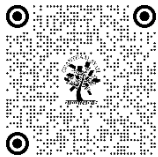


# ESSENCE OF POUMAI NAGA EXISTENCE: THE ROLE OF ORAL LITERATURE IN PRESERVING POUMAI NAGA CULTURAL HERITAGE AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY COHESION

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## ABSTRACT

The Poumai Naga, an indigenous community in Northeast India, has a distinct cultural heritage preserved through oral literature, folklore, and traditional customs. These traditions serve as a repository of history, wisdom, and moral values, passed down through generations. However, the impact of modernisation, migration, and globalisation has led to a decline in traditional storytelling and cultural practices, threatening their continuity. This study explores the role of oral literature in shaping Poumai Naga heritage and identity while examining the challenges faced in their preservation. Using ethnographic research and community-based approaches, the study documents traditional narratives, and indigenous knowledge systems. It highlights the significance of storytelling, folk songs, and proverbs in maintaining social cohesion and reinforcing cultural identity. Furthermore, it advocates for integrating indigenous oral literature into educational curricula and digital platforms to ensure its survival in a rapidly changing world. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and participatory observation to explore the significance of oral literature among the Poumai Naga. The findings reveal that Poumai Naga oral literature plays a crucial role in transmitting knowledge about ancestry, community values, and spiritual beliefs. However, diminishing intergenerational transmission due to external influences and lifestyle changes poses a significant challenge. Despite this, the need for cultural preservation, with initiatives such as storytelling festivals, cultural workshops, and digital archiving, is emerging as an effective solution. The findings will contribute to broader discourses on cultural sustainability and the role of oral literature in safeguarding cultural heritage and identities.

**Keywords:** Oral Literature, Heritage, Cultural Identity, Preservation, Poumai Naga Tribe

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Poumai Naga are an indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in the Senapati district of Manipur, India, with smaller populations in parts of Nagaland. They are a vital part of the broader Naga community, known for their distinct cultural heritage, language, and traditions. The term “Poumai” translates to “people of Pou,” signifying their ancestral lineage and identity. They speak the Poula dialect, a part of the Trans-Himalayan (Tibeto-Burman) language family (Veikho, 2021). This dialect serves as an important link among the Naga tribes, highlighting their shared linguistic and cultural characteristics.

Traditionally, the Poumai people have lived an agrarian lifestyle, with farming as their primary occupation. This agricultural foundation not only sustains its community but also reinforces its cultural values. The Poumai society is

organised around village councils, which act as customary governing bodies, alongside clan-based organisations and age-group systems. These structures are crucial for informed decision-making, effective community governance, and resolving conflicts. The village councils embody democratic principles at the grassroots level, fostering unity and collective responsibility among community members.

The Poumai Naga historically held spiritual beliefs that were deeply rooted in animism, engaging in rituals centred on ancestor worship and nature spirits that played a crucial role in their daily lives. These practices demonstrated their strong connection to nature and deep respect for their ancestors. However, the arrival of Christianity in the early 20th century significantly altered these beliefs and practices. In the 1930s, a wave of conversions to Christianity occurred, leading to substantial socio-cultural changes (James, n.d.). This transformation introduced new values and practices that began to intertwine with existing traditions. Consequently, the Poumai community has undergone a dynamic evolution of its cultural and spiritual identity, striving to reconcile its historical beliefs with contemporary teachings.

Despite these changes, the Poumai people remain dedicated to preserving their cultural identity. Traditional festivals such as *Thounii* (Seed Sowing Festival) and *Laonii* (Post-transplantation Festival) continue to hold great significance within the community. These celebrations not only express their culture but also serve as essential platforms for passing down history, oral literature, folk songs, and storytelling. By participating in these festivals, the Poumai reaffirm their unique identity and maintain a sense of continuity in a changing world. The oral literature handed down through generations acts as a reservoir of collective wisdom, strengthening the connection between the past and the present.

