

KHEZHA CHAKHESANG FOLK NARRATIVES: AN ECOLOGICAL STUDY

(Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English)

By

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-2022-

DECLARATION

I, Medongunuo Ngone, hereby declare that the thesis entitled *Khezha Chakhesang Folk Narratives: an Ecological Study* is a record of bonafide research done by me under the supervision of Prof. Jano S. Liegise, in the Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus during the period of 2016-2022 and that the content of the thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis or any part of it, has not been submitted by me for any other research degree in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.


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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Khezha Chakhesang Folk Narratives: An Ecological Study**” is the bonafide record of research work done by Medongunuo Ngone, Reg. No. 811/2018 (w.e.f. 10/08/2016), Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2016-2022. Submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other title and that the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the scholar under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations May 2016 (amended) and the scholar has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for submission of the thesis. Plagiarism test of the thesis has been conducted and 2% of similarity has been detected which is permissible under the UGC regulations 2018.

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Abstract

The Khezhas, a sub-allied group of the Chakhesang tribe of Nagaland, are quintessentially hill people. As such they share a profound relationship with and a deep understanding of nature. The Khezha's affinity with nature goes beyond its utilitarian worth and this is visible by taking into account the beliefs, ethics, rituals, customs and traditions the Khezhas observed. The Khezhas' folk knowledge is also a testament of their understanding of nature. For example- determining agricultural cycle and seasons through observation of the movement of the sun and by deciphering sounds made by certain birds and animals; the knowledge of useful birds and animals that keep pests and insects from destroying paddy fields; traditional medicines made of plants, herbs, berries and other available forest resources to treat illnesses from headaches, stomach aches, toothaches, gastritis to even kidney stones and piles. Khezhas in the olden days attached spiritual values to nature and believed in the presence of spirits in the different forms and elements of nature. Natural calamities and disasters were believed to be the wrath of the Supreme Being and the spirits in nature for some wrong doing on the part of humans and as such the Khezha society was marked by acts of propitiation to appease the spirits. They believed that a harmonious living with nature is essential for their own wellbeing. And that is why they practised the ethics of restraint in their use of the natural resources available to them. In the primitive Khezha society, though there were no written laws, the traditional codes of conduct '*Metha, Menyie and Kenyü*' (fear, shame and taboo) were strictly adhered to and they worked as social sanctions that regulated their behaviour, conduct and actions. These traditional ethics forbade them from mindless and excessive use of the forest resources. Some portions of the forested

area were also regarded as sacred and as such no human intrusions in any form were allowed in those areas. The Khezha culture in this way promoted conservation of the physical environment around them.

An examination of the Khezha cultural cosmology shows that folk tradition still pervades the life of this indigenous group. The identity of the Khezhas is closely connected to the tradition they practice and a cultural understanding of this ethnic group can be drawn by a study of its folk tradition and oral narratives. Keeping this in mind, an estimation of the Khezhas' sensibility and consciousness towards the environment has been attempted by taking into the purview of study the folk narratives of the Khezhas that include folksongs, tales, legends, myths, and finally, their folk expressions. Folk or oral narratives are reflections of the people's belief system and tradition and as such, the Khezha folk narratives make for an apt medium to understand the Khezha culture. In the present work, different theoretical approaches of ecocriticism such as green politics, deep ecology, spiritual ecology, eco feminism and eco ethics have been employed in the analysis of the folk narratives to explore the sensibility of Khezhas toward nature and the environment. The correlation between Khezha traditional ethics and environmental ethics has also been explored.

Chapter I introduces the subject of study and the various theoretical perspectives of ecocriticism. The introductory chapter also presents the hypothesis that folk narratives can be read as eco text or eco literature. Chapter II studies folk songs of the Khezha Chakhesangs under three dimensions of green politics, that is, the economic, spiritual and feminist dimension. Songs related to agricultural and other household activities, songs on the mysticism of nature and songs on women portraying the patriarchal society have been

analysed in this chapter. The greens talk of radical alternatives as the need of the hour to save the planet earth and puts emphasis on the notion of 'limits'. The same notion of limit is found in the traditional Khezha culture now distorted by the modern ethics of unlimited material gain. The link between the cultural and material well-being of the Khezhas and their physical environment is evident from the songs. Greens' core philosophy stresses on ecocentrism and similar core values can be traced in Khezha culture through the folksongs analysed in chapter II. Chapter III attempts an ecocritical analysis of Khezha folktales and legends. The tales and legends have been categorised under five sub headings namely- man and nature; birds and animals; stones and spirits; rivers and forests; women and nature. The findings of the study are varied and some tales are anthropocentric in nature as opposed to ecocentrism that ecocritics advocate but the Khezha culture has been that of restraint behaviour towards the physical surroundings and reverence for nature and thereby displaying traits that are more conservationist than destructive in nature. The final section of chapter III brings to question the linkage between the domination of women and the domination of nature by man and while the ecofeminist perspective does not apply to the traditional Khezha culture of the past in totality, the same cannot be said of the modern Khezha society where the traditional ethics and values are losing significance. Chapter IV is a modest attempt to make an eco-ethical exegesis of the idiomatic expressions of the Khezhas. While focussing on the folk expressions which were pronounced in the form of prayers and incantation in the Khezha society, the chapter also discusses the affinity between Khezha traditional ethics and environmental ethics with special reference to the three codes of conduct as observed in the Khezha culture. The analysis shows that Khezhas were protocol-minded people and their reverence for nature and culture of restraint in hunting or exploitation of forest resources to

meet their needs as reflected in the folk expressions are proof of the eco-sensibility of the Khezhas.

Ecocriticism attempts to establish and achieve a symbiosis between the dichotomous worlds of human and non-human, of culture and nature, and to redefine the relationships between them on a new eco-ethical foundation. To achieve this end, the existing knowledge systems and modern ideologies need to be re-examined and reviewed. Restoration of such traditional values and ethics that are ecologically sound and sustainable can aid in the efforts to control the environmental crisis the world is in today and folk narratives have a significant role to play in the restoration and dissemination of the ecological wisdom, knowledge and ethics.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Chakhesangs- a brief account

The Chakhesang people are inhabitants of Phek district, a mountainous region in the South-Eastern part of Nagaland, and bounded by Burma (Myanmar) in the east, Kohima district in the west, state of Manipur in the south, and Zunheboto district in the north. Prior to the recognition of the Chakhesangs as one of the tribes in Nagaland, they were part of the Angami tribe and were known as the Eastern Angamis. This accounts to a great extent for the close affinity that the Chakhesangs and the Angamis share in respect to customs and culture. It can be said that the Angamis and the Chakhesangs have a shared history and a shared culture. However, realizing the need to have a separate ethnic and community status for political and developmental reasons, the demand for a separate tribe was forwarded to the district administration of Kohima in December of 1944 and the name 'Chakhesang' came into existence as the result of a unanimous decision taken and approved by leaders at a meeting held in 1945. The word 'Chakhesang' is an amalgamation of the names of three allied sub-tribes: 'Cha' from Chakrii (chokri), 'Khe' from Khezha, and 'Sang' from Sangtam (Pochury) in alphabetical order of arrangement. However, with the formation and recognition of Pochury as a separate tribal group, the Poumai community has taken the place of the third allied group in the present-day Chakhesang society.

The Chakhesang people, like other Naga tribes, have mongoloid features although there are different traditions concerning their migration. Most writers, however, ascribe to the

belief that the Chakhesangs migrated from Mekroma (Maikhel) located in the district of Senapati, under the state of Manipur. According to legend, a particular wave of Naga tribes crossed Burma (Myanmar), wandered through the valley of Imphal, Manipur then moved northward and finally settled at the present site of Khezhakeno village, Nagaland. This group stayed in and around Khezhakeno for a considerable period but enmity arose causing their dispersal to different regions for further settlement. Some of the Naga tribes believed to have dispersed from Khezhakeno village are the Angami, Chakhesang, Lotha, Rengma, Sumi, and numerous other clans.

Traditional folklore as handed down from the forebearers speaks of this migrating group as headed by a chief named Koza. The chief on reaching *Shajouba*, now called *Chaho*, thrust his hand staff on the ground asking his Creator for direction. He said, "If I am to settle here, let the bird hovering and following me perch on my hand staff, if not, then let my staff fall towards such direction where I should settle." His hand staff tilted towards the east. The bird (swallow) flew ahead of them and they followed. Koza's hand staff took roots and grew to a huge tree called *Kasubo* in Khezha dialect which means "pointing tree". After moving from *Chaho*, Koza came to a place where, as he halted to rest, he could hear a *mokhro* (bubbling) sound and so that place came to be known as *Mokhromi* (Maikhel) named after the word *Mokhro*. Koza and his people followed the bird until it stopped and hovered over at a place (Khezhakeno) where a large flat stone lay. The bird refused to fly any further and this place also had water. Thrusting another staff once again into the ground, he said, "If I am to settle here, let the bird hovering and following me perch on my hand staff when I set it in the ground." The bird perched on his staff. When Koza looked around, he saw a frog carry a

stalk of paddy in its mouth and hopped onto the large-flat stone. As the frog left behind the stalk of paddy on the stone, to the amazement of Koza and his people, the paddy multiplied. All these signs convinced them of some divine guidance and consequently, the group settled at the site.

Koza and his wife had three sons and they used to take turns in drying their paddy on the large flat stone (*Tso Tawo*). However, one day there arose a bitter fight amongst the brothers each claiming it was his turn to use the stone. Writing about the same story, J.H. Hutton records the parents fearing bloodshed, “broke eggs on the stone, covered it with brushwood, laid faggots about it, and set the whole on fire. The stone burst with a crack like thunder, the spirit went up to heaven in a cloud of smoke, and the virtue of the stone departed” (19). This was later followed by the dispersal of groups to different parts of Nagaland forming different tribes.

However, as B.B. Kumar points out that the early history of the Naga tribes is shrouded in mystery and obscurity, and that their origin, on one hand, points towards “wider linkages”, while on the other hand, most of the general accounts and legends are shared by a few tribes only (109).

The Chakhesang people speak three major languages: Chokri, Khezha, and Poumai, with variations in the language depending on the range, area, and village of its usage.

Geographically speaking, the land inhabited by this ethnic group is divided into six physical features namely “Kuzhathede, Secheku, Phek, Chokri, Chozuba and Pochury” (Marhu 10).

The Chakhesang tribe has a literacy rate of 79.13% as per the census data of 2011.

Among the many tribes in Nagaland, the Chakhesang people also have one of the most beautiful and unique cultures, and the simple fact that the district inhabited by this group has come to be known as “The land of Traditions” in recent years, is proof of the distinctive culture that this group of people practices. Culture, as pointed out by Horam, can be generally characterised as a set of ideas, including, among other things, “law codes, attitudes towards one’s parents, forms of gambling, designs of the plough, songs and dances, sculpture, and quaint customs such as language and literature, government, religion, philosophy and science” (26). The Chakhesangs are known for their vibrant culture as can be seen through their colourful festivals, and their display of rites, customs, and traditions, which in turn is a display of how they associate themselves with the past and with nature.

1.2. The Khezha Chakhesang

The Khezha Chakhesang is a sub tribe of the Chakhesang Nagas. A tribe, according to M. Horam, is a group of people sharing blood ties, linguistic identity, social organisation and above all, a well-defined “political system and cultural homogeneity” (26). The word Khezha seems to be of Angami origin, derived from *Keza* or *Kezha* meaning ‘big’. The native Khezhas call themselves *Kozami*, *Közhami*, *Kuzhami*, *Kuzami*. The names are proto-form of the original name *Koza*, the name of the Khezha ancestor, and can be roughly translated as people of *Koza* (Kapfo 1). This difference is due to the dialectical variation in the Khezha language owing to the geographical differences of the Khezha speaking villages. On the whole, fifteen villages speak the Khezha language in different variations, and inhabit the mountain ranges in the south-eastern part of Nagaland viz. “Kepamedzü and Terututuphe in Nagaland and Krowemi mountain range and Ruphe mountain range in the northwestern part

of Manipur” (Lohe 17). However, Khezha area (now referred to as Khezha/Kuzha Tephe), as a political and social demography and as recognized by Chakhesang Public Organization (apex body of the Chakhesangs) covers only eight villages namely, Khezhakeno, Lishemi, Lasumi, Lewoza, Zapami, Kami, Lekromi, and Pfutseromi, and with an approximate total population of 14,768 persons according to Census 2011. The data for the present study have been collected from oral narrators belonging to these eight villages and from literature produced by the Kuzhami (Khezha) Literature committee. A brief account of the eight Khezha villages is provided below:

1. Khezhakeno: also known as *Kozabomi* (meaning place of origin of the descendants of *Koza*, believed to be the Naga ancestral forefather) village is believed by many Naga tribes to be their ancestral home. Oral tradition says that *Koza* with his wife and people came to the present site of Khezhakeno village via Burma and finding the place favourable for habitation settled there. Over time groups of people from Khezhakeno migrated to different areas and a splinter of villages came up. Interestingly, certain rituals were forbidden for the *Mowo* (chief) of splinter villages to perform unless the *Mowo* of Khezhakeno village had performed it first. Similarly, tribute or tax locally referred to as *Khezhan Khro* or *Kozano Khro*, were realized from the descendants of *Koza* who had migrated and established their own villages and given to the *Mowo* of Khezhakeno village.
2. Lishemi: Lishemi is also considered one of the oldest amongst the Khezha villages. The name is derived from the words ‘*Le*’ which means fell, ‘*She*’ meaning stood and ‘*Mi*’ which means people. The name is connected to an event that occurred at the time

of settlement when the *Zhiemakhulerah* (descendants' seat) 'fell and stood erect'.

Lishemi is also known as *Tsiroma* which means 'people who bore through rocks'.

Some also used to call the village *Theva Komi* because they were excellent night warriors. According to oral tradition of the village, their ancestor Kuzha came to the present site of Lishemi with his group, his men carrying *Zhiemakhulerah*, some fetish stones, dog, cock and the seeds of cereals and vegetables. Kuzha believed that on reaching the right spot for settlement, the *Zhiemakhulerah* will fall, the dog will bark and the cock will crow, and true to their belief, these omens occurred when they reached a particular spot and on which Lishemi village stands to this day.

3. Lasumi village takes its name from *Lasu*, the founder of the village. The word '*La*' means stand, '*su*' stands for truth and '*Mi*' people. So Lasumi can be translated as 'people who stand on truth'. *Lasu* the founder decided to set up a new village for better settlement of the coming generations and so he went to the priest and elders of Lishemi village and sought their permission. On being granted the permission, he took a saucer, fetish stone, weapons, rooster, dog, some paddy seeds, and cotton seeds, and began exploring the places around Lishemi village. On reaching the present site of Lasumi village, he sat under a big **B**onsum tree and made fire. The smoke from the fire went up straight to the sky and observing this good omen, Lasumi village was established there.
4. Lewoza: the youngest village amongst the eight, Mr. Lopenyi Tepfo of Lishemi village was the first settler of Lewoza. Because of the favourable landscape and geographical area, the village came to be populated by others in course of time. Since the early days wrestling, a type of sport popular with the Khezhas, have been held at

this village during *Tsükhenye* festival by the three brother villages namely Lishemi, Lasumi and Lewoza.

5. Zapami: the name is derived from the word Zipami which is an amalgamation of the words ‘*Zi*’ which means ‘lake’, ‘*pa*’ meaning ‘by the side’ and ‘*mi*’ means people. So, Zapami literally means people living by the side of a lake. The village was referred to as *Nizama* or *Nezama* which translates into ‘village with immense wealth’. According to oral tradition, two persons from Lishemi set out to harvest the stinging nettle plant locally called *thebvo* at the present site of the village and finding the lush green valley with a lake tucked in the middle deeply captivating decided to settle there and the village was born.
6. Kami: located few kilometres south of Pfutsero town, Kami village is also regarded as being one amongst the oldest Khezha villages. Kami means ‘great warriors’ and the title of ‘The Great Warrior’ or ‘The Great Kami’ was bestowed upon them by the neighbouring villages for the excellent combating skills and prowess displayed by the famed village warrior named Khelo Kupa in fighting off the army advances made under the Manipur ruler from the neighbouring state. The village has as historical artefacts and relics the village gate called *Ketsa*, as many as 173 stone monoliths or pillars called *Tsoshe* amongst others.
7. Lekhromi: the village is said to have been founded by Zhie and Ngacu. It is believed that when the village was first established, the place was full of ‘*tetro*’ (a very thorny and bushy creeper) and so the village was named Tetromi, ‘*mi*’ being ‘people’ but later the name evolved into Lekromi. The people of Lekromi are believed to have

migrated from Makhel. The village has over 122 ancient monolithic stones erected through *Zatho* or the feast of merit over the years.

8. Pfutseromi: the name Pfutseromi signifies 'settlers of a new site'. According to oral tradition, the ancestors of Pfutseromi first lived at Mekhrore village (presently under Senapati district of Manipur), then moved to Khezhakeno village and lived there for many years before seeking the blessings of the elders of Khezhakeno village to move north-easterny passing through the villages of Lishemi, Kami and Lekromi and finally settling down at the present site of the village (Chakhesang Public Organisation 145-161).

The Khezhas are a patrilineal group belonging to the mongoloid race with "...straight black hair, black eyes, epicanthic eye-fold and other features of the huge spread of Mongoloid peoples" (Lohe 10). They are robust people endowed with strength for hard physical labour and of medium stature with the average height of men being 5ft and 6 inches (17). The colour of their skin ranges from light to dark brown while some are endowed with yellowish coloured skin. The Khezhas are "cheerful in disposition and light-hearted by nature" (17). G.K. Ghosh writes of the young Chakhesang folks as being "usually very fine, light, beautifully built and powerful" (103).

The main occupation of the Khezhas is farming. They practise terrace cultivation as well as shifting cultivation. In the olden days, all the economic activities were controlled by the village priest. The priest would perform all the rituals before any work could be carried out. In some cases, all the households of a village performed the agricultural rituals with the priest on a fixed day such as *Etseboukepfü*, and *Eloshemeri* (Lohe 170). While all the family

members were involved in agricultural labour, weaving is another activity that was and continues to be an important skill of the Khezha women. Other crafts like basket making, pot making, etc were also practiced.

Villages of this indigenous group are mostly located on hilltops or ridges of the spurs running down high ranges and foothills. In the olden days, the Khezhas would set up their villages in places where “the cock crows, the dog barks, the Mithun (*Bos frontalis*) bellows, and the stone falls down” (Lohe 19). On finding such a place, they would exclaim “*Zetshe kewe rukekeku kajü cie tengu bera* (it is a good sign, the land of good luck and victory has been shown to us)”. This is to say, the Khezhas lived by omens and their activities were governed by signs and omens. Like the other Naga villages, the Khezhas also had *morungs*, which are separate dormitories for both girls and boys. While the *morung* prepared young boys and girls to take up responsibilities as adults in the society, socialization also took place among boys and girls in the *morung*.

The Khezhas, as Dr. Kewepfuzu Lohe puts it, “are a colourful lot and their dresses are representatives of their colourful spirit” (28). While the male members use a white shawl and black *mene* (kilt) tied around the waist with a belt, their female counterpart adorns themselves with shawls in different designs and colours, *etalashe* (cloth to wrap the body), *mene* and *nekhro* (a small cloth worn under the kilt). On special occasions, as in festivals and feasts, feathers and flowers are used to decorate the ears. They also adorn themselves with accessories made of brass, ivory, cowry shells, and beads.

Another aspect of the Khezha culture is the number of festivals connected with the agricultural seasons; ritual sacrifices for plentiful harvest; rituals for the departed soul and thanksgiving to their God in the form of worship. Festivals are observed joyously with special *hazi* (rice beer), meat, singing and dance. Some of the festivals observed in different Khezha speaking villages are named as Rünnye (celebrated by all the Khezha villages), Likhennye (celebrated at Khezhakeno and Thetsumi), Tsükhenye (observed in Pfutseromi, Lekhromi), Selunyi (observed in all the villages), Dzünnye (observed in Pfusero, Lekromi and Leshemi) and Nonye (celebrated at Khezhakeno and Thetsumi) (Nagi 83). All the festivals are linked to the agricultural cycle starting from sowing to harvesting.

1.3. Oral Tradition and Folk Literature of the Khezhas

Folk literature is the literary manifestations of the people's creativity such as tales, poems, sayings and such oral texts that reflect the "cultural ethos of the society" (Aier 2). It is the lore chiefly transmitted by word of mouth. It consists of prose as well as verse narratives, myths, legends, poems, songs, rituals, proverbs, riddles and the like. There is no way of knowing the origins of folk literature, nor can any evolution in folk literature or any overall developments be spoken explicitly for each group of people has handled its folk literature in its own way. However, societies have produced some men and women of considerable natural endowments such as shamans, priests, warriors and the like and from these have emerged the greatest impetus everywhere toward producing and listening to lore and songs. Folk literature has shown to be relatively stable sometimes but it has undergone drastic changes at other times. Because of its oral nature, it is subject to alteration and modification as it travels over time and space and "this lends credence to the assumptions

that the elemental essence of folklore and oral traditions are its acquiescent qualities to the changing social and cultural landscape” (Aier 2). Also, since in essence all folk literature is oral, it is subject to survival or decay depending on the memory as well as the skill or lack of skill of the practitioner. In Naga society, the old people continue as creators, repositories and disseminators of folk stories and songs.

The Khezha Chakhesang, like other indigenous groups of Nagaland, has a history of culture passed on orally from one generation to the other and the people being deeply rooted in this oral tradition. In fact oral tradition is an intrinsic aspect of the Khezha culture. An examination of the Khezha cultural milieu shows that folk tradition still pervades all aspects of life of the people. The group as well as individual identity of this people is closely connected with the tradition they practice. A cultural understanding of the Khezhas can be drawn by a study of its folk tradition and oral narratives.

The field of oral tradition is extensive and provides an immensely rich treasure of the culture of the people, their beliefs and customs, values and morals, thoughts and practices, common behavioural pattern and traits, even fears and affinities. It also mirrors the ideas, ideals and desires of the society to which it belongs. Oral tradition reflects as well as impacts and generates culture. As the word ‘oral’ suggest, the mode of transmission is through word of the mouth. Oral transmission can be roughly defined as a form of human communication wherein this knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another. Oral transmission is passing over of information, memories and knowledge held in common by a group of people, over many generations. In a general sense, oral transmission refers to the recall and passing on of

preserved cultural knowledge through vocal utterances. Some of the ways in which this oral transmission has been taking place for generations in the Khezha villages have been briefly discussed herein.

1.3.1. Folktales (Story Telling)

A folktale can be defined as imaginative narrative passed on orally from one generation to the next. It is “a narrative which is related and received as a fiction or fantasy” (Oring ed. 126). It is an important part of Oral literature also called “verbal art or expressive literature” (Handoo 7). “The oral fictional tale, from whatever ultimate origin, is practically universal both in time and place. Certain people tell very simple stories and others tales of great complexity, but the basic pattern of tale-teller and his audience is found everywhere and as far back as can remember” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 458).

Storytelling is one of the basic features of any tribal culture. It is an age old art of presenting events in words, images, and sounds often by “improvisation or embellishment” (Sebastian 27). Stories or narratives have been shared in every culture as means of entertainment, education, preservation of culture and to teach moral values”. Margaret Read MacDonald echoes the same thought about the utility of storytelling as she says that folktales are instructive and educational for the young minds and serves as a source of “inspiration in fashioning a moral code, giving the whole community a sense of belongingness” (10).

One basic feature of folktales is the anonymity of its author. Story telling has been a continual exercise from the earliest of times but to ascribe a tale to any one author is an exercise that is almost impossible to achieve at the present time. The stories have survived

through the mouths of its tellers but the tellers/narrators are just carriers of this tradition and not its real masters. There are as many versions of the same story as there are tellers. This is due to the oral nature of the tradition, which is highly unstable, as opposed to written literature, which is fixed. This feature of folktales can be summarized thus, “Its originators have long been forgotten and it exists in many versions, all equally valid. Instead of being fixed like a literary document, it is in continual flux” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 458).

Folktales can be of varied themes- nature, love, marriage, magic and so on mostly based on ancient oral tradition. These tales can be highly instructive and didactic in nature and theme. There are also stories of the supernatural, spirits and fairies, witches, devils, deities, and supernatural guardians of the mountains. There are also tales celebrating men and women heroes. One important theme in folktales is the relation between human and animals. In folk narratives animals abound “whether in their natural form or anthropomorphized so that they seem sometimes men and sometimes beasts” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 458). Jhan Hochman writes that there is “no longer any convincing boundary between human and animals, why should animals not be represented by people just as people are represented by people. It could even be convincingly argued that animals, like people who cannot or do not represent themselves are the ones most in need of representation” (190). There are also tales on marriage and union between an animal and a human. Such stories abound the folk narratives of different culture.

Characters in folktales are generally flat and two-dimensional and the narratives are built on events and actions. Oring points out that folktales place little emphasis upon character development. That, characters, whether animal or human, are recognised through their

actions or physical attributes, and there is generally no internal conflict or “complex motivation” (Oring 128).

Another elemental aspect of a folktale is its plot. According to Elliott Oring, the plot of a folktale consists of a logical sequence of events and can be described as single stranded, merely following the action of a single character although there are also tales where the plot charts out the actions of multiple characters (129).

Folktales as stories are mostly inseparable from the routine of daily life so that they are not perceived as stories anymore, they become part of culture. As Sebastian points out, a proper understanding of folk narratives will reveal insights into the tribal culture. As folktales have a social function as guide to ethical behaviour, imparting moral values, the “symbols and allegories” presented in the tales can be analysed for better understanding of tribal culture (Sebastian 28). Aier too writes that the passing on of these stories from generation to generation keeps the “social order intact” (Aier 15).

Folktales are generally considered to belong to the realm of imagination. However, it can hover between belief and unbelief and vary from culture to culture and even from person to person, in fact, in “the most sophisticated societies legends of strange things from the past or present continue being told and are usually believed” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 459). Folktales may be seen as not merely “incidental allusions or speculations” but based on observations and experiences that the people live through (Mawlong 6). Whether fictional or based on real life experiences, there is no denying the fact that folk narratives are greatly influenced by the tribal culture and vice versa. And an understanding of the narratives will enhance understanding of the culture to which the narratives belong. Folktales are windows

to the culture, traditions, beliefs, sensibilities, superstitions, taboos, mind and art of the various ethnic groups and as such a proper understanding of these narratives will give excellent insights into their tribal culture.

1.3.2. Folk Songs

Singing is universal. As far as Naga Society is concerned, music can be said to be a very important part of its culture. In fact, M. Horam writes, “if music is any index of a people’s cultural heritage, the Nagas possess a rich cultural heritage indeed” (49). In the Khezha society, folk singing holds a very important position. Almost every occasion or event in a Khezha village calls for the composing and singing of folksongs, sung in groups, with or without the accompaniment of indigenous stringed instruments such as the *Tati*. And as such the themes of the folk songs are varied: songs eulogizing ancestors, the brave deed of warriors, love songs, songs on incidents, mourning songs, war songs, songs to invoke the favour of the supernatural powers, songs of wooing, and so on. There are also songs with no apparent theme but simply sung for the pleasure of it. During the olden days, acquaintances between girls and boys were restricted and personal courting was absent. Socialization would take place between the boys and girls in the *morung* where among other things they would communicate and praise each other through singing of folk songs. There are also songs for different activities like the spinning of yarn, lullabies and so on.

Folk songs are an integral part of any ethnic culture and are also passed on orally from generation to generation through singers, families or even social groups. Because of their orality, folk songs often exist in diverse versions. Folk songs are often in narrative verse

and consist of different voice parts. They can be both traditional and contemporary. Folk songs are more participatory than presentational in nature because they are more often associated with activities such as agriculture, rituals, works, games, hunting, enculturation etc. Substantial number of folk songs is also based on myths and tales belonging to the culture where the songs are sung. As such they also gain cultural significance in the dissemination and promulgation of values, beliefs and ways of life of the people. While specialized folk singers and composers exist, many folk songs are to be sung by the community, youths or just any group. Folk songs are sometimes accompanied by dances. In such cases, the performers are usually the young folk.

1.3.3. Folk Expressions

Every tribal community or ethnic group has certain expressions which are distinctive of that group of people. Such folk expressions are expository of the cultural, traditional and even religious beliefs of the people. Under the ambit of folk expressions, different modes of spoken verbal art such as proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, idiomatic expressions, prayers etc can be included. Proverbs are simply, concrete traditional sayings used for expressing perceived truths or for giving advices. Proverbs that expresses in pithy form statements embodying observations about the nature of life or about wise or unwise conducts may be so much an oral tradition as to serve in the pre-literate tribal societies as a sanction for decisions. While proverbs make clear and distinct statements, the purpose of riddles is normally to deceive the listener about its meaning. A description is given and then the answer is demanded as to what has been meant. Tongue twisters are a sequence of words or sounds, typically of an alliterative kind, that are difficult to pronounce quickly and correctly.

Idiomatic expressions are those phrases that typically present the non literal meaning attached to the given phrases. Categorized as figurative and formulaic language, the purpose of such expressions is to go beyond what meets the eye. Prayers have always been an important routine in the life of the Khezhas. Prayers in the olden days were offered to the spirits as an act of appeasement and also for the favour of the Supreme Being and the spirits. Prayers were also part of most of the rituals that the Khezhas observed. These prayers have come to hold much significance as expressions of the Khezhas belief and practices. The Khezha Chakhesang culture abounds in all of the above mentioned folk expressions that add to the beauty of their culture while serving their own didactic as well as aesthetic purposes. In the days gone by, folk expressions served as an important medium of imparting values and morals based on their simple philosophy of life acquired directly from their daily living.

The Khezha Chakhesang oral tradition, as with the other tribes and ethnic groups, is testament of the rich culture of the people. It is a reflection of their value system, beliefs, customs, and their common identity. Oral tradition is one of the important forces that has shaped the common thoughts, ideals, ethos and behavioural pattern of this group of people through generations and continue to pervade all aspects of their lives even in the present time.

1.4. Ecological significance of Khezha folk narratives

The Khezhas are quintessentially a hill people and the mountains their home. As such the Khezhas have always shared a very profound relationship with nature. The relationship between the environment and Khezhas can be ascertained from their “adaptive behaviours,

which range from subsistence systems to settlement patterns and to other subsidiary activities such as hunting and gathering” (Nienu xviii). The Khezhas’ relationship with their physical environment can also be established by taking into account the beliefs, ethics, rituals and social constraints the Khezhas observed. Their affinity with nature goes beyond its utilitarian worth. Land, for instance, is considered a symbol of identity and therefore, selling of land is confined to family or next in kin and even this selling is done only in the most urgent of situations. Khezhas’ folk knowledge can also be considered while analyzing their relationship with nature. For example- the knowledge of useful birds and animals that keep pests and insects from destroying paddy fields, deciphering sounds made by certain birds and animals to determine agricultural cycles, use of plants as medicines, understanding nature through observation. As primitive as the Khezha society was before the advent of Christianity, the society was controlled by social and religious sanctions and these sanctions prohibited and prevented the Khezhas from rampant destruction of nature. These sanctions were guided by the three codes of conduct namely *Metha*, *Menyie* and *Kenyü* translated as ‘fear’, ‘shame’ and ‘taboo’. To name few positive practices- it was prohibited to cut trees randomly, only what was required were to be taken and rituals were to be performed for forgiveness and divine approval from the creator and spirits of the trees; it was prohibited to kill birds and animals randomly and individual hunting for pleasure was not practiced; it was prohibited to hunt or trap animals and birds in the breeding season and to kill gestating animals etc.

