

Towards Reading Tangkhul Proverbs

A Study of Cultural Representation

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Towards Reading Tangkhul Proverbs: A Study of Cultural Representation**” is the result of research carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr Debapriya Basu, Associate Professor in English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. I affirm that the research findings and information presented in this thesis are my own work and have been duly acknowledged through appropriate citations and a comprehensive list of references.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the research work for the thesis titled *Towards Reading Tangkhul Proverbs: A Study of Cultural Representation* submitted by Ng Mawonthing for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati was carried out under my supervision. The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other Institution for a degree or a diploma.

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Abstract

This thesis employs a literary critical approach along with insights from ethnography and linguistics to examine Tangkhul proverbs as both cultural expressions and literary objects, aiming to uncover their significance in reflecting the community's worldview. The study focuses on stylistic devices such as symbols, metaphors, similes, and various figures of speech, exploring their contributions to rhetorical effects, aesthetic values, and meaning formation. Rather than deriving principles from a limited set, the research provides glimpses into Tangkhul philosophy as articulated through their proverbs, emphasising their role as cultural texts embodying the community's beliefs and values. To illustrate their meanings and conversational usage, the study includes examples of actual or hypothetical situations.

The thesis also offers a cultural background of the Tangkhul community and discusses various scholarly theories to understand the Tangkhul concept of proverbs. The proverbs are systematically analysed under five thematic divisions. The study seeks to offer valuable historical and cultural insights into the Tangkhul community, enhancing the understanding of how proverbs serve as powerful communication tools. This analysis provides insights into Tangkhul philosophy, social norms, and ethical values, highlighting the role of proverbs in character development, ethical awareness, and the conveyance of moral principles within a little-studied and predominantly oral culture.

Keywords: proverbs, proverbial phrases, Phalee, Tangkhul, culture, tradition, worldview



List of Abbreviations and Figures

Abbreviations

(N.B. For full bibliographical details, see Works Cited)

Angkang: *Ancient Sayings of Hao and Modern Proverbs*

Arokianathan: *Tangkhul Folk Literature*

Kanrei: *Tangkhul Chanjam* (“Tangkhul Proverbs”)

Kasomwoshi: *Hao Tangkhul Chānjam*

John: *Awo-Ayi Ngashan* (“Culture, Custom, Lasem”)

MK: The Matti Kuusi International Type System and Database of Proverbs

Oxford: *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*

Penguin: *The Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs*

Pettigrew: *Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary (Ukhrul Dialect) with Illustrative Sentences*

Pheirei: *Hao Chāncham* (“Hao Proverbs”)

Routledge: *The Routledge Book of World Proverbs*

Sira: *Haowui Kharar Chānsam* (“Proverbs”)

Figures

Figure 1: Map of the Tangkhul Naga population distribution in India

Figure 2: Neal R. Norrick’s proverbial feature matrix schematic



Chapter One

Tangkhul over Time

Tuichi lāna, lāchi tuina

Word is song, song is word

Paremiology is a well-established and highly developed field of scholarly research with a history of important contributions from disciplines as varied as linguistics, folklore studies, psychology, literary studies, anthropology, religious studies, cultural studies, and sociology. Proverbs have long been a subject of interest in European, Chinese, Arab and African cultures, and extensive research has been conducted on these fixed expressions of various societies within those geographical ambits by stalwarts such as Edward Westermarck (1930), Archer Taylor (1931), Wolfgang Mieder (1993), Sw. Anand Prahlad (1996), Oyekan Owomoyela (2005), Kwesi Yangkah (1989) John Lewis Burckhardt (2010), and Gerd de Ley (2019). Indian proverbs in languages and cultures such as Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, and Kashmiri are also vibrant areas of collection and study, with notable contributions from Herman Jensen (1987), Raymond D. Doctor (1993, 2004, 2005), Raj Kachru (2021), and R. C. Temple (2012). However, these discussions are overwhelmingly of proverbs used by languages that possess a writing system. Indian oral cultures have not, to my knowledge, been an object of study in paremiology. The literary significance of the proverbs used by the Tangkhul Naga nation in the Tangkhul and Phalee languages, which is the subject of this study, remains largely unexplored. There is a lack of systematic scholarly engagement with Tangkhul proverbs and a notable absence of literary, aesthetic, hermeneutical, and rhetorical studies within this cultural and linguistic context.

Scholarship on Tangkhul Naga culture, which this research is based upon, is yet to establish a comprehensive corpus of the proverbs that are used by speakers of the language. Native speakers, especially school educators and private citizens, have started to undertake initiatives for cultural and linguistic preservation only recently. With the exception of individual enthusiasts and limited efforts in collections, the exploration of Tangkhul proverbs has been sparse. This research seeks to address this gap and contribute to the nascent study of Tangkhul proverbs with special emphasis on Phalee, a dialect of Tangkhul that is mutually incomprehensible with it, and which is spoken by the inhabitants of the villages of Phalee and Thoyee in Manipur, India. The data aggregator and visualising platform for the identification of ethnic populations The Joshua Project, although strongly religious in motivation, does offer a convenient starting point for imagining the geospatial distribution of the Tangkhul Naga people in India and offers some preliminary metrics (Figure 1). Although these figures may not be fully reliable, they do show not only the population concentration but also indicate the diasporic presence of the people in the rest of the country.

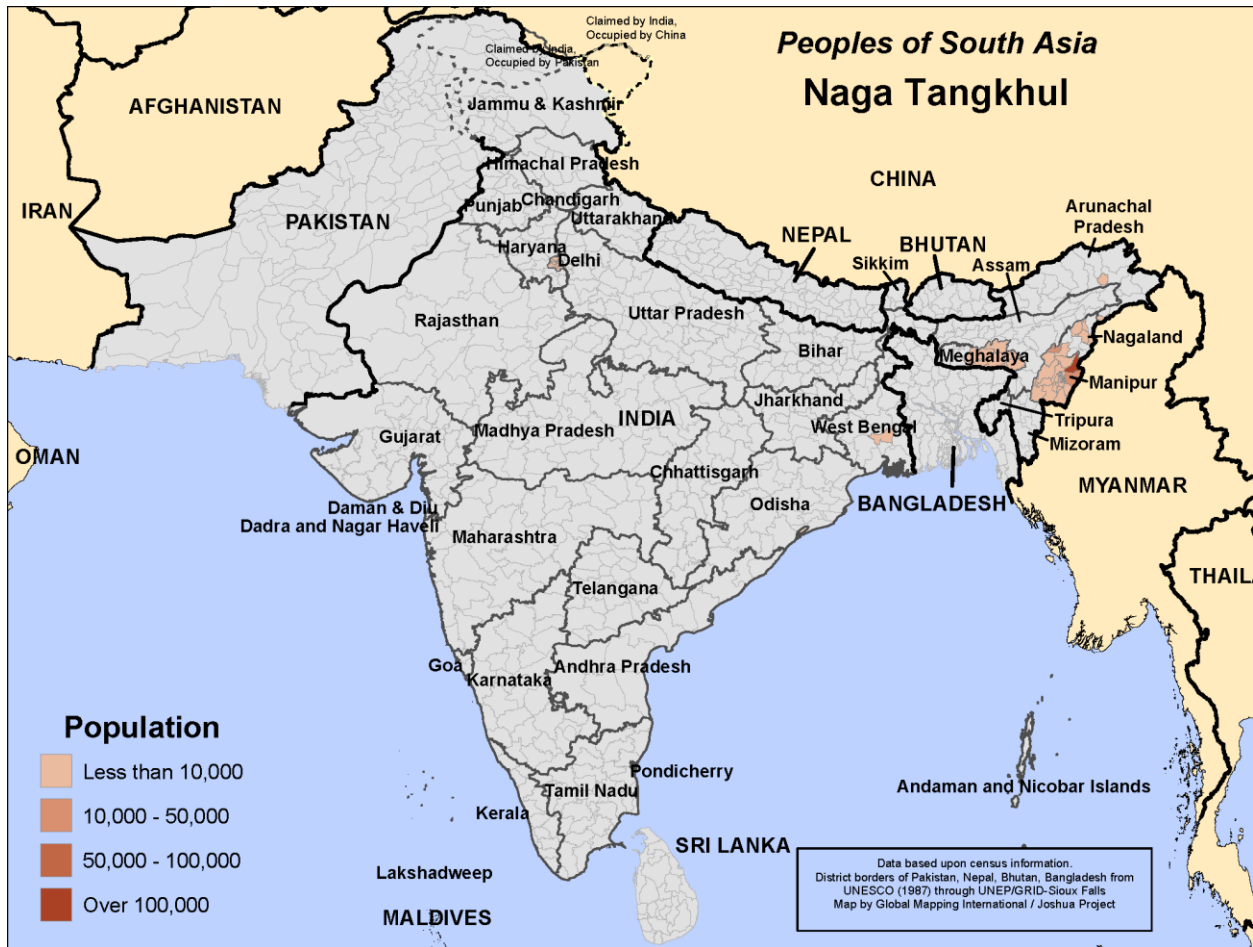


Figure 1: Map downloaded from the Tangkhul Naga entry in The Joshua Project, showing population density and distribution of the Tangkhul Naga in India (URL: <https://joshuaproject.net/maps/india/18214>, accessed August 2024).

Contextual details about the relationship between the two languages and cultures of Tangkhul and Phalee are discussed throughout this study. Suffice it to say here that since the Tangkhul Nagas share very strong cultural traits and beliefs, mutual incomprehensibility in dialect and geospatial differences notwithstanding; the Phalee, like myself, speak and write Tangkhul fluently. Phalee village, formerly called Phadang, is located within the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot, 22 kms west of Ukhrul district and 86 kms from the state capital Imphal in the north-eastern part of India. Thoyee (formerly Thawai) village is located approximately 80 kms away

from Phalee village, in the Kamjong district. The inhabitants of these two villages speak Phalee and Tangkhul. Phalee does not have a standard orthography yet, but attempts are underway to formalise the language and help it transition to a written culture. A significant motivation for the present work, and part of the hybrid methodology followed (i.e. interpretive and critical analysis of proverbs available in existing printed anthologies for Tangkhul; plus paremiographical collection from the field and subsequent close readings for Phalee) may be attributed to the researcher's own investment in this ongoing community initiative for the preservation of Phalee language and culture as part of the Tangkhul Naga composite cultural identity.

I have chosen proverbs as my genre for analysis due to the implications of the brevity and fixity of its form that seem to be particularly suited to the focus and scope of the work: it keeps the material manageable (as opposed to songs or folk tales, which can run into many versions), opens the material up to literary interpretation, and invites stylistic and rhetorical analysis. However, before a discussion of the scholarship on paremiology and the understanding of proverbs in Tangkhul may be initiated, the language and culture under study must be introduced. Sources are slim to none on Tangkhul and Phalee people. At the risk of making the thesis top-heavy, this introduction is sectioned into two parts. Part I provides the socio-historical background of the Tangkhul language and culture illustrated by proverbial sayings and other oral genres in order to serve a double purpose: firstly, to provide the necessary background information to readers unfamiliar with Tangkhul and Phalee and, secondly, to show how the verbal arts, especially proverbial sayings, are fundamental to the identity formation of these communities, thereby also underscoring the rationale for the present dissertation. The second section of the chapter indicates the modes through which this work seeks to categorise proverbs and distinguish them from other proverbial expressions, going on to outline the objectives of the work, the research questions that

this study addresses, the methodology followed with a brief summary of the thesis structure, and the subject matter of subsequent chapters. Throughout the study, the underlying aim is to describe the Tangkhul understanding of proverbiality, limited as it is by challenges encountered in building a taxonomy via cultural translation for proverbial expressions and the terminological conundrums posed by existing printed collections.

Part I

The World According to the Tangkhul

Naming the Nation

Tangkhul in India is one of the Naga tribal ethnic groups settled in the northeast part of India. This document will use Tangkhul instead of Tangkhul Naga throughout for brevity and because it is standard practice by the Tangkhul nation spread across India and Myanmar. The language spoken by the Tangkhul is also known as Tangkhul. The Tangkhuls live mainly in the Indo-Burma border area, occupying the Ukhrul District and Kamjong District of Manipur, India.¹ The Somra Tangkhuls live mainly in the Somra tract hills in Layshi and Homalin townships in Myanmar (R. Vashum, “Terrains” 12). According to the 2011 census of India, the total population of Tangkhul is around 1,83,998. There are more than 200 Tangkhul villages (Ahum 21), and each village, with a few exceptions, has its own dialect named after itself, as in the case of Phalee (Thoyee is one of these exceptions).² As Mortensen and Miller note the Tangkhul language is thought to belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages, but this view is not an uncontested one: “The proper

¹ For the authorised history of the Tangkhul people and language, see The Government of India’s Ukhrul District entry at <https://ukhrul.nic.in/history/#:~:text=The%20Tangkhuls%20belong%20to%20the,sub%2Dfamily%20Tibeto%2DBurman>. (accessed, August 2024).

² According to the locals, now only the chief of the village and a few elders can speak the Thoyee dialect.

classification of these languages within Tibeto-Burman is still uncertain” (1). Despite the absence of scholarly consensus, the varieties of Tangkhul spoken in different villages are classified as dialects of the Tangkhul language. The degree of mutual intelligibility between these dialects decreases with increasing geographical distance between the villages, thereby constituting a dialect continuum (Chambers and Trudgill 5). The Tangkhul language is primarily comprised of different varieties, of which the Hunphun variety occupies a significant portion and is used as the lingua franca. The writing script uses the English alphabet with two extra letters- ‘ā’ ‘/a:/’ and ‘a’ ‘/u/’. The majority of Tangkhuls are multilingual, having Tangkhul, the village language (Phalee, in my case), and Manipuri at the very least. In addition to these, most educated people also speak English and Hindi. Depending on the situation and context, both Tangkhul and the village dialect are used for communication within a village. Tangkhul is utilised for the conduct of official proceedings such as funerals, wedding ceremonies, and other significant formal events. It is also used as a medium of instruction in many educational institutions. According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, Tangkhul is classed as ‘vulnerable’, meaning it could become endangered soon. R. Vashum argues that the imposition of foreign languages on students against their preferences is counter-productive, exemplified by the Meitei language being imposed on Manipur’s tribal communities. This hinders the development of minority languages, such as Tangkhul. He also observes community complacency on this issue and suggests that the perceived lack of job opportunities linked to native languages leads many natives to deprioritise learning their own languages (“Tangkhuls” 360).

In his seminal work, *Wung (Tangkhul) Naga Okhot Mayonzā: Wung Tangkhul Naga Traditional Laws*, T. Luikham, who was a student of William Pettigrew,³ employs the term Wung,

³ He is a British Christian missionary, who arrived in the Ukhrul District in 1896, where he was instrumental in introducing Christianity and Western education to the Tangkhul community.

instead of Tangkhul or the alternative Hao, to designate the people.⁴ This work is noteworthy for being the first book written by a Tangkhul. Luikham argues that Wung is the authentic name of the tribe, contending that Tangkhul is not indigenous but rather a name given by the Meiteis⁵. He asserts that Tangkhul is a relatively recent term, having been in use for only a generation, whereas Wung has been the tribe's name for many generations (18). He further claims that the term Tangkhul does not appear in any Tangkhul folk songs, whereas Wung is frequently mentioned. This, he argues, substantiates the correctness of the nomenclature Wung for the tribe. He supports his assertion by citing two folk songs (19).

The nomenclature of Tangkhul is problematic. There seems to be no clear and satisfactory explanation of the term in any of the Tangkhul dialects. Many scholars have attempted to decipher the meaning of it, but so far, no conclusive and unanimously agreed meaning has been propounded. R. Vashum discusses the etymology of Tangkhul, its ethnic origin, migration pattern and cultural age in his article "Situating the Ethnohistory of the Tangkhul Nagas". In this essay, he observes that the "etymology of the word Tangkhul is still unknown. It is unclear whether the term is 'indigenous' or was given by outsiders" (33). One of the folk etymologies he records is that the word originates in the name *Tangkhu* who was supposedly an outstanding person with many

⁴ Hao is used to designate the Tangkhuls by both the Meiteis (as a derogation) and the Tangkhul themselves (as the original). Hau is an orthographic variation.

⁵ T. Luikham discusses the fraternal relationship between the Tangkhul and Meitei communities, emphasising the historical migration patterns that influenced their settlement in Manipur. He notes that upon arriving in Manipur, part of the migrating group settled in the Imphal Valley, while others, including other Naga tribes, continued their migration and eventually established their current habitats. Luikham does not claim a direct ancestral connection between the entire Wung (Tangkhul) population and the present-day Meitei. Rather, he suggests that the Wung people were the first settlers in Manipur, preceding the Meiteis' arrival (25–26).

The repeated references to Tangkhuls during the Meitei Moirang Lai Haraoba and Mera Wayungba festivals and other rituals highlight their historical and cultural influence and connection to the Meitei community. This could point to historical interactions, intermarriages, or other forms of cultural exchanges that have left a lasting impact on these rituals. However, there are groups of people such as NSCN (IM), which argue that the historical relationship between their community and the Meiteis is specific to Hundung village and does not extend to all Tangkhuls ("Meitei-Tangkhul blood").

commendable qualities in the distant past. Thus, the descendants of *Tangkhu* came to be later known as Tangkhul. Other claims propose that it comes from the Burmese term *Athangpi* or *Thanpi* (meaning ‘iron men’) and the Meitei term *Than-khul* (meaning ‘*than* village’). It is said that the Burmese had trade and commerce with the Nagas (including the Tangkhuls) while the latter was settled in Samsok (33). Yet another proposed etymology is that Tangkhul comes from the Manipuri words *atangpa* and *khul*. The word *atangpa* means ‘valuable’ or ‘rare,’ and *khul* means ‘village’ (Robert Shimray 28). Huimi Zimik suggests that the Tangkhul people are called *Hau* because they chant *hau hau* while performing physical labour and respond with *hau* when addressed. Additionally, he argues that the Meiteis refer to the Tangkhul as brothers, thus calling their place “tada kikhun,” which translates to “the village of my brother.” Consequently, this term evolved into Tangkhul (3). However, this proposition seems to be a little far-fetched given the fraught history of Tangkhul-Meitei relations and is perhaps more an attempt at self-exaltation than anything else. According to T. C. Hodson, an influential anthropologist, the Meiteis call *Hao* means Naga (9n1, 15n2). The term *Hao* is often used in a derogative sense by the Meiteis, referring to all the tribal people living in the hilly regions in Manipur, including all the tribes of the Naga and Kuki, Mizo, Paite and Hmar (Mawon 36). According to Vashum, some scholars argue that the term “Tangkhul-Hao” is more appropriate for referring to the Tangkhul people. This term is derived from *haokaphok*, meaning ‘origin’ which signifies the origin of the Tangkhuls when they were in the cave (33). However, this claim lacks substantial evidence, rendering the hypothesis unconvincing.

With the advent of Christianity, Christians among the Tangkhul community came to be referred to as *vareshi*, while non-Christian Tangkhuls were generally known as *hao*. Prior to their religious conversion, all Tangkhuls seem to have been known as *hao*. Presently, Tangkhul scholars

and lay people often use the term *hao* to refer to themselves, regardless of their religious affiliation. The term *hao* carries traditional and folkloric significance. In the Tangkhul language, there are expressions such as *haolā* (folksong), *haopheichak* (folk dance), *haohok* (a breed of indigenous pig), *haofa* (a species of indigenous dog), *haokhongphei* (traditional wooden plate), and *haokuiret* (traditional coiffeur), among others. *Hao* thus connotes notions of the old, folk, indigenous, and traditional.

Like other Naga tribes, it is believed that the Tangkhuls have a myth asserting that they once possessed a script of their own (M. Horam 13; T. Luikham 17). According to this myth, the script was inscribed on cowhide, which was subsequently eaten by a dog, and was thus lost to the people. However, Rev. William Pettigrew reports that “[u]nlike the Manipuris, the Tangkhul Nagas had no written language, not even the rudiments of an alphabet” (Solo and Mahangthei 39). There appears to be no awareness of this script among the Tangkhul people either, nor have any remnants of it been discovered. Furthermore, no folk song or verbal art form mentions the supposed lost script, aside from the myth itself. This myth, then, should perhaps not be interpreted literally. In ancient times, when there was no writing system, all information was recorded orally and stored in memory. Over time, some of this information inevitably deteriorated. It may be argued that the image of a cowhide being eaten by a dog metaphorically expresses the unavoidable loss of valuable information. This reading of the myth suggests that the culture may hold that the transience of certain knowledge is such a truism that even recorded information is vulnerable to loss.⁶

The origin of the Tangkhul people, like the origin of the Nagas, remains obscure. T. C. Hodson mentions three possible traditions regarding the origin of the Tangkhuls in his book *Naga*

⁶ See the discussion of the folk song (Appendix II, 7) referring to the uses of the *ngalāmq* below.

Tribes of Manipur (8–9). R. Vashum, also summarises seven possible traditions of their origin. He asserts, “[t]he origin of the Tangkhuls cannot be traced in isolation as their historical sojourn is tied with the other cognate Naga tribes” (“Situating the Ethnohistory” 34). He posits that the Tangkhuls, like other Naga tribes and other groups of Mongoloid stock, are believed to have originated somewhere in the regions now occupied by China, Mongolia, and Korea (35). The Tangkhuls, akin to other Naga tribes, are thought to have migrated to their present habitats in successive waves. M. Horam observes, “[a]s a matter of fact, no single writer has yet found himself equal to the task of correctly portraying the Nagas—historically, socially, politically, and psychologically” (1). Consequently, there is currently no clear or unanimously agreed-upon hypothesis or theory regarding the nomenclature or origin of the Tangkhuls.

Many scholars highlight the challenges in determining the origin of the Tangkhul due to the absence of proper documentation. A. S. W. Shimray explores the origin, migration, settlement, and nomenclature of the Nagas in his book *History of Tangkhul Naga*. In this work, he recounts the journey of the people, starting from China. It is believed that the Nagas once worked as enslaved labourers during the construction of the Great Wall of China (3). Due to unbearable hardship, they are thought to have fled from that place. According to Shimray’s account, the present Tangkhuls are descendants of Meifu-Li, the first son of Hunter Li of Kachin legend. He writes that, according to Tangkhul legend, Chaphang-Hong Hongmalai was the first to settle in the area presently inhabited by the Tangkhuls in Manipur (24). Shimray also mentions that the Nagas claimed their migration from the southeast direction, probably from Samsok. Many of the scholars cited above, including Tangkhul scholars, agree that they migrated from China during several waves of migration.

Yuimirin Kapai notes that the origins of the Naga people are the subject of two predominant theories. The first theory, which is widely endorsed by Naga scholars, posits that the Naga originated from the upper reaches of the Yellow River in Sikiang province, subsequently migrating through the Southeast archipelagos before settling in their present location. In contrast, Bellwood advances the theory that Southeast Asians migrated from the eastern seacoast of China in Fujian province, a hypothesis that is corroborated by Ballinger’s mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) research. However, Kapai emphasises the significance of the fact that Ballinger’s blood samples did not include specimens from the region purported to be the Naga’s original homeland. Consequently, he asserts that additional genetic investigations, particularly those involving mtDNA studies, are necessary to attain a more definitive account of the Naga’s origins (17). The Tangkhul folksong, which T. Luikham provides in his seminal work, is one of the earliest accounts of an origin myth for the people and somewhat cryptically tells of Tangkhuls as emerging from the earth:

Tangkhul	English
<i>O katātā kashangshang,</i>	O Comings and goings
<i>Na kachieina shokli,</i>	Whence thou cometh?
<i>O marilungv āklishok.</i>	O from the deep rock.
<i>O chili mashokakha</i>	O if not from there,
<i>O kaszing sirāli kānganālu,</i>	O Go to the sky, the stars and listen,
<i>Laga unghāngserlu. (T. Luikham 24)</i>	And affirm to one and all. (Kapai 15)

Later scholars have used this in support of their own arguments and interpretations. Kapai, in support of Shimray’s speculation, argues that this song hints at passing through a deep trough or

gorge, adding the conjecture that the specific location may be Myitkyina in Myanmar, where the Irrawaddy River traverses three gorges (14–15). However, other songs about origins also exist. The two reproduced below from Ringkahao Horam’s *The Tangkhul Folk Poetry (Haola) in Song* are more explicit about the subject matter:

<i>Miurlung, Yangyirlaa</i>	<i>Translation</i>
<i>Oh! hauri haura kachida haulu?</i>	Oh! Where did people come from?
<i>Oh hauri haura Wahukongda haowa</i>	Oh, people start from Hwangho River,
<i>Oh! Wahukongda tunga.</i>	Oh, came from Hwangho River. ⁷
[Wahukong Hwanghao River] (18)	

<i>Miurlung, Kathur Laa</i>	<i>Miurlung, Māklā</i>
<i>O kachili tunglo</i>	<i>Kachili tunglo...</i>
<i>Awa Samsoklitunga</i>	<i>Āvā Samsokli tung thuiya.</i>
<i>O, Makungana O iliphunga</i>	<i>O Makungana O ili phungtung,</i>
<i>O, Makungana O ilipangthan</i>	<i>O Ngakāngana O ili pāngthāng.</i>
<i>O, Lungshang Makangana safasing sing</i>	<i>Lungshāng Makanana...</i>
<i>O, mala mangli</i>	<i>Sāfasing singsing, O malā mangmi,</i>
<i>O, Hunphun Ava kharar</i>	<i>O Hunphun āvā khararwo</i>
<i>O, Yanga ngachanchihuili [Imphal Valley]</i>	<i>Ya ngachāng chihuili,</i>

⁷ Henceforth, all translations, unless cited, are mine. The annotation within parentheses providing the name of the river is Horam’s, the Huang He or Hwang Ho (Yellow River) (see Clapp’s seminal essay for an account of the river and the river valley civilisation). It is also attractive to conjecture a link with the Chinese Monkey King (Sun Wukong), born as a stone monkey and whose travels to the West i.e. India is recounted in the second part of the iconic Chinese novel *Xiyouji (Journey to the West)* translated by Anthony Yu. See, for e.g. Walker’s work for the origins of the myth.

<i>O, Ram wungaphei</i>	<i>O rom wungaphei.</i>
<i>O, Shokvaoliwungho maya</i>	<i>O Shokaoli unghoyama,</i>
<i>O, Mavalungli, O meiwungayar</i> (R. Horam 18).	<i>O unγκānlo inaoshang,</i> <i>O māvālungli, O mei ungayar,</i> <i>O Hunphun āvā khararshi.</i> <i>O Gachuivo Ronrawo,...</i> <i>O nali iwui shimzunna,</i> <i>O iwui shimzunna.</i> <i>O tungyanglo,</i> <i>O Chisom rarā āpeiya</i> (T. Luikham 169–170)

The *Yangyirlaa*, ‘spring song’ clearly mentions that they come from Wahukong, which means Hwangho River. The second folksong, as presented by R. Horam and T. Luikham, are distinct versions of the same song. Horam refers to it as *kathurlaa*, meaning ‘the song from *kathur*,⁸ while Luikham names it *māklā* ‘a type of folksong’. Minor variations exist between their renditions, likely attributable to the flexibility in folk song performance, where different tunes may necessitate the addition or omission of certain syllables. Luikham’s version, being more extensive, contains greater detail. Despite these lyrical differences, both versions narrate the origins of the people, their migratory journey, and subsequent separation. The folksong states that they come from Samsok. It also records their significant activities at various places during their sojourn. A.

⁸ Ungphun (Hunphun), Shirui, Langdāng, Ruidhar, Lungshong, Khāngkhui, Shāngching, Shangshak, Kuishui, Lungshāng, Humpum, Lamva, Tashār, Ringui, and Phalung villages are collectively called *kathur*. Historically, due to frequent raids among these villages, sharing essential commodities such as salt and chillies was challenging. Ungphun Somsai had a salt spring; however, the salt from this spring was known for its slightly sour taste. Consequently, the inhabitants of these villages, who consumed the salt from this spring, became known as *kathur*, meaning ‘sour’ (Gachui 11).

S. W. Shimray quotes R.R. Shimray and has recorded an English translation of a Tangkhul folksong. Although there are a few differences between the two Tangkhul folksongs cited above and the translated version of R.R. Shimray, which is given below, mention that they come from a place called Samsok in Burma. The similarities suggest that they may be versions of the same song:

Oh whence cometh thou originally?
Oh we originated from Samsok in Burma,
We call and gather all our kindred at Shokvao,
We make fire at Meichailung,
We distribute at Ru-Ngatak,
Oh Hunphun chief, the eldest,
Oh Ronra Shimray your tributes are everywhere.
Au...Oh. (R. R. Shimray 21, ellipses in original)

This research does not aim to introduce new possibilities beyond reiterating the hypotheses of previous scholars. It does not delve into the origins, settlement patterns, or etymology of the Tangkhul, as these topics are complex and much debated and fall outside the scope of the present study. No proverbs refer to origin myths either or dwelling overmuch on this would constitute a not particularly illuminating digression.

Social Structure, Beliefs, and Institutions

Religion

It was often said, especially by the Christian missionaries, that the Tangkhuls had no religion before the introduction of Christianity. They were considered pagans, animal worshipers, and animists. However, Tangkhuls themselves do not necessarily agree. Yangkahao Vashum claims

that before the conversion to Christianity, “the tribals practised what can be called a primal religion, which is very often incorrectly classified as ‘animism’” (139). Rimai discusses the Tangkhul religion in his essay “Religion of the Tangkhul Naga in North-East India: Continuity and Change” and states that the Hao religion was polytheistic in the sense that the spirits (*kameo*) people worshipped were many (74). He remarks that the “Tangkhul Naga were undergoing a process of evolution in religion where Christianity brought an end to the basic three steps given by E. B. Tylor” (76), namely savagery (‘animism’), through barbarism to civilisation.⁹ Pettigrew records in his mission report that the Tangkhul Nagas, “like all other tribes in these hills, believe in a supreme being, known by them as *Varivara*, who made the world but is not much interested in its inhabitants” (Solo and Maringthei 39).¹⁰ A. S. W. Shimray also notes as follows: “The Tangkhuls believe in the existence of a Supreme God whom they call by different names such as *Kasā-Ākhavā* (Master of Creation or Creator), *Varivarā* (Source of Peace), *Kazingpā* (the one who dwells in heaven/ dweller of heaven) and *Reisang Chonme*” (192). He says that the Tangkhuls believe in the existence of spirits capable of harming them by bringing sicknesses and calamities and even causing men to die with their supernatural powers. “They are called by different names such as *Chipee* (Satan), *kameo*, *Rengpa* (owner or master of the land) because they dominated the world and became the rulers of the earth” (193). According to him, the *kameo* are malevolent spirits, so the relationship of the Tangkhul with the spirits is rather negative; therefore, they have to propitiate the spirits by performing religious rites and sacrifices to ward off their suffering. He

⁹ Tylor, incidentally, also used the term ‘animism’ in his 1871 book *Primitive Culture* in an academic and anthropological sense to characterise the first (erroneous) step of the development of religions (see Harvey for a comprehensive account of the shifting values accorded to the term).

¹⁰ In an interview Wungnaopam mentions that Pettigrew sought the Tangkhul word to describe an entity that had existed since time immemorial, with his own mental reference being God. However, the locals misunderstood his inquiry and interpreted the object of his search as being what they call *varivarāthing*, referring to the *varivarā*, an ancient tree. Consequently, the term *Varivara* came to be acknowledged as the word for God. (“Varivara kachiwui mingpho.” See timestamp 40:00–41:00.

adds that if the spirits who were propitiated did not respond to their sacrifices, the Tangkhuls would then seek the assistance of their benevolent deity.

Various types of *kameo* (spirit) were associated with different places and objects. For example, there was a *luikameo* ‘field *kameo*’, *shimkameo* ‘house *kameo*’, *thingkameo* ‘tree *kameo*’, *ngalungkameo* ‘rock *kameo*’. Additionally, there were *kameo* for every hill and river, among many others. Almost every natural object that had an unusual shape or size was often believed to be the abode of a *kameo*. Pettigrew writes in his mission report that “[f]ar more important to the average man are the numerous *kumyas*, “demons,” who are supposed to inhabit every hill and stream. Every illness and every failure of crops is put down to the influence of some demon; propitiating them consumes the whole of a hill man’s existence” (Solo and Maringthei 39). Hodson also notes that among the Tangkhuls “we find that the deity Kamyou, the eldest son of the Creator of all things, is worshipped by man in trouble or sickness” (138–139).¹¹ Horam claims that according to the Nagas, “men act as mediators between the good God and the evil spirits so that the good God may be comforted.” He notes how, before venturing upon any activity, they would offer sacrifices to the appropriate *kameo* in propitiation and appeasement. In this belief system, the Almighty God resident in far away in *kazingram* ‘sky or heaven’¹² is not concerned with the daily affairs of humans and, therefore, needed to rely upon household, agricultural, or other activity-appropriate spirit, who operated at a quotidian level and could be engaged with on an everyday basis.

It is interesting to note in this respect that *kameo* need not only be associated with benevolent spirits. Even today, the word *chipee*, which means Devil or Satan, is also used

¹¹ Kamyou is probably a variant of *kameo* and is identical in meaning with it. I have not been able to find further support for Kamyou being the Creator’s eldest son at the time of writing.

¹² Single quotation marks will be used throughout this text to indicate word meanings, double quotes for citation, and words transliterated from Tangkhul will be styled in italics. Proverb translations cited in text will be within single quotation marks unless typographically set apart and/or numbered as in the epigraph above.

synonymously to talk about the *kameo* that causes havoc in the human realm. “In the remote past no other than the name Kameo is found to be the notion of God. It is through the introduction of Christianity creating the notion of God as Varivara and Satan as Kameo or Chipee,” says Robert Shimray (135). Chinaochin Raingam, a nonagenarian from Phalee village, said that the term *chipee*, was probably introduced when Christianity came to Tangkhul. In his view *chipee*¹³ comes from the Hunphun¹⁴ word *chipih*. *Chipih* is a type of saw sedge, a weed with sharp-edged leaves that cuts whoever comes into contact with it. The notion of the Devil in the Christian religion has the same characteristic of harming everyone he meets, like this sharp-edged weed. However, these two words are pronounced with different tones. The word *chipih* is pronounced with a high tone on the second syllable, but the word *chipee* is with a low tone. Another respondent, Maninglum Jagoi, an octogenarian from Phalee village, agreed that the word seemed to have been introduced when they started following Christianity. So far, the term *chipee* has not been found in folktales or folksongs. It might be true that the term *chipee* is a recently invented word. When the requisite rituals and sacrifices were neglected, the *kameo*'s wrath was believed to manifest, resulting in illness and various calamities. Many writers used the term evil with *kameo*. However, in Phalee oral narratives, I see that the *kameo* that inflicted diseases and misfortunes was not referred to as *makathuiya kameo* ‘bad or evil *kameo*’ but rather a *sakashe kameo* (fierce *kameo*). The adjective *makathuiya* is usually used with *chipee*, the Devil or Satan of Christianity.

There are four significant deities other than the material specific *kameo*. T. Luikham lists and discusses *Āmeowo* and the other three significant gods that the Tangkhuls worshipped: (a) *Phunghui philāvāli kaphaning* lit. ‘worshipping Goddess *Phunghui*,’ the goddess of wealth, (b)

¹³ *chipee*- *makaphā kameo* (malevolent spirit) (N. Luikham)
chipih-*Ngashi kathā kaho yur ākha-khai thāda kazan* ‘a type of grass that has sharp edges like a knife’ (N. Luikham).
 See Appendix III.

¹⁴ As mentioned above, this is the name of a village whose dialect has been adopted as the default Tangkhul variant.

Shimlui kameoli kaphaning lit. ‘worshipping the spirit of house and field’, (c) *Koktoli kaphaning* lit. ‘worshipping *Kokto*, the king of the land of the dead’, and (d) *Āmeowoli khamachut* lit. ‘worshipping the Almighty God, *Āmeowo*’. He describes the various seasonal festivals and the related rituals and practices that were associated with these gods (44–85). He writes that Tangkhuls performed various divinations and omen readings like *kapā khayang* ‘bamboo divination’, *harkho khayang* ‘chicken leg divination’, *hara khayang* ‘egg divination’, *makho*¹⁵ *kazang* ‘entering to *makho*’, and *raihai*¹⁶ *kakapeo* ‘checking the *raihai*’ as they could not speak face-to-face with Him (80).

Ng. Ngareophung expresses a similar notion, asserting that the Tangkhuls communicate with God through the practice of divination.¹⁷ He further contends that it is accurate to state that whatever is revealed through divination represents the will of God (2). The Tangkhuls believed that God disclosed His divine answers through various forms of divination, omens, and dreams. It appears that most of their divinations were conducted to obtain a simple yes or no answer or to determine whether it was favourable or unfavourable to proceed, rather than to receive a detailed explanation. For example, before undertaking any journey or important task, they performed divination and interpreted omens to ascertain whether it was auspicious to proceed or advisable to cancel. No one proceeded with their activities without consent or affirmation from the *Āmeowo*¹⁸. Some divinations, such as those listed above, were performed only by priests, and divine assistance was invoked by performing rites and giving sacrifices. Laypersons would listen to and observe the

¹⁵ See Appendix III

¹⁶ “*Raihai kaho hi raiwui āhai kachina. Lungui eina kuimareida khorkālaga chiwui ālungli raiwui āhai (lunghairā) mikui thāda ākha sanghai, chi raihai kakhorna*”

“*Raihai* is a stone talisman believed to bring good fortune in wartime. It is placed atop a stack of stones, resembling a human head” (N. Luikham 84)

¹⁷ He writes *Wungram* instead of Tangkhul and *Ārhā* instead of *Āmeowo*.

¹⁸ A Phalee folksong describes a man who uses bamboo divination to determine if he will be able to marry the woman he loves. See Appendix II (1).

sounds and movements of specific birds and animals and interpret these for guidance in their daily lives. If they noticed any ominous or unusual sounds or behaviours in animals or nature, they were required to cancel their plans.

As noted above, pre-Christian Tangkhuls believed in the existence of *kazingram* ‘heaven’, where the Almighty God lived, and *kazeiram*, ‘land of death’. According to popular belief, when people died, their souls went to *kazeiram* irrespective of their beliefs or deeds and continued to exist there. This was the underworld, the realm of the dead where *Kokto* ruled as king. According to T. Luikham, the Tangkhuls regarded *Kokto* as the most formidable entity. Recognising that they would coexist with *Kokto* after death, they conducted rituals for the deceased with meticulous care and utmost reverence (67). The deceased were provided with a selection of shawls as funerary offerings, with the finest new shawl reserved specifically for *Kokto*. To safeguard the rest of the shawls from being taken by *Kokto*, all others were deliberately cut at the edges. It was believed that before transitioning to the afterlife, the souls of the departed lingered on earth until the celebration of Thishām/Thisam, the soul departure festival. This festival was celebrated about at the end of January for ten days (Hodson 153–157). As stated by T. Luikham, the celebration lasted for twelve days (123). According to certain oral accounts, this festival extended for a month, encompassing the time spent preparing various objects, food, and essentials. Consequently, considerable effort and resources were invested in this elaborate festival. In case someone died at the end of the year and the soul had to be sent off by year ending, everything had to be prepared in a hurry. This habitual fact is used as a proverbial phrase in Phalee—*Thishām kapām theka* lit. ‘like trying to catch up with Thishām’ to express that one is in a great hurry, similar to the English phrase “working against the clock.” This festival was celebrated to bid farewell to the souls of the recently dead. T. Luikham has also recorded the major events of this festival (75–79).

Christianity was introduced to Manipur relatively late, with William Pettigrew's arrival in the Ukhrul District and the conversion of twelve Tangkhul Nagas to Christianity (Solo and Mahangthei x). Gradually, the rest of the Tangkhuls followed, and most of their traditional faith and practices were abandoned. However, while this civilising mission was celebrated in colonial times, following shifts in global discourse around colonisation, recent scholars from both within and outside the community have inevitably offered critiques of the effects of the influx of Western culture among the Tangkhuls. On the one hand, the arrival of Western education and Christianity brought written culture and a common language to the community, but on the other hand, most of the ancient traditions became paralysed. Shimreiwung characterises the influence of Christian missionary activity under Pettigrew in the following way:

When we interrogated why missionaries like Rev. William Pettigrew had taken so much emphasis on literacy of the 'natives' while they were steadfastly engaged in proselytisation of Christianity to the 'native', it can be analysed from the religious practices of Protestants. The ritualistic practices of Christians, like singing Hymnals and reading Bible, were purely based on textual words, which necessitated printing of these books in large numbers. Thus, for oral societies like Tangkhuls, the conversion to Christianity also led to adoption of print culture as an integral part of their cultural practices (156).

When they converted to Christianity, the concerns and perspectives of the Tangkhuls shifted. Ramung Shanchuila also points out how this religious conversion disrupted the cultural continuity and community cohesion:

The intrusion of this highly institutionalised religion brought the decline of their ancestral beliefs, myths, and the many forms of art and practices that nurtured the

survival of their ancient culture. The converted Nagas were not allowed to participate in the ritual festivals and ceremonies of their non-Christian fellow villagers, and this inevitably led to the decline of their social structure and the slow corruption and loss of their oral tradition (viii).

People imbibed Western education and felt that their culture was inferior, and their cultural practices were barbaric as they were taught by the imperialist power. Eventually, the younger generation gradually lost contact with their old beliefs and culture as they became exposed to Western education, religion, and culture, and soon, they started abandoning their traditional folk culture. The adoption of Tangkhul as a lingua franca, alongside the increasing use of English, has significantly contributed to the rapid decline of indigenous village dialects. As young, educated individuals leave their villages for education and job, they gradually abandon their native languages. This shift poses a major threat to the preservation and continuity of indigenous languages. After embracing Christianity, many traditional festivals have persisted in altered forms. For example, in Phalee, the Chumphā festival is observed in a manner that reflects significant Christian influences. The traditional rituals performed by the family matriarch have been discontinued. Instead, the Women's Society of the church now organises and sponsors all related activities for the festival, which takes place in the church on a designated Sunday. On this day, members of the society bring offerings particularly paddy, to the church.

Tangkhul scholars have highlighted the intimate connection between the traditional religion, traditional laws, and customary practices within the cultural framework. Shishak states that among the Nagas, “to be religious means to be true to the traditions of the tribe; everything in the routine of life is bound up with some belief, traditions, or superstition, which is an integral part

of their religion. In all its aspects, a Naga's life is guided by his religious beliefs and practices” (qtd. in A. S. W. Shimray 191). Shimray goes on to observe that:

Again, in the Riyan (unwritten Constitution) of the Tangkhuls, we find the presence of religious elements. The Riyan is based on social customs which is the foundation stone of the Tangkhul customary laws. Further, the Tangkhuls believed that violation of customary law entails not only legal punishment but the wrath of God and His ultimate punishment. From this point of view, the customary law has religious sanction (161).

This connection is also evident in Tangkhul proverbs, a topic that will be further explored later in this chapter. Shimray states that the Tangkhul religion is a corporate religion where the entire community participates in religious rites and ceremonies equally, and the same village taboo binds one and the whole village community (192). For instance, when natural calamities like earthquakes or unnatural deaths would occur, the entire village community observed a *kaphani* day, the date of which the village chief declared. Shimray remarks that early Christian missionaries and converts “failed to distinguish culture, customs and other social practices from religion” (210).¹⁹ T. Luikham adds that if an enemy or animal kills someone or commits suicide, then the whole village abstains so that such unfortunate incidents will not happen again (60). It is said that no one was allowed to go outside the village, nor was anyone allowed to enter the village on such occasions. Tree branches would be placed at the main village gate to let the strangers know the village was observing *kaphani*. When any misfortune or bad omens were observed, a single household could keep such a day, called *shimkasher* in the Phalee dialect.²⁰ In the tradition of *shimkasher*, branches

¹⁹ A. S. W Shimray uses the word *Shar* for *kaphani* (199–200).

²⁰ This word is mentioned in a folk song. See Appendix II (2).

were positioned at the doorway to signal to others that the household was in mourning or doing some rituals for a special occasion. Allowing outsiders into their homes was strictly forbidden, requiring a ceremonial ritual if anyone entered intentionally or accidentally, aimed at averting any potential harm to the visitor as well as the family.

“Naga’s religion is based on fear is largely true. However, fear is not only of spirits but also of ‘retribution for violating traditional prohibitions and communal law,’” says Kapai (78). Transgressions against various *kashār*, traditional practices, and communal laws within the village were deemed punishable offences. Ng. Ngareophung highlights the consequences, referring to this as *Ārhā kashong* ‘God’s punishment/penalty’, which brought about poverty, handicaps, and misfortunes, leading to the lack of descendants (8).²¹ It was believed that violation of traditional laws incurred not only customary but also divine punishments. The Tangkhul community adhered to the concept of collective responsibility. Oral narratives indicate that those who violated communal laws, such as committing murder or engaging in incest, faced excommunication and sometimes expulsion from the village. This was grounded in the belief that the entire community could be punished for the immoral actions of a few. The Tangkhul held the conviction that allowing such individuals to remain in the village would jeopardise the community’s prosperity in terms of war, hunting, and harvest, among many others (T. Luikham 91). An illustrative Phalee folksong (see Appendix II (3)) narrates the story of two lovers who, being cousins, were purportedly engaged in incestuous relations, leading to their expulsion from the village.²² Tangkhul customary

²¹ *kashār* approximates to ‘taboo.’ See Appendix III.

²² However, there is an exceptional case, it is permissible for a man to marry his cousin, the daughter of his paternal aunt, a practice known as *pam*. Should either individual decide to forgo the marriage, the termination of their relationship is referred to as *pamchā kachat*. In such cases, the party who withdraws from the agreement is obligated to pay a fine. This practice is documented by T. Luikham (93).

law strictly prohibits marriage within the same clan, the violation of which is referred to as *shokhalā*.

Maxims such as *Shokhalāli mangasolu, lāngpārna tāknarpaishina* lit. ‘Don’t associate with those who engage in incestuous relationships; lest lightning strike you’, and *Lākhot makhamashungli shangkhaṇa rimsāya* lit. ‘Tigers ambush those who are in an illicit relationship’ reveal the peoples’ fear and belief in divine judgement. In both maxims, those who engage in culturally unacceptable relationships are punished through natural agents like lightning and tigers. The symbolic meanings of the statements imply that engaging in an illicit relationship may lead to unexpected and harmful consequences, drawing a parallel between the stealthy nature of tigers ambushing their prey, accidentally struck by lightning, and the potential dangers that may arise from forbidden relationships. They serve as a cautionary message, advising against involvement in the infringement of social morality. According to Tangkhuls, individuals who met an unnatural or untimely death were believed to have knowingly or unknowingly violated one of the customary laws or taboos. Consequently, *Āmeowo* was thought to have administered His punishment to them. They were not given a proper burial and necessary rituals and rites, and thus, it was believed that they could not have a comfortable life even in the land of the dead. Those who were killed by wild animals were buried inside their house (Gachui 95). Luikham notes that during the Thishām festival, specific rituals like *zeirun kharung* and *kazei katā*²³ were not performed for them along with the rest of the deceased people of the village. The belief was that tigers might assail them en route to the land of the dead, and as a result, others were discouraged from accompanying them (102). The consequences of earthly transgressions were thought to extend into the afterlife, shaping the deceased’s fate.

²³ The former is the (last) feast for the deceased and the latter is the final ritual, facilitating the soul’s departure to the land of the dead on the last day of Thishām (76–77).

The influence of Western education and Christianity is evident in the transformation of Tangkhul folklore. With the introduction of written culture, many oral traditions experienced a significant decline. Instead of recounting traditional folk tales, children are now exposed to stories from the Bible. Over time, the legendary figures of their heritage gave way to biblical heroes. The current generation is more familiar with Aesop’s fables and Bible parables than the indigenous folk tales of their ancestors. Folk tunes are considered outdated, leading to the loss of meaning and value in culturally significant archaic words and stories within folk songs. Numerous culture-specific words have faded into disuse, deemed irrelevant to modern lifestyles. Some biblical proverbs have seamlessly integrated into the repertoire. Examples of this assimilation can be observed in the examples below, reflecting the dynamic shift in cultural narratives and expressions.