The pressures of modernisation, globalisation, urbanisation, and migration have presented significant challenges to the Poumai Naga community. In response, the community has shown remarkable resilience, leading to a growing movement focused on cultural preservation and revitalisation. Cultural organisations have been established to maintain and promote Poumai heritage through various educational initiatives, hosting storytelling festivals, and conducting awareness campaigns about Poumai traditions. Community members are increasingly recognising the importance of documenting their customs and beliefs to safeguard their cultural identity for future generations. Efforts to revitalise Poumai culture include integrating traditional knowledge into school curricula to inspire younger generations and demonstrate its modern relevance. Engaging youth in cultural festivals and activities fosters a sense of belonging, ensuring that traditions are actively preserved and adapted.

The Poumai Naga are a resilient and culturally rich community navigating the complexities of modernisation while striving to preserve their unique identity. Rooted in agriculture, they maintain traditional governance structures, celebrate vibrant festivals, and are committed to heritage preservation, all of which contribute to their rich cultural tapestry. As they face the challenges of globalisation, their efforts to maintain and revitalise traditions demonstrate a strong dedication to ensuring that future generations can appreciate and uphold the values and customs that define their identity in an ever-changing world. The ongoing discourse around cultural preservation highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernisation, showcasing the Poumai's commitment to their roots as they adapt to contemporary challenges.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore the role of oral literature in shaping the heritage and identity of the Poumai Naga community, while also addressing the challenges of preserving these traditions. Through ethnographic fieldwork, data is collected via semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observation, along with video and audio recordings of traditional narratives, rituals, and indigenous knowledge systems. Focusing on the Poumai Naga community, the research aims to understand how oral literature impacts cultural identity and promotes social cohesion.

Fieldwork has engaged key participants, including elders, storytellers, and cultural practitioners, who actively contribute to the preservation of oral traditions. Thematic analysis has been utilised to identify significant patterns related to these traditions, cultural identity, and preservation challenges. Documenting and preserving oral literature will benefit the Poumai Naga community and enrich global discussions on the importance of safeguarding indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. The study advocates for integrating these traditions into educational curricula and digital platforms to ensure their survival in a changing world.

### 3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the role of Poumai Naga oral literature in shaping cultural identity and fostering social cohesion. It also suggests strategies for its preservation and revitalisation through education, cultural initiatives, and documentation.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A community's unique identity is shaped by a rich history characterised by its social, cultural, and historical distinctions. For the Poumai Naga community, which does not have a written script and records of its history, people, and culture, the preservation and transmission of knowledge depend largely on oral narrations. Cultural memory and historical awareness are maintained through verbal art forms, which are deeply rooted in collective memory as well as in the daily practices, customs, and beliefs of the community.

Scholars in folkloristics have further reinforced these perspectives. Dan Ben-Amos argues that folklore, including oral literature, should be seen as a "form of artistic communication in small groups," which situates oral traditions within their social context (Ben-Amos, 1976). Linda Degh emphasises the performative and communal aspects of oral narratives, illustrating how they reflect and strengthen cultural identity (Degh, 1995). Similarly, Barre Toelken highlights that oral traditions represent a "dynamic process" of continuity and change, balancing tradition with adaptation to contemporary realities (Toelken, 1996). Collectively, these scholarly contributions affirm that oral literature is not merely entertainment; it serves as a vital repository of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, and historical memory.

Oral literature, often defined as a body of knowledge transmitted verbally across generations, serves as the primary medium for preserving indigenous information, cultural values, and historical narratives. Ruth Finnegan describes oral literature as a form of "creative verbal art," emphasising its unique qualities in comparison to written texts and the significance of performance, context, and audience (Finnegan, 1970). Jan Vansina views oral traditions as "documents of the present" that hold lasting historical importance, maintaining the continuity of collective memory (Vansina, 2017). Similarly, N. Scott Momaday describes oral tradition as the means by which myths, legends, tales, and lore are communicated and sustained orally, setting it apart from written records (Momaday, 1997). William R. Bascom classifies oral literature into myths, folktales, and proverbs, highlighting its four essential functions: to entertain, to educate, to validate culture, and to uphold societal morals (Bascom, 1954). In the present study, oral literature is examined under four sub-categories: myths, folktales, folk songs, and proverbs. Each serves as a vital medium for preserving, transmitting, and reinforcing the cultural heritage, values, and collective memory of the Poumai Naga community.