Khezhas’ association with nature is multi-dimensional. Nature does not just meet their basic economic needs but it also provides them with all essentials, both tangible and non-

tangible, which make up the life of the natives. Nature with all its elements is also a spiritual entity that should be revered as is evident in the oral tradition of this group of people. Their folk literature is a window to their culture and their affinities so much so that a study of its folk literature is a study of the Khezhas themselves for folklores along with beliefs, language, culture, customs, geography and history are pivotal to the identity and even existence of an ethnic group.

“Mountains also create mystic fantasies”, says V. Nienu (xiii) and true to what Nienu says, the mountains (nature) have been subjects as well as objects of many a folk narrative as well as beliefs of the Khezha Chakhesangs. The folk literature of Khezhas has nature and environment as part of its narrative. A depiction of the forest and its landscape can be found in oral narratives as being orphic and inhabited by a host of both malevolent and benevolent forest spirits that protect the wild landscape. This belief that the natural landscape is home to the spirits has led to the concept and the practice of reserving some segments of landscape with all its inhabitants as sacred and thus to be left undisturbed from human interference. This belief has ecological, cultural and religious significance. From the ecologically standpoint, these sacred forests are fragments of the original ecosystem and help in sheltering plants and animals that may have otherwise disappeared because of hunting practices of the locals. Culturally, sacred forests are of substantial interest and importance because they exemplify “phases of social interaction with the local ecosystem” (Zehol 35). The Khezhas believed that any sacrilege to the sacred forest would bring the wrath of the spirits residing in that part of the forest or the Supreme Being whom the Khezhas of Khezhakeno called *Chükichio*. In case of any sacrilege, rituals had to be performed for forgiveness. Social

sanctions were so strictly binding that nobody dared to defile the sacred grooves by human activities. The taboos or rituals associated with such protected forest areas reveal the community's attitude towards nature. The concept of sacred grooves or forests also throws light on the traditional wisdom of tribals in the conservation of nature. This cultural concept is scientifically valid as well for protected ecosystem will lead to a healthy ecosystem. On the religious level, this belief that forests are homes to spirits provided the locals with a spiritual connection to the mountains and things of the wild; but most importantly, such a belief and practice echoes the tribal wisdom of the people and their attitude to nature and as Zehol says, "the consequences of such a practice have been positive from the point of its impact on environment and maintenance of bio-diversity" (36). The concept of sacred forest or *bo künyü wo*, as locally translated, is found in abundance in the folk narratives of this group of people. Keeping all these in mind, therefore, an estimation of the Khezhas' eco-consciousness can be drawn upon by taking into consideration their oral texts/narrations.

The folk narratives on purview in this study include not just myths and folktales but also their folk poetry and folk expressions that show the close association that Khezhas had with Nature in the past. The Khezhas in the pre Christian period considered land and forest to be abode of the spirits (most of the beliefs are still existent) and that is why many myths and legends are connected to the forests, rivers, lakes and even stones, the stories of which have been transmitted from generation to generation by story tellers, the custodians of such autochthonous knowledge. Tales titled *Tawobou*, *Zhi Nhaka*, *Kabvü Nhou*, *Zhimike*, *Ki Koli* etc (narrated in Chapter 3 of the thesis) are such tales that mystifies nature. 'The Spirited Stone', another famous and often narrated tale has become the core of Khezha oral tradition.

There are ample number of tales and myths where references are made to the Spirited Stone. This stone does not just hold mythological significance but it is important historically for the stone is related to the story of Naga migration. To this day remnants of the stone have been preserved in the oldest Khezha village that is Khezhakeno. According to Sashikaba Kechutzar, “Sacredness of nature” is reflected in various folktales which tells of the stories of the workings of the supernatural powers and its relationship with humans, animals, and the rest of the natural world (217). Folk song/poetry such as *Zöh Kesökehmo* echoes the same belief in the mysticism of nature. Then, there are songs like *Tsükhenye Lü* that celebrates nature. *Tuphakezüyi*, the Cotton spinning song and *Rünye Lü* (the Harvest song) throw light on how nature provides. (The above mentioned folk songs are given in Chapter 2)

The Khezhas’ ethics concerning nature is that of partnership. This has been achieved by putting nature in the same pedestal as humans. This is especially true in the presentation of animals in some tales. The animals are endowed with speech and have equal role to play in the tales. ‘Friendship between Risamo and the Tiger’ (discussed in chapter 3) is one such story of the Khezhas where there is a communion of the human and the natural world in the form of friendship between a human and an animal. There are also animal tales with no human interference that shows that a parallel world exists with as much exuberance and vitality as the human world itself. The humorous story of “Hen, Wildcat and Crab” (given in chapter 3) is one example of an animal centric story. Animals are not just motifs or symbols to be allegorized but they are entities in themselves and the Khezha folklore speaks of them as real characters and not just as a symbol or metaphor. In the Khezha cosmology every entity, human or non human, has its place in the scheme of the universe and their own

assigned roles to play. Folklores help in developing an understanding of this belief system. Such beliefs also break the anthropocentric structural hierarchies that man builds in the human-animal relationship.

Khezhas' allegiance to nature can also be seen in the way the sky is regarded as the father and earth as the mother by this people. Folk expressions (discussed in Chapter 4) in this connection abound and every ritual, ceremonial activity or sacramental observances are preceded by acknowledging the sky and the earth as father and mother. This speaks volume of the kind of reverence the Khezhas have for nature. Razouselie Lasetso presents a very interesting worldview of some tribal communities in relation to the sky and the earth in the book *Tribal Ecologies*. He states that the well-being of either was considered of utmost importance for life's sustenance. If mother earth is disturbed through deforestation the sky will be affected. And if the sky does not send due rainfall and sunshine, the mother earth will be seriously affected. Therefore, keeping both the mother earth and the male sky "healthy was a beautiful tribal cosmology" (2). Also, that for many tribal communities, it is their belief that as long as clouds gather over the forest, it is a good sign because it indicates the sound health of the forest with its bountiful riches. As such, tribals take care not to disturb the "abode of the clouds" (4). Lasetso also speaks of the 'sky-earth gathering ritual' (*tü tejü kängu*) which is observed by the Chakhesang Nagas to seek, firstly, forgiveness from the Supreme Being for the destruction that they may have caused to nature by their agricultural activities and secondly, blessings for revitalizing mother earth and for good vegetation (5). Such ethics are precisely why Lasetso says, "Tribals are the most eco-friendly people in the world" (1). The Khezhas' ascribed to the same belief and observed such practices and rituals

in the past which is reflective of their eco-awareness. Though the same rituals and practices are not observed anymore, the beliefs still run strong in the Khezha culture. These local wisdoms are still part of the cultural values of the Khezhas and on which their ethics are built.

The oral narratives of the Khezhas are shaped by their profound beliefs that are ingrained in the collective unconscious of this ethnic group and nature is a significant part of it. The exercise of breathing life into non-animate nature and inter-wreathing it with mysticism or spirituality based on their cultural beliefs is a significant aspect of the Khezha folklore and cosmology. In fact, the different dimensions of Khezhas' association and connection with nature are visible in the folk tradition and narratives of this group of people. The folktales in particular portray just how intimate and compact are the links that bind the Khezhas with nature and then their environment.

1.5. Ecocriticism and its Approaches

“Man is the measure of all things,” said Protagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher, which is a resonation of the anthropocentric worldview that has led to the colonization of nature. Nature is simply looked at as a repository of resources undermining its value as a separate entity. Modern man's dehumanizing tendencies toward nature have led to what we are now facing- a global environmental crisis. Glen A. Love identifies various modes and factors responsible for the ecological disaster that is taking place in the physical environment today. Firstly, she speaks of the disturbing fact that man has grown accustomed to the bad news of human and natural disasters; secondly, she enumerates the various ways by which

human activities are causing this disaster such as radiation poisoning, chemical or germ warfare, rendered more threatening by the rise of terrorism, industrial accidents, destruction of the ozone layer, deforestation, critical loss of land and groundwater through desertification and contamination, overpopulation, overfishing and harmful poisoning of the oceans (14-15). Neil Carter echoes the same opinion and writes of the greens' thought that draws a connection between the current ecological crisis and the arrogance of humans toward the natural world. Man legitimises the exploitation of nature and its resources to satisfy his interests. The arrogance of humans toward nature is rooted in anthropocentrism which looks at man as the master and the superior creation over the rest, the belief that ethical principles apply only to humans. Anthropocentrism looks at human needs and interests as of the highest significance and places humans at the centre of the universe, separated from nature and endowed with unique values (15).

In the past discourses of human history, the complex and intricate relationship between humans and the natural environment has often been neglected and the focus has been more on the different dimensions of human life. However, environmental concerns are now entering all domains such as political, socio-cultural, and even academics on the level of both theory and activism in a significant way. To this end, a new school of literary criticism emerged called Ecocriticism in the later part of twentieth century that envisaged taking environmental concerns to academics and beyond and creating a space for eco-centric discourses as well as actions. Ecocriticism is often used as a comprehensive term for all forms of the humanities that address ecological issues and includes art, media, and film as well, but it basically functions as a literary and cultural theory.

Ecocriticism is primarily concerned with the environmental interpretations and implications of a literary text. Ecocriticism, according to Joe Moran, “explores the relationship between literature and other forms of culture and the natural world, often combining this with a commitment to raising awareness about environmental issues” (171). Ecocritics look at non-human nature and give it the status of a subject. As a literary theory, Ecocriticism engages with literature that speaks for the non-human world and of the essential connections it has with the human world. It explores or confronts dogmas that are man-centric and governing human societies in their relationship with the environment. This form of criticism also examines texts that provide new ethics that look for restoring environment and its sustainability in this age of global environmental crisis. Ecocriticism calls for a new ecological paradigm that is based on awareness and social justice. Ecological Criticism according to Cheryll Glotfelty shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world and affects as well as affected by it. It concerns itself with the interconnections between nature and culture and specifically takes into consideration the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As Glotfelty puts it that as a critical stance, ecocriticism has “one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non human” (xix).

Ecocritics also examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of representation of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. It is concerned with how man’s relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. Ecocritical writings are also inclined towards raising their readers’ awareness, and even toward inciting them to

social and political action, a number of ecocritics are impelled by the conviction that what is at stake in their enterprise is not only the well being but ultimately the survival of human life (Barry 243). In simple terms, ecocriticism is informed by ecological awareness.

In ecocriticism, examination and analysis of the underlying ecological values as well as the human perceptions of nature is carried out, and it endeavours to determine whether the perceptions have changed through history and if current environmental concerns are accurately represented in literature of the modern time. As a critical and a theoretical endeavour, it studies literary texts mediating between the two worlds. Srilatha G. writes of how ecocriticism is not a unitary theory. According to her, different strands of ecocriticism proliferate into various sub-fields of eco-conscious studies. In ecocriticism the notion of the world is expanded to include the entire ecosphere. Srilatha G. also asserts that while all ecocritical texts speak of nature, not all nature writings are ecocritical in content. The ecocritical basis of a text, according to her is the presence of a bond between the human and the non-human. Ecocriticism pleads for a better understanding of nature while offering an interpretation as well as a representation of the natural world and seeks to protect the ecological rights of the non-human world (2).

The basic tasks of ecocritics are to review texts from an ecocentric perspective and identify the natural world applying a range of ecocentric concepts. Ecocriticism is essentially an ethical criticism and a broad approach and there are varying theoretical perspectives under ecocriticism. Ecocritics' preoccupation with eco texts or such literature that writes/speaks of the environment manifests a wide range of mode of analysis. Also all ecocritical approaches are part of a wide-ranging continuum. Thus, these approaches are not just theoretical but also

analytical or psychological, didactical, scientific, sometimes combination of few, sometimes of all and so on.

The present ecological study of Khezha folk narratives has been carried out by employing different approaches of Ecocriticism such as Green Politics (chapter 2); Deep Ecology, Eco-spirituality and Eco-feminism (Chapter 3); and, Eco-ethics (chapter 4).

1.5.1. Green Politics

According to Derek Wall, “Green politics is first and foremost the politics of ecology” (12). The origins of green politics can be traced to the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first ecological political party, that is, Australia’s United Tasmania Group, was formed in the year 1972 with the charter that they were:

- United in a global movement for survival
- Concerned for the dignity of humanity and the value of cultural heritage while rejecting any view of humans which gives them the right to exploit all of nature;
- Moved by the need for a new ethic, which unites humans with nature to prevent the collapse of life support systems of the earth (15).

Green politics is now a global phenomenon. Over the decades green political thought has shaped into a distinctive field of inquiry and as Douglas Torgerson believes, green concerns now “frame an ecological discourse that, while diverse and contentious, has sufficient coherence, cohesion, and scope to be significant in public life” (IX). The most distinctive characteristic of green political thought is that it puts nature at the centre of

attention. More specifically, it questions long thought-of presuppositions about nature-human relationships. The fundamental premise for this questioning is the perception that the celebrated course of industrialisation has caused the modern world to be ecologically irrational and unsustainable in both the short and the long run (IX-X).

Jonathan Porritt presents certain criteria for identifying the key elements of green politics. They are:

- A veneration for the Earth and for all its creatures
- A willingness to share the world's wealth among its peoples
- Prosperity to be achieved through sustainable alternatives to the rat race of economic expansion
- Durable security to be achieved through non-nuclear defence strategies and considerably reduced arms spending
- A rejection of materialism and the damaging values of industrialism
- A recognition of the rights of future generations in our utilisation of all resources
- A stress on socially useful, personally rewarding work, enhanced by human-scale technology
- Protection of the environment as prerequisite of a healthy society
- An emphasis on internal growth and spiritual development
- Respect for the affable side of human nature
- Open, participatory democracy at all levels of society

- Recognition of the crucial need of significant reductions in population levels
- Harmony amongst people of every race, colour and creed
- A non-nuclear, low-energy action plan, based on conservation, greater efficiency and renewable sources
- A stress on self-reliance and decentralized communities (11)

Green politics is deeply rooted in the struggles for peace and social justice as well as ecology. Caroline Lucas in her forward note to Derek Wall's book *The No-Nonsense Guide to Green Politics* declares that green politics is indispensable if we are to have a sustainable and happy future, faced, as we are, with the "threat of climate change, financial catastrophe and peak oil", adding that green politics are about creating an economy that delivers prosperity in the long term, about considering the needs of future generations" (Wall 6). Green politics had grown and developed in the recent years because of the ever growing environmental crisis. Though environmental problems are not new, what is new is their global scale. Environmental crisis has become a global issue and its devastating effects have also come to be felt globally. Climate change is one such effect of the environmental crisis the world is in today and it is just one of the visible manifestation of a wider ecological crisis, which threatens the whole of humanity and the rest of nature. (30)

The consequences of climate change are disturbing. Climate change degrades the ecosystem. Some probable consequences of climate change are extinction of entire species and destabilization of the ecosystems. Forests may disappear and barren land may spread. Forests so far have acted as carbon sinks absorbing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere but with the degradation of our environment, the situation could be reversed. The

increase in carbon dioxide will not only result in increased temperature but will also lead to a lot of complications thereby creating havoc in the ecosystem. In fact, climate change is part of a much wider network of closely linked ecological problems.

1.5.2. Deep Ecology, Eco-spirituality, Eco-feminism

Deep Ecology

As advocated by environmentalist like Arne Naess and Bill Devall, deep ecology upholds the view that man is only a part of nature and does not privilege man over other natural forms. The basic principle of deep ecology is that “man flows with the system of nature” as opposed to seeking to control nature (Merchant 130-135). It puts forward a new norm that is based on a sense of responsibility towards the environment so that the present exploitation of nature can turn into co-participation with nature. Deep ecology believes that all life forms and nature are interconnected. It is the anthropocentric attitude of humans that has caused man to alienate himself from nature leading to rampant exploitation of nature. Deep ecology endeavours to enunciate an all-inclusive worldview. Deep ecology has its foundation on the basic eco-conscious human intuitions and experiences. It calls for a return to nature. It also calls for working out an ecosophical approach to nature. Ecosophy according to Arne Naess is “a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium” (Drengson and Inoue 8). It also calls for bio-centric equality that is equality of all in the biosphere and believes that we are part of a living continuum and when we partake in the destruction of this continuum, we are ironically destroying ourselves as well. In fact, Arne Naess says that the ecosystems in which humans find themselves in are generally in a particular state of balance

which, there are grounds to assume is to be of “more service to mankind than states of disturbance and their resultant unpredictable and far-reaching changes” (27).

The proponents of deep ecology proposed the following principles:

1. The wellbeing and flourishing of both human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the utilitarian worth of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. The richness and diverseness of all life forms on Earth contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans do not have the right to reduce this richness and diversity except for the satisfaction of vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and culture is compatible with a reasonable decrease of human population. Such a decrease is required for non-human life to flourish.
5. Human intrusion with the nonhuman world at present is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Change is therefore required in policies. These policies will affect basic structures of economy, technology, and ideology and the resultant state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is basically that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to a growing higher standard of living. There will be a profound consciousness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the aforesaid points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the needed changes. (Naess 439)

Ecospirituality

The next ecocritical perspective that has gained much momentum in the last few decades and needs to be highlighted is ecospirituality. It explores the intricate links between ecology and spirituality. Ecospirituality engages itself with ecological concerns in spiritual or religious ethics, beliefs, tendencies or actions. History of the linkage between earth and spirituality is as old as the history of oral tradition itself having its roots in the religious traditions, beliefs, practices and culture of the ethnic group to which the oral tradition belong. There are various aspects to ecospirituality and while one opposes the anthropocentric view of man being the centre of the universe, the other advocates a biocentric world where nature in any of its form is not valued based on its utilitarian worth but as possessing a value that is intrinsic and inherent. The concepts of deep ecology and ecospirituality provide for a holistic perspective that aims to create ecoconsciousness and ecoawareness.

Mathew T. Fox is the chief exponent of Spiritual ecology. While seeking to construe an ecological spirituality within the Christian tradition, he reinstates a spiritual experience that builds on a sense of awe, wonder, unconditional love and delight. He proposes a deviation from the Christian ethic of duty oriented stewardship to an eco-spirituality that is established on mysticism and the cosmic Christ, which is the image of divinity. In the backdrop of a society that is characterized by a prevalent sense of depression and distress, Fox advocates a theology of blessings. Fox says that every person must recognize the beauty inherent in the imperfections of self, others and the world.

Fox proposes four paths to a spiritual ecology:

1. To experience the divine in terms of delight, awe and wonder at being present in the world (Via Positiva).
2. A second journey into a spiritual ecology comes through experiencing darkness, deprivation, suffering and pain (Via Negativa).
3. Human experiences with the first two journeys will lead to a rebirth of creativity (Via Creativa) that involves new ecological virtues for living such as vegetarianism, recycling, relearning the sacredness of nature, defending creation through political action and making new rituals to celebrate sacred places, times and being in nature.
4. Transformation to a more compassionate society in which all beings love one another (Via Transformativa); such compassion includes the making of justice (228).

Ecofeminism

The concept was first introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. It basically links women's oppression to that of the domination and exploitation of nature. It calls for an understanding of how the lives and status of women are intricately connected to environmental problems. Ecofeminism dwells on the twin domination of women and non human nature and "...as an ethico-political response to this "dual oppression," ecofeminists advocated turning toward nature and reclaiming the connection, to protect the interests of the natural world, and to empower women physically, spiritually, and economically" (Cuomo 7). Karen J. Warren lays down that ecological feminism is a broad term which houses a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections *within* social systems of domination between those humans in "subdominant or subordinate positions", particularly women, and the "domination of nonhuman nature" (1). Ecofeminism is multicultural and

includes complex social systems of domination, like “racism, classism, ageism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism, as well as sexism” in its study of women-nature connection, as also “consideration of the domination of people of colour, children, and the underclass” (1-2). As such ecofeminist theory is geared to conduct an inclusive analysis of these problems in both their human and natural contexts. Ecofeminism’s central claim is that these problems stem from the “mutually reinforcing oppression of humans and of the natural world” (Gaard and L. Gruen 236). While stressing on the gender based social systems of domination what makes ecological feminism ‘ecological’ is its understanding of and commitment to the importance and need of valuing and preserving the non human world. This includes the recognition of human beings as relational and ecological beings, and of the necessity of an environmental dimension to any adequate feminism or feminist philosophy (Warren 2). Ecofeminism is also ecological because it brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women (Mellor 1).

Ecofeminism stresses human realities which are embedded in ecological realities and the fact that “we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships” (Cuomo 1). Based on the premise that all forms of oppression are interrelated and unacceptable, ecofeminism associates women with nature and this association demonstrates a special convergence of interests between feminism and ecology. This convergence is seen to arise partly from the fact that patriarchal culture locates women somewhere between men

and the rest of nature on a conceptual hierarchy of being (i.e., God, man, woman, nature), and this has enabled ecofeminists to identify a ‘similar logic of domination between the destruction of non human nature and the oppression of women’ (Eckersley 64). ‘The body based argument’ that Robyn Eckersley also talks about identifies the connection of women and nature to the reproductive and nurturing capabilities of both (66).

Ecofeminism is inclusive and a plurality of beliefs is found within it from race, class and gender to spiritual, from ascertaining how responses to sexuality is also a mechanism of oppression to exploring different theories that can be incorporated into the precepts of ecofeminism, and from radical to cultural. As a result, ecofeminism as a movement is ever-growing and expanding and in the process, accommodating and accumulating new variations of beliefs and applications which may be complementary or contradictory. However, the central premise of ecofeminism remains to be the suppression of women and nature. Noel Sturgeon writes of ecofeminism as a movement that draws connection between environmentalists and feminism. According to Sturgeon, ecofeminism articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment (132).

1.5.3. Eco-ethics

Environmental ethics emerged in the last few decades as a response to environmental degradation. Environmental ethics is the field of inquiry that addresses the ethical responsibility of human beings for their natural environment, however, this field is “not limited to ethical enquiry, but also is imbedded in a larger matrix of aesthetic, religious,

scientific, economic, and political considerations” (Botzler and Armstrong 2). Environmental ethics is multidisciplinary, multicultural and transformative. Firstly, it includes all major perspectives; secondly, the political, economic, religious, moral, and aesthetic traditions, as well as institutional structures in both Western and non-Western societies are to be sympathetically addressed and understood to successfully develop a respectful, workable international environmental ethic; and thirdly, it calls for a transformation of human experience and a change in approach (2-3). Environmental ethics challenges traditional anthropocentrism and while it questions the assumed moral superiority and authority of human beings over the non-human, it also addresses the argument of assigning intrinsic value to the natural world.

As quoted in the book *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, Gregory Gull says, “to speak of ethical behaviour is to speak of behaviour that is consistent with life-affirming values- values that are in harmony with the nature of all that is alive” (43). Environmental ethics, as a discipline in philosophy, studies this ethical behaviour and relationship of human beings with the environment. Environmental ethics as a discipline also investigate questions related to the sustainability of nature and whether this sustainability is essential for the well being of human beings or because the natural environment with all its constituents have intrinsic values in their own right and they need to be respected. It studies both the conceptual as well as the factual issues surrounding environmental sustainability determined by societal attitudes, policies and actions. The aim is not to destroy the distinction between human culture and the natural world but to work out an ethic that is inclusive and sensitive to both.

Ecocriticism attempts to establish and achieve a symbiosis between the dichotomous worlds of human and non-human, of culture and nature, and to redefine the relationships between human, animals, nature and environment on a new eco-ethical foundation. The connecting thread with all the different approaches of ecocritical theory is the engagement with literature that explores the organic relationship between human and the non-human world. Ecocritical theory concerns with texts that explore the ideologies governing human actions and their impact on physical environment. Ecocriticism also focuses on texts that embody an awareness of the man made environmental crisis the world is into and propagates creating a sustainable world by adopting a new ethical order that is eco-centric and eco-sustainable. Ecocriticism calls for a paradigm shift from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism.

1.6. Rationale and scope of the present study

Keeping the discussed theoretical base in mind, the present study is an attempt to give insights into the dynamics of Khezhas' attitude toward the natural world (both sentient and non-sentient) by theoretically analyzing their oral narratives and with an attempt to contribute knowledge about this ethnic group's ecological stance and their relationship with nature as visible in their culture and traditional narratives. Tradition is the cornerstone of ethical stability while this same ethics can be said to shape tradition. Therefore, while the cultural tradition is important to establish a rational eco-ethics, the presence of a strong ethical culture can contribute in building a strong tradition. This correlation has been explored in this thesis and attempts to establish an understanding of the Khezhas' ecoethical system based on their traditional culture of oral narration has been made. Questions like the following have also been explored:

1. Is Khezha worldview in consonance with green movements?
2. Can Khezha folk narratives be read as eco-text or eco-literature?
3. Can one derive values from Khezha folk narratives that promote the cause of a healthy eco-system?
4. Do the Khezha folk narratives also evince ecocides?
5. Can the traditional culture approach provide an alternative in the efforts for environmental conservation?
6. How can the folk narratives become a value system to guide the local people?

The ecological issues we are facing today are partly due to the disappearance of traditional wisdom and knowledge, values, ethic and beliefs that prompted the people to be conscious of the intrinsic value of nature and its sacredness in the past. Ethnic groups all over the world were once the custodians of nature. They believed in nature being sacred and thus not to be destroyed or even disturbed if not essential. Though modernity and globalization could not completely wipe out these belief systems, it has resulted in humanity's disconnection from nature. Worldviews of these ethnic communities including the Khezhas have come to lose much of their significance. Restoration of these fast disappearing ecological values and ethics can help in building an eco-conscious world again. With the exception of those who have migrated to cities or towns, the majority of Khezhas still live close to nature and most of them still depend on land and its resources for survival. As such, this ethnic group and their culture make for an apt subject of research study in the ecocritical perspective.

The approach of this study is qualitative with close text and content analysis employing ecocritical theory. The research data are Khezha folk narratives that include myths and folktales, folk songs and folk expressions. For the purpose of generating data, the study has devoted itself towards gathering primary data through interviews, audio recordings and video recordings wherever deemed necessary. The study is focussed on assimilating environmental wisdom of the Khezhas and exploring the ecological dimension of the cultural values and belief system of this ethnic group. So far no study has been conducted on the Khezha culture and its folk narratives in the ecocritical perspective and the possibility of Khezha folk narratives being read as eco-text. It is therefore believed that this precursory study of Khezha folk narratives from the ecocritical dimension will serve as a catalyst for later scholars to further investigate into this paradigm and beyond and contribute valuable inputs to the knowledge bank in literary studies of ethnic cultures and also help in building a community of young intellectuals who are eco-conscious and eco-informed.

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CHAPTER II

KHEZHA CHAKHESANG FOLK SONGS- A STUDY IN GREEN POLITICS

2.1. Khezha Folksongs and Green Politics

A unique aspect of the Khezha folk songs is that it is inspired by life itself and as such they represent the life and culture of the Khezhas. The songs are windows to the life of the Khezhas. Each song serves a purpose. The songs may be of different genres like love songs, work songs, festive songs, harvest songs, lullabies, etc., but they all connect at multiple levels. The folk songs are reflections of the customs and the traditional laws that govern the daily lives of a Khezha village. This chapter attempts a study of Khezha Chakhesang folk songs from the green political perspective. The songs presented in this chapter were sung during different occasions, activities or even tasks. Songs were sung during agricultural activities such as ground clearing, ploughing, rice transplantation, weeding, harvesting, and pounding. So also, songs were sung for different other activities. For instance, the first set of songs analysed in this chapter was sung during the task of producing yarn for weaving purposes which was one of the main activities of Khezha women. Then, the song *Tsükhenye Lüih* was sung to welcome the spring season which also signified the sprouting of new seeds for later transplantation. The term 'tsü' can be translated as sprouts. The song was also sung during the *Tsükhenye* festival which was celebrated between march, april and may marked by feasting, traditional sports, rituals and gennas. After the event, transplantation of saplings in the fields was carried out. *Rünye Lüih* was sung during the harvesting season. While 'rü'

means paddy, 'nye' means festival. The *Rünye* festival was celebrated during a full moon after harvest and lasted for about ten days. Individual cleansing was done before the festival, with young girls shaving their hair and men taking the sacramental bath. The song *Rünye Lüh* was sung in the festivity. Song like *Kerimi Lühzotro* is an echo of the Khezhas' awareness of the fleetingness of life and though not meant for a specific occasion, such songs were sung on any community gatherings. *Zöh Kesökehmo* is based on Khezha folklore and sung by the older folks to transmit traditional lores to the younger generation so also to pass on their beliefs. *Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo* was sung at the birth of a girl child as a tribute to her.

Data for study in this chapter has been collected from the Khezha folk group *Kerimi Lühzotro* and also extracted from *Aspects of Chakhesang Folklore, a Critical Study* by Aneile Puro. The folk group *Kerimi Lühzotro* was formed in the year 2003 and comprises of six members. The name *Kerimi Lühzotro* is in *Kuzhale* (Khezha language). *Keri* means 'early', *Mi* means 'people' and *Lühzotro* means 'song composers'. All the songs sung by the group relates to the folklore and history of Leshemi village, counted amongst the oldest villages of the Khezhas. The songs provided in this chapter have been analyzed under different dimensions of green politics.

2.1.1. The Economic Dimension of Green Politics

The current technological, institutional and economic changes taking place in the global arena run the risk of augmenting the already complex environmental crisis we are in. Economic growth is one root cause of the multi faceted ecological crisis that the world is facing today. Economic growth calls for technological advancement, use of specialized

technology, exploitation of available resources etc. Derek Wall says, “While technology may allow us to produce goods in cleaner ways, there is a contradiction at the heart of the pursuit of growth” (37). “Greens certainly believe that there needs to be tighter regulation aimed at preventing and cleaning up the various ecological problems, but see ever-increasing economic growth as the root cause” (37). To deal with the serious problem of environmental degradation, Wall asserts, “we need more radical alternatives because relentless increases in economic growth, even if accompanied by cleaner, greener ways of doing things, still tend to damage the environment” (37). Modern technology is yet to invade Khezha society in totality. The traditional method is still employed in farming and other such productions that require the use of natural resources with the exception of the minimal use of advance technology. The songs *Tuphakezüyi* and *Thebvo Ketshü Lü* are examples of the traditional method of spinning cotton and processing the nettle plant for producing yarn. The songs have been reproduced below:

Tuphakezüyi (Cotton spinning song)

Ami yimi

We women

Hiye hon i

In this manner

Tupha nyohi

Cotton is kneaded

Choyi kerü

Cotton is rolled

Hiye zulo

Spun in this way (Puro 207)

(This folk song is sung while spinning cotton into yarn by the women folk. This is a common practice of the Khezhas and such activities are always accompanied by songs.)

