



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## ORAL LITERATURE AND NAGA CULTURAL IDENTITY: A DISCOURSE ON FOLK SONGS AS AGENTS OF TRANSMISSION AND PRESERVATION.

Neizevonuo Suokhrie

Assistant Professor

Department of Tenyidie

Pfutsero Government College

Pfutsero, India

**Abstract:** This paper provides a discourse on the crucial role played by folk songs in the transmission and preservation of cultural history and identity within the context of Nagaland. It is rooted in the pressing need and significance of safeguarding the extensive and meaningful folk songs that serve not only as musical compositions but also as potent agents of history and identity. These folk songs serve as invaluable repositories of cultural narratives, offering profound insights into the cultural heritage and way of life of the Naga people. The renowned Angami folk song "AvuNei Hu" is selected as the focal point of analysis in this paper to shed light on the intricate interplay between tradition, identity, and storytelling through music. This paper aims to highlight the enduring significance of folk music as a vital component of cultural heritage, emphasizing its role as a conduit for preserving and transmitting the rich cultural history and identity of Nagaland for generations to come.

**Key Words:** Oral Tradition, Folk Songs, Cultural Narratives

### INTRODUCTION

The Naga community, residing in the northeastern region of India, is renowned for its rich cultural diversity, vibrant traditions, and deep-rooted heritage. Comprising various tribes with distinct languages, customs, and belief systems, the Naga people have cultivated a unique identity shaped by decades of history, interactions, and experiences. Central to the preservation and transmission of this rich cultural tapestry is the tradition of oral literature, which serves as a timeless repository of Naga cultural identity.

The importance of oral literature in Naga society cannot be overstated. Passed down through generations, oral narratives, myths, legends, and folk songs embody the collective wisdom, values, and history of the Naga people. These oral traditions not only connect individuals to their cultural roots but also serve as a means of identity formation and community cohesion. In this light, Kapfo (2023) comments that the oral narratives not only carries forward ancestral legacies but also nurtures a feeling of collective belonging and identity while also remarking that they serves as conduits bridging generations, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries to convey the core of Naga heritage. These narratives extend beyond mere entertainment, serving as vessels of cultural values that encapsulate the Naga worldview, ethics, and ethos.

The purpose of this study is centered upon the pivotal role of Naga folk songs as agents of transmission and preservation of cultural identity. Through the exploration and analyses of “A Vu Neihu” a famous Angami Naga Folk song, this paper aims to uncover the profound impact of oral literature in sustaining Naga cultural heritage amidst changing times. By delving into the intricacies of this Naga folk song, this paper seeks to highlight the significance of folk songs as enduring symbols of cultural continuity, resilience, and identity within the Naga community.

## **NAGA ORAL TRADITION**

Martins (2012) noted that oral tradition dates back to the origins of humanity, preceding the invention of writing. Information was transmitted orally from one generation to another. He further noted that today, many cultures worldwide still rely on oral traditions as a means to convey knowledge and wisdom. In the same light, the origins of Naga oral tradition can also be traced back to ancient times, rooted in the cultural practices and beliefs of the indigenous tribes inhabiting the Naga Hills. Before written language and formal documentation became widespread, oral tradition played a crucial role in communication, knowledge transfer, and cultural expression within Naga communities. According to Suokhrie (2023), *“these traditions have been meticulously preserved and passed down through generations, contributing to the rich and vibrant heritage of Nagaland”*.

This oral tradition encompasses various forms of storytelling, folklore, myths, legends, songs, chants, proverbs, and rituals that have been passed down orally from generation to generation. One of the primary aspects of Naga oral tradition is the preservation of historical accounts, genealogies, and tribal narratives. Elders in Naga communities are entrusted with the task of orally transmitting the history of their tribes, including heroic deeds, migrations, customs and other aspects of their heritage.. In the same light Dixit and Goyal (2011), observes that in most cultures, the elderly are looked upon as responsible for passing down oral tradition and instructing the younger generation. These oral narratives often serve to reinforce tribal identities and cultural pride.