(1) *Lan kachungkha khuiki kachiwui vānga kaphā āming kazat phāmei* (Sira)

lit. It’s better to have a good name rather than riches

ee. Better good name than riches (MK)

“*Kashāng-khareile kaphā āming kapangkhuithara, kala sinā lupāle mina ngahānkhangai phāmei* (Kathara Bible, Prov. 22.1)

(2) *Morkasāp shanaowui khamor kathuka chikhurna* (Sira)

lit. The mouth of a female gossip is a deep grave

“*Morkasāp shanaowui khamor kathuka chomna; Prohona malung khavāt mi chi chili tāzanga.*” (Kathara Bible, Prov. 22.14)

(3) *Khamor yāzan kasangbing ringa* (John)

lit. Those who guard their mouth survive

“*Khamorli khangarin mina āwuimirin phārihai, morsham makhavai mi chi kashimānli zanga.*” (Kathara Bible, Prov. 13.3)

These proverbs appear to have been translated from the Bible. The fact that a single collector— (1) and (2) by Sira and (3) by John—compiled them further suggests that they are either newly coined or borrowed. A further investigation may be needed in this respect.

Some old customary laws or practices might have undergone subtle transformations due to changing times. Perhaps it is also true that some of them now have the flavour of Christian doctrines. Traditional Tangkhul laws mainly concern morality, ethical norms, social etiquette, and community behaviour. They are like the biblical Ten Commandments. Even though Tangkhuls had converted to Christianity, some of their ancestral beliefs and taboos based on their old religion are still in use. Today, some of them are used as maxims and proverbs. The topic of *kashār* is further discussed in Chapter 3, but a few examples are offered below:

(4) *Kharar sākui, sāphei-āpāng ngapai shārra* (Pheirei)

lit. One shan't contend with the senior's share (head or legs of an animal)

(5) *Thari phurshāra* (Angkang)

lit. One shan't remove the boundary stones

(6) *Ngalei rarmeiya, ngapaishārra* (Kasomwoshi)

“Land is older, thou shall not plunder (infringe) land” (Kasomwoshi)

(4) implies a customary practice addressing the consumption of specific animal parts and is a caution against forcibly seizing authoritative positions within the tribe, village, clan, or family lineage. The Tangkhul community has stringent regulations regarding the giving and receiving of specific meat parts, such as the head, legs, or inner organs. These portions are designated for specific individuals, who hold the exclusive right to receive them. The term *kharar* (old) here refers to individuals who hold a certain position or status within the community, often due to seniority in family lineage, age, or other factors. For instance, the chief was entitled to the heads

of all game caught (McCulloch 81). However, McCulloch's observation may not be universally applicable to all villages. The proverb advises against challenging or disputing the allocation of these particular parts, emphasising respect for the established order. It underscores the importance of adhering to cultural norms and not interfering with the traditional distribution of meat portions, which could symbolise broader community principles, including the rights and responsibilities associated with giving and receiving. The proverb may also carry a metaphorical meaning, cautioning against challenging or usurping the authority or positions held by elders or leaders within the tribe, village, clan, or family. It serves as a reminder to respect hierarchical structures and established traditions, promoting harmony and social cohesion within the community.

(5) means it is taboo to remove the boundary stones. T. Luikham states that during the installation of the stones, rituals were performed invoking the *kameo* and the following spell was cast: “*Yah mina hei mi thilo, sāna hei sā thilo*” lit. ‘If a man touches, may he die; if an animal touches, may it die’ (150). Therefore, to this day, these stones, which were planted many years ago, are still left untouched. The statement conveys a message about respecting established boundaries, limits, or rules. It may refer to physical markers or boundary stones that are used to demarcate the limits of a particular piece of land or property. Removing or tampering with these boundary stones can lead to disputes and conflicts over land ownership. The proverb underscores the importance of maintaining boundaries to uphold order, prevent conflicts, and foster a sense of shared understanding and respect within a community. It serves as a reminder to act with prudence and adhere to established norms and limits. It also signifies that any individual who encroaches upon another person's land will face retribution from the land itself, symbolising nature's inherent justice.

The next proverb, *Ngalei rarmeiya, ngapaishārra*, although absent from some collections, is referenced by other Tangkhul writers in a variant form: *Mikumona ngaleili mararmeimana* (Ngalung; Khongreiwo) lit. ‘Human is not older than land’. Khongreiwo asserts that this principle constitutes the foundation of the Tangkhul’s social system and customary law. He posits that this adage reflects their view of nature as a living organism capable of influencing human lives. He further explains that for the Tangkhul, “[a]ll landscapes, by virtue of being the abodes of some supernatural spirits, were consequently regarded as powerful entities in both the tangible world and the abstract spiritual realm” (71). This proverb highlights the intrinsic connection between humanity and the earth. It conveys the notion that land pre-existed humanity and possesses an inherent awareness of the happenings on earth. It also suggests that the land contains boundary marks established by ancestors, whose bodies remain eternally within it, thereby serving as a perpetual witness to ownership and territorial boundaries. Consequently, no one should infringe upon another’s land. As Shimreingam L. Shimray puts it in an interview, “encroaching, stealing and selling of land is dangerous. It would consume him/her, s/he would die soon” (qtd. in Ngalung 40). Furthermore, this proverb conveys a profound philosophical understanding within Tangkhul culture, wherein humans, regarded as younger and sustained by the land, are obligated to demonstrate respect and reverence toward it.

It may be claimed that some of these old cultural norms have gained the status of a proverb. Such proverbs use *shārra* at the end of the statement and signify a prohibition, the infringement of which is followed by divine retribution. “Shall not” in the Ten Commandments in the Bible is also translated as *shārra* in Tangkhul. The Tangkhuls took such moral principles seriously, as it was believed that violating them was not only punishable by customary law but also by the *Āmeowo*. Individuals who transgress customary laws or practices whether knowingly or unknowingly, may

be subject to punitive measures in accordance with their cultural traditions. Despite embracing Christianity, these cultural taboos persist, and transgressions can strain individual, family, and community bonds significantly. The above examples cannot be called proverbs in a strict sense. They have didactic content but have no other distinguishing features. However, in certain instances, these statements related to taboos acquire metaphorical significance. Moreover, native speakers treat them as proverbs. This issue relates to the identification and classification of Tangkhul proverbs, and I have chosen to retain proverb status for them, the justification for which is given below and in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Peer group system and the concept of community

The Tangkhul community has a long-standing tradition of cooperation and interdependence. Throughout history, they have cherished the camaraderie among members and valued collective activities. Traditional peer groups with distinct societal roles have been a part of the culture since ancient times and still operate albeit in modified ways. These peer groups were actively involved in communal tasks, agricultural works, and festive celebrations involving competitive singing, dancing, and games. The communal spirit was further nurtured as members spent their nights in *longshim*, where they learnt moral values and societal responsibilities from senior peer group members. This system played a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and social duty. Even today, a modified version of the peer group system persists, emphasising the belief that each individual plays a unique role in maintaining communal harmony. The Phalee folksong (4) warmly reminisces about the days of youth, when the singers worked, sang, walked, and engaged in various activities together as a close-knit peer group.

In the past, working alone was infrequent in the Tangkhul community; instead, they engaged in collective efforts through a rotational system known as *yarkathui*. This entails working

together in a coordinated manner, with one day dedicated to cultivating the field of a particular member and the next day moving on to another member's field, and so on. During these collaborative fieldwork sessions, the members chanted 'hei-ho' in harmony known as *khamahon* or sang songs together.²⁴ This rhythmic chanting or work song serves multiple purposes—it aids in exerting force, alleviates stress, and ensures that everyone works uniformly at a consistent pace, preventing anyone from being left behind. The rotational *yarkathui* system, where collective efforts were prioritised over individual endeavours, exemplifies the community's emphasis on unity and mutual support.

Upon reaching puberty, both boys and girls in the Tangkhul community would attend separate *longshim*. These served as cultural institutes providing training in Tangkhul social life. Following marriage, women typically ceased attending *ngalālong*, though some married men continued for a specific period, as seen in Kanrei's folktale "*Shaizawo eina Kasomwo Long Kakā*" (*Tangkhul Khararchan* 13–29). This narrative also highlights a unique practice called *khumkui khangarin*, in which male peer group members attended *longshim* until all were married. These dormitories played a crucial role in the youths' development, teaching social etiquette, dance, songs, handicrafts, manners, morals, and life skills demanded by society. They chose their life partners from this place as well. This place was an institute for grooming, a kind of finishing school as it were, although it did not happen at the end of childhood but throughout, and the pedagogical philosophy behind it is radically different from Western models of formal education. Horam remarks that *longshim* were training schools in the arts of life and war and a club for entertainment and fun (67). Ruivah agrees that the institution of *longshim* "occupied a central position in the village organization and administration, as an institutionalized mechanism of social control and

²⁴ See entry in Appendix III.

socialized education” (93). As Bascom notes, in many societies “folklore is employed to control, influence, or direct the activities of others from the time the first lullaby is sung or ogre tale is told them” (346). It may be said that a similar kind of education was imparted in the *longshim* through communal living, which included singing and storytelling as much as working, fighting, and eating.

A pivotal factor leading to significant cultural change and loss among the Tangkhul people was the disappearance of the *longshim*. These dormitories, hosted primarily by clan heads or affluent individuals, were distinct for males (*mayarlong*) and females (*ngalālong*). The disappearance of the *longshim*, coupled with the advent of Western education, had profound repercussions on the indigenous culture of Tangkhul society. This shift could arguably be likened to the dismantling of a museum. Following the introduction of Western education, the Tangkhuls no longer saw the necessity of attending the *longshim*. Some students had to seek education in other villages due to the absence of schools in their own village, ultimately leading them to move away from the *longshim*. Citing Pettigrew, Solo and Maringthei write:

If people looked with suspicion upon any attempt to educate their sons, how much more strongly did they oppose the education of girls. Girls were meant for a life of drudgery in the home and the rice fields. It took Mrs. Pettigrew 14 years to make any appreciable impression upon that attitude of mind, even where parents had become Christians (89).

Women obtained education much later compared to their male counterparts. A Phalee folksong humorously depicts a woman who appears to be one of the pioneering females venturing into the realm of education with a touch of sarcasm, (see Appendix II, (5)). Conversely, individuals who pursued education started embracing Christianity, and the doctrines of this new faith did not align

with traditional cultural practices. Those who adopted Christianity gradually distanced themselves from the *longshim* leading to their decline.

The sanctity of *longshim* was considered unassailable in Tangkhul culture. This belief is encapsulated in the proverb

(7) *Longpet sāmakhao shārra* (Pheirei)

lit. One shan't destroy the sanctity of the *longpet*

This could literally mean that a man and woman should refrain from having sex on the *longshim* bed, symbolising the expectation of chastity. Furthermore, it was taboo for non-virgin women to sleep in the *longshim*, as doing so was believed to ruin its sanctity and bring calamity upon the community. However, this taboo did not extend to men, as there were accounts of married men continuing to attend *longshim*.

As may be gathered from the above discussion, the Tangkhul community's rich tapestry of traditions, characterised by a strong sense of cooperation and interconnectedness, has played a fundamental role in shaping their social fabric over time. The enduring legacy of peer groups, communal activities, and the unique educational system provided by *longshim* reflects a commitment to communal harmony, shared responsibilities, and the preservation of cultural values. This institution not only prepared the younger generation for the practical aspects of life but also served as platforms for socialisation, entertainment, and the formation of lifelong bonds.

Central to Tangkhul philosophy is the principle of unity, fostering a deep appreciation for companionship, mutual aid, and shared experiences among individuals and the environment. The emphasis on collective responsibility is not only a cultural ethos but a way of life in which working, sharing, and eating together becomes a means of forming individual identity. The community's inclination towards unity is exemplified by the practice of sharing the yield from fields or the spoils

of hunting with neighbours, emphasising cooperation over self-interest. Proverbs and maxims encapsulate this robust belief in the strength derived from unity and shared endeavours. For instance:

(8) *Ngalengkakha shilengthā, ngayurakha ngawurthā, yangakha ngayangthā* (Kanrei)

lit. Like rock bees when united, like bamboo mice when together, like a sieve when sieved

(9) *Khāngrip ngavengmei; shairip shaiphāmei* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Carrying together is lighter; eating together is tastier

(8) draws upon traditional observations of the surroundings, employing vivid imagery to convey its message. The metaphorical use of *ngawur* and *shileng* symbolise unity, emphasising the collective strength found in staying together. It conveys a meaning akin to the English proverb “Union is strength.” In the third clause, the metaphor shifts to *ngayang* representing division and disunity as a sieve fails to hold water or small particles. Upon closer examination, sieves possess numerous tiny holes, presenting only a superficial image of unity. The striking aspect of this proverb lies in its reliance on natural elements to illustrate the importance of unity. Rock bees and bamboo mice, symbols of togetherness, are drawn from the natural world, while the symbol of disunity is a man-made object, the sieve, emphasising the inherent fragility and inefficiency of manmade objects. This proverb is specifically crafted for second-person correlation and is more likely to be employed by adults addressing a group. Its purpose is to instil a sense of togetherness and promote unity amongst the community, using the rich imagery of nature to convey a powerful message about the strength found in collective harmony.

(9) also encapsulates the profound wisdom of shared experiences and collective efforts, emphasising the value of unity and cooperation in facing challenges and savouring life’s pleasures. The first part of the proverb, ‘eating together is tastier,’ extends the comparison to shared

enjoyment, emphasising that joy and satisfaction from accomplishments and moments of happiness are heightened when experienced collectively. 'Carrying together is lighter' implies that working together towards common objectives makes any burdensome task feel lighter, both metaphorically and literally. Overall, the proverb promotes the idea that unity and collaboration not only make challenges more bearable but also enhance the flavour of shared successes and moments of happiness. Constant raids between neighbouring villages in the pre-colonial past probably lie at the bottom of the habit of working together in groups since it ensures better safety against attackers, but it is not only the pragmatic strategy that the proverb espouses. The community actively promotes the sharing of both food and workloads, a tradition that not only ensures collective safety but also strengthens the social fabric among the Tangkhul people. The existence of *longshim* and peer groups in the past are crucial to understanding the idea of collectivism in Tangkhul society. These social institutions arguably functioned not just for companionship and sharing skills but also as a tool to nurture unity and collective identity.

Kinship, Gender and Sexual Relations

Tangkhul society is a patriarchal as well as a patrilineal society. The father is revered as the family member with the highest authority. At the same time, as the head of the family, he is responsible for keeping his family protected and in order. He represents the family in any clan or general village meeting. Generally, the eldest son gets the most significant share of the family property. When he gets married, his parents and siblings move out of the house. However, he must help his siblings settle down and must look after his parents in their old age.

According to customary law, women are not allowed to be members of the *hangashim* or participate in any form of village meetings. Women have no voice in the administration or socio-political issues of the village. Gachui mentions five women who held the position of village chief:

Harkhonlā (Marem Village), Kaireilā (Talla Village), Shakhanglā (Mangchon Village), Lāmenglā (Tuinem Village), and Seikhanglā (Laotei Village) (103). However, he does not give a detailed account of the lives and careers of these women. According to the traditional patriarchal division of mutually exclusive gender roles, men are hunters and women carers. Tangkhul women do not participate in hunting and warfare activities, and there are strict prohibitions against females handling hunting or war-related tools. Similarly, men used to be also cautioned against touching weaving equipment, yarn, or garments belonging to women before embarking on war or hunting expeditions. The maternal figure is responsible for providing sustenance and clothing for the entire family. Women primarily engage in tasks such as fetching water and firewood, childcare, weaving, and agricultural work. Some scholars argue that, despite being a patriarchal society, Tangkhul women are not subjected to demeaning treatment and do not experience a sense of vulnerability. For example, A. S. W. Shimray quotes scholars like Sardesh Pande and Heimendorf and claims that “[o]nly on biological grounds and culture, Tangkhul women are not allowed to go to war and hunting and howling” (114). Additionally, he notes that women are afforded sufficient freedom to actively engage in various social and festive events, including dancing, singing, and playing games. Shimray suggests that the patriarchal structure in Tangkhul society may be rooted in biological distinctions only. Nevertheless, a closer examination of certain maxims and proverbs reveals matters to be less straightforward:

- (10) *Siluili nāreng sanglaga shichinpai, mafala kateo mina shichin pai, kha makaphā shanaoli marākpaimana* (John)

lit. Bull can be used by piercing its nose, an elephant can be used by a man, but an evil woman cannot be tamed

The proverb articulates a comparison between the domestication or control of animals and the perceived difficulty in managing a woman deemed as 'evil' or problematic. The image of piercing a bull's nose and training an elephant implies methods of exerting control over animals to do man's bidding. But this piece of wisdom takes a negative stance when it comes to women, specifically those labelled as 'evil,' although it is unclear whether lack of docility is the cause or effect of being evil. It possibly suggests that, unlike animals that can be guided or disciplined, a woman with negative qualities may be viewed as resistant to any attempts at reform or control. This proverb, therefore, reflects the traditional view that associates women, particularly those considered morally questionable, with an inherently untameable nature. In this proverb, the term *shichinpai*, signifying something that 'can be used,' is employed in reference to animals, placing women on an equal footing with beasts. This verb *shikachin* in the proverb and its association with animals carry unflattering connotations. Additionally, the term *marākpaimana*, conveying 'cannot be tamed,' raises concerns. This proverb appears to imply a man's responsibility (though not explicitly mentioned) to train or exert control over a woman. It problematises the view that Tangkhul women enjoy equal status and freedom. While it is true that given the overall holistic and animistic view of the relationship between humans and flora and fauna that the Tangkhuls hold, being compared to an animal may not be a disparagement, but it is undeniable that in this and other such derogatory proverbs, the connection between women and animals does not come from a place of gender equality.

(11) *Ngalānao shingnairaona* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Women are strangers' servants

This proverb also does not look at women favourably. Women are seen essentially as being born to serve others, whether rich or poor, no matter whom they marry. It seems that women are never

family members or people on the inside, whether before or after marriage. It refers to the traditional fact of changing the family and clan after marriage. Women are seen as people who do not belong in their own right, whose identity is in flux. They are given away as in all patriarchal societies (and like the animals in (10) above) in marriage to an outsider. According to oral narratives, in the past, women, especially married women, had to wake up very early before dawn, fetch water from the well, pound paddy, carry firewood, and cook for the family. After cooking and serving food, they went to the field and cooked again for the family in the evening. They wove clothes for the entire family, and their work never seemed to end. Social status did not make a difference: even a girl of a wealthy family did more or less the same duties before or after getting married. The law of inheritance still in practice is perhaps the most illustrative of the status of Tangkhul women. According to the traditional inheritance law, the ancestral property is inherited only through the male line. If there is no male heir in the family, instead of being inherited by the daughters, the next male kin inherits the entire property except money, some moveable property like cattle and other livestock, and personal items. While parents may choose to allocate property to their daughters, the daughters cannot be designated as the primary heir (*shimluikat*) of the father (T. Luikham 212). The parental house and ancestral lands are not permitted to be given to the daughters. In the past, transferring ancestral property to another clan was considered shameful. There is a superstitious belief that a married woman who inherits or purchases her parental home is destined to have an unhappy married life. I recall an instance in my village involving a man who lived with his wife in her parental home after her parents passed away. Unfortunately, the wife died at a young age, and the villagers believed that her early demise was due to her residing in her familial home.

Men had the discretion to sell property they acquired during their lifetimes. However, ancestral land *rampāhtlui* could only be sold to the designated heir (*shimluikat*) or to members of the same clan. If these individuals could not purchase the property, only then could it be sold to outsiders. This situation could bring shame to the clan, as it would suggest that they could not protect or redeem their ancestral land and had to sell it to non-clan members. Additionally, if women were permitted to inherit ancestral properties, such properties would eventually be transferred to another clan upon marriage. This may explain why women were historically not allowed to inherit ancestral property.

Numerous social taboos encapsulate the status of women in society. For example, the cultural dictum *Shanaona pheiyākreida pamshārra* lit. ‘It is taboo for a woman to sit crossing her legs’ (T. Luikham 88) reflects an ingrained belief. These social norms historically dictated the subjugation of women to men, going to the extent of deeming sitting with crossed legs as taboo and socially unacceptable. Therefore, the previous claim that women have great freedom and equality becomes untenable without qualification.

(12) *Wuiri naoroi ramuiye, gahar naoroi khāmtongshu* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Children under the wife’s care go inside the storeroom; under the husband’s care go beyond the threshold

This proverb vividly illustrates the imbalance within Tangkhul society, delving into the roles of fathers and mothers while shedding light on the broader societal power structures that discriminate between men and women. The essence of the proverb lies in portraying parenting roles, suggesting that a child under a mother’s guidance may lack societal honour but remains obedient, whereas a child under the care of a father commands more respect but potentially lacks the warmth of familial bonds. This proverb seems to draw upon the image of a child raised by a single parent. In Tangkhul

tradition, women often take on the primary responsibility of child-rearing. Therefore, interpreting this proverb in the context of the presence of both parents might not entirely capture its intended meaning. In a patriarchal setting, a child under the protection of a father may feel secure and face minimal societal criticism. In contrast, a child of a widow may grapple with insecurity and lack of confidence. The term *rammui*, referring to a dark storeroom attached to a traditional kitchen, adds another layer of interpretation. It suggests that the widow's children, raised under her care, exhibit discipline and closeness to family, but on the flip side, are relegated to obscurity. Yet, the latter part of the proverb, venturing beyond the threshold, signifies that they experience greater security and honour within the community, but may lack discipline, missing out on the nurturing love and care typically provided at home, potentially leading to delinquency. Using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, we see that the metaphor *rammui* which is located at the back of the kitchen, this proverb conceptualises spatial hierarchy: the man is at the forefront (threshold) of society while the woman is behind and out of sight. This spatial metaphor reflects and reinforces the cognitive schema that positions men as having more prestige and women as quiet and timid, thus influencing how people conceptualise gender roles. This proverb offers a nuanced reflection on the intricate interplay of gender roles, parenting dynamics, and societal perceptions within the context of Tangkhul culture, prompting contemplation on the multifaceted implications of gender relations within the family structure and upbringing on individual development.

An interesting cultural practice sheds further light on the traditional perception of women and the relations between the sexes (invariably heterosexual) in Tangkhul society. Oral narratives talk of how men add a yarn motif called *ngalāmq* to their headgear in order to signify the number of women they had had sexual intercourse with. The cultural significance attached to a man's prowess in both warfare and romantic conquests is expressed in the belief, *Rai kathat, ngalā*

khangashām hili yarkhok hoi lit. ‘Those who could kill their enemies and sleep with girls are called *yarkhok* ‘distinguished gentlemen’ (T. Luikham 101). In his documentation of a folksong, Luikham explains that the *khalāknao* assert a man’s prowess in both warfare and romantic conquests to be of equal value (168). Conversely, commoners perceive prowess in warfare as superior, as it affords them the distinction of wearing the *mayongchā*. The symbolic significance of the *ngalāma* has diminished in modern understanding and men casually adorn their headgear with this motif, often without ascribing any specific meaning to it. In the past, it was customary to refrain from adding *ngalāma* without engaging in sexual relations with a woman, as it was believed that the *ngalāma* would eventually break off: an instance of *Āmeowo* publicly shaming a pretentious boaster. For the male, the *ngalāma* served as a symbol of prestige, like the English idiom “a feather in one’s cap,” signifying a man’s prowess in sexual relations. Men would adorn their headgear with a *ngalāma* for each woman they had been with, showcasing their military and sexual prowess. Ng Ngareophung states that if the girl was not a Tangkhul, then the *ngalāma* pattern would be made in orange colour, giving foreign conquests special status (46). Analogously, to show prowess in battle, warriors wore the *mayongchā* necklace and *raiyng* on their heads.²⁵ They also adorned their headdress with the hair of the enemies they had killed (McCulloch 82).

A Phalee folk song reveals attitudes towards *ngalāma* (see Appendix II (7)) in an ostensibly humorous and entertaining way. The song is about a woman who attempts to make her former lover, whom she calls Mr Arrogant, jealous by initiating sexual relations with a new man, who is Mr Arrogant’s friend. The girl urges her new lover to relax and display affection in front of him. Mr Arrogant counters by nonchalantly denying any cause for jealousy (although he does seem somewhat uneasy), since he has already been privy to the body that she is now offering to the new

²⁵ A traditional Phalee folk song beautifully captures the cultural essence and contemplations surrounding the *raiyng* orchid. See Appendix II (6).

man. When she vehemently denies any sexual relations with him during their past courtship, he brings up the *ngalāma* (*nromui* in Phalee) as proof of sexual intercourse. He boasts that he has had around thirty women as sexual partners, has added a symbolic ornament (the abovementioned *ngalāma*) for each conquest, and can show the one he has for her. The woman maintains that she has never been in bed with him and, as proof of her own truth, predicts that the *ngalāma* will eventually fall off because of his false boasting. Undeterred, he bets that even if he fastens a *chengui* on top of the *ngalāma* and dances gracefully, it will not fall off. This fascinating tug of war between the sexes based upon the possession of the female body by the male and the anxiety behind the difficulty of establishing a public truth in private matters may be read as symptomatic not only of the position of women (which seems to be a complex mix of agency and subjugation), but also of an epistemological interest in the constitution of knowledge and truth. The textile motif seems to serve as a shorthand in this song for the inscription and recording of facts. However, records may be falsified (in the case of the man), just as verbal claims may come from an intention to manipulate and mislead (in the case of the woman), and the song seems to suggest that in such cases, when diametrically opposite claims are being made for something and there is no public witness to resolve the matter, truth may only be established through divine intervention.²⁶

Masculine privilege obviously extends to the larger unit of the village as well. Every village has *āwunga* lit. ‘king’, the village chief. Headed by him, there is a village council called *hangashim*. Every clan and sub-clan have their chief, and they are usually the members of the *hangashim*. These individuals are called *hangva*. They have the title *āmeikharar*, a term of respect

²⁶ See the story about the loss of the Tangkhul script when a dog ate the cowhide on which it was inscribed mentioned above.

denoting that they belong to the most respectable social class and family (T. Luikham199).²⁷ Only the eldest son inherits the coveted position of *āmeikharar*. Therefore, the population of *āmeikharar* remains the same throughout several generations. Although there is no caste division as in Hindu society, there are three distinct divisions of class or status. The division indicates the individual who is the head of the lineage, sub-clan, clan, and village. Following this system of primogeniture, the eldest is called *āmei*, the second *āchui*, and the third son is called *āchei*. The village chief and chiefs of the clans, often referred to as *khalāknao*, had a lot more privilege, power, and wealth than the *vāhongnao* or *āyao* ‘the commoners or the poor’ because most of the lands and paddy fields belonged to them. There were certain types of clothes that only the *khalāknao* could wear. For instance, the commoners would never dare to wear the *haorā* that has seven panels or *thangkang*. Varamla Ngashangva, a nonagenarian from Phalee village said that in the past, only the *khalāknao* could add the pattern called *chonphor* in their shawls.²⁸ Several proverbs reflect the divine right that is accorded to the community chief:

(13) *Kazingrek, wungnaorek* (Kasomwoshi)

tran. Heavens’ wisdom, *yangnao*’s wisdom

Yangnao (*wungnao* in Tangkhul) is a hereditary chief of a village, a clan, or a sub-clan, and he is addressed respectfully as *mitharra* or *wutharra* in the Phalee dialect.²⁹ This proverb employs parallel construction and rhyme to underscore the similarities between a *wungnao* and a god. Just as humans struggle to comprehend the wisdom and thoughts of a god, deciphering the mind of a *wungnao* is equally challenging: both the *wungnao* and the god work in mysterious ways. The

²⁷ The term is derived from the combination of *āmei* (elder brother) and *kharar* (old or elder). Both words signify someone who is older, and their combination emphasises a position at the highest level of the hierarchy. See Appendix III for details.

²⁸ Nowadays this pattern is known as *phorri* in Phalee and *phorrei* in Tangkhul. See Appendix III.

²⁹ See Appendix III.

analogy emphasises the divine sanction inherent in the title of *wungnao*, endowing the individual with special status and infinite knowledge and wisdom. Kasomwoshi suggests that the quality of patience in the *wungnao* is analogous to the vast patience of the heavens. The *wungnao*, known for their great patience and magnanimity, become uncontrollable when angered, much like the heavens and forces of nature, which are beyond human control. However, despite his omnipotence and omniscience, and the universal respect he commands because of his status and assumed qualities, he is not seen to be free from moral responsibility. This view is reflected in some proverbs. For instance:

(14) *Khi yangnaona saho rākshi, khi phuirina nru?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What *yangnao* speaks impolitely, what python bites?

It is expected that *yangnao*, as a respected man in the community, should be humble, polite, and friendly to everyone. These individuals are not supposed to speak rudely but be compassionate and courteous to everybody. According to the Phalee's popular belief, a python is harmless (since it does not have a venomous bite) and even listens to what people say, although it has the power to kill by constriction. This belief of a python's good nature is mapped onto a human while expressing societal expectations of how *yangnao* should conduct themselves. This saying is commonly invoked when someone speaks disparagingly or rudely about others of lower age or social standing. The proverb user seeks to correct the behaviour of a scoffer by asking them to act like the *yangnao*. This strategically couches the criticism within a compliment. Indeed, the proverb works in the way that the *yangnao* himself would offer critique and correction through gentle and inoffensive rebuke and urges the speaker and performs its content through its form.

(15) *Khi yangnaona ayao rāthomrai par?* (Collected, Phalee)

tran. What *yangnao* picks from the *ayao rāthom*?

The term *ayao* (*āyao* in Tangkhul) refers to common men and carries connotations of being children. *Rāthom* specifically pertains to food served on leaves, typically banana leaves in communal dining. The *yangnao*, as a distinguished individual, is not expected to partake in the food served to the commoners; instead, he is meant to eat from a traditional tall wooden plate. Figuratively, this proverb implies that a respectable person should not infringe upon the rights of others and must uphold a sense of royal dignity couching the expected behaviour for individuals of noble lineage in a rhetorical question. It asserts that powerful individuals should embody humility, communicate with respect, and recognise their societal position, thus refraining from encroaching upon the rights of the lesser privileged.

(16) *Khi khongri harwo na rangphewrai nru?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What matured rooster pecks on sun-drying grain?

I translate *khongri harwo* as ‘matured rooster’ as English has no equivalent term. These words are cultural-specific, and the cultural nuances could not be transferred accurately into English. A matured rooster does not habitually peck on grains drying in the sun. Only young chicks and hens scratch at and eat from them. The matured rooster metaphorically refers to a man of social standing, perhaps a *yangnao*. Like the matured rooster, the dignified man is expected to be a person who does not interfere in others’ business and shows self-restraint. They are members of the village court who handle major disputes that ordinary people cannot resolve among themselves. This proverb is cited to chide a person who involves themselves in petty matters. It can also be used to ridicule when a man of a higher social status and greater wealth takes from the share of the commoners. During fieldwork, an elderly individual remarked that this proverb remains profoundly pertinent to contemporary society. He states that it emphasises the principle that leaders ought not to appropriate funds from societal resources or government schemes for personal gain, yet many do so, living lavish lifestyles while also exerting undue influence even in electoral

processes. Expanding on his point, he referenced proverb (48) ‘The chopping sound of the axe reaches till heavens,’ asserting that those engaged in such unethical behaviour will inevitably face divine retribution.

A notable discriminatory belief exists that certain lineages are thought to wield spiritual influence capable of possessing individuals, called *raiphunga* lit. ‘a person who harbours an evil spirit’. These families are often stigmatised as impure, leading individuals from so-called ‘clean’ families to refrain from marrying them. According to Phalee oral narratives, in the past, women from these families would wear a short *ruishum*, a traditional wrap-around skirt revealing their knees, in the belief that the malevolent spirits would be embarrassed and go away.³⁰ Allegedly, these families could take control of the body and minds of those they either hated or loved intensely. It is believed that on occasion, individuals may inadvertently cause harm to others simply because they do not have mastery over their spiritual power. More frequently, jealousy, hatred, and love are cited as the motivating forces for these families to cause harm to others. Victims reportedly endure intense physical pain, particularly in the stomach or sensitive areas like the groin, and armpits, speak in a similar voice, and adopt the behaviour of the possessing spirit. Chansa Makan describes such occurrences in his book *Living Ghost and Other Uncanny Stories* (2020).

(17) *Mi ākhali phumphor phorshārra* (Pheirei)

lit. One shan’t be called names

This moral dictum advises against labelling anyone with names such as *raiphunga* and name calling of others in general. It emphasises the importance of treating others with courtesy and

³⁰ Historically, all *ruishum* (*kashan* in Tangkhul) garments were designed to be knee-length. See Appendix III.

avoiding derogatory and insulting language. Paradoxically, although individuals may experience unjust treatment, labelling anyone with derogatory terms is regarded as a punishable offense.

Feasts in the Tangkhul economy

Similar to other non-market societies, the Tangkhul socio-political bond is maintained through an economy of gift-giving.³¹ Prior to British colonisation, its lack of exposure to the outside world resulted in limited ambition and, consequently, modest desires for the Tangkhuls. Citing Pettigrew, Solo and Maringthei write, “[t]heir only desire is to get money to build a big house, buy two or three buffaloes, and sufficient cultivation for their needs, resign, and lead a lazy dissolute life” (61). Wealth among the Tangkhul was largely defined by the ownership of extensive paddy fields, plots of land, and domesticated animals³². The majority of this land was owned by the *wungnao*. Numerous villages designated specific areas for public cultivation, enabling the less fortunate, who lacked their own land for cultivation or gathering firewood, to utilise these communal lands for sustenance.

Some affluent families, especially the chief of a clan or a sub-clan, were the hosts of *longshim*. Common people could not afford to install *sumkok* or *petkhok*, a big bed cut out of a single tree which is usually 6 feet or wider and long enough for all the members to sleep together. In order to construct the large bed, the tree had to be marked and felled, and the enormous bed had to be transported home. Throughout this process, the host was required to provide food and drink to the entire clan, local community, and village. No tree is cut down without taking proper permission from the tree. A sacrifice of rather a gift is given and waited for the response of the spirit of the tree, whether it would like to become the *waiwui* (or *akhoka*) of his household. This

³¹ See, for instance, Malinowski’s pioneering work and succeeding anthropological explorations on gift economies.

³² A Phalee folksong describes the assets of a wealthy man. See Appendix II (8).

exchange of labour for material acquisitions that are symbolic of power and affluence is evident in many aspects of the material culture of the community. Through the labour contract, then, the community became willing participants and enablers in the individual's pursuit of special status in the community.

This transactional reciprocal dynamic was obtained on a larger scale when the task became bigger, requiring longer investment in labour and resources. With the permission from the village chief and his *hangva*, rich people gave lavish *marān* (feasts of merit) to showcase their wealth and receive community recognition and fame in return.³³ However, Mayirnao and Khayi in their paper “Decolonising feasts of merit: reasoning *Marān Kasā* from a Tangkhul Naga perspective”, argue that in the Tangkhul Naga context, the translation of the notion of *marān kasā* as mere feasts of merit is misleading and a colonial construction. They aim to show the practice of the feast of merit is actually entangled in an entire complex of elements that constitute the Tangkhul worldview, which was arguably missed, or not highlighted, in colonial discourse:

Indeed, *marān kasā* includes social status enhancement and entitles the host to wear *lurim kachon* (a traditional royal Tangkhul Naga shawl), etc. It, however, also includes a range of socio-religious and culturo-educational functions like benevolence towards society and nature, observance of religious rites, and transmission of knowledge and culture, etc., undergirded with deeper metaphysical understandings, philosophy, consciousness and agency. Thus, *marān kasā* is not merely an FoM but comprises many other things (164).

While their position seems to tend towards an idealisation of the feast (as does Horam's, who sees generosity and charitable giving as the primary motivation for this activity), the importance of the

³³ A Phalee folksong records the story of a man who wanted to host *marān* but was not permitted. See Appendix II (9).

marān cannot be denied. There are two types of *marān*: *rānrei* and *longmarān* (T. Luikham 54–57). *Rānrei* is a grand event involving the participation of every villager, while *longmarān* is hosted by the owner of the *longshim*, with only members of the specific *longshim* and their relatives taking part.³⁴ This version of *marān* involves a smaller number of slaughtered animals and fewer installed totemic *tarung* to commemorate the event.³⁵ According to Gachui, there are two types of *marān*. The first type is hosted by wealthy individuals for the purpose of feasting and merrymaking, while the second type occurs when two affluent individuals challenge each other (44). Affluent individuals would sometimes challenge each other to organise a succession of feasts for the local community as a way of resolving a personal dispute or insult in a kind of competition (R. Horam, “Feast” 507). This is called *kaitāka* in Phalee. According to Horam, the number of animals to be slaughtered was predetermined by the villages to ensure that the rivalry was not carried too far and the village emptied of its food resources. No official winner or loser was declared either, and according to Horam, this kind of feasting was rare and did not receive its intended outcome of the host becoming a subject of admiring discussion and forming the basis of his reputation. However, Phalee oral narratives indicate that the competition was structured such that the participant who exhausted their resources and could no longer host feasts for the villagers was indeed recognised as the loser. Subsequently, the defeated individual was expected to stay in his place and not issue further challenges to the victor.

Traditionally, *marān* was hosted by the chief of the village or clan, who, during the celebration provided food and drinks for the entire village over several days. In return, he gained admiration and esteem from the community. The festivities included eating, drinking, dancing,

³⁴ See Appendix II (10). In this folksong, a man sarcastically advises a woman to choose a man who has hosted *rānri* (*rānrei* in Tangkhul). Maninglum Jagoi said that the biggest type of *marān* is called *kapaiwon*.

³⁵ A symbol of wealth. See Appendix III for details. Appendix II (11) talks about a girl who was a commoner but married a nobleman.

singing songs, marking the trees for *tarung*, felling them, bringing them home, and erecting them as totems. The number of *tarung* erected is variable and subject to regional differences and the strength of the host. Typically, the central *tarung ākhokka* (called *waiwui* in Phalee) is flanked by an equal number of *tarung* on each side. For example, in a setup with five *tarung*, the central *tarung ākhokka* is flanked by *harpom* on either side and *angā* at both ends (Mayirnao and Khayi 267). Some are accompanied by installing monoliths as well. It is possible for a wealthy commoner to host, although the likelihood of such an occurrence is low. According to oral traditions, younger siblings typically refrained from hosting *marān*, even if they could afford it, as it was considered shameful for the elder brother if he could not undertake such a responsibility. Hosting *marān* was not solely about the capability of the host but also involved contributions from relatives, particularly the *yorlā* and *varei*, who also provided cattle or pigs for the feast. T. Luikham has documented a few folk songs related to *marān* (167). One of the songs tells the story of a brother-in-law who was too miserly to contribute towards the building of his house. People with the substantial wealth required for hosting *marān* were few in number since most people's primary source of income, that is agricultural produce, was limited. The *khalāknao* owned most of the fertile and good plots of land. Climbing the social ladder for commoners, therefore, was nearly impossible in the normal course. Moreover, without the permission of the *hangva*, nobody was allowed to do *marān*.

There are two main types of traditional houses: *lengchengshim* and *ngashishim*. The common populace resided in *ngashishim*, structures that were typically roofed with thatch. On the other hand, *lengchengshim* is roofed with wooden shingles. In the past, other than *khalāknao*, the commoners were not allowed to build a *lengchengshim*. Moreover, individuals aspiring to construct a *lengchengshim* were required to organise a *marān*, contingent upon receiving

authorisation from the village chief and his council members. Building a *lengchengshim* is a long process and the community gave their labour in exchange for sustenance for the entire duration of construction. Few could afford to keep all able-bodied men of an entire village in wine, beer, rice, and meat for the whole period of house building. Not surprisingly, common people could not afford to do this. Interestingly, certain designs were restricted and could not be displayed on the building unless the individual was the eldest son or a clan chief, regardless of their ability to host a *marān*. Mayirnao and Khayi have discussed the significance of the various designs and motifs in detail (168–169). After hosting a series of feasts and slaughtering a sufficient number of animals, an individual could earn the privilege to embellish their home with motifs and intricate carvings, including various patterns and animal images. The number of *tarung*, patterns and the designs on the *lengchengshim* showed the owner's status.

Wealthy individuals with extensive paddy fields would organise an event called *lengvei kaphung*. This spectacle featured the village's most robust and muscular men competing to display their strength in a race. The objective was to carry a load of paddy, securely packed in cloth, weighing approximately 200 kgs, known as *lengvei* or *otrei*. The man who could carry the load over the longest distance without taking a break or with the least number of breaks and rests earned the esteemed title of *yārkhokka*, tantamount to the title of the most 'distinguished gentleman' of the village. (See Appendix II (12), which includes a folksong about a man who could not bear this load). The participants carried the *lengvei* from the field to the owner's granary, thus solving the landowner's crop transportation problems while offering a means of securing fame and special status. Similar to the feast of merit, these occasions were accompanied by plentiful servings of meat, beer, and wine, enhancing the celebratory atmosphere. On the evening before the competition, all participants gathered at the house of the field's owner and were fed with

nourishing food and beverages to fortify their bodies. This traditional practice is referred to as *rangteokoka* in Phalee local terminology.³⁶ It is possibly due to the real physical risks in performing such feats of strength and stamina that village youth thirsting for glory and honour would be enthusiastic participants in this gamified form of work. The risks, moreover, outweigh the benefits because there is also a guiding maxim, *Mākrina mida phaso masaronei*, which reassures the load bearer that ‘Paddy does not harm humans.’ This belief is founded on the notion that the paddy, through its gentle exhalations (literally gently blowing air on the fatigued body) and soothing caress, protects individuals from harm while they carry heavy loads. Rice is a staple food and a primary source of energy for them, and consequently, they do not associate rice with any potential harm. Furthermore, the provision of drinks and food during these occasions served a dual purpose by adding to the celebratory ambience and offering essential nutrients and energy to the participants, contributing to their high spirits and emotional well-being during the strenuous competition.

The Tangkhul community possesses several proverbs that offer insights into their perspectives on wealth and poverty. The following proverbs reflect the cultural attitudes and social values associated with economic status:

(18) *Vāhongnao kashāng hanremhan katim sāngmei* (Sira)

lit. Buckwheat flourishes longer than a commoner’s wealth

This proverb carries a mocking tone as it underscores the fleeting and insubstantial nature of a commoner’s wealth. It draws a disparaging comparison between the brief lifespan of buckwheat and the even more transient nature of a poor man’s financial resources. Buckwheat, known for its

³⁶ Although this practice is no longer followed, people still gather at the owner’s house to share a meal after storing the paddy in the granary.

short growth period and its tendency to wilt rapidly once uprooted, serves as a derisive metaphor for the ephemeral and fragile economic standing of the commoner. This proverb, therefore, mocks the insignificance of the commoner's wealth, suggesting that even a plant with a notoriously short life span outlasts it, thereby highlighting the precarious and often pitiful financial situation of those with limited means. Another similar proverb says:

(19) *Vāhongnaoshān renguichān* (Sira)

lit. The wealth of a commoner; the burning of small twigs

The image is vivid in the context, poignantly describing the precarious economic condition of a common villager. It likens the financial status of a commoner to small twigs, which ignite quickly with a large flame but burn out rapidly due to their low mass and density. The common person's wealth, like the twigs, may be acquired quickly but lacks durability and permanence. The underlying reality reflected in this piece of wisdom is that commoners often lack stable and continuous sources of income. Historically, among the Tangkhuls, agriculture was the primary means of livelihood. However, the most fertile fields and productive lands were owned by noble families, leaving commoners with less reliable and less productive plots. Consequently, their income was inherently unstable and insufficient for long-term sustenance. Even when commoners managed to accumulate wealth through hard labor, it quickly dissipated due to the absence of a stable economic foundation.

These two proverbs reflect the fragility of a commoner's financial situation, emphasising that their wealth is as ephemeral as buckwheat that grows for a short period or small branches that catch fire and burn out swiftly. The comparisons underscore the inherent instability and fleeting nature of the economic gains of those without secure and consistent sources of income. These proverbs, while highlighting the transient nature of a commoner's wealth, also illustrate the

broader socio-economic challenges faced by individuals with unstable financial foundations. They reveal a social structure within which most of the land and resources were owned by the *khalāknao*, who then automatically become the individuals with the highest social status in the community. These proverbs are frequently employed to scornfully mock impoverished individuals, pointing out the error of their attitude in flaunting non-generational wealth, especially those who then go on to swiftly squander it.

There are other proverbs that explore the opposite side, viz. the financial situations of the privileged:

(20) *Seinao thangkha chānga, wungnao thangkha chānga* (Kanrei)

lit. Sometimes a calve is scrawny, sometimes an *wungnao* is scrawny

The proverb employs a metaphor from animal husbandry to warn that even the privileged may face economic precarity. This comparison draws parallels between noblemen (*wungnao*) and calves, highlighting that both can go through phases of weakness and recovery. During the dry season, calves may become thin due to limited grazing options, yet they regain their health with the arrival of the spring season and abundant pastures. Similarly, noblemen may encounter temporary setbacks in their wealth and status, but their inherent qualities and resources enable them to recover and regain prosperity.

In Tangkhul society, bulls are highly esteemed possessions, symbolising wealth and status. The number of bulls slaughtered during significant events such as *marān kasā*, funeral wakes, and Thishām festivals is indicative of a person's wealth. The heads of these bulls are displayed in the homes of the affluent, serving as symbols of their prosperity. As noted above, the *wungnao* holds a position akin to royalty within the community. Despite facing temporary impoverishment, the belief persists that they will eventually recover their wealth and glory. The Tangkhul people respect the *wungnao* not only for their material wealth but also for their anointed status and divine

sanction. This respect underscores the idea that the coveted status of an *wungnao* cannot be acquired merely through wealth, but is a result of their inherent qualities, hereditary status, and the community's recognition of their authority. This proverb, therefore, emphasises the cyclical nature of fortune and the enduring respect for noblemen in Tangkhul culture, regardless of present misfortune. Thus, it is implied that while the common man's wealth is temporary, it is the privileged man's poverty that is transient.

According to Tangkhul belief, any wealth a person acquires on earth accompanies them to the land of the dead. It was assumed that the departed soul continued their earthly life in *kazeiram*, with the poor remaining poor and the rich staying rich. Oral narratives recount that some wealthy individuals prepared or instructed their families on the grave goods that they desired to be buried with. Wealthy individuals commissioned *wonrā* to commemorate the deceased.³⁷ This practice stemmed from the belief that an unhappy soul could disturb the living, with unexplained illnesses often being attributed to a dissatisfied ghost. Consequently, during funerals and the Thishām festival, families would sometimes impoverish themselves by investing substantial wealth in slaughtering numerous animals and arranging grave goods for the deceased. Anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower recorded a case of her retainer, Luikai, who incurred significant debt over his wife's funeral (16). Similarly, the Tangkhul folktale "Kachai Thishām Shāmkhului" (Hugh 61–65) tells the story of a poor couple who observed Thishām for their son for two consecutive years, which was an uncommon practice. In the first year, they could not afford to celebrate with any animals, so they used a crab instead. This allegedly led to their son eating alone while the other deceased did not share the food offered since it was so meagre. Moved by this, the couple arranged another Thishām the following year with a dog. This illustrates how even impoverished families

³⁷ A cenotaph. See Appendix III.

strived to provide funerary goods and animals to ensure a better existence for their loved ones in the afterlife. There was a practice involving the entry into the land of the dead (*kazei kazang*) by a *khanong* or ‘medicine man’. When an individual was gravely ill and it was suspected that their soul was being held captive by the dead, a *khanong* would be dispatched to ascertain the reasons for the soul’s captivity (T. Luikham 79–80).

Death held profound significance within Tangkhul culture due to the deeply rooted belief in the continuation of life beyond earthly existence. This belief compelled the community to uphold numerous social obligations, meticulously observe rituals and rites, and willingly make substantial economic sacrifices, all in anticipation of securing a more favourable existence in the afterlife. The following proverb gives the picture of a rich man’s wake.

(21) *Ayaiwui thithang paihuirukrai sheroiyei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. When the rich man dies, even the chamber pot is filled with food

Historically, a wealthy individual’s funeral wake was lavish, marked by opulence and grand celebrations. Abundant servings of food and drinks were customary. The essence of this proverb lies in the funerary feast scenario of a rich man, where the abundance of food and drinks was so extensive that there were insufficient vessels, pots, or baskets to contain them. Consequently, even chamber pots were filled with food. The subtext conveys a situation where someone has an overwhelming abundance of possessions. The custom of food sharing can occasionally lead to unforeseen situations when individuals receive an abundance of various food items from different sources. In such instances, the following proverb is often invoked to describe the state of possessing much more than necessary, as in the wake feast of a rich man.