Thebvo Ketshü Lü (Nettle plant processing song)

Thebvo thelode- dzü ketshu lode

Nettle plant will be cut – washed in water

Thebvo tölode – lota kenhe lode

Nettle bark will be cleaned – soaked in rice flour broth

Mechi kerülode – la ketshülode

Removing the nettle spikes – coiling of yarn

Thebvo melülode – thebvora ralode

Spinning of the yarn – yarn is made ready for meandering

Che ketshülode – lo metsülode

Nettle yarn will be recoiled – yarn will be coiled in a bamboo stick

Thebvo zhülode – thebvora dolode

Nettle yarn will be refined – the yarn will be woven

Thebvo wölode – ra therülode

Nettle yarn will be warped – shawl will be stitched

Thebvo khalode – rado balode

Nettle yarn will be soaked – woven shawl will be worn

Thebvo do lode

Nettle shawl will be woven (Puro 254-255)

(The stinging nettle plant used to be one of the most used raw materials for the production of cloths and shawls in the olden days. The above song was sung during the collection of this raw material and the weaving of cloths.)

The songs *Tuphakeziyi* and *Thebvo Ketshü Lü* are example of community based folk practices and also home based production units of the Khezhas. Weaving is a big part of their economy to this day, second only to agriculture. Though the labour of weaving is confined to the women folk only, a traditional Khezha home, where other source of income is not easily accessible, mostly run on income generated by weaving. In the olden days, the womenfolk produced their own yarn for weaving from cotton plant and also the nettle plant. With time, this practice has become less frequent and at the present time, such activities are performed only for spectacle on occasions. One reason for such practices losing their significance is the availability of materials and machines for weaving in the market in abundance and the labour and time saving it accords those engaged in the activity. Most importantly, such folk practices losing their significance are evidences of how deep the impact of industrialization and globalization is and how it has penetrated even the traditional crevices of people in Khezha villages. Globalization is good as long as sustainability of both human and the natural world is maintained. All developmental goals should aim at sustainability of the human and the non-human world. However, the technological advancements and economical growth in the present time is taking place at the expense of our environment and its impact is already felt in the global warming that even densely forested areas like the Khezha villages are experiencing today. Global warming is just the tip of an iceberg, the destruction to follow

human's reckless exploitation and carnage of the natural world is beyond human comprehension. The traditional method of producing yarn or fibre practiced by the Khezhas, and as presented in the two songs, also involves the utilization of natural resources as raw materials. However, the traditional Khezha society practiced a culture of restraint and the order of the day was 'take only as much as is needed' and therefore, words like 'excess' or 'waste' did not figure much in their day to day lives. Because they were governed by strict social sanctions, it was forbidden and also considered a matter of shame to cut trees more than was required or take anything from nature beyond their requirements.

The song *Merithsühdo* is also an example of the Khezha culture of restraint where random and individual collection of woods was not allowed and instead young boys and girls would go to the forest on appointed days and collect wood. In the case of the song *Merithsühdo*, young boys and girls collectively go to the forest to collect a special kind of wood which is usually done in festivities. Few lines of the song have been provided below.

Merithsühdo

Hü ü hüyi

Kenei dzelo – khromi lümiro

In festivity – boys and girls

Mheto moro – meritshüdo pfü

Without food – went to carry *meritshüdo* (special wood carried by youth in the olden days)

Oh zhale lohele azho – lohe le azho yi

Khromi kele – tshü kechi repfo

One male youth – took dried firewood

Apfo chehi – tshü kechi hino

Loaded it in my basket – these dried firewood

The song is about a young girl who participates in a community act of collecting *Merithsühdo*, a special kind of wood collected by young boys and girls in merry making and festivities but finds her basket being filled by a young man with dried fire wood instead. She wonders if that happened because she is yet to become a full grown woman. The cultural background of the song is a reflection of the ecologically sensible practice of Khezhas in the olden days that forbade individual from cutting trees and limiting the practice of felling and collecting woods only to such times when the need arose or during ceremonial occasions.

In opposition to the traditional ethics is the modern ethic that is governed by principles of profit, competition and expansion. The question of sustainability arises from infinite economic growth on a finite planet. One example is the modern textile industry. Production, consumption and wasting at an ever increasing rate are going to cause extreme damage not just to human beings at the present and also in the future time but to the rest of nature as well. Hence, greens talk of the notion of 'limits'. This notion of limits fits with the ecocentric principle that even if unlimited economic growth were possible, it would not be desirable because of its impact on the rest of nature. Mahatma Gandhi famously argued, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." This summarizes the green attitude. Meeting the ever increasing consumption needs and wants of the people is neither possible nor desirable. The greens reject unrestrained pursuit of economic growth and are also sceptical about unlimited international trade, globalization and other aspects of economics. Greens talk of the difficulty to maintain the ecological system with the ever increasing economic growth. Greens also believe that diminishing resources

make economic growth unsustainable. Unlimited economic growth seems unlikely in a planet with limited resources.

The next set of folksongs is a celebration of nature. *Tsükhenye* and *Rünye* are two important festivals of the Khezhas connected to agriculture. While *Tsükhenye* is observed to mark a new agricultural cycle, *Rünye* is a celebration of harvest. The songs reproduced below are sung during these two celebrations respectively to thank the Supreme Being for the abundance of nature that provides and sustains. The first song *Tsükhenye Lüh* is from the folk group *Kerimi Lühzotro* while the second song *Rünye Lüh* has been taken from Aneile Puro's *Aspects of Chakhesang Folklore, a Critical Study*.

Tsükhenye Lüh

Hino khrühi – we dibi ketshükhrü

This month – what month is it?

Dio ketshükhrü – tsükhenye khrüluo

Which month – is the month of *tsükhenye*

Hino khrühi – we theni ketshü khrü

This month – is the spring month

Theni ketshü – dzü kehuo khrüluo

Spring – is the month of warm water

Tshünyhü bvohi – we kadsü zotshüpfü

Leaves appear – making everything beautiful

Khrükeletsho – tsülo kediewo

When a month ends – time changes

Khunucü ro – wetsülo sowöza

Insects are – also arriving

Kutou wöda – chingurou beda

Kutou bird has arrived – indicating the time

Taketami – we mechitemvüro

Cultivators – with seeds

Mechitemvü – kechi tsülo da

With seeds – it's time to sow

Rocüdzelo – we tsülo ro chelo

The chirping of birds – informs us of the time

Tsülohi zü – ro mhethotshülo

With time – we complete the works

Tshünyhüpedei – we bvo dele pede

Leaves will wither – but grow back again

Meno kelhou – keshede züchi

Man's life – after we grow old

Keshe dele – we kecü le hode

After we grow old – we cannot be made young again

Tsülorohi – mesü lisü luo

This time – how sweet to think of it

(*Tsükhenye* is an important festival not just of the Khezhas but of the Chakhesang tribe as a whole. Celebrated in the season of spring, this festival is marked by ceremonial

rituals and sacrificial offerings that last for four days. This festival marks the culmination of all leisure activities and the beginning of a new agricultural cycle. The song also talks of the spring season which is symbolic of revival and rejuvenation. The appearance of insects and the chirping of birds are indicative of the time of sowing for the cultivators.)

Rünye Lü (Harvest Song)

Rünyehinü – nye kediekele-o

Rünye is – the biggest festival

Keshe kechü – na ketshepfürö

Old young – wearing new clothes

Rünyehinü – zacerünye

Rünye is – celebrated ten days

Kechüronü – kesherohachi

Young ones – serve wine to the elders

Kesheronü – tekhekhepfotsü

The elders – give blessings

Zacerü nye – toqhapfürö

Ten days – putting on girdles

Samü rube – tshürizorö

All crops – looking at warfare

Tsülo rohi – kewekesüche

Time will tell- the good/evil days (Puro 253)

(*Rünye* is a festival of harvest celebrated for a span of ten days in the month of December after the harvesting of paddy. *Rünye Lü* is a song sung in this festival.)

There is no denying the fact that tribal societies are the closest to nature. Their sustenance itself largely depends on nature. These communities share a deep understanding of how nature works and this intimate knowledge is just a part of their life. *Tsükhenye Lü* and *Rünye Lü* are songs that reveal just how vital is nature to the survival and sustenance of the Khezhas and also how their culture revolves around nature. The song *Tsükhenye Lü* reveals another aspect of the Khezha culture that can be referred to as folk science or local wisdom. The song talks about the spring season when the festival of *Tsükhenye* is celebrated. This season, as the song says, is the season of warm water, when leaves appear, insects and birds arrive, and cultivators get ready with seeds to be sown. This is the beginning of a new agricultural cycle and the onset of this new agricultural cycle is not ascertained by reference to the lunar calendar or with the use of any scientific tools. Keen observation of the different natural phenomena and local wisdom of the people connected to the changes in nature informs them of what activity to carry out and at what time and space. And therefore, the arrival of certain birds and their chirpings, the appearance of certain insects and the sounds made, the flowering of certain plants and trees, the length of days and nights, the movement of the sun and the clouds, the rain and so on are all signs that the Khezhas in particular and the other indigenous communities in general have learnt to decipher for their benefit and the science of this knowledge has been developed through local observation and calculation. The song *Rünye Lü* marks the culmination of this agricultural cycle with harvesting. It is a season of reverie as the people indulge in the fruits of their labour and after a short hiatus prepares

for the arrival of the next agricultural cycle. *Rünye Lü* is celebrated spanning ten days and a score of rituals are performed to thank the Supreme Being for bountiful harvest.

One common thread that connects *Tsükhenye* and *Rünye* is the focus on nature. For the Khezhas, life centres on nature and they seem to be closely aware of their dependence on nature and therefore all of their cultural, economic and even spiritual life is grounded on nature. The songs reproduced in the preceding pages reveal just how vital land and forest is to the survival of this ethnic community and therefore they revered nature and all that was to be found in nature. The songs provide an understanding of the fundamental links between the cultural and material well being of the Khezhas and the environment. The most important element of green philosophy is its ecocentric approach. Greens put the environment at the centre of their concerns. Greens tend to share a core philosophy that sees human relationship with the rest of nature as central. The ecocentric element of green philosophy stresses that other species- and even the earth itself- have moral standing; they cannot just be used without regard, merely as instruments to benefit humanity. In essence, greens argue that the rest of nature has ethical status and cannot be used for human gain without thought (Wall 47). The traditional Khezha attitude towards nature in the bygone days was not very different from this green philosophical thought. Based on this understanding, it can be inferred that since Khezha folk songs are mirrors of their culture itself, an analysis of these songs can contribute to an ecocentric approach advocated by the greens.

Provided below is a short extract from an interactive song sung between boys and girls for socialising. The song is highly reflective of the Khezhas close affinity with nature

for the idiomatic expressions they used in their song are beautifully packed with nature metaphors.

Girls: *Sho! Nomi ni Ewutejonyi so karhü zhole keke dzepfo no mi nimi tsü jai kesole?*

Is it true that you wrap a grain of *karhü* with a *tekronyi* leaf for your lover?)

Girls: *Sho! Nomi ni Ewutejonyi so karhü zhole keke dzepfo no mi nimi tsü jai kesole?*

Is it true that you also wrap a handful of *karhü* with *Ewutejonyi* (leaf) for your loved one?

Boys: *Sho! Nomi Thomhikusü pfo nomi nimi thi kezo jai keso no?*

Is it true that you sieve rice powder with one wing of a fly for your dear one?

Girls: *Sho! Nomini Ecülhibou khupfo nomi nimi thi thi jai kesole?*

Is it true that you pound rice with the arm of a flea for your loved one?

Boys: *Luzakhunie palho tekhri ni tahunyi fü mewi ne cüye, nomi keyimini hatsülowu tshü be eloh*

We thought we heard the whisper of pine leaves from *Luzakhunie* but it is your *morung* girls singing *hatsülowu* (Lohe 23)

The above extract speaks volume of just how connected and aware the Khezhas were of nature. The expressions used in the interaction that took place between young people of opposite sex in a Khezha society is a beautiful example of how deeply the Khezhas identified themselves with nature and how this closeness manifested in their songs, tales, and all other forms of creative expressions.

2.1.2. The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics

Charlene Spretnak says, “Any delineation of spiritual values within the vision of Green politics must reflect three essential elements of the cultural direction in which the movement is growing.” These are,

1. Green politics repudiates the anthropocentric orientation of humanism
2. Green politics goes beyond the anthropocentric perceptions of humanism to the broader constellation of values that constitute modernity
3. Green politics opposes patriarchal values and the accompanying cultural traits such as love of hierarchical structure and competition, love of dominance-or-submission modes of relating, alienation from Nature, suppression of empathy and other emotions, and persistent insecurity about all of those matters. (Schumacher Lectures n.p)

Employing the above elements as guidelines for study in the spiritual dimension of green politics, two famous folksongs by the folk music group from Lishemi village, *Kerimi Lühzotro* have been provided and analyzed.

Kerimi Lühzotro

Menopi ze – kerimi lüzokro

In God’s name – early people’s song composers

Tsülo kewe – zülü tshühide

In good times – will sing together

Tshünyhü brohi – kechekuwawötso

Spring season – has lightened everywhere

Tshü bonyhü ni – kechemenapa

Tree leaves are – flowers of the west

Tekrupani – kedtsülo menapa

Tetru flowers – flowers of the garden

Khromi lümi – netho menapa

Boys and girls – are flowers of the village

Licikemhou – hini khromi khwele

Blowing of horn – is the voice of men

Kuno kesü – ni lümi khwele

Kuno (traditional instrument) sound – is the voice of women

Tarache – we-terachepa-ro- keshe menapa

Pomegranate – pomegranate flowers are – flowers of oldies

Lodipa – we-lodiparo-ro- wö menapa luo

Rhododendron – rhododendron flowers are – flowers of the jungle

Mhekewe – we-mhekewehi-ro- bemetha moluo

Good things – good things do – not stay long

Aditsü – we-adetsühi-ro- kenomitsüluo

Present time – the present time- is – for the next generation

Milhühi – we-melhühini-ro- kadsümethaho

Men's life – men's life is – not as long as the earth's

Tsüloni – we-arokhwemo-ro-mesülesüluo

Time will – not wait for us – how sad to think of it.

The Khezhas' indigenous religion was nature centred even though they believed in the Supreme Being, the creator. Nature was not just a source of sustenance but also a part of divinity. As creation of the Supreme Being, nature was to be revered and not to be disturbed unless it was to meet their vital needs. This belief partially resonates with the idea of creation spirituality that “emphasize the interrelatedness of all creation, the understanding that humans do not occupy the central position in the cosmic creation but have a responsible role to play, and the transformation of society in direction that will further the continuation of life” (Spretnak 300). The song *Kerimi Lühzotro* is a cheerful composition sung in the spring season when nature teems with new life and new blooms. Spring is in its abundance and the song takes delight in this abundance. This attitude towards nature and all things from nature has its bearing in the reverence and respect the Khezhas have for nature. Though the Khezha society was basically patriarchal, they did not look at themselves, in the words of Joanna Macy, as “the rulers nor the centre of the universe” but “embedded in a vast living matrix and subject to its laws of reciprocity” (292). Their way of life showed them more as ecological beings for they revered nature and practiced a culture of restraint, taking only as much as was required to meet their needs. The Khezha culture was that of conservation in the past. The lines,

Tekrupani – kedtsülo menapa (Tetru flowers – flowers of the garden) / *Khromi lümi – netho menapa* (Boys and girls – are flowers of the village) / *Licikemhou – hini khromi khwele* (Blowing of horn – is the voice of men) / *Kuno kesü – ni lümi khwele* (*Kuno* (traditional instrument) sound – is the voice of women) / *Tarache – we-terachepa-ro-keshe menapa* (Pomegranate – pomegranate flowers are – flowers of oldies)

-are indicative of Khezhas' sense of oneness and affinity with nature. Such thoughts helped in propelling their sense of connection with the non human world. They identified themselves with nature and that is why, even in the present time the Khezhas use nature metaphor to speak of the human life. If this affinity and sense of oneness is maintained, it would inspire the human world to honour the sacred in creation. The penultimate line of the song, "*Milhühi – we-melhühini-ro- kadsümethaho*" (Men's life – men's life is – not as long as the earth's) is a humble acceptance of the fact that human's life is fleeting in contrast to the earth's, which is also an indication of the awareness the Khezhas had about their position on earth, which was not that of a master but of a cohabitant that depended on nature for survival. Though the society was patriarchal, they had a unique affiliation with nature which was in opposition to the anthropocentric orientation of patriarchy that looks at man as the master over all. Though in the old culture the values placed on the non human world were basically spiritual, those values not only restricted the people from rampant destruction of nature but they also formed the basis of their cultural orientation and so the customs, practices, beliefs and traditions of this group of people were guided by the spiritual values they placed on nature. And therefore, the patriarchal values that green politics seek to counter such as dominance, alienation from nature, suppression of empathy and other such emotions (listed by Charlene Spretnak) were not much heard of in this patriarchal set up. But perhaps, this unique stance of the Khezhas in the old tradition even within the ambit of patriarchy can be referred to as ecological sensibility, which according to Douglas Torgerson "involves a transformation in the human perception of nature together with a "revolution in ethics." The relationship between human and nature should centre on "a style of cohabitation that involves the knowledgeable, respectful, and restrained use of nature" (110).

The next song titled *Zöh Kesökehmo* presents another aspect of Khezhas' spiritual belief.

Zöh Kesökehmo

We do hio

Khromilümiro... Keneitshüsoni

Boys and girls ... in merrymaking

Tshükechirerö ... repa temhame

Dried firewood... went to the jungle to collect

Lümi keleni – puzutsükemou

One girl – step-mother's necklace

Nyü pfüsoni ke – zümi chishü

She wore and followed her friends

Khromilümiro – zhilo dzüchrüru

The boys and girls – were bathing in a pond

Puzu tsüshüzhü – lo tsaluda

The step-mother's necklace fell into the pond

Didatshü soni – azukechüdi

'How do I meet my mother?'

Tsü kemoushü pfhü – ngulomoda

The necklace was nowhere to be found

Nicümi ni chie – datshürutenuo

'You crafty girl – is this how a lady behaves' (the mother chided)

Pulu mezhie zhi – lo lewö pfhü

Saddened – she went back and searched

Romizihio no – asümelha hi

‘Hey spirited pond – my sümelha (wrap around)

Lolo soni tsü – kehideo

You take and return my necklace’

Römizihio a – kemololoru

‘Spirited pond – take my life

Azu tsüshü ke- cehidele

My mother’s necklace – please return’

The song *Zöh Kesökehmo* is based on Khezhas’ belief that nature is spirited. In this case, it is a spirited pond. The word *Romizihio* has been used in the song to refer to the spirited water. *Romi* is a Khezha word used for ‘spirits’ and *zhi* can be translated as ‘pond’. It is a common belief of the different Khezha villages that certain water bodies possess spirits that are powerful enough to take lives. And therefore, its sanctity should not be disturbed. This song is based on a popular folktale of the Khezhas. The story continues- when the girl offered her life for the necklace, the necklace appeared above the water. She took it back home but after the necklace was given back to her step mother, the girl passed away. The spirited pond had taken her life in return for the necklace. Such stories of spirited water bodies and other elements of nature abound Khezha culture. This is a reflection of their belief system, their superstitious beliefs included, and shows to some extent why the Khezhas hold nature with reverence and awe. The song defines the general attitude of Khezhas towards

nature. The mysteries of the natural world filled them with awe as well as fear but instead of trying to unravel them like the modern man, they gave manifestation to their spiritual needs by venerating and revering this nature. However, the modern society, the Khezha society bearing no exception, has lost this spiritual connection with nature and as such nature has come to be commodified in perception and practice. Charlene Spretnak questions as to the level of destruction caused in the past few decades “while we have failed to include nature in our religion” (301).

Charlene Spretnak talks of “the convergence of spiritual growth and political responsibility”, that can be achieved in the “spiritual practice of cultivating moment-to-moment awareness, being fully “awake” and focused on our action” (305). Such convergence can have a significant impact on the efforts toward environmental sustainability for as Spretnak says, “there is no end to what we could do to focus spiritually based awareness and action on saving the great web of life” (301).

2.1.3. The feminist dimension of green politics

“The domination of nature is part of a larger pattern of domination that includes systematic domination by human beings over other human beings and, indeed, over human nature itself”, says Douglas Torgerson (12). Environmental critiques link the control over and exploitation of nature to that of human beings. In the essay, “The Ecopolitics Debate and the Politics of Nature”, Val Plumwood talks of the possibility and the necessity of such a perspective connecting human and nonhuman forms of domination to do justice to the concerns of ecopolitical movements. Different ecocritical schools present different

approaches on the linkage: deep ecology propounded by Arne Naess treats anthropocentrism as the root cause of environmental crisis, while social ecology espoused by Murray Bookchin focuses on environmental problems in terms of human social hierarchy. Then there is gender-based domination that ecofeminists have been trying to bring to focus. “Many ecological feminists have seen the domination of nature and the domination of women as arising from the same problematic and as sharing a common ideological foundation” (Plumwood 65).

Keeping the concept of domination in view, this section attempts a green political analysis of Khezha folksongs in the feminist dimension. This sub-section has three songs, two of which have been provided by the Khezha folk music group, *Kerimi Lühzotro*, while the last one titled “*Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo*” has been extracted from *Aspects of Chakhesang Folklore, a Critical Study* by Aneile Puro.

Nicühmi Ube Uzü Chemo

Apfü azö – Apfü azö

Father mother – father mother

Awe meno hiluo

Gave me life

Meno pfozon – nicümi tshü hiluo

Gave me life and – nurtured me into a woman

Nicümühi – uluo mezhie shieluo

Women’s life is very sad

Kedsüdzemo – ubezü chiemo

Because we don't know our home

Nicü mini – umedo tshüloho

Women cannot do as they wish (or live independently)

Pfücümi shü – no le khrie no medo

Men can do as they wish (live in freedom)

Pfücümi shü – ketsa tezo Sadie

Men please don't leave the village

Pfücümi shü – netho khwe belo die

Men please protect the village

Nicühmi Ube Uzü Chemo is a song that laments the life of a woman for she is given birth and nurtured by her parents to adulthood just to be given away in marriage to another man. Her home is not known because she has to leave her parents' home and follow as her husband leads. The underlying significance of the song is that it reflects on the life of a woman in a patriarchal society where women are subjected to domination and control by men. Patriarchy is “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 214). It is further sanctioned by both formal as well as informal authority such as the State, the society, tradition, culture, religion and so on. This patriarchal strand is captured in the line, “*Nicü mini – umedo tshüloho*” (Women cannot do as they wish or live independently). A patriarchal society assigns role to women and dictates her life. For a woman, to break role is to defy the society, and the role is that of a subordinate. The next line of the song, “*Pfücümi shü – no le khrie no medo* (Men can do as they wish or live in freedom) is antithetical to the life dictated to women. While a woman's

life is constrained by social dictums and sanctions, men hold the power of these dictums and sanctions. Robert Bahlieda believes in concentration of power as the fundamental premise of patriarchy and that the use and application of power and force is not a random act but a conscious human choice (24). And therefore, the domination and control over women is a conscious choice practiced in a patriarchal society. The song ends with a request to men to protect the village from enemies. The last two lines of the song, “*Pfücümi shü – ketsa tezo Sadie*” (Men please don’t leave the village) / “*Pfücümi shü – netho khwe belo die*” (Men please protect the village), are a submission to men’s power and a quiet resignation to their domination. While domination is a conscious act, submission can also be a conscious act, for subordination or submission can indicate the unconscious and conscious “mutual socialized acceptance of patriarchy by both women and men” (27). This act of submission, both conscious and unconscious, is a result of their mindset being conditioned by years of patriarchal living. Bahlieda says that a “process of cultural socialization” carried out by patriarchy has “normalized male domination, violence, and control in human relations” and today patriarchal power has come to be “absorbed and deeply embedded into the psychological fabric of humankind” (30). The feminist movement is a fight to overthrow this male dominance and along with it, the mutual socialized acceptance of this dominance. The movement aims at empowering women not by transferring power into their hands but by doing away with the very concept of power concentration.

The ecological feminists see this domination of women “as an illuminating and well theorized model for many other kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both feminized and naturalized” (Plumwood 73). To them, the oppression as well as the liberation

of women and that of nature are very intimately connected though they have their own specific features. Ecological feminists connect women and nature at multiple levels: first of all, issues of human justice and destruction of nature converges as women and nature finds themselves without any market power in an economy controlled by men. Secondly, Nature is feminized while woman is naturalized. Nature is referred to as Mother Nature which originally must have come from the old tradition of spiritual reverence. But over time, this same term has come to represent the binary exploitation of all that patriarchy considers to be its subjects. The gendering of nature as a maternal force, the womb that produces, in this time of techno-culture, reinforces the woman-nature linkage in a patriarchal society and degrades their role to that of just being essentially procreators for continuity of life. Their inherent worth is lost in such a set up. The next song is a presentation of the gendered life of a woman whose destiny, as sanctioned by society, is to get married and produce offspring.

Kemhösu Kadzu Rü

Kemhosüthu – kadsü rükebehi

Clouds – covering the earth

Rube nipe – pfo sukeche tshüpfü

Ripped paddy at its best

Lochebepe – menasu zhu tshüpfü

Job's tears at its best

Hino khrühi – dibi ketshü khrü deo

This month – which month is it?

Nicüminyü khrühi dzütshümonuo

The month of women's marriage, isn't it sad

Dzü tshüle ne nieü mizho daya wemodiri

It is sad but it is inevitable

Hazhu rüha – melepfo che khehi

Rice beer in a container – put in a basket

Rakekhipfo – rüha patou bapfü

Shawl folded – placed on top of the container

Hino hipfü – nimoshe idiri

To carry such – isn't it very sad

Pfünimoshe – pfütemohodaya

Doesn't want to carry these – but cannot escape this moment

Shüchini che – menaretsha pforo

After that the basket – carefully carrying

Phenol phekke – nhedzü mezhuchehi

On the thighlet – tears roll over

The song continues –

“Life of a girl is over, from now on to live with a man I shall live for the rest of my life.

With kids in my arms and sing *oh hiele* for the rest of my life. From now on, I shall live the life of a wife”.

The song presents the inevitable fate of a girl in a patriarchal culture that has to leave her parents' home and loved ones behind and go and live with a man as his wife forever and

bear him children. The next song, titled “*Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo*”, is a loving tribute to a girl child sung on her birth.

Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo (Tribute to a Girl Child)

Anu no

My dear child

Metso be ide

Be a good child

Ketsü za dzü

Short is the childhood

Kesemi za tha

Long is the adulthood

Anu no hi

My dear child

Ikelhi re thsemo

Your destiny is not known

Ichie thsü pfvüü

Once you pack and get ready

Tepe kede thsi

To be gone

Edelo ho

There is no return

Mesüü lisü yo

Lovingly you will be remembered

Lisü mezi

Though dearly loved

Kekho mo ho yo

We have to part

Anu no hi

My dear child

Kewe thsü tele

May good fortune be with you

According to the song, *Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo*, a girl's future is shrouded in mystery. Her future is not known as the song says, *Ikelhi re thsemo* (Your destiny is not known). Her young days are short and as she attains adulthood, she has to pack her *ichie* (basket; in the old culture, a girl carries a basket to her new home as part of the marriage ritual) and leave for her husband's home, a life from which there is no return: *Ichie thsü pfvüu* (Once you pack and get ready) / *Tepe kede thsi* (To be gone) / *Edelo ho* (There is no return). Even though the song talks of the destiny of a girl as being shrouded in mystery, the song in actuality presents the fate of a girl which is already decided and sealed from the moment she is born. Such has been the fate of women in patriarchal cultures, their roles constricted to that of being just wives and mothers and subject to domination and oppression.

The folk songs provided and analysed in this sub-section points toward one aspect of the patriarchal system that was in practice in the past and to some extent still in practice in

the Khezha society, that is, the subjugation of women. Women were subject to a lot of sanctions and their roles were restricted to family and the four corners of the house. From participation in the decision making body of the villages, meetings concerning the community, to observance of certain rituals and sacramental acts, women had no voice or representation in the old culture. However, a study of the eco-sensibility of Khezhas in the olden days as discussed in the previous sub-section when society was completely bounded by traditional customs and beliefs contradict the eco-feminist worldview that links domination of women with the domination of nature. Whereas, patriarchy subjected women to domination in the old Khezha culture, the same ethnic group also practiced a culture of reverence and even surrender to the forces of nature which is a negation of the anthropocentric attitude towards nature. So while it cannot be denied that a woman's role in the primitive patriarchal Khezha society was restrictive, submissive and subject to male domination as evident in the songs analysed in the preceding pages, to apply the same perspective on Khezhas' attitude towards nature would be inappropriate as far as the old Khezha culture is concerned.

However, like any culture, the Khezha society is ever evolving and with modernisation and globalisation penetrating the community to the core, this indigenous group has come to lose much of its traditional ethics and values over the years, and its impact can be seen in its attitude towards nature and the environment as well. While nature was a mystical entity to the old to be feared and revered, it is a commodity now for humans to boundlessly exploit and use for their benefits. Though the traditional codes of conduct that guided the behaviour of Khezhas in the past are still regarded and the traditional beliefs have

not completely disappeared, yet much of it has lost its significance because of Christianity, industrialization, modernization and globalization, the impact seen in the change of attitude towards nature and the resultant rampant and mindless destruction of nature. As for women, the status remains more or less the same in the patriarchal society. Certain restrictions are still in force to this day such as, the forbiddance of womenfolk (allowed only in such cases as in the absence of male member in the family) from participation in meetings or gatherings pertaining to cases that are deemed to be the domain of men folk only such as, land or border disputes, inter-village conflicts, clan issues, customary practices or laws to name a few. As the traditional ethics continue to lose their ground in the fast changing Khezha society, the eco-feminist worldview that looks at nature as a feminist issue because the exploitation of both women and nature is linked to their unjustified domination becomes pertinent. Therefore, to deal with the crisis today, environmental ethics, as eco-feminists advocate, must be ethics of ecojustice that perceives the interconnection of social and nature domination and is focused on the liberation of both.

An ecocentric approach draws on the science of ecology to show that we are closely linked to other species. Life is a web and human beings are part of this web just as any other species. In fact, green politics basically draws its principle from the deep ecological thought that the human and the natural world are part of an interrelated web and both have inherent values with the core concepts being sustainability and interrelatedness. To pretend that humanity is separate from the rest of creation is a form of madness from an ecocentric point of view. Green political philosophy also clearly includes an element of human rights. While notions of rights can be difficult to define with absolute precision, animals have moral status

for greens. “To link green politics with ecocentric ethics in this way is to erect a moral posture not subject to compromise with- or contamination by- positions conceived merely in terms of human interests” (Torgerson 105).

Karl Marx in his *Our Duty to the Earth and the Future* talks of how even an entire nation, a society or all simultaneously existing societies collectively, are not and cannot be owners of the earth. They are simply its occupants or beneficiaries, and have to hand it over in an improved state to the succeeding generations as ‘*boni patres familias*’ (good heads of the household) (www.climateandcapitalism.com, posted on Aug 19, 2007)

Greens propagate ecological sustainability and believes that the generations to come deserve nature as much as we do at the present time. Ecological problems and the exhaustion resources that are scarce and essential need to be tackled from a green political point of view if we are to bequeath a sustainable future to our children and grandchildren.

