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ORAL TRADITION AND CULTURAL MEMORY: ANALYSIS OF DISPERSAL WILD PEAR TREE OF THE NAGAS

Abstract

The oral tradition of the Nagas points that once their ancestor had lived at Makhel and those Nagas who acknowledged the Makhelian tradition have called themselves as Tenymi. To foster brotherhood of Tenymi the dispersal wild pear tree (tamara chütebu kaji) was imprinted as witnessed for posterity. The dispersal tree symbolises a tangible non-verbal medium that communicates the common ancestor. As a remembrance of dispersal, incase any branch of the tree has been twirled, the Makhelian observe chütebukajigenna (prohibited and observed holiday). The observance of the genna by the Makhelian communicates the sense of fraternity while reminding the generations of the common root.

Keywords: *Dispersal, fraternity, genna, imprinted, non-verbal, oral tradition, tangible.*

Introduction

Oral tradition as a subject of study is increasing across disciplines and it has begun to consider as a medium of communication. It connotes the sum total of arts, ideas, tales, myths and other cultural practices that are preserved in oral and are communicated through word of mouth. Oral tradition fosters commonness of the people. Momady, a well-known advocate of the subject states “the oral tradition is the process by which the myths, legends, tales and lore of a people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing” (1970:56). Since formulation and preservation is not in a text but orally to further communicate the same is done through memory. From a historical perspective, Vansina defines “oral traditions as verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present. The definition specifies that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only” (1985:27). Memory is crucial to pass the verbal messages from one generation

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to another and what had been passed on together formed the folklore of the people. Accordingly, any studies on folklore have to deal with oral tradition. There are such as cultural studies or ethnic studies but not “tradition studies” since the study of folklore studies tradition (Bronner 1998:12). So folklore distinct connection is with oral tradition. As Thompson proclaims, “...the idea of tradition is the touchstone for everything that is to be included in the term folklore” (1951:11). In acknowledging intertwined and mutual process Ben-Amos notes, “tradition has survived criticism and remained a symbol of and for folklore” (1984:124). To stress the centrality of oral tradition in folklore, according to Bauman “there is no single idea more central to conceptions of folklore than tradition” (1992:30). Thus, the last important citadel for the folklorists is oral tradition. And “the common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another either by memory or practice rather than written record” (Thompson 1949: 403). People remembered and practice the tradition orally since it is the core in construction of defining identity. Cultural memory plays a central role in transmission of identity and construction of oneness, which is based on oral tradition. So, oral tradition is a medium of communication to use the famous phrase of McLuhan’s “medium is the message” (1964: 23-39). Oral tradition is a medium of transmission which is done in the form of cultural memory.

Objectives

Against this broad understanding of oral tradition, the paper attempts to explore on how the oral tradition relates that the Nagas of Northeast India had begun their civilisation at *Makhel* and subsequent dispersal. *Makhel* is a hamlet in the Mao region of Senapati district, Manipur, bordering to Nagaland. Those Nagas who acknowledged the *Makhelian*¹ tradition have called themselves as *Tenyimi*² and they are found in the states of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland in Northeast region. The terms *Makhelian* and *Tenyimi* are used interchangeable in the paper. Begins with of the scores of evidences which explain that *Makhel* is an ancestral place of the *Tenyimi*, the tale of dispersal wild pear tree (*tamara chütebu kaji*) is realistically prominent.

The paper aims at to find out the meaning of the experience for those who had experienced about the dispersal wild pear tree. Thus, since communication starts with oral to convey messages and ideas, can the dispersal wild pear tree be considered as tangible oral medium of communication? As oral literature, how do people narrate and transmit their memory about the origin of the dispersal tree? While keeping in mind the theory of dispersal, does the tale of dispersal tree signifies anything in the Naga society. Likewise, it looks at the significance of the practice of *chütebukajigenna* that was conceptualised out of the dispersal tree. The study is also intended to consider the role of cultural memory as oral tradition in continuation of the legacy of dispersal treaty (*alepealikha*).