(22) *Kathai kachām kathanrarām, kashāng khari nkoiriri* (Collected, Phalee)

tran. The poor are *kathanrarām*, the rich keep prudently

(23) *Makhalei malaothaya* (Arokianathan)

lit. One who has nothing boils over

ee. “No pride like that of an enriched beggar” (MK)

(22) provides insight into the mindset and behaviour of both wealthy and impoverished individuals, portraying them as architects of their own destinies. The proverb depicts the affluent as not exactly spendthrifts, at least prudent custodians of their wealth. The term *nkoiriri*, meaning the careful handling of things, especially valuable ones, introduces a positive connotation. Yet, in usage, this saying might also carry a hint of sarcasm, suggesting that the rich are stingy. In contrast, the indigent is portrayed as extravagant and lacking judicious financial management. The term *kathanrarām* is a combination of the words *kathan* ‘to shake’ and *tarām* ‘breaking off easily, like a dry clod of earth’, evoking agricultural practice. When vegetation or paddy is pulled out for transplantation or other usage, the shoots are vigorously shaken or struck on the palm or another surface to dislodge the soil. The loose soil easily breaks away and falls off. In the proverb, *kathanrarām* can be interpreted as an individual being profligate, overgenerous or using wealth thoughtlessly. An alternative interpretation suggests that the proverb implies the wealthy are stingy, while the poor exhibit generosity. *Kathanrarām* symbolises the attitude of the less affluent, who share their possessions generously, akin to a farmer shaking off dirt without hesitation. The proverb conveys the message that the rich amass wealth through prudent usage, while the poor remain impoverished due to their careless handling of resources. It serves as a cautionary tale and as financial advice.

Proverb (23) serves as a cautionary advisory about the precariousness of flaunting wealth, especially when one’s financial resources are limited. It uses the image of a pot not filled with useful items to the brim but with bubbles, which eventually boil over. While the proverb does not explicitly mention the pot, it evokes the image of a boiling pot familiar to those who cook or boil

water or ferment rice beer or wine. Those who lack substance or genuine qualities are often compared to bubbles, which create the illusion of abundance but are ultimately insubstantial, containing nothing but air. This metaphor is also encapsulated in the Phalee proverb (172) ‘Bad rice wine produces more froth; unattractive person is more flamboyant’ which emphasises the disparity between appearance and reality, underscoring the notion that superficial qualities are devoid of true value. The essence of (23) lies in its analogy between a boiling pot and the behaviour of individuals with limited wealth. Despite their meagre resources, some individuals may attempt to attract attention through ostentatious displays or lavish spending (compare 18 and 19 above). However, this outward show of affluence is likened to the bubbles in a boiling pot—transient, unsustainable, and prone to boiling over. The image of the bubbling pot reinforces the notion that just as the pot is filled to the brim with ephemeral bubbles, individuals who flaunt their wealth (as opposed to spending them on community feasts) are in reality empty of true and abiding wealth. This analogy extends to the idea that such behaviour is often driven by ego, creating a false impression of abundance. The proverb cautions against the pitfalls of pretentious displays, emphasising the importance of humility and authenticity in financial conduct. The proverb serves as a reminder to prioritise genuine wealth over superficial displays and to avoid ego-driven actions that can lead to imprudent financial management. Furthermore, by extension, it suggests that financial instability may often result from such ego-driven behaviour and poor financial decisions.

Through these proverbs, it becomes evident that the Tangkhul people recognise the stark contrasts between the rich and the poor, acknowledging the social and economic divides that influence their community’s structure and interactions. As we saw, some proverbs convey the notion of a predetermined fate, implying that individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are akin to puppets manipulated by destiny. Within this framework, the cycle of life seems

immutable, with the wealthy maintaining affluence and the impoverished remaining in destitution. Conversely, other proverbs emphasise individual agency, portraying individuals as the architects of their own destinies. Some proverbs (155), (156) and (157), which will be discussed later in Chapter Four, serve as a warning against demeaning or underestimating individuals based on their financial status. They underscore the idea that one should refrain from insulting others for their economic situation since fortune is fickle and reminds the hearer of the impermanence of wealth. The next section will offer introductory remarks, contextualising the above discussion more particularly within the focus of the present dissertation. The study of proverbs as a Western scholarly enterprise is of longstanding vintage. Nevertheless, some complexities in the application of terminology remain for the native speaker of a non-English language to the textual corpus under discussion. While Chapter Two undertakes a more thorough overview of the existing scholarly literature and outlines how academic terminology has been interpreted to understand and theorise the texts, here I will try to offer a brief outline of how this work engages with paremiology in general.

The above discussion has tried to show the intricate interplay between Tangkhul cultural beliefs, folklore, and the transformative forces of Western education and Christianity. It aims to demonstrate how the Tangkhul people navigate the tension between tradition and modernity, preserving certain elements while adapting to the evolving landscape of education and belief systems. Traditional maxims and proverbs reflecting the fear of divine judgment reveal a deep-seated connection between cultural norms, belief systems, and perceived consequences. Despite the cultural transformations due to modernisation, certain Tangkhul proverbs rooted in traditional laws and taboos persist, serving as moral guidelines and cautionary tales. These proverbs, with the distinctive suffix *shārra* denoting prohibition and divine retribution, demonstrate the enduring

influence of customary beliefs. The coexistence of these traditional norms with Christian doctrines reflects the complex negotiation of cultural identity among the Tangkhul people. While Tangkhul society has undergone significant changes due to external influences, a resilient thread of cultural values, norms, and taboos persists.

I have tried to show how in the Tangkhul community proverbs serve as valuable windows into the economic ethos, societal norms, and cultural heritage. They offer timeless wisdom that transcends generations, providing a rich tapestry of insights into the complexities of human relationships, societal structures, and the ever-evolving dynamics between wealth and poverty within the Tangkhul community.

Part II

Structure of the Study

A few collections of Tangkhul proverbs have been published, but no research has been done yet for discussion and analysis. These texts have not been systematically studied, and their structure has not been formally discussed either. The collections lack any thematic or alphabetical categorisation and often offer limited meanings, leaving much unknown about variant forms and structural differences. The absence of a formal study raises the possibility that existing theoretical frameworks may not align with Tangkhul ways of thinking and practices.

This research performs a dual activity. It collects a preliminary corpus of Tangkhul and Phalee proverbs, gathered from the field as well as from existing anthologies. In this, it acts as a form of documentation which will hopefully be augmented in the future. The other parallel objective, as mentioned above, lies in a rhetorical, aesthetic, and stylistic analysis of the collected

proverbs, and an attempt at a tentative typology based on these markers. The proverbs exhibit a beauty of language, vivid imagery, and allusive metaphorical expressions that are worth exploring for a deeper understanding of aesthetic and sociocultural values. Drawing upon ethnographic (and sometimes auto-ethnographic) insights, this work engages with proverbs not only as cultural expressions but as literary and aesthetic objects and strategic rhetorical moments within everyday language use.

The primary research question for the project was to try and determine what we might mean when we call a fixed expression in Tangkhul and Phalee a 'proverb' and what are the ways in which we might be able to identify and interpret them. Several related questions then follow, viz.: What are some of the commonly used proverbs in Tangkhul and Phalee speech? How do these proverbs express the culture's attitudes towards human behaviour and the natural and built environments? Are there specific proverbs that may be tied to an awareness of the biodiversity hotspot that the speakers natively inhabit? How can these proverbs be seen as representing the Tangkhul worldview? How does the Tangkhul community use proverbs in sociocultural contexts and everyday communicative speech? How can we see the stylistic features of proverbs as being creatively utilised to aid memory and to achieve aesthetic, poetic, and communicative effects in a predominantly oral culture?

It is important to note here that proverbs from the Bible have not been considered unless useful for explication and comparison. The influence of Christianity and missionary activity is a highly complex phenomenon and boasts of a century's worth of history. A study of the sociocultural changes that Christianity, Western education, colonial modernity, and post-colonial urban living has wrought upon the Tangkhuls is beyond my competence and the scope of this research. This work may be undertaken by others in the future.

The Corpus and Primary Sources

In this research, six collections of proverbs serve as primary texts to form the basis of the corpus: *Tangkhul Chanjam (Tangkhul Proverbs)* (1978) by S. Kanrei, *Haowui Kharar Chānsam (Proverbs)* (1991) by L.K. Sira, *Hao Chāncham (Hao Proverbs)* (2018) by Peter Pheirei, *Ancient Sayings of Hao and Modern Proverbs* (No date) by Stephen Angkang, *Awo-Ayi Ngashan (Culture, Custom, Lasem)* (No date) by K. John, and *Hao Tangkhul Chānjam* (2022) by Somi Kasomwoshi. Some collections are from unknown or self-publications, lacking publication dates and page numbers. John’s work, while not solely a collection of Tangkhul proverbs, includes a chapter called “*Zatkhanā Tui*” meaning “Current Saying”, listing 292 fixed expressions, some considered proverbs. S. Arokianathan also lists 163 proverbs in *Tangkhul Folk Literature* (1982), and William Pettigrew’s *Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary (Ukhrul Dialect) with Illustrative Sentences* (1918) contains twenty-eight proverbs. I have cited entries from John, Arokianathan, and Pettigrew, even though they are not dedicated proverb collections. Pettigrew, Arokianathan, and Kasomwoshi provide English translations. Sira, Kanrei, and Kasomwoshi give meanings of the proverbs. Pheirei offers limited meanings and often employs prose styles despite the availability of more structural and poetic forms. Proverbs marked as “Collected, Phalee” within parentheses are gathered through the researcher’s own lived experience and fieldwork. The collection of field data on proverbs is limited to Phalee village because I am a native of Phalee village and the scope of fieldwork in other locations was restricted due to the limitations of time.

Methodology and Approaches

This research adopts a multifaceted approach, borrowing terminology and concepts from linguistics, oral studies, and ethnographic research to arrive at a comprehensive understanding and more accurate interpretation of Tangkhul proverbs. My original training is in literary studies, but

I have used linguistic analysis to the best of my ability and my own usage of the languages as a native speaker to scrutinise the specific words used in proverbs, unravelling their meanings and exploring nuances. I have also considered the syntactic structure of proverbs, seeking to comprehend how this could contribute to meaning making. Given that Tangkhul is predominantly an oral culture and that proverbs are regularly used in oral performances, an investigation into the performative aspects of proverbs within a cultural context becomes essential. This aspect aims to grasp how native speakers employ and interpret proverbs.

Due to the limited availability of recorded and published sources, the research also involves the collection of proverbs from the field, initiating the creation of what would hopefully grow into a comprehensive database. During fieldwork, interviews were recorded with the consent of village elders (mostly octo/nonagenarians) to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural context, the role of proverbs in daily life, and the evolution of their use over time. Some of the respondents in Phalee village remember the coming of Christianity, and their accounts of pre-Christian animistic proverbial sayings were used in conjunction with biblical and post-conversion ones, although, as mentioned earlier, biblical proverbs are not the focus of this research.

Two cultural experts were also consulted—a paremiographer and the secretary of the Tangkhul Literature Society, who was also a teacher of Tangkhul in a school. Their interviews were not recorded since consent was withheld, but manual notes were taken. They were consulted mainly for help with the interpretation of the proverbs. Unstructured interviews with elderly people were conducted in Phalee village and approximately 30 hours of interviews with different individuals of both genders were recorded. During fieldwork, around 60 Phalee proverbs, which are not found in the published Tangkhul collections, and approximately one hundred folk songs were collected. The interviews were recorded using a Zoom H1N audio recorder and stored in

WAV format. The size of the recorded data is approximately 15 GB, comprising 145 files. The file naming protocol follows the template below:

Serial recording number in three digits_Two-letter code for place of recording_date in day-month-year format_Initial of the interviewee_Initial of the interviewer.File format. For instance, the first audio file, numbered according to date of recording is labelled as “001_PH_11-12-21_Ng.V_M.WAV.” The audio files were transcribed according to IPA notation. Following the same naming protocol, the transcription of the first recording is labelled as “001_PH_11-12-21_Ng.V_M. TXTWAV” and so on.

Tangkhal proverbs and fixed expressions used in this thesis are presented in Appendix I with their translation and equivalent English proverbs (when present). The full record of field respondents and the complete list of proverbs collected till date are currently stored in an MS Excel database, which will be uploaded on a web-based platform in the future. A complete list has not been provided with this document since the entire corpus is yet to be transliterated and translated. Appendix II contains all the Phalee folk songs referenced in this thesis. An illustrated glossary of the Tangkhal and Phalee terms for various concepts, flora and fauna, and cultural objects that have been used frequently in the thesis and images have been provided when available and as applicable. Most of the images in the glossary are reproduced from freely-available Internet sources with citation and hyperlinks. Images of some specific cultural objects are from the personal collections of my own family and the owner’s name has been mentioned in such cases. The source is cited as ‘Author’ for an image captured by me during fieldwork.

A variety of translation methods have been used in this project, drawing primarily upon Baker’s methodology, as outlined in Chapter Two. Each method is indicated by a specific abbreviation. “lit.” stands for literal translation, “ee.” represents the English equivalent, “para.”

denotes translation by paraphrase, and “tran.” signifies translation by borrowing the original word with footnotes. Each proverb used in this study has been assigned a number based upon its first mention for ease of reference and in order to restrict repetition. However, in some cases, repetition has been unavoidable, especially when subsequent discussions involve some aspects that had not been addressed earlier. This was considered to be the best method for facilitating a smoother reading experience albeit at the cost of contributing to the length of the work.

I have attempted close readings of selected proverbs, highlighting and unpacking cultural allusions, focusing on the utilisation of literary devices, archaic words, culture-specific terminology, and rhetorical aspects. Given my native background, some proverbs have been interpreted through my own cultural competence. Native concepts and regularly used terms are set in italics in the thesis. This document follows the MLA 8th edition style guide for citation and referencing.

The rest of the thesis refers to the framing discussion on the cultural context offered in Part I of this chapter. Chapter Two is the literature review and looks at the general paremiological debates around definition and markers as well as those around translation and translatability. It invokes the problem of proverb definition as it pertains to how the Tangkhul understand proverbiality. This discussion may be viewed as an extension of the methodological challenges that the subject raises for the student. The chapter assesses some existing standard theories and examines whether and to what extent they may be claimed to apply to Tangkhul and Phalee proverbs. It articulates the possibility that standard Western ideas about identity, nature, language and the world could differ from the Tangkhul worldview and, therefore, the collected material needs to be evaluated against standard academic models. Tangkhul has recently started being written in Roman script but without standardisation, and as such literary, aesthetic, hermeneutical,

and rhetorical criticism in Tangkhul is also rare. Especially for Phalee, which does not possess an orthography or script yet, literary study is non-existent. The literature review, therefore, takes into account allied scholarly discourses such as orality studies since academic literature on Tangkhul is scanty too, even in the discipline of linguistics.

Chapter Three undertakes a close reading of selected proverbs used in the study. This section is based on oral texts collected through fieldwork undertaken in Ukhrul district, especially in Phalee village. Since the wider academic readership is envisaged as not having either Tangkhul or Phalee, and no standard translations exist, this chapter offers literal translations of some proverbs, an analysis of the contexts of proverbial usage, and interpretations and glosses of the translated proverbs.

Chapter Four offers a tentative typology based upon stylistic markers and other observed and analysed aspects of the collected proverbs. The functions of the proverbs and the stylistic features of proverbs are categorised according to groupings used in paremiological analyses of other cultures. These are then studied to understand how examples from individual proverbs generate complex symbolic and metaphorical meanings.

The Conclusion outlines the insights gained from the hermeneutical, semantic, lexical and rhetorical analysis of the form and content of the collected Tangkhul and Phalee proverbs and indicates avenues for further research.

Chapter Two

Buying the Beads: Review of Literature

Khi miroyungna mpār; khi tewna mpār?

What fatwood decays; what word decays?

This chapter is the introduction to the academic context within which the present work seeks to position itself. It undertakes a review of the literature and provides the rationale and methodology for the thesis grounded in the cultural and linguistic introduction offered in Chapter One. It does not attempt to provide a review of previous literature on Tangkhul proverbs since the academic discourse on them is virtually non-existent. Apart from colonial accounts (Pettigrew and others), which have been mentioned in the previous chapter, recent work on the subject has taken place mostly under the initiative of native Tangkhul speakers who are increasingly growing conscious of the threatened status of the language.³⁸ This thesis relies upon locally published Tangkhul pamphlets and collections with appropriate citations. Phalee, however, is an entirely undocumented language and since the majority of younger speakers are diasporic, its vulnerability is greater. The first academic documentation of the language and culture is contained in the present work, and all the documented data is from field recordings and interviews undertaken by me. Paremiologists typically adopt an inclusive perspective, incorporating insights from diverse fields such as anthropology, art, communication, culture, folklore, history, literature, philology, psychology, religion, and sociology (Mieder 2004). While some of these works may not be directly engaged with in the current research, they are valuable for a comprehensive understanding of

³⁸ The Manipur State Government undertakes initiatives for local language training as well. See, for e.g. <https://www.ifp.co.in/manipur/applications-invited-for-local-language-training-programme> (accessed 15 July 2024)

proverbs and aids in contextualising this thesis. This chapter, therefore, begins with the Tangkhul understanding of and vocabulary for proverbiality, citing existing work on Tangkhul, but the rest of the review of literature is of the theories and debates within Western paremiology that have together helped in building the foundations for this study.

Chāncham

As paremiologists attest (see next section), the proverb as a concept is notoriously difficult to define. *The Oxford English Dictionary* calls it a “short, traditional, and pithy saying; a concise sentence, typically metaphorical or alliterative in form, stating a general truth or piece of advice; an adage or maxim” first recorded c1375 in Chaucer (Sense 1.a.). The dictionary definition is, unsurprisingly, overinclusive, connoting the various senses in which almost synonymous terms may be used to signify a particular kind of linguistic utterance that may take on various forms but still be described as such. For paremiographic/paremiological purposes, however, the inclusivity of the dictionary definition is not particularly helpful. Proverbs are universally used in speech, and a sense of the proverbial is intuitively grasped even by novice users of any given language. Jennifer Speake’s opening comments in the introduction to the standard Anglo-American reference, *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (2011), offers a better starting point in the context of this research:

A proverb is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner. Paradoxically, many phrases which are called ‘proverbial’ are not proverbs as we now understand the term. [...] The confusion dates from before the eighteenth century, when the term ‘proverb’ also covered metaphorical phrases, similes, and descriptive epithets, and was used far more loosely than it is today. Nowadays we would normally expect a proverb to be cast in the form of a sentence (ix).

The “confusion” Speake notes above is fully present in any attempt to define Tangkhul proverbs as well. The closest equivalent word for “proverb” in Tangkhul is *chāncham*. It has been alternatively written as *chānjam* or *chānsam*. Proverbs encompassing various genres such as proverbial phrases, proverbial comparisons, wellerisms, maxims, and aphorisms, among others are collectively referred to as *chāncham* in the Tangkhul language. Distinguishing between proverbs and all these related forms proves challenging, as these utterances lack a clear proverb status but are frequently used in figurative speech and are considered proverbs by native speakers. Interestingly, in the Tangkhul Bible, the Book of Proverbs is translated as *Chānsam*, though some locals argue that it might be an error, and the correct form should be *Chāncham*. Apart from collectors like Somi Kasomwoshi (2022) and Peter Pheirei (2018) other Tangkhul paremiographers also use the term *chānsam*. Many Tangkhuls use *chānsam* and *chāncham* interchangeably, despite *chānsam* literally meaning ‘example.’ On the other hand, the word *chāncham* is a composite of *chān* meaning ‘word’ and *kacham* meaning ‘old’ and it can be argued that *chāncham* (word+old) implies ‘the old saying.’ As Ruth Finnegan notes in a discussion about oral poetry, naming is important since the terminology used by speakers to self-describe linguistic objects such as proverbs can offer insights into local attitudes towards them (*Oral Poetry* 15). I will nevertheless use the word *chāncham* for proverbs in the established English sense in this thesis, disregarding the variation *chānjam* due to the voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate in its second syllable which makes this more a variant transliteration without semantic distinction for speakers.³⁹

³⁹ Voiced plosives and voiced affricates are very rare in spoken Tangkhul. Ahum identified the voiced sounds [b, d, g, and j] as allophones of the phonemes [p, t, k, and c] respectively (35). However, Tangkhul speakers have begun using them when writing on digital communication platforms such as Facebook, X, and WhatsApp. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy because the younger generation of Tangkhul speakers is increasingly diasporic, and linguistic heritage preservation attempts are occurring through digital communication platforms like WhatsApp and

Moreover, if we turn to history and look at the imperialist project of linguistic documentation, William Pettigrew's seminal dictionary (from which Tangkhul derives its orthography and due to the influence of which Tangkhul transitioned into writing) defines the word *chānjam* as a symbol, simile, similitude, emblem, metaphor, or figurative expression and *chanjamwui tui* (lit. 'Proverb's word') as proverb (242). The Phalee word *chamsam* also refers to metaphor, simile, and figurative expressions. In N. Luikham's dictionary (1997), the term *chamsam* is used when explaining *chāngpopāp* (8). While this could be a typing error, it also raises the possibility that the term *chamsam* might have existed in Tangkhul.

Tangkhul may be called a "residually oral" culture in Walter Ong's terms (*Oral Literature* 21). Consequently, within the Tangkhul context, proverbs are predominantly employed in oral communication. Additionally, it is a tonal language; therefore, its very orality and tonal nature add sophistication and melody to the proverbs. Despite a few observable functional similarities between Tangkhul and English proverbs, the complexity and sophistication of the poetic use in the language make it challenging to translate, analyse, and interpret Tangkhul proverbs into English. The suppressed punning, aesthetic appeal, and emotive force that comes from its sonic beauty get lost in translation and interpretative exercises carry the risk of sounding overwrought when examined within a written cultural context. Furthermore, individuals from various cultural backgrounds perceive the idea of proverbs in diverse ways. These two cultures have different worldviews and interactions with the world around them. Therefore, it is important to reiterate that when a Tangkhul or Phalee proverb is expressed and recorded in translation in the present work (sometimes for the first time in the history of the language), it loses some of the inherent power

Facebook groups and communities. Consequently, transliteration often becomes spontaneous, idiosyncratic, and based upon individual interpretations of orthography, and listening comprehension.

derived from its oral nature. However, without documentation and critical study, the few surviving texts will soon vanish without a trace, as they are losing their older custodians and their younger users due to rapid urbanisation and increase in the exclusive use of English among native speakers. The global concern for the resuscitation of endangered languages reflects this reality: “The Missing Scripts started from the alarming realization that nearly half of the world’s writings remain absent from digital platforms. Among these are not only ancient scripts, some of which remain undeciphered, but also a large number of minority or Indigenous writings still in use today” (UNESCO). There is thus a strong need to study and document such texts before these beautiful sayings that are witnesses of a linguistic community’s unique perspective on life and the world, and its own history, become extinct.

It is widely acknowledged that the ancestors of oral communities preserve their knowledge and information through various forms, such as songs, festivals, ceremonies, crafts, beliefs, games, rituals, tales, riddles, proverbs, and other forms of folklore (Vansina 1985; Finnegan 2012). Proverbs are succinctly phrased in language that is both aesthetically pleasing and meaningful, making them easily learned and shareable. They do not require a specific context or situation to be relevant; rather, they can be seamlessly integrated into any conversation contingent upon the speaker’s intention, forming an essential component of discourse. Proverbs can be employed by anyone, at any time, and in any place, and they are closely connected to the natural environment and specific conversational intent of the users. Proverbs are also polyfunctional, offering a wide array of values and knowledge. As Mieder notes, for thousands of years, the wisdom encapsulated in proverbs has guided people in their social interactions across the globe (*Proverbs* xi). They are considered the “expressions of wisdom and truth from generation to generation” (Hrisztova-Gotthardt and Varga 1). Every society uses sayings and proverbs as vehicles for the hierarchising

of values and of their inculcation in the young. Observing the proverbs of a community can help understand what a certain society deems important and what moral attitudes it privileges and tries to promote among its members. This does not mean, of course, that proverbs are free of biases and stereotypical slurs: indeed, quite the opposite. As Odesoji observes, “[p]roverbs are a universal phenomenon which probably evolved with the growth and development of the society reflecting the diverse aspects of its culture” (3) and this includes its biases. Thus, proverbs may be considered a rich place to start understanding and recording the life of a community, as it is the very language that native speakers use every day.

Given this context, this study attempts a preliminary documentation of proverbs through field data collection as well as from printed pamphlets and books, but it also performs extensive readings and acts of interpretation of the collected proverbs, based upon the researcher’s personal knowledge of the culture as a native speaker herself. In this work I try to, therefore, not only perform a paremiographical service to my language, but also offer a rhetorical, aesthetic, and stylistic reading of Tangkhul proverbs as a literary scholar and a native of Phalee village. Like the proverbs of other languages, Tangkhul proverbs are also composed in a language that is figurative, symbolic, poetic, and allusive. The poetic diction, figurative devices, rich imagery, and metaphorical expression employed in the proverbs are worth identifying and studying because, as has been pointed out above, they can help understand aesthetic and socio-cultural values.

Since proverbs contain ideas, thoughts, principles, ideologies, and beliefs, and the themes and topics they discuss are numerous, this thesis tries to also initiate a preliminary documentation of the ways in which the speaker and the listener use, understand, and interpret the meanings of the proverbs. We know that proverbs are “highly context dependent because they have different meanings in varied contexts” (Lomotey and Csajbok-Twerefou 86). Therefore, they are often used

as a communication strategy to fulfil one's intention in many speech situations. People use proverbs as a rhetorical device to persuade, exhort, ridicule, convince, influence, teach, support their statements, and gain approval or attention from the listeners. It is interesting to study and offer hypotheses about why and how an individual speaker uses a proverb in real world situations to influence their listeners and what aspects of a particular proverb may turn it into a tool of persuasion and power. The next section will briefly touch upon the methodological and terminological problems in the available printed corpus of Tangkhul proverbs, which led to one of the central concerns of this work: to suggest a working definition by which the various folk sayings used by Tangkhul and Phalee speakers may be identified as proverbs and to offer alternative labels for other similar proverbial genres in the languages.

Tangkhul Proverbs

As indicated above, the precise definition of what constitutes a proverb remains a persistent challenge among scholars, a debate that will be surveyed in the next chapter. Tangkhul, moreover, has no terminology for differentiating between proverbs, idioms, and related expressions. The issue is further complicated by the fact that many proverbs in Tangkhul are truncated and retain only the core metaphor in everyday speech. It is difficult, therefore, to define Tangkhul proverbial sayings according to Western understanding, and tackling this problem in itself constitutes an integral part of this study. This research tries to tease out the differences in Tangkhul and Phalee proverb usage and proposes some modes of distinctions from an analysis of the collected sayings that are considered proverbial (in the sense of the umbrella word *chāncham* as noted above).

Tangkhul proverb collectors have amalgamated proverbs, sayings, maxims, dictums, and other proverb-related genres in their collections and therefore, the understanding lacks precision. Phalee has no recorded collections till date, so this complication does not exist in it at the time of

writing. The distinction between proverbs and other fixed expressions, such as idioms and phrases, is also often overlooked in the existing Tangkhul collections published by such private enthusiasts. It seems that in these collections any traditional metaphorical and/or didactic utterance is automatically considered a proverb. This suggests that the Tangkhul notion of proverbs might differ from Western or other cultural perspectives. However, this issue is not unique to Tangkhul; scholars like Taylor (1962), Finnegan (2012) and others have similarly highlighted such challenges in their studies across different languages. Additionally, linguists also study proverbs as an integral component of phraseology.

In order to differentiate between “true proverbs” (Mieder, “Origin” 41) and other figurative language and fixed expressions in the Tangkhul context, I have adopted several strategies, which are outlined below. Some scholars consider (grammatical) sentence or full or propositional statement (Taylor 1931, Mieder 1985, Norrick 1985) status as a defining feature of a proverb. Of course, this notion of considering proverbs as grammatical sentences has shortcomings, which Norrick points out (*How Proverbs* 34). Nevertheless, this feature is used in this work to distinguish proverbs from proverbial phrases. Tangkhul grammar has two tenses: future and non-future. “Non-future tense is marked by the suffix /ə/. It has three phonologically conditioned allomorphs- /yə/, /i/, and /wə/ indicating either the past or the present tense, and the future tense is marked by the suffix /rə/” (Ahum 168). Some proverbs in imperative forms end with *-lu*. For instance, (132) *Mayonlu, mangonlu*, ‘lit. Protect it, devour it.’ If the expressions end with such markers, they are complete sentences and therefore, considered in the present work to be proverbs. It does not mean that all the proverbs end with such markers. In some cases, these markers are omitted to maintain the rhyme and rhythmic quality. On the other hand, proverbial phrases contain non-finite verbs, especially at the end; therefore, the tense is often obscure. Non-finite verbs in Tangkhul are formed

by affixing *-ka-* or *-kha-*. Proverbial phrases do not contain a fully articulated thought but simply add colour to the utterance. They are proverbial in that they are traditional and metaphorical. Taylor speculates that perhaps proverbial phrases contain more allusions to traditional superstitions and older beliefs than proverbs (*Proverb* 197) and my corpus tends to agree with this view.

In “true proverbs,” the word *kachikathā* or *kachithāda* meaning ‘like that/ it is like’ (the complimentiser *that*) can be added at the end. *Kachikathā* has a quotative quality. Only if it is possible to add the word *kathā* (adjectival) or *thāda* (adverbial) meaning ‘like’ can the expression be considered a proverbial phrase. Here is a pair of illustrations:

(24) *āva thila āshāmali chapkázat (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) crying for the lover when her mother died

(25) *Kashi mareo, hangkhā mareo (kachikathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) bad excitement, crowd excitement

The first example is rendered incomplete due to the absence of a finite verb, thereby necessitating the addition of solely *kathā*. In instances where the sentence concludes with a non-finite verb, the inclusion of the term *kachikathā* may appear awkward. On the other hand, the second example, although highly elliptical, makes complete sense. In Norrick’s words, it has a “potential free conversational turn” (67). In this second example, the word *kachikathā* can be added. (In actual speech, the use of these tags is optional). To distinguish proverbial phrases from proverbs in this thesis, the term *kathā* has been systematically added.

(26) *malum thāda chāmkathi* (Sira)

lit. rush to death like flying termites

The native speakers identified the above proverbial simile (25) as a proverb in a field survey I undertook (see Conclusion). This is similar to Arora's finding (1984) that if speakers hear it from the older generation, they will consider any saying to be a proverb, irrespective of whether it was formed like a simile or a complete sentence. But using *thāda* to make the comparison signals that the expression is a simile and that it is also an incomplete sentence. Calling such expressions proverbial phrases or proverbial similes rather than proverbs seems to be more appropriate. The collected corpus shows that if the statement has a metaphorical or figurative meaning, didactic content, or can be used as an analogy in a situation, no finer formal distinctions are made by Tangkhuls. Proverbial similes perhaps occur even more frequently than proverbs in everyday language use. Native speakers have no problem identifying *chāncham* (proverbs), but it becomes difficult to establish a categorisation and ordering of these according to English paremiological standards. Native speakers identify proverbial phrases as proverbs without any hesitation because according to the commonsense understanding, this expression can be used figuratively and contains traditional knowledge. However, the scholar cannot be satisfied with such intuitive conceptualisations, especially if the language and culture is to be documented in standard academic terms and translated for an introduction to a global audience. The observed formal and thematic variety, and the discernible grammatical and stylistic trends within the corpus also demands more precise categorisation for sustainable study. As stated above, this work tentatively proposes certain boundary conditions, following established standards, for bestowing proverbial status to certain proverbial expressions in Tangkhul and Phalee, and suggests that other formulaic expressions may be designated by separate terminology, such as proverbial phrases or proverbial similes, thereby highlighting their unique grammatical and stylistic features. However, because they are considered proverbs by speakers, this thesis does not ignore these phrases but includes them in the discussion.

Tangkhul transitioned into a print culture with the arrival of Christian missionaries only in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, Tangkhul proverbs predominantly still exist in oral form. Given their oral nature, these proverbs likely underwent various transformations in form, structure, and meaning over time. It may be claimed that speakers do not take the form and structure as important as a written context. Speakers often shorten or truncate proverbs or use only the “kernel of the proverb” (Norrick *How Proverbs*, 45) in everyday conversation, and thus, some of them now exist as proverbial phrases. As a result, the collectors might have written down the proverbs in full or truncated form as they heard them in verbal conversations without paying much attention to the format of the linguistic representation.

Thus, there is a possibility that these proverbial phrases were once a proverb or vice versa. The conflation of proverbial phrases as proverbs could be an indication that the people who use them emphasise the culturally accepted authority that gives the signal that it is a proverbial utterance rather than the exact linguistic expression. Anybody belonging to a culture with a certain level of cultural literacy would be able to understand instantly that the utterance is proverbial and will be able to deduce the meaning even if only the “kernel of the proverb” is heard. In Tangkhul, the word *thāda/kathā* or *kachikathā/ kachithāda* seems to be used as a *chāncham* or ‘proverbial’ marker. When used with proverbial phrases and proverbs respectively, it shows that a comparison is made, and the expression should not be understood literally. In oral speech this helps the speaker to flag a comparison.

Some collectors and those who write the foreword to their collections seem to look at a proverb primarily as a form of verbal art for imparting moral values and, therefore, assume that *chāncham* is used by default and exclusively for teaching *shiyān-chikān*, *āchei-ārei* (etiquette), and *thangmet* (wisdom). There is no corresponding word in English that can cover the various

connotations of *shiyān-chikān*. This compound word is another umbrella term, the meanings of which encompass etiquette, norms, ethics, values, manner, and penal code⁴⁰. Maybe because of this assumption, the existing printed collections of Tangkhul proverbs include all traditional sayings, taboos, maxims, and superstitions that aim to impart moral values. Taylor says, “[i]n early times proverbs were collected for their didactic values, as rules and guides for life” (*Proverb* 174). Granted that not only the Tangkhuls but other cultural communities and paremiologists identify didacticism as a primary characteristic of proverbs (Norrick 1985), following the practice of the existing proverb collections does not really help in a better understanding of the exact nature of Tangkhul proverbs as distinguishable from other exhortatory folk genres. In this thesis, therefore, if the statement has no metaphor or archaic resonance and no figurative meanings, it is not considered a proverb. In some cases, I have relied upon a combination of intuitive understanding, cultural familiarity as a native speaker, and scholarly literature to distinguish proverbs from other related genres.

As I note above, proverbial comparisons and proverbial phrases are prevalent in Tangkhul. However, other forms of proverbs, such as wellerisms, interrogative proverbs, and dialogue proverbs, are considerably rare. Only a handful of them are found in the printed collections. Coiningh describes wellerism as a “proverbial subtype that has a distinctive syntactic formula and is used for purposes of irony or humour. Typically, the formula is triadic with three distinct parts: a statement (often a proverb) + a speaker + context (phrase or subclause)” (“Structural Aspects” 120). Paremiographers usually use quotation marks to indicate the speaker within the statement while transcribing wellerisms. Explanatory clauses or phrases often accompany them, providing a clear context for the situation. In the Tangkhul proverb collection, however, quotation

⁴⁰ T. Luikham translated this as “penal code” (7).

marks are frequently omitted, and the wellerisms are written in declarative sentences. Below are a few examples of wellerisms:

(27) *Rikruina nkimamanka, “Iya mursu makāka mankenei” chiyichei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. “I can’t bite as I have no mouth”, says the nit as it bites

(28) (i) *Zingsho philāvāli āchon hoakha “Ili āyai mahola”, āyai hoakha “Ili āchon mahola” da āmaili shaokatā* (Sira)⁴¹

lit. When people call *zingsho philāvā* “*āchon*,” she responds, “Why don’t you call me *āyai*?” When they call her “*āyai*,” she retorts, “Why don’t you call me *āchon*?” and tumbles down the slope.

(ii) *Zingsho philāvāli āchon hola āmaili saokatā (kathā)* (Pettigrew)

lit. (like) *zingsho philāvā* tumbles down a slope for being called *āchon*

(29) (i) *Purhumna kaphung ngalei minakha khi zāsito kaji thadā*⁴², *kala khābungli yongsangakha khi mangsito kaji thāda* (Kasomwoshi)

“Like the toad wondering what to eat during landslide and what to drink while jumping inside the pool” (Kasomwoshi)

(ii) *Purhumna kaphung ngalei minakha “Khi zāsito” kaji thadā, kala khābungli yongsangakha “Khi mangsito” kaji thāda*

lit. During landslide, the toad says, “What shall I eat?”, while jumping into a pond it says, “What shall I drink?”

⁴¹ The term *Zingsho philāvā* means ‘princess of the east,’ while *āchon* refers to the eldest daughter of a clan or village chief, and *āyai* denotes the younger daughters. In some collections, *Zingsui Khashimlā* means ‘Khashimlā from Zingsui village’ (Kasomwoshi 175), likely indicating the daughter of the Zingsui chief. The story’s origin is unclear, but it critiques the discontent and indecisiveness of the privileged. The girl in the wellerism is dissatisfied whether addressed as *āchon* or *āyai*, and her exaggerated action of rolling down a slope reflects childish tantrums. This proverb is used to describe someone who is hard to please or always complains despite their privilege.

⁴² *kaji thāda* is an orthographic variant of *kachithāda* ‘like that’

(30) *Kafanaobingna āvali manākashi “Nawui āhā āpāk khanina”* (John)

lit. Baby *kafa* laugh at their mother and say, “You have only two teeth”⁴³

ee. “The kettle calls the pot black arse” (MK)

(31) *Khaireonaobingna “Āva nawui kazat makheiya” chi* (John)

lit. Baby crabs say, “Mother, you are walking sideways”

Example (27) was collected during fieldwork in Phalee village, and I have classified it as a wellerism. In the printed collection, examples (28), (29), (30) and (31) lack punctuation and, therefore, do not adhere to the wellerism form. Consequently, I propose an alternative representation, which I consider to be more accurate. Since Kasomwoshi has provided the translation, I have referenced his translation and the original structure he employs. The more accurate structure is also provided in (28) (ii). *Kachithāda* means ‘like that.’ Kasomwoshi writes *kaji thāda*. As mentioned earlier, *kachikathā* or *kachithāda* can be added if the statement is a complete sentence. The verb *chi* can introduce direct speech where the exact words of the speaker are quoted (Ahum 197). Therefore, the occurrence of the word *chi* in (31) indicates that it is direct speech. However, John does not punctuate this proverb and uses a reported speech style. A further discussion on the importance of punctuation is offered later in the study.

Wellerisms are of two types, which Taylor citing Kalén, describes as “those in which the allusion requires an indication of the scene, the speaker or the object to which the reference is being made, and those in which no additional details are given” (*Proverb* 218). Unlike other examples, (31) lacks any additional information and therefore belongs to the second group. The speakers in these wellerisms are hypocritical, as their actions and fundamental nature do not align

⁴³ hoary bamboo rat, see Appendix III.

with their statements. These wellerisms incorporate and are frequently employed to convey sarcasm.

Dialogue proverbs, as classified by Taylor (*Proverb* 156), are relatively uncommon in Tangkhul proverbs. Notably, only Kasomwoshi, as cited below has accurately transcribed a dialogue proverb in his collection of proverbs. Aside from this instance, none of the other proverbs are presented with accurate structural representations.

(32) “*Irihāva baizālu*” “*Mazāngaiga āni*” *chilaga baihik manākazā kathā*
(Kasomwoshi)

“Eat yam, daughter-in-law.” “No, I won’t, mother-in-law,” but she ended up eating the husk yam at night. (Kasomwoshi)

(33) *Rachangli—Thei nguishailu; Ritli—Ngalung khāngsanglu* (Kanrei)

lit. (I’m) thirsty—Eat roasted nuts; It’s heavy—Add rocks

(34) *Shanāle—Pharonsanglu; Sāngnāle—katathaolu* (Sira)

lit. It’s too short—Join it; It’s too long—Cut it

Proverbs (33) and (34) mentioned above are not presented with punctuation in the written collections. As mentioned earlier, it may be understood that in Tangkhul culture, the written format is not as crucial as the richness of expression, the resonance of words, and the depth of meaning. Oral tradition takes precedence, highlighting the beauty in the spoken form of the language.

It has been noted that proverbial interrogatives are generally absent from the published proverb collections. Nonetheless, some examples have been documented during fieldwork conducted in Phalee village. Examples (14), (15), and (16) illustrate these proverbial interrogatives.

Certain collectors opt for a simplified rendition of proverbs, overlooking their structural or poetic aspects. Whether the collectors are not aware of the existence of the form or simply ignore it is unclear. Such simplification may also be due to the differences in dialects, personal preferences for prose over poetry, and lapses in memory. The existing printed collections are in the nature of pamphlets and ephemera and not scholarly editions. Lack of standardisation and an emphasis on quantity over quality makes these publications less useful than they could be.

As in English or other languages, introductory formulae like- *āwo-āyiwui chāncham thāda* lit. ‘like the proverb of forebears’ and *āchālakha chāncham thāda* lit. ‘like the old proverbs’ are used when quoting a proverb. This makes the statement impersonal and authoritative and avoids personal responsibility for the advice offered. The speaker becomes a spokesperson: “those of the community or common sense speaking through him” (Obelkevich 114). In Arora’s words, it belongs to the category of “they say” and not “I say (“Perception” 8). She adds that “[u]sers of proverbs in oral contexts may also—consciously or unconsciously—signal the shift to the “proverbial mode” by a change in intonation, an emphatic, even recitative or sing-song effect that conveys the message that what is being said is being repeated, not invented, by the speaker” (6). Furthermore, listeners with the same cultural background could accept it as an authoritative statement with “cultural truism” (Yangkah, “Do Proverbs” 132). It is also safer for the user because it makes the statement impersonal. (*Āchālakha*) *chithāda chāncham sāsai* lit. ‘there was a proverb like that (in olden days)’ is also used after quoting a proverb. However, this statement is used narratively. This expression softens the didactic tone of the proverbs. It is often used as a communicative strategy to reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs, Obeng, see discussion in Chapter Three below) or to draw a conclusive remark. In Phalee, the phrase *chiyi chera* meaning ‘as it is said,’ is utilised to cite a proverb. For instance, *Misokha mikhut phalungi chera*, which translates

to ‘As it is said, “There will be smoke if one makes fire,”’ demonstrates this usage. Notably, in this example, a minor alteration is observed where certain letters are clipped depending on the final letter of the preceding word, rather than using the entire phrase.

Many proverbs, but not all, contain metaphors; therefore, it is considered an arbitrary characteristic of a proverb. Arora (1984) agrees that not all proverbs contain metaphors but calls it one of the most effective indicators of proverbiality. She states that in some cases “the proverb is simply a statement that becomes metaphorical only within a context that rules out a literal interpretation” (11). It is also observed that metaphor is one of the most used rhetorical devices in Tangkhul proverbs. As per Pettigrew’s dictionary, *chānjam* is also synonymous with metaphor. Within the Phalee lexicon, there exists a term called *chamsam*, embodying multiple meanings such as ‘comparison,’ ‘figurative,’ ‘reference,’ and ‘having an intimate conversation.’⁴⁴ So, probably this term refers to various kinds of non-literal usage. Perhaps the Tangkhuls identified metaphorical expressions like proverbial phrases, proverbial comparison, and folk similes as proverbs because of an understanding of the inherently metaphorical nature of embodied cognition. It may also be assumed that the Tangkhuls do not distinguish between metaphors and proverbs, as both of them are used to make comparisons. In this thesis, a statement is deemed a proverb if it can be employed metaphorically in a given situation and can operate independently without relying on other grammatical categories.

Paremiologists frequently assert that in order to qualify as a genuine proverb, a saying must be in current use among the people at any given time (see below). It may be noted here, however, that this assertion aligns with the Tangkhuls’ perspective on proverbs. According to the oral narratives and the discussions presented, speakers often describe proverbs as the sayings of their

⁴⁴ N. Luikham has also recorded the term *chānsam kasā* in his dictionary which has a similar meaning with the third meaning: “*Tui pheikhangarok, kashok tui hāngkhangarok, chān khangazek* (intimate conversation)” (8).

ancestors, long-established popular sayings, and ancient wisdom. Thus, Peter Pheirei aptly subtitles his proverb collection the “Wisdom of the Forebears.” The Tangkhuls’ understanding of proverbs as being current, traditional, and connected to the past aligns with the concept of traditionality, which scholars consider one of the defining characteristics of a proverb. A sentence that includes archaic words, evokes rustic imagery, and appears in multiple proverb collections is also recognised as a proverb in this thesis.

During an interview, Yarkao Ngashangva, a nonagenarian field respondent from Phalee village states that *chāncham* is a comparison, embellishment of a language, diction, and to put in other words.⁴⁵ His wife Varamla Ngashangva, who is also a nonagenarian, described a proverb as *tewru* (the bone of a language) which means a valuable and important statement. She further suggests that *chāncham* encapsulates a wealth of traditional wisdom that may not be so easily understood. Referring to *chāncham* as the “bones” of a language makes sense in that, akin to how bones provide structural integrity and support to the body, *chāncham* similarly reinforces and supports a statement or argument. When queried about the concept of *chāncham*, Tangkhul speakers frequently provided responses such as: “It denotes an archaic traditional saying,” “It facilitates analogy,” “It enhances clarity of expression,” and “It serves as an embellishment,” among other explanations.

Kasomwoshi, one of the proverb collectors, writes in the foreword of Pheirei’s *Hao Chancham (Hao Proverbs)*:

*Chanjamkaho hi mikumona raokathuili ngasokhara maningmana. Kha
kharitkazar, shairanra, chara kata, kala kala neicham kachungkha*

⁴⁵ “*Nraokhui, tewsari, tewyar, tewpong asikharai*”

*makankhara wuieina hi shiya, hi phaya kaji theikhuikahai chieina
thangkhamei rakashoka tuina.*

(para. A proverb is not an inborn entity but words of practical wisdom that emerge from learning what is good and evil through lived experiences.)

He sees proverbs as practical wisdom. He further adds that our forebears kept their wisdom in the form of proverbs, culture, and stories as inheritances for us. Acher Taylor also remarks that “it is a moral advice based on experience” (“Wisdom” 4).

Upon examining the perspectives of proverb collectors, the collected data corpus, and the intuitive understanding of the general population, it is evident that the Tangkhul people view *chāncham* as figurative expressions or speech that enhance speech, draw comparisons through analogies, and serve as repositories of communal experiences reflecting the wisdom of past generations which are used for imparting *āchei-ārei* (etiquette).

Problems in the Study of Tangkhul Proverbs

The study of Tangkhul proverbs faces several significant challenges. Till date, there are no scholarly studies dedicated to them. The lack of a dictionary of proverbs and the ubiquitous use of the umbrella term for any kind of fixed expression place the task of distinguishing proverbs from other fixed expressions upon the present research. This lack of differentiation makes it difficult to identify genuine or true proverbs as well.

It is true that there are varying interpretations of what constitutes a proverb, even among paremiologists. Similarly, the collectors of Tangkhul proverbs also appear to have different or unclear intuitive concepts regarding what constitutes a proverb. Many fixed expressions in Tangkhul incorporate metaphors and allusions, and these expressions are commonly regarded as

proverbs by both collectors and the general population. However, they cannot be considered genuine proverbs in the strictest sense. Examples include:

(35) *Siluli fana shalaka ākhamei makakhayit (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a buffalo not wagging its tail at the dog's barking

(36) *chiklen kakachāk (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) the cry of wren

(37) *Shiwok khamei khamayut (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) grabbing the rat's tail

These expressions serve figurative functions and are used to make comparisons but do not make complete sense on their own. Therefore, they are better classified as folk similes or proverbial phrases rather than proverbs.