#### 4.1. MYTH OF DZIILIAMOSIIROU

According to Poumai oral literature, *Dziiliamosiirou* is the ancestress mother of the *Shiipoumai* Naga tribe and possibly of all humanity. One day, while sleeping under a Banyan tree, she was enveloped by a column of white cloud, resulting in her becoming pregnant and giving birth to three sons: the Tiger (*Khao*), the Spirit (*Rahmaih*), and the Man (*Mai*). These three brothers are believed to represent different realms: the Tiger symbolises the animal kingdom, the Spirit represents the spiritual realm, and the Man embodies the human race. Each brother possesses dual qualities, embodying both holiness and malevolence, instinctive and irrational behaviours, as well as the capacity to understand and follow instructions.

As the brothers matured, they desired to claim their ancestral inheritance and agreed to compete in a race to touch a target (*mouziih*), with the winner set to inherit the land. However, *Dziiliamosiirou* favoured her youngest son and wished for him to occupy the ancestral inheritance. She instructed the Man to use a bow and arrow to hit the target during the race. When the race began, all three brothers sprinted toward the target, but the Man struck it first with his arrow, declaring himself the rightful heir to their ancestral inheritance. Consequently, the two brothers accepted their youngest brother's claim. The Tiger (*Khao*), representing animal species, retreated into the dense jungle; the Spirit (*Rahmaih*), symbolising the spiritual world, occupied the vast expanse; and the Man (*Mai*), representing humankind, took possession of their homeland, Makhel (*Makhrüfö*).

As *Dziiliamosiirou* aged, her three sons took turns caring for her. *Rahmaih's* spiritual presence created an oppressive heat that made her uneasy, while *Khao's* predatory instincts disturbed her, as he viewed her as potential prey. Only *Mai*

attended to her with genuine care, preparing food and tending to her needs. Anticipating her death, *Dziiliamosiirou* instructed *Mai* to hide her body from *Khao*. After her passing, *Mai* secretly buried her beneath the hearth, masking the scent with fire, and creating another fake grave filled with thorns. When *Khao* attempted to dig up the fake grave, he injured his paws, and upon realising the deception, he grew enraged. To drive him away permanently, *Mai* exploited his fears of fire and sound, attaching burning bamboo to his tail and blowing a horn near his ear. Terrified, *Khao* fled into the wilderness. This is said to explain why the Poumai use the phrase, “*We shall part ways like Mai and Khao*,” to describe irreparable separation (Punij, 2017).

With *Khao* gone, *Rahmaih* and *Mai* remained together, but their relationship eventually fractured. One day, *Rahmaih* asked *Mai* whether he would prefer to eat only ripe chillies or green and tender ones. *Mai* replied that he would eat chillies, whether ripe or unripe. Upon hearing this, *Rahmaih* proclaimed that *Mai* would die at any age, young or old. In retaliation, *Mai* declared that *Rahmaih* should die if *Mai* saw him first before *Rahmaih* saw him. That night, *Rahmaih* exchanged *Mai*'s eyes with those of a dog, rendering humans unable to perceive spirits while granting dogs this ability, which explains why dogs howl in the presence of spirits. Thereafter, *Rahmaih* withdrew into the forest, dwelling among bamboo groves and rocky places.