Naga oral literature embodies a multitude of cultural values and identity markers that define the collective ethos of the Naga people. Through storytelling, folk songs, and oral performances, Naga cultural values such as courage, resilience, communal harmony, respect for nature, and reverence for elders are vividly portrayed. Mor and Kezo (2023) remarks that *“For Centuries, these oral traditions has been the primary and only source for the Nagas to preserve and transmit their values and culture from generation to generation. Even today oral tradition is looked upon as an indispensable vehicle for gathering data on the past glories and traditions of the Naga people”*.

## **FOLK SONGS AS A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF ORAL TRADITION**

In Nagaland, folksongs as a significant source of oral tradition play a crucial role in preserving cultural continuity and identity. Folksongs are an integral part of Naga culture, reflecting the history, beliefs, customs, and daily lives of the various tribes in the region. Folk songs hold a special significance within Naga oral tradition as they serve as carriers of historical narratives, communal memory, and cultural continuity. These songs often recount significant events, heroic deeds, love stories, seasonal celebrations, agricultural practices, and ancestral wisdom, encapsulating the collective experiences and ethos of Naga society. Additionally, folk songs play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, preserving linguistic diversity, and strengthening intergenerational bonds within Naga communities.

Tünyi (2020) observes that folksongs in Nagaland are often composed spontaneously, reflecting the immediate feelings and situations of the singer or composer. These songs serve as a means for people to find solace and express their unspoken emotions, often filled with yearning, pain, and longing. The community's deep connection with nature is evident in folksongs, where bird whistles, initially used as war cries or alerts, find their way into melodies. The melodies are often inspired by the sounds of birds chirping, and the simple utterances like *“oh ho, oh ho, oh ho”* during work become integral parts of the songs. As agriculture is a significant part of life, agricultural themes are prevalent in folksongs, capturing the essence of rural life and the challenges faced. The spontaneous composition of folksong lyrics allows individuals to pour out their thoughts and emotions, providing a channel for expression and reflection on life's moments and situations.

Through the analysis of the Angami folk song titled; “*AvuNeihu*” this paper presents a discourse to place emphasis on the enduring legacy of oral literature in shaping Naga cultural identity, values, and heritage. It highlights the pivotal role of folk songs as dynamic repositories of historical narratives and communal memory, highlighting their intrinsic importance in preserving and transmitting Naga cultural heritage across generations.

## ANALYSIS OF “*AVUNEIHU*” (IN LOVE WE STAND)

The focus of this paper is the analysis of a famous Angami folksong titled “*AvuNei Hu*,” which translates to “In Love We Stand.” This text is sourced from the book “*Üca-53*,” a publication by Ura Academy compiled by Shürhozelie. The renowned Angami folk song “*AvuNeihu*” intricately weaves a tale of unfulfilled love and marriage, delving into the yearning of two lovers constrained by social norms and familial disapproval. This poignant love song unfolds against the backdrop of Naga cultural identity, shedding light on several thematic nuances and societal dynamics. Structured in the form of a dialogue, the narrative of “*AvuNeihu*” captures the emotional separation of the two lovers, providing a glimpse into their shared regrets and unspoken affection. Through heartfelt exchanges and symbolic gestures, the lovers convey their enduring love despite the obstacles imposed by societal norms and family decisions. In essence, “*AvuNeihu*” serves as a profound exploration of love, marriage, and societal constraints within the context of Naga cultural identity. It illuminates the intricacies of personal agency, familial obligations, and the resilience of love amidst external pressures, offering a poignant reflection of the human experience within the backdrop of Naga heritage and traditions.