The means adopted for economic progress are also important for they sometime end up being more detrimental to certain section of men and nature. Across the world there are daily accounts of indigenous people being removed to make way for mines and oil exploration. Their stories show a side to economic growth which is, in a sense, uneconomic by destroying sustainable local economies that are often based on ecological principles. The Khezhas, though not faced with the same predicament, have also come to face the negative consequences of economic growth with its flora and fauna diminishing to a great extent. The traditional attitude to nature, of reverence and respect, has given in to the pursuit for economic expansion and has resulted in the senseless exploitation of nature. One of the most

important challenges advocated by the greens to protect the environment and promote sustainability is liberation of nature through social justice.

The Khezhas in particular and Chakhesangs in general, however, seem to be growing sensitive to ecological concerns at the present time. Keeping in mind the growing man induced disturbances to nature, the Chakhesang Public Organization (CPO), the apex body of the Chakhesang Nagas, had passed certain resolutions notified vide Notification CPO/2016-18/A-1, dated 03-03-2016 for preservation and conservation of the ecosystem in the Chakhesang inhabited areas of Phek district under which the Khezha area also falls. The same was reaffirmed and implemented by the Chakhesang Youth Front (CYF) reference no CYF/NOT/01 dated 29-01-18. The resolutions passed read as follows:

1. Indiscriminate burning of jungle is strictly restricted. Defaulters shall be penalized with a fine of Rs. 20,000/- (Rupees Twenty Thousand only)
2. Collection/ extraction of Medicinal plants are banned. Fine of Rs 5,000/- (Rupees Five Thousand only) shall be penalized from the defaulters and goods shall be confiscated by the concerned authority.
3. Hunting will be strictly restricted throughout the year. Capturing, coursing, snaring, trapping or baiting of any birds or wild animals shall be restricted. Any person found carrying weapons, explosives, firearms, poison, snares and traps or apparatus capable of anaesthetizing, decoying, destroying, injuring or killing of birds and wild animals shall be penalized with a fine of Rs. 5,000/- (Rupees Five Thousand only) and such equipments/ apparatus shall be seized.

4. Use of equipments/ apparatus such as battery, generator, chemicals etc for fishing is strictly restricted. A fine of Rs. 5,000/- (Rupees Five Thousand only) will be penalized on the defaulters, which can be enhanced depending on the extent of devastation caused. Such equipments/ apparatus will be seized.

The former president of the Republic of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma in his message to the Continental Gathering of Solidarity with Bolivia in Guatemala City on 9 October 2008 presented the “Ten commandments to save the planet”. A few of these commandments are given below:

- If we want to save the planet earth and save life and humanity, we are obliged to end the capitalist system. The grave effects of climate change and of energy, food, and financial crisis, are not products of human beings in general, but rather of the capitalist system as it is, inhuman, with its idea of unlimited industrial development.
- To renounce war, because it is not the people but only the imperial power that wins in war; the nations do not win, but rather the transnational corporations. Wars benefit only a small group of families and not the people. The money used for war should be directed to the cause of repairing and curing Mother Earth wounded by climate change.
- The capitalist system treats Mother Earth as a raw material, but the Earth is not a commodity; who would or could privatise, rent or lease their own mother? To organise an international movement in defense of Mother Nature, so as to

recover the health of Mother Earth and re-establish a harmonious and responsible life with her.

- To consume what is required, prioritize what is produced locally, end consumerism, decadence and luxury. There is a need to prioritize local production for local consumption, stimulating self-reliance and the sovereignty of the communities within the limits that the health and remaining resources of the planet permit.
- To promote cultural diversity and also diversity in economies. To live in unity respecting differences, not only physical, but also economic, through economies managed by the different communities.
- To Live Well- not live better at the expense of another, but Live Well based on the lifestyle of peoples, the riches of communities, fertile lands, water and clean air. Socialism is talked about a lot, but there is a need to improve socialism, improve the proposals for socialism in the 21st century, building a communitarian socialism, or simply Live Well, in harmony with Mother Earth, respecting the shared life ways of the community.

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Green politics is also about cultural change. “Green politics involves us all reconsidering the relationship of our species to the rest of nature” (Wall 66). In the case of Khezhas, the greens would propagate revisiting the ancient beliefs of the divine and the

spiritual in nature and bringing back the old culture of respect and reverence for nature.

Greens also propagate thinking globally and acting locally.

Green politics is inclusive. In a modern reductionist society where academics and all other disciplines are increasingly moving towards specialization, greens propagate understanding something by looking at it as part of the wider system. Ecology, according to the greens, is a holistic science and should be based on understanding and awareness of the relationship of all species. This holistic viewpoint can help in the development of an ecocentric attitude and the notion of limits (Wall 51).

Greens are strongly committed to creating a more equal world and rejects that solutions to environmental problems that further increases inequality. Another key characteristic of green politics is compassion for other species which flows from the understanding that human beings are part of a larger living network. Green politics is “multi-faceted, embracing direct action and lifestyle change, ‘green business’, and indigenous campaigners” (Wall 104). Green politics, according to Derek Wall is like all politics and concerns itself like ‘power, change and strategy’. Green political strategy is important given the reality of climate change in the present time and the genuine fear that we are very close to a turning point beyond which devastating destruction will be inevitable. The methods the greens have adopted to create the change needed are varied. Elections, nonviolent direct and indirect action, working in NGOs, change of lifestyle and cultural strategies: all these have been employed in the pursuit to create the necessary transformation (104).

Indigenous people, in many parts of the world including Khezhas, were for sometime able to maintain environmental diversity, at least in part because their economic and social activity was underpinned by an Earth ethic that respects the rest of nature. The Khezha traditional lifestyle was closely linked with nature because while their economy was sustained by agriculture, the social fabric of the Khezhas was built on their beliefs and practices that called for a harmonious living with nature. Environmental stewardship was found to some extent in the Khezha culture for compassion, reverence, and protection of nature ran in the traditional culture of the people. The same stewardship needs to be revived by reviving the traditional ethics of reverence and respect for nature. Green politics need to become part of culture and green cultural change should be part of all green strategies to save the environment from further damage. Though it is not the only means to effect change, it is an effective and essential element.

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CHAPTER III
KHEZHA CHAKHESANG FOLKTALES AND LEGENDS: AN ECOCRITICAL
ANALYSIS

3.1. Folk narratives as ecological literature

Eco-text or ecological literature can be explained as those where environmental insights are obtained through a literary work. Eco literature includes the entire gamut of literary works that focuses on ecological issues while also carrying literary values. Such texts are ecocentric and ecocritical and they take, in the purview of their discourse, the dynamics of human behaviour that causes ecological crisis. This type of discourse does not just concern itself with whether the theme of the text is related to environmental issues but with how environment becomes the soul of the narration itself. Lawrence Buell presents his notion of an environmental text by suggesting some useful theoretical ideas. He devises ‘a rough checklist’ of some of the elements that might be said to comprise an ‘environmentally oriented work’. They are:

1. The natural environment is present not merely as a framing device but as an existence that begins to suggest that history of man is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not accepted to be the only legitimate concern.
3. Human accountability towards environment is part of the text’s ethical bearing.
4. Some awareness of the environment as a process rather than as a constant, static condition is at least implicit in the text (Buell 7-8).

Eco literature delves into the portrayal of how environmental degradation causes displacements and sufferings to humans and non-humans alike. And therefore, such literature can effectively instil environmental ethics in human consciousness and also help develop an all inclusive understanding of environmental issues the world is grappled with today. Eco literature can help in relocating attitudes of men toward natural resources, sustainability and aid in building a new ecocentric order. To deal with the present crisis of environmental degradation, it has become imperative to instil in the people, especially the young generation, an ethic that is holistic, and sees both humans and non human as equal partners in the grand design of the universe. Folk narratives can play the role of eco literature by disseminating local wisdom that are ecologically sound and promote new ideas of environmental significance apart from the traditional role it plays of entertaining and teaching moral values. Integrating environmental ethics into folk teachings, folk narratives can help in promoting environmental awareness. Folk narratives are products of local culture and therefore more relatable to the people, and as such can play a vital role as eco text.

Tribal communities are regarded as “the most eco-friendly people in the world” (Lasetso 1). Their culture, customs, beliefs, traditions and way of life reflect a deep association with nature. They live in nature and on nature. Most of these communities depend on agriculture and the forest resources available to them for sustenance and survival besides nature being the source from where they draw their spirituality. As such even their folk literature is imbued with ecological nuances. Folklore of such people presents ecological ethics and conscience based on the local wisdom. The Khezhas’ folklore is no exception. The Khezhas’ association with nature runs deep and runs long back into the time

of their first settlement. They were believed to have been brought to the place of their first settlement following signs that the Supreme Being provided through the different forces of nature as can be seen in “The Legend of Koza”. This legend is often narrated by the Khezha community as a story of their migration. This consequential folk legend is just the first of many other folk narratives that exemplifies Khezhas’ close affinity with nature. Therefore, can the Khezha folktales be considered as ecological literature and can these folk narratives provide environmental insights in the different ecological perspectives are questions that have been explored in this chapter. The data for the study have been collected from various narrators belonging to different Khezha villages through personal interviews and also from the source *Folktales of Khuzhami Nagas* by Dr. D. Kapfo, and *The Ethnology of the Khezhas and the Khezha Grammar* by Kedutso Kapfo.

3.2. Khezha folktales in the ecological perspective

The Khezha folktales and narratives have been analyzed in the perspectives of deep ecology, eco-spirituality and eco-feminism. The folktales discussed in this chapter are of varied themes and character and as such they have been categorized into five groups for the purpose of study.

3.2.1. Of Man and Nature

Narration 1: “The Legend of Koza and the Spirited Stone” as narrated by A. Lhoupeni Kevie, aged 84 years of Khezhakeno village.

Koza, regarded as the ancestor of the Khezhas, was looking for a new settlement for his people. He came to a place called *Chawho* and finding the place to be favourable, he

halted there with his people. He thrust his hand staff into the ground and prayed to the Supreme Being to guide his path and show him the place where he should settle with his people. There was a gush of wind and the hand staff tilted towards a particular direction and later on the staff turned into a *Kasouche* (pear) plant. He intercepted it as a sign and leading his people, he moved towards the direction shown by the tilted hand staff. A bird, *Chitu* (Swallow), flew ahead of them and led them all the way through until they came to a place where the spirited stone stood. Unaware of its magical powers, they decided to spend the night there. They gathered all their belongings and keeping it on the spirited stone, lay under it for the night. When they woke up the next morning, they found that their belongings kept on the spirited stone had doubled. As Koza looked around, he saw the place to be ideal and believing it to be the Supreme Being's working, Koza and his men established their settlement there.

Koza had three sons named- Ruu, Luu and Kasheu. When Koza was on his deathbed, he called his three sons and instructed them to take turns in drying their paddy on the spirited stone. The eldest son was to take the first opportunity, followed by the next son and finally the youngest. The father passed away and for sometime the sons followed their father's instruction and lived peacefully. The village had grown in size and number and seven smaller villages had now sprung up. They were- *Chiloumi, Latsülomi, Tepfülomi, Mebvülomi, komonoke, Pfulo* and *Chitsülo*. With the growing population, enmity arose among the brothers and the two elder brothers stopped the youngest from using the spirited stone. Fights ensued among them. An old woman fearing the worst forbade them from fighting but the brothers won't listen so she called them all to the spirited stone and breaking an egg on the stone she tried to make the brothers realize that just like the destroyed egg, the brothers have

broken apart but it was to no avail. Then, the tribe of the youngest brother brought dried stalks of *Kinibo* (perilla plant) and putting it over the stone, set it on fire. A loud burst was heard and there was a crack in the stone and the spirit of the stone which appeared in the form of a bird left the stone. After that event, even the tongues of the people changed and the people dispersed to different places setting up new establishments for their respective tribes.

Analysis

This narrative is multi faceted in its projection of the human-nature relationship. It stands in accord as well as discord with the deep ecology environmental movement and philosophy that calls for a move from anthropocentric view of nature and regards human life as one of the many and equal components in the grand design of our ecosystem. The narrative is essentially anthropocentric with Koza as the central figure; however, nature here has been painted mystically and has been presented as the connecting link between man and the Supreme Being.

This folk legend is ascribed to by some of the Naga tribes like the Angamis, Semas, Rengmas as the story of their migration with some variation in the story according to the tribe and region. The story tells us of the Khezhas' close proximity with nature. Koza established his settlement in the very lap of nature and to this day all Khezha villages are found either at hilltops or on spurs of the ridges along the hills where, as Kewepfuzu Lohe puts it, "summits of the lofty peaks are thickly wooded, clad in evergreen vegetation; they abound in the varied flora and fauna" (5). The story gains ecocritical significance in its projection of nature. The Khezhas have always been a religious group of people, believing in the Supreme Being and the presence of spirits in nature. The mode of communication to this

Supreme Being and also the spirits is through natural agents like birds, the wind, trees, even stones and water. And as such all these agents have important roles to play in carrying forth the will of the Supreme Being. The bird *Chitu*, acts as an agent of the Supreme Being in the story and guides Koza and his men to the place of the spirited stone. The natural agents are also believed to possess spirits of their own and therefore even inanimate objects like stones have magical powers and in some instances can even move (the story of *Tawobou*). In the story, another inanimate object that has been given life is the hand staff of Koza. The hand staff tilts giving direction to Koza and his men and later on turns into a *Kasouche* (pear) plant.

Nature is also presented as a provider and supplier when the spirited stone doubles the paddy dried on it to be used by the tribes there. The Khezhas are an agricultural community and while depending on land to give them good yield, the demands of the ever growing community are met by the use of the spirited stone. And the destruction of this stone is a destruction of their provider. The destruction of the spirited stone is also significant because it resulted in the destruction of the community and their dispersal to different places thereafter. Therefore, the destruction of nature can be equated to the destruction of man. This is in conjunction with the deep ecological thought that the natural and the human worlds are co-existent and is structured of complex-relationships and destruction of the natural world is a threat to the human and the natural order alike.

Narration 2: “Friendship between Risamo and the Tiger” (source- *The Ethnology of the Khezhas and the Khezha Grammar* by Keductso Kapfo)

Risamo was handsome, rich and also a good sportsman. Thus, many women became fans of him. Taking advantage of his popularity, he began to commit to illicit relationship, not only with girls, but also with wives of many men. Ultimately, he became a public nuisance. The villagers therefore had him excommunicated and banished him from the village. Thereafter, he could not find a place to live in since no other village was ready to accept him. As he went on meditating, a thought came to him, "I will go to the tiger, offer him my friendship and then avenge the villagers." He sharpened his spear, blade, packed his meal and went to the thick forest in search of the tiger. He went on calling out the tiger "Ekhu-o, ekhu-o" whenever he reached the peak of any hill. At last the tiger responded, "we-y" from a distant. When Risamo offered his friendship, the tiger accepted it and welcomed Risamo into his cave.

Risamo and the tiger began to chat, relating their grievances, miseries and other experiences in life; shared their food, and thus became good friends. Each day they would go out hunting and when they killed an animal, the tiger would eat raw meat, while Risamo would cook and eat them.

One morning, Risamo challenged the tiger to a game. "Athra-o (my friend), shall we have a competition today? We will break this *tehtrorho* (a variety of very hard rope)" challenged Risamo. The tiger agreed and it was decided that the tiger would try first. With his utmost strength the tiger bit the rope again and again till he was completely exhausted. The repeated biting had left his lips bleeding. Finally, the tiger surrendered. And now it was Risamo's turn. Risamo took out his blade and chopped it off with one stroke. The tiger was amazed and at the same time felt depressed as he realized that he was no match for his friend.

After that they began to discuss about taking revenge for each other. “*Athra-o*, what are you afraid of most?” asked Risamo. The tiger replied, “What I am actually afraid of are those two boars, the husband and the wife. Both of them would come and attack me as soon as they heard my sound.” They began scheming to take revenge on them. “Let us go to a place where we can see each surrounding. You climb up a tree, I will be below you with my spears ready. You could then begin making noises”, Risamo suggested. The plan was put into action. Risamo and the tiger thus positioned themselves. As the tiger made noises, the two boars came rushing and surrounded the tree. Risamo threw a spear and hit one of the boars. He then took out another spear and hit the other one too, right on the target. Likewise, both the boars were killed without much effort. The tiger was so relieved and grateful to his friend.

Now, it was the turn of the tiger to help his friend take revenge. Risamo narrated the story of how he was banished by his villagers. The tiger assured him of executing the task within whatever his capacity was. Then they marched to the village. When they reached the village, they heard some boys and girls singing and pounding *zathobe* (paddies of *zatho*) as per the tradition in a house. So they crept towards that direction and finally reached the location. There, they saw a large pig sleeping under the eaves of the host’s house. Risamo said, “*Athra-o*, I will be watching here, you go and grab that pig!” as the tiger grabbed the pig, it squealed loudly and all the boys who heard the pig squealing went out and attacked the tiger with their pounding sticks. Risamo then jumped in making the war cry, “*kuku*”, took position with his spear and defended the tiger. The boys and all those who were there ran away hither and thither out of fear and shock.

After that, the entire village gathered and discussed what the consequence would be saying, “Now the great tiger and Risamo have become friends. There is thus no way for us to live in peace anymore. The best option is to reconcile and request Risamo to come back to the village and live with us.” Accordingly, the village elders went to the forest and requested Risamo to come back to the village. Initially, Risamo was unwilling to reconcile because the humiliation meted upon him by the village was too much for him to bear with. Moreover, it was too difficult for him to part ways from his friend. But due to unrelenting requests of the villagers he could not resist any further. So finally he agreed to go back home.

While parting Risamo and the tiger made a vow to each other, “We will never die unnoticed from each other. Therefore, if one of us is going to die, we would send a message to each other before we die.” One day Risamo became seriously sick and it seemed like he would die. So he sent a message to the tiger. As soon as the tiger received the message, he went to the village and met Risamo under the eaves of his house. Both of them wept and as they wept, they let their tears drop on the paw of each other. Finally, they separated.

Analysis

The story narrated above is about friendship between man and tiger. The Khezhas have always had a close affinity with the tiger though the reasons remain unknown. A reading of Khezha folktales show that man has always been associated with the tiger, sometimes as friends, as foes, as brothers, and sometimes even as mates to women. There are even beliefs that some man possesses the spirit of tiger and when the tiger spirit is injured or killed, the same fate is seen with the possessor of the spirit. Tiger association therefore is very important in Khezha folklore. In the story of Risamo and the tiger, the tiger has been

personified into a speaking entity with a hospitable heart. The tiger opens his door to Risamo when he has been rejected by all else. The friendship between Risamo and the tiger is a testimony to how man and nature can be bonded if love, respect and trust exist between the two. The tiger is regarded as one of the fiercest animals in the jungle and yet it has been presented as a being with love for Risamo. In a world where man is against man, the tiger sets the example of true friendship and care. The concluding portion of the story is moving as the tiger visits his friend who is on his dead bed and says his goodbye. The emotions and feelings endowed to the tiger is note worthy as it defies the traditional role assigned to tigers of being man eating beast. Ecocriticism calls for a change in the understanding of earth and all the species living on it. All species, human and non-human are cohabitants of the earth and has equal claim over life and space. The story reflects on how the tiger is not just an entity feared or revered by the Khezhas but is also a cohabitant of the earth and with as much right to occupy his space as any human has. Ecocentrism is a call to tear down the man made hierarchical structure where man is the master and all other species are below him. It calls for the adoption of a new order where both human and non human are looked at as being same.

Narration 3: “The Killing of a Pregnant Doe” (*Folktales of Khuzhami Nagas* by Dr. D. Kapfo)

Once upon a time, there were two brothers in a village. One day their father asked the two brothers to go to the forest and collect firewood for their family. Being obedient children, they agreed readily and set off for the forest. As the vast forest was a common property for the whole village, there were no restrictions for anybody to go and cut the wood anytime anywhere, and anybody could cut the forest wood as much as they wanted. They

ascended a hillside and reached a spot where the trees were plentiful. Then they fell down a good number of trees in the forest. They cut the trees into logs of equal length and began to roll them down to the steep slope. They fell a good number of logs and went back home and told their parents of the job done as instructed.

The next day their father asked them to go and roll down the logs they had cut and the two brothers agreed. Their mother had packed lunch for them and they proceeded for the job. As they walked, the elder brother spoke about his dream of the previous night to his younger brother. He said that in his dream, he was sleeping with a beautiful girl but the girl's family came to know about it and was offended and he fell into trouble. His younger brother interpreted the dream of his elder brother. The younger brother said, sleeping with a woman in a dream is said to be a sign of shame and one might face accidents in real life. The older brother argued that dreams were often opposite in reality. Thus talking they reached the spot and started rolling down the logs.

As they were busy rolling down their logs from above, they shouted and warned anyone passing through the path where the logs were being rolled to stay away. Unfortunately, a pregnant mother happened to pass with her load of firewood below them that day. She was passing along the footpath unaware of the rolling down of the logs from above. As she passed she could not hear the warnings of the boys above because her ears were partially covered by the head strap of the carrying basket. All of a sudden, a big log rolled down and hit her. She was killed instantly because of the head injuries and lay motionless. The boys unaware of the accident kept rolling the logs. Just then, a man happened to pass and found the pregnant woman lying dead along the path. He found out that the woman was killed by the rolling logs from above. He wanted to know who the culprits

were but if he said that a woman was killed he thought the culprits would flee. So he thought of a way to trap the killers. He shouted and said that a pregnant deer was killed. The two brothers believed him and came hurriedly because venison was one of the tastiest meats found in the wild. When the brothers approached and found that a pregnant woman was killed, they were dumbfounded.

As all of them were from the same village and knew each other well, the man told the brothers to flee for they would face dire consequences in the village. The brothers fled as instructed to a neighbouring village. As soon as the woman was buried, the village elders gathered to discuss the case of the incident although the killers had already taken flight. Not long after discussion the jury came up with a decision that as per the custom the punishment for this type of accidental death was seven years of banishment from the village. But the two brothers have already left never to return. They both got married and settled in another village for the rest of their lives.

Analysis

One negative aspect of Khezhas' dependence on nature is that it has resulted in exploitation of nature to meet the needs of the ever increasing population. Forest wealth is depleting at an alarming rate and has to be checked. Forest is the favourite hunting ground for villagers so also the trees meet the demand for village expansion and house buildings. The trees are also source of firewood for the villagers. All these have led to deforestation, depletion of forest area, endangerment of animal kingdom, extinction of some animal species and total mayhem of the natural world. These practices if not checked will result in chaos, for human well being is directly linked to well being of nature.

In the story “The Killing of a Pregnant Doe”, the brothers are involved in the act of cutting trees for firewood. This practice is common to any village settled near the forest though people are now becoming eco-conscious and steps are being initiated for conservation of forest. The act of cutting trees by the brothers is an act of destruction of the forest life and it is only apt that this act is paralleled in the human world by the killing of the pregnant woman. However, when the killing is discovered by another villager who was passing by, he fools the two brothers by saying that a pregnant doe has been killed. The significance of this lie is that, in the Khezha society venison’s meat makes for a special delicacy and it is much sought after. And so when the brothers hear that they have killed a doe, they come running down excited. This calls for a reflection on the hunting practices of the Khezhas. With the traditional ethics slowly disappearing, even animals are being hunted indiscriminately at the present time for their meat and this has resulted in the depletion of animal life in the forest. Both birds and animals have become endangered by the hunting practices of the people. These hunting expeditions are carried out for different purposes. While certain birds and animals are considered medicinal and sought after to be used for curing sicknesses, traditional practices also call for hunting. Celebrations and public rejoicing, observance of certain gennas and rituals involves feasting on games from the forest. In this way indigenous customs become detrimental to nature. The story can be read as a warning against the mindless destruction of Nature. Carolyn Merchant says, “The unrestrained use of nature destroys its own conditions for continuation, as the inexorable expansion of capital undercuts its own natural resource base” (4). Of the ecology movement fighting against this indiscriminate exploitation of nature, she says,

Ecology is a revolutionary force of life, against which the counterrevolutionary forces of ecocide were destroying “the sources and resources of life itself” in the service of monopoly capital... the same process that transforms people into objects in a market society also transforms nature into commodities, leaving little natural beauty, tranquillity or untouched space. The ecology movement exposes this war against nature... the movement attempts to defend what is left of untouched nature (5).

However, for society that is entirely dependent on forest and its resources, the question arises as to how such a society can sustain itself otherwise. Arne Naess talks of “biospherical egalitarianism- in principle”. According to him some degree of “killing, exploitation, suppression” is necessary but “the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves” (121). He goes on to say that “the attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of man from himself” (121). Nature is an equal subject and not an object to be controlled. Deep ecology propagates a partnership ethic which means a human community is in a sustainable ecological relationship with its surrounding natural community. The ancestral Khezhas’ attitude towards nature was based on reverence and even fear for nature and this attitude helped strike a balance in their relationship with nature. Take only what is needed was the maxim of the day and as such a “sustained ecological relationship” could be established between the Khezhas and natural world. This attitude, however, changed as the traditional values were replaced by the new age notion of progress and development which resulted in indiscriminate and thoughtless exploitation of nature and destruction of the environment. Over the years, people have become more sensitive to issues of environment

and forest life and efforts are being made to replenish what has been taken from nature though the result of such works is yet to be seen.

Narration 4: “Mvüsupra and Mvüsütso” (narrated by K.Meze, aged 87 years, Khezhakeno village)

Mvüsupra and Mvüsütso were two brothers. Mvüsupra was younger of the two and his wife was an evil woman because of which there were always fights between the two brothers. Both of them had given the Feast of Merit (*zatsü*) but in all that the brothers did, the elder brother always outshined the younger and this led to more jealousy. Mvüsütso’s wife even requested Mvüsupra’s wife to mend her evil ways which were leading to a rift between the brothers. The rifts worsen and the brothers were no more in talking terms. One day, Mvüsütso and his wife decided to teach the younger brother’s wife a lesson and so behind closed doors the husband pretended to hit his wife shouting “because of you, I am fighting with my brother” loud enough for Mvüsupra to hear. The brother heard the noises and the shouts and when he went home, he did the same to his wife, that is beat her for causing a rift between brothers.

One day the male members of the village were to go to the jungle to get bamboo canes. They both made their wives prepare their meal and left with the rest. After cutting the bamboo canes while the rest gathered their loads to return, Mvüsütso noticed that his younger brother was not cutting the canes right and that his load was far from being done. Since they were not in talking terms, he started singing “*bo mili mili cho, ke mili mili zhü*” (cut from the bottom, it will break, cut from the top, it won’t break). Listening to the song, the younger brother started cutting the bamboo canes from the top and this time he was able

to do it right. It was time for them to leave but Mvüsupra was not done with his load and he was left behind. Each time the villagers called out to check if anyone was left behind, Mvüsupra would respond that he has been left behind. A tiger prowling nearby heard him too and finding him alone ate him up. To this day two rocks believed to belong to the brothers is said to stand in the village. While Mvüsupra's rock is said to face downwards, Mvüsütso's stone faces upward.

Analysis

The Feast of Merit used to be an important event in Khezha villages that determines the social position and prestige of a person. The people who have held the Feast of Merit were held in high esteem in the community. Both the brothers had given the Feast of Merit which implies that they were both wealthy and of some social standing in the community. However the feeling of jealousy and ill will against the elder brother by the younger one is what concerns the first part of the story. The story can be taken as a typical tale of jealousy and hatred perpetuated by an evil wife that leads to the downfall of the guilty.

The ecological significance of the story lies in the representation of the two brothers as rocks after their death. The Khezhas have always been deeply connected with nature and they have also believed in the presence of mystical power in the different elements of nature. Stones and rocks are also believed to possess life and spirits of their own. The Khezhas have also believed in the union between man and nature and it is of no surprise or shock that in Khezha culture, stories abound of man getting transformed into stones/rocks and other objects of nature. The two brothers in the tale being represented by the two rocks standing erect to this day is testament of Khezhas' belief. The brothers had different personalities and

characters when they were alive. While the elder brother was upright and loved his younger brother, the younger one listened to his wife and harboured jealousy and ill will against his own brother. And therefore, the rocks representing them also differ in the way they stand. Mvüsupra's rock faces downward, while Mvüsütso's rock faces upward.

Narration 5: "Puzhonuo and Kabvü Pfumcho" (narrated by Dilhou Chikha, aged 86 years from Khezhakeno village)

Puzhonuo was amongst the oldest ancestors of the people of Khezhakeno village. He was friends with Kabvü Pfumcho, an elder from Kohima. One day, Kabvü Pfumcho asked his friend Puzhonuo for a basket of paddy and requested it to be brought to his place. As requested, Puzhonuo brought a basket of paddy for him. But after that, Kabvü Pfumcho would often request him to come and check the paddy for he could hear noises coming from the basket. On Kabvü Pfumcho's insistence, Puzhonuo visited him and on removing the lid of the basket, instead of the paddy, they saw the basket was filled with *maliwho* (butterflies). The butterflies swarm out of the basket and the whole village came under the shadow of the butterflies. On seeing this unique sight, Puzhonuo said to his friend that in the future, a host of people from different walks would come and reside in *Kabvümike* (Kohima village).

Analysis

Kohima district is the capital of Nagaland and inhabited by Nagas from different tribes. Though the district originally belongs to the Angami Nagas, it has come to be the home of various tribes more so because of being the capital of the state. In the above story, a wise man foretells the future of Kohima. In the olden days, the act of gifting was very

significant as it meant the receiver was held in very high esteem. In the story Puzhonuo gifts Kabvü Pfumcho a basket of paddy. The paddy that later turned into butterflies is significant because they signify the people who will come to settle in Kohima in the future. The butterflies, in this tale, have been used to symbolize human beings and it is only apt to bring in this metaphor because the Nagas in general and the Khezhas in particular have always been close to nature and have used nature imageries as representation of human society.

Narration 6: “The Miser and the Magic Stone of Riches” (from Dr. D. Kapfo’s Folk Tales of Kuzhami Nagas)

Long ago there was a man who was blessed by God with the stone of riches. Because of the stone, he enjoyed abundance of harvest and became very wealthy and prosperous. But he was a voracious and miserly person and never shared his wealth with others but spent all his time and energy in accumulating more wealth. Because of his greed he could not enjoy his wealth. God was displeased by his greed and as a punishment, sent a rat who took the magic stone and ran away into the forest. The miser did not want the people including his own relatives to know about the magic stone lest they start looking for it themselves, so he bore the sadness of losing the stone alone. His sadness was noticed by his pet cat who offered to go after the rat and retrieve the magic stone for his master. The next day, the man sent off the cat for the mission accompanied by his dog. The cat went ahead following the smell of the rat. After crossing three difficult hillocks, the duo finally found the rat. A plan was devised and the cat and the dog approached the rat from opposite directions. Overpowered by two bigger beings, the rat gave in and the magic stone was recovered by the cat and the dog. Happily they started their journey back home with the stone held firmly by

the cat in its mouth. As they travelled homeward, the dog wanted to hold the magic stone too and after much request, was handed the magic stone by the cat. They continued the journey with the magic stone now in the mouth of the dog. On the way, they had to cross a river. As the two pets stepped on the river bridge, the dog saw his reflection on the water and mistaking it to be another dog, opened its mouth to bite it and the stone fell into the water. Their repeated effort to find the stone went in vain because the stone had sunk deep into the water never to be recovered. They reached home with their heads low and when the master was informed of what happened, he was so angry he punished the dog by starving it. Very soon the man's wealth drained out, the yields of his field were poor and whatever riches he had accumulated got exhausted and at the end, the man became poor again and lived miserably for the rest of his life.