Research Methods and Data Collection

The study follows participant observation method to dig out the significance of the dispersal tree in the Naga society. Along with this, hermeneutic method was employed to draw the social and cultural meaning of the dispersal tree. This was supplemented by personal interaction with some village elders who were familiar with oral knowledge of the dispersal tree. Identifying the village elders for personal interaction was based on snowball method. The study thus tracked multiplicity of qualitative methods and accordingly, the data was collected.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Underpinning

Oral tradition is based on cultural memory of those people who considered themselves as one and practiced the same orally for ages. It is preserved in oral literature in the form of tales, lore, arts, ideas and myths, and have been transmitted from one generation to another. The culmination of oral socio-cultural practices that have been continued for ages gave birth to oral tradition. Cultural memory is built from the shared commonality that the people experienced as collective behaviour. The transformation of human civilisation to ethno-cultural centric is not just an outcome of evolutionary process but the product of appropriating social tradition. Ethno-centrism is an outcome of social practice of the community' social life that has continued for ages. Such collective memory of ethnic culture is based on "a concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (Assmann & Czaplicka 1995:126). Cultural memory and oral literature are essential part of oral tradition.

Arts, myths, rituals, *gennas*, tales and memorable events together constitute cultural memory. In broad sense, cultural memory is defined by Heller as "embodied in objectifications which store meanings in a concentrated manner, meanings shared by a group of people who take them for granted. These can be texts, such as sacred scrolls, historical chronicles, lyric or epic poetry. They can also be monuments, such as buildings or statues, shared material signs, signals, and symbols as storages of experience, memorabilia erected as reminders. Further on, cultural memory is embodied in regularly repeated and repeatable practices, such as festivals, ceremonies, and rites" (2001: 139). In the world of uncertainty and confusion, it shapes the identity of the people to live in an orderly way. To differentiate communicative memory from cultural memory, Assmann & Czaplicks refers the former as everyday communications, the usage that lacks cultural characteristics. Whereas, the latter means "whose memory are maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)", which they called "figures of memory" (1995: 126-129). In oral based society, cultural memory will be a mixture of the "figures of memory"

from both cultural formation and institutional communication. Theoretically, the dispersal tree can be considered as a text and monument scripted the tale of dispersal that contributed in the formation of cultural memory.

Cultural memory is the binding force in sustaining the oral tradition. Subsequently, oral tradition gave birth to the subject of folklore. When Thomas first coined the term “folklore” in 1846 (Emrich 1946: 355) to replace “popular antiquities” and “popular literature”, he intended to include manners, customs, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, riddles, songs, dances, which he called the lore of the people. Folklore is an inclusive and comprehensive body of knowledge of the society. It is anything that includes tales, arts, festivals, agricultural practices, caring of sicknesses and worldviews, which are disseminated through oral and behavioural mode of everyday life. Every community possessed a shared tradition, which is central to its ethnic identity is the folklore of the community. Folklore can be in the form of verbal expression, musical expression, expression by action, and tangible expression (UNESCO and WIPO 1985). Out of these various forms of folklore, the spotlight of the paper is concentrated on tangible expression. From the theoretical perspective, the dispersal wild pear tree can be included within the category of non-verbal communication and can be examined as an extension of tangible non-verbal expression. While taking into account of its tangibly durable characteristic and communicative message as the dispersal tree, as part of theoretical exploration the tree is incorporated within the category of tangible expression.

Further, oral tradition is rooted in everyday oral social milieu because of which the former is knitted with the latter. Oral culture totalises, and makes orality itself pretty much continuous with social existence (Ong 1982). Orality of a lifeworld is rooted in face-to-face interaction and transmitted through oral social life. Lifeworld of an oral culture mediates members of a community of how to act and behave in a particular way. Ong’s moving analysis of orality shows how an oral culture is closer to be “living in the moment” as compared to a literate society, which is far from physical presence. According to him, knowledge and wisdom is already embedded in everyday lifeworld of orality since knowledge is based on participative and collaborative as “embedded in the human lifeworld” and therefore situates within a “context of struggle” (Ong 1982: 44). In an oral world, communication is in the nature of participative endeavour since both the sender and the receiver co-exist in a situation of time-space unity. It characterises a human society that has not recourse to writing but understand through “what we offer to sight, sound, and touch. It is perceived by the soul and manifested through what is sketched, painted, pencilled, sculpted, and tattooed” (Devantine 2009:11). It means transmission of ideas by word of mouth and through signs, attires, tales, arts, monoliths, and other socio-cultural practices. In term of the theoretical perspective of the orality of lifeworld, the dispersal tree is becoming a part of social life. Its presence in physical that one can see, touch, and smell and is speaking to

those who observes. One can read and visualise from the tree orally the tale of dispersal and can impart to the wider world.

