through seven ancestresses.

Kuki-Chin tribes believe that their ancestors emerged from a cave.

### **Man and the Super-natural**

In many Naga folk-tales, we find men and women in communication with supernatural. The supernatural beings and supernatural phenomena are depicted in most natural way in such folk-tales.

In the famous Ao folk-tales, "Longkongla", we find a hornbill's feather turning into a stone; the stone into a bamboo-vessel and the latter into a baby boy.

Elvin has collected some transformation myths where dog is transformed into man, man into dog and tiger into dog. Tiger and cat into man and man into tiger transformation is very common. Transformation of man into bird and dog in Tangkhul stories and man into bird and animals in many Tripuri stories are also reported. In a Tripuri folk-tale, white-ants are converted into a prince, who married a girl tortured by her step-mother.

Marriage with birds, rat, frog, snakes, tigers, dogs, tree, fire, and super-natural beings such as water-gods, fairies, etc. are the themes of many myths and folk-tales of Arunachal Tribes, Nagas, Kuki-Chin tribes, Bodo tribes, Khasis etc. In the Tangkhul tale. Thanglongphi is married to a python-man.

Haoata Kumar the hero of the famous Karbi (Mikir) folk-tale marries a fairy. In Arunachal myth, a Viyu (spirit) marries a man. Similarly, we have a tale about star-wife.

Stories of Giants/demons are also numerous in North East India specially among Khasis and Assamese.

"Hunchibill" is a Lotha folk-tale. A man manages to marry a god's daughter. The latter is killed by an ugly woman called Hunchibilli, who manages to stay with the man as his wife. The murdered wife turns into a bamboo plant and then into an orange and ultimately reunites with her husband. We have numerous Naga folk-tales where men and women get married to the fairies and goddesses and male spirits respectively. The Lotha story of "Lichao and his daughter" and the Ao story of Champichanglangba are the variation of the same plot. "The fairy husband" is a folk-tale of the Semas, which slightly varies with the tale of "Pelikutoli". The beautiful, Pelikutoli is married to a heavenly body. Similarly Semas have story about the fairy wife.

The story of Momola, who was married to water spirit is well known to Aos, and neighbouring tribes.

The Tangkhul story of "The Return from the Valley of Death", the story of the "Ogress and the Two Orphans" narrated by Angamis and Chakhesangs; Ao story of "Nokpoliba, the Magician" and that of "Champichanglangba" are woven around magical and supernatural powers. Apfuho the famous hero of the Lotha folk-tales was turned into stone.

The tales about the attempt to make ladder between earth and heaven are reported from Arunachal Pradesh, Naga area and from Khasis war of men with hornets, frogs and monkeys; war between snakes and cock; stars and water-spirits; frog as enemy of sun and moon; flute, fish, plantain and tree as objects of magic; tigers, elephant and man with wings form themes of many folk-tales of Arunachal Pradesh.

Many Khasis folk-tales depict objects of magic, marriage with super-human beings origin of hills, lime, rivers, which come in this category.

## Traditions and Legends

Numerous traditions and legends about the origin of villages and clans, their relationship etc. are still preserved in the folk-memory of the Nagas. Hutton in his monograph on "The Angami Nagas" had published some of them.

## Human Sentiment in Naga Folk-lore

Human sentiments also find their display in Naga-tales. Love, self-sacrifice, bravery, hate, anger, revenge, jealousy, wonder etc. find full expression in the same.

Chinasangba and Itiven were legendary Ao lovmates, who sacrificed their lives on the altar of love. The same is true about Shimreishang and Maitonphi of the Tangkhul country. In the above mentioned two stories we find lovers sacrificing their lives for the sake of love. We have also Ao love story where Salunaru is treacherously killed by her lover Rangtsung.

In a Khasi tale, Ka Lieng Makaw dies as she fails to secure the company of U Mih, whom she loves so dearly. U Mih realises her deep love for him after her death only and then he also dies. The pair of buffaloes shed tears and became stones when their master is prevented by Ka Syiem Lalympang from going to field as she loved him and desired his prolonged company.

In a Tangkhul story, Phuilenla kills herself by throwing herself from a roof-top after her husband is murdered by her own brothers.

The stories of revenge abound in many folk-tales. In Tangkhul folk-tale Thanglongphi, son-in-law kills mother-in-law in revenge and brother-in-law kills brother-in-law with the same motive.

Cruelty is a common theme. However, cruelty towards own sons and daughters are also the themes of many folk-tales.

Stories of orphans and trickster stories are found almost in every part of North East India.