Analysis

The story of the Miser and the Magic Stone of Riches has the apparent lesson of being punished for one's miserliness. As long as the man was favoured by God, he had plentiful harvest and became a prosperous man. But because of his greed, he lost everything. The bountiful yield that he got from his field was gone over time and he was left with nothing but bad harvest year after year. The story speaks of human's lack of kindness and virtue of giving as against the ever giving nature. When nature decided to withdraw as a form of punishment, the miser had his fall. This story can carry meaning for modern readers as well. Nature is being overtly exploited for man's greed. The world has become like the miser and everyone is running after his own wants. Today we live in a world where every man is for himself only. The sense of common good, community well being, collectivism, the bonds

that tied the people together in the olden days is fast disappearing. In the course, nature has become a gold mine for individuals to exploit and draw wealth from. If nature decides to withdraw, the same fate will befall the modern man. Unless there is a check on the exploiting actions of man on nature, very soon the world will run out on essential resources and man can only face the consequences like the miser. Ecological balance is the need of the hour to make nature sustainable and also to deal with the environmental challenges the world is facing today. And this balance can be brought about only if rampant destruction of natural resources for human benefit and greed is checked and stopped.

3.3.2. Of Birds and Animals

The Khezha folklore abounds with tales of birds and animals with little or no human participation or interference. The animal kingdom is a world of its own and in this parallel universe, the birds and animals thrive by itself and are independent of any human association. This presentation runs in line with deep ecology which is grounded on the assumption that the living environment has rights of its own, independent of its utility to human beings and these rights should be respected and acknowledged by man. These rights pertain to moral and legal rights. Arne Naess expounds, “The right of all forms to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified.” He says, “No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species” (166).

Narration 7: “The Lizard and the Bird” (narrated by Sarano of Khezhakeno village, aged 49 years)

Long time ago, the Lizard and a bird were very good friends. They decided to dig a well for their use and decided that they would go to the well together every day to drink from

there. However, every morning when they would go to the well to drink water from there, they would find the water all dirty and unfit for drinking. This went on for quite some time so the bird finally decided to keep watch and catch the culprit. So one day, the bird hiding at the top of a tree nearby kept vigil to catch the culprit and just before dawn, the bird could spot none but his very own friend the lizard approach the well. The lizard then drank to its heart's content and when it could not drink anymore, it intentionally dirtied the pool of water. Unable to believe its eyes and angered by this wicked deed of the lizard, the bird flew down straight to the lizard and hit him really hard on its back and broke the back of the lizard. Since that day, the lizard could not stand upright again but had to crawl using all of its four limbs and tail.

Analysis

This is a short and a simple story about the lizard and a bird. The story can be categorized under animal tales in Khezha folk narratives. Animal tales abound in Khezha folklore where there is minimum or no participation of humans. The Khezhas have a vast storehouse of folktales that seek to explain why and how animals are the way they are as in the case of the lizard in the story. It crawls because it was attacked by the bird and crippled for life. However, underneath the apparent, it should be noted that the lizard and the bird presents a parallel universe from that of humans. As Gary Paul Nabhan says, "each plant or animal has a story of some unique way of living in this world. By tracking their stories down to the finest detail, our own lives may somehow be informed, and perhaps enriched" (144).

Another story of similar nature that tries to explain as to why a cat always hides her droppings and a tiger's sense of smell is weak is widely narrated in the Khezha speaking villages. The story is about a conflict between cat and tiger. The tiger has heard much about the cat and its cunningness before their encounter and so when they finally meet, the tiger is impressed by the agility and swiftness of the cat. However, the cat is also aware of the aggression of the tiger and the threat to his life that being near the tiger poses. Their display of capabilities in climbing up and down a tree causes the tiger to fall and injure his nose thereby damaging his sense of smell permanently. In his anger he threatens to kill the cat and as the cat saves himself by climbing to the top of a tree, the conversation that ensues is presented below-

Tiger: I will not leave you, I will continue to stay here till you come down. You have tricked me and injured me badly, so I will kill you.

Cat: I will not come down, I will stay here till you leave

Tiger: what will you eat if you continue to stay there?

Cat: I will catch flies and eat them. But what will you eat if you continue to wait for me without moving out in search of your food?

Tiger: I would wait for your droppings and eat them

And therefore, to this day the cat hides its droppings in the fear that the tiger will find him otherwise and the tiger's sense of smell is weak because of the injury it sustained long ago. In the primitive Khezhas society, the people built their understanding of the world around

them according to the emotions, beliefs they attached to it and so in Khezhas cosmos, there is no difference between the world of the plants, trees, mountains, birds, animals, lakes, ponds, rivers, forests or any form of nature and the human world and therefore in the collection of tales provided, there is no difference between the two worlds. This sense of regard and value for the non human world as equal to their own human world is what makes the Khezhas and their beliefs ecocentric. Today, though so called progress has taken place and continue to take place at the expense of the environment, the deep regard that the Khezhas had for nature in the past has survived and continue to influence the actions and practices of the people to some extent.

Narration 8: “Hen, Wild Cat, Crab” (*Pfü, Nanga, Wo*) narrated by Ngolo Lomi of Leshemi Village, aged 100 years

Pfü (Hen), *Nanga* (Wild cat) and *Wo* (Crab) were friends. They decided to help each other in their fields. On the day they went to work at *pfü*'s field, *pfü* had prepared eggs for their lunch. When the turn of the *nanga* came, he made *nanga* meat for their lunch. But when the *Wo*'s turn came, he could not find anything to cook. As he looked around the kitchen, he accidentally fell into the boiling pot and died. Now, *pfü* had come looking for *wo* and finding him dead in the pot, the hen ate up the crab. When the *nanga* heard of it, he was so angered because the hen had not shared the crab's meat with him. He decided to kill the hen himself. He decided to attack the hen while the hen was on his way to the field. But *pfü* got to know of *nanga*'s plan so when *nanga* asked her which way she would be taking to her field, she said she would be going south but went north instead. The next day, she said she was going north but she went south instead. This went on for some days until *nanga* deciphered her

trick and caught her one day. She was hit with a *chidu* (stick) and as *pfü* breathed her last, her egg jumped out of her and escaped being killed with its mother. Now, the egg decided to avenge its mother's death. The egg hid itself in the hearth of the *nanga*'s kitchen and when the *nanga* fired his hearth, the egg burst open smearing the *nanga* all over with its glair. The *nanga* could not see anything and as it tried sitting down, its' bottom was cut by a knife. In pain the *nanga* ran out and as it placed its hands on the wall, they were bitten by a snake. Then the *nanga* unable to bear the pain ran to a tree nearby and tried climbing it, but the roots of the tree were all rotten being eaten by insects and so the tree could not hold and the *nanga* fell down and broke its back. A *theku* (praying mantis) was observing everything and finding the scene to be very funny laughed so hard that its head fell off and the head had to be joined to its body using a *thopiyika* (stem of a wild plant). This is the reason why a *theku* has long neck.

Analysis

The story narrated above is an amusing story with no apparent moral to convey. Its primary aim seems to be to make people laugh. When narrated to the young folks by the elders, the story must have generated peals of laughter. But behind the laughter and the humour, the ingenuity of the creator can be seen. The animals and the insect *theku* (praying mantis) have been personified in the story. Their representation points toward the Khezha belief that animals are as human as any human being and this can be further seen in the animal tales that abounds Khezha folklore. Animals are given speech, they live with man as brothers, they participate in human activities and their own activities are like that of human beings. In the story, the animals have been endowed with human attributions and emotions

such as friendship, anger, revenge and so on. Such tales show how Khezha man is closely related to the animal kingdom.

Another aspect of significance in the story is the effort to explain how things of nature came to be. As farcical as it is, the theku (praying mantis) is believed to have a long neck because its head fell off while laughing hard at the hilarious misfortune of the nanga and the head could be rejoined to its body only with the use of *thopiyika* and hence the long neck. This points towards the attempt of the Khezhas to explain and understand the physical attributes and behaviour of the animal world.

Narration 9: Animal tales abound in Khezha folklore and the story of Tiger (*Khu*) and Wild cat (*Nanga*), narrated by Razouko Ngone, is another tale where there is no human participation but a parallel world where animals speak, live and act like people in the human world.

Tiger and Wildcat were friends but the tiger always looked for opportunity to eat the wild cat. One day as they roamed about, they ran into *Chu* (a famous trickster in Khezha folklore, sometimes projected as a human, sometimes an animal. In this tale, *Chu* is an animal) and tries to catch him but *Chu* hides himself in a tree hole. Wildcat makes the suggestion that they put fire in the tree hole so that *Chu* is compelled to come out. However, the tiger makes the same mistake of bringing dry leaves instead of fire for four times and finally, wildcat losing his patience decides to get the fire himself. *Chu* being very cunning tricks the tiger and is able to save himself from him and escape. Having lost their food, the two felines decide to look for food again but this time they make the pact of tying their tails to each other and taking each step together. The tiger had always looked at his friend as food

and so to kill him, the tiger runs at a great speed, hurling the wild cat from one side to the other. The wild cat dies as a result of the impact but the tiger unaware of it turns back to check on the wildcat from time to time just to see the same expression on the face of the wildcat which he deduces to be a smile. The tiger starts running even faster but falls into a ditch and because of the intensity of the fall, the tiger passes away too.

Analysis

Ecocritics view nature with all its components as value carrying entity that has to be accorded the same position in the biosphere as humans. The animal kingdom is as intrinsically vibrant as that of the human world and a study of the Khezha folktales show this vibrancy of the non human world. The story of "*Khu and Nanga*" is one such tale that does not require human characters or intervention to give it the value that it has. The story can be read both as an allegory with a moral tone to it or just as a simple depiction of the animal kingdom where friendship, betrayals, survival of the cunning runs parallel and similar to that of the human world. The portrayal of the animal kingdom as similar to that of the human world, including the emotions of friendship, betrayal, fear etc is revelatory of the Khezhas attitude towards the natural world in the olden days. They attached intrinsic value to nature and saw the physical world with all its inhabitants as entities that existed and functioned as human beings do. While tales were usually narrated to entertain or to teach moral lessons, the Khezhas saw the animal kingdom as no different from the human world and their depiction of it, as farcical as they may seem, reflect their way of attaching value to the non-human world.

Narration10: “*Ki Koli*” (narrated by Dilhou Chikha, aged 86 years from Khezhakeno village)

In the olden days men spoke the same language. But it worried the elders because if men continue to speak the same tongue, it will give rise to ill wills and fights since everyone will be able to understand what the other person is saying. One day a bird, *Kodokhrü*, came flying around the land chirping ‘*ki koli*’ as it flew. Everyone heard the bird and started imitating the sound ‘*ki koli*’. They all gave their own meanings to the two sounds and that is when they started speaking in different tongues. Some wrote their new language in *tholopfe* (dried bamboo), some wrote it in *duchy* (tree barks) while some continued speaking in the old language and this is how diverse tongue came about. The *Kozamis* (men of Koza, Khezhas’ ancestral father) wrote the words in the dried skin of an animal but unfortunately it was eaten by a dog and that is how the *Kozamis* lost their language and could not even compose their folk songs in their own language and so they sang in *Tepfule*, tongue of the neighbouring village that lies within the Manipur boundary today.

Analysis

This story takes us back to the old belief that man, once upon a time, spoke the same tongue. It was the arrival of a bird that brought diverse tongues amongst the people. When the people heard the bird chirp ‘*ki koli*’, it led to multiple interpretations. Folktales are sometimes found to be grounded on illogical assumptions but there is no denying or undermining the fact that most folktales are usually based on the belief system of the people. Through the above story the importance of the bird in Khezha culture can easily be ascertained in the way it has been projected. The bird chirping led to confusion amongst the people as everyone tried interpreting the message which further resulted in the birth of

diverse tongues, thereby leading to the separation of the people. While on the one hand, it put the worries of the elders of ill will and fights to rest, on the other hand, it resulted in the breaking up of the community into different groups.

The chirping of the birds is also significant because birds in the olden days were revered as messengers of the Supreme Being and a medium of communication between man and the Supreme Being. The chirping of certain birds is considered as bad omen while the chirping of others as a good sign. Details like the type of chirping, whether the birds are in pairs or flying alone are also taken into consideration while deciding on whether the bird brings good tidings or bad.

Narration 11: “Spirit of a Tiger”, narrated by Dilhou Chikha of Khezhakeno village, aged 86 years

The *Kozamis* (Khezhakeno village) as a whole is believed to possess the spirit of a tiger. And that is why every time the *Kozamis* move together or decide to work together a tiger is seen moving behind the people. Onlookers would see the tiger and fear that the tiger might pounce on the people and kill them but the tiger would never harm anyone and instead keep guard. One day, an old tiger, which is not the spirit, came to *Tsapfulu* colony of Khezhakeno village and sat by an old woman’s fence. The villagers after gathering firewood for a *zatho* (Feast of Merit), were now gathered at a place and taking rest. There was a man by the name Mechimvu who sat in the middle of this gathering. As the tiger pounced at the gathering, everyone started running hither and thither. Later when the tiger had left, the people inquired for anyone who could have disappeared (taken by the tiger) but no one noticed the absence of Mechimvu. Later when his disappearance was noticed, it was already

too late for the tiger was long gone and Mechimvu had already been eaten by the tiger under a huge rock. The villagers decided to take revenge on the tiger but they could not find the tiger so they all gathered at a place called *Kabvü Nho* and shouted in unison “*A-ho, a-ho*”. The tiger had already reached a distant place called *Mipfimi* by that time but when the villagers shout echoed, the hair of his tail rose in fear and the tiger said to himself that this village has a different aura and he should never return to this village.

Analysis

This is another myth related to tigers. The Khezhas of Khezhakeno village believe that the tiger is the common spirit of the village that keeps guard over the village. Tiger association is very important in Khezha traditional lore and although the cause of this association is not known, tigers are held with much regard in the Khezha society. There are also stories of were-tigers and there are people who claim to possess the spirit of a tiger. The popular belief is that the tiger spirit roams the jungles and forest as the possessor of the spirit sleeps at night and any harm done to the tiger (the spirit) will have direct repercussion on the man himself whose spirit has been harmed. There are stories of people dying in their sleep because their tiger spirits were shot dead by unsuspecting hunters, the dead man bearing the same shot wounds on his body as the tiger. Sometimes even women are believed to possess animal spirits, mostly tigers. In the case of the narration above, the village is believed to be guarded by the spirit of a tiger. When the whole village moves together for ceremonial or other public purposes, the tiger spirit is believed to prowl behind the people.

Narration 12: “The Tiger, Spirit and Man” (narrated by Dilhou Chikha, aged 86 years from Khezhakeno Village)

The tiger, spirit and man were born to the same mother and lived together in the same house as brothers. The tiger was the eldest while man was the youngest of the three. When the mother fell sick, the three brothers took turns to wait on the mother. However the older brothers, that is, the tiger and the spirit, were devoid of human feelings and while the tiger wanted the mother dead so that he can feast on her body, the spirit’s negative aura brought more sickness on the mother. When it was the youngest son’s turn to wait on the mother, he cooked warm food for his mother, gave her proper care and treated her kindly.

As the mother neared her death, realizing that her youngest son, who was the weakest of all, might suffer after her death, she called all three to bless or curse them according to their measure of care for her. She gave the open space to man to dwell and to prosper, wisdom to guide, and also made him superior over all animals and birds on earth. To the spirit, she gave the dirty and the secluded places, and also ordered him to stay out of man’s sight. As for the eldest and the strongest, the tiger, the mother chased him away to the jungles and cursed him to live ever in fear of man away from human habitations and to eat only raw food.

Analysis

One significant characteristic feature of Khezha folktales is the representation of animal as a speaking entity who would participate in human activities. In a good number of tales different animals are presented as supernatural beings that can take human form, while in some tales animals are capable of speech and live with humans as brothers. One such tale

is that of “The Tiger, Spirit and Man” where the tiger as well as the spirit have been presented as man’s brother, born of the same mother. Although it goes on to explain how the three brothers came to inhabit different abodes, the story is essentially anthropocentric. Man is presented as superior over other beings and the only being capable of emotions which is in conflict with the Green movement that advocates a move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism.

The Khezhas have always had a close association with tigers, from being feared as a man eater to being referred to as the elder brother, and this association can be traced in many of the folktales. In more than one is the tiger referred to as the elder brother. In the story above, the tiger is the eldest of the three brothers, which also includes the spirit. The tiger though endowed with human qualities and capable of speech, fundamentally remains a man eater and thus waits for his mother’s death to feast on her dead body. The tiger appears in a lot of Khezha folktale, sometimes as a brother, sometimes as a beast and sometimes even as a friend. The cause of Khezhas’ affinity with tigers is not known but there is no denying the fact that tigers are an important element in Khezha folklores.

Khezhas have also always believed in the existence of spirits. In fact, every element of nature is believed to possess a spirit of its own and its worship is usually meant to appease those spirits for a peaceful living. In the story, the spirit has been manifested as the older brother of man. However, the story concedes to the belief that the human world and the world of the spirits are different and man can worship or fight spirits but not live with them.

3.3.3. Of Stones and Spirits

Narration 13: “Dwelling Place of Sacred Stones” (*Tawobou*), narrated by Thochü Koza, aged 75 years, Khezhakeno village

In *Tepfulo* khel of Khezhakeno village, there is a stack of sacred rocks. Underneath it lives *ghawo* (sacred stones). Whenever *ghawo* comes out, it looks like precious stone and it goes to the house of *Mowo* (head priest). The *ghawo* that lives in the house of the *Mowo* would in turn move to the *Tawobou*. The belief attached to *Tawobou* is that if the stones are touched even with a stick then it will result in heavy rain and thunder storms and also make the person who touches the *ghawo* itchy all over the body. The story goes, long time ago, Central Reserve Police Force personnel had made their camp around the *Tawobou* area. They were warned against touching the stones or moving them. But not heeding to the warning, they meddled with the stones. As they meddled so, the sky suddenly broke into a terrible thunder storm and lightning struck one of the personnel killing him immediately.

Analysis

The above narration is attached to the belief of the Khezhas in the mysticism of nature. Though fictitious to the ears, the people of Khezhakeno village ascribe to the belief to this day that the *Tawobou* is not to be meddled with for it can bring bad weather upon the village. Not just heavy rainfall but even droughts in the village especially in the cultivating season are associated with this belief. This narrative throws light on the extent of Khezhas' association with nature. The rocks as well as the stones here are sacred and their sanctity is to be maintained by keeping them untouched and unmoved. Nature's fury is unleashed when man meddles with nature disrupting its sanctity. In the case of the belief in the given narrative, nature punishes through heavy rain, thunderstorms or the complete absence of rain

resulting in a drought like situation, considering how important rainfall is for this predominantly agricultural community. The above narrative also gives us insight into the religious belief of the Khezhas. There is spirit in nature and every element of nature is to be respected and a communion with nature is to be maintained so that man can have a peaceful and a productive life. It is also interesting to note that in the event of such incidents, the *Mowo* perform rituals of appeasement to bring back the climatic condition to normalcy. Only the *Mowo* can perform these rituals.

Another significant detail in the narrative is the moving of the sacred stones from the *Tawabou* to the house of *Mowo*. Stones are inanimate object of nature but in the narrative, they have been endowed with the power to move from one place to the other. The people of Khezhakeno village ascribe to the belief that sacred stones exist and though not seen by all with their naked eyes, there are still some persons who claim to have witnessed this unusual phenomenon. This takes us back to the belief of the Khezhas that there is sacredness in nature. The Khezhas have always attached very high value and reverence to this sacredness in nature and this is evident in the prohibitions and taboos attached to the disruption of nature.

In the following account, Dipeo Koza, 38 year old granddaughter of the last original *Mowo* of the oldest Khezha village, narrates of her childhood days living near the *Mowo* and of her personal experience of the *Tso Tawo* and also the rituals associated with the *Tso Tawo*.

My paternal grandfather was the last *Mowo* (Chief of the village), since *Mowo* was hereditary and all his children having become Christians. I never got to meet my paternal grandmother since she had passed away before mom and dad got married.

But I would often sit beside my grandfather along with the other grandchildren and listen to his narrations of folk-tales, myths, and legends. And it always fascinated us as kids. There were also quite a number of taboos and other things that grandfather would often remind us to be careful of while in and around his house. Being chief of the village, traditional beliefs and practices, customary laws, and taboos were strictly followed, gennas observed, and rituals performed for the well being of individual lives and the village, for plentiful harvests and good climate and also for harmonious co-existence with nature around them. We observed rituals and practices being performed for decades passed, especially on the roofs of grandfather's house.

One such legend and closely connected with taboo that we grew up with noticing as grand children of *Mowo* was *Tso-Tawo Bu* which means dwelling/residing place of spirit stones which was in grandfather's house. The backyard of my grandfather's house was where his kitchen was and where his bed was also at. The fire place was in the middle of the kitchen made of three firmly placed stones facing each other. The floor was not plastered with mud or cement but covered in thin layer of ashes. Though we didn't get to see the actual movements of these spirit stones or how it dwelt inside since the upper layer was covered in ordinary stones, we did get to notice and experience some things about these spirit stones. On rare occasions, when we visited grandfather early mornings, we saw thin and fine lines on the ash covered floor of grandfather's kitchen. And grandfather told us that these lines were made by the movements of *Tso Tawo*.

The front portion of grandfather's house was this huge room used for storing paddy grains in big oval bamboo baskets. Though we were told that seeing these spirit stones in and around the house had become quite less since most were burnt to dead during the burning of the whole village, a couple of times we did get to notice pebble stones that were kind of shiny, lustrous, and dark brown/black in colour on the floor, in between the spaces of these oval bamboo baskets where grains were stored. We grew up being reminded never to touch if at all we happen to notice these kinds of stones but inform grandfather or our parents who ever were around. My grandfather told us that the spirit stones that are dead lost its lustre and the colour also changed as compared to those that are still alive.

We were also warned never to urinate in and around grandfather's house since we might mistakenly urinate over or near this spirit stones; the consequence was that it would cause itching all over the body. As kids, we loved playing around grandfather's big house and sometimes in the midst of playing we would in a hurry go to the backyard of his house to pee. There were times we had itching all over our body. If our parents noticed this itching while around grandfather's house they would ask us if we had urinated near his house but most often they concluded we must have had. My grandfather also kept telling us that disturbance to *Tso Tawo Bu* the place where these spirit stones dwell causes severe hailstorm, thunder and lightning, and rain. And whoever disregards it and causes disturbance will be struck dead by natural bolts. So, we were kind of always careful while around grandfather's house.

Tawobu, to this day, holds great significance for the people of Khezhakeno village. With the last of the old religion follower converting into a Christian, the village was declared a 100% Christian village in the year 2018. However, the old beliefs have not completely been wiped out and *tso tawo* is one aspect of the old belief that may continue to pervade the lives of the people for a long time to come. It is still considered a taboo to meddle with *tawobu* and droughts during the sowing season are usually believed to be because of some intrusions on the *tawobu* to this day. Further analysis has been given below with the next narration.

Narration 14: “Stones that grew Heavenwards” (*Tsopoupe Chitude Kebe*), narrated by Sarano of Khezhakeno Village

Tsopoupe Chitude Kebe can be simply translated as the stone that grew heavenwards. This is another folk legend associated with the belief in spirited stones. According to legend, a pile of vertically standing flat stones in the oldest Khezha village continued growing heavenwards and it was believed that they would continue growing until they reach the heavens. However, a fire broke out and as the stones were consumed in flames, the spirit in the stones left and from that day onwards, the stones stopped growing. The legend is shrouded in mystery as no one knows what caused the fire that led to the destruction of the ever growing stones.

Analysis

Stones have always been significant for the Khezhas. While some were believed to be spirited or charmed like the *Tsotawo* or *Tsopoupe Chitude Kebe*, stones erected to mark *Zatho* (feast of merit) stood as a symbol of the feast provider’s status. Stones in such cases

became identifiers of a Khezha's position in the society. After every *Zatho* followed by performance of rituals, the feast provider could erect a menhir and the more the menhirs, the more prestige he received. So, stone erections were identities for the Khezhas that put certain people above the rest. Any visitor to the Khezha villages would witness the *Zatho* stone structures standing tall to this day nearby the paddy fields or other locations in and around the village. With the coming of Christianity, the old ceremonial practices of *Zatho* and stone erections lost their significance but the same practices, as Dr. Zokho Venuh puts it, have been "remodeled on christian lines" and what we have today is wealthy Christians providing Christmas feasts to the whole village or stone erections being carried out to commemorate significant social and religious occasions. (252)

The mystical belief attached to the different forms of nature including the stones such as *Tsotawo* or *Tsopoupe Chitude Kebe* is also expository of the Khezhas' spirituality. Before the advent of Christianity, the Khezhas practiced their own indigenous religion which looked at nature as mystical and possessor of spirits and also as messenger of the Supreme Being. Their everyday life was dominated by rituals and acts of appeasement to keep the spirits in nature happy. This brings us to the question, was Khezhas' spirituality ecocentric? How far did this ecocentric spirituality help in building a balanced relationship with nature? Valerie Lincoln defines ecospirituality as a "manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment." Ecospirituality, she adds, integrates an "intuitive and embodied awareness of all life and engages a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to soil". She talks of five essences of an ecospiritual consciousness that

are uniquely intertwined entities that are ingrained within the framework of an ecospiritual consciousness. They are-

- 1) Tending- being awake and conscious with deep inner self reflection
- 2) Dwelling- a process of being with the seen and the unseen
- 3) Reverence- rediscovering the mystery present in all creation, and is embodied sense of the sacred
- 4) Connectedness- an organic relationship with the universe
- 5) Sentience- a sense of knowing (227)

Ecospirituality is based on the belief in the sacredness of nature, earth and the universe, a belief that is abundantly found in the Khezha culture. Based on the above, it is safe to conclude that the Khezhas' spirituality was ecological and ecoethical as well for they did not just believe in the sacredness of nature but their actions were also controlled by this belief and that is why they would offer prayers of appeasement to the spirits in nature if they were required to harm nature for their needs.

3.3.4. Of Rivers and Forests

Narration 15: "The angry water" (narrated by K.Meze, aged 87 years, Khezhakeno village)

Long time ago, a man named Solhou was travelling to Kohima but along the way he was swallowed by a river. The villagers of Solhou were much saddened by the death of Solhou while his clansmen could not fathom the truth. Carrying their daos and spears with them they went to the river and when they reached the shore, they started hitting on the water with their weapons shouting as they did so, "Solhou was a good leader, why did you take him from us?", while there were some men who did not approve of this action and opposed

it. After that incident whenever people travelled by the river, the water would be very clear but when any of the *Rhüchimie* (the clan that punished the water) travelled and were to cross the river, the water would become dark and dirty and swallow the *Rhüchimie*. This continued for some time and this is when the *Rhüchimie* people realised they were wrong in their act. They carried some hot water with them and submerged it in the water as an act of repentance and atonement. The water suddenly cleared and as they turned to leave, they saw a body like that of Solhou beautiful like the flowering of a pomegranate plant.

Analysis

The story is based on the belief of the Khezhas that even rivers possess spirits of its own. Solhou died of drowning and when the river was unduly punished by his clansmen, the water turned against them. The Khezhas have always been a superstitious group of people. Their lives are characterized by taboos and rituals observed to appease the spirits for a harmonious living. However in the case of Solhou, the fury of nature was aroused when his clansmen tried to punish this element of nature for the death of Solhou. It is a popular belief of the Khezhas that certain water asks for the lives of young people from time to time. This is how the drowning of young men is explained. Solhou was swallowed by nature herself when he drowned. And the act of hitting the water is an act of contempt against this element of nature. Nature showed its fury for the contempt shown by becoming dark and dirty whenever any of the clansmen of Solhou travelled by the river and also by swallowing them. This takes us to the mysticism in nature. Nature has different facets to it and while it can be a provider, it can also take away what belongs to men. But as long as men live in harmony with nature, nature seldom lashes its fury on men. In the story above, when the sanctity of the river is

disturbed, men have to bear the consequences. When viewed from another perspective, it can be said that when men disturbs the sanctity of nature, nature finds its own way to get back on men. Nature is equated to a living being who is capable of emotions and when man tried hurting it, it retorted by unleashing its' fury on the perpetrators. The final act of atonement is also significant for it brought back the sanctity that exists between man and nature. The appearance of the body of Solhou like the flowering of a pomegranate plant is symbolical of the restoration of the relationship between man and nature that is based on mutual trust and respect.

Narration 16: "Nose of a Lake" (*Zhi Nhaka*), narrated by Thochü Koza, aged 75 years, Khezhakeno village

There was once a lake but due to natural calamity, the lake got covered with mud and a village settlement took place there. A big tree grew in the place and after some years though the tree withered, the root of the tree had already penetrated deep into the earth. When the root also withered, a deep hollow was created inside it. A boy fell into this hollowed root and passed away and though people tried to close the hole, they were not successful for water kept on filling the hollowed root. Then they put a lot of stones inside the hole, and finally covered the perimeter of its mouth with a *chira bou* (wooden lid). From then on, the villagers started using the water gathered for their daily needs and this place came to be called *Zhi Nhaka* (nose of a lake). It is said that the water level never changes in the *Zhi Nhaka* but remains the same at all times and in all seasons.

The unusual aspect about *Zhi Nhaka* is that the water level is believed to remain constant throughout the year, in all the seasons. Many of the villagers consider this water

source to be sacred. *Zhi Nakha* is not just a source of water supply for the villagers but is also surrounded by an air of mysticism for the water level never goes down even in the driest season. Nature with all its mysteries has always been a source of much awe and amazement to the people. *Zhi Nakha* arouses this same awe and adds to the mystery that surrounds nature.

Narration 17: “*Kabvü Nhou*” (narrated by Thochü Koza, aged 75 years, Khezhakeno village)

There is a place called *Kabvü Nhou* in Khezhakeno village. In this place there is an area called *Kowo be* (mad place). The myth behind the place is that if any person on a hunting expedition or out for any purpose walks over *Kowo be* then he will not know how to get out of the place. No matter which direction he takes, he will find himself back in the same spot. People who had gone to gather bamboo canes have reportedly experienced the same confusing situation. In this cursed like land, if even a tree is felled or the land cultivated, there will be thunderstorms and heavy rain and to this day in Khezhakeno village, no one is allowed to cut trees there or work the land for any purpose. It is not known whether the plants and the trees there or the soil itself is tabooed.

Analysis

This myth is associated with the belief that nature is sacred. In this case, nature possesses the mystical power to confuse people. The people of Khezhakeno ascribe to this belief and cultivation, tree felling, hunting or any human activity is prohibited in this place. *Kowo Be* can be translated as “mad place” and to this day the place is considered tabooed. Many tribal communities have their own sacred grooves or forest and for the Khezhas of this

particular village, *Kowo Be* is the groove that is beyond human explanation and to be avoided. Sacred grooves are common in the tribal society. Such beliefs that some forested areas are sacred have resulted in nature conservation for human interference in such areas is prohibited by the ethnic groups themselves. Apart from the spiritual significance of such beliefs, these sacred grooves also hold cultural and ecological significance.

