

A Study On The Love Themes In Hao Laa (Tangkhul Naga Folksong)

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Abstract: Tangkhul is one of the Naga tribes residing in Ukhrul District of Manipur, in the North-Eastern part of India. Like any other tribe, the Tangkhuls have their own culture and traditions which set them apart from other neighbouring tribes. Their rich cultural heritage is narrated through folklore. One in particular is the Tangkhul folksong which has become a fundamental source of the history of the Tangkhuls since they had no tradition of written documentation from their early days. Communications in the form of songs, words, gestures and the like remain the bearer of their culture and customs for the continuing generations. In this paper some of the Hao laa in context to the theme of 'love' are studied and analyzed to bring out certain social significance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Music and song play a significant role in the different stages of human life starting from childhood to adolescence till death and these evolve around the different activities of human life. We find that lullabies are sung to pacify babies, game songs are found to have sung both by children as well as adults depending on the context of the game and many others. Again, elaborate songs are sung by the adults describing the ups and downs of life. There are work songs which direct the energies of workers and relieve the tedium of labour and so on.

The Tangkhuls are hill people belonging to the Naga group of communities. A majority of their population is found in Ukhrul District of Manipur in the north-eastern region of India, while some also inhabit the Senapati district of Manipur and few in pockets of Myanmar (Fig. 1). Although, scientific research carried out by scholars on the origin of the Tangkhul Nagas in the last century has led to different insights on the question of their origin, however, based upon their physical and cultural findings dialect such as physical feature, culture, custom and practices and oral tradition, they belong to the Mongoloid stock and speak Tibeto-Burman (Ruivah 1993).¹ Consensus on the origin of the Tangkhuls points towards China in the upper reaches of Huang Ho and Yangtze Rivers

which now lie in the south-eastern part of the Xinjiang province.²

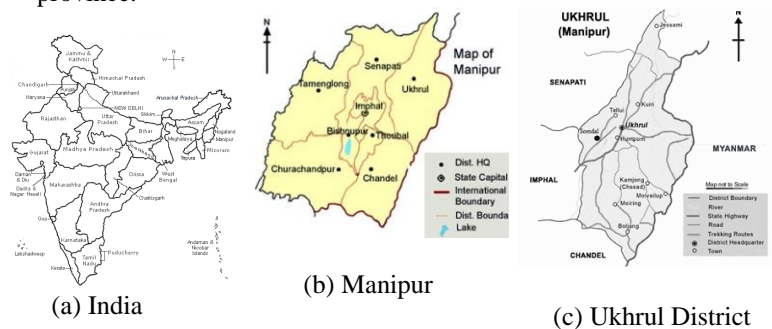


Figure 1: Maps showing the location of the Tangkhul Nagas in India

Hao Laa is the folksong of the Tangkhul Nagas. It is a conglomeration of two words- 'Hao' referring to the Tangkhuls and 'Laa' meaning song. 'Hao' is the original name of the Tangkhuls. This term is used even today as a suffix to their folk songs (*Hao Laa*), dresses (*Hao sari*), coiffure (*Hao Kuiret*) and other day to day articles in use like traditional spade (*Hao tin*) etc. The origin of the name 'Hao' has various discourses. According to some, the name is derived from 'Ho-Ho' a tone the Tangkhuls use in harmony in two or three groups when they sing, dance or carry heavy loads and other merry makings (Shimray 2001).³ Some are of the opinion that 'Hao' is a city in China presently known as Xian and that the

Tangkhuls have been a resident of this city in early days before they inhabited their present homeland/habitat and so the name (Lunghar, 1986).⁴

In its utmost importance, *Hao Laa* has become one of the fundamental sources of the history of the Tangkhuls since the Tangkhuls had no tradition of written documentation from their early days. As a result, every beginning of their life is a story which is maintained in oral tradition such as songs, tales since they did not have the knowledge of written documentation and only relied on oral tradition. Hence, communications in the form of songs, words, gestures and the like remains the bearer of their culture and customs for the continuing generations. In the context of the Tangkhul society, singing and dancing are the important features, especially, of all Tangkhul festivals. 'Indeed, there is no life of the Tangkhuls where there is no music and dance. As for the Tangkhuls, they sing while they work, carry heavy loads or as they walk. When they sit together and make merriment, the gathering is seasoned with music'.⁵

The Tangkhuls are music loving people. Their repertoire of *Hao Laa* comprises of variety of themes. There are songs that talk about love, festival, hatred, bravery, war, joys and sorrows. One can see that the performance of an enormous task is lightened by some whistling sounds from the workers or bursting it into a group affair by singing it (Fig. 2). Almost all singing is mostly group or community affair rather than individual activity. *Hao Laa* accompanies every type of celebration and completes the activities of every occasion. *Hao Laa* also acts as a mirror to reflect their past.