Dispersal Wild Pear Tree (*Tamara ChütebuKaji*) Origin

Regarding the origin of the dispersal wild pear tree (*tamara chütebu kaji*), there is multiplicity of claims based on oral tradition that have been transmitted as part of oral tradition. One version considered that the tree has sprouted from the walking stick of *Dzüliamosüa* (broadly means, crystal clear water), who is presumably considered the mother of mankind. According to legend, she got conceived with the miraculous tide of clouds while quiescent beneath the banyan tree (*marabu*) and gave birth to three sons namely, *Ora* (god), *Omei* (man), and *Okhe* (tiger). As the legend goes, the descendants of *Omei* start the human race. While considering that the woman represents a particular evolutionary stage of human being, it corroborates with the geologically universal understanding that once upon a time the earth is covered with water. It may also link with the theory of the Origin of Species in which it theorises that a single living cell to complex form was started in the water. Such philosophical understanding can further confirmed with the Theory of Creation in the book of Genesis that vault was separated from the water. Identity of the mystical woman *Dzüliamosüa*, philosophically depicted the liquid phase of the planet earth.

Well taken that myths and legends are essential for every philosophical and epistemological understanding on matters related to human origin that is beyond our comprehension. While analysing one should be discreet enough to differentiate between myths from that of facts to make the information coherent. This is more challenging to study for a society where there is no tradition of text but cultural memory and oral tradition as the sole obtainable source of literature. In discourses on tradition of the *Makhelian*, thus to distinguish between myths and facts is imperative although the two may have certain links. The version that the dispersal tree as sprouted from the walking stick of *Dzüliamosüa* in all probability will turn the tree to another legend, which is not. The theory of the origin of human race at *Makhel* requires further probe but the theory of dispersal is a fact. Based on cultural memory and oral tradition, the dispersal discourse and eventually the treaty was formalised at the foot of *tamara chütebu kaji*. The dispersal tree in all its evidences seldom represents an additional explanation of the theory of origin.

Another version professes that the tree was planted as the witness of the discourse leading to eventual dispersal treaty. It goes on to say that the stem was planted upside down. Mystically and miraculously, we can't rule out the possibility of growing even though been planted upside down. But rationally, it looks difficult that the stem of wild pear still grows when planted upside-down. For the custodians of the dispersal tree, there is a general intuition that the tree is innate and not planted. This version is found in consonant across. It

is grown by itself, which is why sometime it is referred as *Orasübu* (God's tree). The tree is not planted but wild. It has been known for centuries as wild and the same is called 'wild' pear tree. Planted tree cannot be considered as wild tree. Though there are variation in interpretations on origin of the tree, the sense of revere with it as dispersal tree remain intact. Irrespective of the theory of origin of the tree, it represents and communicates that at one point of time dispersal had happened. Whatever the versions may be, there is hardly any dispute on the theory of dispersal and different versions only authenticated the fact of the dispersal from the tree.

Makhel, ChütebuKaji and Dispersal

Till date, source of information about the migrations of the Nagas are preserved in the form of oral literature represented largely through the medium of tales, attires, arts and other cultural practices. Thus in spite of some accounts on Naga migration, scholars are yet to come to decisive conclusion. In this context, Hutton was of the view that Nagas have migrated from northwest of China somewhere in between upper Yangtze and Ho-ang-ho (Hwang Ho) rivers before they reached the Naga Hills (1921: 6-9). For Mills, the Nagas are mixed of different migration waves in which he noted one of the waves was from south China via the Irrawaddy River from the neighbouring Shan 1922: xvi-xxi). However, Wettstein prefer to trace Naga migration waves to Mongolia even though he admitted that *Makhel*³³ "is one of locations to which many tribes trace back not their actual origin, but the point in history and geography from where they dispersed over the Naga Hills" (2012: 227). Based on oral tradition, it is generally considered that Nagas had migrated from Yunnan province in China after which they reached northern Myanmar (Burma) and finally arrived at *Makhel*.