Narration 18: “*Zhimike*” (Narrated by Dilhou Chikha, aged 86 years from Khezhakeno village)

There is a place called *Zhimike* (so called by the *Kozamis*) within Manipur boundary. Long time ago, water from *Zhimike* was making its way towards *Kozamike* (land of Koza’s people) through chasms and foothills between the two lands. The water was led by a pair of *Lechü* (bird). However before the water could reach *Kozamike*, the two birds were spotted by a cowherd. The cowherd shot down the two birds and the moment the birds were killed, the water changed its course. It is said that had the cowherd not killed the birds, there would be a river flowing into *kozamike* from Manipur (neighbouring state of Nagaland).

Analysis

This story narrates how the course of a river changed because the birds leading the water of the river were killed, thereby depriving the village of the water source that could have met the water demands of the entire village. This story is an example of how nature punishes when it is harmed. The village had to pay for the reckless action of one of its cowherds by losing on a very important water source. Similar to the story “The Angry Water”, *Zhimike* points toward the ecological thought that when the normal course of nature is disturbed, the same disturbance is reverberated in the human world.

Narration 19: “The deserted boy”. The following story has also been narrated by Ngolo Lomi of Leshemi Village, aged 100 years

A man lost his wife and was left alone with his child. He decided to remarry but when he proposed a lady, he was told that she would marry him only if he got rid of his child. The man had fallen in love with the lady and so he decided to sacrifice his child for the lady. One day he took his child and set out for the deep forest. After they have walked for a while, the man asked his child if he can see their house. The child replied that their house is clearly visible. They continued walking and after a while, the father asked his child the question again. The child responded that he could see a cock alighted at the roof of their house. They continued walking and after covering a considerably long distance, the father asked the child again if their house was still visible. But now the child replied, “How can I see anything. We have come so deep into the forest.”

The father looked for a big tree nearby and climbed up the tree with his child. As he did so, he inserted spikes in the tree so that he can come down later. Leaving the child in the tree, the father came down removing the spikes as he came down and made his way back to the village. Now the child was left alone and in fright as he called for his father, a tiger responded instead. Whenever he shouted “*apfo*” (father), a tiger underneath would respond, “*hoi apfo mohi, khu kaduy*” (it’s not father, but a big tiger). The child called for his father again but the same reply came. The child continued to live there in the tree for some time until a pair of crows came and offered to help him down. The child was scared that they would drop him but the crows picked up a huge rock from a nearby stream and convinced the child of their strength. The child was brought down successfully. After the child came down, he wandered around looking for human settlement and came across a series of field. He sat

down nearby one playing with the water that ran into the field. The owner of the field happened to be a rich farmer and on noticing that the water flowing into his field was dirty came up to inquire and found the child. On finding the child homeless, he took pity of him and took the child with him and thereby the child found a new home where he was raised with love and comfort.

Analysis

The story raises question on the love of the father for his child. He sacrifices his only child leaving him to die in the forest to please the woman he wants to marry. In Khezha folklore similar stories of sons and daughters deserted in the forest to die abound. What is of significance in such stories is the role played by the forest and the inhabitants of the forest. Forests have always been regarded as no man's land and to be kept out of. In the story above, the father uses this forest to discard off his son. The boy encounters different inhabitants of the forest here and is finally taken pity by the crows. Both the tiger and the crows have been personified and endowed with speech to communicate with the boy. The crows have also been endowed with supernatural strength to carry the boy to safe ground. The tree on which the boy was alighted is also significant for it stands as a protector of the boy until the crows came to his rescue. The story shows that even when man had failed in love, nature still harbours, protects and shows love to all those who come to its lap.

Narration 20: "Narheo and Nakra", narrated by Thochü Koza (aged 75 years)

Narheo and Nakra were orphans. Their parents passed away when they were very young and so they had to grow up without the love of their parents. Being orphans they were

disliked by a lot of people. They grew up innocent yet mischievous and would often annoy an old woman by climbing up to her roof. The old woman losing her patience shouted at them one day and told them to avenge their parents' death instead of wasting their time annoying her. When interrogated by the two boys, the old woman gave them details about their parents' death. The orphans then set out to avenge their parents' death. Thereafter the orphans lived a very honest and truthful life and so whenever they went hunting, even nature was kind to them. As they grew old and passed away, their souls could be seen alighting into the sky. Henceforth, the paddy fields of those people who disliked them were destroyed by hail storm while the ones who loved them had bountiful harvest, especially that of the old woman. That is why people started worshipping Narheo and Nakra who now lived in the skies. Henceforth, when the harvesting season approaches, people would observe genna for three months restricting the exit or entry of anyone from inside or outside the village. Disobedience would cause natural forces to destroy the harvest.

Analysis

The story of Narheo and Nakra is an example of the Khezhas' belief system that speaks of the possibility of the symbiosis between man and spirits or nature. The Khezhas narrate tales where humans have transformed into stones or animals, tales where intermarriages between humans and animals, especially snakes, and also between spirits and humans take place, tales where humans are taken away by spirits and such stories are bred from the folk belief of the Khezhas that communion between the human and the natural world or between human and the world of the spirits is possible. Unlike in the story *The Miser and the Magic Stone of Riches* where the miser is punished by God and nature for his

greed, the orphans in this story are blessed by nature for their honest and truthful ways by being kind and blessing them with good sport whenever they set out for hunting. The blessings of the brothers even passed on to those people who were kind to them and they also enjoyed good harvest. Honest and truthful living in the past meant, besides practising other virtues, being obedient to the social and religious sanctions the traditional culture imposed on them, which included avoidance of rampant or senseless exploitation of natural resources, an attitude of awe and respect for the natural world, and living in harmony with the rest of creation. When nature was respected, it blessed the boys with good yields from its forest. The ecologically sound attitude of the old Khezha culture helped them in living a balanced life for generations until the society was exposed to globalisation and the modern culture of materialism.

3.3.5. Of Women and Nature

Ecocritics sees the exploitation of women as a similar experience to nature being exploited. Women and nature are the procreators, but both are subjected to dominance, oppression and even abuse in a patriarchal set up. Ecocritics try to draw a connection between the exploitation of the two. This branch of ecocritical study is broadly referred to as ecofeminism. The term is used by some academics and activists to refer to the feminism that connects ecological degradation and the domination and oppression of women. A great deal of the ecofeminists' action seeks to "resist and subvert political institutions, economic structures, and daily activities" that are against the concerns of life on earth. While theoretical and academic ecofeminism seeks to "identify, critique and overthrow ideological frameworks and ways of thinking" that allows ecological degradation and the oppression of

women, ecofeminism also seeks to bring to awareness diverse non-dominating forms of social organization and human-nature interaction that is available and possible (Carlassare 220).

Lois K. Daly in his essay, "Ecofeminism and Ethics", talks of four characteristics that ecofeminist share:

Firstly, ecofeminists seek to bring to light the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. For ecofeminists, the structures of patriarchy not only shape human relationships but they also organize the way the nonhuman world is conceived and treated.

Secondly, ecofeminism seek to overcome hierarchical dualisms and to destroy the logic of domination that supports them. According to this logic, difference indicates inferiority. This is the assumption that allows the "higher" to control the "lower" and the "oppressors" to "oppress".

Thirdly, ecofeminism is strongly "communal and contextual". And finally, it is grounded in praxis. Ecofeminist reflection arose out of the particular experiences of specific women groups who struggled against the interconnections of their situation to the environmental degradation taking place around them. (285-286)

A reflection on Khezha traditional society shows a patriarchal set up peculiar in its features and working. Women were subject to male domination and they were expected to perform the role assigned to them without questioning. The society was governed by strict social sanctions and while both man and woman had to abide by the laws and dictums, these laws and dictums were highly restrictive and binding for women. For instance, an unmarried

woman could not keep long hair; a woman's movements were restricted from certain places like the men dormitory, place of meeting, and a woman's free movement was also restricted in the village unless there was a specific purpose to do so. But women in Khezha society also enjoyed a high degree of respect and position in the village and also played significant role in the society. On the first day of The Feast of Merit, only the wife could offer prayers to the Creator for sustenance during the feasting period. In her absence, the feast could not be hosted. Women also played key roles in performing different rituals which was a very important part of the Khezha society. Some women were held in high esteem such as Dze-o who was believed to be the Creator's messenger; Tarünie-o who instructed the villagers to sing for rain near her grave after her death in times of drought; Kevechü-o, Zonie-o, Zode-o who were believed to own *Nyiepi-o* (the spirit believed to bring wealth and riches); Kaponie-o, Tarünie-o, and She-o who mediated between their native village and neighbouring villages at different times of conflict. The wife of the *Mowo* (village priest), known as *Mowopi*, was also held in high esteem and in certain cases discharged the same powers as the *Mowo*. For instance, if the *Mowo* passed away leaving behind a minor, the *Mowopi* assumed all the charges of the *Mowo* and could convene meetings, implement resolutions, perform rituals and carry out the tasks of a *Mowo*. A *Mowopi* worth mentioning is Chi-o who discharged the duties of a *Mowo* for fifteen years after the death of her husband (Zehol and Lucy Zehol 68-71). Keeping this peculiar status of women in the Khezha tradition in mind, the following legend of Kapone-o has been analysed.

Narration 21: "Kapone-o, the Promiscuous" (*Kaponeo, milikrüo*): narrated by Kodolhou Ladu, aged 87 years, Khezhakeno village

Kadeo was a brave warrior, the best in his village and someone who had never seen defeat. His fame and stories reached far and wide and soon even the enemy villages got to hear of him. There lived a girl in one such village that has been constantly at war with Kadeo's village, and her name was Kaponeo. When she heard of this invincible warrior, she went to the villagers and claimed that she can overpower Kadeo and bring his head as her trophy. Women were not allowed to go for head hunting but Kaponeo, defying the law of the land, set out to kill this warrior that was feared by everyone.

When she reached the village of Kadeo, she went looking for him. Soon she found him. Kaponeo went up to him, worked her womanly charm on him and told him that she has travelled a long distance just so that she can have some moments of fun with him. Kadeo got enticed by her and fell into the trap of her charm. She served drinks after drink to him and at last when he was too intoxicated and fell on her thighs, she beheaded him with the sickle that she had carried on her back. Then she properly wrapped the head with banana leaves, put it in her basket and made for the village gate. However, on the way she was spotted by some villagers with her back stained by blood (she held the basket with Kadeo's head on her back). When she was inquired by the villagers, she escaped by saying that she was on her impure days (menstruation was regarded as impure in the olden days) and so they should not defile themselves by coming near her.

As she neared her own village, she sent words about her victory but no one believed or even came to the gate to welcome her. She carried the head to the middle of the village and when her fellow villagers saw the head for real, they could not believe their eyes nor believe in the story that they were now hearing from Kaponeo herself. The people were more

shocked at the unabashed boldness of this girl and from that day onwards, Kaponeo came to be known as Kaponeo, the promiscuous.

Analysis

The story narrated here is about a female protagonist who defies the law of the land and sets out to hunt the head of a feared warrior. She is successful in her venture but her unabashed ways earn her the title of being promiscuous. The story takes us to the interior of Khezha villages where the lives of the people are governed by strict laws and traditions. Khezha villages are built on ridges and spurs of mountains and strategically located to help them thwart off enemy attacks. The story also takes us to the old practice of head hunting.

Kapone-o's story reflects the attitude of people in a patriarchal society where a woman's role is defined and dictated by the society. In the Khezha patriarchal system, man is the head of all social institutions and while roles are assigned to both men and women, to shift roles is considered a taboo. Basically men dominate and women subserviate. Kaponeo is regarded with contempt because of her ways that is not in conformity with the village laws. In the story, Kaponeo is expected to follow her socially assigned role and keep to the four corners of her house. When she defies her assigned role, she earns the title "*milikrüo*" (being promiscuous) instead of being hailed as a warrior herself on beheading the most feared enemy. In the modern context, her action would be analysed as an action of liberation where she breaks down the walls set up by patriarchy and performs the role assigned to men in women's garb.

The ostracism of this adventurous and fearless woman is reflective of a traditional culture that is unaccepting of any deviation from what is socially accepted and imposed by

society. Assigning roles to man and woman in the old culture is believed to have stemmed from the need of men to be physically fit and fine in order to fight the enemy during the head hunting days and therefore women had to take care of most of the works at home. The restrictions on free movement of women in and around the village is also believed to have been imposed initially to keep them safe from raids and enemy attacks which were frequent in the olden days. These precautionary measures became taboos and later strong social sanctions. Another aspect of patriarchy can be reflected on from the next narration.

Narration 21: “Chichüe” (Extracted from Dr. D. Kapfo’s *Folktales of Kuzhami Nagas*)

Chichüe is the protagonist here and the story is about hers struggles as she takes care of her siblings and the home after the death of her mother and later her father. She would go to the field during the day, weave cloths for her younger brother and to run the house for which she had to first complete the arduous task of spinning yarn at night after a long day in the field, all the while taking care of her infant sister and the house. She had to do all the works by herself because her elder brothers were married and the custom of the day relieved young men from the responsibility of looking after the house. So Chichüe lived a life no better than that of a servant in her own house. But Chichüe never rebelled, never complained, never felt unfairly treated and silently struggled even more when she was made to marry an old man who had children from his previous marriages. She just continued working hard and finally died with a satisfied heart because her children treated her well in her old age. The moral of the story is supposed to be how hard work and perseverance is rewarded at the end for Chichüe was satisfied on her death bed but a close text reading of the story reflects a very disturbing aspect of patriarchy- the conscious and unconscious “mutual socialized acceptance

of patriarchy” by both women and men making them both “unwitting hosts of its effects co-collaborators in its action” (Bahlieda 27-30). In the story, Chichüe neither complains nor finds anything wrong with her subservient life because she is just playing the role assigned to her unlike the woman Kaponeo of the previous story. The two women based stories presented in this sub-section point to two different aspects of patriarchy- firstly, ostracism of women who dare to go against the roles assigned to them by the patriarchal society; and secondly, acceptance of the role assigned to women by women as a result of the process of cultural socialisation normalising male dominance and female subservience.

Coming to ecofeminism, Val Plumwood opines that the liberation of women is tied to “the liberation of all systems of oppression” (211). An important aspect of the story is the role assigned to women in a patriarchal society. Val Plumwood speaks of the domination of women as being not only central to the ecofeminist understanding of domination, but also being an illuminating model for many other kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both “feminized and naturalized” (211). Originally, ecofeminism was linked to the point of view that women and nature were morally connected for both of them identified with femininity or characteristic traits that were labelled as ‘feminine’. The accepted feminine aspects ranging from fertility, vulnerability to wildness were seen as a source of ‘ecological or social flourishing’ violently degraded in the patriarchal culture. Ecofeminists saw an intimate connection between women and nature because they were both providers of life, sustenance and creativity and were similarly important and valuable with their strengths similarly ‘suppressed. Controlled and violated’ by men. (Coumo 7)

However, the ecofeminist thought that links domination in patriarchy with that of nature may not be applied to the traditional Khezha culture in totality for as previously

analysed in chapter II, the attitude of the Khezhas towards nature was that of reverence as opposed to the ecofeminist perspective on the domination of nature and women, and yet, today the same society has come to exhibit all the destructive traits that their traditional society once prohibited. Though the traditional beliefs have survived the test of time to a great extent, the Khezha society today has moved far from the old ethics, precepts and principles of limits, and the new ethics is not just detrimental to the human society but also the non-human world. Taking into account the rampant and unrestrained exploitations of nature that is being carried out in the name of progress today and change of attitude from that of 'restraints' to that of 'take what you can' at the present time, it can only be concluded that ecofeminists are justified when they connect the domination of nature to that of the *Kaponeos* and *Chichües* of today.

A reading of the different folktales show one common thread: a diverse and symbiotic human and the natural world. These principles of diversity and symbiosis are highlights of deep ecology. Diversity "enhances the potentialities of survival" while symbiosis should be "interpreted in the sense of ability to coexist and cooperate in complex relationships..." (Naess121). Khezha folktales abound in stories that talk of communion between nature and man. This is a reflection of the Khezhas' culture where nature is looked with reverence and awe and tales like "The Spirited Stone", "Nose of a Lake" are examples of such. Deep ecology talks of the coexistence of the human and the natural world and the destruction of one is the destruction of the other. "The Spirited Stone" is based on such a belief. While all was good as long as Koza's men lived in harmony not just amongst themselves but also with nature, the destruction of the spirited stone led to the destruction of the village into smaller

sub-units and the dispersal of the people from the village to different parts of the land. There is also much to learn of Khezhas understanding of the ways of the animal kingdom in tales like “The Lizard and the Bird” and “Hen, Wildcat and Crab”. Humorous as they may be, they are still tales that have shaped the Khezhas’ understanding of why and how certain elements of the natural kingdom behave the way they do. In such tales, the natural world seems to run parallel to the human world. The projection of such tales also establishes the basic right of all beings to live for all living environment has equal right to life. Man is just part of the environment and beside the human habitation there is a world that is inhabited by both sentient and non sentient life forms. A study of these tales and legends and other such narratives will help in reviving the relationship that Khezhas once shared with the physical environment around them and stimulate a response to nature that is not based merely on intellectual reasoning.

The Khezhas’ attitude towards nature in the old culture was that of reverence, awe and respect. Nature was and to some degree is still mystical to this ethnic group and that is why we see the interface of their indigenous beliefs with their Christian faith even at the present time. Forest, stones and spirits are still subjects of awe and mysticism to this group of people. The chirpings of certain birds are still considered as omens and acts of appeasement to nature are still carried out though the mode of such appeasement acts has changed from pagan rituals to Christian prayers.

Emma Marsella is of the opinion that folk stories can be a channel for “environmental expression” for it is a “genre that is close to the universe” (529). A study of the Khezha folktales and legends substantiate this viewpoint as most of the stories accord intrinsic value

to nature, something that ecocritics endeavour to do. Ecological values and eco-ethics can be drawn from the stories as the folktales, with the exception of few, subvert the notion of human superiority over the non-human forms. There are some stories such as “The Tiger, Spirit and Man” that are anthropocentric in nature. The folktales which are reflections of the Khezha culture and attitude beautifully illustrate the place given to the non-human world in their daily lives. However, the traditional ethics as deduced from the different folktales stand in contradiction to the modern ethic that is exploitative and violent and has as its end material achievements. As such revisiting the traditional culture and restoring those values that calls for harmonious living with the non-human world may help in bringing some ecological equilibrium that is lost in the modern world and folk narratives can play a pivotal role in transmitting these ecologically sound ethics to the young generation through the art of storytelling.

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CHAPTER IV

IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS: AN ECO-ETHICAL EXEGESIS

4.1. Khezha Traditional Ethics and Environmental Ethics

The Khezha society is basically oral and all aspects of their lives are guided by values and principles passed down through generations. The old traditional society of this group was bounded by strict unwritten laws and codes of conduct and any conduct that was not in conformity with these laws and ethical codes were believed to invite the wrath and punishment from the Supreme Being and the spirits that resided in nature. And therefore, the Khezhas practiced what Wati Longchar term as a “culture of restraint” (18). It is worth noting that even in the absence of an organized governing body and written statutes, the Khezhas exhibited discipline and followed a strict socio-ethical lifestyle, something that is of rarity in the modern society. This was made possible by their strict observance and adherence of the unwritten ethical sanctions. All Khezha ethical values were governed by the three codes of conduct, *Metha*, *Menyie* and *Kenyü* translated as ‘fear’, ‘shame’ and ‘taboo’ and they were “the three traditional codes of conduct that bind both social and individual lives of the community” (Marhu 1). These three codes of conduct continue to influence the Khezhas to this day as people are still found to adhere to these sanctions especially the third code of conduct, that is, *Kenyü*. Traditional ethics in the words of Emma Marsella are ‘cultural elements’ that works as a value system, guidance, and guideline for them to live and these ethics regulate and pattern their behaviours and way of thinking (532). The Khezhas believed that *Metha*, *Menyie* and *Kenyü* were important to “maintain proper order and right relationship with the Supreme Being, spirits, nature and fellow human beings” (Marhu 31).

They brought “blessing, success, victory, joyful life, achievement, prosperity and long life etc to those who hold on to it... curse, failure, sorrowful life, poverty and short life etc to those who break these principles” (31). They also believed that the failure to observe one would lead to the failure to observe all.

Metha (Fear)

Metha is the fearful reverence of the Supreme Being and the fear of being punished and thus, obedience is the essence of *Metha*. In his book *From Naga Animism to Christianity*, Veprari Epao writes, “Fear is the basis of religion. Fear causes obedience to one another and to the Supreme Being. Fear also causes ultimate sincerity in devotion for remedy” (19). The primitive Khezhas had lived in constant fear of natural phenomenon, like earthquakes, eclipses, diseases, bad harvest, crop failures, and also fear of the unknown, all thought of to be the doings of spirits. They also believed that the natural calamities were a result of the Supreme Being’s displeasure over failure of the people to observe the ethical principles expected of them. In relation to land holdings, even though the village, clans and even individuals can claim ownership, the Khezhas believed that everything ultimately belonged to the Supreme Being and as such the people cannot use or misuse land for ulterior motives or against the community principles which will invite the wrath of the Supreme Being.

Menyie (Shame)

The second code of conduct *Menyie* means shame and it dominated the life of the Khezhas ensuring decorous conduct from all. Strict adherence to the ethical principles laid down for the community was because of the belief that “when the village is ethically strong

their community spirit is also strong and it protects them from injuries, calamities, famine, plague, and any other misfortunes” (Marhu 48). *Menyie* mostly had to do with intra-human relationships but the core of this code of conduct was the belief that when one abided by the traditional ethical laws, the Supreme Being and all the spiritual entities in nature were appeased which would lead to good harvest, no plagues, protection from natural calamities and protection from the unknown. The concept of shame covered all aspects of a Khezha’s daily life from character, behaviour, speech, to all forms of conduct and action. For instance, it was shameful for parents to steal, speak evil, be lazy, and disobey the village and if they fail to abide by the principles of shame, the people would disregard not just the parents but even their children. Similarly, for children, it is shameful if one does not know how to weave or make baskets, is lazy or speak shameful and harsh words, is quick to anger or reacts too soon. Further, it is shameful for a village to be poor, to have beggars, to be disorganised, to be disunited, it is shameful if a village has to administer the customary practice of oath taking for land disputes all the time, it is shameful to disregard one another and fail to help each other. *Menyie* related to the village priest includes exploiting others, hiding from difficult situations, failing to control his family, thinking highly of himself, being unfaithful or insincere in his words and deeds.

Kenyü (Taboo)

The final code of conduct, *Kenyü*, refers to forbidden activities and prohibited days and if the principle of *Kenyü* was/is violated, it is believe to incur the wrath of the Supreme Being or the spirits. “It works between human and Supreme Being, human and spirit, human and nature, human and human” (Marhu 50). Examples of few taboos that were ecologically

sensible are: it was *Kenyü* for a husband to kill any animal when the wife was pregnant; it was *Kenyü* to cut trees randomly without any purpose; setting traps for hunting purposes were not allowed during the breeding seasons; use of poisonous roots for fishing was not allowed during the spawning season; *Kenyü* period was also observed for those land areas that had been extensively used for agricultural purposes so that those areas can rejuvenate its fertility.

The three codes of conduct played a significant role in nature stewardship in the olden days because the Khezhas believed that the Supreme Being was the creator of all and thus nature should be revered and not exploited for commercial purposes. Most of the folk expressions of Khezhas are based on the ethical principles laid down and governed by these codes of conduct.

Environmental ethics is the requisite bedrock for sustainable use and regeneration of the planet. The environmental concerns today challenge us to include the well being of the natural world in all of our decisions for our own well being. However, environmental ethics goes beyond human sustainability concerns and is constructed on the ethical principles of respect, justice, and sustainable use of natural resources while looking at nature not just from the instrumental perspective but also as an entity with intrinsic values. Environmental ethics is built on both scientific and moral understandings and as such adherence to these ethics can bring about possible relief to the ecological crisis the world is in today. Ethical norms are standards against which our actions can be evaluated and the Khezha codes of conduct show this sub allied group of the Chakhesangs as ecologically sensible. Khezhas' relationship with external nature is structured through physical and cultural ties, and these ties have come to be

embedded in their social, economical, political, religious and cultural practices and beliefs. However, in the face of scientific and industrial boom that the world had witnessed in the last few centuries, the ecological tradition was replaced by mechanistic attitude and nature's value came to be evaluated on the basis of its utility. Environmental ethics seek to promote the concept of a global community that regard all forms of life, human or non-human and also the physical environment as equal parties in this global community. This eco-ethical principle of the modern age resounds with the old traditional principles and beliefs of the Khezha culture. The Khezhas as a tribal group and as highlanders have always been inextricably linked to nature in all aspects, so much so that, their daily routine and practices were charted out keeping in mind the balance that needs to be maintained for harmonious living with nature. The Khezhas also seemed acutely aware of the consequences of severing ties with the physical environment around them and thus, their traditional ethics forbade them from practicing anything in excess. The Khezhas seem to know that their physical, material and cultural well-being rested on the physical environment around them and therefore, they practiced the culture of restraint that sets the old culture apart from the new culture of rampant exploitation and destruction on nature in the name of progress. This culture of restraint strikes a chord with the environmental ethics propagated today.

4.2. Analysis of the idiomatic expressions of Khezhas in the ecoethical perspective

The Khezhas are very rich in their verbal culture or folk speech and various traditional kinds of expressive utterances as distinct from formal or standard speech. Folk utterances are an important element in any tribal society that makes up the lingual fabric of their culture. Prominent among them are the idiomatic expressions: phrases or expressions

with figurative meanings; proverbs or folk sayings, embodying wisdom in pithy phrases; riddles, enigmatic questions paired with deceptive answers; along with such other forms involving a special use of language. This folk speech plays a very important role in Khezha culture and is a reflection of the thought process and the principles by which the Khezhas live by. A great deal of the folk life of the Khezhas can be understood by a study of its folk speech. The folk speech of the Khezhas has a moral undertone and is usually meant to convey noble lessons or messages. While riddles are more popular with the young folks, proverbs and other verbal expressions with symbolical meanings are usually used by the old to teach, instruct or even admonish the young. At the present time, with the adulteration of the original language with modern terms and the resultant dialectal changes and also the passing away of the elders who are the original carriers of the different folk lingo, the old folk expressions and utterances are faced with the danger of becoming obsolete.

This chapter focuses on the folk expressions of the old Khezha culture which were pronounced in the form of prayers and incantations not in common uses anymore, proverbs and sayings, phrases and idioms, and the like that bear ecological significance. Christianity has penetrated all the Khezha villages and the old indigenous religion practiced by this ethnic group has lost its significance rendering the expressions insignificant as well except in the case of those few persons who chose to keep the old beliefs alive and remained unaffected by modernity and the new religion. The old folk expressions are also faced with another threat, that of vanishing. Because of the oral nature of Khezha culture and tradition, most of them have already disappeared and only some remnants of these expressions remain, still used by those few persons who have held on to the old religion and beliefs to this day. These folk expressions are part of the Khezha culture and history and unless they are preserved as verbal

relics, a significant part of history will be lost. Bearing this need in mind, the chapter has been devoted mostly to analysis of folk expressions of the past. Also, the idiomatic expressions taken for study in this chapter are those that exhibit Khezhas' affinity with nature. The natural world was an enigma for this indigenous group of people and they did not try to unravel this mystery. Rather, their curiosity and fear for the mysterious and the unknown gave shape to the feelings of awe and reverence for nature and all that belonged to the natural world. Their spirituality also found manifestation in nature and therefore, until modernity started invading the Khezha culture and Christianity was introduced, their lives centred on appeasing and propitiating the spirits believed to reside in nature.

The old Khezha culture was one of rituals, beliefs and gennas. Every activity, from agriculture to hunting, from spiritual to social and all other aspects of the Khezhas' daily life was preceded and also followed by prayers and worships that involved the recitation of certain expressions. The Khezha people's affiliation with Nature can be seen in the expressions that preceded or followed a lot of their social, cultural as well as personal activities involving their natural surroundings. Nature was revered and therefore the different elements of nature were also held in sacredness. The Khezhas shared a common belief with the rest of the Naga tribes that nature and its different elements were abodes to spirits and a peaceful living was possible only if these spirits were kept in appeasement. From this belief sprung an abundance of rituals and even gennas that dominated their folk life. These rituals included expressions that were uttered in salutation, reverence, request, fear, and even seeking approval of nature before certain activities were carried out like cutting of trees or hunting animals.

For the Khezha ancestors the act of worship and paying obeisance to the spirits, seeking their blessing and protection before the onset of any activity or work was an important part of their everyday lives. Before they begin with their day's work, they sought the favour of the Supreme Being by offering prayer in the following manner:

*Röpfü Rözöh, Ehtsüh nü a pfü, Kadzü nü a zö h, awe lo to mepumelö so mepumelö
mehtsüleh, mhetho thsü ketsünhie thsünühzerekeh kenü, mhethoro thsü metröthuh
mehtsüleh”(Kapfo 9)*

(Supreme god, Sky is my father and Earth is my mother; let whatever I eat and drink be sufficient and filling for me and all who consume it; when I work, let no sickness or injury befall me and let my works be fruitful.)

Röpfü and *Rözöh* are the masculine and feminine references to the Supreme Being. With this prayer the different Khezha households would begin their day's work. This prayer is an acknowledgement of their belief in the Supreme Being and also of their reverence of nature. The ecological significance of this prayer is the honour and the importance accorded to the sky and earth by addressing them as father and mother. The father and mother in any Khezha household exert authority and responsibility. By addressing the sky and the earth as father and mother the Khezhas accord authority to them. A father and mother provide for, protect and nurture their family so also the sky and the earth provide for, protect and nurture the human species. The Khezhas from the ancestral days seemed to be aware of this role that the sky and the earth play and therefore sought their blessings before they start with their day.

The expression *Ehtsüh nü a pfü, Kadzü nü a zöh* (sky is my father and earth is my mother) is an assertion of their belief in the familial bond humans share with their cosmos. Also the phrase, as expression of Khezhas' belief, points toward the credence that the sky and the earth are superior to humans and thus to be revered. This familial reference to the sky and earth as father and mother reflects the spirit of respect and oneness with nature that the people maintained in the days gone by. The practice of addressing the sky as father and earth as the mother was common to all the Khezha villages in the olden days. The prayer that follows the phrase is a submission to the power of the Supreme Being and a supplication to this Supreme Being for sustenance, sound health and productivity. Nature was not just a physical presence to the Khezhas but a living entity that could either sustain them or create havoc in their lives if angered. The natural physical world was indispensable to the well being of this tribal community and they sought to live in harmony with it.

There is another dimension through which the Nagas' attitude towards the sky and the earth in general and the Khezhas' in particular can be analyzed. As Razouselie Lasetso puts it in the book *Tribal Ecology*, "the health of either (earth or sky) was considered of paramount importance for life's sustenance.... If this mother earth is harmed through deforestation the sky will be injured. And if the sky does not provide rainfall and sunshine the mother earth will be injured. Therefore, keeping both the mother earth and the male sky healthy was a beautiful tribal cosmology" (2).