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Lothas still remembered Ramphan and his courage and bravery. The stories of the exploits of some mythical individuals are also very popular in Nagaland. The stories Aphuho of the Northern Lothas and Yamphuho of Southern Lothas correspond exactly to the Sema character Iki. Many of their stories are identical. They are always represented getting in and out of scrapes and as tricking their fellow villagers or their friend, the tiger, often in the meanest possible way. Angamis have a similar mythical character "Matsuo". "Langkongrhoni and the villagers" is a Lotha story of widow and her handsome son, who was killed by the villagers due to their jealousy. The widow, in revenge, plotted and killed all the children of the village.

The stories of Akui and Guileng are two stories of the orphans tortured by their step-mothers. Certain folk-tales like "How head-hunting began" and "Invention of Fire" explain the traditions and inventiveness of man.

Semas Angamis and Arunachal tribes believed in the existence of a place, Amazons where only the women live. They kill the new born male baby by throwing boiling water over his body.

### **Stories of Birds, Animals etc.**

We find large number of Naga folk-tales about birds and animals, trees, stones, etc. and their relation with men. The Lotha folk-tales of "The Sambhar and the Huluk Monkey", "The Wild bear and the tiger", "How men became Catfish", "How men turned into Gibbons", "The Girl who married a Tiger", "The Women with a Caterpillar for a husband" and "The Wagtail and the Owlet" are such stories. The Ao folk-tales include stories like "Why wild-pigs Eat the Crops". "Why Rats eat the rice", "Why the Crow is black", "The Sun and the Cock", "The Girl who had a tree for a lover", Similarly we can cite the Angami folk-tales "Battle of birds and snakes", "The Fig Tree", "The Tiger men and spirit", "The Rat Princess and the Greedy Man", "The Monkey and the Jackal" etc. and Sema folk-tales like "The squirrel and the Quail", "The Leopard Cat and the Squirrel", "The Leopard-Cat and the Nightjar", "The Otter

and the Leopard Cat", "The Battle of Birds and Creeping Things", "The Dispersion of Crabs", "The Iki and the Tiger" etc. under this category. The folk-tales like "The Sun and the Cock" told by the Angamis and Aos, "The Great Assembly of the Creatures" of the Tangkhuls, "The Man and the Kind Fig tree" of the Zeliangroung Nagas provide interesting reading. Nagas have yet many more interesting folk-tales like "The Case against the Crab", "How dogs became hornless", "The squirrel and the Tiger", "Bat and Animals", "The wild Boar and the Tiger", "How Tigers came on this earth" "How leeches came on this earth", "How Tigers began to eat human flesh", Tales from Arunachal depict owl and monkey as possessors of fire and birds, parrot and frog as messengers.

According to a Lotha folk-tale "Aphuhe and Tiger"; men could understand the talk of animals in olden days.

## Folk-Songs

Folk songs of this part of the country have expressions of finest human sentiments. Various languages abound in folk songs. The songs in many cases are sung in archaic language, which differs considerably from the ordinary spoken language.

The songs usually depict the past exploits of their heroes; their finest sentiments etc.

The classification of the folk-songs may be done tribe-wise taking into consideration the circumstances and occasions under which song is sung, the nature of the tune and the number of the singers.

Repetition and vocal interpolations are the essential features of folk-songs in North East India. Sometimes the singing is dull and repetitive and sometimes enchanting and vigorous, accompanied by dance and musical instruments.

Most of the festivals and special occasions were celebrated by feasting, dancing and singing by different communities of this region, such as during marriage and birth of a child in many cases, as in the case of Assamese.

Nagas used to celebrate success in war (Head-hunting) and feasts of merit by brisk feasting, dancing and singing. Assamese have their special songs for different occasions like marriage, birth, outbreak of small-pox etc. They also have teasing songs sung during marriage. Deh-bichar songs of Assamese are related to tantric rituals. Assamese people also have Baramahi songs describing twelve months of the year. However, Bihu songs and dances (specially Bohag-Bihuspring festival) link them with many tribal communities of North-East India. The Bihu dances and songs are accompanied by instruments like drum, cymbal, gagana (Jew's harp), bamboo clapper and horn-pipe. The theme of the song is mostly romance and love. Some specimen of English translation of some Bihu songs (taken from folk-literature of Assam by Praphulla Datta Goshwami) are given below.

What have I eaten up O-mother O father  
that you babble about me  
only let this year's Bihu be over, my father  
not long shall I stay in your house

This yellow bird, lovely its wings,  
once it flies up, it cannot be caught,  
this youth, if it goes away  
no more is to be got back.

High you tied your long hair,  
as you tied your long hair,  
as you walked, you crushed the grass  
as I looked into your eyes you smiled,  
wild you made my mind.

I throw at the mango  
why does the tamarind fall,  
as brother-in-law, I offer him a seat  
how is it he snatches at my breasts.

Free rendering of a popular Miri Bihu song is given below:

I would be a bird and wing to your lake,  
I would be a pigeon and flutter on your roof,  
I would be perspiration and well up in your body,  
I would be a fly and fall on your cheek.