Nagas are Mongolian by race and there is every probability that after migrated from China, they moved down through the rivers like Salween (Nu-Jiang), Mekong and Irrawaddy to Myanmar (Burma). It is widely considered that during the ancient days, settlements happened predominantly along the river banks as rivers served as the main source of socio-economic life of the people. It appears that through the course of Salween (Nu-Jiang) river, Nagas settled in Southern Seas of Moulmein/Mawlamyine (southern Myanmar) prior to Naga Hills since their costumes and attires are decorated with marine shells, which are found only in the seas. Instead of proceeding further towards Southeast they retreated from Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers to Imphal River from their intersection. Then proceeded to the north and took the course of Barak River (*ShüvoKorü*) from Karong (*Dzüni*) and ultimately settled at *Makhel*. It is believed that once Imphal valley was under the water and the Loktak Lake is the remnant of that ancient lake. Inconvenient of natural environmental condition seems to be the compelling factor for Naga ancestors to move further north of Imphal valley. They settled at *Makhel* in Naga Hills

that is an oval spot and strategically located since from here starts the slopping range of both the north and the south respective valley. *Makhel* and its surrounding vicinities is an intersecting place of the ranges from both the north and the south. On account of its location terrain and territorial landscape, tributaries of Barak River (*Shüvorü*) and Doyang River (*Chüherü*), the largest river of Manipur and Nagaland respectively start from in and around *Makhel*. As a mark of the origin of Doyang River (*Chüherü*), a span of paddy fields called *chühe* and *chühezhe* (*chühe lake*) is situated within the jurisdiction of *Shajouba* flanking *Makhel*. The landscape of the villages such as *Ethofü* (Tadubi), *Charangho* (Shajouba), *MakhrariRabu* (Makhel), *Shülofü* (Kaibi) and *Tobufü* formed like a roof of the house in which water can easily flow to opposite directions. *Makhel* and its surrounding is such a central location (*totsüfu*) that the ancestors of the Nagas decided to settle. The geographical location of *Makhel* and its surrounding also constituted the pedestal structure of *IsüPfoki* (Mount Tenipu), the highest peak in Manipur.

In course of time, as the population increases the requirement of additional territory has necessitated to disperse. Living together at *Makhel* in proximity for years prompted the *Makhelian* to conduct a discourse prior to dispersal. Decided to disperse for a common good is reasonable but not worth enough to foster memory of their oneness for posterity. The necessity might thus felt to organise a memorable dispersal discourse with an oath of allegiance of their oneness. Based on oral tradition, the dispersal discourse was not held where they resided, but a bit far off yet within an audible distance to hear crowing of a cock. The site where the dispersal discourse was held is known as *charangho* (means mystic edge/charm edge). In the account of *Makhelian* tradition, the tree is not a myth but a living fact, which is still there for everyone to see. Today, the dispersal tree is located at *Charanghomei* (Shajouba), which is at a distance of 2 km east from Tadubi –NH 2 (erstwhile 39), Dimapur-Imphal road. *Charanghomei* (Shajouba) is adjacent to *MakhrariRabu* (Makhel). Once upon a time, the entire vicinity areas of *Makhel* have been within the purview of *Makhel* and with the expulsion of population, satellite villages begun.

Tamara Chütebu Kaji (Dispersal Wild Pear Tree) as Medium

When communication is considered as passing information from one person to another, the dispersal tree can form part of the non-verbal communication. So, in the absence of the script and text where orality is the norm, verbal, symbols, stones, trees, arts, attires and so forth are only means to communicate. The dispersal tree was imprinted as mark of dispersal treaty (*alepealekha*) of the *Makhelian* to transmit the message of dispersion for posterity. Likewise, it is like a text that one can read the tale of dispersal and ancestors. It is also a communicative tangible non-verbal medium that anybody can listen and observe. It represents orality, which is an expression of face-to-

face physical presence communication and information is orally transmitted by way of living out on everyday life basis. The physical presence within time-space unity is the distinct mark of orality, of which the dispersal tree is albeit in non-verbal form.