This beautiful worldview of the Nagas is in line with the ecoethical viewpoint that if one element of the environment is harmed, the rest of the ecosystem is also affected. When mother earth is injured, the well being of both human and non human beings is also injured.

Environmental sustainability is important to sustain all forms of life on earth and prayer like the above establishes the assertion that the Khezhas from the old tradition were environmentally sensible.

A similar salutary expression was used by the *Mowo* at the beginning of hunting season when genna had to be observed before community hunting was carried out. He would stand on a *chinisabe* (raised platform made for the purpose of declaring gennas) and in a prolonging voice speak the following lines,

Woooo..... chi ni pfü loo

O Heaven is father

Kajüni zu loo

Earth is mother

*Woooo.....thija kürapulhouminy de loo, mvükhomvüra mvüchümode loo, tata
pfopfümode loo*

Tomorrow will be observed as *kürapulhouminy*

No one will be allowed to do heavy work, field work or carry heavy-load. (Lucy and Kevekha Zehol 70)

Yet another expression where reference is made to the sky and the earth as father and mother goes is the following blessing-

Romitsho, chi ni pfü loo-o

Spirits, sky is my father

Kadzü ni zu loo-o

Earth is my mother

Mi pe hoi pe, mi che-e chi kunyüluo

Move ahead even when others cannot, live even when others die

Wooh lechu lepu tshü-e kilielie-o khrohichi-o

Unitedly help one another (Lucy and Kevekha Zehol 73)

This expression was pronounced by an elder during wedding ceremonies. The repetition or continued use of the phrase, sky/heaven is my father and earth is my mother before the onset of activities points to the honour the Khezhas accorded to nature. The expression is an example of the awareness that the Khezhas carried about the role the ecosystem around them played in their wellbeing.

The aforementioned expressions are but examples of the many expressions that abound the Khezha culture and speaks volume not just of Khezhas' affinity with nature but also of the eco-ethical practices and tradition of this group of people. More of such utterances and expressions have been discussed in this chapter.

Efü nü nethomi kesü kephumaro le kethsükenü kebehro med öh pfü tedah

The rooster has taken away all the sins and sicknesses of the village (Kapfo 13)

The above expression was uttered during the rooster release ritual which was done at the beginning of a new month in order to keep the village pure of sins and free of diseases. Before the sun set, an old man and a well built man were selected from amongst the villagers and sent out of the village with a traditional spear and a rooster. A little distant away from the village they would release the rooster towards the jungle as they prayed to the spirits

uttering the above mentioned expression. But before the rooster was released, the other villagers had to return to the village from their fields so that the ill the rooster is to take with it would not return through those villagers. Once the ritual was completed, they would make their way back to the village. After entering the village, the gates would be fenced with bamboos. This fencing was done to show that no evil spirits had followed them back to the village. None from the village were allowed to go out of the village for the evening after the ritual was carried out. A similar act was performed whenever any member of a family would fall sick. It was believed that the sickness was brought by *romi* or spirit and therefore to appease the spirit, the father would carry a *fütsü* (chicken) to the nearby jungle and release it there, then return without speaking to anyone on the way. In the meantime none of his family members can outside. On reaching his home, he would break his silence by calling out the sick member's name and say,

Ni ropfe ke-o wotsa ta du

Your spirit has reached home

The release of the rooster/chicken was significant to the Khezhas as it meant releasing the village from sins and sicknesses. As such even a rooster held importance in Khezha tradition. The significance lies not in the act but in the simple belief of the people that a rooster can carry away the evils of the village or sicknesses that comes to individuals. The Khezhas were sensitive to the strong aura of nature around them and their belief in the divinity of nature is what helped in developing an attitude of awe and veneration of nature among them.

The Khezhas were a superstitious group and they believed in the existence of spirits all around them. To anger the spirits would mean bringing upon themselves the wrath of the spirits and therefore to appease them, the Khezhas performed worships and rituals at regular interval.

The Khezha society was primarily agrarian in the past. They also practiced hunting for food. However theirs was not mindless rampant hunting. First of all, the villagers were bound by certain regulations pertaining hunting. The three codes of conduct *Metha*, *Menyie* and *Kenyü* (fear, shame and taboo) dominated all aspects of their lives and thus, all of their actions were guided by these unwritten sanctions, including hunting. The taboos attached to killing certain birds and animals also restricted them from heedless killings. Community hunting was practiced and random hunting was prohibited. On appointed days, after proper rituals have been carried out was hunting allowed. One significant aspect of the rituals was the prayer pronounced before the hunting began. The prayer spoken was thus-

*Ehthsü thsü kechio, rocü thsü kechio, ehthsü eroh nechü kece le pheba kese kele mecyi pfoh
awe kechü mehtsühileh. Nienü kewe ketha kadiero nü khayemo, ne nonü lonibe kemoro
lethre khah kebehby (Kapfo 12)*

Creator of animals, creator of birds, may you give me animals that are blind in the eyes and bad in the limbs. I do not ask for the healthy and big but only those animals that you don't want for yourself, I ask you to give me.

This prayer is an apt example of the eco-ethical attitude of the Khezhas who lived on resources from the forest. Hunting was essential for food in the olden days but they practiced

restraint unlike the present scenario where nature with its fauna is being rampantly exploited and destroyed for pleasure and greed. The Khezhas were believers in spirits and the Supreme Being and to displease them in any way was frightful to them. To disturb nature in which the spirits reside and kill the creations of the Supreme Being would be inviting the wrath of the creator and so the above prayer was pronounced. When they hunted animals for food they did not look for the healthy and the big, instead they looked for animals that the creator would reject. Another point of significance is that the Khezhas never took more than what was needed. They practiced frugality in hunting. When the requirement was met, the hunting was suspended until the time the need arose again. It was also a taboo to hunt animals during the breeding season or to kill a gestating animal. This restraint hunting speaks volume of the disciplined and sensible attitude the Khezhas carried in the days gone by. Though there were no defined concept of conservation and preservation, the practices and way of life of Khezhas indicated a deep sense of knowledge and respect for nature and all that resided in it. Also, the desire to kill only those that are already damaged and may not survive the harsh jungle life for long shows their good sense of guardianship. The Khezha worldview in this context seems highly conservationist. Random cutting of trees were also prohibited and this ethic has survived to the present day. Individuals cannot cut trees at their whim and fancy in those lands marked as ancestral territory. Each clan in the different Khezha villages has its ancestral plots and forested areas. Cutting of trees in such areas has to be done with the consent and knowledge of the other clan members. People found felling trees or collecting wood from an ancestral land not their own are penalized. This prevents the random cutting of trees. Usually, a day is fixed and a combined effort is put and the woods/timber collected equally distributed. The trees are cut a few feet above the ground so that the stump can

regenerate into a new tree. Trees are felled usually in the winter season when the leaves have been shed and the woods are dry so that with nature leafing out the following spring season with the first rain, the trees would also regenerate. As Obed Marhu says, in the Chakhesang culture “human cannot cut a tree without reciprocity of supplementing its loss” (24).

However, it is also to be noted that regeneration is not guaranteed and in the present context, with the growing population and the ever increasing demand, the forest cover is declining at an alarming rate. And jhum cultivation practised in some Khezha villages which involve slashing and burning of forest is also a cause of worry now. With the passage of time and with tradition slowly losing its grip on the ever evolving population, practice like community hunting has lost its significance, individualism has taken over communal thought and the ethics of the past have been replaced by a new ethic that is both narcissistic and mechanical.

A folk utterance that shows how random and senseless cutting of trees were not practiced in the olden days is produced below:

Ajolo koto karachü tsü de chiemo, moi zonimo moi mhe küsü mvüsü ni chümo, nishi yeni chibo hinihi ni mhe kevie jolo chüdoa, sü jolo zomizhe ni mhe küsü pfüme aphe wode sedie

(Kovechü-o)

Not for my lavish use, neither because of hatred nor bad intentions, but I am going to cut this tree for noble use and so please do not inflict harm or misfortune upon me

Though this prayer is directed towards the spirits that resided on the trees according to Khezhaz’ belief, the expression also points toward the ethical practice of not cutting trees for random use. Only when the need arose would they cut trees. The Khezhaz in this sense

appears to have been conscientious people who avoided excessive exploitation of resources that the forest provided. Their actions were driven by their needs and even when they had to exploit nature by cutting trees, excess was avoided. The Khezhas attached spirituality to all forms and forces of nature and therefore trees were also sacred to them. Before cutting trees which was necessitated by their needs, they would offer their humble prayers seeking mercy and requesting the tree spirits to be kind to them and not bring any harm or misfortune upon them for their actions are driven by noble intentions.

A prayer of gratitude and appreciation to the tree similar to the aforementioned prayer is provided below-

Mini nyüve chie soni be

As people praising you

Mhetho kivie tsüde chiede jolo, nyüveü tsümo süita

For a good purpose, I need you

Süjolo, nyüve lupfü lukro tango de sede

Therefore, never show your anger

Hye chibo zokevie bo, hichipa mechi hidzülo tsümvüvie le pede.

Oh beautiful tree, spring up better than this next time. (Marhu 57)

According to the Khezha tradition, trees ought never to be cut without offering a prayer first or performing a ritual. It is also *Kenyü* (taboo) to cut trees randomly without a justifiable purpose. And before the tree is cut, ritual performance has to be carried out for divine approval. Respect has to be paid to the trees for they are creations of the Supreme

Being and also because trees are believed to possess spirits. If the appeasement ritual is not carried out then the people would face the wrath of the spirits and the Supreme Being in the form of sicknesses, diseases, unnatural deaths and so on. The concept of *Metha* (fear of the Supreme Being) also comes into play in this case because the Khezhas fear the Supreme Being and any damage caused or the commercialization of the Supreme Being's creations would invite his wrath. And that is why, trees were not randomly chopped, days were assigned for cutting of trees and only as much as was needed was allowed to be taken. When trees were to be felled, prayers were offered to show their gratitude and appreciation to the tree and to the Supreme Being.

In the old Khezha culture blessings were pronounced for every activity before and after the establishment of a new village. While a new land was being assessed for settlement, a prayer was pronounced few lines of which have been given below:

Kadzü chükechio, koso kebe mapou

The maker of the Land, the host

Khrü le tenyi kebetha

As long as the moon and the sun exist

Kadzü kevie hinohi khepfo akoe tsüde

May this good land be given to us (Kovechü-o)

The pronouncement of the prayer was followed by the act of giving some portions of the food and drinks that the group had carried with them to the spirits by dropping some portion of the food (rice and meat) on the ground. The act was significant for it was meant

for the spirits that were believed to reside in the land. Khezhas have always accorded great importance to land for to the Khezhas land is their identity, a mark of their status and the very medium of justice when disputes between two parties had reached an impasse (oath taking was the ultimate practice that was resorted to in case of a deadlock in any disputes and for disputes related to land, the contending parties had to swallow a mouthful of soil from the disputed land area and swear on their life and the lives of their family that their claims were true). Therefore, taboos were attached to the land. A person could not act according to his individual will when it comes to selling ancestral plots of land, or for any other purpose. The extracted prayer provided above was offered to the Supreme Being.

After the establishment of a new village the chief priest pronounced the prayer of blessings the extract of which has been presented below:

Chi le kadzū, auo pfū le zoh

The heaven and the earth, our father and mother

Noni kheketsü tikhe aneitho belode

May your manifold blessings be upon this village

Noni auolo ko küpfhelode, khunuocü pfüme wo auolo ko chümesü deshiede

May you protect our field and may no pest attack our fields

Noni ntikhe khepfō auo keko chide, auo khunu mürüno ko lhoupfo kuphrü kele

cüchide

May you bless our households and the domestic animals increase numerously and

bountifully

Küchu künyü pfüme khunu phe wode sede

May no epidemic come upon the domestic animals

Khunu müürüno kele toe rapa khunu pfüme dekhu dese de

May no domestic animals be killed by the wild animals (Kovechü-o)

The next expression is a blessing pronounced by the oldest male in the village before any physical activity outside the village was carried out:

He-i! Chi le kadzū, auo pfü le auo zoh

Oh! The heaven and the earth, the father and mother of us

Ano khromi, Chi le kadzū koko

My sons, the power of the heaven and the earth

*Chi takro ve kova le kadzū koko küle pfüme no metho mepu tekhüchi mho pato neiphe
belo de*

The light of heaven and mighty strength of the earth be with you in all your ventures

No depolou dibi metho chüdo ka, no va zokemümi dizhie küchü douka

In all your participation, in all your encounters with your enemies

No mhekele poe nephe neba müshü de se de

May nothing be stumbling to your feet or arms

No zokemümi münü soni, kokolo zakra moe kokolo zashi pfü ke lewode

May you defeat your enemy and return home with the victor's trophy or news

(Kovechü-o)

The continued reference to sky and earth as father and mother in all the traditional prayers of the Khezhas shows just how connected they were with their cosmos. Any activity

was preceded by a show of respect by the people. The Khezhas looked upon themselves as neither superior nor better than the physical world but always ascribed intrinsic value to all forms of nature.

The next folk expression is also related to the ethic of *Metha*. In case of disputes related to land ownership, the *Mowo* (head priest) would administer *Tashü koto* (oath-taking) act of the contending parties. Both the disputing parties would take a small portion of the mud and swallow it and declare in front of the people present,

Mhe kelie puolo yieni kiki tale, yie mhe chüdie, mochi sü kichi aphe wodie

If I am guilty, either I will be struck with sickness or death will come to me

(Kovechü-o)

Such oath-taking was resorted to only in the situation of an impasse and when no other solution was possible but for the guilty to pay with his life. The belief is that the guilty will either fall sick or die for the Supreme Being uses all forms of nature to either reward the deserving or punish the guilty while the earth itself has a spiritual essence. People in the olden days were honest and observed all social sanctions with sincerity and truth more so because of their strict adherence to *Metha*, *Menyie*, and *Kenyü* therefore, there was no room for false oaths. *Tashü koto* was the ultimate judgement to any case that cannot be solved otherwise. *Tashü koto* was avoided until deemed extremely necessary for it meant misfortune, sickness, or even death of the guilty. In some villages, the oath was taken over the life of the most loved son in the family. Therefore, *Tashü koto* was a very serious act that was feared by all and the gravity of a conflict could be ascertained if such an act was to be

carried out. The Khezhas held to this belief solemnly and earnestly and it is worth mentioning that to this day *Tashü koto* is still in practice in villages and is administered with the greatest degree of solemnity. The given expression is uttered each time the action is executed.

The next expression is an example of the respect the Khezhas have for mother earth and the importance accorded to it. As the Supreme Being's paramount creation, the earth is at the apex of all creations and an acknowledgement of this fact will keep one grounded and humble.

Kadzü nü ba merida, tsüchyzü a nö nü ba mecyi mhekelei modah

The earth will wear it first, and then it will be alright for my child to wear it (Kapfo 25)

The above expression is about dedicating to Mother Earth *erah* (shawl) that has been newly woven by a Khezha mother for her child. In the olden days, *ezöhmiro*, that is, mothers would weave shawls for their infants but before they could be placed on the infants, a ritual of dedication to Mother Earth was carried out. The woven shawl was placed on the floor to signify that the shawl has been worn by earth first and the above expression was pronounced as the act was carried out. The Khezhas believed that by doing so the earth is being honoured and this act would ensure that the child grows up to be humble like the earth and unlike the human world where there is so much pride. This act also demonstrated that everything belongs to mother earth and thus she should come first. This point of view that earth should come first is shared by eco-activists of the modern-day who advocate placing earth first if not on the same pedestal as humans. This perception also debunks the anthropocentric view that

human beings are the central and most important entities in the world. 'Earth First!' is the name of an American environmental advocacy group that was formed in the year 1980 as a result of growing anger at the failure of the government to protect and preserve wilderness. Though this group employs a direct action attitude and is quite radical in its approach, the core belief of this group that the earth should come first resonates with the belief of the people in the old Khezha culture. The Earth First! Group calls for the defence of mother earth and anticipates "the demise of industrialized civilization", which is one of the root causes of men losing connection with Mother Earth (Abbey 22)..

The Khezhas had their unique ways of paying obeisance to those forces where they believed the spirits resided. These obeisances were in the form of sacrifices and prayers. Random prayers were also not pronounced. They had specific expressions and utterances for specific situations and rituals. Whether in words or in deeds, the Khezha ancestors lived in humility in the fear that they would anger the Supreme Being and spirits and lose their blessings. They observed gennas for every important activity, task, or work and the concept of *Kenyü* played a dominant role in the daily lives of the Khezhas. *Kenyü* can be roughly translated as meaning taboo or a forbidden activity/act, something which is against social or behavioural approval. The observance of *Kenyü* was accompanied by prayers as well as expressions of submission and reverence to the spirits that they believed resided in all forces and elements of nature. The Khezhas' reverence for nature can be analyzed from an eco-ethical perspective for it is this reverence that prompted the Khezhas to be conscious of their actions as they carried out activities that required the use of natural resources available to them. This included taboo on random and excess cutting of trees, taboo on killing animals

during the breeding season, killing of gestating animals, cutting trees from groves believed to be sacred, and even when hunting was allowed, it had to be done following a proper protocol like the pronouncement of prayers as discussed in the preceding pages and only as a community avoiding excess and hunting for pleasure.

The following curse was also pronounced when a Khezha had defied a taboo through his disobedience.

Ekhi nyi iwe tsü, eri nyi iwe yie

Let a tiger eat you, let a warrior kill you (Neikhwe Tsuhah)

This expression was uttered when someone was disobedient. Taboos or Kenyü were strictly observed and disobedience called for penance or act of appeasement to the spirits that could have been offended. It is to be mentioned that Khezhas were petrified of defying the spirits by being disobedient and the curses that could befall upon them and so a simple expression was received with much fear.

It is observed that Khezhas of the past exhibited environmental sensibility more than the modern man of today. The folk expressions discussed in this chapter are a testament to the Khezha ethics that resonate with the eco-ethical views of the present time in terms of the intrinsic value they both place on nature and the sensibility towards the environment that both the ethics create. In the case of Khezhas, this sensibility has been forged by their strict adherence to the codes of conduct discussed in the first part of the chapter. Even in the absence of a defined concept of conservation, their practices and their very way of living show what Marhu calls “the ethics of conservation” (36). The primeval Khezhas’ knowledge

about environmental degradation cannot be ascertained but the local wisdom of these people in practising restraint even as they utilized the natural resources available to them and their strict adherence to traditional ethics that were ecocentric in nature is worth taking note of. Ecological values based on such local wisdom and ethics can help in maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

It has been an age-old practice of the Khezhas to use nature metaphors and imageries while imparting folk lessons to the youngsters. The following proverb is an example of one such folk saying meant to convey the moral lesson that more than the external beauty, the inner values are what make a person likable.

Pfusochie ni zo sü ni tove, Kovachie ni zove ni tosü.

Pfusochie are ugly but delicious, bitter cherries are beautiful but bitter to the mouth (Kemvü Koza)

The local variety of bayberries (*Pfusochie*) is ugly to look at but good to eat while bitter berries (*Kovachie*) are beautiful to look at but bitter in taste. The proverb here means to say that one may not be good to look at but if she has a good heart then she will be liked by all, while a beautiful person with a bitter mouth and heart can only leave a sour taste in our lives. The fruits in the proverb have been used as metaphors for humans, more specifically for women and through this proverb, the elders in the olden days would try to impress upon the young ones lessons on vanity that can grow when one puts excessive importance on outward appearance. Another folk saying is provided below:

Chü pfümvü kriö se mvükra toü me, wo yie delo mvü se mhie ne toy

Poverty awaits those who hunt for meat daily; prosperity is for the ones who live on vegetables from the forest (Kemvü Koza)

The proverb means to say that those who only seek luxurious life will soon bring themselves to ruin while the ones living the simple life would prosper with time. Meat in the proverb represents the luxuries of life and an insatiable thirst for extravagance can only lead man to his downfall. The old folks would often admonish or impart knowledge and life lessons to the younger ones through proverbs and sayings. The two proverbs are also examples of how Khezhas identified themselves with their physical world.

Some common riddles popular in Khezha villages are presented below. These riddles have been extracted from *Aspects of Chakhesang Folklore, a Critical Study* by Aneile Puro.

1. What wears green shawl when young and red shawl when old?

Tsütshe (chilli)

Tender chilli is green in colour but turns red on maturing.

2. What never passes stool even after food?

Dzü Hapu (bamboo water holder)

Water is filled from the mouth and poured out from the mouth in a bamboo water holder

3. What gives birth from the head-top?

Ngathse (banana)

Since bananas come out from the top of its plant so it is said to give birth from the head-top.

4. What gives birth from the arm-pit?

Krita (Maize)

Maize sprouts out in the nodes of its plant and hence, given birth from the arm-pit.

5. What is the strongest?

Thacho (ants)

Ants are said to be able to lift loads heavier than seven times its weight

6. What pierces you like spear when it is young and cut you like dao when it has matured?

Lezhi (straw plant)

It pricks you when young plant is sprouting but cuts you with sharp edges of its slender long leaves when old.

7. What wears trousers when young but go naked when old?

Kavü (bamboo)

The covers of bamboo fall off when it matures.

8. What gives birth from the arm-pit?

Krita (Maize)

Maize sprouts out in the nodes of its plant and hence, given birth from the arm-pit.

9. What has five eyes?

Kulutshe (wild slippery fruit like berry)

The top of this wild fruit has five marks which are referred to as its eyes.

10. What encircles the village?

Tekro (a thorny vine)

In the olden times this thorny creeper grew around the villages and they act as protective barriers (217-221)

The sayings and riddles are simple examples of the deep knowledge that the tribal communities have of their natural surroundings and how this knowledge has come to be incorporated into their teachings or in their day-to-day life. The Khezhas were intimately connected to their land and the natural world around them and this close affinity with nature groomed their sensibility which was further reinforced by their cultural and religious beliefs. This sensibility could also be seen in their various folk expressions. Such practices are examples of a sensibility that views man and nature as inextricably linked and regards humans as part of a community of beings that includes other living creatures and the physical environment as well. Their cultural as well as religious beliefs are results of their relationship with their physical surroundings. And these beliefs have regulated their behaviour and attitude towards other members of their community of beings. The few proverbs and riddles provided in this chapter are examples of this and also of the knowledge the Khezhas carried of the plant and animal kingdom that contributed to the development of eco sensibility amongst the community. However, over the decades, folk expressions had seen a decline in their usage, and “with modernization, state-formation, and Christianization, the tribal people are themselves far removed from their erstwhile sensibilities” (Jamieson 97).

Barry commoner’s first law of Ecology states, “Everything is connected to everything else” (41) and this statement stands true as environment, culture, man, and all other institutions are intertwined and the degradation of one results in the degradation of the

others. Culture is dynamic and as Carolyn Merchant says in her introduction of *Key Concepts in Critical Theory-Ecology*, culture “is developing in an open-ended transforming process” (2). In such a state of flux, the revival of traditional ethics and local wisdom to bring about a certain degree of cultural stability and aid the efforts for environmental amelioration is a possibility that should not be undermined. Environmental ethics is about environmental protection and environmental protection “is a matter of moral and cultural ethics”, says Banshaikupar L. Mawlong (4). Developing proper environmental ethics is important more than ever now because of the magnitude of the environmental crisis the world is in today and since nature and culture are interconnected embodiments that affect each other, restoration of traditional cultural ethics can play significant roles in bringing about some balance and equilibrium in this hour of global crisis.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The present research work is an attempt to study the folk narratives of Khezhas from the ecological perspective employing different theoretical approaches and to explore the sensibility of Khezhas towards nature and the environment through its narratives. The study delves into the traditional ethics as reflected in the folk narratives and explores the possibility of drawing ecological connections as well as values from it. The traditional ethics in study here are those unwritten social dictums and sanctions that governed the behaviour of this indigenous community and have gone to shape the consciousness of the people. The thesis is an attempt to study this consciousness of the people through its folk narratives and the ecological values that can be subsequently drawn from it. The correlation between Khezha traditional ethics and environmental ethics has also been explored. The study also takes into purview those facets of the Khezha society that are detrimental to the physical world. The thesis is in five chapters.

The first chapter introduces the Khezhas, a sub-allied group of the Chakhesang Nagas. Eight Khezha villages that form the Khezha/Kuzha Tephe recognised by Chakhesang Public Organisation (apex body of the Chakhesang community) have been taken into purview for the present study. The villages are- Khezhakeno, Lishemi, Lasumi, Lewoza, Zapami, Kami, Lekromi and Pfutseromi village. A brief note has been provided for the eight Khezha villages. The affinity of the Khezhas and their close association with nature has been

highlighted. The Khezha tradition, like that of other indigenous groups, is oral and the orality of this culture has been briefly highlighted with emphasis on storytelling, folksongs, and folk utterances. The Khezhas are hill people and dependent on the natural resources and forest products available to them for their sustenance. The spiritual beliefs of the Khezhas also found manifestation in nature in the form of spirits, sacred rivers, sacred grooves, spirited stones, and so on. The Khezha-nature interaction is multi-faceted and this multi-faceted relationship has been discussed in the chapter. The work is devoted to the eco-critical study of traditional narratives and as such the ecological significance of the Khezha folk narratives has been briefly explored and highlighted in this chapter. A general overview of Ecocriticism and the different approaches of ecocriticism such as green politics, deep ecology, eco-spirituality, eco-feminism, and eco-ethics have been provided. The thesis attempts to explore if Khezha folk narratives can be read as eco-text and what values and local wisdom can be drawn from the traditional narratives that can contribute to the efforts for environmental conservation.

Chapter II focuses on the green political study of Khezha folk songs. Singing is a very important aspect of the Khezha culture. Folk songs were sung during different occasions, festivities, activities, and tasks. So the Khezhas have songs for the different festivals, for the different agricultural cycles, for sports, for merry-making, for warriors, for women, lullabies for children, songs for lovers, songs of mourning, songs for youth, songs for old age and so on. The data of study for chapter II have been collected from the folk group belonging to Lishemi village named *Kerimi Lühzotro*, also extracted from *Aspects of Chakhesang Folklore, a Critical Study* by Aneile Puro. The folk songs have been categorized and studied

under three dimensions of green politics: Economic, Spiritual, and Feminist dimension.

Economic growth, technological advancements, material prosperity, and the establishment of big industries have come at the expense of our environment and the world is in a crisis at present. The greens talk of radical alternatives as the need of the hour to save the planet earth. Greens stress on the threat of diminishing resources that will make economic growth unsustainable. The Greens' notion of 'limits' is based on the fact that infinite economic growth is not possible on a planet with finite resources. In the backdrop of globalization and the consequent environmental crisis, a study of Khezha folk songs show that certain ecological values can be drawn from Khezha culture. The songs *Tuphakezüyi* and *Thebvo Ketshü Lü* are examples of small-scale household-based industries of the Khezhas. Yarns are self-produced drawing materials from their natural surroundings. The greens propagate going traditional again and returning to small-scale industries to stop the environmental crisis from worsening. However, this traditional skill and labour of producing yarn are becoming uncommon due to the impact of modernity in the Khezha villages and if such skills are not kept up, they will soon become a lost art. The songs *Tsükhenye Lüh* and *Rünye Lüh* show the interdependence of man and nature and the agricultural activities carried out according to the changing seasons. The two songs are examples of the organic community that this ethnic group is where work, leisure, festivities, religion, and rituals become a part of each other. More specifically, the songs show the respect and dependence of Khezhas on nature for survival and sustenance. The Khezha culture revolves around nature as is evident from a study of its folk songs. Folk science and local wisdom of the Khezhas can also be ascertained from the songs. The link between the cultural and material well-being of the Khezhas and

their natural environment is evident from the songs. Greens' core philosophy stresses on ecocentrism and similar core values can also be traced in Khezha culture through the songs.

The next set of songs titled *Kerimi Lühzotro* and *Zöh Kesökehmo* have been analysed under the spiritual dimension of green politics and the songs are evidence of how Khezha spirituality has been manifested in their deference of the different forces and elements of nature. The indigenous religion practised by the Khezhas was centred on their reverence and fear of nature even though they believed in the Supreme Being. The song *Kerimi Lühzotro* takes delight in the abundance of the spring season while also taking humble note of the fact that human life is fleeting as against the permanence of nature. The sensibility displayed by the Khezhas towards the non-human creations of the Supreme Being has its root in the reverence and respect the Khezhas have for nature. Greens call for a convergence of spiritual growth and political responsibility to make an impact on environmental sustainability. Under the next sub-heading, the songs *Nicühmi Ube Uzü Chemo*, *Kemhösu Kadzu Rü*, and *Enu yimi kenyi-i yizo* dwell on a different aspect of green politics, that is, the feminist dimension and links the domination of nature with that of women. Environmental ethics must encompass ecojustice in its domain and focus on the liberation of all that is dominated. However, the ecofeminist perspective of aligning the domination of women and nature to a common source is found to be lacking ground in the Khezha society so far as the old culture is concerned for this indigenous group in the olden days practised what has been called a 'culture of restraint'. But the same culture has undergone a drastic change in its attitude and action and today what we have is a society that is equally guilty of exploiting nature beyond the limits and contributing to the ecological imbalance the world is faced with. And as such,

the view propounded by ecofeminists that sees the domination of women and the domination of nature in the same light does not seem far-fetched anymore.

The overall study of songs in the green political perspective show stewardship attitude of the Khezhas and green politics as a part of their culture and policies can help in bringing about positive change. The greens advocate what can be phrased as thinking globally and acting locally. Living so close to nature the people of the old culture have deeper knowledge and understanding of the importance of living an ecologically balanced life for their own well-being and restoration of such understanding and value can help in redeeming the present situation and thereby building a sustainable future. If policymakers look into various mechanisms of promoting local knowledge, and values, then some degree of ecological balance can be brought about for there is so much ecological wisdom and knowledge to be derived from a tradition that was deeply rooted in nature. The modern economy is centred on growth and technology and while most of the tribal communities are moving in the direction of globalisation and modernisation, the traditional ethic of collectivism, reverence, and limits are on the verge of disappearing, and therefore, the need to formulate such policies and systems that would ensure the survival and rejuvenation of these traditional cultures is felt at the present time more than ever.