According to another version, *Dziiliamosiirou* was sleeping beneath a banyan tree when she was engulfed by a group of white clouds. She became pregnant and gave birth to three sons as a result of this encounter: *Alewo*, the ancestor of the Naga race; *Chiituwo*, the ancestor of the Meitei; and *Asiipfo Alafa*, the progenitor of the non-Naga race. *Alewo* is said to be the ancestor of the Poumai Naga tribe (Nepuni, 2010). The story goes that the three brothers first resided in *Makhrafi*, but they eventually left to build their communities since the area grew overpopulated. Oral tradition of Poumai tells that the world and the race of humankind would end when the *Marubu* tree dies.

As to the oral narration of the Poupais, the *Marabu* (Banyan tree) is closely associated with the origin of humanity and is well-regarded as the tree of life. It is believed that the leaves of this tree never completely wither throughout the year. Even if some branches lose their leaves, others continue to bud and remain green. The withered leaves of the *Marabu* are thought to indicate impending calamity in the direction they face. Additionally, spitting or urinating near the tree is considered sacrilegious and taboo; those who commit this act are believed to face retribution from nature, resulting in unfortunate and unnatural death.

In the oral narratives of conception mentioned earlier, *Dziiliamosiirou* is presented as the original source of life, nurturing and fostering it as the first lone mother, existing since the beginning. She symbolises productivity and fertility. Analysing the symbolic meaning of her name, Nepuni notes that *Dziiliamosiirou* represents a mother embodying the feminine aspects of reproduction and care. “*Dziilia*” translates to pure spring, clean and clear spring, or virgin, while “*Mosiirou*” signifies concern, care, respect, love, and longevity. Thus, her name can be interpreted as “woman of pure concern” or “spring of life” (Nepuni, 2010). The trajectory of her evolution is never questioned, and her primordial existence is often taken for granted as if she has always existed, requiring no creator. Consequently, she is associated with multiple identities: the first lone mother, the sustainer of life, and Mother Earth herself. These myths of conception and creation articulate how reality comes into being through a fusion of supernatural events, a narrative common to many creation myths across different cultures.

Additionally, the myth reflects the values and moral principles deeply embedded in Poumai society. The depiction of the three brothers, each representing a distinct realm, conveys an understanding of duality and the complexity of human nature, encompassing both good and evil. *Dziiliamosiirou* embodies motherhood, care, and fertility, underscoring the vital role of women in life and cultural continuity. The narrative also incorporates taboos, such as the reverence for the Banyan tree, which serve as moral guidelines governing the tribe's interactions with nature and the community. Together, these elements shape a vibrant cultural identity that preserves the history, values, and worldview of the Poumai Naga people.

## 4.2. FOLKTALE OF VAA YE LOUW KO (THE CRAB AND THE FOWL)

One day, a crab was leisurely strolling along a stream when it spotted a beautiful fowl drinking water nearby. Amused by its presence, the crab decided to play a mischievous prank. It crept up behind the fowl and teasingly pinched her tail with its claws. The sudden and unexpected pinch startled her, causing her to flap her wings wildly in a panic. In her fright, she lost her balance and flew directly into a nearby tree where a colony of bats was sleeping peacefully.



The sudden commotion woke the bats, who were disoriented as they struggled to see in the daylight. In confusion and fear, they scattered in all directions, flapping their wings wildly in their attempt to escape. In the chaos, some of the bats accidentally flew into the ear of a stag that was peacefully drinking water by the brook. The sensation of the bats in its ear made the stag feel extremely itchy and restless. Overwhelmed with discomfort, the stag began to shake its head violently and then bolted away, desperate to rid itself of the irritation.

Unfortunately, in its attempt to find relief, the stag unknowingly ran into the den of a tigress, where it accidentally stepped on one of her cubs. The impact was fatal, and the cub died instantly. When the tigress returned and discovered what had happened, she was filled with grief and rage. Determined to find and punish the culprit, she set out to track down whoever was responsible for the tragic loss of her cub.

Soon, the tigress found the stag and seized it by the neck. Growling fiercely, she demanded to know why it had killed her cub. Trembling in fear, the stag pleaded for mercy and explained, "Oh, mighty tigress, I did not kill your cub intentionally. While I was drinking water, a group of bats suddenly flew into my ear, causing great disturbance. In my panic, I ran without realising where I was going and unknowingly stepped on your cub. Please believe me; I never intended to harm your family."