Yearning and bird motif is very common in their folk-songs. Ligang festival of Miri is just like Bihu.

Miris have a form of song known as Kalicipad, (which they claim to be the oldest form), which mostly give expression to their sentiments of love and yearning.

Miris are a hard-working cheerful people (also known as Mishing) with their villages on river banks (mostly on the bank of Brahmaputra) and on Majuli Island. It is worth noting that they have a kind of sorrowful songs known as Ai-nitam songs. These songs, although on love-theme, depict their deep-longing for beloved and sense of frustration and sadness due to love failure. Bidhi (destiny) Bidhata (God, fate), Kapal (Kamphal fore-head, writing in forehead, fate), Yama (Yamaraja god of death), dos (blame, error) etc. find copious expressions in Ai-nitam songs. Deep frustration seeks solace in union after death.

If I do not secure you here  
I shall secure you in the next world  
where is Yama's city  
there, I shall meet you.

If fate does mean our union,  
then, after death,  
he shall grow to grasses in the cemetery,  
and put us together.

Bodo and Dimasa Kacharis have also numerous love songs. A Kachari song goes thus:

Flower, fully bloomed flower  
alone you are blooming alone wilting,  
our age also has reached youth,  
alone it is wilting.

Languages of North East India are rich in proverbs, riddles and aphorisms. However, no work has been done in this direction except a little in the case of Assamese. Assamese proverbs are found even in the Buranjis. Dak-Purush was famous aphorist. His aphorisms have been collected, compiled, edited and published by many authors. Phakaras are the special kind of Assamese riddles.

Zikirs are the folk-literature of Assamese of Muslim origin, which are very popular. Nursery rhymes are also found in Assamese and Kachari.

### Folk-epic

Much information is not available about folk-epic of North-East India. Assamese and Manipuri must have some. Karbi has Ramayana in folk-epic form.

Manipuri epic Moirangsayon has seven epic cycles concerning seven incarnations (sayon) of two lovers of Moi-lang. The story of Khamba and Thoibi is in the seventh part of that epic cycle. Khamba and Thoibi, regarded as deities, personify ideal Meithei hero and women. A brief synopsis of Mirangsayon containing entire Khamba Thoibi episode is given in Hudson's monograph on Meitheis (London, David Nutt, pp 130-151).

### Ballads

A ballad is a tale, mostly in verse form. Singing of ballads accompanied dancing during festivals in olden days. Now-a-days, the minstrels chant it in accompaniment of cymbal or a stringed musical instrument. According to Professor P.D. Goshwami, the oldest Assamese ballads, depicting unsophisticated Assamese society in the folk-loristic atmosphere are Janagabharur Geet, Mani Konwarar Geet and Phul Konwarar Geet.

Jana Gabharur Geet i.e. the ballad of the maid Jana is a fictional folk composition. Although the hero Gopichand and his mother Mainawati (term used is Manyawati/Minawati) and their association with Nath yogis is a historically known phenomenon throughout North-India; the ballad is not at all historical. Gopichand accomplishes all the tasks given by Jana, the queen by use of her magical powers and later defeats her brother Abhiman and frees nine hundred princess imprisoned by her and dethrones her.

The other two ballads, Manikonwarar Geet and Phul Konwarar Geet — the ballads of Prince Mani and that of

his posthumous son, prince Phul-have all the combinations of story plot inter woven in supernatural frame of mythical nature in the Assamese folk-background. Manikonwar is abducted by river-god after his marriage at the age of sixteen years as he was born by the boon given by the latter, Mani Konwar's mother Manyawati asking the hand of princess Kanchanmala for her son, her father's statement about her using large quantity of fuel, her not knowing the art of weaving and spinning and habit of loitering as her disqualifications as a bride, — divinity by observing the leg of fowl, etc. indicate depiction of Assamese culture, unsophisticated nature of narration, similar life style of princess and common girls and also that the ballad is not a recent one. There is mention of prince Mani and prince Phul in Kachari ballad, Haidang Geet also.

Ballad of virtuous lady of Dubala apart from interesting narration gives a picture of merchant community of the then Assam. The story in the ballad of Pagla Parvati describes the magical conflict and use of wit by the couple.

Barphukanar Geet and Maniram Dewan are two historical ballads based on the two well known historical personalities of Assam. Badanchandra Barphukan, the Governor of Western Assam incited Burmese to attack Assam in 1817.

Among other numerous ballads mention may be made of "Kali Kaler Geet" in which the evils of modern age and inventions are depicted.

Sonowal Kacharis worship Bathau (Shiva) during the month of Chait during which they recite a semi-mythical ballad named Haidang. Dimasa Kacharis have mythical ballads about the origin of Subansiri, Dhansiri and Belsiri rivers, who were princesses. They have semi historical ballad of Kamaladevi Mahadevi, a Kachari queen.