### Stanza 1

*"In love we stand, to wed we deeply yearn  
But family denies our union  
A wife they brought for me from a distant village  
But the thought you as another man's wife fill me with regret."*

The opening stanza reflects the universal theme of yearning for love and marriage. It portrays the desire of the protagonist and their beloved to be together in wedded union, a sentiment deeply rooted in cultural values of companionship, family, and emotional fulfillment. The mention of family denying the union and arranging a marriage with someone from a distant village highlights the influence of familial decisions and societal expectations in matters of marriage. This aspect highlights the importance of family dynamics and traditional matchmaking practices within Naga culture. According to Kuolie (2018), it signifies the significance placed on social standing and status, along with the cultural belief that familial wishes and expectations are to be respected and followed, even if it means sacrificing one's personal feelings to conform to these external pressures. In short, the mention of family denying the union highlights the influence of familial expectations and societal norms on personal choices, particularly in matters of love and marriage. The song sheds light on the complexities and conflicts that arise when individual desires clash with familial obligations.

### Stanza 2

*"As our village folks celebrate Khruonyi festival  
Carrying my child, I went to visit my parents  
I crossed paths with my beloved that day."*

The term ‘*Khruonyi*,’ represents one of the many festivals celebrated by the Tenyimia community. Rather than denoting a specific festival, it serves as a broad term that can be linked to various festive occasions within the community. (Kuolie, 2018) The reference to the *Khruonyi* festival and visiting parents with a child portrays the significance of cultural festivals and family gatherings in Naga society. It underscores the importance of communal celebrations, familial ties, and the interplay between personal experiences and cultural traditions.

*"Loosening the baby carrier wrap cloth from me  
He asked; "What is the name of your child?" "  
In my anguish, I named her Zevokhrienuo", I said.*

The baby carrier cloth imagery signifies the traditional Naga practice of carrying infants, while the act of naming the child reflects the cultural importance placed on names, chosen with deep meaning and careful thought. The name "Zevokhrienuo" in this context embodies the intense emotional turmoil of the speaker, particularly in terms of letting go of her beloved. It reveals a profound impact of love and separation on the speaker's emotional state.

Kuolie (2018) interprets the name as symbolic of the girl's reluctance to see her lover with another woman, encapsulating the theme of unrequited love. The choice of this name reflects the girl's enduring sorrow and regret, even after her marriage to another man. Her ongoing feelings of sadness and regret towards her lover are poured into the name of her child, making it a poignant and specific representation of her emotional experience. This revelation brings clarity to the girl's complex feelings and underscores the enduring impact of her separation from her beloved.

### Stanza 3

*Removing the finest bead necklace from his neck  
He placed it on my child's tender neck  
"If your husband asks,  
say that it's a gift from parents  
And hide it, dear beloved". He said*

The gesture of the lover removing his bead necklace signifies a hidden affection and the intimate bond shared between the lover and the beloved, transcending societal limitations and existing marital commitments. The lover took off his most precious ornament and adorned it on the child, instructing the beloved to conceal the true source of the gift if questioned by her husband, attributing it to her parental heritage. The bead necklace, known as 'Cüzie,' made of cornelian beads holds immense value as a symbol of wealth and status, making it highly prized among jewelry.

By wearing the 'cüzie,' the lover symbolizes his continued prosperity, yet despite this, he remains discontented due to his inability to marry the woman he loves. His act of bestowing his most cherished ornament upon the child conveys that his deepest essence and emotions, represented by his heart and love, still belong to his beloved. This sentiment is poignantly conveyed through his actions, reflecting his enduring devotion and commitment despite the external constraints imposed upon their relationship. The act of concealing the necklace as a gift from parents and hiding the affectionate gesture speaks to the pressure of conforming to parental expectations and societal norms regarding marriage, fidelity, and social status. It reflects the complexities of navigating cultural norms while expressing personal emotions and desires.

### DISCUSSION

The exploration of the Angami Naga folk song "AvuNei Hu" has provided valuable insights into the intricate tapestry of Naga cultural identity, particularly concerning themes of love, marriage, societal constraints, and emotional resilience. Through the analysis of the three stanzas and narrative elements, we have uncovered the profound significance of oral literature as a carrier of cultural heritage, embodying timeless values, traditions, and societal dynamics within the Naga community.

The folk song eloquently captures the struggles and complexities faced by individuals navigating the intersection of personal desires with familial expectations and societal norms. The portrayal of unfulfilled love, familial interference in marriage, and the enduring impact of separation on emotional well-being is aligned with universal human experiences while also showcasing the unique cultural nuances and traditions of the Naga people.