Hao Laa which was sung by the ancestors and which has been inherited by their succeeding generations is maintained with little or no variation despite the adaptation to modern changes with the passage of time. In this paper some of the *Hao laa* in context to the theme of 'love' are studied and analyzed.



Figure 2: Young Tangkhul Naga damsels participating in the performance of *Laa Khangani* (Virgin Dance) during the *Luir* (seed-sowing festival) in Hunphun village, Manipur, India

II. HAO LAA WITH THE THEME OF LOVE

Love, which is the essence of life, is found not only among youths; it covers the entire relationship of human life.

In the absence of this affectionate attachment, humans could have never come this far. But the main force of emotional sustenance that binds people, being love, it is of immense importance to be taken into study.

Based upon the study on *Hao Laa* with the theme of love, two kinds of love songs are observed: *Hao laa* related to romance termed locally as *Lungchan Laa* and filial love songs which can be generally termed as *Avā-avā naongara Leishat Laa*. Those *Hao laa* in the category of *Lungchan Laa* have emanated from popular and well-known legends and tales in the Tangkhul society. In such folk songs, even playful or mocking element also comes into play. On the other hand, love songs have also been generated from different feelings of love shared among parents and their children.

Below is a reproduction and analysis of romantic love songs:

*Iram shongshanli,
Oh, kahaotheri chungmei chatalo
Chungmei chatalo
Ram yaron shupshaishangrali
Ram yaron shokhamarona
Oh, shokhamarona
Zingkumthei shupshaiphalunga.*

TRANSLATION:

In the roadside of our village
Oh, let there be more girls
Let there be more
Village boys are coming to propose you
Smart and proud village boys
Oh, smart boys
By nature find girls of age.

In the above Tangkhul folksong, the nature of romantic love between a boy and a girl is reflected. In this song, girls are referred to as 'chestnuts' by the roadside. The outer covering of the chestnut is thorny which when peeled or uncovered becomes smooth and brownish in colour carrying the pure fresh white nut within. The whiteness and the purity of the fresh chestnut are compared to the purity of virgin girls. Thus, the natural instinct in man to marry a pure virgin girl is conveyed through the nut. And since men would like to choose their woman from many; the text of the song calls for the number of girls to increase so that boys would get a chance of selecting one for them.

The bond that exists between parents and children, especially a mother and a child is unbreakable. To parents, no matter how cruel and unscrupulous their children may be, their love for their children never fails. The same is the case with children's love towards parents. In the Tangkhul context, one occasion which exposes Parental love is during marriage of daughters wherein daughters leave their parental home to be joined with husbands in a new home. Initially this may seem uneasy and uncomfortable in both homes, but time gradually heals and everything goes back to normalcy as described in the following *Hao Laa*:

*Oh, leishi ningchuiya, maheiram
Eh, ngala kafanao
Oh, ngala kafanao leishiya
Eh, chonrei shaksamiya*

*Oh, chonrei shaksami, kongmakan
Eh, ngarei chapshona*

TRANSLATION:

Oh, love burns the heart, different place
Eh, for married girls
Oh, married girls, miss you
Oh, packs for her all that she needs
Oh, all that she needs, and crosses the river
Eh, turn back and cried continuously.

This *Hao Laa* speaks of the Tangkhuls' belief in the departed life journey of the girls by way of marriage. The notion is that a girl will die twice in her life. The first death is when she leaves her parent's house permanently to be united with her husband and his family; while the second is when she meets her physical death. Both the deaths result in tears. When she leaves her own home where she was born and brought-up, her parents would shed tears of their unsurpassed love for her, and when she meets her end in this world, tears of love overflows in the eyes of her beloved ones once again. The fact that happens to a girl in the Tangkhul Naga society when she gets married is that she goes to live with her husband and his family, leaving behind her very own mother and father. In the third line of the song, the package includes all that she needs starting from emotional needs to her physical needs. Again 'married girl crossing the river' refers to the boundary line between her and her parents, signifying that she has become a wife, no longer a virgin, and that she has crossed her life of youth. When she turns back and cries it means her longing for her old life, the days of her youth and her not wanting to part with everything that has to do with her attachments with her kinsmen. It also shows that the girl in question is not ready yet to accept the new life and role of being a woman, wife and mother. She still longs and needs her freedom, wanting to live on her own will and hence turns back and cries as she knows that she cannot fulfil her wish anymore after her marriage. Besides, she will no longer get the same love and affection from her husband as she got from her parents, the love so unbound, unsurpassed by anything in the world. Therefore, even if she does not cut off the parent-child relationship it looks like she has done so because she belongs to her husband's family after their union. It is not an easy task for her when she leaves for a new life. But time consumes her tears of longings and blesses her with new love.