The ballad of Disru describes abandonment of Haphalong Barcha's daughter Disru in forest, later her meeting the King and his proposal to marry her; her denial of his incestuous proposal resulting in Disru's exile. The ballads "Khalanching, Chakradaingdai" "Laringdao, Laringdi" and

Juhua and Boncharanj, have love theme. Chakrangdaingdai murders his sweetheart Khalaching. Laringdao and Laringdi die together as they are denied marriage.

Hutton has mentioned the following categories of Angami songs, which is not genre-based.

1. Tsali – sung specially at gennas.
2. Charu – sung in the village or in the fields.
3. Sheli – sung in the jungle only.
4. Lhipecha – sung when dancing in the Tehuba or similar place at genna.
5. Pithucha – sung when pounding paddy.
6. Likwino – sung rather fast and pitched fairly high.
7. Lhipisu – sung by two men; the words of those or similar to chakru, but with different tune.
8. Wupese – sung by boys sleeping on machan in Morung.
9. Keli – sung by two men and two women taking alternate versicles.
10. Lideh – sung very slowly in very low pitch.

Similar categorisation is possible in case of other tribal folk-songs also.

During feasts of merit, the Nagas sing either traditional or spontaneously composed songs in honour of the donor. The myths and traditions and heroic deeds of their fore-fathers are narrated in the songs sung during gennas and festivals. Love, youthful longings, the sorrows of life etc. also find their full expression in Naga folk-songs.

I give below the free renderings of two Chakhesang Naga songs published by M. Alemchiba in his "Arts and Crafts of Nagaland".

The longing of the youthful days are described in the following folk-song :

Born pure and innocent like a flower  
with the blessings of parents, my dear parents,  
My life was planned to be as ever flowing as a stream,  
And as peaceful and glorious as blooming rose.

As a child, I had no cares, no worries, no fear  
Nor did I ever dream of a thing such as death  
I spent my youth with joy and happiness,

Never did I feel sorrow in my heart  
Full of joy, gaiety and laughter,  
Everything and everyone around me was cheerful  
and bright,

It seemed the whole world was made for me  
To give me pleasure.

But alas? as the years rolled by,  
And as I grew in age and wisdom  
I began to realise, life on this earth  
Is not eternal, not for ever, not everlasting.

I learn life is short-lived  
The treasures, the glories and the sorrows,  
One day would fade and die  
I find death an inescapable thing  
I find death an inescapable thing.

Our lives are not like the roses,  
That wither and fade today,  
Their beauty will once more be seen,  
In the next spring time.

Today the sun will set, the moon disappears,  
Tomorrow they will be there shining,  
As unchanged as ever in all their immortal glory  
But once we die, the beauty, joy, fear and sorrow ends.

With death we have no more  
The joys, sorrows, happiness and fear,  
But only peace, everlasting peace.

Recalling the days of my youth,  
I could see and understand how life has changed  
What a mystery and strange death is.

Before we meet our enternal fate  
Let us one and all join hands together,  
For death shows no distinction,  
To rich and poor, young and old.

And now the plight of a step-daughter finds its expression in another folk-song :

Dear Rusulu, where are you going?  
I'm going to Poruba-chepi-chozu to chop fire wood.  
Why today? There is feast in village,  
And nobody leaves village to gather fuel today.

What else could I do but go,  
My wicked step-mother ordered me to go  
Though I am afraid of the enemies  
Yet I can't disobey for fear of step-mother.

And away she went with tears in her eyes  
She looked to village and soliloquies  
What a beautiful scene,  
Would I ever see it again?

She climbed up the peak of Poruba-chepi-chozu,  
She heard no voice but cries of birds in the wood.  
Birds on the branches seemed to say,  
Death; Death; Death.

Suddenly enemies appeared around her  
She pleaded to spare her life  
We go to war to kill, not to save,  
Replied the enemy.

If you can't spare the life of a poor orphan girl,  
Then kill me but cut not my hair,  
When we kill we do cut the hair of a woman,  
Replied the enemy.

Lastly she pleaded, kill me then  
But not cut my head off,  
Let my wicked step-mother see it,  
And let her be rejoiced in my death.  
When a man kills,

He does not spare even the head of his victim  
For head is a trophy that makes him a hero,  
Replied the enemy.

Alas? she was slain,  
And cut her hair and head off  
She would neither see beautiful Poruba nor  
her friends,  
She was left in the misery of death.

Folk-lore of North East India need immediate compilation, editing and publication and study based on the same.

There are only very few institutions and individuals engaged in the collection, compilation and study of folk-lore. Prominent among the institutions doing some work in this field are Research Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Department of Art & Culture, Government of Nagaland, Manipur University, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore and Nagaland Bhasha Parishad, Kohima. Their works mostly involve publication of material. Analytical work is yet to start.

Gauhati University and North East Hill University have their folk-lore departments.

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