When the *Makhelian* do not have a written tradition, based on tangibly expressive potential the tree has been embossed to testify as witness of dispersal for posterity. They chose a durably communicable tree as the medium to proof of their dispersal and the tree is the living document that corroborates the dispersal tradition. The tree speaks and communicates that their ancestors dispersed from here.

One can imagine, why *chütebu* is considered to communicate the tale of dispersal for posterity. Besides been large amongst the trees, what might have caught their interest of the tree is its stems and branches are strong that can't be easily tweaked. Similarly, *chütebu* doesn't normally wither and can withhold common storms and other natural calamities. Further, those fruits that aren't ripe in its season won't fall but rejuvenate themselves to join the next batch. There is popular credence that like the *chütebu* the *Makhelian* will have a fruitful and longevity life. Expected the *Makhelian* to be honest who would be healthy to resist diseases like that of the tree that can withhold common natural calamities.

Though there are various other wild pear trees, dispersal wild pear tree stands par excellence in terms of its size. Its circumference (round size of the tree) is about 25 feet. Accordingly, its radius and diameter are 4.053 feet and 8.106 feet respectively. On average, its height is measured something like 50-55 feet. Start from its bottommost part, instead of opening with a single trunk, there are four sizable trunks. The tree communicates not only of the solemn dispersal discourse but also fraternity of the Nagas. The *tamara chütebu kaji* speaks volume of oral literature and oral tradition that can't be simply dumped as another myth. Indeed, it is a living proof that communicates dispersal had happened. Till date the dispersal tree survives and speaks.

Dispersal Wild Pear Tree as Representation of Ancestor

Been regarded and believed as one of the oldest trees and the dispersion conclave was held under its shade, it symbolizes as forebear and ancestor (*opfo-ope*). The tree can be considered as the totem in Durkheimian school of religion for the *Makhelian* although it is not actually worship. Revering the tree may reflect certain form of worship. However, there is no any specific rite and ritual that is devoted to it as an act of worship. Neither any instance to show that people actually put forth their prayers to the tree for any favour or expressing gratitude for blessings. Although there were incidents in which people seek for a longevity of the tree and its protection from storms and other calamities. For instance, as *orameizhomazhepio*, *pfoyepenoakretichüno*,

chükrichüriedzünokolo! (Means, seeking God's benevolent protection, let the tree withhold rains and storms, and not fall). The prayer reflects nothing less than what one would pray for one's loved ones.

Likewise, occasional seeking of blessing for the custodians by the village chief or elders will be normally performed near beneath the tree. Seeking of blessing begins with an utterance: *Oratho, ochümadai he apfo-e ojümashe he apfü-e, Oh! ekhra-mahra, enapu-kapemata, ememe, singha-mozho eh shüpfolikohrü raku kokule. Kayio so, omeikokhowe, otokokhowe.* (Worship God, crystal blue sky my father, open flat earth my mother, Oh! souls of the Makhan, Maram, Lepaona, Paomata, Mao, Angami and Lotha of all *Shüpfowo* descendants be united. Good wishes, seeking for people, seeking for wealth). Of the many fruit bearing wild trees, its fruit is forbidden to eat for the human though the same can be enjoyed by reptiles and birds. This prohibition is on account of reverence as one does so to his/her ancestors. Likewise, birds and reptiles can make nest and have good time on the tree, but human being habitually don't climb on it.

Being the most revered tree among the *Makhelian*, it is widely believed that the flourishing of the branches have its own significance and implication. Hence, bud of a new branch in whichever direction indicates the nature of righteous and noble life of the people and that they will have a prosperous life. Opposite is the case in whichever direction that the branch of tree is fallen or withered. So, in the direction where the branches are blooming is considered as an indication where the *Makhelians* will thrive. The fallen of big stem/trunk indicates an imminent occurrence or had already occurred of severe consequence which is not easy to fill the void.