The following expressions are typically employed for didactic purposes and are identified as proverbs by collectors. However, despite their resemblance to proverbs, they lack any distinctive feature beyond their didactic intent. Therefore, they cannot be classified as proverbs in the true sense. For example:

(38) *Āva-āvāli khayāshikathei hiya sokhami kahakka ākhana* (Pheirei)

lit. Showing respect to parents is a great blessing

(39) *Konkathemma mi chiliva mibingna ningkachai* (Pheirei)

lit. Everybody hates arrogant people

(40) *Malung vātkazār mangkhamā āchamna* (Angkang)

lit. Quick to anger is a foolish act

(41) *Mili khayoma chili mina yomra* (Angkang)

lit. Those who look down upon will also be looked down upon

These examples appear to be common dictums given to children by elders. The compilers of Tangkhul proverbs may have confused these old dicta or maxims with proverbs due to their didactic content. While such statements are perceived as expressions of beliefs, life principles, and conduct, they lack the stylistic and distinctive features that make proverbs appealing aurally and delightful to the imagination. Additionally, they do not possess figurative meanings beyond their moralistic teachings and are merely simple sentences. This thesis does not classify such sentences as proverbs. These sentences do not contain archaic words or rustic imagery either that might indicate their origin in older cultural contexts. Taylor notes that certain apothegms, which lack metaphorical language, are characterised by their straightforward assertions. These statements achieve proverbial status not through figurative expression but because they are frequently heard and can be applied to a variety of contexts (*Proverb 5*). Meider also argues that newly coined proverbs become truly proverbial when they acquire some figurative meaning or extended application through recognition and repeated usage (2004). Therefore, such statements could attain the status of proverbs when they are widely recognised and used.

Given that the Tangkhul community comprises numerous dialects (approximately 200), collecting proverbs from different villages is a monumental task. Each village corresponds to a unique dialect and possesses distinct cultural practices, increasing the likelihood of having unique and culturally specific proverbs. Moreover, translating proverbs from Tangkhul into English presents significant challenges. In addition to cultural differences, Tangkhul and English have disparate grammatical structures and collocation rules. Consequently, during the translation process, it is inevitable that the poetic and stylistic qualities of the original proverbs will be compromised, often resulting in the loss of the subtle cultural nuances inherent in the original proverbs. Thus, the study of Tangkhul proverbs is fraught with difficulties due to the absence of

scholarly resources, conceptual ambiguities, misclassification of didactic statements, dialectal diversity, and translation challenges. These factors collectively impede a comprehensive understanding and accurate documentation of Tangkhul proverbs.

The rest of this chapter summarises the major scholarship in the field around definitions of proverbs, markers of proverbiality in textual objects, proverbs as an oral literary genre, and the discourse around the translation of proverbs.

Exploring Definitions

The elusive nature of a comprehensive proverb definition persists, as acknowledged more than half a century ago by Archer Taylor and mentioned in Chapter One. As one of the foremost American folklorists and a seminal thinker in paremiology, Taylor's notorious refusal to define proverbs is indicative of the difficulties of fixing a highly polyvalent genre with linguistic description. In Taylor's view:

The definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine in a single definition all the essential elements and give each the proper emphasis, we should not even then have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial, and that one is not. Hence, no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial (Taylor, *Proverb* 3).

Alan Dundes adds anecdotally that when “asked about this pessimistic statement, Professor Taylor remarked that in a way his whole book constituted a definition of the proverb” (“On the Structure” 44). Richard P. Honeck refers to this challenge as “Taylor's curse” (18) and the present study is also haunted by it. However, some explanation of what I understand as proverb, given the specificity of my texts and based upon existing descriptions and observations must be offered. This

section thus recounts various definitions put forth by prominent scholars to assess their alignment with the traditional Tangkhul understanding of proverbs.

Peter Grzybek claims that polyfunctionality, heterosituationality, and polysemanticity condition each other in one way or another, and it seems to be for this interrelationship that no consistent and satisfying definition of the proverb as a genre has ever been achieved (43). Citing Kanyó, he holds that the members of society obviously have some intuitive notion of what is a proverb and what is not. This intuitive knowledge, which serves as the basis for scholarly investigation, also brings about ambiguity where there seemed to have been clarity before (36). Meta proverbs are an important part of understanding proverbs since all scholars stress the importance of how the speakers intuitively use and understand by them should be the starting point of any scholarly discussion (see Wolfgang Mieder's experiment below). The Spanish describe a proverb as "a short sentence based on long experience"; the French, "the child of experience"; for the Arab, "Proverb is to speech what salt is to food"; the Dutch call it "the daughter of daily experience", and the Germans compare it to butterflies "some are caught some fly away" (Stone 347).

Returning to paremiology, the most inclusive definition is offered in dictionaries such as *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* which explains that a proverb "is a traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner," dividing it into three sub-categories. The first type takes the form of abstract statements expressing general truths, the second uses specific observations from everyday experience to make a general point and the third of comprise sayings from particular areas of traditional wisdom and folklore (Speake ix). Bartlett Jere Whiting offers a description drawn from previous literature as follows:

A proverb is an expression which, owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. It expresses what is apparently a fundamental truth—that is, a truism—in homely language, often adorned, however, with alliteration and rhyme. It is usually short, but need not be; it is usually true, but need not be. Some proverbs have both a literal and figurative meaning, either of which makes perfect sense; but more often they have but one of the two. A proverb must be venerable; it must bear the sign of antiquity, and, since such signs may be counterfeited by a clever literary man, it should be attested in different places at different times. This last requirement we must often waive in dealing with very early literature, where the material at our disposal is incomplete (qtd. in Mieder, *Proverbs* 2).

A couple of markers in this definition, however, do not fit the proverbs under discussion in this project: homely language is difficult to determine when we discuss Tangkhul and Phalee, and all of the proverbs under discussion have a figurative meaning.

Wolfgang Mieder's experiment with fifty-five Vermont citizens, in which he solicited their definitions of proverbs, provides insights important for this project into collective folk understanding. His analysis, focusing on the frequency of key lexical items—nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—culminates in a detailed and useful definition: "A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" ("Popular Views" 119). He subsequently simplifies the definition using only the most frequently appearing words according to popular understanding: "A proverb is a short sentence of wisdom". His definition encapsulates several critical dimensions of proverbs: brevity, communal

recognition, wisdom, ethical guidance, traditional perspectives, metaphorical language, fixity, and memorability. It underscores the cultural transmission inherent in and the enduring nature of proverbs. Dundes' abovementioned essay "On the Structure of Proverbs" argues that the proverb may best be defined in structural terms because "[p]urely functional definitions are inadequate in as much as other genres of folklore may share same function(s) as proverbs" (45). He adds:

The proverbs appear to be a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic, and a comment. This means that proverbs must have at least two words. Proverbs which contain a single descriptive element are non-oppositional. Proverbs with two or more descriptive elements may be either oppositional or non-oppositional (60).

While this structural approach is technically satisfying, it may become somewhat reductive, as it does not consider the cultural and contextual richness that many proverbs embody. Some proverbs rely heavily on cultural context for their full meaning, which this approach seems to overlook. Neal Norrick critiques Dundes' topic-comment structure definition by pointing out that it is too broad to distinguish proverbs from other figurative language (*How Proverbs* 7). His digest includes markers such as self-containment, pithiness, and being traditional expressions with didactic content and a fixed poetic form (31). He proposes an ethnolinguistic definition: "The proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning" (78), adding in a supercultural note: "the proverb is a typically spoken, conversational form with didactic function and not associated with any particular source" (79). Norrick

delineates eleven properties of proverbs and creates a feature matrix model for categorising proverbs and distinguish them from other allied genres.

Norrick’s schematic is worth reproducing as it provides a handy visualisation and tabulation (See figure below). Honeck’s objection that such a rigid feature-based approach may not adequately capture the complexity of proverbs, since it seems to disregard the nuanced interplay of situation, context, and the multifaceted that the proverb can serve (13), Norrick’s table was nevertheless one of the starting points for organising the data in this project.

3.5 A linguistically founded proverb definition 73

	potential free conversational turn	conversational	traditional	spoken	fixed form	didactic	general	figurative	prosodic	entertaining	humorous
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
proverb	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	0	-	0
cliché	+	+	+	+	+	-	0	0	0	-	0
Wellerism	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	0	0	+	+
curse	0	+	+	+	+	-	-	0	0	-	0
proverbial phrase	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	0	-	0
riddle	-	-	+	+	0	0	-	0	0	+	0
joke	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	0	-	+	+
tale	-	-	+	+	-	0	-	0	-	+	0
song	-	-	+	-	+	0	-	0	+	+	0
slogan	+	-	-	0	+	0	-	0	0	-	0
aphorism	0	-	-	-	+	0	+	0	0	+	0

Figure 2

Figure 2: Norrick’s proverbial feature matrix (*How Proverbs Mean*, 73). ‘+’ signifies the presence of a characteristic in a particular form, ‘-’ indicates the absence of the feature and ‘0’ denotes “optional presence.”

In “The Perception of Proverbiality,” Shirley Arora examines various markers—such as traditionality, currency, syntactical features, semantic markers, lexical markers, phonic markers, and metaphors—that contribute to the perception of proverbiality, concluding that texts possessing these markers are more likely to be recognised as proverbs (13). More recently, Mieder (2004) revisits the works of Blehr (1973), Peuke (1977), and Arora (1984) examines the contributions of scholars including Abraham (1968), Holbek (1970), and Milner (1969), providing an in-depth analysis on the markers of proverbs. Additionally, have explored the features of proverbs. Silverman-Weinreich (1978) and Coinnigh (2015) have also analysed the structure and stylistic features of proverbs. The stylistic features of Tangkhul proverbs with reference to existing theories are discussed in Chapter Four. Thus, we see that no single feature exclusively guarantees a statement as a proverb, and not all proverbs share the same features. Possessing these features does not automatically classify a statement as a proverb, as other figurative language forms may exhibit similar traits. Nevertheless, the argument presented here underscores the necessity of identifying prominent markers of proverbs to distinguish them from other related genres. This distinction becomes more critical considering the conflation of proverbs and other figurative genres by Tangkhul native speakers and proverb collectors.

All of these perspectives are essential to an understanding of the material, but none of them can be singled out to resolve the questions that arise from my primary texts. Traditionality, brevity, wisdom, and truth are some of the features that Tangkhul speakers hold in common with other cultures. Honeck claims that “[p]roverbs do not fit the definition of classical categories in which members belong if and only if they have a set of simply necessary and jointly sufficient properties” (23). A unanimously held perfect definition that fits the needs of every discipline, therefore, is neither possible nor absolutely needed.

Prominent Markers

An incommunicable quality, then, is what constitutes a proverb (Taylor, *Proverb* 3), and statements that exhibit recognised proverb markers are more likely to be perceived as such (Arora, “Perception” 13). Having noted that, this section nevertheless examines the most identified characteristics of proverbs—self-containedness, truth, fixed and poetic form, traditionality, currency, metaphoricity, and didactic nature—in greater detail. Additionally, it aims to determine whether these characteristics are present in Tangkhul proverbs and to study how they can help distinguish proverbs from other related genres.

Self-containedness and Brevity

Norrick discusses the concept of self-containedness in detail, drawing upon Seiler’s work (1922) to reiterate that proverbs must be self-contained sayings (in sich geschlossene Sprüche). This means that none of their essential grammatical units may be replaced (*How Proverbs* 8). He contends that proverbs can stand independently in free conversation, distinguishing them from proverbial phrases. Honeck too, in response to Cram’s observation regarding the quotational status of proverbs, emphasises that proverbs are frequently “invoked or cited” rather than used in a propositional manner. Akin to quotations, proverbs can be introduced in conversations with tags such as “Well, you know what they say” and “as the saying goes” (16). In Tangkhul speakers add *kathā* or *kachikathā*, as noted in Chapter One (24 and 25) like these conversation tags. Moreover, proverbial phrases allow alterations to fit the grammatical context (Adam 1949). Previously Taylor had also made this distinction, asserting that while a proverb remains unchanged, proverbial phrases permit shifts according to time and person (*Proverb* 184).

It, therefore, seems indicated that the property of self-containedness primarily helps distinguish proverbs from proverbial phrases and idioms, but not necessarily from other related

genres like clichés and maxims, as they can also function independently as complete sentences. In some of the abovementioned definitions, sentence status emerges as a defining characteristic. Norrick maintains that terms like “full” or “propositional statement” are preferable to “complete” or “grammatical sentence,” “because the latter are too narrow on their customary interpretation to include many structures traditionally considered proverbial” (*How Proverbs* 67). His focus on one potentially free conversational turn, in which a turn is defined as “a discrete contribution to an ongoing conversation which the speaker ends voluntarily (i.e., without being interrupted),” setting the proverb apart is useful in an understanding of Tangkhul usage as well (68).

It is generally agreed that proverbs are short (Dundes, Mieder, and others). Dundes believes that a proverb can be as short as two words, like “Money talks”. Proverbs are prevalent in both spoken and written communication; however, they are more commonly found in oral contexts. The brevity of proverbs offers substantial advantages, as it facilitates ease of articulation and memorisation. This conciseness ensures that proverbs can be learned and repeated with accuracy and efficiency. “But still shortness is only a relative term, and it would perhaps be more accurate to say that a proverb must be concise, cut down, that is, to the fewest possible words; condensed, quintessential wisdom” (Trench 9). For instance, “You can take a horse to the water, but you can’t make him drink” is not short when it is compared with a proverb like “Money talks”. However, it is relatively short compared to other linguistic carriers of folk wisdom. Proverbs frequently employ literary devices such as ellipses and parallelism, often compromising grammatical rules to achieve brevity. Mieder notes that in practice, proverbs are frequently used in truncated forms rather than as complete sentences, remarking that “proverbs are often shortened to mere allusion owing to their general recognizability” (*Proverbs* 7). This phenomenon is explored in greater detail in Chapter Four, which discusses the stylistic features of Tangkhul proverbs.

Traditionality: Age and Currency

Norrick comments that in general proverbs are traditional by virtue of their being items of folklore, and also, it can be determined whether they are traditional or not if they are cast in rustic imagery (*What Proverbs* 40). The term ‘traditionality’ is identified as one of the most important features of a proverb by other prominent scholars like Mieder (1993, 2004), Taylor (1962; 1994), Norrick (1985), Arora (1984), and many more. Arora and Mieder identified two dimensions or aspects of “traditionality”—age and currency. “Currency basically means that a proverb must be repeated by members of a certain group of people” (Mieder, *Proverbs are Never* 6). Taylor’s assertion “[l]et us be satisfied with acknowledging that a proverb is a saying currently circulating among the people” (*Proverb* 3) underscores the dynamic and communal nature of proverbs. Arora posits that determining the precise age of a proverb is challenging, though it can be somewhat discerned through available written records. She argues that currency, defined as general acceptance within any time period, is a nebulous criterion and questions the extent to which this acceptance must be measured. Arora highlights that “no one suggested a means of identifying the point at which sufficient ‘currency’ has been attained to mark the magical transformation from non-proverb to proverb” (“Perception” 7). She dismisses the significance of both the actual age and currency of a proverb, viewing these as concerns primarily for scholars. Instead, Arora contends that for proverb users, a proverb is considered old if it is remembered from childhood or heard from the older generation. Crucially, she asserts that what is essential is that the speaker does not invent the proverb but rather that it belongs to the collective category of “they say” rather than “I say” (8). Determining the age of a proverb and its duration of use in an oral culture, or a society that has recently transitioned to print culture, such as the Tangkhul community under study, is complex. Mieder asserts that certain sayings or quotations have attained the status of proverbs due to their prolonged and widespread usage (*Proverbs are Never* 7). These proverbs have transitioned from

being associated with their original authors to belonging to the collective “they say” category. For a saying to become a proverb, it must maintain its currency, which Arora describes as a “trial period” between its invention and its adoption into the corpus of proverbs. Repeated usage is essential for maintaining this currency, as Arora notes, “the recognition that the repetition brings about is one of the most decisive clues to proverbiality” (“Perception” 9). Similar to other oral genres, proverbs rely on people’s memory and recognition for their preservation. Oral texts that fail to resonate with the audience quickly lose their significance and are eventually forgotten. The survival of oral texts is contingent upon their repetitive use. Ong remarks, “In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost: fixed formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration (23).

Arora cautions against the risk of “false recognition” when an expression mimics the structure of a known proverb (“Perception” 9). Whiting also cautions that the signs of antiquity can be replicated by skilled writers (302). Mieder also points out that the creation of a “proverb-like” statement, sharing grammatical patterns, rhythm, and structure with existing proverbs, remains possible at any time. However, its status as a bona fide proverb hinges on its adoption and currency within a specific community (*Proverb* 5). If the community does not recognise and actively use it, the statement remains figurative speech and fails to attain genuine proverbial status. The transformation into a bona fide proverb necessitates acceptance within the cultural context and consistent usage to maintain its relevance and currency over time. Honeck refers to widely recognised sayings as cultural proverbs, while he categorises less-known ones, known only to a select few or proverb experts, as private proverbs and expertise-specific (88). Trench uses the term ‘popularity’ and claims as follows:

Without this popularity, without these suffrages and this consent of the many, no saying, however brief, however wise, however seasoned with salt, however worthy on all these accounts to have become a proverb, however fulfilling all other its conditions, can yet be esteemed as such. This popularity, omitted in that enumeration of the essential notes of the proverb, is yet the only one whose presence is absolutely necessary, whose absence is fatal to the claims of any saying to be regarded as such (10).

As a member of society, individuals possess a basic knowledge of their culture. Mieder writes, “Proverbs continue to be effective verbal devices, and culturally literate persons, both native and foreign, must have a certain paremiological minimum at their disposal to participate in meaningful oral and written communication” (“Paremiological Minimum” 312). Despite some skeptical criticism, scholars have attempted to define the paremiological minimum for various languages. The paremiological minimum refers to the set of proverbs that an average adult within a specific culture is expected to know (Ďurčo 183). Such studies provide insight into the currency, familiarity, frequency of usage of proverbs among people at a particular time. Notable works in this area include Grigorii Permiakov’s “On the Question of a Russian Paremiological Minimum” (1989), Wolfgang Mieder’s “Paremiological Minimum and Cultural Literacy” (2015), Peter Ďurčo’s “Empirical Research and Paremiological Minimum” (2015), and Heather A. Haas’ “Proverb Familiarity in the United States: Cross-Regional Comparisons of the Paremiological Minimum (2023).

Fixedness of Form

Proverbs are often perceived as having a fixed form. However, Norrick argues that they are not entirely immutable, as many have variants even within the same linguistic community. He posits

that the fixedness of form in proverbs, akin to all idiomatic expressions, arises from the need for recognisability among community members (*How Proverbs* 43). He asserts, “Without fixedness of form, the proverb would be lost in the flow of conversation” (64). He further argues that “once fixedness of form is understood as a limitation on variation to ensure recognisability, rather than as complete frozenness, it provides a viable defining property” (66). Mieder agrees that “proverbs are not absolutely fixed or frozen, but they actually live by being varied to fit various situations and purposes” (*Proverbs are Never* 8). He notes that people frequently use truncated forms of proverbs in oral speech, literature, and the mass media. According to him, “[p]roverbs are fixed only in the proverb collections; otherwise, they can be used rather freely, even though the predominant way of citing them is in their unaltered entirety” (*Proverbs* 7). Norrick also contends that for a well-known proverb, the mention of one crucial, recognisable phrase—what he terms the “kernel of the proverb”—is sufficient to evoke the proverb in its entirety (45), making formal fixity a matter of degree. This holds for languages other than English as well. Yankah, for example, discusses how Akan speakers may transform proverbs by rephrasing them as questions or altering their basic impersonal format to a personal one. He adds that speakers may also subject proverbs to elision, elaboration, or intersperse them with emphatic markers or question tags (*Proverb in Akan* 164). Yankah notes that truncation or abbreviation is one of the most common ways of transformation. Rather than citing the entire proverb, speakers often make only a reference to it, assuming that both the speaker and listener share the same cultural background and understand the abbreviated form without further explanation (167–168). He offers several scenarios for proverb transformations:

Even more significant in proverb application is the series of structural transformations to which the proverb may be subjected during performance—

elision, question, personalisation, paraphrasing, etc. A proverb may, for instance, be truncated to achieve a more rhythmic effect, to denote a shared sociocultural experience between the speaker and addressee, or to avert ritualistic monotony. On the other hand, the truncation may be part of a technique of testing an audience's proverb knowledge or their approval of the speaker's cause. In this case, the skilful speaker may seek to arouse the audience's sympathy by eliciting them in the performance. Besides elision and other transformations, a proverb may be changed to or complemented with a prose or poetic style to lend it clarity, density or emphasis (255).

More recently, Pierre Crépeau, in his examination of the aspects of oral transmission in a Rwandan proverb that exists in 70 different variants, finds that this happens with a degree of fixity but not without mobility and adaptability. Earlier, Taylor had also observed that oral transmission leads to minor variations in proverbs (*Proverb 22*). To turn to my texts, native speakers of Tangkhul frequently utilise truncated forms, occasionally incorporating slight modifications in form and diction. Tangkhul collectors often employ various variants or versions of the same proverb. Below I give the variants of a well-known proverb collected by different paremiographers, illustrating the fluidity and adaptability of these expressions within the community.

(42) (i) *Hokna ot murmur āsāla fana ina sāya kachikatha* (Kanrei)

lit. "Pig did the strenuous work; dog says, "I did it"

(ii) *Hokna luiot murmur āsāla fana ina sāya kaji* (Kasomwoshi)

"Though pig laboured the field, dog claims the workmanship. Only pig works hard in the field but dog says I did (Kasomwoshi)"

(iii) *Hokna lui vāya chiakha, fana ina vāya ngapaihaowa* (Sira)

lit. Pig says, “I did the work”; dog claims, “I did it”

(iv) *Hokna ot s̄a, f̄ana s̄aman samphang* (John)

lit. Pig does the work; dog gets the reward.

ee. “Asses carry the oats, horses eat them” (MK)

Kanrei and Kasomwoshi exhibit notable similarities in their respective versions of the wellerism, though neither adheres to the traditional wellerism structure. Sira’s rendition closely parallels their versions, whereas John’s variation significantly deviates from the conventional structure, thus disqualifying it as a true wellerism. Instead, Sira’s version qualifies as a dialogue proverb. Despite these structural differences, all the versions convey a similar meaning. Additionally, Phalee has a comparable proverb: *Hākna wotso, huina kathongshe* lit. ‘Pig works, dog flatters’, and despite variation, the recognisability of the proverb remains unchanged.

Thus, we may say that the preservation of the fundamental structure and core meaning of a proverb is one of its hallmarks: a proverb is flexible within a fixed boundary. Indeed, the existence of variants can be seen as a positive indication of the popularity of a proverb, as in the Tangkhul example above. Since oral texts are perpetually passed down through the spoken word, they are inherently susceptible to change due to the vicissitudes of memory. However, while formal fixity is an important marker, it is not a sufficient one since it does not help in distinguishing proverbs from other fixed expressions. As Honeck puts it, “idioms are also typically shorter and more syntactically frozen than proverbs, properties that will tend to limit application” (81).

Truth Claim

The proverb’s claim to being a truth utterance is noted in the literature as another important characteristic. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that the truth that proverbs proclaim sounds absolute and authoritative and this impression originates in traditionality and community consensus. She

sees this as an instrumental part of the proverb's strategy (111). While Chukwukere believes that proverbs "are literal truths validated by experience" (qtd. in Ezejideaku 161) Louis, in agreement with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, puts it as follows:

In fact, proverbs are a kind of truth whose validity lies in their very expression, rather than in any specific truth signified by them, and moreover, they are often expressed in metaphors and figurative language without which they might not be proverbs at all. Thus, rather than tending to establish a truth using figurative language, proverbs are an embodiment of figurative language, whose very ambiguity (sometimes to the point of contradiction) is a part of the essence of the type of language employed (188–189).

As Louis indicates, the point about contradiction is important in any discussion of truth as a proverbial marker. English is replete with examples of apparently contradictory sayings, both claiming to be authoritatively true such as "Many hands make light work" (Oxford) and "Too many cooks spoil the broth" (MK). The existence of contradictory proverbs within a language may apparently challenge the notion that proverbs inherently contain truth, but that is not really the case if we make a distinction between truth in the abstract and truth claims in particular contexts. In his work "Do Proverbs Contradict?," Kwesi Yankah addresses the phenomenon of contradictory proverbs, not within individual proverbs, but rather within pairs of proverbs that seem to advocate opposing principles through the juxtaposition of antonymous elements. Yankah critiques scholars for focusing solely on the conceptual nature of proverbs while neglecting the importance of context in interpreting their meanings and contradictions. He claims that "[i]n the realm of discourse context, the proverb ceases to be fact-oriented; it assumes the character of an opinion, confirming or validating the judgement or opinion the speaker has already formed" (122). "Whereas in the

realm of proverb concept,” he goes on, “one is dealing with the proverb as a cultural fact or truism, which is liable to contradiction, in contextual usage the truth in a proverb is irrelevant” (131). Obelkevich adds that “in situations of conflict, proverbs are used less for their truth or wisdom than to take advantage of their impersonality” (217).

In “On Somali Paremiās,” Kapchits analyses Somali proverbs that contradict each other and remarks that according to normal logic, if one of them is true, the other would be false. But proverbs have their own logic; thus, both the mentioned proverbs can be both true and false. If they are used in the situations they are intended for, then they are true; if not, they are false, and this holds for cultures other than Somali as well. Goodwin and Wenzel also comment on the problem as follows:

Although at first glance such contradictions suggest inconsistency, on reflection they constitute a unique kind of solution to conflicting human tendencies, for the contemplation of contrary proverbs leads to a moderation of impulses. Knowing both “Look before you leap” and “He who hesitates is lost,” one is inclined to hesitate just long enough to look! (143).

Contradictory proverbs serve a practical function by promoting a nuanced consideration of situations. The implied paradox underscores the adaptive nature of proverbial wisdom, allowing it to remain relevant across diverse contexts and experiences. Moreover, this interpretation suggests that proverbs encapsulate a deeper understanding of human behaviour, recognising the complexity and variability of life’s circumstances. Instead of prescribing one-size-fits-all solutions, they provide flexible guidance that can be tailored to specific situations, leaving the ultimate authority of judging their applicability in a given context to the user. This adaptability is a strength, not a

flaw, of proverbial wisdom. Mieder (1989; 1985) notes that a person chooses a proverb according to the demands of the situation, not due to its universal, abstract truth value.

Another way of interpreting the truth of proverbs is offered by Hass (2013). In order to distinguish proverbial interrogatives from other formulaic interrogatives such as sarcastic ones, he uses the concept of generalisable truth. The truth that the proverb talks about is open to generalisation rather than universalisation. It is a truth that applies not just to one given situation (as in sarcastic interrogatives), but which can be expanded to encompass similar situations. The truth expressed by the proverbs results from the historical experiences of the people. In order to understand a proverb, one has to accept the truth of the particular people or culture. It is the truth relative to the society that generated it.

Metaphoricity

“Metaphorical concepts can be extended beyond the range of ordinary literal ways of thinking and talking into the range of what is called figurative, poetic, colorful, or fanciful thought and language,” Lakoff and Johnson say in their celebrated book (13). They claim that metaphor is “one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices and spiritual awareness” (193). Similarly, a proverb also helps the speaker convey what cannot be expressed with everyday language. Mieder remarks that one of the reasons for preference for metaphorical proverbs is that they can be employed figuratively or indirectly. He adds that associating an actual situation with a metaphorical proverb generalises the particular instance into a common occurrence of life (*Proverb* 8). Arora also claims that “[o]ne of the most effective indicators of proverbiality is metaphor, the sudden shift in topic that disrupts the normal conversational flow and signals by its “out-of-context” quality that the statement in question is to be interpreted figuratively and not

literally” (“Perception” 11). As Ntshing puts it, “[i]t appears that the most artistic proverbs are those that arise from the metaphorical use of a simple event” (130). The metaphorical use of proverbs not only embellishes speech but also helps the speaker to generate the desired impact on listeners through comparison and suggestion. Metaphoricity, however, might have its pitfalls. In Louis’s words, proverbs “tend to be cryptic and brief and therefore, an unreliable sign, ambiguous and susceptible to varying interpretation. The use of metaphor only tends to increase the unreliability of interpretation” (186). However, this confusion and obscurity seems to happen when the listeners or readers do not have cultural competency.

Metaphoricity allows the proverb to adapt to different situations, providing insights or lessons that are relevant to the specific circumstances. Most of the proverbs in my textual corpus contain a metaphor, but some, make perfect literal sense without resorting to implicit comparison. For example, compare the following:

(39) *Konkathemma mi chiliva mibingna ningkachai* (Pheirei)

lit. Everyone hates arrogant people

(43) *Mi sokha mikhutphalungei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. If (you) make fire, there will be smoke

ee. “There is no smoke without fire” (MK)

In (39), the effect derives from the literal meaning and it is not necessary to resort to the figurative level. However, proverb (43), while containing no metaphor within itself and perfectly understandable at the literal level as describing a physical phenomenon, will only perform its proverbial function if the listener comprehends the comparison that is implied in it. In this figurative sense, the presence of ‘smoke’ (gossip, speculation, or signs of something untoward) hints at the existence of an underlying ‘fire’ (the truth or substance behind the rumours). Thus,

some proverbs may perform their proverbial role through implication in real-life situations, allowing their metaphorical meanings to resonate more deeply with the audience. When a proverb is used in an actual situation, its out-of-contextness, the way in which it “violates the “usual” rules of conversation” (Seitel 124), signals figurative use. Lisa Granbom-Herranen claims that using proverbs and metaphors is a part of communicative speech that is supposed to follow Paul Grice’s four co-operative principles— quantity, quality, relation and manner (2011). According to her, one or all of these principles are violated consciously or unconsciously in proverbs and metaphors, making them appear out of context. Citing Mieder (2012), Hass asserts that only half of modern American proverbs (coined since 1900) are metaphorical, and many paremiologists do not consider metaphoricity a prerequisite for proverbiality (“If it walks” 23).

Coinnigh, in, ““The Heart of Irish-Language Proverbs’: A Linguo-Stylistic Analysis of Explicit Metaphor,” provides an extensive list of works on paremiological metaphoricity from various disciplinary perspectives such as lexicography, translation, psycholinguistics, pragmatics second language acquisition and linguo-stylistics (114). He states that two “essential components are required for a metaphorical transfer: the literal subject of the metaphor, i.e. that to which the metaphor refers, and an anomalous field from which attributes are taken” (117–118). Coinnigh’s study is on explicit metaphors, so social context is not a prerequisite for the identification of the metaphor. Using empirical data, he studies the metaphors and related metaphorical tropes as proverbial markers in Irish proverbs. He uses the identification criteria N1-3 suggested by Cameron (“Identifying and describing metaphor” 118), based on ‘the “purely semantical” (virtual, context-free) mode’ (Krikmann, *Proverb Semantics* 15), and also provides a statistical frequency of metaphor types.

Consensus

Apart from the features discussed above, there are several more that scholars identify as proverbial markers. Norrick has listed scholars like Seiler (1922), Firth (1926), and Taylor (1931), among others, who suggest that many proverbs exhibit either direct or indirect didactic tendencies (*How Proverbs* 41). Obelkevich also believes that what “defines proverb, though, is not its internal layout but its external function, and that ordinarily, is moral and didactic: people use proverbs to tell others what to do in a given situation or what attitude to take towards it” (213). This feature helps distinguish proverbs from proverbial phrases and clichés but cannot distinguish proverbs and other related genres like maxims, sayings, and apophthegms, as they also teach lessons and moral values. Most proverbs are moralistic and didactic and touch upon all aspects of life and activities. However, considering all proverbs to be didactic may be an overstatement. For instance:

(44) • *Khanranada khayina ror* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Aphids attack the weak ones

ee. “Flies haunt lean horses” (MK)

This proverb does not seem like a statement with a didactic purpose but simply descriptive, stating a fact of life as it were. It is obviously based upon observing the nature of aphids that often attack weak and stressed plants and analogising human life to it. It is usually used to comment when things go wrong one after the other or when a person suffers multiple misfortunes. It has similar implications to the English proverb “Misfortunes never come singly” (Oxford).

While reviewing some of the proverbial features that scholars have identified, we note that none of these features necessarily or sufficiently make a proverb what it is. More importance is given to one or the feature by individual scholars and some, like Taylor, Arora and Mieder, believe that the ones that exhibit more of these features are more likely to be considered proverbs. It is difficult to tell how long it takes for a saying to attain the status of a bona fide proverb. Therefore,

the feature of traditionality becomes problematic. Mieder remarks that traditionality is obvious because of steady repetition in various speech acts (*Proverbs are Never 7*). However, in an oral society, it is not easy to trace how long and frequently the proverbs have been used. If a proverb user has heard it from an older person in the past, she will likely think it to be old (Arora, “Perception” 7). Norrick (1985) states that he could find only one true proverb and one marginal one in Svartvik and Quirk’s *A Corpus of English Conversation* (1980), which contains 43,165 lines and 891 pages. It is necessary to spend a lot of time with native speakers to try to find the origin of a proverb, and even then, it might not be possible to know for certain. As Norrick claims, among native speakers, even truncated versions are recognised. The users often manipulate its form and meaning to suit their intentions. Moreover, proverbs are used mainly orally, so the chances of undergoing changes are very high. Not all proverbs are short, metaphorical, or contain a generalisable truth. Therefore, it may be concluded that the features discussed above do not make a statement or expression a bona fide proverb but may help in increasing its proverbiality quotient. Haas (2013), referring to Arora (1984), Lau ,et al. (2004) and Mieder (1993), observes, “[j]ust how brief, how fixed in form, how poetic, how metaphorical, how traditional, how widely used, and how far removed from the original speaker a phrase must be to be truly proverbial is left largely to the discretion of the individual paremiologist or paremiographer” (20). I have accordingly tried to organise my corpus according to the markers I observe as working most consistently over usage scenarios from everyday conversation, field recordings, and memory.

Context is King

“Context is the environment or situation in which the communication encounter takes place,” says Ntshinga (131). There is no dearth of studies that seek to assess the role of context in determining the meaning of proverbs. It is widely accepted that a proverb has different meanings depending on

the context. In their essay “Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore”, E. Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes apply Hymes’ concept of the “ethnography of speaking” to the study of proverbs. This concerns not only the rules of the language but also the use of the language. They consider folklore as communication, and they argue that if this is granted, then the ways in which it is used as communication must be considered. They claim that the study of context is not the same as the more generalisable study of the function of proverbs like passing comment, recommending a course of action etc., because they do not tell us “the particular function of a particular proverb used by a particular individual in a particular society” (71). They insist that the study of context brings out the distinction between knowing the proverb and knowing the rules of how to use it in real-life situations. However, this work has been criticised for not providing examples recorded in natural contextual situations nor asking the proverb users to construct hypothetical situations to conjecture appropriate usage scenarios (Yankah, *Proverb in Akan* 59). Later, Arewa published another paper, “Proverb Usage in a “Natural” Context and Oral Literary Criticism”, in which he further emphasises the importance of context in proverbs study and also demonstrates the importance of “oral literary criticism” in the analysis of proverbs. In the study, he uses the actual instances of Yoruba proverbs applied in real-life contexts. He writes:

In order to undertake a full treatment of context, meanings and usage should be recorded not only from the point of view of the collector, but also from the viewpoint of the group from which the collector has obtained his data. In other words, the meanings and the usage of a proverb, and of other forms of folklore for that matter, must be obtained from the folk. Folk, as used here, refers to any group of people who share at least one common characteristic. This is what Dundes has recently called “oral literary criticism (430).

In “Proverbs: A Social Use of Metaphor,” Peter Seitel proposes a heuristic model for understanding the use of proverbs within cultural contexts. This model emphasises the importance of comprehending the social rules necessary to correctly use and interpret proverbs in a given culture. Seitel asserts that “to understand proverb use one must understand the mechanism of this metaphor and how it is manipulated to serve social ends” (126). He introduces five key concepts for studying the usage of proverbs: social context, the proverbial situation, the social situation, correlation, and strategy. The social context involves the relationship between the speaker and the intended listener, considering factors such as sex, age, and status. The proverbial situation refers to the imaginary scenario depicted within the proverb itself. The social situation pertains to the actual context in which the proverb is applied or referenced. Correlation is defined as “the manner in which the speaker ‘matched up’ the terms in the proverb with the people in the social situation and possibly in the social context”. Finally, strategy denotes the “plan for dealing with the situation which the proverb names” (128–130). Seitel’s examples of proverbs are sourced from novels rather than real-life situations. He justifies this choice by highlighting the realistic portrayal of proverbs in literature, while also acknowledging the limitations of this approach. He contends that his proposed method can be applied to field research in two ways. First, researchers should construct hypothetical situations for a single proverb during interviews with individuals familiar with proverb usage. Second, researchers should aim to “record instances of proverb use in their natural social context” (133–134).

Kwesi Yankah emphasises the challenges inherent in extracting meaning from proverbs without their accompanying context and highlights the necessity of contextual understanding in proverb studies (1989). He strongly advocates for ethnographers to meticulously document the sources of the proverbs, informants’ data, contextual usage, and the situational meanings of

proverbs. Similar to Seitel, Yankah argues that if proverbs are not recorded in real-life situations, hypothetical situations must be provided to elucidate their meanings, but he does acknowledge the difficulties associated with collecting proverbs directly from natural contexts. He identifies two primary factors contributing to this challenge: firstly, the proverb forms an integral part of the discourse and cannot be easily predicted; secondly, unlike other genres like the tale and epic, the natural context for the use of proverbs cannot be easily “induced” (53).

Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s work “Towards a Theory of Proverb Meaning” illustrates how proverbs can be subject to varied interpretations, each carrying its own distinct meaning. She surveys eighty Texas students to discover the meanings of commonly used proverbs like “A rolling stone gathers no moss”, “Money talks”, and “A friend in need is a friend indeed”. The finding shows that these frequently used proverbs are not understood and used similarly. “The multiple usages and socially situated meanings of the proverb “Money talks” [...] are not a result either of an ambiguity in the proverb metaphor or of the proverb’s yielding multiple base meanings but rather the *various convergences of social situation, participant evaluation, and interactional strategy*,” she notes (118). She identifies the possible sources of a proverb’s multiple meanings: (1) what is understood by the image presented in the metaphor, (2) what is understood as the general principle expressed by the metaphor, (3) how the general principle is evaluated (positive/negative), (4) syntactic ambiguity, (5) lexical ambiguity, and (6) key (serious, sarcastic etc.) (119). Apart from these, she points out that some proverbs have the capacity to yield more than one base meaning besides alternate readings of the proverb metaphor and believes that our concern should not be the proverb meaning that ultimately emerges from a proverb’s use in a specific situation but the meaning of the proverb performance. Base meanings of a proverb must not be confused with “proverb meaning” or, more accurately, “proverb performance meaning,” which may be defined

as that which emerges from the integration of proverbial (base) meaning and situational meaning (participants' evaluation of situation plus interactional strategy) (119–120).

Norrick, cited above, however, warns that “in order that they [proverbs] be used and understood in a consistent manner, they must also be fixed in meaning” (*How proverbs* 82). Although a proverb has its customary meaning, which Norrick refers to as standard proverbial interpretation (SPI), the SPI may differ from the literal reading or coincide with it. If the literal reading of a proverb coincides with its SPI, it is considered literal, and if not identical, it is considered figurative: “Whether one can arrive at a consistent literal reading for a given proverb at all, and, if so, how this reading relates to its SPI, determines its classification as literal or figurative and its subclassification within these categories. Proverbs differ in this respect from freely formed sentences” (83). Norrick points out that proverbs need a literal meaning despite the fact they have SPIs. He claims that the perception of their literal readings is crucially involved in their interpretation. Affirming the psychologists' claim, he states that not only children and schizophrenics, but normal adults perceive literal meanings for proverbs before working out their exact contextual figurative meanings: “Although we need not semantically analyse proverbs to provide them with SPIs, we must still account for speaker's ability to paraphrase, and transform whole proverbs and parts of them on either their literal or their figurative readings” (82–83). He further adds that native speakers have the ability to form and interpret proverb-like constructions or true proverbs that they are not familiar with.

Ntshinga states that the speakers decide whether to interpret a proverb differently from its standard interpretation (128–129). According to him, proverbs contain two types of information to which meaning is attached: content information and relational information. The content level refers to factual or literal information about the topic of the message in a proverb, that is, what it

is about. On the other hand, the relational level determines how the participants communicate and understand their relationship. Meaning resides in people, not in words, and thus meaning can differ. He claims that there is no direct relationship between a word and a referent: the only direct relationship between words and the things they represent is in people's minds (131). He further claims that interpretation depends on social (shared) and individual (personal or subjective) meanings. He concludes that, firstly, the meaning of a proverb is contained both in its literal reading, although to a minimal extent, and mainly in its connotative reading. Secondly, proverbs always refer to social situations, and the social context gives meaning to a particular proverb. Thirdly, there is a strong connection between culture and meaning. On a separate note, his three observations make it clear why the translation of a proverb from one language to another language is very challenging. In the case of tonal languages like Tangkhul and Phalee, Yangkah's comments regarding the polyvalence of proverbs resonate strongly:

Part of the reasons for the multiple meanings of a proverb may acquire is that potential proverb users may have different techniques of timing in applying the proverb, which may occasion a change in proverb meaning. This is besides the manipulation of other extralinguistic features such as tones, stress, or recourse to facial expression or other motor or gestural activity by proverb users ("Do Proverbs" 133).

The consensus is that recalling a proverb without considering its context can be challenging. While proverbs are versatile and applicable in various situations, their usage is unpredictable and tends to emerge organically when the circumstance calls for it. Contextualists strongly advocate for documenting the actual use of proverbs in natural contextual settings or, at the very least, presenting hypothetical situations that align with appropriate proverbial usage. However, as

indicated above, contextualism is not free of limitations as an approach. Collecting real-time application of proverbs in natural contexts necessitates a substantial investment of time and dedication which may not always be feasible in a project. On the other hand, given that a proverb can have multiple meanings depending on the context, relying on a single recorded incident is not comprehensive enough. The present work tries to work out a compromise, retaining as much context as possible within unavoidable spatio-temporal limitations, and as outlined in Chapter One, has developed a multi-pronged methodology to look at the data from several different perspectives.

Proverbs as Oral Cultural Texts

Tangkhul culture is predominantly oral, with proverbs serving as a primary mode of expression. This thesis investigates the interpretation of individual proverbs as oral cultural texts, aiming to unravel the traditional worldview of the Tangkhul community through them. Bowden describes the proverb as “the smallest unit of verbal art,” situating proverbs within the domain of verbal genres (442). Oral texts are often structurally well-organised, making memorisation easier and more aesthetically pleasing. Sackett comments on the functional role of poetic devices in the transmission and preservation of folklore and states that the “use of poetic devices—rhyme, alliteration, assonance, parallel construction, and rhythm—is to make folklore easily remembered” (145). These devices create patterns that enhance auditory and cognitive retention, which is crucial in oral traditions where written records are absent or secondary. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of these techniques aids in embedding the stories, songs, and sayings (including proverbs) into the collective memory of a community, ensuring survival of these texts across generations. Moreover, the aesthetic pleasure and delight that these devices offer enhances engagement, making folklore not only a vessel of cultural transmission but also a form of art. This dual role highlights the sophisticated nature of oral traditions and their reliance on linguistic artistry to maintain cultural

heritage and identity. Unlike written language in which grammar holds precedence, oral traditions place great emphasis on rhetorical devices. Proverbs, for example, may not adhere strictly to traditional grammatical rules but rely on rhetorical devices that play with grammar and regular language usage for beauty, clarity, and memorability. In oral discourse, comprehension hinges more on effective rhetoric than grammatical precision. Paralinguistic elements such as tone, intonation, and mannerisms are paramount, superseding correctness in language and grammar. As a result, translating an oral text into written text is very challenging, as the conversational tone is often lost in translation.

As Walter Ong puts it, in an oral culture, “experience is intellectualized mnemonically” (35). But human memory is fallible and thus the text is always recreated as information is stored and disseminated verbally through repetitive articulation. Narratives get subtly mutated to keep them fresh and exciting. Abrahams and Foss states that “change is an integral part of the process of oral dissemination” (qtd in Gray 290). The oral text we encounter is always a variant one, sometimes with discernible traces of the changes that it has gone through. Although the details may vary, the core idea or story generally remains the same. Variations can occur not only in form but also in meaning, as evidenced by examples (90), (136), and (171) discussed in this thesis.

In an oral culture, information is circulated in a personal space, with the speaker and listeners or audience present simultaneously. Once a text is uttered in an oral society, it is either accepted or rejected by the members. If accepted, it becomes the property of society, gradually becoming incorporated into the collective memory and authorship of society. Therefore, to achieve recognition from the audience, the composition must be crafted in an appealing form and with acceptable content. As Ong notes, “[c]olorless personalities cannot survive oral mnemonics” (68). Drawing on a Darwinian metaphor, Rubin argues that for a genre (or species) to survive, it must

be successfully transmitted (reproduced) (10). People retain information that impresses them the most. In oral traditions, community recognition is crucial, and texts that fail to engage or captivate listeners quickly fade into obscurity. Scholars of proverbs also emphasise the importance of a proverb's relevance and currency within society as already discussed in the previous section. Thus, proverbs, distinguished by their unique style and structure, differ from everyday language, enhancing their versatility and impact. Serving various communicative functions, proverbs may be considered one of the most frequently used oral genres in daily interactions. It may be argued that rhetorical effectiveness and contextual convenience contribute to their dynamism and popularity as an oral genre.

A proverb is viewed as “a reflection of rules and ideals of life” (Hertzler 1933; Cohen 1913; Kelso 1930) (qtd in Yankah, “Do Proverbs Contradict” 129). It also forms the essence of a culture's worldview. Based upon this proposition, the collected Tangkhul proverbs are analysed as cultural texts to interpret and understand the various aspects of the community. As Webster notes, historically, paremiology has retained the interest of scholars due to the belief that “the proverbs of a people would provide a valuable clue about their character and culture and open paths of communication” (173). Petrova asserts that scholars consistently provide evidence to support the claim that a proverb reveals a specific worldview (“Comparing proverbs” 333). In the context of Haitian proverbs, Tavernier-Almada concurs, stating that proverbs constitute a valuable body of folklore for analysing sociological and psychological characteristics (327). This indicates that examining the proverbs prevalent in a particular culture can yield significant insights into the social norms, behaviors, and thought processes of individuals within that culture. Consequently, proverbs function as a lens through which the complex relationship between an individual's social environment and mental state can be more comprehensively understood. They reveal underlying

societal attitudes, beliefs, and values, thereby providing a rich source of information for sociological and psychological analysis.

The reason why paremiology can even be a means for understanding the very specific sayings among the Tangkhul nation is possibly because “all people, regardless of their culture, share common experiences, many of the same proverbs appear throughout the world” (Samovar 30). Proverbs can be found in many languages and cultures with similar or different linguistic or cultural histories because “they contain universal human experiences and insights” (Mieder, *Proverb* 11). Robinson remarks that it is difficult to assert any proverb to be considered as any people’s exclusive or original property. He suggests that we need more nearly complete collections of gnomic material and also ought to know the age and originality of the proverb to understand mutual influence (286). He further adds to his claim that similar meanings or ideas are often presented by different figures or comparisons in different communities (289). So, he proposes three things that may help in distinguishing the proverbs of a particular people: (I) local colour or setting (II) local stylistic devices, formulas, and the like; (III) national customs, traits, virtues, or vices which the proverb may reflect (290). Thus, despite the lack of evidence or information on the origin of proverbs and the presence of similar proverbs in different languages, it can be observed that similar proverbs may or may not be similar structurally and may also be coloured with local flavours. The same proverbs may not be understood or mean the same thing to different individuals or in different cultures. Besides the similarities, some features or characteristics are culture-specific, coloured with local flavours, and reflect the cultural peculiarities of the people. They may reflect the way particular people think and perceive the world. So, the interpretation of some proverbs demands a historical or cultural explanation. For instance, the Phalee Tangkhul proverb

(45) *Cho marurira chorui mayiraro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Twist not the threads before buying the beads

The Mundas' proverb, "She prepares a waist string for her child still unborn" (Ponette 525), and the English proverb, "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched" (Penguin), convey similar meanings. These proverbs, which can be classified as parallel proverbs, express the caution against celebrating too early before any achievement is realised. Although they share a common message, the metaphors and imagery employed are culturally specific, reflecting the familiar contexts of their respective cultures. Among the Tangkhuls, the practice of twisting multiple strands of yarn together to create a strong string for beading *khongsang*, a traditional multi-strand necklace, is well known. This cultural practice is alluded to in the proverb, though no direct reference is made. The locals can easily understand this reference due to their familiarity with the practice. Conversely, the imagery used in this Tangkhul proverb would be obscure to the Munda and English speakers, just as the waist string metaphor from the Munda proverb would be unfamiliar to the Tangkhuls.