Though still filled with anger, the tigress decided to investigate further. She released the stag and went to confront the bats. "Why did you disturb the stag while he was drinking water?" she demanded. The bats, still shaken from the earlier incident, quickly replied, "We did not mean to disturb the stag! We were sleeping peacefully in a tree when, all of a sudden, a fowl crashed into our colony. She startled us, and in our confusion, we scattered and accidentally flew into the stag's ear."

Determined to uncover the true source of the problem, the tigress approached the fowl. "Why did you disturb the bats?" she asked sternly. The fowl, feeling remorseful, lowered her head and replied, "Oh great tigress, I did not mean to cause any harm. I was drinking water by the stream when, out of nowhere, a crab sneaked up behind me and pinched my tail. Startled, I flapped my wings in fright, lost control, and accidentally flew into the bats. I deeply regret the chaos my reaction has caused."

Finally, the tigress reached the crab's hole and called out, "Come out and explain yourself!" she roared. The crab, sensing the tigress's anger, hesitated and pretended to be busy. "I'm preparing my dinner," he replied from inside his hole, hoping to avoid the confrontation. However, the tigress saw through his deception and was furious at his refusal to take responsibility for the turmoil he had caused.

In her anger, the tigress declared a curse upon the crab: "From this day forward, may you never walk straight! May you always crawl sideways as a reminder of the trouble you have caused!" And so, from that day on, all crabs were destined to walk sideways, forever bearing the consequences of their mischief.

The narrative illustrates how one careless act can set off a chain of unintended consequences, causing widespread disruption. In the Poumai Naga community, where communal living is paramount, individuals must recognise that their actions impact the well-being of the entire group. Just as the crab's mischief resulted in unforeseen suffering, irresponsible behaviour can lead to conflicts and disharmony within society. This highlights the importance of mindfulness, accountability, and a shared sense of responsibility to maintain peace and stability. The tigress's reaction to the loss of her cub underscores the significance of justice and the quest for truth. Instead of acting impulsively, she investigates the root cause of the tragedy, emphasising the need for careful examination before assigning blame. In Poumai Naga culture, justice is woven into communal discussions, where disputes are resolved through collective decision-making guided by elders. The story reinforces the value of fairness and integrity in upholding social order, ensuring that conflicts are resolved through appropriate channels rather than through rash retaliation.

The crab's unwillingness to accept responsibility for its actions ultimately results in a lifelong curse, symbolising that mischief and negligence carry lasting repercussions. In Poumai Naga culture, maintaining harmony requires adherence to traditional norms, respect for elders, and responsible behaviour. Those who act recklessly or disturb societal balance often face social sanctions, reinforcing the idea that actions have consequences. This aligns with the belief that upholding ethical values is essential for sustaining peace and unity.

Overall, the story conveys vital moral values such as accountability, justice, and collective responsibility - principles that resonate deeply with Poumai Naga traditions. It serves as a reminder that harmony in human society relies on mindful actions, respect for communal values, and a commitment to justice and fairness.

### 4.3. FOLKSONGS

Folk songs are a vital part of cultural heritage, serving as a medium for the oral transmission of history, traditions, and shared experiences. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines a folk song as “a song in the traditional style of a country or community; songs of this type.” (Oxford University Press, n.d.) Typically, folk songs originate from unknown authors and are passed down orally from generation to generation. This oral literature results in multiple versions of the songs, each featuring variations in lyrics and melody. Traditionally performed without instrumental accompaniment, folk songs act as repositories of cultural narratives, values, and historical accounts.

In the Naga tribes, including the Poumai Naga community, folk songs are essential for preserving and perpetuating cultural knowledge in the absence of written records. They tell stories that convey important aspects of life, such as human relationships, interactions with nature, seasonal changes, and beliefs related to celestial bodies. The thematic diversity of these songs reflects the interconnectedness of human existence and the natural world, reinforcing indigenous worldviews and cultural philosophies.