Dispersal Wild Pear Tree Symbolises Oneness

In oral tradition of the Nagas, the existence of a living dispersal wild pear tree corroborated the proof of the *Makhelian* tradition. The recognition of the tradition that the Naga ancestors once lived at *Makhel* is the basis of what is considered as ethnic Naga culture. Ethnic identity of the Nagas is very much linked with the tradition of the dispersal tree. Culture is not just an outcome of biological but social aspect of human life. Culture shapes the sense of oneness as members of a community while creating a common identity where 'others' do not identify with it. The community coherence is constructed based on culture. Nagas as a people of the world community want their distinct culture to be recognised as they aspire to live as per their own cultural ethos.

While comprehending that the tree is an ideal durable and concrete medium in the world of orality, *Makhelian* have used *tamara chütebu kaji* to conceive and visualise the idea of "Imagined Community" (Anderson 1983). Through the tree they had decided to relate and communicate of their oneness. To symbolizes that once upon a time they "co-presence" and "shared common

locale” to use Thompson’s words (1996), the *Makhelian* stamped the tree in the dispersal discourse (*ashüji*). There is a popular tradition that any swearing or oath is taken/done in the name of something bigger/powerful than thyself. Thus, in dispersal treaty (*alepealekha*) of oneness of the *Makhelian*, the tree became an arbiter and witness. It symbolizes unison and oneness of the Nagas.

Dispersal Wild Pear Tree *Genna*

In traditional religion of the Nagas, there is no concept of the place of worship or scared text. They considered thick jungle, mighty tree or stone as abode of the spirits though they belief inexistence of the Supreme Being (*Ora*) and *Oratho* (worship God) is a common usage in their daily life. Spirits are comprised of both benevolent and malevolent. Their act of worship focus more on the malevolent spirits since there is a fear that they cause sickness and trouble. And they worshipped through means of *genna* prior to the coming of print culture and Christianity. *Genna* communicates an act of worship, signifying abstention from normal schedule that constitutes a regular feature in the Naga magico-religious rites (Hutton 1921:189). It is also a medium of social control and means of socialisation. *Gennais* an oral channel informing the people of how they should conduct in a lifeworld of orality. While communicating what is sagacious, it enhances the quality of sociability. It is broadly known and used in two ways – *thene* and *mane*. *Thene* means monthly or annual holiday of the lunar calendar year. Whereas, *mane* connotes specific observation of *thene* on account of earthquakes, eclipses, storms, floods, fire-furnaces (*chüdechüvu*), hailstorms, etc.

Occurrence of *genna*, whether monthly, annually or occasionally will be usually informed by the village chief and villagers are expected to abstain from usual works. Some popular *gennas* are such as *omikazhü*, *phre mane* and *dzükho*. Following the death of a person, a village *genna* will be observed as a marked of respect for the departed soul. This is how respect is shown and observed in the form of *genna*. So also the annual festivals is observed as *genna*. To ward off epidemic in neighbouring villages, occasions such as *feast of merit*, peace treaty (*asü-koto*), public gathering, prayers for success in warfare, etc., *gennais* observed. At this point, it is suffice to know the significance of *genna* in the Naga society since to discuss the detail about the *genna* is not the focus of the paper.

The *genna* of the dispersal wild pear tree is termed as *chütebukajiachae mane*, which is pronounced as per information of the fallen branch of the tree. It can be announced by any male member of the village whoever first sighted the incident. Women are barred to enunciate the *genna* even if they first noticed the incident but can bring notice to the male-folk. In case, if an incident is first seen by an “outsider”(not custodians), it will be intimated to the villagers and accordingly *genna* will be pronounced. As tradition, the avowal of *genna* begins from *Charanghomei (Shajouba)* by virtue that the village is the custodian of

the tree. Since the time of dispersal, this is how village centric community and the idea of village republic had been instituted. Village-state administration is largely depended on functionality of *genna* to sustain order in the village. The discourse of village republic is a distinct marked of the Naga society since every village has its own land beside group of villages, tribe and community as a whole.