To labour the previous point a little more, it appears, then, that we can gain insights into the values, culture, and practices of the people who use them through an analysis of their proverbs. Sumner notes that "proverbs are much more current in the life of the people than stories which are told only on the occasion of certain social gatherings" (23). Proverbs, as a form of verbal art, serve as a convenient medium for conveying simple beliefs and cultural attitudes. Despite their brevity, proverbs are rich in meaning and cultural information, drawing on human experiences (Taylor 1931). They are often described as the wisdom of many and the wit of one (Taylor, "Wisdom" 3). While coined by individuals, proverbs gain popularity among people as they are often based on shared experiences and eventually become accepted as "cultural truisms" (Yahkah 1989; Mieder

1993). They are more concise than other oral genres, characterised by their vibrant structure, imagery, and functions. Their brevity and dynamic nature make them easy to remember and repeat with great precision. Additionally, proverbs are frequently used in everyday discourse, suggesting they contain many authentic cultural imprints of the history of the people. By examining Tangkhul proverbs as cultural texts, and analysing their stylistic, aesthetic, and rhetorical functions, we may not only begin to synthesise the worldview of the Tangkhul people and their interactions with their environment, but also to gain some understanding of the pre-Christian past. This study will provide critical perspectives on how the Tangkhuls perceive, understand, and respond to their surroundings, and how they may have done so differently in a history of which there are no written records.

Problems of Translation

The process of translating from one language to another involves conveying the content's meaning with minimal loss. Translation extends beyond a mere linguistic task, as culture plays a crucial role in this endeavour. Cultural assumptions, social habits, beliefs, superstitions, attitudes, values, expectations, and others contribute to the nuanced meanings carried by words. As translators and theorists of translation are fully aware, translation is not a simple substitution of one language for another; it encompasses pragmatics and cultural context. As such, it necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both the source and target languages, encompassing linguistic and cultural knowledge. Each language adheres to unique grammatical and collocation rules, and words often encapsulate the culture of the language community, making them distinctive to society. The translation process, therefore, requires a profound awareness of linguistic intricacies and cultural nuances in both the source and target languages.⁴⁶ Since proverbs express certain universal human

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of the complexity of translation studies as a discipline see Munday.

sentiments and have major overlaps, comparative paremiology, as noted above, is an important activity. However, this task cannot be fulfilled without translation, and this often poses a major challenge.

Mona Baker notes how the existing literature “abounds with theoretical arguments which suggest that translation is an impossible task, that it is doomed to failure because (a) languages are never sufficiently similar to express the same realities and (b) even worse, ‘reality’ cannot be assumed to exist independently of language” (8). Baker’s statement raises important theoretical issues about the nature of language and translation, emphasising the complexities and limitations of translating meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. She argues that languages are not sufficiently similar to express the same realities. This perspective is rooted in the idea of linguistic relativity (Whorf 1956), which suggests that the structure and vocabulary of a language influence how its speakers perceive and experience the world. Baker’s second point questions the existence of a stable, objective reality that can be expressed independently of language. This view aligns with certain post-structuralist and relativist theories which argue that language shapes our understanding of reality to such an extent that different languages might construct different realities. This viewpoint suggests that language does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs it. Thus, she highlights the philosophical challenges of translation, suggesting that it involves more than linguistic equivalence; it requires navigating complex cultural and conceptual landscapes. Scholars such as Is’haaq Akbarian (2012), Ekrema Shehab and Abdelkarim Daragmeh (2014), Farah Abbas Abo Al Timen (2015), and Lulu Atun Azizah (2019) have proposed diverse translation strategies for handling proverbs in different languages.

Human beings may have similar experiences, but we see the same reality differently depending on the cultural background, and the language to express the reality we perceive is also

different. Therefore, linguistic and cultural untranslatability occurs when we translate one language into another. The problems arise even at the word level. Even a single word is not free to exist independently in all contexts. Its meaning often depends on its relationship with the other words co-existing with it. A simple distortion in pattern and syntax can destroy the meaning of the statement. The differences in the lexical patterning of the source and target languages also hinder the translation of one language into another.

Translating fixed expressions such as idioms, phrases, and proverbs poses a more significant challenge. The individual word or phrase may have an equivalent in the target language, but the translation may still sound awkward, and the meaning may be unclear to the target readers. The collocations may sound awkward, and at the same time, the figurative meaning may not be rendered in the target language. Moreover, the translation of proverbs and other fixed expressions does not come solely from the individual units but the meaning of the expressions, and as discussed above, the usage context. They often allude to past events and cultural experiences. Therefore, some proverbs need longer explanations to convey the meaning in the target language. Thus, translation is also a sort of interpretation of the text. Sometimes, the poetic structure or the patterning of the lexical items, rhyme, and metaphorical images are required to be rendered in the original form as accurately as possible to the target language because they contribute to the meaning formation of the proverb. The distortion of these structures could affect the emotive force of the proverb. The striking figures of speech employed in the expressions are often difficult to translate with the same rhetorical power into another language.

Tangkhul and English belong to different sociocultural backgrounds. Both languages have very great linguistic, stylistic, and cultural differences. Some aspects belong exclusively to Tangkhul and are not found in English. The proverb meaning is often considered as frozen as it

appears in the dictionaries but, in fact, is very flexible. Therefore, some proverbs may not have a clear meaning unless applied in a context. This context-bound meaning and the multiplicity of meanings make proverb translation very difficult. Ntshinga states that a “clear signal that connotation is a strong part of a shared sense of a group is the fact that while denotative is easily translated into other languages, connotative is not” (“How proverbs” 130). He further claims that “the totality of meaning does not reside denotatively, but in the feelings people have about situations, words and items”. Proverbs are often used for their connotative meaning instead of the denotative or literal meaning. The connotative meaning is shaped by the attitudes, value judgements, and implications that a person attaches to the word or the statement. This makes the translation of proverbs very complicated. The literal meaning may be transported to the target language, but the connotative meanings often fail to deliver in the target language.

In this thesis, Tangkhul proverbs are translated into English using a variety of methods, drawing from translation strategies for idioms and fixed expressions outlined by Mona Baker in her book *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (2018). Mona Baker states that finding an idiom of similar meaning and similar form in the target language may offer the ideal solution, but that is not always the case. Many Tangkhul proverbs do not have an equivalent proverb in the target language. Therefore, I employ various strategies borrowed from Baker to convey the meaning, including the functional equivalent method, paraphrasing, literal translation, and translating by borrowing the original words with accompanying footnotes (77–87).

While there are equivalent proverbs with similar forms and meanings in Tangkhul and English, considering their distinct sociocultural backgrounds, it is important to note that seemingly equivalent proverbs may possess slight variations in meaning or convey different emotive nuances in the two languages. Additionally, as Abdullaeva claims, equivalent proverbs in both languages

may not always be suitable for use in the same context (87). Jakobson points out that “there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units” (127). Words often reflect the culture of the language community and are unique to society. For instance, the Tangkhul word *kaphani* presents significant challenges when translating into English due to its culture-specific connotations. While it denotes “prohibition,” it encompasses a much broader range of meanings that are not fully captured in English. Therefore, some scholars translate this term as “taboo,” but this translation fails to capture its full meaning accurately. Consequently, native speakers like myself may find such translations inadequate.

Some Tangkhul proverbs share similar meanings and functions with English proverbs. In such instances, the functional equivalent translation method is employed, and the corresponding English proverb (abbreviated as “ee.”) is provided. This method is applied in the following cases, which are discussed below.

(I) Proverbs with different intensities of meaning and force, despite having similarities:

(46) *Wuishui wārui anao khānrāngei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Like mother, like father, the child gets variegated pattern

ee. “Like father, like son” (MK)

The literal translation sounds awkward; therefore, some translators may opt for a proverb that has an equivalent function in the target language: “Like father, like son”. However, the emotive force of the source language is lost if substituted with the target language. The equivalent expression of the latter part of the proverb is not realised in the target language. The general meaning of the proverbs of the two languages is that children often appear and act just like their parents. The Tangkhul proverb has a more negative connotation. This is often cited in a context where the children are as bad as their parents. The imagery of the variegated pattern is used to emphasise the

negative qualities that the children inherited from both parents. An irregular pattern, the stripe, is seen as undesirable in this context.

(II) Similar meaning but different imagery and form

(44) *Khanranada khayina ror* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Aphids attack the weak ones

ee. “Flies haunt lean horses” (MK)

Both Tangkhul and English proverbs convey similar meanings despite employing different imagery. Both aphids and flies exploit the vulnerability of weak plants and animals. However, translating the Tangkhul proverb using a functional equivalent approach might not resonate with non-Tangkhul speakers who are unfamiliar with the relationship between aphids and plants. While the interpretation of these proverbs is relatively straightforward, substituting one with the other may not always be meaningful to speakers of the other language. Additionally, the emotive impact of the original proverb may not be preserved in translation.

(III) Culture-specific

(47) *Khokha kasā karhuina* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Unity is pegs in the dyke

ee. “Union is strength” (Penguin)

“United we stand, divided we fall” (Penguin)

The proverb in the source language is a culture-specific expression rooted in agricultural practices. This proverb conveys a similar meaning to its English equivalent, which may prompt some translators to select the corresponding English proverb to facilitate comprehension among the target language audience. However, this method can result in the loss of the original imagery unique to the source language. In certain instances, although a functionally equivalent proverb is available, I choose a rendition that preserves the artistic essence of the Tangkhul proverb, provided

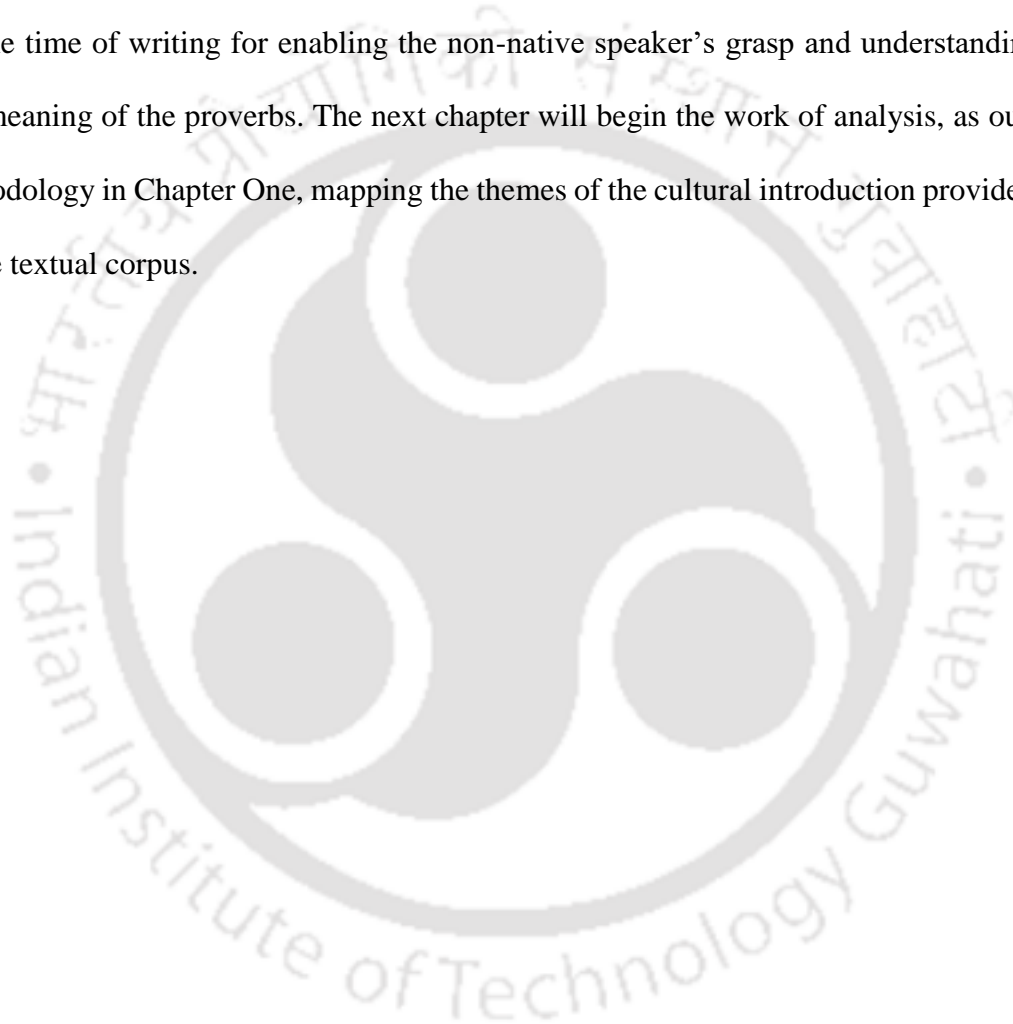
the translation does not appear excessively awkward. In other cases, translations that capture the linguistic beauty of the original proverb are preferred, even when an equivalent proverb exists in the target language. Occasionally, the metaphorical imagery of the original proverb is more evocative and poetic when rendered literally. For the sake of preserving artistic beauty, a slight awkwardness in the translation is sometimes considered acceptable.

(VI) Similar meaning and similar form

Some proverbs are universal, which means similar proverbs, having similar meanings and forms, exist in different languages. For instance, the proverb “Love is blind” has similar counterparts in many languages—in German “Liebe ist blind”; in Tangkhul *Leikashihi mik khangapeona*. Therefore, the proverb *Leikashihi mik khangapeona* may be considered as a translation from English. It can also be called a universal proverb, for its imagery is drawn from a shared human experience and is available in similar meaning and form in different languages. However, it is unwise to conclude that all such kinds of proverbs are universal since universality is a difficult category to establish when it comes to meaning-making. Therefore, despite their similarity, there may be slight differences in meaning or the intensity and forcefulness of the meaning among the native users of the proverbs.

However, this research primarily employs literal translations of proverbs, even when equivalent proverbs are known, to preserve culture-specific content. While some translations may seem awkward, this approach facilitates non-native speakers’ understanding of linguistic and cultural nuances by forcibly putting them in a place that demands imaginative reconstruction rather than smoothed comprehension that may take commonalities for granted and, therefore, overlook differences. Concurrently, it provides native speakers with a means of verification. Understanding the literal reading of proverbs is crucial, as “the literal readings for proverbs are part of what native

speakers know about them” (Norrick, *How Proverbs* 83). Each word in a proverb is purposefully chosen, thus this thesis emphasises the literal translation of every word. Equivalent proverbs are provided when known. Additionally, proverbial phrases, a form of different figurative language, are occasionally used to aid comprehension. Although some may find this method inadvisable, this work justifies this approach because it believes that this mode of alienation is arguably the best way at the time of writing for enabling the non-native speaker’s grasp and understanding of the general meaning of the proverbs. The next chapter will begin the work of analysis, as outlined in the methodology in Chapter One, mapping the themes of the cultural introduction provided in Part I onto the textual corpus.



Chapter Three

Twisting the Yarn: Major Themes in Tangkhul Proverbs

Hanna hannui shaiphamei, tuiva arartui phamei

Young greens are tastier, but the wisdom of elders is superior

This chapter analyses the selected proverbs, with their interpretation primarily based on information collected during fieldwork. The origins and historical backgrounds of the individual proverbs are not examined, most often due to a severe paucity of reliable sources. Instead, the focus is on interpreting them as oral texts, to identify their meanings. These proverbs are not interpreted as texts within literary works, except for their selection from published collections of proverbs. Their functions in mass media and popular culture are also not explored. Special emphasis is placed on the stylistic features of the proverbs.

Categorising proverbs, given their polysemic nature and context sensitivity, presents a significant challenge. For instance, a proverb featuring a dog metaphor may not literally refer to a dog but instead addresses various other aspects of human life. Consequently, deciphering the typology of Tangkhul proverbs is one of the crucial readings of this thesis. This task is particularly intricate due to the overlapping meanings within the proverbs. To address these complexities, I have tried to organise the proverbs according to a conceptual framework, categorising them by themes according to the pragmatic scenarios that I have observed, been informed of, or have employed proverbs in myself. Subsequently, a socio-cultural analysis is conducted to explore how these proverbs function within specific social and cultural contexts. This dualistic approach hopefully facilitates a comprehensive understanding of Tangkhul proverbs, allowing for an appreciation of both their thematic content and cultural significance.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the proverbs analysed in this study are selected from six collections, with additional proverbs gathered during field research labelled as ‘Collected, Phalee’ and categorised according to their themes. It should be noted that some proverbs may fit into multiple sub-categories. This study is not exhaustive, due to practical constraints, only a selection of proverbs under five broad themes is examined in this chapter. The division into sub-categories aims to narrow down the extensive range of proverbs and facilitate a more systematic analysis.

The proverbs are analysed and interpreted with a focus on their significance as expressions of the Tangkhul community’s worldview and to discern the stylistic devices used in them to achieve the rhetorical effects that the speaker intends, trying to unpack their contribution to aesthetic values and the formation of meaning. Rather than laying down principles based on a limited set of proverbs, the study tries to present glimpses of the community’s worldviews as articulated through their proverbs. It tries to illustrate how proverbs serve as cultural texts that reflect the community’s philosophy. Special attention is given to the use of symbols, metaphors, similes, word choices, and various figures of speech to understand how they contribute to the proverbs’ meaning, significance, sophistication, rhetorical, aesthetic, and cultural values. To better understand the meanings of the proverbs and to illustrate their use in conversation, actual or hypothetical situations of proverb use are provided in a few select examples. By studying these proverbs, I aim to gain insights into certain features of Tangkhul culture, while simultaneously using cultural knowledge to explain specific characteristics of the proverbs themselves.

While acknowledging that proverbs may not be historically accurate, they nonetheless provide crucial insights into the people’s mindset, cultural norms, values, and expectations. As Daniel suggests, the corpus of proverbs within a community serves as a repository for attitudes, beliefs, values, philosophical assumptions, virtues, vices, and, overall, a reflection of its worldview

(483). Marvin also emphasises the significance of proverbs by noting that they extend beyond mere indicators of lives; they also document vocabulary, making them indispensable in studying the language of any community (*Curiosities* 4). Norrick further underscores the importance of including proverbs in a comprehensive language description (*How Proverbs* 2). In an oral community, proverbs, as textual remnants, prove invaluable in comprehending values, beliefs, and attitudes, offering crystallised insights into the recent past.

Different cultures perceive specific objects or concepts through unique lenses, often drawing on familiar imagery to express ideas. For instance, the English proverbial phrase “as white as snow” metaphorically symbolises fairness or purity. In a similar vein, the Tangkhuls employ the proverbial phrase “like the stem of a banana tree” to convey a comparable meaning. Given the scarcity or absence of snow in the region, the Tangkhuls naturally opt for imagery that aligns with their surroundings. The choice of comparing whiteness to a banana tree stem is rooted in the community’s familiarity with this entity and its association of a particular abstract virtue to a material object. In addition to being a recognisable part of their environment, banana stems also serve as a source of food, including pig feed, making them widely known and relevant to the majority. Consequently, the proverb becomes an effective expression, capturing a shared understanding among the people. Proverbs and proverbial phrases unveil the community’s unique perspective on the world around them. The selection of specific elements in these expressions reflects not only the absence or presence of certain features in their environment but also the cultural significance and relevance of those elements within their daily lives.

In certain instances, this study also delves into proverbial phrases and comparisons that, while not officially recognised as proverbs, frequently emerge in metaphorical speech during conversations. Despite lacking the formal status of proverbs, these expressions carry rich imagery

and often reference traditional culture. As noted above, the native speakers consider them as proverbs. Hence, these expressions are of particular interest to this study.

The Super-natural in Nature: “Animism”, Omens, and *Kashār*

As mentioned in Part I of Chapter One, in the pre-Christian past, the Tangkhuls were “so-called” an animistic community and believed in the presence of gods within natural objects like large trees, rocks, ponds, rivers, fields, and houses. They also believed that there was a supreme God, *Varivara*, who created the world but according to Pettigrew, was indifferent to human affairs. However, some proverbs show that He is the God who knows everything and treats everyone equally.

(48) *Rarung hikha nhokhon karingram shokoi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. The chopping sound of the axe reaches till the heavens

(49) *Harwo yumshaikha harwokhon karingram shokoi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. The cry of the stolen rooster reaches till the heavens

(48) suggests that the *Āmeowo* is omniscient, aware of all happenings on Earth. Historically, a straight and robust pine tree was selected to become the central front pillar of a house. A small incision was made with an axe, promoting the formation of fatwood within the tree. Once the fatwood fully developed, the tree was felled and used as the house’s main pillar. Touching or extracting resin from such a marked tree was strictly taboo among the Tangkhuls. Fatwood and resin held significant utility within the community. Fatwood served as a lighting source before the advent of electricity, while resin functioned as a medicinal remedy for healing wounds and cracked skin. Harvesting from these marked trees incurred severe consequences. This proverb symbolically warns against clandestinely harming or cutting down such a tree with malicious intent. Believing in the omnipotence of *Āmeowo*, the Tangkhuls held that He could discern the sound of an axe

striking the wood and would consequently punish the wrongdoer. (49) also conveys a similar moral lesson.

These proverbs contradict Pettigrew's notion of *Varivara* who is disinterested in the world's inhabitants presenting instead a perspective that aligns more with the belief in an engaged and just God. This proverb serves as a symbolic warning to those who exploit the vulnerable or less privileged, underlining *Āmeowo*'s role in ensuring justice. Small, seemingly inconspicuous acts such as subtly marking a pine tree to secretly extract a small amount of resin or stealing a rooster, testify to the community's faith in *Āmeowo*'s omniscience and dedication to ensuring impartial justice even in human dealings. This underscores the community's strong conviction in a God that is not passive or indifferent but rather just and responsive, actively attuned to the plight of the underprivileged.

Tangkhul authors have extensively explored the diverse array of superstitions, omens, and taboos prevalent in Tangkhul life, elucidating their profound influence on religious beliefs, customs, and cultural practices (T. Luikham 1964; A. S. W. Shimray 2001; Horam 1977). The assertion that the Tangkhul religion is governed by superstition and fear holds some validity (Kapai 78). Superstitions, omens, and taboos, though seemingly irrational, were fundamental elements of the Tangkhul people's daily belief system, serving to guide and rationalise their existence. Patrick B. Mullen's work "Belief and the American Folk", emphasises the enduring nature of superstitions and their significance in understanding cultural and psychological dimensions of human behaviour. Mullen claims that labelling the beliefs of certain groups as superstition and others as religion lacks scholarly justification (139). He adds that interestingly, it is observed that belief in superstition is not exclusive to any particular group or demographic. Brunvand also suggests that everyone has superstitions, not just those labelled as folk (qtd. in Mullen 126). Many individuals,

at some point, embrace superstitions such as carrying lucky charms, crossing fingers, or knocking on wood to attract good luck or to ward off evil.

In *Folk Beliefs on the Southern Negro*, Puckett divides superstitious signs into two types—prophetic signs and control signs. Prophetic signs include bad and good omens, dream signs, and weather signs; men have no control over them. On the other hand, in the control sign, people partly play a role. “If you (or someone else) behave in such and such a manner, so and so will happen” (312). For instance, the Tangkhuls superstitiously believe that if you touch a toad, you will get ugly skin like a toad. This consequence can be avoided by refraining from the specified action, thereby preventing the perceived outcome: “Human activity in it is intended rather than accidental, and since the human activity is intentional, it is also avoidable” (31). Puckett includes divination in this category because it can be repeated as often as necessary or desired until the positive divination comes out right (32). Alan Dundes in “Brown County Superstitions: The Structure of Superstition”, categorises superstition into three: sign, magic and conversion. He equates his ‘sign’ with Puckett’s prophetic signs. The second category, ‘magic’, is also somewhat similar to Peckett’s positive and negative control signs. He calls the third category ‘conversion’ hybrid because most sign superstitions can be converted into magic superstitions. Here, according to Dundes, human activity is required as well. He further says that adopting a counteractant can avoid or neutralise undesirable results. For instance, the Tangkhul’s superstitious belief that “If you cross over someone either while sitting or lying, the person will not grow tall” can be neutralised by reversing the action. Bad luck will be averted if the person crosses over the other person again in reverse order.

Superstitious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the decision-making processes within the daily lives of the Tangkhul people. When embarking on agricultural activities, participating in

warfare, or engaging in routine tasks, they meticulously observe and interpret the behaviours and sounds of nature, animals, and birds. The appearance of certain animals on their path or the calls of specific birds and animals are regarded as inauspicious signs, leading them to abort their intended activities. The unexpected presence of particular animals in unusual locations is perceived as a harbinger of catastrophic events such as earthquakes, droughts, famines, epidemics, or warfare. For instance, the unexpected entry of a deer into human habitation is interpreted as a portent of village division or the onset of warfare (Gachui 95).

Dreams hold significant interpretative value within the Tangkhul community, much like in other culture. The appearance of certain animals in dreams is believed to portend either good or bad fortune. For instance, dreaming of catching fish is interpreted as a prediction of monetary gain. However, some superstitions do not provide explicit outcomes. The Tangkhuls may be aware that adverse events will occur but lack specific knowledge regarding the exact repercussions if certain actions are taken or omitted. It is plausible that these precise consequences were once well-known but have been forgotten over time due to the oral transmission of these beliefs or their diminished relevance after conversion to Christianity. The following proverbs represent the ways in which superstitions work in folk belief:

(50) *Ningchāngda pāng, ningrida ngaphi* (Sira)

lit. One marries not the beloved, one marries the unloved

This proverb reflects the superstition that intense love between partners results in tragedy, either through untimely death or the diminishment of emotions and affection over time. Conversely, it posits that moderate love or a minimal amount of affection between partners endures longer. For example, marriages arranged or supported by parents, which lack an initial romantic love, are believed to last longer, potentially for a lifetime. It also reflects a sense of realism or skepticism

regarding the nature of marital relationships, suggesting that individuals may hold the belief that they will marry the person they love deeply. However, in reality, they often end up marrying someone for whom they do not possess the same depth of affection. The caution embedded in this proverb advises lovers or spouses to temper their expressions of love to avoid drawing undue attention or negative influences, as they fear the possibility of inviting the evil eye or otherworldly interference. Metaphorically, the proverb extends to advising caution against excessive emotional investment in any pursuit, not only romantic love. It underscores the value placed upon moderation, emphasising that enduring relationships thrive on commitment, stability, and a measured display of affection. This belief is further illustrated through another metaphor in Phalee: *mikrui yeishataika* lit. ‘snapping the nerve in one’s eyes by staring at someone or something too much.’ I witnessed the usage of this metaphor in an anecdote where a woman commented on a couple who appeared distant from each other. She remarked that the wife had been a close friend of hers and was deeply in love with her husband during their youth, to the point of being unable to get enough of him. Reflecting on their current situation, the woman speculated that her friend’s optical nerve might have metaphorically snapped in their younger days, resulting in her now being unable to even look at her husband.

(51) *Thing mashoda marikalu tui mashoda matuiya* (Angkang)

lit. Don’t place the firewood upside down, lest you speak upside down

Elders often impart this proverb as advice to younger generations within the Tangkhul community. The wisdom behind this saying may seem peculiar in cultures unfamiliar with the use of firewood for cooking. Traditionally, the Tangkhuls use wood fires for cooking, and children often make the common mistake of inserting the thinner end of the stick into the hearth first when setting up kindling. Beyond its literal interpretation, the proverb holds a figurative meaning, emphasising the

value of doing things in the right order or in an appropriate manner. It reflects a cultural emphasis on orderliness and precision. This also reflects a societal appreciation for rhetorical skills, as a superstition holds that placing firewood incorrectly may be an omen of poor speaking abilities in later life. The proverb serves as both a practical lesson in daily tasks and a metaphorical guide for navigating life with precision and effective communication.

(52) *Kazei mashoda singshārra* (Pheirei)

lit. One shan't hold a spear upside down

This proverb explores the cultural significance of correctly holding a spear within Tangkhul society, rooted in their traditional beliefs and taboos. In Tangkhul culture, holding a spear upside down is considered a portent of ill fortune. In the context of hunting, it signifies that the hunter will fail to kill any animals. In warfare, it indicates that the warrior will be unable to kill his enemy, or in the worst-case scenario, he may meet his own demise. Within this society, improper spear handling is perceived as indicative of a lack of skill. A competent warrior or hunter would not commit such an error, thus improper handling serves as an omen of the holder's impending misfortune. As in (51), the literal meaning is a record of how to do things properly, according to how the world is (one can physical hurt oneself if a spear is held upside down, just as one does not hold a sword by the blade), but the metaphor extends the comparison into the normative. The improper handling of a spear suggests that there are correct and incorrect approaches to any situation or task. Thus, the expression advocates for proper conduct or behaviour, extending beyond the literal interpretation of holding a spear.

Many superstitious beliefs are also found in proverbial phrases:

(36) *chikren kakachāk kathā* (Kanrei)

lit. like the crying of the wren⁴⁷

This proverbial phrase reflects a superstition among the Tangkhuls associated with the bird known as *chikren* ‘wren’, also referred to by orthographic variants such as *chiklen*, or *chakren*. This tradition is linked to the cultural practice known as *chikren khangana* ‘wren augury,’ which literally translates to ‘listening to the *chikren*.’ T. Luikham has documented six commonly predictable outcomes associated with this augury (83). This proverb metaphorically describes individuals who speak in a harsh or deliberately provocative way about others. It signifies a sense of discontentment, likening such individuals to a wren, especially the one that cries ‘chik, chik,’ whose presence is traditionally believed to herald inauspicious events. The metaphor underscores the cultural perception that the mere presence of such individuals is considered ominous within the Tangkhul community, impacting the mood of others in a negative manner akin to the bad omens associated with the bird.

(53) *harwui kakhuwui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. like a crowing hen

This innocuous phrase reveals deeply rooted cultural taboos and superstitions related to gender roles. While it serves as a mechanism to enforce traditional norms, it also perpetuates stereotypes that limit women’s potential. Although the subject is missing, the gender referred to is unmistakable. In numerous cultures, hens are traditionally associated with laying eggs and exhibiting nurturing and passive qualities as they brood. Conversely, crowing is a behavior typically associated with roosters, which are considered more assertive and louder. When applied to a woman, the phrase implies that she is deviating from the modesty expected of a feminine demeanour. This expression shares a similar meaning with the English proverb “A whistling

⁴⁷ See Appendix III

woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men” (Oxford), both suggesting that the woman and the hen are engaging in behaviours typically reserved for males.

The proverbial expression is used disparagingly to criticise a woman displaying overtly masculine traits. Such behaviour is frowned upon as it suggests a household with a dominant female figure, which is deemed undesirable. The phrase also reflects superstitions surrounding deviations from the expected order. The crowing hen is believed to foretell something ominous, symbolising a breach in the natural order. This belief extends to women who exhibit characteristics traditionally associated with men, viewing such behaviour as unnatural and potentially problematic. In the case of the crowing hen, the undesired outcome can be averted by eliminating the hen. Similarly, the undesirable consequence of having a female-dominant household, stemming from a woman’s perceived masculine behavior, is believed to be preventable by correcting the woman’s conduct. This proverbial phrase reflects not only the superstitions surrounding deviations from the expected order of things but also societal norms and gender roles.

The Tangkhul’s superstitions, omens, taboos, and proverbs offer a unique insight into their worldview, shaping their religious beliefs, customs, and culture. They hold profound significance within the Tangkhul daily belief system, providing guidance and rationalisation for everyday living. The assertion that Tangkhul religion is guided by superstition and fear is not entirely unfounded, as these elements play crucial roles in the decision-making processes and cultural practices of the folk. Citing Bonnie O'Connor, Mullen states that superstitions provide psychological comfort and a sense of control in unpredictable or stressful situations. They help individuals cope with uncertainty and anxiety by offering seemingly plausible explanations and actions (128), and this insight is tenable in Tangkhul culture as well. The integration of superstitious beliefs into everyday life is often evidenced by their occurrence in proverbial

expressions, highlighting their seamless incorporation into the cultural fabric. Proverbs such as ‘Passionate love parts; lukewarm love lasts’ and the proverbial phrase ‘like a crowing hen’ reflect not only the influence of superstition on relationships and gender roles but also the cultural emphasis on moderation, orderliness, and precision. These proverbs serve as both practical lessons in navigating daily tasks and metaphorical guides for leading a life marked by measured displays of affection and effective communication.

The connection between superstitious beliefs and decision-making is evident in Tangkhul life, where individuals carefully observe and interpret natural elements, animal behaviours, and even dreams for making sense of the world. The belief in both prophetic signs and control signs, as categorised by scholars like Puckett, underscores the tangibility and influence of superstitions in shaping behaviours. They not only shed light on superstitions but also reveal a nuanced interplay between tradition, superstition, and cultural values. These proverbs serve as a conduit for passing down wisdom through generations, emphasising the importance of adhering to cultural norms and avoiding actions that may lead to undesirable consequences.

The word *kashār* means taboo. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines taboo as “[t]he prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behaviour is either too sacred and consecrated or too dangerous and accursed for ordinary individuals to undertake.” It plays a crucial role, akin to superstition, in maintaining societal morals. “*Varena/ Ameowana kaso kahai tuingashit, ngashit kahai ningkhami kakai kala kaihak akha thira kajibing chili “shārra’ da mayona”* (para. The act of disobeying *Ameowo’s* commandments and the statement that warns of the death penalty for breaking the *Ameowo’s* commandments are all referred to as *shārra* (Angkang, *Hau Tangkhul* 1).⁴⁸ In Tangkhul culture, this has a clear connection with religion, implying not only a societal

⁴⁸ *Shārra* can be used as an imperative sentence, meaning ‘It is taboo/ forbidden/prohibited.’

prohibition but also a religious mandate. When violated, *kashār* incurs not only legal consequences but is also believed to invoke divine wrath, leading to severe misfortunes. Among the Tangkhuls, breaching any statement labelled as *shārra* is not merely a moral and legal transgression; it is regarded with the same gravity as committing *morei* (sin).

When questioned about the meaning of *kashār*, people unanimously equated it to sin. They emphasised that when something was deemed *shārra*, there was no excuse, and violating such *kashār* could not be justified. The term taboo may fall short in capturing the complexity of *kashār* in Tangkhul culture. It transcends a simple prohibition, encompassing religious dimensions and an inherent understanding of the dire consequences associated with disobedience. The term ‘taboo’ might be redefined as ‘sin’ in a modern context, or it could be the closest word to convey its essence.

In the pre-Christian era, breaking a taboo was akin to committing a sin in the Christian concept. While the concept of *morei* (sin) appears more Christian-oriented, there was no such concept in the past; instead, breaking taboos and customary laws were viewed as morally culpable. With Christianity, the local perspective has entangled with the biblical notion of sin with the violation of taboos, perceiving them as cognate. Yet, a more precise assertion may be that their legal and religious frameworks are rooted in the concept of taboos rather than in the Christian concept of sin (which is a complicated enough concept in itself). Enforcing *kashār* as a means of social regulation may lack effectiveness if it relies solely on customary law for punishment. In Tangkhul culture, these regulations go beyond mere social consequences; they are reinforced by both social and divine penalties. The efficacy of *kashār*, such as the taboo on incest, is heightened not merely by the threat of excommunication but by the real fear of divine judgment. Concerns about potential consequences, such as giving birth to a disabled child or facing severe misfortunes,

underscore the gravity of breaking such taboos. This element of fear ensures that the taboos are not merely formal rules but are deeply internalised by individuals, influencing and controlling their behaviour. Due to their punitive nature, taboos play a crucial role in shaping the ethics and morals of Tangkhul society. Numerous *kashār* exist in Tangkhul, with Stephen Angkang listing over two hundred in his book *Hau (Tangkhul) Customary Law: Hau Shiyan Chikan*, and Huimi Zimik documenting more than a hundred in *The Tangkhul Naga Hau: Primitive Religion*. This record helps in understanding the breadth and depth of *kashār*, indicating that they are deeply ingrained and widespread in the cultural fabric.

As noted above, deliberately or inadvertently breaking any *kashār* is believed to provoke both God in heaven and spirits on earth, so that the very thought of transgressing becomes fear-inducing. However, if a taboo is violated, some measures can nevertheless be taken to mitigate the consequences. Acts of purification, such as sacrificing animals, abstaining from specific foods or actions, and observing *kaphani*, might be performed to undo the effects of breaking a taboo. These rituals reflect the significance placed on maintaining harmony and rectifying the breach of *kashār* within the Tangkhul cultural framework. Hodson discusses various *kaphani*, which he refers to as *genna*, in *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*.⁴⁹

The word *genna* is used in two ways: (1) It may mean practically a holiday- i.e. a man will say, 'My village is doing *genna* today,' by which he means that owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occurrences [...] his people are observing a holiday; (2) *genna* means anything forbidden (Hodson 164n5).

⁴⁹ *Genna* is not a Tangkhul term so the equivalent word *kaphani* is preferred here.

The term *kaphani* is multifaceted, denoting both a holiday and forbidden activities, with overtones of ritualistic penance. On such *kaphani* days, people were forbidden to perform many of their daily activities lest behaving as though nothing had happened brought calamities upon the village or family. *Kaphani* was observed in instances of death, sickness, or in preparations for and the aftermath of specific activities. Prohibitions during these days extended to the consumption of certain foods and restrictions on leaving the village or house. Strangers were barred from entering the village or the home of families observing *kaphani*. The observance of *kaphani* served to appease anger and purify wrongdoing through religious rites, rituals, and sacrifices. Prior to significant events like festivals or crucial agricultural activities such as sowing seeds or harvesting, village chiefs declared a *kaphani* day. This declaration was to seek the blessings from *Āmeowo* or other deities associated with the occasion. *Kaphani* days played a vital role in maintaining social and spiritual equilibrium within the Tangkhul community. They served as a means of social cohesion, spiritual appeasement, and preventive action against misfortune.

As narrated by Varamla Ngashangva in a personal interview, during *kaphani* days when physical labour was prohibited, women who needed to finish their weaving would sometimes relocate to the jungle or neighbouring villages with their looms. This practice is known as *sākreika* in Phalee. Those who did not comply and were caught weaving within the village during the prohibited period faced penalties, typically being required to work in the village chief's field, a practice referred to as *mputnrang*. To enforce this rule, the village chief would dispatch young boys as volunteers to catch any violators. Historically, weaving was considered a seasonal task, strictly forbidden during the harvest season due to the belief that the noise from looms would drive away the bountiful harvest. While stitching was allowed, weaving was strictly prohibited during this period. To adhere to this cultural mandate, weavers had to complete all their weaving before

the onset of the harvest. Additionally, they would weave *rangho kachon*, such as *phingew*, *shukhom*, and *shimchang* to be used during the harvest to carry paddy. Consequently, they would often go to the jungle or other villages to continue their weaving activities.

Angkang asserts that all customary laws stem from the term *shārra*, a view that Zimik also echoes (43). The term *shārra* contains the elements of warning that whoever breaks this law will get the wrath and punishment of *Āmeowo*. *Kashār* holds an indispensable role in discussions about the Tangkhul religion, serving as the guiding principle for religious practices. In the past, an individual who adhered to various *kashār*, like a Hindu or Christian who observed regular fasts, could be recognised as devoutly religious. The violation of any *kashār* not only displeases the *Āmeowo* but also brings discomfort or sadness to the community. This might be referred to as the Tangkhul philosophy, forming the foundation for their beliefs, culture, and traditions, and both reflecting and shaping their overall worldview. In the Tangkhul political system, religious beliefs are intricately integrated into socio-political institutions, a feature common to all non-secular societies, as noted by Shangrei (99).

Proverb collectors have integrated numerous taboos, dicta and maxims into their compilations, particularly those concluding with *shārra*. However, it appears that some of these expressions are explicit taboos or social practices, others may be said to lean towards maxims and dicta. Yaopei Ngalung, in his book *Tangkhul Chānjam Theology: Reclaiming Eco-Life in Context*, which is based on his M.Th. thesis, interprets *chānjam* from an eco-theological perspective. He highlights the Tangkhul's unique attitudes toward God, nature, and the notion of God in nature. He defines *Chānjam* as traditional sayings and proverbs, and the examples he analyses are related to eco-life and contain *shārra*. While these expressions do convey didactic content, they lack the nuanced and polysemantic qualities typically associated with proverbs, offering meanings that are

often limited to a literal level. Thus, not all of Ngalung's examples can be classified as proverbs, despite his use of *chānjam* in the book's title. However, as Mieder shows, some sayings or quotations have gained the status of proverbs because they have enjoyed high currency for a long time and were widely used among the population (*Proverbs are Never 7*).

The example below works only in a society deeply rooted in the natural world:

(54) *Manaothei mashaialu, shaishārra* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. One shan't eat the fruit that bears out of season

Tangkhuls adhere to the belief that everything has a time of its own, which is the right and proper time for it, as it is in nature. Any deviation from this natural order or engaging in activities out of their designated season is deemed unacceptable. This philosophy is applied rigorously not only in agricultural practices but in all aspects of life. A delay in any agricultural activity is believed to have a cascading effect on the entire yearly cycle. The above proverb literally forbids consuming fruits that grow out of season because such happenings are unnatural and a cause for concern (in the natural world surely, but also in the human world, by extension). It is believed that eating such fruit causes dullness of mind and a lack of proper understanding. The knowledge that a careful observation of nature imparts to a community is not only epistemically valuable (it leads to better crops), but morally significant as well. No distinction is made between the 'scientific' and the 'moral:' the natural world is a great manuscript that requires careful reading because it can become an instrument for human success in material terms, be a source of delight and nourishment as well a place of threat and danger, and a guide for the proper and 'natural' functioning of human society. This proverb, thus, encapsulates a holistic worldview, emphasising the interconnectedness of human activities with the natural order and advocating for a respectful and harmonious coexistence with the seasonal cycles.

It is striking that these proverbs conclude with *shārra*. Despite imparting instructive content, they may lack the refined quality often associated with proverbs. It could be argued that while these expressions may not have initially qualified as proverbs, they may have evolved over time to attain proverbial status. Therefore, I call such proverbs “*shārra* proverb”. While seemingly outdated, these traditional beliefs and practices survive in deep-set attitudes and are increasingly starting to be re-evaluated with critical engagement and proving to be valuable in alternative ways. While only a few proverbs directly address superstitions and omens, there is quite a handful of ‘*shārra* proverbs.’ One could argue that taboos are now regarded as a form of figurative expression as their original significance is gradually waning in modern society.

The Tangkhuls’ superstitious beliefs and taboos embedded in their proverbs and daily practices reflect a complex interweaving of tradition, cultural norms, and a pragmatic approach to navigating life. While some superstitions may seem arcane or have lost their significance over time, they continue to shape the community’s identity, providing a lens through which they view the world and make sense of their experiences.

Men and Women: Performing Gender and Sexual Relations

In any language, including Tangkhul, proverbs that mention men and women do not exclusively concern these genders but often relate to broader moral aspects. This section analyses proverbs to examine traditional perceptions and roles of men and women in Tangkhul society and to explore the intersections between gender and culture.

In “Gender Aspects of English Proverbs,” Roumyana Petrova introduces the term “gender-related proverb.” She defines it as any proverb conveying a gender-related message along with an associated attitude toward gender. Specifically, she characterises it as a message indicating either a masculine or feminine trait in contrast to a non-gender or human characteristic in general (337–

338). Her analysis delves into the representation of men and women in proverbs, highlighting the ways in which language can reinforce traditional gender roles and biases. Daniel Anderson Malmgren, in his essay titled “Gender-related Proverbs: A Cultural and Cognitive Approach,” proposes four distinct categories of gender-related proverbs: (i) Explicit gender-related proverbs, (ii) Metaphorical gender-related proverbs, (iii) Explicit gender-related proverbs with non-gender meanings, and (iv) General proverbs with some gender-related attributes. Malmgren’s approach combines cultural and cognitive perspectives to provide a composite understanding of how proverbs function in relation to gender, emphasising their role in both reflecting and shaping societal attitudes towards men and women. When applying these parameters to the corpus, we see that not all Tangkhul proverbs mentioning men and women exclusively focus on gender but often relate to broader moral aspects.

A thorough analysis of the contexts and instances of gender-related proverbs provides a better understanding of the status of men and women in Tangkhul society. Some proverbs lack linguistic markers for identifying the gender of the subject or object. In such instances, gender-specific references to men and women often need to be inferred from the context. The expression of a concept or idea in these proverbs relies on mentioning the relevant word or employing stereotypical language, using semantically related words to convey the intended meaning. For example:

(55) (i) *Ningaishida matheimila naovaiya* (Sira)

lit. Out of courtesy, (she) lies down and becomes pregnant

(ii) *Saho makharanngāka nao waikhew* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Unable to decline a prayer (she) gets pregnant

While the pronoun ‘she’ is omitted, it becomes evident that the reference is to a woman due to the term *naovai*, signifying pregnancy, a universally understood female condition. The term *matheimi*, meaning to lie down on the back for someone, further elucidates the proverb’s imagery, suggesting a conventional sexual position. This proverb extends the image of a woman engaging in a typical sexual position to satirise an individual who unquestioningly agrees to everything and is left holding the baby as it were.

We see a slight difference in the word components in these two variants. The inclusion of the term “courtesy” suggests a motivation seemingly rooted in a desire to be polite or overplease others. The intrinsic meaning of the proverb is a warning against performing immoral acts even if committed with the best intentions. The obscenity in the first variant, although unacceptable in general conversation, is used for shock value, to make the point sharper. The latter variant employs highly polite language, incorporating the phrase *saho makharanngāka* lit. ‘being unable to decline a prayer’. This phrase is typically used to respond to or highlight a polite request that is difficult to decline. The irony of the phrasing introduces generous doses of sarcasm and humour in this proverb. While the former brings a hammer blow, the latter uses a stiletto to inflict the wound: both aim to ridicule but achieve their effects through two very different rhetorical strategies.

According to the Phalees, there is a story behind the proverb. It is about a woman named Luingaiwui, known for her indiscriminate liaisons with men. She would be with a handsome man solely for his good looks but also lie with an unattractive man because she felt sorry for him. This proverb is frequently invoked when expressing dissatisfaction with someone and its colloquial tone enables the speaker to convey displeasure or disappointment with a touch of humour or insult. The Phalee community often employs the proverb, referring to it as *Luingaiwui the machero* lit. ‘Don’t be like Luingaiwui,’ using the shorter version. I can recall a specific incident that illustrates

this proverb. Enraged by her husband's persistent drinking habits, a wife confronted him about his behaviour. In defence, he explained that he had met a long-lost friend that day, using it as justification for his drinking. His habitual excuses irritated her so much that she told him, "Don't be like Luingaiwui who sleeps with everyone out of pity." By invoking a proverb, she vented her anger while also subtly comparing her husband's behaviour to that of a prostitute, adding a touch of insult.

Some proverbs highlight the unequal power dynamics between the sexes and articulate the societal expectations imposed on both men and women. The use of explicit language referring to both male and female anatomy is common, and the ripeness of the expressions makes them smutty and exceedingly arresting. Some proverbs speak for patriarchal values, while others serve as records of traditional cultural practices. Although drawing generalised conclusions from a limited set of proverbs is risky, the recurrence of similar proverbs suggests a prevalent attitude. The repetition of comparable proverbs with shared or similar ideas or themes signifies their societal significance.