The tonal variations, pitch, and rhythm of folk songs change according to the occasion or life stage they represent, covering events from birth to death and beyond. When words alone are insufficient, folk songs provide an alternative means of emotional expression, deepening the impact of human experiences. Their ongoing relevance underscores their role in sustaining cultural identity, fostering social cohesion, and ensuring the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge systems. The following are a few examples of folksongs:

### 4.4. NE THEPHELAI (I WILL FOLLOW YOU)

*Lourou nezhobu laiho zhoholairo?*  
*Nebudzii E bulairo, nehodzii E holairo*  
*Nebulaichiire buchiikilou butai louhoe*  
*Neholaichire hochii kilou hotai louhoe*  
*E bulaichiire buchiikilou butai louhoe*  
*E holaichire hochii kilou holai louhoe*  
*Nebulaichiire E hidore paokupeiro*  
*Neholaichiire E hidore paokupeiro*  
*E bulaichiire nehidore paokupei lairo*  
*E holaichiire nehodore paokupei lairo*  
*Siili siikumose daileshasou daileshi soul haikikhelou?*

### 4.5. ENGLISH TRANSLATION

My beloved, will you stay home or work in the paddy field today?  
If you stay home, I also will stay, and if you go, I'll accompany you  
You can neither go to the paddy field daily  
Nor can you stay home everyday  
Likewise, I too cannot stay home everyday  
Or go to work daily  
If you decide on whether to stay home or go to work, please inform me  
I, too, will do the same for you  
If we do not communicate with each other, how can we be lovers?

This Poumai love verse highlights the cultural principles that link intimate relationships with social unity and cultural identity in an agricultural community. Since the Poumai have traditionally been farmers, mentions of staying at

home or toiling in the paddy fields emphasise the significance of agriculture in shaping everyday life and social roles. The commitment to either staying at home or working the fields reflects a cultural expectation of mutual support and shared responsibilities that extend beyond romantic relationships to include the wider community. The acknowledgement that one cannot work tirelessly or remain inactive forever underscores the importance of balance, a value deeply rooted in the cyclical nature of farming. Furthermore, the emphasis on communication is essential, as it is seen as the basic foundation for trust and harmony; the assertion that “without communication, love cannot endure” signifies the societal norm of openness and dialogue. By situating love within the context of agricultural life, the verse connects affection to daily subsistence activities while reinforcing agriculture as a central element of Poumai cultural identity and collective strength.

#### 4.6. ZHIMAI HAI RAAMAI RIIHAORAI (HUMAN BEINGS ARE GOD’S ANIMALS)

*Teidei hriishurai zhimai rahmai maima riihaorai*

*Turi nilanisoshou hohinou zhia lasosou hohinou*

*Turi nilanisosou pyalou dzükhai nilsha chirai ahidorai paothou mangao lemashiro*

*Turi zhi lasosou pyalou dzükhai aleshachirai nivadorai paothu mangao lemashi lairo*

*Süti süku modzu daileshisou khaidei*

*Teibe laikouni rashio daorai loutoudzü buda`olou buhralouhoe haichikhelou*

#### 4.7. ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Since the beginning of creation, man has been God's creature

My beloved, you cannot go through life alone of your free will, and so do I.

When you attain womanhood, convey to me your love and affections, for when I attain manhood, RsI will do the same

If we do not communicate and convey our feelings for each other

The love and affections of our hearts will be rendered meaningless

For when the evil spirit of the south approaches, we cannot escape from its clutch

Dear brothers and sisters.