Furthermore, the symbolic gestures and emotional depth depicted in the song highlight the resilience and depth of emotions experienced by the protagonists, shedding light on the profound impact of love and societal constraints on individual psyches. The meticulous naming of characters, symbolic actions, and cultural references within the song serve as poignant reminders of the rich cultural heritage and collective identity cherished by the Naga community.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has endeavored to explore the critical role of folk songs as essential carriers of the profound cultural heritage of the Nagas. Music stands at the core of the Naga identity, serving as a powerful medium through which traditions, values, and narratives are passed down through generations. However, in the contemporary era marked by rapid modernization, Western influences, and the rise of modern music, there is a noticeable shift among the younger generation away from traditional folk music. It is imperative to recognize and acknowledge the significance of folk songs in preserving and perpetuating Naga cultural identity. Further studies and research in this domain are essential to unraveling the depth and significance of folk songs in capturing the essence of Naga heritage, values, and traditions.

## REFERENCES

1. Dixit, and Goyal. 2011. Traditional Knowledge From and For Elderly. *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, 10(3), 429-438.
2. Kapfo, Neichüpe. 2023. Integrating Folktales into the Teaching of Writing at the Undergraduate Level: An Exploratory Study in the Context of Nagaland. *IJCRT*, 11(9).
3. Kuolie, Kevizonuo. 2018. Tenyimia Lyrical Poetry and Textual Interpretation: Analyzing "AvuNei Hu" from a Stylistic Orientation. *Journal of Literature, Culture, and Media Studies*, IX & X(17-20), 105-114. ISSN-0974-7192.
4. Martins, NwankoUchenna. 2012. The Position of Oral Tradition (Myths, Mythology, and Legends) in Historical Records. International Conference on Humanity, History, and Society (Volume 34). Singapore: IACSIT Press.
5. Mor, Metseilhouthie, and Kezo, Rükülü. 2023. A Discourse on the Interface of Religion and Nature as Reflected in the Naga Folklore. *IJCRT*, 11 (9).
6. Shürhozelie. 2007. *Üca-53*, Ura Academy, Kohima: Nagaland.
7. Suokhrie, Neizevonuo 2023. Echoes of Tradition: Analysing the Role of Proverbs in Naga Society. *IJCRT*, 11 (9).
8. Tünyi, Setolu. 2020. Oral Narratives of the ChakhesangNagas and its Portrayal of the Community Life Therein. *IJCIRAS*, 2(11).

**THE TEXT****AVUNEI HU**

Avunehukereinyücaü,  
 U kinumiamozo u die rhe  
 Molieidi so kesipfürha  
 A tsüderei no ha khapie se  
 Mia kethaüchü a rosievü.

U ramianieKhruonyinyi-o nyi  
 Hie pie wepfükenienuokivo  
 Kezhanhie we sieunuoler  
 Kehieshüphrei lie zü pie kelhou  
 Nienuozaüsuochü di sievü.  
 A thuo a nou vi kemoüse  
 Zevokrienuotholie ü izo.

Cüziemeluokeviudepie,  
 Hiepieünuovokhshüdinu;  
 Niekethauketsoüliro.  
 A vie ü hiekenienuolhikhrü;  
 Keviewaluo a neikerüü.

**IN LOVE WE STAND**

In love we stand, to wed we deeply yearn  
 But family denies our union  
 A wife they brought for me from a distant village  
 But the thought you as another man's wife fill me with regret.

As our village folks celebrate Khruonyi festival  
 Carrying my child, I went to visit my parents  
 I crossed paths with my beloved that day.  
 Loosening the baby carrier wrap cloth from me  
 He asked; "What is the name of your child?"  
 "In my anguish, I named her Zevokhrienuo", I said.

Removing the finest bead necklace from his neck  
 He placed it on my child's tender neck  
 "If your husband asks,  
 say that it's a gift from parents  
 And hide it, dear beloved". He said

Composer: Unknown  
 Compiler: Shürhozelie