(56) *Mayarnao meithalungna, shanao mazum muiyāna* (Kasomwoshi)⁵⁰
lit. Man is hearth; woman is fog/mist

(57) *Shanao ning harna sheithui* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. "Women's mind is snatched away by hens"

"Man is hearth; woman is fog" poignantly encapsulates the reality of men and women in a patriarchal society. In this framework, men, as family heirs, inherit titles and property, preserving their surnames, clans, and villages without alteration and fixed to the home like a hearth. In contrast, due to the prohibition of endogamy, women must marry outside their clans, leading to changes in family, clan, and sometimes even village or tribe. The "hearth" symbolises heat,

⁵⁰ Orthographic variants of *mazum* are *machung* or *mazung*

stability, or a central focal point often associated with traditional male roles. On the other hand, “fog” represents mystery, ambiguity, fluidity, or perhaps the idea of being elusive or difficult to define, aligning with perceived female qualities in this context. The metaphors are built upon heteronormative gender stereotypes. The hearth also invokes the taboo surrounding its removal from the kitchen, where rituals and rites conducted by *shārra* ‘priest’ during installation make it sacrosanct.⁵¹ Men are likened to fixed or permanent entities rooted in tradition. On the other hand, women are metaphorically associated with fog, specifically *machung muiyā*, which drifts during the dry season. The proverb can be interpreted as a comment on the status of women in society, highlighting the perceived instability of their positions. It also implies that women change their minds more frequently than men, drawing a parallel between a woman’s fickleness and indecisive nature and the shifting nature of fog. In situations where the speaker seeks to emphasise a man’s steadfastness, the proverb is invoked to underscore the constancy and reliability akin to a fixed hearth. The beauty and mellowness of autumn mist is also embedded within the perceived contrast, and the tinge of sadness that it carries makes the image seem to almost perform the ambiguity that is part of its message. In most patriarchal cultures, the giving away of the daughter is a poignant moment for her birth family. This proverb embraces these conflicting attitudes in a finely crafted balanced utterance full of repetitive rich and rounded ‘m’ sounds. While establishing gender stereotypes, this proverb does not seem to contain overtly misogynistic connotation, although, of course, it may be used in a manner unflattering to women.

(57) addresses the perceived vulnerability and emotional nature of women’s minds. It suggests that their rational thinking can be easily compromised, illustrated metaphorically by a chicken’s ability to snatch it away. Kasomwoshi elaborates on this notion, comparing women to

⁵¹ Alternatively, the priest is also called *shārvā* and *kasārra* in Phalee.

hens that peck, shake, and scratch at anything fallen on the ground. He explains that women's minds similarly shift easily and are prone to making mistakes or changing their decisions on irrational whims.

The status of women is even more starkly revealed in (10) 'Bull is used by piercing nose, an elephant can be trained, but an evil woman cannot be tamed' and (11) 'Women are strangers' servants,' as discussed in Chapter One. These proverbs express masculine and feminine roles and positions in the family and society. In Malmgren's terms, these proverbs can be called "explicit gender-related proverbs."

(58) *Shanaowui eina philā-wungnao kuitai, shanaowui eina zamshei khamaying, sāpher khamahor ngathaya* (T. Luikham)

lit. Over a woman, *philā-wungnao* behead one another; over a woman, wine and meat are exchanged⁵²

ee. "No war without a woman" (Penguin)

Much like Helen, whose face launched a thousand ships, this proverb places the responsibility for strife among men squarely on feminine shoulders. The first half highlights the intense nature of disputes, suggesting that the *philā-wungnao* might resort to drastic measures, even engaging in violence and warfare in response to mistreatment of a woman by her husband or his family. In such cases, the woman's family ensures retribution or seeks justice, potentially escalating the situation to the point of triggering wars between families, clans, or villages. The word *kuitai* refers to the headhunting culture of the Tangkhul.⁵³ This practice, common among the Tangkhuls and the

⁵² lit. princesses and princes/ nobility

⁵³ According to Gachui, there were two distinct types of war: *rairei* and *ngathitrai*. He stresses the fact that one village did not attack another without justifiable cause. When two villages agreed on a date for combat, this scheduled battle was termed *rairei*. In contrast, *ngathitrai* referred to raids carried out by a select group of skilled warriors (Gachui, 88–89). Gachui further notes that heads collected during *ngathitrai* were not displayed at the *makho* (a big beam of wood that is placed across the room), nor did the warriors don *mayongcho* in these instances. T Luikham also notes that the heads that were collected without proper reasons were not kept at *makho*. Only the head of the enemies killed

Nagas as a whole, was deeply embedded in their cultural and spiritual beliefs. It transcended mere acts of cruelty, functioning instead as a ritual imbued with symbolic significance. Headhunting was associated with bravery, honour, and the warrior ethos, with the act of killing and collecting an enemy's head serving to elevate the individual's status and strength within the community. As noted in Chapter One, successful warriors were entitled to wear certain clothing to proclaim their prowess.

The latter part of the proverb describes a contrasting scenario in which the exchange of *zamshei* and *sāpher* 'wine and meat' becomes a symbolic gesture linked to women.⁵⁴ When families maintained good relations and treated the woman well, the exchange or sharing of delectable food became a customary practice. The woman's family, particularly her brothers, would present her with meat during festivals like *Luirā*. Over time, the married daughter reciprocated by gifting a cow or buffalo, and those facing financial constraints expressed their goodwill through offerings such as a shawl (T. Luikham 97). This underscores the intricate dynamics within Tangkhul customs, in which the treatment of women plays a pivotal role in shaping relationships and determining the nature of the exchange of goods between families.

in *raithit* (revenge) were displayed, and only in the house of the clan chief or the relative who slaughtered an animal in the warrior's name. Other heads would be kept in the house of the village chief (101).

The practice of beheading also extended to the collection of heads of fellow villagers who died far from home. If his dead body could not be brought back, his head—or at least his hair—was retrieved to ensure a proper burial according to traditional customs (Gachui 87). This underscores the importance of the head in Naga rituals and reflects the community's respect for the deceased and their adherence to cultural rites, which were deemed essential for the peace and spiritual well-being of the departed soul.

Headhunting among the Nagas served not only as a means of protecting their communities and asserting their prowess in the face of external threats but also played a critical role in maintaining social cohesion and identity. From a contemporary perspective, the term "headhunter" and the practice itself are often perceived as barbaric and inhumane. This perception is influenced by the biases of Western modernity and is largely uninterested in understanding the logic that underpins the practice. This cluster of concepts related to the practice of headhunting entails significant repetition and cross referencing that may lead to a lack of clarity if it were to be incorporated into Appendix III. Thus a long footnote was chosen as a better format for this explanation instead of glossary entries.

⁵⁴ See Appendix III

There are many customs in which the *yorlā* could claim their rightful pieces of meat from brothers and male cousins.⁵⁵ For instance, when the woman's brothers or cousins get married, she receives a leg of a bull or pig. Moreover, in the past, when they died, she could take as much meat as she could take with her bare hands (without using any tools) from the bull called *leikaiyaosā* that was slaughtered for the villagers (Ngareophung 49). Similarly, if her brother hosted *marān*, the *yorlā* would contribute as much as they could (T. Luikham 107). The Tangkhul still have a strictly traditional meat distribution culture. Making mistakes in giving and taking of shawls and meat can become a major bone of contention, and the wronged person can sue the infringer, both the giver and the receiver, in the village court. Furthermore, the relationship between the two families or village could end there.

Parents or any adults may cite this proverb to remind a married woman that she is a peacemaker for the two families. This proverb may also be cited to the in-laws to exhort them to treat their daughter-in-law well, reminding them of the inevitable results of mistreatment. This proverb, like many others, serves an admonitory function too, but also manages to reveal the Tangkhul's ambiguous, and often contradictory, attitudes in terms of gender roles. Society expects women to exhibit all established moral values and live a decent, modest and chaste life. Failure of a woman to fulfill her role as a wife or daughter-in-law, or to adhere to the moral standards established by society, may lead to tensions between the two families. The proverb mentioned above sums up the traditional view on treating women. From a single woman, a war can start, or a relationship can bloom.

(59) *Sāsā-vāvāda yorlā kachangmei* (Arokianathan)

⁵⁵ A married woman and her children are referred to as *yorlā*, while the woman's father and brothers are designated as *vgrei* (T. Luikham 106). See also Appendix III.

para. *Yorlā* is better in many ways

In this proverb, the community observes and acknowledges the profound filial commitment demonstrated by married daughters. It resonates directly with the understanding that married daughters excel in fulfilling their duties towards their parents, surpassing the expectations commonly associated with sons. The proverb does not require a metaphorical interpretation, as its straightforward meaning highlights the exceptional filial devotion displayed by married daughters. This sentiment is vividly demonstrated in a variety of situations in which daughters, having embarked on the journey of matrimony, continue to uphold their responsibilities towards their natal families. The reduplicative expression *sāsā-vāvā*, which literally translates to “do do-go go,” is used here to emphasise the enduring and widespread utility of a married daughter. This phrase underscores the efficacy and enduring nature of the support and assistance provided by married daughters in various situations and contexts. This proverb reflects the deeply rooted belief that women, even after marriage, are viewed as dutiful and responsible, representing a societal acknowledgment and appreciation of the significant role married daughters play in maintaining family ties and fulfilling filial obligations. It also subtly underscores prevailing social norms. It reinforces the idea that women, even after marriage, remain (and should remain) closely connected to and actively involved in the well-being of their parents, portraying a depth of commitment that is esteemed and acknowledged within the cultural context.

A story told during fieldwork speaks of an elderly woman suffering from illness and experiencing mistreatment from her son and daughter-in-law who sought refuge in her daughter’s home instead. Despite customary expectations for the elderly woman to reside with her son, the unwelcoming atmosphere at his residence prompted her to choose her daughter’s house for solace and care. A sympathetic listener reflected on this situation, expressing the sentiment encapsulated

by the local proverb *Sāsā vāvāda yorlā kachangmei*, which questions the value of having a son when daughters demonstrate superior filial devotion, particularly in critical moments requiring familial care and support. This sentiment underscores the community's recognition of the proverb's truth, emphasising the importance of filial relationships and the compassionate role of daughters in family dynamics.

(60) *Rāmshi khumshili machinhaialu, yorlāshili machinhaialu* (Sira)
tran. Don't despise old huts and old *khum*⁵⁶, don't despise *yorlā*

The proverb advises not to harbour disdain for old huts and *yorlā*. In likening *yorlā* to an old hut and *khum*, the proverb draws a parallel between these seemingly outdated entities. However, old hut and *khum* can prove invaluable during unexpected rain showers when no other shelter is available. Thus, much like an old hut and *khum*, a married woman, too, may not be constantly in demand, may be devalued and taken for granted, yet her worth becomes apparent during unforeseen challenges or difficult times. The significance of *yorlā* within Tangkhul cultural contexts has been highlighted in earlier proverbs. *Yorlā* and *varei* were bound by various customary norms, which included the distribution of specific parts of meat, the presentation of shawls, and the provision of assistance during times of hardship. These practices are meticulously documented by T. Luikham in his work (106–107). The advice against harbouring ill feelings towards married daughters in this proverb extends beyond a plea for fairness and equality; it underscores the potential usefulness of their roles, similar to the hut and *khum*, especially when circumstances demand collaboration and assistance. The very need for the existence of such exhortations, however, arguably implies that in practice women are not really treated well and people need repeated reminders of their worth.

⁵⁶ *Khum* is a traditional rain shield made of bamboo and leaves of himalayan screw pine. See Appendix III for image.

After marriage, a notable shift in social dynamics occurs for women and they attain increased social standing. The transition is marked by traditional rituals symbolising the transfer of ownership from the mother to the daughter-in-law. In the past, among affluent families, such as the *khalāknao*, a pig was ceremoniously slaughtered, and the entire clan feasted together the day after the wedding. During this event, the mother-in-law, as the current household owner, formally introduced the daughter-in-law as the new proprietor to their house deity (*shimkameo*). This celebratory feast is known as *chumshinsā*.⁵⁷ Before *chumsinsā* the husband would sleep in the *longshim*, and conjugal relations commenced only after this ritual. Following this, the daughter-in-law assumed responsibility for all domestic tasks and rituals. The day after *chumsinsā*, the newlywed bride parted her fringe in the middle, symbolising the loss of virginity and the consummation of love. In the past, all virgins had fringes, but marriage marked the transition to parting the hair in the middle and tying their hair in a bun. This hairstyle signified her status as a married woman. It was taboo for a married woman to cut the fringe and doing so was considered to be an insult to the whole village (T. Luikham 98). The term *samsa* in the following proverb refers to the bun worn by married women.

(61) *Samsa kuitongli sāmning phokshārra* (Sira)

lit. One shall not call a married woman by promiscuous names

Sira says that a woman might have been promiscuous as a girl, but calling her chastity into question after marriage is considered an insult to her husband. This proverb emphasises the importance of respecting a woman's honour after marriage. While this proverb may seem supportive of women, it subtly reinforces patriarchal ideals. The restoration of a woman's so-called honour is not

⁵⁷ Ng. Ngareophung called it *ponsinsā* (42).

attributed to her own agency but is constructed by society's injunctions to glorify and save the honour of the man she marries.

Married women are portrayed as courageous, hot-tempered and ferocious in the next two Phalee proverbs.

(62) *Wuiri malung, shāngkhu malung* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Married women's courage, tiger's courage

(63) *Wuiri malung kongro maroi* (Collected, Phalee)

para. Married women's courage is a small brook

In Tangkhul folklore, the tiger symbolises bravery, akin to the lion in Western traditions. Although women are generally perceived as physically weaker, they, especially married women, are said to be able to exhibit a fierceness comparable to that of a tiger when provoked. However, this proverb is frequently employed in a pejorative context, with women's courage often being misinterpreted as mere hotheadedness.

The next proverb also talks about courage, and, at the same time, refers to a hot temper. During rainy days, the water level of small streams rises quickly and flows with great force, but as soon as the rain stops, the water recedes and becomes harmless. The sudden rise and fall of water of a small stream are compared here with the courage of married women. Here, her courage is compared with the current of a babbling brook, apparently harmless and pleasant sounding, but capable of serious destruction when in full spate. She is portrayed as courageous, but the proverb's undertone shows her courage as short-lived and not strong enough to destroy anything thus, not a threat. In the above examples, a woman's powerful reactions are mocked as hysterical. In these proverbs, women are not seen as rational and cool-headed but as people who react in an intensely

emotional manner and yet constitute no thread. Even their tiger-like courage is portrayed as diminutive by comparing it with the force of a small stream.

Old women are not favourably represented in some proverbial phrases. They are considered untidy and loquacious. *Āyi pāngpaolā* (sira) lit. ‘an old lady *pāngpaolā*.’ *Pāngpaolā* means ‘a lady with messy (hair)’. Those who do not take care of their appearance and lack elegance would be compared with this proverbial phrase. Those who chatter continuously or poke their nose in other people’s business would be called *Āyi khongphāla* (Sira). The literal translation would be ‘a lady who barks at everyone.’ These two expressions are not exactly proverbs but metaphorical comparisons, although the collectors have included them in their catalogues. Such formulaic metaphorical expressions are often considered *chāncham*.

Proverbs are stuffed with issues concerning women’s chastity, decency, and modesty, as in (55) above. Here are a few more examples:

(64) *Shanao shānrop katham kathā* (Sira)

lit. like a girl who tucks her skirt properly

The metaphor is drawn from the traditional practice of women ensuring the proper arrangement of their *kashan* (wrap-around skirt) when sitting down. In the past, women usually wore knee-length *kashan*. The reasons may be practical purposes, preventing discomfort during daily chores, walking, or physical labour. Carefully tucking the skirt while sitting down was crucial to avoid embarrassment maintain dignity. According to Sira, the paremiographer, this saying is employed metaphorically to underscore the importance of keeping secrets and being discreet. The analogy emphasises the need to safeguard confidential information, akin to a girl being mindful not to reveal her private parts when sitting down. The act of *shānrop katham* ‘knowing well how to tuck

one's skirt,' carries symbolic weight, representing the virtue of maintaining modesty and, by extension, privacy.

It emerges from the corpus that, as in all patriarchal societies, chastity is highly valued in women and seen as a virtue to be admired. Unmarried couples engaging in premarital sex are referred to as *sāmkasā*, while engaging in sexual relations with a married woman or man is termed *phokaphā*. Despite some men boasting about their experiences with women, there is a prevailing cultural emphasis on women maintaining their virginity until marriage. An illustrative example of this cultural perspective is the prohibition against non-virgin girls participating in singing and dancing performances, according to oral narratives, since it was believed to bring defilement to the community. There was a fear that even if she attempted to keep her non-virgin status a secret, it would be inevitably exposed during the performance. Consequently, such girls would be hesitant to participate in competitions or public events, mindful of the potential consequences and societal judgment, which, ironically, would indicate their loss of virginity in a roundabout way. This cultural narrative highlights the significance placed on a woman's virginity before marriage and the societal repercussions associated with its perceived loss.

As mentioned earlier, a hierarchy can be seen favouring married women over their unmarried counterparts in traditional proverbs. However, this does not imply that married women were exempt from becoming objects of taboo. Notably, in the past, when a woman died during childbirth, specific funerary customs and essential rites were exclusively entrusted to older adults. Participation by youths, particularly girls, was considered taboo due to the prevailing apprehension that a similar tragedy might befall them (T. Luikham 102). During these sombre occasions, the selection of animals for the funerary feast or ritual reflected a sense of restraint and frugality. Higher value meat such as buffalo, cow, and pig were not used, a dog or fowl was slaughtered

instead. Additionally, stringent customs dictated the disposal of all utensils employed in the funerary rituals, along with the remaining food. Reusing such utensils or consuming leftover food was deemed taboo. Some proverbs caution both men and women about the importance of prudence in their friendships. Proverbs such as:

(65) (i) *Ngasankasā eina nao vaikhui* (Kanrei)

lit. (Saying or doing) in jest gets pregnant

(ii) *Meili ngareo ngator, shangli ngareo naovai* (John)

lit. Playing with fire gets burned, playing with a penis makes pregnant

(iii) *Mei eina ngareo ngator, sem eina ngareo naovai* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Playing with fire gets burned, playing with a woman causes pregnancy

(iv) *Shangrada nreokha ntor* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Playing with a penis gets burned

All four variants function as cautionary tales, but they differ in their language tone, structural approach, implications, and the psychological messages they convey. They are frequently cited to counsel young people against becoming too intimately acquainted. These proverbs carry a dual interpretation, serving both as straightforward advice for young boys and girls to maintain a proper distance and as metaphorical guidance. At a literal level, (i) suggests that engaging in seemingly innocent fun between the sexes can lead to unintended consequences, such as pregnancy. Compared to the other three variants the first one is less obscene. Metaphorically, all of these variants emphasise the importance of exercising caution when there is potential risk. The underlying message is a reminder not to treat certain matters lightly or make them the subject of jest. What may initially be intended as a light-hearted comment can lead to significant harm. The

discomfort invoked by these candid proverbs among listeners further amplifies their warning, urging individuals to recognise the potential dangers of trivialising weighty matters.

The next variants (ii) and (iii) employ a parallel structure, juxtaposing two actions with their respective consequences. The only difference in these two variants is the words *shang* ‘penis’ and *sem* ‘female/body’. The initial clause presents a familiar metaphor—playing with fire—resulting in an obvious outcome, getting burned. The subsequent clause parallels this with sexual behaviour, specifically ‘playing with a penis or female/body’ and its potential outcome, pregnancy. The last variant (iv) condenses the message, making it more succinct but also metaphorically more dense by suppressing the explicit comparison. This structure can imply a range of negative repercussions: physical, emotional, and social.

Variants (i), (ii), and (iii), with their explicit mention of pregnancy, place the burden of responsibility squarely upon women. It underscores the potential for pregnancy as a direct result of sexual engagement, thereby reinforcing traditional gender roles, emphasising the unhappy consequences of female sexual agency, and the moral policing of women’s sexual behaviour. By contrast, variant (iv), potentially broadens the scope of consequences and does not solely focus on women. It can be seen as addressing both genders, highlighting a broader range of potential negative outcomes associated with sexual activity. All the variants serve as moral warnings against engaging in unauthorised sexual behaviour.

(66) *Sā kharengli pharkharena khui, shanaoli khanaona khui* (Sira)

lit. In hunting, the one who hurls the spear first gets it; in women, the last one gets it

This proverb alludes to specific traditional hunting and courting customs of the Tangkhul. The similarities and differences between the two can be seen by juxtaposing the two phrases, which draw a parallel between women and prey in hunting. According to hunting customs, the one who

spears the animal is considered the one who killed the animal (*kathatta*), and the right hindleg of the animal is to be given to him.⁵⁸ However, in the case of a woman, although many men may sleep with her, the last one will be the child's father if she gets pregnant. In the past, as there was no scientific test of paternity, customary law was used to identify the father. This proverb advises men to be careful with their sexual adventures. Although it apparently equates women with the prize of the hunt, the irony is that these two prizes are not equally covetable.

Tangkul attitudes towards masculinity are illustrated by the following examples:

(67) (i) *Muilā hai makhuihuk āzara hai ungakhamā yāron āngarit makapei* (John)

lit. Unable to bed his lover; fondles his sister's genital is ungentlemanly

(ii) *Araiwuida makhewthuk, ararui hai yekathup* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Unable to defeat the enemy, fondles his sister's genital

John's version invokes a man who is frustrated because he cannot have sexual intercourse with his lover. In the Phalee version, his frustration stems from his inadequacy as a warrior. In the past, the man who could bring the heads of the enemies and those who could sleep with many women were considered *yarkhoka* (distinguished gentleman or alpha male) (T. Luikham, 101). In both proverbs, the man who cannot bed the female he wants or vanquish his enemies is relegated to the bottom of the social strata. Moreover, he is portrayed as someone who sexually abuses his sister to alleviate his sense of inadequacy. It is unclear whether he has the sister's consent, although given the strong incest taboos, this seems unlikely. If she has given consent, however, then the proverb may perhaps be understood within the context of an endogamous marriage. The marriage between brother and sister or between man and woman of the same clan is called *zarpāni shokhalā*. It is taboo, and

⁵⁸ Different villages may follow distinct customs regarding the distribution of meat. While some may allocate the head or other parts of the animal, the tradition of giving the right leg specifically adheres to the customs of the Phalee village, as documented by Ng. Ngareophung (1998).

those who indulge in this would be exiled since their act would be seen as bringing ill fortune to the village. In practice, it seems that the former meaning is preferred since these proverbs are cited to those who wield power over the weaker ones. They may also allude to a man who abuses his family but has no recognition in society. This proverb is often used in a sarcastic and pejorative tone to mock someone who mistreats his family members. The vulgarity elicited by this proverb helps the speaker express his strong contempt, but they know that this proverb will evoke laughter or at least an embarrassed smile. This, in turn, helps mitigate the personal nature of the comment and lightens the mood of the conversation, while acting as a rebuke.

(68) *Yāron mathālala ngalā mahuithei akha mangasāmrarmana* (John)

lit. Handsome man with no courtship skill cannot consummate love

This proverb is not documented in any other collections of proverbs. Therefore, it may be classified as an “expert proverb,” indicating that it is known only to a select group of proverb scholars. Alternatively, it is possible that the saying was created by the collector, or it may originate from his village. It should be noted that he titles the chapter of his book “*Zatkhanā Tui*” ‘Current Sayings’, which raises the possibility that it is of recent currency. Nevertheless, I offer it here because it reveals the strong links Tangkhul culture still has to tradition.

The saying itself alludes to the Tangkhul tradition of courting women. Men are expected to take the initiative in expressing their desire during courtship. The proverb serves as a reminder to men who may be hesitant or lack the skill to court a woman they are interested in. While (67) ridicules one kind of masculine inadequacy, mapped onto the lack of virility and martial prowess, this proverb highlights another: a deficiency in the softer social skills and possibly bashfulness. The proverb underscores that a man’s appeal to women lies not only in his physical charms alone but also in his ability to woo and court. Given the societal emphasis on marriage, those unable to secure marital unions may face societal scrutiny. If a man remains unmarried while his peers tie

the knot, he is labelled as *yārronga*, which literally conveys a sense of not yielding a fruitful outcome in terms of marriage. The cultural taboo associated with an unmarried man's death involved a distinctive custom: the prohibition of carrying the deceased's body through the door. Instead, planks from the wall were removed to create a hole through which the corpse was carried outside. The overarching message of the proverb encourages young men to hone their courtship skills, recognising that physical attractiveness alone may not suffice in navigating the cultural expectations surrounding courtship and marriage within the Tangkhul community.

(69) *Manao luisom lākhot* (Sira)

para. Late marriage is similar to late paddy transplantation

This proverb is cited to those who do not get married at the appropriate marriageable age. It draws a parallel between late marriage and delayed paddy transplantation. Sira suggests that just as tardy transplantation results in a delayed and reduced harvest, late marriage may lead to fewer or, in extreme cases, no children. The cultural perspective underscores the importance of timely marriage and the desirability of having numerous offsprings. Beyond the specific context of marriage and agriculture, the proverb metaphorically conveys a broader message. It suggests that timely action and adherence to cultural norms are favourable, by drawing this parallel between the consequences of late marriage and delayed crop transplantation.

(70) *Khamathāchi mamalekmana* (Arogianathan)

“Beauty is not for licking”

This seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of the abstract concept of ‘beauty’ with the mammalian habit of ‘licking,’ (primarily for tasting in humans) suggests that beauty should not be seen as consumable. Like (69), this too prioritises virtues like hard work over appearances. The message conveys that beauty does not fill the proverbial stomach and should not be the major focus. This proverb is often employed to counsel individuals, regardless of gender, to prioritise qualities like

diligence and character over mere physical attractiveness when selecting a life partner. This advice is often directed at youths fixated on a prospective partner's looks rather than considering other essential qualities. For instance, parents might counsel their son against pursuing a relationship solely based on a girl's beauty, especially if she lacks qualities the parents value in a daughter-in-law. It humorously conveys the notion that a woman's beauty will not fill their stomachs, implying that outward attractiveness does not guarantee a prosperous and harmonious life together, expressing a sentiment similar to (50) above.

(71) *Shimpān yaronlā kapangnākha rameinao ngaroka* (John)

lit. Extreme pickiness in choosing a partner gets a widow

(72) *Phashāk-pharokhui atamrai lo sokha wuirinao/kaharnao samphangei* (Collected Phalee)

lit. One who sings while eating marries a person who is already married

Young individuals are often guided with proverbs cautioning against excessive snobbery in choosing a partner. (71) suggests that being overly particular and never satisfied with the choices offered in choosing a life partner may lead to unintended consequences, such as ending up with a widow.

(72) aims to discourage inappropriate behaviour, specifically singing while eating, which is not only impolite but may also turn hazardous. The danger of choking on food is metaphorically connected to the undesirable outcome of marrying someone who is already married. The proverb serves as a corrective measure for children, discouraging the habit of singing while eating and instilling good food etiquette. The consequence of marrying a married woman is depicted as unfavourable, aligning with the cultural perspective that marrying a widow is not honourable. People who commit bigamy or marry a widow may face insults, being referred to as *miwui*

hanneng kashaiya, which translates to ‘one who eats leftover food.’ These proverbs offer practical advice to young people, urging them to be mindful of their behaviour in choosing a life partner and cautioning against actions that may lead to undesirable outcomes in marriage, all expressed through culturally relevant metaphors. It can be viewed as a form of superstition meant to prevent undesirable outcomes by associating a specific action with a negative consequence. This aligns with Patrick Mullen’s view on how superstitions provide psychological comfort and control.

The proverbs discussed above reveal their crucial role in shaping societal perspectives on the roles and status of both men and women. These proverbs encapsulate the expected values and attitudes for individuals based on their gender. Some proverbs advocate moral values rooted in patriarchal traditions, while others merely document historical cultural practices. Moreover, these gender-related proverbs are the vehicles of well-camouflaged and crafty criticism, presented in humorous language. The choice of witty and sometimes obscene language seems deliberate, indicating a conscious effort to comment on serious issues rather than merely making fun.

Although performance is ingrained in proverbs than in many rhetorical genres, some of these gender-suggestive proverbs enforce performativity (in the sense proposed by Judith Butler), although the gender performance leaves very little wriggle room for individual creative expression. In (66), (67), and (68) the ideal man must play his role in hunting, warfare, and relational pursuits to be counted as worthy of the sex, while the ideal woman is one who must accept offers that she is not satisfied with and live as passive entities, waiting demurely and dumbly, beast-like, to be acquired. As we saw, these proverbs invoke parallels between women and animals with a frequency not unlike that in the Western cultural record. This overlap sometimes makes marking a distinction between animal symbolism and female symbolism difficult. The next section,

nevertheless, groups proverbs from the corpus according to the ways in which the animal world may be said to be perceived by the Tangkhul people.

Gone to the Dogs: Animal Symbolism

The Tangkhuls frequently use animal images and metaphors to express their ideas and emotions. I have compiled a catalogue with more than one hundred proverbs and proverbial phrases related to animals, and it is by no means exhaustive. In some proverbs, animals are explicitly mentioned; in others, semantically related words are used instead of the names and the focus of the wisdom relates to a perceived characteristic or natural behaviour of the animal that may allegorically reveal truths about the human world and value systems. Sometimes the animal is anthromorphosised and made to speak and act like humans, but the principle of the comparison remains the same in both cases.

Krikmann (2001) has shown that proverbs most frequently name domesticated animals. This largely holds true in the case of Tangkhul proverbs too, with a few exceptions, such as the tiger in (62) above. Dogs, cats, fowl, and cattle are the most commonly used animals. Among them, dogs appear with the greatest consistency. In Western culture, the dog is man's best friend. However, in most of the Tangkhul proverbs, dogs are presented in a different light. Although they stay closest to man, they are often reared for human consumption like other domesticated animals. Apart from the 'good' ones that are used in hunting and tracking, called *sāfa*, dogs are domesticated for meat. As they are associated closely with human beings, their good and bad natures are often used as metaphorical references in the proverbs. Thus, the word could connote cunning, gluttony, filth, and opportunism as well as loyalty and obedience. Some examples are set out below:

(42) (i) *Hokna ot murmur sāla fāna "Ina sāya" kachikathā* (Kanrei)

lit. Pig does the hard work, dog claims that "I did it"

(v) *Hākna wot so, huina kathongshe* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Pig does the work, dog flatters

This proverb is used when someone steals credit from others. The pig is given the epithet of being ‘hard-working’ and the dog is associated with cunning. What allows us to apply those characteristics stems from cultural codes developed through genres such as fairy tales, fables, and stories, but also from everyday practices and anthropocentrically tilted observation. If seen from the pig’s viewpoint, the dog reaps the benefit of human companionship and its fair share of the spoils of human endeavour despite doing no work. In the Phalee version, the dog becomes a symbol of human laziness, using flattery and importuning to get things done for them. In these proverbs, dogs are portrayed as flatterers and opportunists.

(73) *faphei meikachui (thāda)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) a dog’s feet on fire

This proverbial phrase is used to describe the restlessness and fidgetiness of a restive person. In Tangkhul homes, people usually sit and converse around the hearth with dogs lounging by their side, especially during the cold winter months. The dog’s foot could very well touch burning embers or hot ashes during a languid stretch, and it would hop on its paws, unable to stand still. Similarly, a man who is anxious or excited cannot remain calm. This proverbial phrase also describes hyperactive children or individuals who have trouble staying still for long and is often used to express irritation.

(74) *Hampai kaikha fāna manāya* (Sira)

lit. Dog smiles when the earthen pot breaks

The personified dog here is portrayed as enjoying a moment of schadenfreude. The dog cannot understand that the breaking of the pot actually means spoiled food for humans but more food for it. This proverb is used insultingly to those who seem to exult in the misfortune of others.

(75) (i) *Fana*, “*Sāchao Shirui kashong rikha mashaiphalunga*” *kaji* (Kanrei)

para. Dog expresses a fervent desire, stating, “I’ll undoubtedly eat *sāchao* as big as Shirui kashong”⁵⁹

(ii) *Fana*, “*Sāchao shingkhur rikha mashaiphayola*” *kachikathā* (Sira)

tran. Dog says, “*Sāchao* as big as *shingkhur* is not enough”

This proverbial expression means wishing for more than what one is capable of achieving and warns against overambition. The dog’s insatiable appetite is metaphorically used to talk about a man who dreams big but overshoots the mark. The dog is dreaming of eating *sāchao*, a traditional snack made of glutinous rice, perilla seeds, chilli and salt, as big as the Shirui hill or as big as *shingkhur* ‘mortar for pounding paddy’. The hyperbole in the phrase emphasises the impossibility of fulfilling one’s desire. Similarly, a man may desire much but should be aware of his own limitations.

(76) (i) *Khamathā sāki chila fa ngasāthui haowa* (Kanrei)

lit. Mending to make it better turns into a dog

(ii) *Kaphā sāsichila fahā sāthuihaowa* (Arokianathan)

“Care in good action protrudes like dog’s teeth” (Arokianathan)

lit. Mending to make it better turns into a dog’s teeth

These variants demand a little explanation. In usage it means something similar to the Greek adage “Excess mars perfection” (Routledge). It cautions against transforming a situation or object into something less desirable through unwarranted adjustments, embodying the sentiment of the English proverb “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” A variant recorded by Arokianathan substitutes *fa* (dog) with *fahā* (dog’s teeth), possibly reflecting a linguistic misunderstanding or a regional

⁵⁹ Shirui hill, See Appendix III

dialectal nuance. I have heard people saying *fāvā* instead of *fā* in this proverb. So, he might have misheard the word as *fāhā*. In Phalee dialect, a corn cob that has only a few seeds is described as “like a dog’s teeth”. So, Arokianathan’s adaptation might have drawn on the metaphorical imagery of a dog’s irregular and jagged teeth to signify the distortion of a once pristine state.

The proverb’s roots may trace back to a fable in which the protagonist’s attempts to enhance his appearance leads to an irreversible transformation into a dog, emphasising the risks of perfectionism and chronic dissatisfaction. In the fable, a mystical bird performs a miraculous transformation, turning an unsightly man into a handsome one. Witnessing this remarkable change, the younger brother and his wife, consumed by envy, beseeched the same bird to bestow upon him the same beauty as his sibling. Tragically, in the midst of this transformative process, an unforeseen event occurred: a crow swooped down and snatched away the man’s appendix. Consequently, the bird found itself unable to revert the man to his human form. The bird gathered the scattered body parts and with a touch of enchantment, turned him into a dog. Thus, the fable wove a cautionary tale about the unintended consequences that may arise when one seeks to alter their fate without due consideration. This proverb finds application in scenarios where well-intentioned efforts to improve situations result in disappointment, cautioning against overzealous attempts that may mar rather than mend. Whether applied to the excessive use of makeup or personal endeavours gone awry, this proverb serves as a poignant reminder of the delicate balance between improvement and potential disaster. It is often used in first-person co-relation to express one’s disappointment when things turn wrong while trying to fix something.

(77) *fākhanāli pai kakā (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a dog with excrement on its ear

In the proverbial phrase, the dog is seen as a dirty and abominable animal and a source of defilement. The image of a dog with faeces smeared on its ear is very disgusting and can make the

hearer nauseous. The dog is unsightly, spreads bad smells, and ruins the surrounding air, yet the dog is oblivious or unaware of it. No one would like to go close to it. A man who has no dignity and respect for others would be compared with such a dog that nobody wants to approach.

(78) *Fali tolaili phunglala sārakui theiakha ngawoktaiya* (John)

lit. Though the dog is carried on a palanquin, it jumps down if it sees a bone

In this proverb, a dog is regarded as an animal impulsive by nature and severely lacking in self-control. The dog is anthropomorphised, put on a palanquin as rich man, but reveals his true nature with utter disregard for public perception the moment temptation appears. This proverb ridicules a person who, though occupying a high societal position, embarrasses themselves due to a lack of self-discipline and self-respect. When a person of dignity interferes in trivial matters or takes advantage of the weak, they are described using this proverb. Just as the dog cannot conceal its true nature upon seeing a piece of bone, a person who cannot control their desires will reveal their true character when faced with temptation. The dog will invariably pursue the bone, regardless of its size or quality, thus embodying incontinence in this proverb. A similar idea is expressed in the following:

(79) *Kasik makathei sei, kakhayak makathei fā* (John)

lit. Buffalo knows no cold, dog knows no shame

An individual's impudence is compared to a shameless dog and a bovine (here translated as buffalo) that is impervious to the cold. Although buffalo is a domesticated animal, it is often kept in a secluded place without much protection from rain, wind or cold. It is considered an animal that does not feel cold, unlike other domesticated animals like cats and dogs. On the other hand, dogs stay close to human beings and are often chastised by men because they misbehave. Despite the many corrective measures adopted to train them, dogs often behave out of line but seem never

to feel ashamed since they keep behaving in the same way. Thus, a dog is personified as someone who has no shame. While the dog's shamelessness is stated directly, the buffalo's inability to feel the cold implies an analogy between social ostracisation (coldness of the behaviour of others) and isolation that can follow shameless behaviour. The parallel structure and ideas that are employed in this proverb exaggerate the atrociousness of the person referred to. The comparisons not only invoke the characteristics but also invoke the magnitude of the person's imperviousness to social etiquette.

(80) *fana paila harna khangayā (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a dog defecates, and a hen scratches it

The proverbial phrase uses scatological imagery again, as in (77), to elicit disgust. This proverbial phrase can be used to describe something atrocious. For instance, a person's bad handwriting can be commented on with this proverbial phrase. It is also used for those who cannot speak eloquently or do things with care. The nature of a dog (defecating everywhere) and a fowl (scratching everything) and the revolting results of their conjoint actions express intense repugnance.

An unruly or mannerless person who speaks rudely and loudly without respect will be called *khorei fa* or 'street dog'. Masterless stray village dogs bark at passersby without heeding anyone's command. The undisciplined dog is compared to a man with no restraint on his tongue. An amorous man or woman is also compared with the dog's behaviour in the mating season: *Marangfa thai* lit. 'It's like a dog in July' which indicates the behaviour of dogs in July.

These examples show dogs in a particularly unflattering light. Interestingly, scatological references in these operate in similar ways to the use of obscenity in those that relate gender and sexuality. I have been able to find only one proverb that casts a positive light on dogs, but as mentioned above, this is about the special hunting dogs that work hard to help in an important human activity:

(81) *Khi sahuithi raida huishimān shuro?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What hunting dogs breed ordinary dogs?

The indigenous dog breed of Tangkhul is called *haofa* (*haohui* in Phalee), and the male *haofa* that is mainly accompanied in the hunting expedition is called *sāfa* (*sahui* in Phalee). They are faithful, obedient, and known to have unique hunting skills. The ears and tails of such hunting dogs are cut off in puppyhood. This makes them look unique, aggressive, and fierce and at the same time, this has advantages during fights as other dogs cannot bite their tails and ears and cause damage. The proverb invokes careful breeding and pedigree by asserting as a truth that a high-quality dog will not give birth to an ordinary one. Similar to the English saying, “Like begets like” (MK), it underscores the transmission of genetic traits from parents to offspring through heredity. Proverbs beginning with *khi* (what) often carry a sarcastic tone, similar to a rhetorical question. Therefore, this proverb is frequently employed to comment on situations where individuals, whose parents lack a good reputation, make mistakes or commit crimes.

According to Yarkao Ngashangva, a Phalee nonagenarian, these dogs were occasionally co-owned by a small group of professional hunters known as *huirui*. The bounty of the hunt was distributed evenly among the hunters. As already noted, the Tangkhul tradition of dividing and sharing meat is rigorous, with specific parts allocated to particular individuals. For example, in certain regions, the head of a game animal rightfully belonged to the eldest man in the family lineage. The hunt could commence on one hill and conclude far from the starting point. Even if someone other than the hunters delivered the final blow to the animal, the person who initiated the chase retained the right to claim their share. Besides the dog’s owner or co-owners and the individual who killed the animal, others present at the moment could also stake their claim. Despite possibly having twenty or thirty people present, everyone would receive a portion of the meat,

even if it were just a bite-sized share. The entrails and limbs were reserved for the dog's owner or co-owners and those who initiated the pursuit. Animals like deer and stags were highly valued for their nutritional benefits, and to replenish their expended energy, participants would share a meal and drink rice beer and wine that night. Hunting was prohibited during the harvest season due to the noise involved, as shouting, calling, and signaling to friends and dogs were integral to the process. According to traditional belief, making loud noises during harvest time was taboo, as there was a fear that it could drive away a bountiful harvest. This is similar to the earlier prohibition on weaving, which was also thought to disturb good harvest. In the Phalee folksong (See Appendix II (13)), a man shows a reluctance to work in the fields but seems to take pleasure in the popular sport of hunting alongside his dog. The huntsman's cry and war chant carry profound significance for the Tangkhul people. These vocal signals were employed to communicate the sighting of animals or enemies, provide updates on safety, and disclose one's whereabouts during hunting or warfare. Beyond these contexts, in their daily lives, the Tangkhuls would also vocalise rhythmic cries to signify their presence, reassure others, and indicate their well-being. This practice involved creating harmonious and melodious tunes that were pleasing to the ears. Interestingly, women were restricted from participating in such vocalisations. The act of shouting, in this context, was not merely generating loud noise; it was a deliberate, rhythmic, and musical expression serving to establish a connection and alleviate fears. In the context of the mentioned song, the singer, likely a wife, expresses dissatisfaction. The recurring huntsman's cry from different vantage points leads her to suspect that it might be her lover. She says that the soil poses a threat to her lover, prompting him to engage in hunting with his dog instead of working the field. She sarcastically remarks on his reluctance to engage in agricultural work, likening it to an 'allergy' to the soil. This hints at the man's preference for hunting over agrarian tasks.

It is interesting to note that the Tangkhul attitude towards dogs in the proverbs is quite different from the other oral folk genres. For instance, in folktales and legends, dogs are portrayed as loyal and obedient and close friends of man. Almost all the folk legendary figures like Shimreishang and Longyao are said to have been accompanied by their dogs in their expeditions. But while the other genres regard a dog as a symbol of prestige, in proverbs, dogs are portrayed as despicable, cunning, abominable, lascivious, and vulgar. As a pet, a dog is seen as a symbol of prestige, but when it is used to talk about someone, the connotative meaning becomes quite negative. This is a baffling phenomenon and further enquiry is required to look for satisfactory explanations.

Other animals too share the dog's fate. The civet cat, as an example, is seen as cunning.

- (82) *rarāli har kachiphun (kathā)* (Kanrei)
lit. (like) sending chicken through a civet cat⁶⁰

This phrase implies the act of entrusting a task to an individual who is likely to exploit the opportunity for personal gain. This analogy is drawn from the observed behavior of civet cats, which frequently steal chickens from villagers. It is evident that assigning a civet cat the responsibility of delivering a chicken will result in the chicken being consumed rather than safely delivered. Consequently, this proverbial expression serves as a cautionary admonition against placing trust in an unreliable person, likening their behaviour to that of a civet cat.

- (83) (i) *harvā eina rarālā khanganui (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. (like) a rooster and a civet cat singing a song
(ii) *harvā eina rarā shongzā khangakhui (kathā)* (Sira)
lit. (like) a race between a rooster and civet cat

⁶⁰ <https://indiabiodiversity.org/species/show/238455>.

These may be considered variations of a single proverbial phrase and are both derived from a fable. In this fable, a civet cat envies the rooster, who is widely admired for its striking plumage and melodious voice. To garner similar praise, the civet cat positions itself in the front, yet the audience still favour the rooster. According to an alternative story told by Kasomwoshi, when the rooster and the civet cat sing songs for fun, the civet cat suggests standing behind the rooster. However, the rooster, aware of the civet cat's crafty nature, declines. When the civet cat then proposes standing in front, the rooster insists on standing in front himself, preventing the civet cat from eating him. The moral of the story is that liars and bad people form false and self-serving alliances to make others suffer. Consequently, in Tangkhul folklore, the civet cat symbolises cunning, envy, and jealousy, much like the fox in Western tradition.

(84) *puwung mashuithai kahon (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. "(like) an owl waiting for *mashuithai*"⁶¹

This proverbial phrase is based upon the observation of the behaviour of owls. It is said that the *mashuithai* (the fruit of needlewood) becomes increasingly hard as it ripens, and it becomes difficult to crack it when it is fully matured. According to folk narrative, owls wait for this fruit to ripen, but in the end, it becomes too hard to eat, so the owls never get to eat it and the long wait goes in vain. This metaphorical expression explains a situation that does not yield an expected result. In Tangkhul culture, in stark contrast to Western convention, owls are associated with foolishness and an unwise person is called an owl.

(85) *Nāyong shimsak zurli ngathānna* (Angkang)

lit. Monkeys' house gets scattered in monsoon

(86) *Nāyong khamā kaphar (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

⁶¹ needlewood (*L. Schima wallichii*), see Appendix III.

lit. (like) monkey poking at wounds

(87) *Naoyong nnishoi kasing (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) monkeys touching birdlime

(85) is related to a fable and also found in the following truncated form: *nāyong shimsak* lit. ‘Monkey’s way of building a house’. In the fable, the monkeys decide to build a house on rainy days but soon forget to finish construction when the rain stops. It is cited to those who are not prepared to prevent future problems or see things through but abandon a project when the immediate need for it ends.

In (86), monkeys are depicted as mischievous and disorderly, similar to the sentiment expressed in the English phrase ‘monkey business.’ The proverbial phrase illustrates the incessant curiosity of monkeys. It is said that when a monkey is injured, others gather to inspect the wound. While their intention might be to assist the wounded monkey, the constant probing exacerbates the situation. This proverbial phrase is used when someone cannot remain composed in a difficult situation, repeatedly checking to ensure everything is fine but actually making things worse.

In (87) the attitude towards monkeys is similar. Birdlime is derived from the fruit of the plant called *nni*⁶². This phrase conjures an image of monkeys coming into contact with this sticky substance, resulting in a messy situation, difficult to be extricated from. If the monkeys touch the sticky substance it will cling to their fur, and they will struggle to get free. This proverbial expression is employed when someone finds themselves in a sticky situation and struggles to navigate it appropriately. Both proverbial phrases (86) and (87) are used to express not to entrust delicate matters to careless or inexperienced individuals.

(88) *chaothi makathangui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

⁶² See Appendix III

lit. having no gallbladder like deer

(89) *Chao malung thāda malungrāplāka* (Kasomwoshi)

“Coward like the heart of a deer” (Kasomwoshi)

(90) *chaona hipairaka kharatka kasewkhui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) a deer getting startled by its own fart

The proverbial comparison ‘having no gallbladder like deer’ is employed to mock individuals who repeatedly engage in actions or speech that irritate others. This expression is rooted in the belief that deer, lacking a gallbladder, exhibit erratic movements and a tendency to circle their habitat, thereby making themselves vulnerable to hunters. It seems that the Phalee or the Tangkhul in general think that the presence or absence of a gallbladder influences certain behavioural traits in animals. When someone consistently repeats mistakes without learning from previous experiences, they are admonished by being likened to a deer without a gallbladder. This serves as a social critique, warning against careless and repeated mistakes. Moreover, within the Tangkhul community, the deer’s timid and nervous demeanour is associated with the absence of a gallbladder, symbolising cowardice. Kasomwoshi explains (89) by saying that the deer’s quick and vigilant nature is perceived as an indication of lack of courage. Occasionally, the shortened version *āthi makazang* (having no gallbladder) is used to describe a person who acts thoughtlessly and carelessly.

Another proverbial expression that further emphasises the timidity of deer is the proverbial phrase “like a deer getting startled by its own fart.” This expression is used to ridicule someone who gets frightened or nervous easily. The use of hyperbolic and somewhat humorous imagery intensifies the insult, rendering it both a source of laughter and a heightened critique.

From the proverbs already collected and available in some printed collections, a striking fact that may be observed is that they are drawn conspicuously from human interaction and co-

existence with animals. The frequent use of animals is an indicator of the Tangkhul people's profound engagement with, and acute observation of, the flora and fauna of the wooded environment in which they reside. Apart from the domesticated animals like dogs, cats, chickens, cows, buffaloes and pigs, other wild animals like monkeys, bears, tigers, birds and some insects also appear in Tangkhul proverbs. (Some of the animals and their symbolisms are discussed in other sections). It is interesting to note that animal proverbs or proverbial phrases are based upon fables and folk beliefs to a greater degree than proverbs not involving animals. We can see that animal imagery or allusions are found more commonly in proverbial phrases rather than proverbs. Analysing all the proverbs related to animals here is impossible, due to their sheer abundance. Some proverbs that use the imagery of animals or animal metaphors are also discussed in other sub-sections. As mentioned elsewhere, the thematic divisions made here cannot be mutually exclusive: they have been artificially imposed based upon the weightage of their pragmatic charge for the sake of order and systematic discussion, but each proverb is not (and cannot be) restricted to a single theme.