This folksong reflects the Poumai community's deep-rooted belief that life originates from God, affirming a spiritual worldview in which human existence is sacred and guided by divine will. The call to the beloved, expressing that one cannot live life alone, highlights the cultural value of companionship and interdependence, central to Poumai society, where kinship and cooperation are vital for survival in an agrarian lifestyle. The references to womanhood and manhood signify the community's recognition of rites of passage, measuring maturity not only by age but also by the ability to uphold responsibilities of love, reciprocity, and care within family and clan. The emphasis on communicating affection reveals a cultural focus on openness, honesty, and emotional expression as the foundation of strong social bonds. The image of the “evil spirit of the south” conveys the community's awareness of external threats, whether misfortune, conflict, or moral decline, that can only be resisted through unity and solidarity.

#### 4.8. PROVERBS

Proverbs are concise, metaphorical, and culturally embedded expressions of collective wisdom, tradition, and social values, transmitted orally and functioning both as tools of instruction and forms of artistic expression within a community. Archer Taylor described the proverb as the most concise and expressive form of traditional wisdom, emphasising its brevity and depth (Taylor, 1931). Wolfgang Mieder, one of the most influential proverb scholars, defined a proverb as a short, generally known sentence of the folk that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form, passed down through generations (Mieder, 1993). Alan Dundes considered a proverb a traditional prose statement of apparent truth that has had and continues to have currency among the folk, focusing on its communal value and continued relevance (Dundes, 1975). Ruth Finnegan, in her study of African oral traditions, emphasised that proverbs are a form of verbal art encapsulating values, norms, and social commentary, often using metaphor or irony to convey cultural insights (Finnegan, 1970).

Some Proverbs among the Poumai Naga community are as follows:

*Shudzii hidzii pamoyu nangiwo, touzuse.*

Wealth acquired without sweat and tears finishes soon /does not last long.

*Chih jaoza siiloua chihze souse.*

Learnt through hearsay should not spread further.

*Chilaqo avei hai baseih aveili ziinou mutei hise.*

Kind words are better than useful tools.

*Cho Haawo ainou siipoa tae, Zhimaio tsiinou siipoa tase.*

Cows and Buffalos are led by a rope, but men are guided by wisdom.

*Lahbaa ngumoa maibaa nou ngue tuwe.*

We often fail to recognise our own shortcomings, yet we are quick to point out those of others.

*Teih hai pu ye, zhadei hai pfii se.*

The sky is the father; the earth is the mother.

*Pahpahyu teihitei thou shih mose.*

Not everything that blooms is destined to bear fruit.

*Raataih wo shi, maitaih wo veise*

The wrath of God brings destruction, but the wrath of man can lead to blessings.

*Khaipeiuyu hai shupya buse, Khiingu phouyu hai shupya hase.*

Forgiveness brings reward, while revenge leads to emptiness.

*Chi veimoyu mai ah teihkhe teihrii ashi veyuki, liidase.*

The man without a sturdy house realises his mistake when the wind and rain arrive.

These proverbs are terse summaries of experience. These may not be ascribed to any particular individual. Of course, many of these proverbs have found their way into writing. Alan Dundes emphasise the study of the proverbs based on their text, texture, and context. He says, "Texture, text and context must all be recorded. It should be noted that texture, text and context can each be subjected to structural analysis (Dundes, 1978). It is not enough that we record and describe a particular proverb. We must record it along with its exact texture (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, etc.) and the specific social situation in which the proverb is actually used. Dundes has compared the proverb to 'objective correlative' in that it is often an expression of a specific situation or chain of events, which serves to evoke a particular emotion or attitude (Dundes, 1978).

## 5. FINDINGS

The findings in the paper on the Poumai Naga oral literature revolve around several key points:

- 1) Role of Oral Literature:** Oral literature serves as a crucial means of transmitting indigenous knowledge about ancestry, moral values, and spiritual beliefs within the Poumai Naga community. Oral narratives, including myths, folktales, songs, and proverbs, are essential in transmitting ancestral wisdom and reinforcing cultural values. They function as a repository of history and collective wisdom, connecting generations and reinforcing cultural identity.
- 2) Social Cohesion and Cultural Identity:** Storytelling, folk songs, and proverbs play a crucial role in promoting social cohesion among the Poumai Naga. They not only strengthen communal connections but also convey shared values that reinforce cultural identity. Oral literature links individuals to their collective history and heritage, serving as a living archive of memory while shaping societal morals and values. Through festivals, rituals, and performances, these oral traditions foster unity, enhance cultural pride, and preserve the continuity of the Poumai community's identity across generations.
- 3) Challenges to Preservation:** The study identifies modernisation, globalisation, and migration as significant threats to the preservation of oral literature. These factors contribute to the decline of traditional storytelling and practices, particularly among the youth, who are increasingly swayed by contemporary cultures. The absence of a written



language and formal historical documentation further heightens the risk of losing these oral traditions, making them vulnerable to gradual extinction. Moreover, external influences and changing lifestyles disrupt the transmission of knowledge between generations, jeopardising the preservation of cultural wisdom and the continuity of the community's shared identity.

- 4) **Community Resilience:** Despite facing various challenges, the Poumai Naga community has exhibited remarkable resilience through numerous initiatives focused on preserving their culture. Cultural festivals, workshops, and awareness campaigns have become essential platforms for revitalising oral literature and encouraging active engagement, particularly among the youth. By fostering interest in traditional stories and facilitating their transmission to younger generations, these initiatives not only strengthen community ties but also protect cultural identity. The community's commitment to upholding and revitalising its traditions reflects both flexibility and a resolve to withstand external influences, thereby ensuring the safeguarding of its heritage for future generations.
- 5) **Need for Educational Integration:** The study highlights the significance of incorporating indigenous oral literature into educational curricula and digital media to preserve traditional knowledge systems in today's world. By integrating oral literature into formal education, we can protect these heritage practices while fostering appreciation and a stronger sense of identity among youth. Additionally, utilising digital platforms to document and share this content enhances accessibility and ensures long-term preservation, allowing oral literature to endure despite modern challenges.
- 6) **Documentation Efforts:** Documenting oral literature through ethnographic studies, audio-visual recordings, and digital archiving is essential for preserving the culture of the Poumai Naga community. These methods effectively capture the performance elements, expressions, and contextual nuances that written documentation often fails to convey, resulting in a more authentic preservation of traditions. In addition to safeguarding Poumai heritage, these initiatives also play a vital role in global discussions on protecting indigenous cultures, emphasising the importance of maintaining oral traditions in an increasingly modernised world.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the essential role of oral literature in preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Poumai Naga community. Oral literature, which encompasses storytelling, folk songs, and proverbs, is a vital medium for transmitting ancestral knowledge, moral values, and spiritual beliefs across generations. It serves not only as a repository of history but also as a powerful tool for fostering social cohesion and reinforcing a shared cultural identity. By connecting individuals within the community to their past, oral literature sustains the communal bonds that are central to the Poumai Naga's sense of belonging and collective continuity.

However, Poumai Naga oral literature faces increasing challenges from modernisation, globalisation, and migration. These forces have led to a decline in the practice and transmission of traditional oral forms, particularly among younger community members who are increasingly influenced by external cultural and lifestyle changes. This erosion threatens to disrupt the continuity of invaluable cultural knowledge and weaken the social fabric upheld by oral literature. Nevertheless, the Poumai Naga community has demonstrated resilience and adaptability through initiatives such as cultural festivals, workshops, and awareness campaigns aimed at reviving interest in oral literature and engaging youth in its preservation.

To ensure the survival and vitality of Poumai Naga oral literature, this study strongly advocates for its integration into formal educational curricula and for the use of digital platforms for documentation and dissemination. Incorporating these indigenous narratives into schools can foster a deeper appreciation for cultural roots among younger generations, while digital archiving can safeguard oral literature against loss and expand access to a broader audience. Additionally, ethnographic research and audio-visual documentation are essential for capturing the full context and performance elements of oral literature, which written records alone cannot convey. Together, these measures reflect the community's commitment to cultural preservation and provide a model for sustaining indigenous heritage amid the pressures of a rapidly changing world.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Non.

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