Chapter III attempts an ecocritical analysis of Khezha Chakhesang folktales and legends. The folktales have been grouped under different subheadings and the theoretical approaches of deep ecology, spiritual ecology, and feminist ecology have been employed. The folktales have been categorized into four and attempts have been made to explore if Khezha folktales can be read as eco-text or eco-literature. The findings are varied with some tales showing the anthropocentric strain that deep-ecologists endeavour to eradicate while

some tales show the intrinsic value Khezhas attached to nature and the culture of conservation that they practiced. The first category of tales presents the symbiosis of man and nature. Six folk stories have been analysed in this category. The legend and the tales, “The Spirited Stone”, “Friendship between Risamo and the Tiger”, “The Killing of a Pregnant Doe” and the legendary story of two brothers “Mvüsupra and Mvüsütso” are stories that establish the linkage between man and nature. The first story shows nature as a provider and supplier of all essential needs. The destruction of the spirited stone which signifies the destruction of nature, the provider, is followed by the breaking up of the compact society into different groups. The well-being of man is connected and affected by the well-being of nature and the destruction of one will only lead to the destruction of the other. The second narration that speaks of the friendship between man and tiger is an example of the affinity that the Khezhas share with tigers. From being regarded as the elder brother to other such beliefs, their affinity with this animal helped in the conservation of this species because tigers were not hunted randomly by the Khezhas unless they posed any actual threat to them. The story is also an example of the bond that can exist between the human and the animal world if only man would change his attitude and start viewing animals as more than just food. “The Killing of a Pregnant Doe” is reflective of the depletion of forest wealth and the endangerment of the animal kingdom caused by the increase in population over the years. A reading of the story also brings to question “biospherical egalitarianism- in principle”- a concept that Arne Naess talks about. A certain degree of exploitation may be necessary for survival but the right to live by all alike is lost when man tries to establish a master-slave hierarchy with nature and assume the role of the former. The legendary story of the two brothers Mvüsupra and Mvüsütso while giving a small glimpse of the Feast of Merit as

practised by the Khezhas, provides an insight into the belief of Khezhas in the symbiotic possibility of man and nature. The second category of tales is that of birds and animals where there is little to no human intervention. A total of six stories have been provided and analysed in this section. “The Lizard and the Bird” and the following two stories in this subsection are animal-based with no human participation. These stories accord intrinsic value to the birds and animals and present them as capable of feelings and emotions as well. Deep ecologists talk of how all things in nature have intrinsic value that modern man is blind to for he measures the worth of nature only from its instrumental value. Animal stories, as Gary Paul Nabhan say, may somehow inform or enrich our own lives for “each plant or animal has a story of some unique way of living in this world” (144). The last two stories discussed in this section are about the affinity that the Khezhas share with tigers. Then there are stories of stones and spirits and such stories are reflective of the belief of Khezhas in the mysticism of nature. “Dwelling Place of Spirit Stones” (*Tawobou*) and “Stones that grew Heavenwards” (*Tsopoupe Chitude Kebe*) are narratives analyzed under this category. They speak of spirited stones. *Tawobou* was and is still considered sacred and the sanctity of the stones is to be maintained lest nature’s fury is unleashed upon man in the form of droughts or thunderstorms. Under the category of rivers and forests, “The Angry Water” and “Nose of a Lake” among others have been analyzed. These stories further supplement the belief of Khezhas in the existence of spirits in nature and the mysticism of nature. The stories also give an insight into the significance of water as an indispensable component required for life and as such due importance is to be given to it. When Solhou’s people act disrespectfully towards it, it switches roles from being a life nourisher to a punisher. The story of “The Deserted Boy” shows how nature can save, protect and nourish against a world where even

familial love fails. The final story in this category, that of “Narheo and Nakra” exemplifies that nature can bless man with abundance if he lives in harmony with nature and is not driven by greed.

The final category is an attempt to study the interconnection between the domination of women and nature. The story of “Kaponeo, the promiscuous” and “Chichüe” have been analyzed for this purpose. Val Plumwood equates the liberation of women to the liberation of all sorts of oppression and the domination of one is seen as the domination of the other (211). A woman’s position in the old Khezha culture was dichotomous for while on one hand a lot of restrictions were imposed on women, they were also held in high esteem and received much respect in the society. Practices like sati, child marriage, female infanticide and so on did not exist. As mentioned in chapter III, certain restrictions imposed on women in the past were essentially to protect them from being attacked by the head hunters of other villages and also to ensure their safety from the constant raids carried out by the enemy villages. Over time, these restrictions became part of tradition. With the coming of Christianity, head hunting has become a practice of the past and inter- village conflicts, attacks or raids carried out by the more powerful villages, are heard of no more. The practice of fortifying villages and keeping sentry around the village are not required anymore for the society has moved on from the old barbaric ways of attacking and raiding villages. Times have changed and so has the conditions in which man lived and thrived. With the old practices of head hunting and raiding of weak villages by the powerful ones gone, society does not live in constant fear of being attacked and killed, however, the condition of women seems to have gone worse. As the society move further towards modernity, the status accorded to women in the past is fast

disappearing, and the disparity between man and woman is growing bigger. The conditions that essentiated protection and restrictions in the past have been removed but the condition of women have only suffered a setback. Most tribal societies in particular and the world in general remain patriarchal in nature and function and as such, women are still subject to domination and suppression. Towards nature, the Khezhas in the olden days exhibited a sensibility that allowed them to live in harmony with nature. That ecological sensibility is fast disappearing in the modern Khezha society with the disappearance of the old ethics and as the world today talks of the liberation of women, the respect and esteem accorded to women and fellow human beings in the olden days are also fast diminishing in this modern world. And therefore, as ecofeminists try to identify the plight of women with that of nature and find connecting links in both kinds of domination, the same can be applied to the Khezha society today.

An ecological reading of the folktales shows the symbiotic connection between Khezhas and nature and it is also observed that ecological values and ethics can be drawn from these stories. Though anthropocentrism runs in some folktales, the Khezha culture has been that of restraint behaviour towards the physical surroundings and reverence for nature and the unknown and thereby displaying traits that were more conservationist than destructive of the environment. As mirrors of the culture, the Khezha folk narratives can play a significant role in instilling values and attitudes that are ecologically sound. Taking into consideration all the environmental values that can be drawn from the folktales, legends and myths of the Khezha Chakhesang community in Nagaland, it can be concluded that the folk narratives have the potential to be read as eco-texts or eco-literature. The intent of the stories

may not have been ecologically driven but the content is replete with ethics and values, and if these folk tales and legends are revisited, re-narrated and the traditional ethics of conservation restored, it will help in inculcating in the young minds, values and ethics that are required for protection and sustenance of all forms of life on earth. Story telling can be used as a channel to propagate environmental awareness and promote environmental ethics.

Chapter IV is focused on the eco-ethical exegesis of Khezha idiomatic expressions. The Khezha traditional codes of conduct, *Metha* (fear), *Menyie* (shame), and *Kenyü* (taboo), have been highlighted in the chapter because these codes of conduct govern all ethics of Khezhas and the folk expressions or utterances which were pronounced in rituals and other sacramental events are all part of that ethic. The way of life, customary practises, culture and every aspect of the Khezha society was based on these three traditional codes of ethics and because these ethics were built around their belief system in the Supreme Being and awe and reverence for nature, these traditional sanctions were beneficial from the ecological point of view. The folk expressions taken into purview of study for this chapter shows the feelings of awe, reverence, fear, and curiosity for a world which is as dynamic, illuminating and mysterious as the human world and that is the natural world. The Khezhas acknowledged and mystified the sky, the earth and everything on it- plants, birds, animals, rivers, trees, mountains, stones and their attitude towards these different forms of nature was regulated by the traditional codes of conduct. The analysis of the folk expressions reveals that Khezhas were protocol-minded people and their ethics were that of conservation. Their reverence for nature and their acts of appeasement to the spirits they believed to reside in nature, their culture of restraint while hunting animals or cutting trees or any other economic activity,

their strict rules on when to hunt and what to hunt, and their prayers of request and forgiveness, are reflective of their sensibility towards nature and other creations of the supreme being. The few sayings and riddles provided in the chapter exemplify the deep knowledge that this tribal group had of their natural surrounding and how their knowledge was manifested in their lives and teachings. Environmental ethics is closely linked to cultural ethics for they affect each other and reflecting on the culture of the Khezhas as can be inferred from their folk expressions, it can be safely concluded that the ethics practised by this group of people was that of preservation and conservation.

Nature and culture concur at varied levels. For tribal communities like the Khezhas, their cultural values, beliefs, customs, knowledge, ethics, and all folk traditions are built on their understanding of nature. Apart from the narratives studied in this work, the Khezhas' closeness with nature can also be seen in their folk practices, one example of which is the use of traditional medicines to address different illnesses. The tribal social structure has its own ethnic specificity that includes traditional healing methods using plants and herbs available to them. In Khezha villages, treatments using herbal remedial practices are very common both at household and professional level. The medicinal properties of different plants are known to the villagers to some extent but there exist certain man with exceptional knowledge of the plant kingdom and these herbalists or *prü nhü-mi* as locally known are the most sought man in the village. D. Ngolo Chiezou of Khezhakeno village is one such herbalist who has come to be recognised in both the state and national level. He has received honours from National Medicinal Plants Board, Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) and also from State Medicinal Plants Board (SMPB), Nagaland for

his contributions to the medicinal plants sector in the state of Nagaland. According to his testimony, when his wife was diagnosed with kidney stone and she refused undergoing surgery to remove the calculus, he built his own indigenous distillation machine and started preparing herbal medicines from plants and berries available in the village for his wife. Later on when his medicines began to be widely used, the Forest department under Government of Nagaland presented him with a proper distillation machine for use. He was also given a stall to showcase his herbal products in the annual Hornbill Festival of Nagaland by the Forest department and the Bio-Research department of Nagaland. He uses all sorts of berries and plants concoction to treat different kinds of illnesses ranging from toothaches, stomach aches to piles problem. The practice of traditional healing methods using forest resources available to them exemplify the acute knowledge that tribals have of their natural surroundings. The Khezha culture is deeply connected to nature in every way and a shift or change in one is bound to cause a shift in the other.

Nature and culture, though seemingly dichotomous, are interconnected and therefore, the environmental degradation that the world is facing today has much to do with the shift in the cultural pattern of the people and the new techno-culture that has set the world on another track. As Greg Garrard opines environment problems are the outcomes of an interaction between “ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection”, and as such they “require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms” (14). Banshaikupar L. Mawlong writes of how the ecological crisis is not merely a scientific fact that can be addressed through technological fixes, in the introduction to the book *Environment – Cultural Interaction and the Tribes of North-East India*. He calls it a cultural fact that is initiated,

imagined, discussed, and acted upon through the varied cultural activities of humanity. He says this fact is “made sense of culturally, and our responses to the crisis are enabled as well as constrained by our imagination and interpretation of the crisis” (2).

Donald Worster talks of the global crisis we are facing today not because of how the ecosystem functions but rather because of how our ethical systems function. He states that to get through the crisis, what is required is an understanding of our impact on nature as precisely as possible, and even more than that, it is required to understand those ethical systems and use that understanding to reform that (27). Khezha folk narratives are windows of its culture. Modernity has penetrated all aspects of the Khezha society and its impact could be felt not just in the changing lifestyles of the people but also in the changing landscape, weather, and the overall environment. In such a scenario, the traditional culture and attitude of stewardship, reverence, and traditional ethics can provide a new dimension to environmental conservation.

The modern ethic looks at nature as an object to be used, manipulated, and commercialized. This very detrimental view of nature has proved to be fatal to the connection that man once shared with nature. Sudhir Singh asserts, “The major reason for this attenuating attitude seems to be his distancing from the traditional wisdom that he got from the folk sources” (38). In the book *Tribal Ecology* Razouselie Lasetso talks of how firewood, edible plants, wild animals, birds and such other eco-products were seen as nature’s provision by our ancestors and no rampant destruction of the same was ever envisaged. However, today these essential provisions are seen primarily from the economic

and commercial point of view and are now being converted into marketable commodities for monetary profits (8).

For the sustainability of life on earth, the need of the hour is to switch to a new ecological paradigm. To begin with, the elements of culture need to be revitalized and strengthened. Lasetso speaks of “the slow erosion in cultural values” because of the inability of communicating and transmitting the values and knowledge of ancestral experience to subsequent generations (7). Instead of simply romanticizing the old tribal practices, restoration of traditional values, ethics and local wisdom as found in the folk narratives can perhaps help in bringing some sort of redemptive mitigation to the prevailing environmental crisis. At this critical juncture it has become crucial for amiable and ecologically minded people to articulate a new politics, a new ethics and a new “earth-centred moral sensibility that can awaken the life-affirming impulses our society seeks to submerge” (Brian Tokar 114). In this endeavour, restoring the folk ethics of conservation and respect for nature can play a significant role and folk narratives can be a tool in the sharing of these ethical values.

With every increase in our scientific knowledge, there is a greater need to correct our ethical views in order to survive and to maintain a healthy ecosystem. There is a need to constantly and continuously adapt and extend ethics, update guidelines for human behaviour to safeguard our progress on dangerous roads into the future (Kinne 88).

Traditional knowledge and local wisdom have always played a significant role in environmental conservation. Preserving this aspect of culture and amalgamating it with modern approaches and methods will only contribute to the sustainability and preservation of our environment. To this end, folk narratives can play an impactful role by conveying lessons

about the essential relationship between the human world and the natural world. Folk narratives have the rich prospect of transmitting traditional values and ethics of reverence and thereby, aiding in the preservation of the natural world. As Yangkahao Vashum says, “There is a need to restore the tribal concept of the sacredness of land and forest in order to protect the habitats of the endangered species” (27).

Mawlong speaks of how preserving traditional knowledge and amalgamating it with modern methods can help in environmental conservation, modern medicine, and even health care (4-5). The need, so then, is to search for those core values that kept the tribal communities intact and ecologically rich. While highlighting important traditions, folk narratives can facilitate the reinforcement of cultural values. Folk narrative as an amalgamation of the traditions distinct to a particular culture forms a very important part of the culture itself. The narratives are reflections of the culture and as such become an alluring feature to understanding the culture they belong to. The cultural element of folk narratives also helps in bridging the gap that is slowly building up between the old and the young generation and in creating awareness amongst the new generation of the traditional culture that is dying a slow death. The rich idioms of folk narratives play a vital role in the development of traditional wisdom which may guide the ethnic groups to learn, understand and adopt certain ways of life.

A well-balanced ecosystem would depend upon integrated environmental practices that are favourable to both humans and non-humans. The Khezhas’ ethical practice of taking only as much as is needed from the forest and its resources, their concept, and belief in the sacredness of land and forest, the intrinsic value they ascribe to nature and its inhabitants, are

some of the traditional attitudes that can be restored to save the environment from further destruction. Folk literature can work as a source for disseminating traditional wisdom raising the consciousness of the indigenous people who live closest to nature. Folk literature always talks of balance that needs to exist between all forms of life and this conviction, as Sudhir Singh opines, “establishes the relevance of studying folk literature in the twenty-first century” (42). Traditional lore, songs, proverbs, sayings, and all forms of expression are part of this literature and they should be revisited and restudied to restore the understanding of their ethical system as well as their practice of them so that some respite is achieved in the current situation of environmental crisis. The revival of these values and ethics has become impertinent now more than ever because of the environmental doom towards which we are fast headed to. These values can be found encoded in tales, songs, and folk expressions. And while countries and organizations are trying to adopt different methods and policies to stabilise the current situation of environmental degradation, reviving eco-consciousness in the tribals and taking it further to the rest of the people would certainly help in building a community that would live and respond responsibly to the call for the sustainability of the ecosystem. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to how such narratives can become a value system that will guide and govern the community towards environmental preservation. The indigenous tribes see matter and spirit as one and human and the rest of the creations as connected. This all-encompassing holistic view of life, wisdom concerning the life of the trees and forests, and how our well-being is deeply connected to the well-being of the environment around us, need to be restored so that we begin “to revive our almost dying lives” (Woba James 147). The creation of folklore and its transmission is based on a value system that is guided by the mindset of the people who own the culture and the folklores in

turn guide and regulate the mindset of the people it is transmitted to. According to Anungla Aier, “Contemporary cultures are also constantly engaged in the creation and transmission of folklore” and as such both culture and the value systems it carries are dynamic (2). While the modern value system that regulates on the premise of scientific developments and material advancement is completely in opposition to the value system propagated by environmentalists, revisiting the ethics of the past and restoring this part of culture could become a means to change the condition of the society. This shows the interrelationship that nature and culture share and the role folk narratives can play to restore balance in this nature-culture relationship harmed by modern man’s actions.

Folk Narratives usually contain values that are pervasive in the subconscious of the listeners especially children and so they can be used not just to disseminate traditional wisdom but also to plant positive values in the listeners/readers. From an ecological point of view, these folk narratives can hold lessons on sustainability apart from being a window to the sophisticated understanding the tribals carried of nature and her cycles. The knowledge the Khezhas had of their physical environment, the honour they accorded to the different processes of nature, their acute awareness of the association of their well-being with the well-being of the non-human world around them are in themselves lessons on sustainability. In the past few years, one of the noticeable mistakes that had been made in the conservation movement is considering nature simply from the utilitarian point of view, as mere natural resources that need to be utilized. Any effort towards conservation has to be combined with moral values to sustain it.

The ethical and cultural sensibilities that the Khezhas carried in the past are not rationally developed frameworks but beliefs and responses developed and accumulated over a long period through historical processes and as the society tried to build their own understanding of different natural phenomena and live in harmony with the unknown. As such the traditional wisdom and knowledge system of the Khezhas are not logically or rationally constructed whereas, the modern world tries to construct all knowledge and ethics on rationality and logic. However, this same traditional wisdom and knowledge system had allowed them to live in tune with their physical environment for centuries until modernization and globalization hit them. While depending on nature and the forest with all its resources, they still succeeded in living an ecologically sustainable life while the modern world has failed miserably. Over the decades this folk knowledge system and traditional wisdom have lost much of their significance and now run the risk of being obliterated which makes it all the more necessary to restore and revive them.

Taking into consideration the present scenario, where the earth's biosphere is being increasingly damaged and its component species are threatened with extinction, the need to review the existing knowledge systems and the modern ideologies is felt more than ever. There is a need to curb the exploitative capacities of humans whose actions of ravaging the earth are not out of greater needs but out of unchecked greed. Local wisdom is part of cultural values and folk narratives can carry this local wisdom which if restored and relearned can help in keeping a check on unrestrained exploitation of the earth. Folk Narratives have always held their own place in the history of any tribal community. It has helped in shaping young minds and passing on the tradition. Even at the present time, it can help in

communicating values to the younger generation. This local wisdom includes identifying both humans and non-humans as possessing intrinsic value and part of the same creation. When human beings as agents see themselves as an extension of nature outside, there would further evolve a mediated rational order that establishes unity between 'nature' and 'culture' (Biswas and Thomas xix). When unity is achieved, the onslaught on our ecosystem can be controlled to a great extent. The tribals understand ecology and the environment in a way that a modern urban man will never do and as such traditional wisdom can be lessons for the urban man as well on earth keeping.

Globalization has in a way forcefully severed the tribal's link with his environment and has caused a change in the tribal narrative. Recovery of the tribal narrative, restoration of such values that see the presence of the forest as a nurturing mother and a living presence in their lives, and acceptance of the fact that human survival is inextricably linked with nature can once again help in bringing environmental equilibrium by modifying their behaviour and attitude towards nature and the environment for the ecosystem functions to sustain all forms of life on earth and a healthy ecosystem would lead to healthy life for all.

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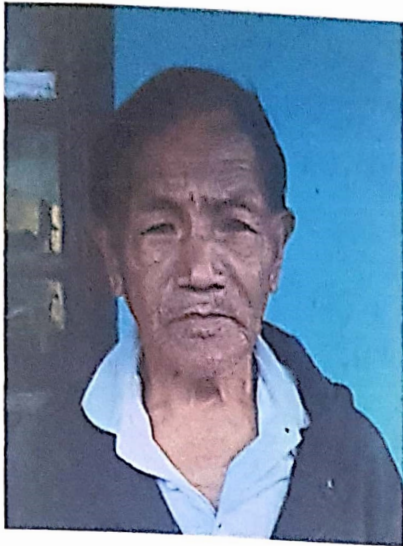
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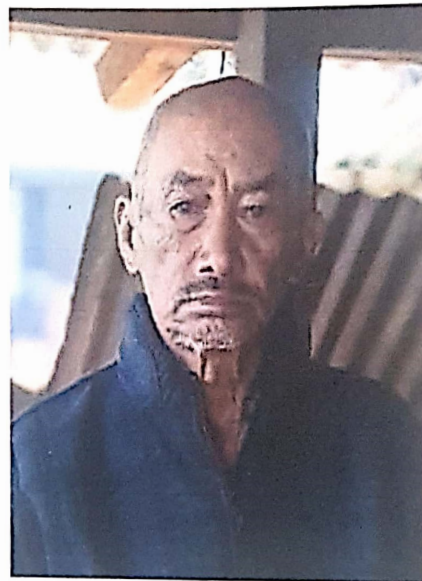
A. L'HOUPENYI KEVIE, 84 YEARS
(DOI : 29TH MARCH 2018)



DILHOU CHIKHA, 86 YEARS
(DOI : 27TH MARCH 2018)



DIPEO KOZA, 38 YEARS
(30TH APRIL 2022)



D. NGOLO CHIEZOU, 75 YEARS
(2ND MAY 2022)



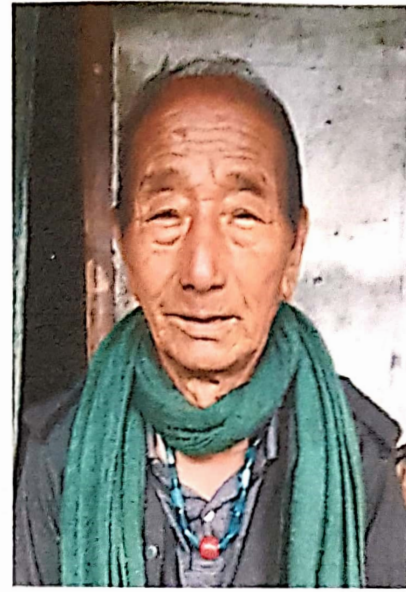
KEMVÜ KOZA, 78 YEARS
(5TH JUNE 2019)



KEZÜTSÜLO MARHU, 97 YEARS
(2ND JUNE 2019)



K. MEZE, 87 YEARS
(18TH FEB 2017)



KODOLHOU LADU, 87 YEARS
(26TH MAY 2018)



KOVECHÜ-O, 86 YEARS
(11TH JUNE 2019)



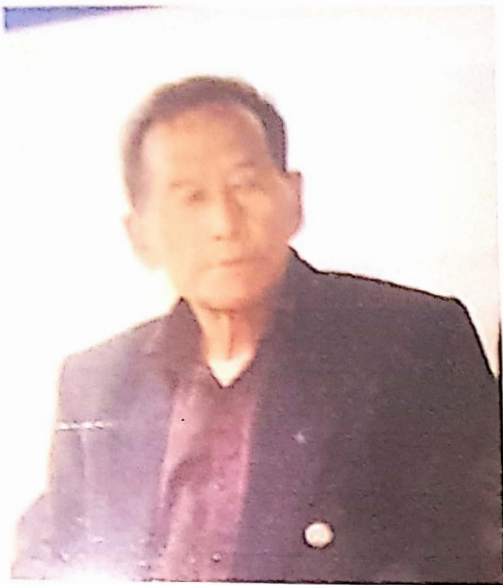
LHOUCHINYI KHALO, 100 YEARS
(4TH JUNE, 2019)



NEIKHWE TSUHAH, 66 YEARS
(29TH JAN. 2020)



NGOLO LOMI, 100 YEARS
(2ND APRIL 2018)



P.WELO, 88 YEARS
(2ND JUNE 2019)



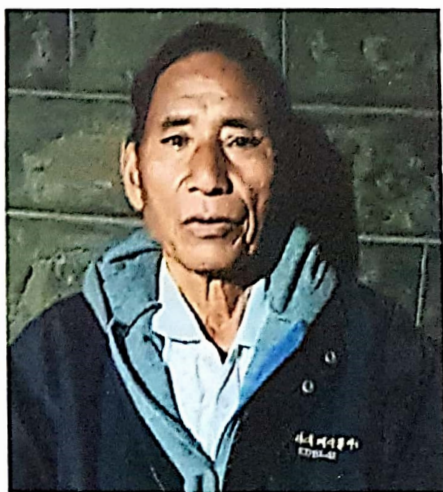
RAZOUKO NGONE, 55 YEARS
17TH FEB 2017



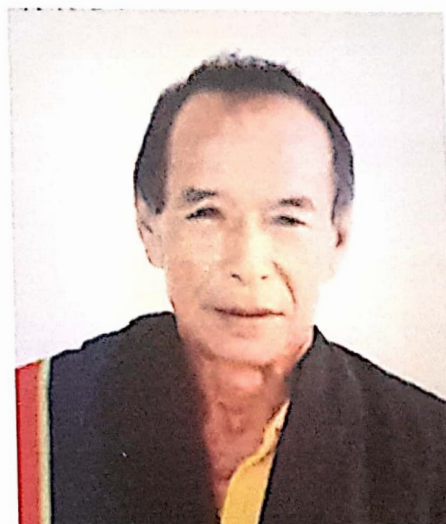
SARANO, 46 YEARS
(10TH JUNE 2019)



S. KEPFELHOU LADU, 67 YEARS
(25TH MAY 2018)



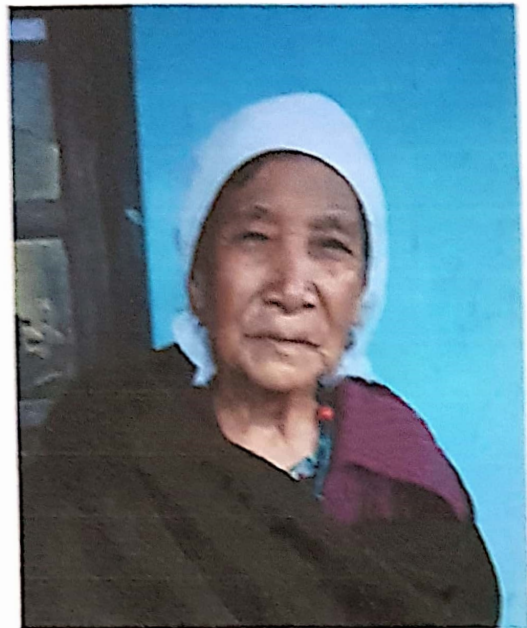
THOCHÜ PFUNO, 75 YEARS
(24TH MARCH 2018)



TIMIKHA PIZOU, 70 YEARS
(26TH MAY 2018)



TSULO THERIE, 96 YEARS
(10TH JUNE 2019)

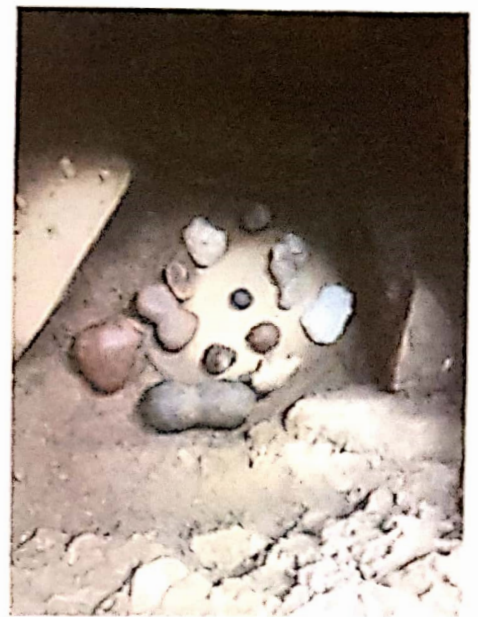


ZONIEO KEVIE, 82 YEARS
(29TH MARCH 2018)



ZÜPELHI MERO, 95 YEARS
(8TH AUG 2019)

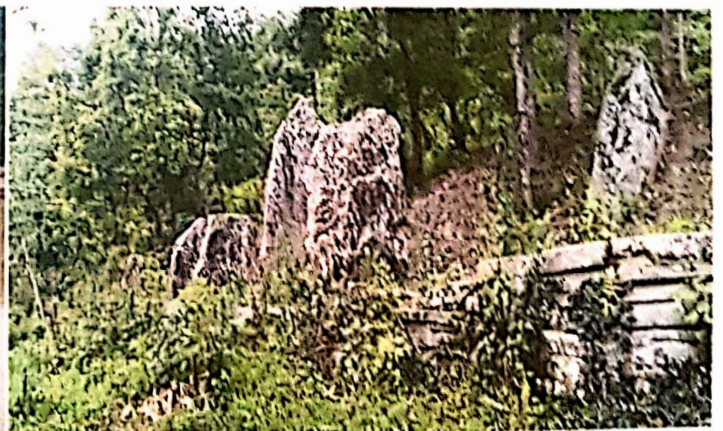
(Age is projected as recorded during personal interview)



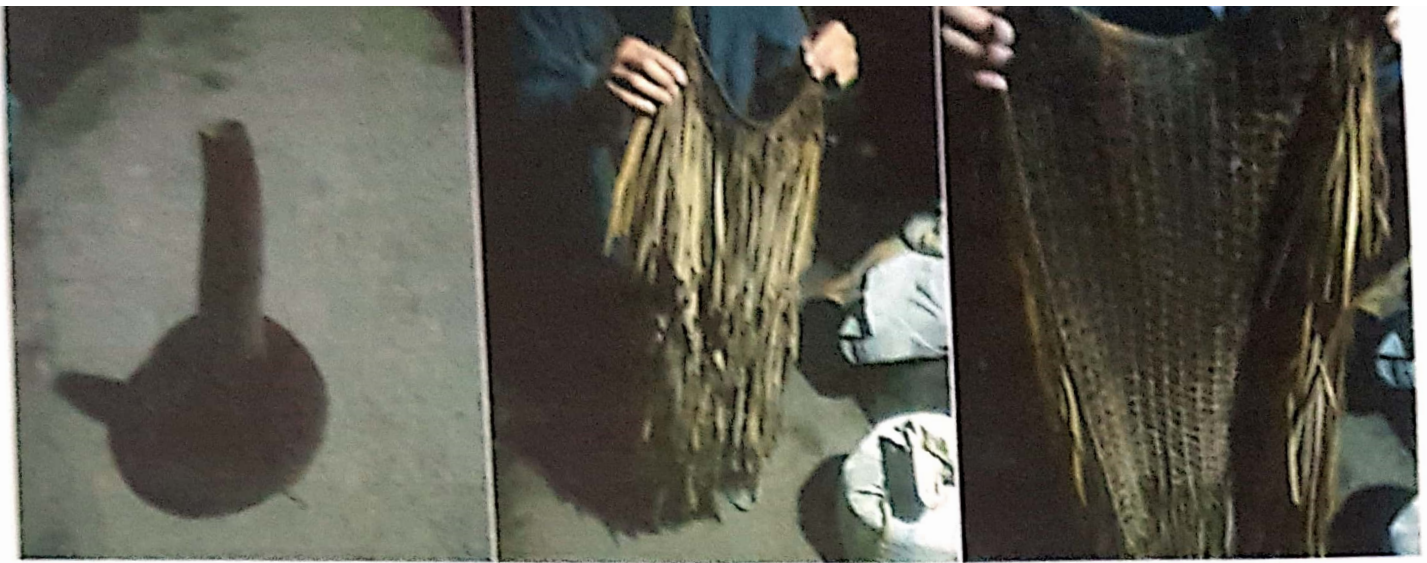
MYTHICAL GROWING STONE *ZHI NHAKA* (NOSE OF A LAKE) *WU TSO* (FETISH STONES)



TSO TAWO (THE SPIRITED STONE)



STONES ERECTED AFTER *ZATHO* (FEAST OF MERIT)



MATERIALS USED BY *MOWO* DURING RITUALS



INDIGENOUS MEDICINES MADE BY D. NGOLO CHIEZOU



DISTILLATION MACHINE PROVIDED TO D. NGOLO CHIEZOU (HERBALIST)
BY DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES (GOVT. OF NAGALAND)



SOME WILD BERRIES AND FRUITS USED FOR MAKING INDIGENOUS MEDICINES