To Sing or not to Speak: The Use of Language in Tangkhul Proverbs

This section focuses on the analysis of proverbs related to speech, aiming to enhance the comprehension of indigenous views on the conception and evaluation of language use. As a form of speech, proverbs offer valuable insights into the community's perception of communication. "Proverbs like metaphors are a part of everyday language and tightly bound with culture" (Granbom-Harranen 49) but they also comment on everyday language. Exploring speech-related proverbs contributes to a deeper understanding of how language is conceptualised and assessed within the community.

J. L. Fisher and Teigo Yoshida (1968) proposed a hypothesis suggesting that demographic characteristics impact attitudes towards speech. Looking at Japanese societal perceptions regarding speech, they argue that the attitudes observed reflect the dynamics of densely populated and closely-knit local communities in which strict control over various forms of open aggression is considered vital for communal survival. Similarly, William K. McNeil (1971) and Frank de Caro (1987) delved into the nature of speech through the analysis of Indian and American proverbs. de Caro contested Fisher and Yoshida's hypothesis, suggesting that attitudes towards speech in the American context seem to be more closely associated with cultural norms and ideologies rather than demographic factors.

Additionally, some proverbs serve purposes beyond didacticism and pedagogy. Arewa and Dundes assert that “[l]ike other forms of folklore, proverbs may serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication” (70). They function as tools for persuasion, convincing others, demeaning someone, or seeking personal gains. In this context, proverbs become strategic communication devices. The speaker can use them confidently, knowing both the speaker and the listener share a common understanding, recognising that the proverbs are not the speaker's personal expressions, but rather impersonal statements rooted in societal wisdom. As Raymond puts it, “[t]o avoid openly criticising a given authority or cultural pattern, folk take recourse to proverbial expressions which voice *personal* tensions in a tone of *generalized* consent. Thus, personal involvement is linked with public opinion” (“Tensions” 301). The Tangkhuls employ proverbs as part of their communication strategy, similar to any other linguistic tool. Obeng states that the “proverb “softens” the force of the impending face threatening act (FTA), lest it be misconstrued as a verbal assault or an imposition on the advisee” (521). So, proverbs are strategically used to save face for both the speaker and the listeners. When a proper proverb is

chosen for a particular situation appropriately, it becomes an effective strategy of communication. Proper choice of proverb reduces tension and awkwardness in a conversation and creates an inclusive environment. The collected proverbs are analysed to show how the cumulative exhortations regarding speaking reflect cultural attitudes toward the role of speech in Tangkhul society.

Historically, the Tangkhul community utilised songs as a significant means of communication. These songs were crafted for various occasions and seasons, serving as expressions of their feelings, emotions, and admiration for people, nature, and their surroundings. Lovers expressed their love for each other with songs. Old people incorporate folksongs when narrating folktales or imparting cultural knowledge. In folktales, characters frequently communicate through songs. All of Tangkhul history, culture, beliefs, stories, laws, legends and customs are passed on orally, especially in the form of songs. Consequently, folk songs are a primary source of information about the Tangkhul culture and its people. Many folk songs are succinct, which facilitates their memorability and seamless integration into everyday conversations. Some proverbs encapsulate how the Tangkhuls consider the essence of songs and words.

(91) *Tuihi lāna, lāhi tuina (Kasomwoshi)*

lit. Word is song, song is word

(92) *Khi lona kup, khitewna kup? (Collected, Phalee)*

lit. What song ends, what word ends?

The proverb clearly paraphrases the perceived relation between song and word. It can be understood that the Tangkhuls take a song as equal in impact and significance to the spoken word. Kasomwoshi observes that it is a living documentary. The mirror image structure and the balanced

parallel construction of the two clauses further cement the equivalence. Moreover, songs are seen as strong evidence as they are composed as records of every important event. Therefore, it is said that when there were disputes regarding historical facts or other issues, songs were admissible as evidence.

The rhetorical proverb (92) interrogates the possibility of words and songs being completely exhausted. This highlights the dynamic and inexhaustible nature of both word and song. The proverb suggests that just as words cannot be quantitatively or figuratively depleted through continuous usage, songs too remain inexhaustible. There are songs to commemorate every occasion, just as there are words to comment on those occasions. The parallel structure of the clauses again appeals to the listeners' sense of symmetry and harmony, with repetition reinforcing the meaning and enhancing the rhetorical impact of the expression.

In agreement with Fisher and Yoshida's hypothesis (1868), Ng and Basu also attribute that the circumspection in speech in Phalee proverb could stem from this localised density of population (53). As a collective society, people pay great attention to what they say to maintain harmony and to promote unity as there was constant fear of enemy raids in the past. There are several proverbial phrases and proverbs that encourage speaking politely and cautiously. Speaking politely and eloquently, that is *chānhān lohān khayē* 'lit. having proper communicative comportment' is considered a sign of good breeding (Ng and Basu 58).

Individuals who speak politely and respectfully are often characterised by traditional figurative expressions, such as *Āwui chānhān lāāhānva tarā khanim thai*, which can be loosely translated as 'His speech is like cool water', and *Āwui ākhonva harvākhon kapeithai*, translated as 'His voice is like the beautiful voice of a rooster.' Polite speech is likened to nurturing and life-supporting earth. The metaphor of a rooster's crowing sound is used to highlight the individual's

wisdom, thorough thinking, and ability to express thoughts with precision and insight. Using such familiar similes, the speakers can describe a person's pleasant and polite speech and soothing effect.

Similarly, crude speakers are often compared with the voice of frogs and crows and the sound of the wren, especially the typical cry that indicates a bad omen. Those who speak harshly are also compared with the sting of nettles *Āwui chānhānva lenghuina kapharikthai*, translated as 'His words are like the sting of nettles.' A person who seems to speak softly and politely but has a standoffish demeanour is compared to a caterpillar, *shemnerui theirakrei* (Phalee, collected) 'lit. just like a caterpillar'. A caterpillar looks harmless, but it destroys plants, fruits and various crops and at the same time its sting is painful. Thus, a person who looks harmless hides his pretence, deceit, and deception in his soft-spoken and seemingly harmless look.

(93) *Phāra maphāmara ākhon eina thei* (John)

lit. One's character can be known from one's voice

ee. "The bird is known by its note, the man by his words" (MK)

According to this proverb, an individual's speech reflects their inner disposition, suggesting that a person's character can be discerned from their language usage and tone. Thus, young children are instructed from an early age to speak politely and respectfully. As in (51) discussed above, proper speech is considered to be of utmost importance for cohesion of the social fabric, since the knowledge of the true nature of every individual leads to improved communal dynamics. Additionally, (51) equates proper laying of the hearth with a proper education. The knowledge of branches and their properties, the technical skill and logic of laying a proper fire and the instilling of the value of upright and proper speech merge seamlessly into an organic view of education.

Communication helps in forming and maintaining social bonds with family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers. Here are a few examples of proverbs expressing how one's speech influences the relationship with strangers and family members.

(94) *Kharam shimzunli chānhān lāāhān mathā akha thingnāhan hangmilala shaiphai, chānhān maung akha sā hangmilala mashaiphā mana* (John)

para. If the host is friendly, even leafy vegetables taste delicious; if the host is unfriendly, even meat tastes bad

(95) *Shimna ngashi eina fakhama, shimpānna tui eina fakhama* (John)

lit. House is roofed with thatch; family is roofed with words

Tangkhus love meat and often consider the regular consumption of meat to be a symbol of wealth. People, indeed, are what they eat. It is a customary practice to cook the best food (especially meat) for guests to show hospitality and to make them feel welcome. The truism shows that the friendly words of the host are considered more important than what sort of food he offers to the guest. Just as a handsome face without courtship skills cannot garner the girl in (68), (94) indicates that the material aspect of hospitality is less important than the goodwill of the host. Inner reality wins every time over appearance, and language seems to act as a lens through which inner reality may be accessed.

Elaborating upon this philosophy, (95) privileges careful and considerate speech as the bond and shelter of families. It is unwise to speak negatively about one's own family. Within the family unit, each individual is expected to communicate with care, as disrespectful and insulting words can fracture familial bonds. If family members speak ill of or rudely to one another without regard for hurt feelings, and without mutual respect, the family risks self-destruction through their own words. It is advised to refrain from discussing family issues publicly. The English proverb

“Don’t wash dirty linen in public” aptly applies here. In Tangkhul tradition, houses are typically roofed with thatch, except for those of the wealthy. Kind words are metaphorically likened to a thatched roof, symbolising protection and ensuring the family’s safety and happiness.

As mentioned earlier, people’s speech etiquette is associated with one’s upbringing. Not only in the Tangkhul context, studies show that people of different classes in other cultures also exhibit differences in their language use (Macaulay 1976). Speaking politely and softly is seen as a sign of humility and a characteristic of those who hold high social prestige in this Phalee proverb:

(31) *Khi yangnaona saho rākshi, khi phuirina nru?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What *yangnao* speaks rudely, what python bites?

This proverb is discussed in Chapter One, albeit in a different context. In a village, a *yangnao* is a respected figure, distinguished by wealth or social standing, and is expected to exhibit dignified behaviour characterised by politeness and kindness towards all individuals. Similarly, in Phalee popular belief, a python is regarded as possessing a good nature and, therefore, is believed to never bite humans. The parallel structure of this rhetorical proverb underscores societal expectations regarding the conduct of a dignified person. The humble and unassuming characteristics of a python are metaphorically mapped onto a human being. This proverb is often employed sarcastically to reprimand someone, suggesting that their actions or behaviour are undignified.

(96) *Khi miroyungna mpār, khi tewna mpar?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What fatwood decays, what word decays?

Once a word is uttered it is difficult to retrieve. Therefore, Tangkhul proverbs often advise the listener to be careful with what one says because improper verbalisation may lead to severe consequences or put the interactants in awkward positions. The Phalee proverb compares the spoken word with the fatwood. Fatwood cannot be destroyed easily by weathering. Its durability

is compared in this proverb with the power of spoken words that have the strength to stick long in people's memories. This proverb can be cited to reproach a person when they find themselves in a tight spot because of speaking unthinkingly earlier. In the next proverb, a person who does not stay true to one's word is compared to a dog that eats its own vomit.

(97) *Faṇa maloshokhailaka zālui* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Dog throws up and eats it again

ee. "Dog returns to its vomit" (MK)

This proverb is cited when someone tries to deny what one has said earlier. His repulsive behaviour is compared to a dog that returns and eats its puke (dogs do not have a good time of it in Tangkhul proverbs, as noted above). Unlike the dog eating up its sick, words once spoken cannot be retrieved, and trying to do so is as disgusting as the dog's act. Words should not be spoken carelessly without consideration because words once spoken may be regretted but not retracted without loss of dignity. Therefore, it is counselled to speak after proper consideration. Sometimes, keeping words unsaid is considered a treasure.

(98) *Thumkhai tuihi wuklungwui lanna* (John)

lit. Keeping secret is the treasure of heart

This proverb encourages silence instead of speech. Spoken words are not error-free; they may contain information that can hurt others intentionally or unintentionally. So, it is better to keep it to oneself rather than say it and regret it later. The importance of confidentiality, trustworthiness, and respect for others' privacy is stressed through this formulation. It highlights the emotional and social value of being able to keep secrets, portraying it as a precious quality that enriches relationships and personal integrity.

(99) *Mashun tuirun, harra ngaron* (Arokianathan)

“Speaking truth is stretching one’s hand with an egg” (Arokianathan)

lit. Speaking truth, sharing an egg

Arokianathan has documented a proverb that appears to be unique, as it is not present in any other known collections. He interprets the proverb to mean that speaking the truth is both good and easy. However, this interpretation seems questionable, potentially due to an erroneous translation or misinterpretation. While an egg is not expensive, it is highly nutritious, which could imply that speaking the truth is not costly but can be beneficial for those who receive it. Therefore, the proverb might be seen to convey that although truth-telling is inherently risky due to its fragility, it is also valuable and advantageous, akin to the modest yet nutritious egg. However, speaking the truth may also be read as handling something fragile, specifically an egg. Passing an egg from one person to another entails significant risk, as there is always the possibility that someone might inadvertently drop and break it. This metaphor suggests that entrusting a truth is akin to passing around an egg: it is fraught with potential danger. Just as an egg is fragile and unsuitable for careless handling, so too is a word when it is passed from one individual to another without caution.

(100) *Matuingainā kachi hili khayona shurzatta* (John)

lit. Fault follows much talk

ee. “Talk much, err much” (Penguin)

This shows that it is inevitable to avoid errors or faults if one speaks more than necessary. There is a danger that the speaker will inadvertently reveal things about himself that he would do better to keep quiet. Therefore, garrulity is to be avoided. Another proverb talks about speaking and being silent at the right moment.

(101) *Matuinā akha kakapik shokka, kasaikha pamakha mangkhama tai* (John)

lit. Much talk leads to lying; saying nothing is foolishness

On the one hand, unrestrained speech is seen as dangerous and can bring an undesirable result, a lie. On the other hand, if one does not speak when the time demands, the person is considered a fool. In this proverb, volubility in speech is seen as self-destruction. However, it is advised to speak according to the situation.

While the mouth is almost absent in Tangkhul proverbial expressions, the tongue is a recurrent motif. In Tangkhul culture, the tongue is valued for its persuasive power and ability to influence others, but it is also recognised for its potential to deceive and cause harm. These perspectives are encapsulated in the proverbs below which reflect the community's complex attitudes towards communication and interpersonal relationships.

(102) *Lenthui male mithikhana* (Kasomwoshi)

“As witty as Lenthui's venomous tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Lenthui's tongue is deadly

(103) *mazui male (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

“like musical string of mazui (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) the tongue of *mazui*

(104) *Sāham male sui kazā (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) pangolin traps food with its tongue

(105) *Male chaoli suilala ungra* (Kasomwoshi)

“A deceitful tongue could entice a wild deer” (Kasomowoshi)

ee. “A soft tongue may break down solid bone” (MK)

In Tangkhul folklore, Lenthui is renowned as a notorious trickster and adventurer figure. According to a folktale, he once packed the head of a deceased man and wrapped it in cloth along

with hornets. Upon arriving at a village, he claimed to possess a lucky charm for sale. As villagers gathered around him, he unpacked the hornets, causing them to flee in panic and impale themselves on spears he had strategically placed as snares, fatally hoisted by their own petard of greedy curiosity. Lengthui is also celebrated for his persuasive speech and reputation for engaging in amorous relationships with many widows, in addition to other infamous deeds. Consequently, the term *Lengthui male* (Lengthui's tongue) is used synonymously to refer to individuals who earn a livelihood through the glibness of their tongue.

The *mazui* is an oral stringed musical instrument traditionally played by women. It has a thin and extremely sensitive string, capable of producing a tune with even a slight touch. Consequently, a person who cannot keep a secret but quickly spreads news is colloquially referred to as having *mazui male*, implying that they have a sensitive tongue like the string of a *mazui*.

In another proverbial phrase (104), a person who speaks softly and sweetly to deceive someone for personal gain is likened to a pangolin extending its sticky tongue to attract ants and termites. Similar to the pangolin's motionless and seemingly harmless tongue, the individual speaks humbly and persuasively to gain people's trust. Once the target's guard is lowered, however, the person attacks, much like the pangolin.

As discussed in other proverbs, the appendix-less deer is symbolically associated with people who are timid and easily startled. However, in (105), an individual's persuasive ability is metaphorically described as a tongue capable of convincing even a deer to approach. This hyperbole drives home the message that the person mentioned is a dangerous sweet talker and that one must be careful with his flattering words.

The tongue is seen as a powerful instrument of persuasion. It is praised for its ability to communicate convincingly, as seen in the character of Lengthui, who is known for his honeyed

tongue and ability to deceive others. The tongue is thus seen as a potentially dangerous and deceptive organ which can be employed to manipulate others.

(106) *Maleakha male ngapaowa* (Kasomwoshi)

“Telling lie casts slurred tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

para. If you use your tongue deceitfully, you’ll have a slurry tongue

This proverb is frequently employed to educate children on the importance of honesty. Children are likely to interpret this proverb literally, which instils a sense of fear and thereby discourages them from engaging in dishonest behaviour. The proverb uses a pun, and this creates a humorous or rhetorical effect. The term tongue is used twice but with different implications. The first “tongue” is a metonymy which figuratively means to tell lies or speak deceitfully. The second “tongue” refers to the actual physical organ and suggests that speaking deceitfully will lead to unclear or compromised speech. The proverb serves as a moral warning about the consequences of lying, such as being caught or having one’s credibility damaged, metaphorically resulting in “slurry” or unclear speech.

Several proverbs counsel against speaking in a similar vein, again emphasising consequences:

(107) (i) *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina mituili thi* (Angkang)

lit. Animals are killed by their spoor; men are killed by their words

(ii) *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina maleli thi* (Kasomwoshi)

“Animals die from their foot print, men by their tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

ee. “Birds are entangled by their feet, and men by their tongues” (Penguin)

In Kasomsoshi’s variant, the tongue is compared to an animal’s spoor. Speaking is seen as something that can bring catastrophe upon oneself. In this proverb, the animal’s tracks are

compared with words spoken by someone that then become a source of their own downfall. The animals cannot avoid leaving their spoor behind; eventually, the feet that help them walk and run may ensnare them and make them vulnerable to hunters. Similarly, what is considered a proper vehicle of self-expression can also bring disaster. This proverb is used to counsel not to speak recklessly.

People often misunderstand when someone says the truth right in their face as an act of rudeness or lack of love. Human beings love to be praised and flattered. However, as with the trickster's tongue, we are warned against sweet-talkers:

(108) *Suikaphaneptui saikora mashungser machimana* (John)

lit. All the persuasive words are not true

(109) *Khamorli shim, alungshong khā* (Kasomwoshi)

“Sweet talk with a bitter heart” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Sweet in mouth, bitter inside

ee. “A honey tongue, a heart of gall” (MK)

(108) serves as a cautionary reminder that not all sweet words are truthful. It is often cited to advise individuals who are inclined to dismiss well-meaning counsel that is unpleasant to hear. The opposite also holds true and this proverb suggests that one should approach persuasive speech with caution and critical thinking, recognising that pleasant words do not necessarily correspond to truth. It encourages a more analytical and thoughtful evaluation of others' intentions. The ability to speak convincingly does not guarantee the veracity of the statements made. Similarly, (109) also warns against the potential deceit of sweet talkers.

There are a couple of proverbs and proverbial phrases that can be used to ridicule people who boast untruthfully:

(110) *mikpeoana āwungashi shimwui maram pheikachithei (kathā)* (Pheirei)

lit. (like) the blind narrates what happens in the king's house

(111) *Paoyi rakhān shai (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a person who eats *rakhān* at Paoyi

(112) *Zaimukna machārongli kāpalaga “Meitei leiwuk theiya” chi* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Quail perches on a fern and says, “I can see the Imphal valley”

(110) illustrates a scenario where someone attempts to speak about something they know nothing of. The blind person symbolises a lack of knowledge. Those who speak as though they know more than they actually do, without restraint, are often ridiculed with such proverbs. This particular proverb highlights the absurdity and futility of trying to provide an account of events one cannot comprehend. It can be used to humble someone who speaks outside of their knowledge.

According to oral tradition, an annual trade fair was historically held in Paoyi (currently known as Pe) village. This event attracted Tangkhuls from various villages who came to buy and sell handicrafts, livestock, and agricultural products. The fair was also notable for its offerings of wine, beer, and meat. It is recounted that an individual, despite having never attended the fair, boasted about their experience and the exceptional quality of the rice beer. Consequently, a person who speaks with significant exaggeration without actual experience is metaphorically likened to someone “who drinks the finest rice beer at the Paoyi fair.”

(112) is a wellerism that can be used to ridicule an ignorant know-it-all. It is cited to warn against self-aggrandisement as contemptible behaviour. The quail is a ground bird and cannot perch on tall trees. To it, a bendy and short fern seems to be a great height and it thinks that it can survey the world from its low perch. Like the quail, the ignorant boaster knows very little yet

speaks with much exaggeration, desiring the admiration of the people around him and foolishly trying to make his presence felt.

These proverbs collectively teach the importance of humility, truthfulness, and the value of genuine knowledge and experience in human interactions. They caution against arrogance, exaggeration, and speaking without understanding, promoting a more grounded and authentic approach to communication and self-expression. Some proverbial expressions are also used to warn against gossip.

(113) *Kashu miru miphungraida yātkhew* (collected, Phalee)

lit. One scratches out trouble from the hearth

(114) *Kashong meirong khamongli zokakhui (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) getting into trouble right at the threshold

(113) is cited when someone gets into unexpected problems due to gossip. Usually, people sit around the hearth and indulge in sociable talk. During such warm and cosy conversations, people exchange news. Sometimes, such small talk includes sharing rumours and secrets, which spread further and end up hurting someone. In extreme cases, we can imagine that the referent of the conversation sometimes accuses them and brings them to the village court for slander or defamation. This proverbial expression is cited to warn the listener to avoid oversharing and unnecessary gossip. It is also used to ridicule someone who faces trouble for bad-mouthing somebody.

Similarly, (114) conveys the idea that anyone can inadvertently become an offender due to unforeseen circumstances. Just as one might trip over the threshold, on the verge of entering the safety of the home, due to absent-mindedness or haste, people can unintentionally become entangled in problematic situations as though the problem were right at their doorstep. This

expression serves as a caution against careless speech and also commiserates with those who find themselves in unfortunate situations, suggesting that their involvement was not due to their own fault but rather to extreme misfortune.

Proverbs addressing verbal aggression and quarrels are relatively scarce. One particular proverb highlights the futility of verbal aggression:

(115) *Tham khangarok ngalung mavātmana* (John)

lit. There is no shortage of stones for throwing at each other

This may be cited during quarrels by one of the participants when the opponent keeps adding unnecessary or unrelated statements to their topic of discussion. It also suggests that opportunities for conflict, criticism, or aggression are always plentiful. Just as stones are readily available and can be easily picked up and thrown, harsh words, accusations, and disagreements can arise at any time.

In Tangkhul culture, age holds a significant role that is synonymous with wisdom. Regardless of whether they have grey hair, community elders are regarded as educators responsible for imparting cultural knowledge to younger generations. The absence of formal education, until recently, led older individuals to be automatic bearers of cultural wisdom. Age, symbolising the accumulation of knowledge and the wisdom to apply it, renders any older person as more experienced, well-informed, and knowledgeable. Tangkhul people value learning through lived experiences, attributing profound significance to the words of their elders. Several proverbs advise young people to heed and obey the words of their elders.

(116) *Hanna hannui shaiphamei, tuiva ārartui phāmei* (Sira)

lit. Young greens are tastier, but the wisdom of elders is superior

(117) *Kharartew nniro, kaphunghan shairo* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Heed elder's words, eat greens

This proverb employs a parallel structure, juxtaposing young vegetables with the words of elders. While young vegetables are soft, tasty, and perhaps more nutritious, the words of elders are considered sweeter than those of the young. The proverb suggests that although youths have an immediate appeal, the insights and guidance of elders are more meaningful and beneficial in the long run. In some cases, such as with vegetables, the younger ones are preferable due to their immediate appeal. However, in terms of speech, the wisdom of elders holds lasting value.

Similarly, the Phalee proverb emphasises that youth is not an advantage (implying that it is often considered to be so, especially by the young themselves). It serves as a reproach for a child disregarding the advice of an elder, emphasising that relative maturity in years, not necessarily old age, carries inherent wisdom. Metaphorically, it encourages listeners to heed the ancient wisdom of forefathers, often encapsulated in proverbs or old maxims. Such wisdom, having withstood the test of time, now stands as a cultural truism, urging individuals to value and respect the counsel of their elders. Young children are also reprimanded with proverbs like:

(118) *Hākpai huipai thikhareda khayō shiro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Respect the person who saw the animal's droppings earlier than you

(119) *Amik aho somkhareda khayō shiro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Respect the person who gets eyes and teeth before you

Based on family relations and social status, proper honorifics must be used when addressing elders. These proverbs come into play when a senior member wishes a junior to acknowledge their authority, leveraging the notion that the elder possesses more varied life experiences—both positive and negative. Consequently, the wisdom embedded in their words should be taken seriously, reinforcing the importance of respecting and heeding the counsel of older people.

In Tangkhul society, the art of eloquence holds profound significance, placing a premium on the beauty of speech akin to a song. Speakers are expected to meticulously craft their words, adhering to societal standards of verbal prowess. Caution in speech is fervently advocated to avert potential embarrassment and minimise Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) (Obeng 1996). The community believes in the potency of words to either comfort or harm individuals, emphasising the need for careful expression. There exists a superstition in Phalee that excessive discussion about someone, particularly regarding socially unacceptable behaviour, can adversely affect their well-being, leading to diminished appetite, fatigue, and eventual physical decline. Certain proverbs even suggest that spoken words possess the power to disrupt the natural environment (Ng and Basu 64).

Thus, we find that in some Tangkhul proverbs, speaking is considered essential for accomplishing tasks, thus encouraging verbal expression. While words are seen as appropriate means of self-expression and eloquence is valued, other proverbs highlight the dangers of spoken words and advocate for minimal speech. Silence is often valued more highly in communal settings. The collected corpus of proverbs reveals a prevalent theme advocating restraint in speech, with a noticeable lack of proverbs encouraging excessive speaking. This cultural emphasis on avoiding unnecessary speech indicates a keen awareness among community members of the importance of their words, aiming to prevent embarrassment and adhere to societal standards of polite and gentle expression. The tongue, as the organ of speech, is often viewed as deceitful and perilous, warranting judicious use. Some proverbs condemn self-aggrandising speech as distasteful. As with almost every proverb, moderation seems to be the supreme good in the Tangkhul moral system. Pleasant, song-like speech backed by goodwill is valuable, but so is silence, and the utmost value lies in the ability to judge which circumstances require prudent and pleasing language.

Chicken and Egg: The *Khararchān* Path to Proverbiality

In Tangkhul culture, no distinct categorisation exists among fables, folktales, myths, legends, and fairy tales—they collectively fall under the umbrella term *khararchān*. Combining *kharar* ‘old’, with *chān* ‘word’, the term could be likened to “folktale.” Similarly, the term *chāncham* is composed of two words: *chan* ‘word’ and *kacham* ‘old’, giving both terms *chāncham* and *khararchān* a sense of belonging to the past. Although they convey a similar meaning, native speakers will not perceive them the same way or consider them synonymous. The word *kacham* carries overtones of being worn out due to constant use, like a cliché, that the word *kharar* does not possess. Therefore, perhaps it can be argued that the Tangkhul view *chāncham* as a kind of cliché. It appears that the folk oral genres are divided into two categories in the folk understanding. Longer, non-poetic narratives are typically referred to as *khararchān*, while shorter, poetic fixed expressions are commonly termed *chāncham*. This categorisation reflects a nuanced approach to oral genres, where length and poetic form determine classification. It is already mentioned in the introduction chapter that *chāncham* is an umbrella term for fixed expressions. However, in this thesis, the term *chāncham* is used exclusively to refer to proverbs. Taylor says that the “relation of the fable and the proverb is particularly close, and not all nations have regarded them as distinct forms; the Greek *aivos* means both ‘fable’ and ‘proverb’. So also, the Aramaic-Syriac *mathla* and the related Hebrew *maschal* as well as the Old English gied” (*Proverb* 27).

People all over the world share stories for both entertainment and educational purposes. Listeners, particularly children, derive enjoyment from these tales while imbibing various moral lessons endorsed by the community. The Tangkhuls are no exception. Folktales, often grounded in themes from everyday human experiences, weave traditional beliefs and practices into their narratives. Many of these stories convey moral values, utilising fictional characters or personified

objects to exemplify virtues and vices, acting as a means for society to inculcate ethical standards. Consequently, both adults and children find in these tales not only sources of hope and dreams but also avenues to address and alleviate fears and anxieties.

Pack Carnes pointed out that the proverb and the fable are closely related “in function, in mechanism, and even in shape in some extreme cases” (468). Much like proverbs, *khararchān* serve as a vessel for imparting educational values facilitating discussions on societal concerns, taboos, and various social issues. The didactic nature of *khararchān* aligns with its capacity to address matters of importance. Considering that children may find highly metaphorical and symbolic language challenging due to a lack of sufficient social experience or knowledge, using a prose narrative style in *khararchān* becomes more effective than the more figurative poetic style found in proverbs. Proverbs can be integrated into stories to bridge this gap, creating a connection that aids comprehension. Proverbs may be more suited for an adult audience, while *khararchān*, with its narrative simplicity, becomes an apt medium for conveying lessons to children at a level more aligned with their understanding.

It is generally accepted in paremiography that it is difficult to determine which of the two genres, that is, fable and proverbs, generates the other. There are cases in which the fables or folktales are built up from proverbs and in others a proverb encapsulates the moral of the fable. In examining the relationship between proverbs and their narrative origins, it becomes apparent that the precedence of one over the other is often difficult to discern. Taylor addresses this complexity, stating that “[w]henver the scanty narrative content of the fable is summed up in the proverb, we are justified in suspecting that the fable is secondary in origin” (31). He goes on to say that when a fable can be definitively identified as the source of a proverb, the proverb itself functions as an allusion, comprehensible only to those acquainted with the originating story, rather than as a mere

summary. Mieder critiques Taylor for overlooking the possibility that a fable might have been specifically devised to elucidate a proverbial expression that, for subsequent generations, would be nonsensical without an accompanying explanatory narrative (*Behold the Proverbs* 321). Also, in “The Dog in the Manger”: The Rise and Decline in Popularity of a Proverb and a Fable” he traces the origins of the “The dog in the manger” proverb, showing how it emerged and evolved over time. He examines its earliest uses and how it became associated with a specific fable. He posits that the proverb “The dog in the manger” originated independently and subsequently inspired the creation of a fable to explain its meaning. This relationship highlights the proverb’s role as a concise moral statement and the fable’s function as an illustrative tool that enhances understanding and retention of the proverb’s lesson.

Carnes, cited above, explores the intertextual relationship between fables and proverbs, noting that these two genres frequently coexist in various forms such as songs, folktales, animal epics, and a broad array of oral and iconographic modes. He observes that while fables and proverbs share many similar functions, they do not occupy the same niche within the narrative ecology. Fables are more commonly situated within literary environments, whereas proverbs are predominantly found in oral traditions. He states that “[t]he proverb seems to have taken over in many ways the didactic function of the fable in conversational intercourse. The narrative fable takes too long to make its point in the normal flow of conversational ecology. The proverb is shorter, quicker, and directly to the point” (483). In most Western contexts, Carnes argues, proverbs serve as conclusive statements rather than titles, often appearing as an epimythium at the conclusion of a story. They function to summarise and reinforce the didactic content of the fable. He distinguishes between the two forms by characterising the fable as a narrative form and the proverb as a non-narrative form.

Many English proverbs share close connections with fables, particularly the Aesopic. However, the origin of one genre from the other often remains ambiguous. For instance, proverbs such as “Necessity is the mother of invention” from “The Crow and the Water Jug,” “Slow and steady wins the race” from “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “Beauty is not as important as usefulness” from “The Stag and the Pool,” and “Unity is strength” from “The Trees and the Ants” are used as epimythia in Aesop’s fables, among many others. These examples illustrate how both fables and proverbs are commonly employed for their moral lessons. Similar principles apply within Tangkhul culture, where both fables and proverbs serve didactic functions. Some Tangkhul proverbs and proverbial phrases also have a direct connection with *khararchān*, while others appear related but do not overtly reflect the moral lessons of the story. Unlike in Western contexts, Tangkhul proverbs derived from *khararchān* are not always the conclusive statement of the narrative. Additionally, many titles of folktales and fables are used as proverbs and proverbial phrases. These Tangkhul proverbs and proverbial phrases are metaphorical and the connection can be immediately made by the culturally literate listener. A few of these proverbs and proverbial phrases that are connected to fables and folktales have been discussed in the previous thematic categories and are not reproduced here. They were placed in other categories since their primary usage is not necessarily dependent upon the fable and they lean towards invoking those themes more than the fables. This section deals with those sayings that primarily allude to folktales:

(120) *Ningrinao mikhhot (theka)* (Phalee, collected)

lit. (like) the way Ningrinao borrowing fire

This proverbial phrase originates from the fable “Wukhari and Ningrinao.” Wukhari is a grotesque stock character who is easily deceived, akin to the foolish ogre archetype found in the Arne-Thompson folktale type “Tales of the Stupid Ogre” (1000–1199). Ningrinao, whose name is

derived from *ningri*, a small squirrel-like animal, with *nao* as a diminutive marker (literally meaning ‘baby’), is frequently depicted as a trickster in folktales, but of a different type than Lengthui. In the fable, Ningrinao either lacks the skill to make fire or deliberately seeks to annoy his neighbour Wukhari by repeatedly borrowing fire. Each time, Ningrinao returns with dubious excuses, blaming the extinguished fire on the wind or the rain.

This proverbial phrase is used to describe someone who frequently borrows or seeks help from others. Here is an actual incident that a mother used this expression to reprimand her son for his frequent request for money, highlighting her frustration and suspicion about his behaviour. Responding to his request for another loan she retorted, “I gave you money just a couple of days ago; why do you frequently ask money these days? It’s just like *Ningrinao mikhot*.” By using this proverbial phrase, the mother succinctly conveys a complex message of disapproval, moral guidance, and cultural teaching without the need for lengthy explanations.

(121) *chikren eina kafa kongkān khangathei (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. like *chikren* and *kafa* compete crossing a river

In the related fable, the bird Chikren⁶³ ‘wren’ suggests to his friend Kafa ‘hoary bamboo rat’ that they should compete in crossing a river. Unaware of his friend’s scheming suggestion, Kafa agrees to do so. Kafa, as a land animal, does not know how to cross the river, so he walks up and down the riverbank, trying to cross the river. While his friend is busy looking for a way to cross the river, Chikren flies across it. The moral of the fable is not to take advantage of your friend’s weakness and also not to make friendship with the wrong people. This proverb can be used to express the hurt of betrayal. It is also used to warn people who are not tactful in their relationships. The fable

⁶³ In this section, the names of animals are treated as proper nouns, each beginning with a capital letter.

underscores the ethical principle that taking advantage of another's weaknesses is morally wrong. Chikren's behaviour is presented as unethical, teaching the value of empathy and fairness in relationships. The story warns against forming friendships with deceitful or manipulative individuals. Kafa's experience serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of discerning and trustworthy friendships. The fable of Chikren and Kafa and its associated proverb offer valuable moral lessons about the ethics of relationships and the importance of trust. (121) discussed above, delivers a similar message about discerning and true friendship and is also based upon the fable of the rooster and civet cat. In a variant telling, the outcome is more dire: the civet flatters his 'friend' and persuades him to stand before him and sing. Taken in by the praise the rooster stretches out his neck and crows, whereupon the civet attacks the neck and kills him.

(122) *hurshung phākhok (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) futile search for *hursung*

(123) *Chālingthi kaphā (thāhaira)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (It's like) searching for an ant's appendix

In this folktale, the chief of a village called Hurshung mistreated his subjects and abused his power. He bedded every young woman in the village before they got married. At last, the villagers could no longer tolerate his nepotic rule and decided to leave the village. One morning, when he woke up, he found the village empty. From somewhere nearby, a bird cried, "Hurshung phākhok" 'lit. Hurshung is nowhere to be found'. It is believed that the bird that cried "Hurshung phākhok" came into existence. The folktale of the Hurshung village chief and his tyrannical behaviour encapsulates a profound cultural narrative concerning the abuse of power and its ramifications. The villagers' collective decision to abandon their home signifies a unified stand against injustice and immorality. The bird's cry, "Hurshung phākhok," serves as a symbol of the aftermath of tyranny

and the silence imposed upon the oppressed villagers. Within this context, the bird is perceived as a messenger or omen, and its cry embodies poetic justice, acting as a natural commentary on the chief's fate.

As a proverbial phrase, *hurshung phākhok* signifies total absence or disappearance. This phrase can be applied in contemporary contexts to comment on situations in which individuals or objects have disappeared because of maltreatment or neglect, functioning as a potent metaphor for absence and loss resulting from injustice. Additionally, it can be employed to describe scenarios in which an individual is unavailable when the situation or other people need them the most and it may be used to articulate this sense of betrayal and hopelessness. Kasomwoshi noted that this phrase can be employed to express the sorrow of a parent who, despite having many offspring, can find nobody to care for them.

The hyperbolic expression in (123) makes the utterance absurd and therefore funny, but actually aims to articulate the hopelessness of the endeavour. Other cultures have similar sayings for impossible or futile tasks, such as “looking for a needle in a haystack” in English. These proverbial phrases serve the same purpose but might vary in their cultural connotations and humorous appeal. Although this phrase does not originate in a fable, it is related in meaning to the one that does, and it is likely that for a native speaker such as myself, these would be identified as related.

(124) *maremrāzaina rākhong kakhon makazang (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) *maremrāzai* not taking part in the construction of a well

This phrase is drawn from a Tangkhul folktale in which the bird *Maremrāzai*, who is known to be lazy, fails to participate in the communal activity of well-boring. This narrative is linked to the Tangkhul custom of digging a well, particularly the tradition of cleaning village wells during the

Chumphā festival. This annual festival, held after the harvest and before consuming the new produce, involves significant ritual practices, including the drawing of the first water by a morally upstanding woman. If a woman of questionable character were to fetch the water first, it could offend the community (T Luikham 68). As Maremrāzai does not come to help in making the well, he is exiled in disgrace and is not allowed to drink from it. It is believed that Maremrāzai goes about searching for water to this day, crying in its name. Thus, an unsociable person is simply referred to as Maremrāzai.

This proverbial phrase based upon the story is a tool for social regulation, promoting conformity and active participation. It highlights the community's stance that individual well-being is inherently dependent upon mutual support and the well-being of the collective. The Maremrāzai's story serves as a powerful metaphor for the consequences of non-participation. Its perpetual search for water symbolises the incessant struggle for acquiring basic resources and the social ostracisation faced by those who isolate themselves from supporting communal endeavours. This narrative device effectively conveys the message that social engagement is not merely a communal duty but a necessity for a fulfilled and satisfactory life. Carelessly using such a proverbial phrase could potentially become an FTA though, and harm relationships between individuals.

(125) (i) *Huirā chithang thāk, thākra chithang hui* (Sira)

lit. Early when expected to be late, late when expected to be early

(ii) *singom tantak thāda* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. like a bear's schedule

The proverbial expression (i) is perfectly understandable without a backstory. However, the phrase 'the bear's schedule' while conveying a comparable meaning, requires context and possibly

originates from a fable. It is employed to highlight situations in which an individual intentionally or unintentionally deviates from the expected time, overturning any anticipation of a pattern of behaviour and frustrating expectations. For instance, a neighbour might say she will return early from the field because she has only a few tasks left. However, if she comes back late, another neighbour might comment that her sense of time is like *shingom tantak*. This phrase can also be used to express irritation at someone who lacks punctuality.

The tale of the woman and the bear is possibly the context of these sayings. Khanot Kengoo Hugh, Ngathingkhui Jagoi, and Phayam Raleng have each collected this folktale, but their versions differ significantly in narrative style and content. In this tale, a woman unknowingly marries a bear who is disguised as a handsome man from another village. Discovering his identity after marriage, she finds herself imprisoned on a large rock with no escape. During her captivity, she observes a peculiar behaviour pattern: whenever he claims he will return home early, he arrives late, and vice versa. Utilising this insight, she finally devises a plan to escape from her bear husband. The proverbial expression (describes the bear's behaviour. It conveys a situation where one anticipates completing a task or work early but faces the opposite outcome. The expression captures the irony of expectations not aligning with reality. This fantastical story offers insights into the customs and historical circumstances surrounding women in the community. In Jagoi's version, in search of a suitable match for his daughter, the father organises a competition to select the most muscular man. The father promises that whoever can kill the pig in one blow will be given his daughter. Unaware of the bear's true identity, the parents entrust their daughter to him based on his apparent strength, handsomeness, and the perception of being from a prosperous family. However, the naivety and vanity of the father result in a decision that adversely affects his daughter's life. The

narrative unveils the societal dynamics of older times, showcasing women's limited agency in choosing life partners, and the subjection to paternal/familial decisions.

In Raleng's version, the girl elopes with the bear without her parent's consent. Thus, this tale can be used to warn against the danger of eloping without the parental consent by inducing fear. In Kengoo's version, the parents give consent but only the man came to take her to his house without his family members or friends, which could be a warning sign for the parent and the girl. However, the parents give their daughter's hand because he is handsome and doubts that she would not be able to find a more handsome and suitable man for her.

The tale further introduces a supernatural element with the bear's transformation into a man, which reflects the community's belief in lycanthropy. The notion of certain families having the ability to change into humanoid animals, referred to as *khangayei* 'shapeshifters,' persists even today. People speak guardedly when discussing them, as they are supposed to possess acute hearing, and speaking ill or disrespectfully is thought to incur their wrath. Numerous folk narratives recount unfortunate incidents related to these beings. This tale serves as a form of wish fulfilment, offering hope that individuals might have a chance to transform their lives, rectify their mistakes, and find freedom as the girl does.

(126) *sānglina zeisānao tungli kala seipai tungli ngalong kazā (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) *sāngli*⁶⁴ leaping on the tip of a spear and a pile of cow dung for sustenance

This phrase also originates from a fable. In the story, Sāngli, a small bird, uses its wit to deceive Tiger. Due to its small size and light weight, Sāngli can perch on almost anything. Sāngli convinces Tiger that he can get whatever he wants by sitting on a heap of cow dung. Following this advice, Tiger attempts to do the same but slips and falls, injuring himself. Infuriated by the realisation that

⁶⁴ Orthographic variants *sāngri* or *sāngreinganamshe*

Sāngli has tricked him, Tiger seeks revenge. On another occasion, Tiger observes Sāngli hopping around and perching on the tip of a spear. Once again, Sāngli deceives Tiger, leading to Tiger's demise as he attempts to sit on top of the spear, trying to emulate the bird. Raleng has recorded a more elaborated version of this tale (14–20). Sāngli represents intelligence and adaptability. Its ability to perch on almost anything symbolises versatility and resourcefulness. Tiger, on the other hand, symbolises foolishness and the danger of not learning from past mistakes. His repeated failures reflect a lack of self-awareness. The fable reinforces the cultural value placed upon intelligence and flexibility. Many cultures have stories in which the underdog triumphs through wit against a more powerful antagonist, Tom and Jerry being one of the best known in modern times, which says something about the appreciation humans have for mental acuity. The fable highlights the theme of wit over brute force. Sāngli, despite being small and seemingly powerless, uses its intelligence to outwit the larger and presumably stronger Tiger. This underscores the idea that intelligence and cleverness can often triumph over physical strength. However, in the proverbial phrase Sāngli is not seen in a positive light and therefore, this proverbial expression is used in a derisive tone to mock at individuals who avoid physical labour and instead rely on their cunning to make a living.

(127) *naoyong khana tharam pheiwokhui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) the friendship of a monkey and an otter

(128) *kharei eina kotkalā yarthat masākapai (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

“(like) squirrel and prawn don't get along” (Kasomwoshi)

In the fable, Monkey and Otter were good friends. One day, Otter invited his friend Monkey for a meal. He cooked fish for his friend, and Monkey ate heartily. In return, he also asked his friend Otter for a meal. He cooked pumpkin for Otter. But Otter could not eat the food and he was very

disappointed with his friend. In some versions, the story continues. The Otter threw the pumpkin dish at the wall in anger; Monkey licked it and made a hole. This fable is used to talk about an inconsiderate friendship. Monkey, as a friend of Otter, should have known that Otter does not eat pumpkin but still does not put an effort to provide a decent meal. The licking of the wall shows that Monkey really loves pumpkins; therefore, from Monkey's perspective, he cooked the best food for his friend, but his kind gesture was not cheerfully accepted by the friend nor the listeners of the fable. The dish Monkey prepared for Otter does not convey a warm and true friendship and violates the rules of Tangkhul hospitality. Their incompatible friendship is used as a figure of speech to warn people who are friends with opportunistic or self-centred people.

Similarly, the next proverbial phrase is also used to warn against incompatible relationship. Squirrel is a land animal and prawn is an aquatic animal. So, even if they try to become friends and work together, they cannot, for their natures, like Monkey and Otter's, are totally different from each other. The proverbial phrases about the Squirrel and the Prawn, Monkey and Otter emphasise the inherent differences between land and aquatic animals. It is used metaphorically to caution against forming relationships or collaborations that are fundamentally incompatible due to differences in nature.

(129) (i) *zenvāpai khamalek (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) licking the dung of *zenvā*

(ii) *khareina zenvāpai malek kakhui (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

“Like the tiger that licks the droppings of magpie robin” (Kasomwoshi)

Phayam Raleng provides an alternative, longer version of the story “The Monkey and the Otter” (1–5). In his version, the narrative concludes with the bird *Zenvā* being captured by the tiger,

(referred to as Kacho⁶⁵ in the Phalee version). Initially, Monkey refuses to share bananas with Otter, prompting Otter to withhold fish from the monkey. One day, the two animals go fishing together in a pond. Otter warns the monkey not to laugh when it catches a large fish, but Monkey laughs, causing Otter to laugh as well. Consequently, Otter chokes on water and faints.

While Monkey attempts to help the Otter regain consciousness, Tiger appears and prepares to eat the Otter. Monkey deceives Tiger by claiming that the Otter has drowned in the water and that its body is now waterlogged. Tiger, believing the monkey, decides to wait until Otter's body dries. Monkey then sings a song, signaling to Otter to jump back into the water when it regains consciousness. When Otter awakens, it jumps into the water and escapes from Tiger.

Enraged at being tricked, Tiger starts drinking the pond's water to catch Otter. Tiger plugs its anus with leaves to prevent the water from leaking out. Observing this, Zenvā the bird repeatedly unplugs the leaves, causing the water to fall back into the pond. Frustrated, Tiger chases Zenvā and eventually captures its smallest chick. In an attempt to escape, the bird proposes that Tiger should bounce the chick in his palm, suggesting that this action would make it fatter and more delectable. The tiger, following the bird's suggestion, proceeds to bounce the bird in his palm. Subsequently, the bird defecates in his palm and flies away. Tiger then licks his palm and remarks on the pleasant taste, pondering how much more delicious the bird's flesh would have been. This proverbial phrase serves as a cautionary expression and is also employed to convey disappointment at one's own foolish actions.

In a recent incident within my village, I observed the use of this proverbial phrase during a conversation between two women discussing an outbreak of poultry disease. One woman mentioned that many of her chickens had died, leaving only two hens and a rooster. The other

⁶⁵ Fool, a stock character. See Appendix III.

woman responded that she had recently bought maize and marijuana seeds for the chicken, but all her chickens had perished as well. She then remarked that, although they would have a substantial amount of chicken to eat that year, it was akin to ‘licking the dung of *zenvā*.’ The woman employs the proverbial phrase to convey her disappointment, as despite having an abundance of chicken, none of the chicken was suitable for human consumption. Similar to the tale where the tiger is only able to lick the dung of the bird, in a literal sense, she also receives only chicken droppings, which she can use as fertiliser for her vegetables.

(130) *Kafa thāda kumkha thang, kumkha ngayā* (Kasomwoshi)

“Like gopher calendar, a whole year for night, a whole year for a day” (Kasomwoshi)

This proverb originates from a folktale set in the early days of the Earth, when day and night were not yet differentiated, leading to chaos as some animals rested while others remained active. One night, an elephant accidentally killed a human baby, bringing matters to a crisis and revealing an urgent need for a solution. Consequently, the animal kingdom convened to establish uniform working and sleeping hours to prevent such misfortunes in the future. During the meeting, each animal proposed a solution. *Kafa*, known for his laziness, suggested, “Let us make one whole year bright and one whole year dark.” This impractical and illogical suggestion was immediately rejected by the other animals, and thus it became a proverb used to ridicule illogical and impractical ideas.