Another song of the same theme runs as follows:

*Oh, yaovayaavaram
Oh, yaovaya
Oh, avamakol kharamliyo
Eh, nava Tusom tui saliya
Oh, tuila mashamana
Tuilayo mashamana
Eh, nako vairupmi
Oh, rachang chirhaowa
Eh, rachangyo chirhaoda
Oh, ngarailo inaokhani
Oh, hongva thaiphungle
Hongvachi oh mathairalo
Eh, iniva kong makanhaira
Oh, ramli chanung haomaga*

TRANSLATION:

Oh, visited motherland
Oh, visited
Oh, mother you are speaking Tusom dialect
We don't understand your words
Oh, she served us water in a leaf
Oh, our thirst is quenched
Eh, since we have quenched our thirst
Oh, wait my sons
Oh, I'm bringing water filled in a gourd
Oh, don't bring it anymore
Eh, we have crossed the river
Oh, we will return to our village.

This *Hao Laa* describes how a beautiful woman of two sons was captured to be killed in an inter-village feud. Fortunately, the man who captured her was caught by the beauty of the woman and decided to prevent her from becoming a victim of war. He took her with him to Tusom village to be his wife. Long after seventeen years, her two sons became aware of the fact that their mother was alive and decided to look for her. They went on from one village to another till they finally reached Tusom village. On entering the village, they met an old woman with whom they enquired about their mother by referring her as a woman who was captured from war. To their delight, they were well informed about their mother and proceeded to seek for her, entered her house and asked for water. It is to be noted here that while these boys recognized their mother at a glance the latter did not. Unaware of who they were, the mother served them water from the leaves. Since the boys did not disclose their identity, it is obvious that the mother would not recognize them. After they finished drinking, they decided to go back on their way home to their village. Soon after they left, the old woman came to the mother and told her that the two men were none other than her own sons. At this, she was filled with remorse. She immediately filled water in a gourd and ran towards her sons. But they have already crossed the river by then. Across the river, they told her not to come after them anymore. So, miserably and filled with shame and guilt, she threw towards them some bean seeds to be planted in their village. She returned home and so her sons. In this *Hao Laa*, filial love is seen in the mother's wish for the well-being of her two sons.

The song is usually sung during summer. This song was sung by the woman's elder son. They travelled on foot to seek their mother, but in finding her they were not thrilled. They found that she did not speak their vernacular anymore. Moreover, since their mother did not recognize them as her sons, she gave them water in a container made of leaf, for the practice was that outsiders or visitors should be served in a leaf. Since water never stays in a leaf, the sons left their mother's place without quenching their thirst. Therefore, in a mocking manner, the older son sings that they are quenched and satisfied. He sings what he actually felt at the treatment received from his own biological mother. Following Freudian's psychoanalytical theory,⁶ it is found that the song speaks of the wish fulfilment of the two grown up sons. This is seen through their quest for the mother they lost since childhood, the water to quench their thirst, the leaves with which they were served and the bean seeds. All together these

elements signify the longing of prosperity, and fertility for reproduction through the mother's blessings.

The quest symbolizes the desire for the mother, her absence from home for such long years, is put up to the conscious but their search did not materialize as she did not recognize them when she was in their presence. The water and the leaves symbolize the wish for a prosperous life. Again, the river here would mean the line of demarcation and the distance between the sons and the mother. While the bean seeds thrown by the mother to her sons signifies reproduction. Further, it is a symbolic act of her wish for the well-being of her sons and also to never go hungry.

III. CONCLUSION

A study of the above songs containing love theme in them reflects not only the prevalent love affairs between youths but also the form of society and the functions that these songs serve in the Tangkhul society. The first song focuses on the existence of love affair or relationship between man and woman which sometimes results in their union based on love even if not always as the society permits both arranged and love marriage. In the second song the love of parents for their children at the parting for a new life is conveyed. The song also reveals the patrilineal form of society where women have to

leave their parental home and go away to stay with their spouses. Thus, the closeness between parents and children is also seen in their society. The last song reflects the history of the Tangkhuls. The cause and effect of war is pictured in the song. The fact that war destroys love and the like is clearly surfaced in the text of the song thereby determining the life of the people. Thus, *Hao Laa* is not only sung as they are meant to be but they bear witnesses to variants of life and the activities through the stories they carry with them.

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