As and when the broken/fallen branch is seen, *genna* can be pronounced until sunset and the villagers will abstain from work for remaining of the day. Like observing *genna* on account of passing away a fellow-being on hearing the news those who had gone to field will return. Unlike the *genna* of the death of a person, however, the *genna* of the dispersal tree is observed till the last suburb of the *Makhelianas* the news spreads. The *genna* will be observed even if the information reaches after days. This shows that the *genna* of the dispersal tree is been honoured at a different scale as compared to death of a person. Two or more villages can jointly observe the *genna* on the same day depending on the information they received. It is believed that the *gennais* observed till *pheshukozhülie* (distantly thick-wood). Observation of *genna* of the dispersal tree is thus few and far between.

An observation of *genna* from the place of dispersal till the farthest suburb where the *Makhelianan* settled reflects the sense of brotherhood. That the *genna* will be observed from nearest to outermost hamlet of the *Makhelianin* the event of the fallen stem is a consequence of the dispersal treaty. The tree is a living witness of dispersion and have not come across any disputed view on this account. The hard fact is that there is not claimant of objection on observation of *genna* from any corner. Generations after generations, the tradition has been continued, though nowhere in oral tradition shown that those failing to observe will face consequences. All such secrets and mysteries are constituted part of *alepealekha* (covenant) and to disclose that the tree represent the treaty is enough to continue the legacy. The tree does not just manifest the treaty but also its implication.

As an expression of respect, those who noticed the fallen/broken branch will take the trouble to keep aside the broken part(s) from the public view. This act indicates as paying homage to the departed soul and giving interment like that of the dead fellow-being since there is a tradition of burying the death among the *Makhelian*. It is one of the few trees, whose stem or branch is not utilised for fire-wood though fire-wood is the basic fuel of the people. Neither trimming of any sort will be done as interference of human action is a taboo (*chüno*) unless so naturally. Such reverence and symbolic embeddedness of the people is accorded only *totamara chütebu kajü* and no other trees, however big or small since antiquity. Broken or fallen of its stem is usually an outcome of natural calamities. The villagers recalled that whenever natural calamities occurred often they envision the stem might have tweaked and the next day would be observed *chütebukajiachaemane*. Contrary to what they have been

envisaged the tree remains intact. Unlike other trees, there is believed that as *Orasübu* (God's tree), it possess natural strength to withhold natural calamities and putrefy depending on its own time. The tree testifies that whoever observed *genna* are descendance of common root.

With the wave of change and Christianisation, the significance of *genna/mane* is getting battered and its observance is also limited to some nearby villages. However, by not observing strictly the *genna* in no way has devalued its importance as dispersal tree. Not so far away, Chümukedema town, Nagaland (2003); Viswema Village, *K. Khel* (1983); Khonoma, *Themova Khel* (1992), and Medzüphema (Nagaland) among others had affirmed their reverence of the dispersal tree. The tree that survives till date is the representative figure and living testimony of the dispersal treaty.

Conclusion

The analysis unfolds the historicity of *Makhelas* ancestral place and divulges that indisputably dispersal had happened. Tangible non-verbal communicative evidence of dispersal tale such as *tarama chütebu kaji* is rare to transmit for posterity. In the absence of written text, the dispersal wild pear tree has been stamped as the witness of the dispersal treaty. A treaty that continue for generations cannot be simply an outcome of a mere pronouncement but a product of a concentrated discourse, though nothing much have been ascertained of an actual content. The dispersal tree is a text that people can read and becomes a medium that conveys the tale of the brotherhood of a family tree. In a lifeworld of orality, the tree become part of peoples' social life in which they can see, touch and smell. And to uphold the legacy of dispersal treaty, the *Makhelian* observed a *genna* whenever a trunk or branch of the tree is broken.

Notes

- 1 The term *Makhelian* is referred to those Naga tribes who considered *Makhel* as their ancestral place and subscribed to the theory of dispersal.
- 2 *Tenymiare* the Nagas who believed that they have descended from a common ancestor and so they are blood brothers.
- 3 *Makhel* is a village in the Mao area of Senapati district, Manipur located in between NH 2 (erstwhile NH 39) Dimapur-Moreh road and the proposed Trans-Asian Highway.

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