Subsequently, *Chikren* perched on a tall bamboo, disagreed with the *Kafa* and proposed a more practical solution: alternating one whole day of light with one whole day of darkness. The animal kingdom agreed with this proposal, and they adopted it from that day onward. According to Somi Kasomwoshi, this is why the Tangkhul people use bamboo and rely on the cry and movement of the *chikren* (wren) for divination. The folktale serves as an etiological narrative

explaining the natural phenomenon of day and night. Such stories are common in many cultures, offering explanations for natural events and embedding moral or practical lessons within the narrative. The tale provides insight into how early societies might have conceptualised and rationalised their environment. This proverb and folktale function as a didactic tool, embedding moral and practical lessons within an engaging narrative. It teaches listeners to value practicality and collective wisdom, discouraging laziness and impractical thinking

(131) *kongriksei thāda kazei mashoda kasing* (Kanrei)

lit. “holding a spear upside down like water beetles”

This proverbial phrase too has an association with a fable. Phayam Raleng called it “Kongriksei eina Khaifa Khangama” ‘lit. Water Beetle and Frog waging a Battle’ in his collection. It may also derive from the natural physical appearance of water beetles. Water beetles have a needle-like spur on their tibia and a sharp spine on their underside, which can cause injury if the beetle is not handled carefully. It seems like carrying a spear upside down. The beetle’s hidden weapons uncover the notion of concealed danger, aligning with the proverb’s warning about people who disguise their true capabilities. The proverb is tied deeply to Tangkhul culture, where holding a spear upside down is taboo (see proverb (52)). This act symbolises incompetence in warfare and effeminacy, both highly undesirable traits in a culture that values martial prowess and martial masculinity. The cultural context provided is essential in understanding the proverb’s deeper meanings and implications.

Some proverbs related to *khararchān*, like (42) *Hokna murmur sāla fana ina sāya kachi* and (76) *Khamatha sāsi chila fa onthuihaowa* have been addressed in other sections; to prevent redundancy, they are not reiterated here. As previously noted, proverbs possess multiple meanings

contingent upon the context in which they are employed. Consequently, a single proverb can be categorised under various thematic classifications.

We see from the above examples that most of the proverbs and proverbial phrases related to fables and folktales contain the protagonists' names (in most case the animal's name is used as the protagonist's name) and their unique characteristics or relationships portrayed in the tales. Most of them appear in truncated form and thus seem to be proverbial phrases rather than proverbs proper. The names and the unique characteristics of the protagonists suffice as a reminder of the story. Some characters have made such an impact that their names have become synonymous with or symbolic representations of particular virtues and vices. Carnes mentions that many fables are contractions that lead to the "moral" frame as a parodied proverbial epimythium and form a proverb, a proverbial phrase, or a famous quotation. In the case of Tangkhul, they are not used as a concluding remark at the end of the story, but most of them appear as the title of the tales. Maybe they were once used in a bona fide proverb, but due to the passage of time and the vagaries of oral transmission, resulted in truncated proverbial phrases or proverbial comparisons. Norrick claims that members of a society with cultural competency would easily understand when the "kernel of the proverb" is mentioned. It may be concluded that the "kernel of the proverb" is what remains at present in these expressions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the native seems to put more effort into the meaning of the proverbs rather than the linguistic representation. It is not clear whether *chāncham* is an offshoot of *khararchān* or vice versa. Perhaps the proverb adds a bit of moralising or ethical wisdom at the end of a *khararchān* to summarise its content or the *kharachān* an explanatory comment on the original proverb. They are complementary to each other in this sense. These Tangkhul proverbs and phrases may not encapsulate the moral lessons of the

corresponding story but still exhibit a close relationship with *khararchān*, highlighting the nuanced and interconnected nature of such cultural expressions.

The connection between proverbial expressions and *khararchān* provides a layered understanding enriched by cultural context, symbolic interpretation, and narrative illustration. It reveals how proverbs encapsulate cultural wisdom and societal values, serving both as practical warnings and moral teachings. The continued relevance of the folktales and proverbs in contemporary Tangkhul society suggests a robust cultural continuity. This adaptability ensures that cultural narratives remain pertinent, guiding social behaviour and reinforcing communal bonds.

While proverbs and proverbial phrases often convey valuable cultural wisdom, their misuse or misinterpretation can lead to undesirable outcomes. Many proverbial phrases in this section focus on the negative qualities of protagonists from folktales, such as Maremrazai, Kongriksei, Zenvā, and Singom. These characters are depicted in stories as exhibiting behaviours or traits that are seen as undesirable, cunning, or foolish. The intended listener might perceive these references as derogatory or demeaning, potentially causing offense and damaging interpersonal relationships. It is thus crucial to consider the cultural and emotional impact of these references when analysing their social function. Proverbs serve as valuable cultural artefacts, but their interpretation and use require sensitivity to avoid inadvertently causing offense or perpetuating negative stereotypes.

Chapter Four

Stringing the Beads: Aesthetics, Style and Context in Tangkhul Proverbs

Khi yangnaona saho rākshi, khi phuirina nru?

What *yangnao* speaks impolitely, what python bites?

This chapter is divided into two segments. The first section looks at the aesthetic dimensions of proverbs, exploring the artistic and expressive qualities that contribute to their overall emotional impact. The investigation encompasses various stylistic features, imagery, and symbolism situated within the cultural context. This scrutiny brings to light the creative techniques and artistic manipulation of language employed in crafting Tangkhul proverbs. The stylistic features are categorised into four sub-sections drawn from linguistics: syntactic, semantic, phonic, and lexical.

The second section endeavours to construct a framework for comprehending the utilisation of proverbs by communities as rhetorical strategies within sociocultural contexts and quotidian communicative discourse. It also aims to show how proverbs convey wisdom, cultural insights, and moral lessons in real world contexts.

Style Matters

Although I am not trained in linguistics, I have categorised the stylistic elements that the collected proverbs demonstrate into four sub-sections, drawing from principles used in the discipline as they provide a useful conceptual framework. These are syntactic, semantic, phonic, and lexical, as proposed by Silverman-Weinreich (1994). A selection of proverbs from the database have been used as representatives and closely examined to assess the effectiveness of their usage in conveying the intended meanings.

Numerous paremiologists have shown keen interest in examining features, often referred to as markers, commonly present in proverbs, as the cause of aiding in their identification (Mieder, *Proverb* 6). Chapter Two of this thesis conducts a literature review on markers or features of proverbs, such as traditionality, conciseness, fixed form, and metaphoricity, among others. In addition to these, various other stylistic features or markers enhance the aesthetic and rhetorical quality of proverbs. Arora emphasises the significance of these markers, stating that “the more markers a given saying possesses, the greater its chances of being perceived as a proverb at the initial hearing” (“Perception” 13). These markers distinguish proverbs from everyday language, imbuing them with meaning, freshness, uniqueness, and emotive intensity.

In his essay “Structural Aspects of Proverbs”, Marcas Mac Coinnigh delves into the structure of proverbs, providing a comprehensive overview of their “unique architecture” across various languages. He contends that proverbial markers signify that a particular sentence deviates from naturally occurring language, serving as a pragmatic signal that the expression holds importance in terms of its use, function, or meaning (112). From a syntactic perspective, Coinnigh categorises proverbial sentence types based on the number of clauses and sub-clauses into simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex structures. He notes that the complex, extended structure is prohibitive to proverb composition, presumably due to the difficulty of memorisation and recall in speech situations. Examining widely dispersed traditional proverb formulae and other structures, Coinnigh supports Mieder’s suggestion with examples and concurs that modern proverbs are not based solely on a small number of traditional formulaic structures. In line with Mieder’s findings on modern Anglo-American proverbs (2012), Coinnigh observes a shift where straightforward indicative formulae appear to lack many traditional proverbial markers, especially syntactic ones, possibly influenced by a written culture that requires less effort in memorisation.

Ong's exploration of how literacy has impacted information recall and increased dependence on external sources resonates with these observations (94).

Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich has also conducted an extensive study on Yiddish proverbs in "Towards a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverb". Silverman-Weinreich notes that these markers "serve as a kind of oral quotation marks, making the proverb easier to remember and to transmit for those who know it, while intimating to those who do not know it that it is a proverb, when heard for the first time" (71). The following sections of this chapter will examine the linguistic and literary elements present in Tangkhul proverbs, seeking to understand how these features enhance aesthetic appeal, memorability, engagement, and emotive force. This section draws heavily from the studies of Mac Coinnigh, Shirley Arora and Beatrice Silverman Weinreich cited above.

Syntax and Rhetorical Impact

Many proverbs intentionally deviate from conventional grammatical rules for rhetorical effect. While some scholars may hesitate to categorise proverbs as sentences due to their structural nonconformity, scholars such as Taylor, Mieder, Norrick, and Arora consider proverbs as sentences because they convey complete sense independently, without relying on additional grammatical units. Norrick introduces the concept of a "potential (initial) free conversation turn," asserting that a proverb comprises one and only one of them, with a preferably figurative meaning (*How Proverbs* 68), and as Dundes notes, they can be as brief as two words (see Chapter Two).

While the average length of Tangkhul proverbs has not been statistically computed, the shortest proverb in my primary texts consists of two words:

(132) *Mayonlu, mangonlu* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Protect it; devour it

(133) *Chihānla ngamānna* (Sira)

lit. Expectantly disappointing

(132) captures the sentiment of disappointment when someone entrusted with something ends up causing its destruction. It employs antithesis by juxtaposing two imperative statements with opposing meanings (“protect it” and “devour it”). This intensifies the paradoxical nature of the situation—someone entrusted with protecting something ends up consuming or destroying it, contrary to expectations. The use of antithesis and rhyme gives the proverb a certain charm that makes it more memorable and impactful. If these sentences are uttered separately, their individual meanings would change, losing their proverbial essence. However, when combined, they condense the message, eliminating excess words while infusing poetic charm. An expanded rendition of this proverb might be, “You are told to look after it, but it seems like you are told to eat it”. While this expanded rendition clarifies the meaning, it loses the proverb’s suggestive power. It becomes more descriptive and less impactful.

The next proverb can be employed when confronted with either positive or negative outcomes contrary to expectations. Oxymoron is skillfully employed within the proverb to accentuate the disparity between expectation and reality leading to rich and pithy ironic commentary. A more elaborate version of this proverb is found in Phalee:

(134) *Chihānda mān, maphaninda nkinanin* (Collected, Phalee)

para. Expectantly disappointing; unexpectedly tender

This proverb employs various figurative devices. Firstly, an oxymoron in the initial clause highlights the stark contrast between anticipation and reality. Secondly, parallelism, alongside an antithetical device, serves to juxtapose the words *chihān* (expectation) and *maphanin* (unexpected), representing opposing ideas. Although *machihān* could convey the opposite of

chihān, the deliberate choice of *maphanin* in the subsequent clause creates rhyme with *nkinanin*, meaning “tenderness when chewing”. The metaphor comparing tender meat or vegetables to an individual who, against all odds, flourishes unexpectedly and contributes positively to the community is particularly striking and the pleasure of a pleasant surprise in place of dire consequences is brilliantly compared to a gustatory delight. This proverb is also employed when something reveals its positive qualities or usefulness despite initially appearing to be unattractive or unfavourable.

Ellipses

Ellipsis is a frequently utilised literary device in Tangkhul proverbs, and it serves to achieve textual brevity. Words are contracted or omitted, deliberately violating grammatical rules. Functional words, deemed less contributory to meaning, are frequently left out. It becomes evident from the reading that the omission of words and syllables is not solely for the purpose of economy but also to imbue the text with a lilting musicality and poetic appeal.

In Tangkhul, the fundamental sentence structure is “Subject + object + verb” or NP + VP. Proverbs and everyday speech often omit the subject unless retaining it serves some specific purpose. Tangkhul lacks definite and indefinite articles; the indefinite article is expressed by the numeral adjective *ākha* ‘one,’ while the demonstrative adjectives *hi* ‘this’ and *chi* ‘that’ are employed in lieu of the indefinite article. These, too, are frequently omitted in proverbs. Additionally, personal pronouns are subject to omission. Beyond these grammatical categories, both verb phrases and noun phrases are occasionally omitted in Tangkhul proverbs, yet comprehension remains intact.

(135) *Shakmalai, zāmalai* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Eat forget, drink forget

para. What has been eaten and drunk is soon forgotten

ee. “To do good to an ungrateful man is to throw rosewater in the sea” (MK)

(136) *Āshanli shaopaiya, ātunli mashaopaimana* (Sira)

lit. Can beat while going uphill; can't beat while going downhill

In (135), the subject is omitted in both clauses, but its inference from the context is straightforward. The repetition of the word *malai* ‘forget’ not only creates a melodic rhyming rhythm and balance but also underscores the central theme—the forgetful nature of the person. This proverb is commonly applied to describe ingrates. The literal translation, ‘Eat forget, drink forget,’ is characterised by its conciseness and directness, exhibiting a stronger rhythmic quality due to its parallelism and repetition. In contrast, the paraphrased version, ‘What has been eaten and drunk is soon forgotten,’ offers greater detail and context, with a smoother flow resulting from its more complex sentence structure. The paraphrased version introduces a temporal element with the word “soon,” thereby adding a layer of connotative meaning that is not present in the literal version. This version provides a more comprehensive thought, specifying that what is consumed is quickly forgotten. Conversely, the literal translation is succinct and economical, using only four words to convey a complete idea, making it easier to remember but more abstract in nature. The task of translating proverbs involves a balance between preserving the original’s brevity, rhythm, and cultural nuances (as seen in the literal translation) and enhancing clarity, context, and accessibility (as seen in the paraphrased translation). Each approach has its strengths and trade-offs, reflecting different priorities in the translation process.

In the proverb *Āshanli shaopaiya, ātunli mashaopaimana*, both subjects and objects are missing in both clauses, presenting a challenge in deducing them from the context. Cultural knowledge is essential to visualise the proverb’s imagery. The subject can be reasonably deduced

as the verb ‘beat’ implies a person, but the object remains ambiguous. The imagery likely involves a farmer and his cattle. In this proverbial situation, the subject and object of the sentence are not stated, but it can be assumed that the object is an animal, probably cattle, given that Tangkhul is an agrarian community. In case the animal refuses to move or tries to wander off in a different direction, the cowherd or the farmer beats them. Beating makes the animals walk according to the speed and along the path desired by the farmer. But if he beats while going downhill, the animal will run too fast and can get hurt, or the farmer will not be able to control the animal’s pace. It is easier to control the speed and the direction while going uphill. The image of a farmer and his animal is used here to advise the listener to teach or correct children’s unwanted behaviours while they are young. There are several levels of comparison couched in insights about the lifeworld articulated in the proverb: the obvious analogy of children to cattle and by extension, education to herding (comparable to the metaphor of shepherding used in Christianity) is also an implied comparison between the process of teaching and the act of going uphill which also acts as an acknowledgement and a comment on the difficulty of the activity of education. Moreover, in contextual terms, the proverb is used as advice to an adult to tutor his children while they are still young. In Tangkhul culture, the *orientational metaphor* of growing children is, as in English, *up*, and ageing is *down*.⁶⁶ Therefore, comparisons of going uphill and downhill with ‘growing up’ and ‘ageing’ make complete sense. In her collection of proverbs, Sira says that this proverb means one should not take revenge after a dispute is settled and that is another possible reading since, as Taylor pointed out, a single use of a proverb cannot exhaust its meaning. So, also this proverb will accrue multiple meanings depending on the real-time context in which it is used.

⁶⁶ Lakoff and Johnson (14–21).

In the following proverb, words are contracted or clipped to form a compound word, effectively shortening the text. Despite the omission of crucial word components, the meaning remains clear.

(13) *Kazingrek, wungnaorek* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Heavens' wisdom, *wungnao*'s wisdom

(137) *Nro khani, chao khani* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Orphan's ears, deer's ears

(13) compares the cognitive power or wisdom of *wungnao* to that of God, reflecting the Tangkhul's belief that God anoints village or clan chiefs. They hold *wungnao* in high reverence, believing him to be the chosen one endowed with god-like wisdom. Despite omitting other essential grammatical categories, the intended meaning remains clear using the parallel structure and juxtaposing two noun phrases to emphasise their similarities. *Kazingrek* is a combination of the words *kazing* 'rain' or *kazingram* 'sky or heaven or heavens' and *ārek* 'tactic or knowledge or wisdom'. *Wungnaorek* is also a compound word *wungnao* and *ārek*. The possessive case marker *wui* is omitted in the proverb. This straightforward structure, "X's, Y's" is observed in other proverbs such as (62) *Wuiri malung, shangkhu malung* and (63) *Wuiri malung, kongro maroi*.

In (137), a similar technique to the first one is employed, juxtaposing two noun phrases to draw parallels between an orphan and a deer. Although the proverb does not explicitly mention it, one can vividly conjure the image of a deer with pricked ears, showing alertness and resistance. In Phalee, *nringka* is the term used to describe being erect. This also applies when someone's hair stands up due to fear or cold. It also refers to vegetables such as potatoes or pulses that maintain their firmness and do not soften easily while cooking. This term's upward connotation contrasts with the usual downward softening imagery, highlighting the orphan's resistance to the counsel of

elders. The implication is that just as the wary deer is unapproachable and unamenable to human control, the absence of parental guidance and a secure home life make orphans perennially wary, skittish, and uncontrollable. This proverb is often used in a derogatory manner when an orphan behaves inappropriately or engages in immoral actions.

These proverbs, though structurally unconventional in grammatical terms, convey meaningful messages. Their effectiveness lies in the use of highly condensed forms employing parallel structures. Meaning is crafted by juxtaposing similar or contrasting clauses or ideas in close proximity, allowing these succinct expressions to communicate profound insights.

Bipartite Structure

Many Tangkhul proverbs exhibit a bipartite structure, often divided into two sections of equal or roughly equal length, with a comma or semi-colon serving as a medial caesura pause in written form. The examples discussed above (13) and (137) also employ this bipartite structure. While this punctuation aids disambiguation in written texts, proper intonation and enunciation are essential for clarity in oral communication. Typically, similar or contrasting ideas are juxtaposed within a brief sentence, sometimes omitting words to maintain a balanced structure. Although syntactic symmetry seems to be preferred, not all proverbs with two halves achieve perfect equilibrium. Here is an example of a completely balanced bipartite structure:

(25) *Kashi mareo, hangkhā mareo* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Bad excitement, crow excitement

Asyndeton is used here to convey the message. The expression consists of two independent clauses separated by a comma, without coordinating conjunctions, maintaining equal syllabic counts on both sides (four syllables each in Tangkhul). This figure of speech creates a sense of urgency and directness, emphasising the equivalence between “bad excitement” and “crow excitement” without

any diluting words. Additionally, it utilises the rhetorical device of schesis onomaton, employing only nouns and adjectives and directing the listeners to focus purely on the comparison, without distractions. The flawlessly symmetrical structure and rhyming words of the proverb emphasise the likeness between an exuberant individual and the raucous cawing of a crow, notorious across cultures for its loud and grating cry, thereby accentuating the profound irritation it conveys. The comparison is between the irritating cawing of a crow and the unwarranted manic and loud jubilation expressed by a person. The two examples mentioned below have an unbalanced bipartite structure, the two clauses in each possessing different syllable counts.

(138) *Sakathi chonshi nvi, shukharu langsu* (Collected, phalee)

lit. Adept wears worn out clothes; inept wears attitudes

This proverb paints a vivid picture of two weavers, contrasting the attitudes of a proficient one with an incompetent counterpart. An imbalanced bipartite structure enacts the disbalance in the real quality of the two weavers. The clauses also employ different rhyming sounds. In the first clause, three words end with the /i/ sound, while in the second clause, the /u/ sound is repeated thrice and is structured in a spondaic meter. The entire expression scans as comprising four feet, with the first three being spondees and the final foot being trochaic. This creates a musical quality and underscores the distinctions between the two types of weavers. The first part emphasises the simplicity of the skilled weaver, who does not need flashy attire to display her expertise. She prioritises functionality and comfort over superficial ornamentation, showcasing their competence through the worth of the work rather than mere appearance. She possesses a keen understanding of the value of her creations, ensuring she does not wear them in unsuitable settings. Furthermore, this expression sheds light on the livelihood of skilled weavers. While they excel in crafting clothes, their primary focus lies in generating income from their creations rather than prioritising

wearing the finest garments themselves. Conversely, the inept weaver's "attitudes" symbolise a facade of confidence that masks their lack of skill. Instead of honing their craft, they rely on superficial displays to compensate for their shortcomings. Essentially, this proverb serves as a mocking commentary on those who prioritise style over substance, highlighting the emptiness of outward appearances that are unsupported by genuine talent or ability. There are several proverbs that have unbalanced bipartite structures in Tangkhul such as examples (153) and (155).

Tripartite structures are comparatively rare in Tangkhul proverbs. When they do occur, asyndeton is often employed, contributing to the fluidity and smooth texture of the expressions. The following examples possess equal syllable counts in each of the three clauses. Due to their rhyming and evenly distributed meters, these proverbs possess a rhythmic and musical quality, eliding the song and word distinction in keeping with proverbial wisdom:

(139) *Mareklāna mareka, yāreklāna yāreka, yāninglāna nganingung* (Sira)

lit. Miss Hardworking works hard, Miss Idle idles away (the time), Miss Arrogant becomes ignorant

Several stylistic features are employed in this proverb to create a memorable, rhythmic, and compelling statement that vividly illustrates the outcomes of different behaviours. The structure of each clause is uniform, characterised by an equal number of syllables, which establishes a balanced and rhythmic sentence. This repetitive structure accentuates the comparison between the characters. Additionally, the use of initial consonance and alliteration imbues the phrase with a musical quality, enhancing its memorability.

The abstract qualities of "hardworking," "idle," and "arrogant" are personified by adding the feminine suffix *lā* (here translated as Miss). This humanises these traits and makes the proverb appear as if it is comparing the characteristics of three different types of women. Furthermore, the

contrasting characters and their respective actions—hardworking, lazy, and arrogant—highlight the distinctions between them, thereby emphasising the consequences of their behaviours. An element of irony is embedded within the proverb, particularly evident in Miss Arrogant who becomes an ignoramus. Arrogance typically implies a belief in one’s superior knowledge, and the folly of this attitude lies in the unhappy fate. The phrasing also seems to suggest a hierarchisation, similar to the arrangement in the English phrase ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly.’ This proverb conveys the notion that everyone receives what they deserve based on their actions. If someone works hard, they will achieve their desires; if they are lazy, they will face shortages, and if they are arrogant, they will become ignorant. The proverb (8) *Ngalengakha shilengthā, ngayurakha ngawurthā, ngayangakha ngayang thā* is also an example of this tripartite structure.

Parallelism

Parallelism serves as a rhetorical pattern in which successive lines mirror each other in grammatical structure, sound structure, notional content, or a combination of all three (Coinnigh 122). Literary devices such as meter, repetition, antithesis, and paradox can be used with parallelism to further enhance the persuasive and communicative effects. Semantic parallelism is explored in the “Semantic markers” section ahead; here I discuss only syntactic parallelism. Identified as a rhetorical device for emphasis or foregrounding, structural or syntactic parallelism involves placing grammatically similar or identical words, phrases, or clauses side by side. This creates a symmetrical structure, conveying equal importance and contributing to rhythmic flow imparting symmetry and balance to the text.

(79) *Kasik makathei sei, kakhayak makathei fa* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Buffalo knows no cold; dog knows no shame

Syntactic parallelism is used in this proverb, which has been discussed in the “Animal Symbolism” section in Chapter Three. More on this in the “Phonic Markers” section below. The proverb accentuates the criticism in its balanced bipartite parallel structure and jabbing repetition of the word *makathei* ‘not knowing,’ intended to pierce the apparently impervious armour of shamelessness the addressee is seen to possess. Many proverbs discussed in this study such as (9), (62), (63), (150), and many more, use parallelism.

Punctuation

Proverbs, predominantly utilised in oral communication, typically lack explicit punctuation marks, particularly at the end of statements in dictionary entries or lists in collections. However, given that many proverbs are composed in a concise manner using parallelism, bipartite or tripartite structures, the proper usage of punctuation like colon, semicolon and comma are necessary when transcribing them. Additionally, wellerisms, dialogue proverbs, and rhetorical proverbs also require appropriate punctuation in print. Despite their similarities to quotations, proverbs seamlessly integrate into both verbal and written expression without overt markers, relying on contextual and vocal cues for recognition. As Arora notes, “[u]sers of proverbs in oral contexts may also—consciously or unconsciously—signal the shift to the ‘proverbial mode’ by a change in intonation, an emphatic, even recitative or sing-song effect that conveys the message that what is being said is being repeated, not invented, by the speaker” (“The Perception” 5). At the time of written documentation and typographic setting, however, punctuation, including periods, question marks, colons, semicolons, and quotation marks, can serve to clarify and disambiguate meaning.

In Tangkhul proverbs, wellerisms and dialogue proverbs are notable for their use of more punctuation compared to other proverbial structures. Here is an analysis of a wellerism and dialogue proverbs (see Chapter Two for general commentary).

(27) *Rikruina nkimamānka*, “*Iya mursu makāka mankenei*” chiyichei (Collected, Phalee)

lit. “I can’t bite as I have no mouth,” says the nit as it bites

(32) (i) “*Irihāva, paizālu,*” “*Mazāngaika āni*” *chilaga naoda paihik manākazā*

(Kasomwoshi)

lit. “Eat yam, my daughter-in-law.” “No, my mother-in-law,” she replies, and eats the skin later.

(ii) *Ānivana paizālo chilakha mazāmara chilaka naoda paihik manākazā (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) eating the yam peel after refusing when the mother-in-law offered the yam

This wellerism employs stylistic features such as irony, pun, and anthropomorphism making the wellerism both engaging and effective in conveying its ironic and humorous message. These stylistic elements serve to underscore the hypocrisy of the target. The wellerism attributes a human quality—speech—to a nit. The nit’s words “I can’t bite” are contrary to the reality of its action (biting), thus creating a paradoxical situation. Furthermore, there is a play on words with the dual meanings of “bite”—referring to both the physical act of biting and a sarcastic remark implying the nit’s inability to speak. It claims it has no mouth yet uses it as an organ of speech to defend and paint a good image of itself. The humour inherent in the wellerism arises from the absurdity and wit of the nit’s contradictory statement and action. Here, we see that punctuation plays a crucial role in wellerisms by clarifying the intended meaning, particularly in distinguishing between the spoken parts and actions of different characters or entities. (32) illustrates a brief interaction between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law concerning yams. Initially, the mother-in-law suggests the daughter-in-law should eat the yam, but she declines. Later, when no yam is left, the daughter-in-law eats the skin. It could be seen as a stereotypical portrayal of the relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, which often tends to be depicted

negatively. This proverb fits into such stereotypes, again setting up the tension between appearance and reality that so many of the collected proverbs seem to be concerned with. Such portrayals reinforce traditional perceptions of conflict between these familial roles, commenting upon gender jealousy, and privileging established social hierarchies, but perhaps not wholly withholding sympathy from the less privileged. This proverb is used to critique individuals who pretend disinterest in something they are actually keenly interested in. It warns that those who refuse opportunities when presented with them may miss out on benefits altogether.

This proverb is also used as a proverbial phrase (ii) *Ānivāna paizālo chilakha mazāngaika chilaka naoda paihik manākazā kathā*, or more succinctly *paihik manākazā* ‘eating the peel’ to mock someone who feigns disinterest in something but indulges in it secretly. No punctuation is needed in the proverbial phrases, but in the wellerism, proper punctuation is necessary to avoid confusion. Here is another example of a dialogue proverb:

(33) *Rachangli—Thei nguishailu; Ritnāli—Ngalung khāngsanglu* (Kanrei)

lit. “(I’m) thirsty—Eat roasted nuts; It’s heavy—Add rocks”

The structure of the two clauses mirrors each other, creating a rhythmic and balanced form. This parallelism enhances the proverb’s memorability and impact, reinforcing the theme of unhelpful advice in times of need. In this proverb, the speakers engaging in conversation are not explicitly identified, but the sentence structure indicates dialogue between two individuals in two different contexts, or potentially four individuals in two separate contexts. These two contexts are juxtaposed to emphasise the intense hardship that the individuals are experiencing. In the first context, one speaker states, “*Rachangli*” ‘(I’m) thirsty,’ and the other responds, “*Theinguishailu*” ‘Eat roasted nuts’. To retain the conciseness of the proverb, a shorter translation is preferred, thereby emphasising the emotional intensity and the need to conserve energy. However, the more

precise translation of “*Theinguishailu*” would be ‘Roast nuts and eat.’ In this instance, the other speaker does not offer a solution, nor offer help in the useless suggestion. This may imply that the speaker is the agent of their own suffering. Additionally, it reveals the insincerity and malicious intent of the other person, whose advice is designed to exacerbate the individual’s plight. The responses “Eat roasted nuts” and “Add rocks” are ironic, as they suggest actions that would result in exacerbation rather than amelioration of the speaker’s distress. This irony underscores the malice and cruel indifference of the advice-givers. In the second context, too, the responder’s underlying intent seems to be avoiding blame while causing further hardship. By omitting the speakers and condensing the dialogue into a more concise form, the proverb highlights the extreme hardship faced by the individuals. This brevity captures the gasps with which a parched or overburdened person might speak. In the original collection of this proverb, no punctuation is used. However, I propose that using the em dash in place of quotation marks and periods is more appropriate. The em dash effectively conveys the pauses in the conversation, adding meaningful emphasis to the dialogue.

The Semantic Charge of Figurative Speech

A figure of speech is a form of expression “in which the departure from standard usage is not primarily in the meaning of the words but in the order or syntactical pattern of the words” (Abram 97). It departs from conventional grammar and vocabulary usage. It comes into play when conveying precise emotions or moods, proving challenging in everyday language. Figures of speech play a pivotal role in emphasising ideas or sentiments, adding an aesthetic quality to language in spoken communication or literary compositions. By employing these linguistic devices, speakers or authors can vividly articulate their thoughts while also veiling their true intentions through the use of indirect language. As Norrick notes, “[p]roverb allows the speaker to

disguise his true feelings, to leave himself an escape route to offer his hearer choices, and to indicate real or imagined consensus” (“Proverbial Perlocution” 148). This underscores the ability of proverbs to provide speakers with a means of concealing emotions, creating room for flexibility, and suggesting shared perspectives, all achieved through the artful use of indirect language.

As has already been seen, proverbs employ various figures of speech including metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, oxymoron, asyndeton, and others, to enhance meaning and imbue the expression with emotive force. The following discussion explores the most prevalent figures of speech in Tangkhul proverbs.

Metaphor

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, in Tangkhul, there are no specific terms corresponding to metaphor, simile, or other figures of speech. They all fall under the umbrella term *chāncham*. According to William Pettigrew’s dictionary, *chānjam* means a symbol, simile, similitude, emblem, metaphor, or figurative expression. The term *chamsam*, a Phalee word, also serves as a possible equivalent, carrying dual meanings: (a) a comparison and (b) having an intimate conversation. While *chamsam* encompasses a broad semantic field, it is a term that resonates with the essence of metaphor. Metaphor emerges as a prevalent literary device in proverbs in general, often acting as an important marker of proverbiality, as Arora (1984) and Taylor (1931) have noted. Bascom, in line with this perspective, contends that metaphorical proverbs, distinct from maxims and aphorisms, are more genuinely proverbial. He proposes that metaphorical proverbs are more broadly applicable to a wider array of human situations, particularly when they exhibit greater levels of indirectness and metaphorical expression (69). The metaphorical quality enables multiple interpretations, facilitating oblique commentary and enriching its depth and versatility.

Coinnigh utilises Lynne Cameron's N1-3 criteria in "The Heart of Irish-Language Proverbs': A Linguo-Stylistic Analysis of Explicit Metaphor." These conditions outline the essential features that must be present for the metaphor to function as intended in discourse.

N1 it contains reference to a Topic domain by a Vehicle term (or terms)

N2 there is potentially an incongruity between the domain of the Vehicle term and the Topic domain

N3 it is possible for a receiver (in general, or a particular person), as a member of a particular discourse community to find a coherent interpretation which makes sense of the incongruity in its discourse context, and which involves some transfer of meaning from the Vehicle domain (Cameron 118).

Drawing inspiration from Coinnigh's (2013) comprehensive study on metaphors in Irish proverbs, this section explores the use of metaphor in Tangkhul proverbs, albeit with modifications and tailored adjustments. Unlike Coinnigh's emphasis on frequency, this study focuses only on the prominent semantic aspects of metaphors and analyse how they contribute to the nuanced meanings of Tangkhul proverbs.

Metaphor serves the purpose of transferring qualities or establishing associations between two objects, elucidating the latter by drawing on the characteristics of the former, and constitutes a form of translation. In instances where the two domains within an utterance lack compatibility, a metaphorical interpretation becomes necessary. Semantic incongruities are often constructed through the attachment of noun phrases (NPs) to verbs (VPs) or other predicative components that are inherently non-compatible. The literal interpretation of such utterances may lack logical coherence, prompting listeners or readers to seek connotative meanings. Explicit metaphor occurs when both the tenor and the vehicle are contained within the same linguistic utterance. Some

proverbs may exhibit no incongruency between the tenor and the vehicle, representing an implicit metaphor. As the comparison is not clearly suggested, the listeners must infer the meaning and the connection. Therefore, implicit metaphors require a deeper level of interpretation and can be more nuanced.

Coinnigh’s assertion that metaphors often co-occur with other metaphorical tropes such as personification and various literary devices like parallelism, alliteration, and rhyme is pertinent. I discuss other devices where applicable, and also include non-metaphorical proverbs sharing similar themes in order to articulate the Tangkhul worldview, aligning with one of the primary objectives of this thesis.

(47) *Khokha kasā karhui na*

lit. Unity is pegs in a dyke

ee. “Unity is strength” (Oxford)

(140) *Khamana eina kachapva chinaonina* (Pheirei)

lit. Crying and laughing are siblings

(141) *Masimaphanla thingnā manganukmana* (John)

lit. Without wind, no leaves quiver

ee. “There is no smoke without fire” (MK)

(44) *Khanrannada khayina ror* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Aphids haunt the weak

(47) is an explicit metaphorical proverb as the tenor and vehicle are incongruent. It derives from a traditional agricultural practice. A literal interpretation of the proverb proves challenging, as the elements involved— “pegs” and “unity”— appear incompatible. “Unity,” being an abstract noun, cannot physically be “pegs in a dyke.” A single peg is insufficient to construct a durable and

resilient dyke; however, the collective placement of multiple pegs within the dyke symbolises unity and conveys an image of cohesion and solidarity. The repetition of the /k/ sound in this proverb introduces a musical quality.

In (140) crying and laughing are personified. It suggests that these two seemingly opposite but universal human emotional expressions—crying, associated with sadness or pain, and laughing, associated with joy or amusement—share a deep connection or similarity. It implies that human joys and sorrows, rather than being isolated emotions, are inseparable and have the same origin as is found in natural siblings. While they might be physically apart due to several reasons, the genetic components of siblings can never truly be severed: they are and always will be kin. This proverb can be employed to remark on situations where an individual simultaneously experiences joy and sorrow, such as grieving a death while celebrating happy events such as birthdays or weddings.

There are numerous proverbs that are not inherently metaphorical but take on metaphorical meanings based on context. For example, (141) uses a causal connection observed in nature to imply comparison (although leaves may quiver due to other causes, such as the movement of birds and animals, the most common cause for widespread tremors is undoubtedly the wind). The same analogy and a theory of causation is applied to give some form of credibility to rumours. Similarly, it is used metaphorically to suggest that rumours, like leaf movements, require a catalyst—reason or cause—to proliferate. Thus, the expression holds literal truth regarding the relationship between wind and leaf movement but is unlikely to be used to comment on quivering leaves. Instead, its metaphorical resonance emerges when applied in various contexts beyond literal leaf movement. In this sense, while the proverb itself is not explicitly metaphorical, its application often lends itself

to metaphorical interpretation, revealing deeper meanings about causation and truth in human interactions.

Similarly, (44), is rarely, if ever, used in discussions about plant-insect interactions. Instead, its metaphorical application emerges when referencing human behaviours, particularly instances of discrimination or exploitation against those perceived as weaker. In this context, the proverb suggests a parallel between the vulnerability of weaker plants to aphid infestations and the susceptibility of disadvantaged individuals to exploitation by those in positions of power or privilege. Thus, while the proverb remains rooted in a natural phenomenon, its metaphorical usage illuminates broader social dynamics, expressing dismay or frustration when individuals repeatedly face oppression or mistreatment. This proverb can also be used to comment on someone afflicted by a rapid stream of misfortune, coming thick and fast. A likely scenario of usage would be a farmer who, having recently lost his bull, also has his fields flooded during the monsoons. This proverb can also be used in a first-person correlation, allowing him to express his own dejection and figuring himself as the weak plant.

Simile

Formulaic figurative languages, such as proverbial similes, proverbial comparisons, and proverbial phrases, closely resemble proverbs and often lead to confusion among Tangkhul paremiographers, as well as scholars globally. Haas notes several shared characteristics, including brevity, fixed form, poetic elements, metaphorical usage, and traditional roots, all indicative of proverbiality. However, these expressions may lack the distinctive trait of conveying generalisable truth or generalisable injunction to wise response often found in proverbs (Haas, “If it Walks” 24).

As discussed in Chapter One, the words *thāda* or *kathā* ‘like’ can be appended to the end of every proverbial phrase, thereby giving them the appearance of proverbial similes. The

Tangkhul proverb collections encompass over 300 such formulaic figurative expressions which, strictly speaking, may not align with the conventional definition of proverbs. This ambiguity stems from the lack of precise terminology in the Tangkhul language and the absence of standardised documentation practices, or rather, it may be attributed to a differing concept of what constitutes a proverb. Scholars, including Taylor, Arora, and Mieder, acknowledge the absence of one absolute criterion to classify an expression as a proverb. Here are two examples of proverbial simile that the natives consider to be proverbs:

(142) *malum thāda chāmkathi* (Sira)

lit. rush to death like flying termites

(143) *mangmanāhaida hampā hampai (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. as stupid as a black pot in the *hampā*

(144) *hangkornāli tarā heikharor (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. like pouring water over yam leaves

ee. “The things passed off like water from a duck’s back” (MK)

(142) invokes the fate of flying termites and compares it to that of impulsive humans. Termite swarms have a negative cultural connotation, since swarming leads to new colonies and thus poses as a threat of destruction of human property. During hot and humid summer evenings or rainy days, flying termites emerge from the ground in a flurry, seemingly eager to explore the world. They swarm in large numbers and are attracted to light. This frantic image is vivid and evocative and thus creates a strong impression of chaos. After mating in flight they lose their wings, die, and become easy pickings for birds, cats, and chickens. Similarly, individuals who make decisions hastily or proceed without proper planning are akin to these termites, unaware of the perilous

journey ahead. This proverbial simile can be used to serve as a warning against impulsivity and emphasises the importance of thoughtful consideration before taking action.

(143) is employed pejoratively to denigrate an individual perceived as exceptionally unintelligent. The term *hampai* refers to a traditional black earthen cooking pot, typically stored in a *hampa* (cupboard usually used for storing cooking pots). Cooking with firewood results in pots coated in black soot. Consequently, these pots, which are naturally black in colour, further become darkened with soot and lack lustre, symbolising ignorance and lack of intelligence. Moreover, the *hampa* cupboard is situated in the farthest corner of the kitchen, representing darkness, seclusion, and neglect. The association of knowledge with light and ignorance with darkness is standard across cultures, and this implicit association is utilised by the proverb to conjure up in the imagination a personified pot that is forgotten in the darkest corner of the farthest cupboard and can have no hope of shining in the light of intelligence.

(144) is frequently employed to admonish young children who fail to heed the advice of their elders, and it can also be used to describe any individual who is impervious to good counsel. Like water running off the waxy and impermeable surface of yam leaves, the concerned person remains unaffected. A likely usage scenario for this proverb could be the following: an individual complains to his neighbour that the neighbour's dog has eaten several of his chickens and requests that the neighbour take action. However, the neighbour does nothing in response, which irritates the complainant. To comment on the neighbour's indifference, the complainant might use this proverbial phrase when recounting the incident to a friend or directly to the neighbour to express his anger.

Although these examples could be classified as similes Tangkhul paremiographers and native speakers often treat them as proverbs. The inclusion of the adverbial *thāda* or adjectival

kathā clearly designates them as similes. Additionally, while a proverb is typically a self-contained statement, these proverb-like expressions are dependent clauses, relying on a word, phrase, or clause for completeness. Numerous proverbial phrases can be effortlessly transformed into similes by incorporating the word *thāda* or *kathā*.

Personification

While many of the above examples provide illustration of the dependence of Tangkhul proverbs upon personification, this section offers a focused analysis. Personification “involves the projection of human physical attributes, characteristics, emotions, habits, beliefs and activities, onto a range of nonhuman entities, events and abstract concepts that feature at a lower level of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING” [sic] (Coinnigh, “Heart” 129). Despite the widespread belief in animism, human characteristics, emotions, or qualities are sparingly assigned to inanimate objects or abstract ideas in the proverbs under discussion. The ones that do use personification often draw inspiration from fables, where animals take on human characteristics. In these fables, animals are typically portrayed with human traits, making anthropomorphism perhaps a more suitable term than personification:

(145) *Phaklāngla khanā kāya*

lit. Walls have ears

(74) *Hampai kaikha fāna manaya*

lit. Dog grins when the earthen pot breaks

(146) (i) *Lāmina kazing sirā shānkhuithailaga meithalung kathum mashānkhui kathei*

(*thāda*)(Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a cat that knows how to tally the number of stars in the sky but doesn't know how to tally the three stones of the hearth.

(ii) *Lāmina kazing sirā shānkhuithelaka meithalung kathum mashānkhuithaimana*

lit. Cat knows how to tally the number of stars in the sky but doesn't know how to tally the three stones of the hearth

(145) is likely a borrowed proverb. Found in English, Tangkhul and many other languages, these may be termed universal proverbs (Taylor 1931). Personification plays a role in these expressions, attributing ears to walls. While animals do possess eyes and ears, when such human-like attributes are assigned to non-human entities, our immediate association is with humans rather than animals (Coinnigh, "Heart" 133). It personifies the walls, suggesting they can listen and perhaps even convey what they have heard.

Humans regularly read human emotions in the features of non-human entities and the grinning of dogs is one of the most common examples. (74), also discussed earlier, uses this common activity to ascribe human emotion to an animal, as also to set a type for certain animals. Examples in English would be 'sly as a fox,' 'faithful as a dog,' and so on. This proverb invokes the culturally established stereotypes attributed to the nature of an animal (pythons are benevolent, owls are stupid, dogs are dirty and cunning), thereby humanising and anthropomorphising alien life forms. The association is then folded back onto the human realm and the proverb is used to mock a person who benefits from the misfortune of others and is thus happy at other people's sorrow. The individual who revels in gossip or misfortune ironically ends up consuming the "dirty food" of their own gossip, which ultimately tarnishes her own reputation rather than causing harm to the intended target (see also (79) for additional uses of the personification of dogs).

The proverbial phrase *lāmi otshan* 'lit. cat math' is likely a condensed version of (146). The Phalee's rendition of the same idea is *ringeo nthu chāk* 'lit. cat counting the stones of the hearth.' Cats, drawn to warm places, often sit near fires. This proverb ascribes the human quality

of counting to the cat. In this context, the cat is portrayed as capable of tallying numbers, suggesting that despite its feline nature, it possesses this cognitive ability typically associated with humans. In a traditional hearth, three stones are arranged in a circle. When seated too close to the warmth, the cat cannot count the stones, or in other words, cannot see what is right in front of their eyes. Thus, someone may be observant and knowledgeable about distant matters, symbolised by the vastness of the stars in the sky, yet may lack awareness or understanding of more immediate surroundings and responsibilities, represented by the stones on the hearth. For instance, this proverb can be used to gently mock or criticise individuals who focus on the village's affairs while neglecting their family. Additionally, the proverbial phrase *lāmi otshān* can be invoked when someone repeatedly makes mistakes while counting something.

Kasomwoshi recorded the proverb as a proverbial phrase marked by the word *thāda* at the end. However, I have rewritten it as a sentence, for I use sentence as one of the essential markers of proverbs. Many Tangkhul proverbs, similar to this example, can be easily converted into complete sentences by modifying the non-finite verb at the end. This involves deleting the non-finite marker *-ka-* or *-kha-* and adding *-mana* for negative sentences, or adding /ə/ with its three allomorphs /yə/, /i/, and /wə/ for assertive sentences. The Tangkhul community has only recently begun documenting their language and culture, and thus, the author(s) might have transcribed what they heard from conversations. Moreover, many proverbs can be utilised as proverbial phrases in various contexts. Given that all necessary word components are present, recording the sentence as a phrase by just adding *thāda* appears to be an arbitrary practice.

(85) *Nāyong shimsak zurli ngathāna*

lit. “The monkeys’ dwelling scatters during the rainy season”

In this proverb, also discussed earlier, monkeys are anthropomorphised, resembling humans capable of planning for the future and constructing their own homes. Anthropomorphism is also built into wellerisms, examples of which are discussed above in (27), (28), (29), (30), and (31).

Phonic Markers

Words endowed with a melodic quality possess the capacity to resonate, soothe or delight us and kindle specific thoughts and emotions. In the case of tonal languages like Tangkhul and Phalee the phonic quality of the utterance also impacts basic comprehension. Sound play is thus as important as word play in this context. Phonic elements such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and meter serve to infuse a musical charm, enhancing aesthetic and emotional impact, and often wittily punning with intonation. These linguistic devices draw attention to particular words, ensuring they stand out and contribute to the memorability of expressions. Alliteration plays a pervasive role in Tangkhul proverbs, with a majority showcasing a deliberate use of repetitive sounds. For example, (79), discussed in terms of parallelism and a perfect bipartite structure above, but the recurrence of the term *makathei* (do not know) also contributes to the rhythmic quality and emphasises the individual's imperviousness to shame. The /k/ (seven times) and /ə/ (eight times) sounds resonate throughout the proverb.

(147) *Mahai ida āhai matātunghaisāmana* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. "By luck, one won't find a lucky charm casually lying on the ground"

In this proverb, the repetition of the syllable *hai* three times, with varying tones and meanings, creates a rhythmic pattern. The first and second *hai* feature a low tone, while the third adopts a high tone. Additionally, the repetition of the syllable *ma* three times, along with the recurrent presence of the /ə/ sound five times, contributes to a pulsating rhythmic quality. This rhythmic arrangement imparts an energetic sense of fervent yearning. The proverb can be effectively utilised

to counsel individuals excited about getting rewarded despite having not worked hard. A noteworthy aspect is the wordplay within the proverb. Given Tangkhul's tonal nature, a slight mispronunciation in the tone of the second *hai* 'lucky charm' can drastically alter the sentence's meaning. A shift from a low tone to a mid-tone transforms its meaning into a vulgar reference to female genitalia. Such instances of wordplay or puns are relatively uncommon, but when they do occur, they express the potential for linguistic nuances in communication. This proverb suggests that true luck or fortune is not something easily or randomly encountered. The idea is that valuable or auspicious things are not just found by accident; genuine luck takes place more by some kind of elusive design. It implies that meaningful opportunities or positive outcomes often require effort, intention, or a purposeful search rather than being stumbled upon by chance.

(107) *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina mituili thi* (Angkang)

lit. Animals are killed by their spoor and men by their words

ee. "Birds are entangled by their feet, and men by their tongues" (Penguin)

The meaning of this proverb is discussed in Chapter Three. In this proverb, the echoes of *sā* 'animal' and *mi* 'man', each accompanied by the nominative marker *-na* and dative marker *-li*, resound twice each, while the /i/ sound reverberates six times. The syllables *sā*, *na*, *li*, *thi*, *mi* occur twice each. This creates a harmonious, balanced bipartite structure adorned with an internal or middle rhyme that contributes to a captivating rhythmic pattern. The parallelism within the structure paints a vivid image of the equivalence between man and animal, as well as the significance of feet and words, emphasising their equal weightage.

Lexical Markers

Archaism

The incorporation of archaic words imparts a profound sense of historical and cultural values, evoking a connection to the past and establishing the proverb as an authentic cultural relic. This inclusion paints a rustic image, transporting us to a bygone era. It suggests that the wisdom contained within the proverb is grounded in practical, everyday experiences of rural life, which were often seen as closer to nature. By retaining words that are no longer in common use, proverbs preserve linguistic elements that might otherwise be lost. This continuity helps maintain a link between contemporary culture and its historical roots, reinforcing a shared cultural identity.

(45) *Chorui maru rira chorui mayirraro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Twist not the threads before buying the beads

(11) *Ngalānao shingnai raona* (asomwoshi)

lit. Women are strangers' servants

(12) *Wuiri naoroi ramuiye, gahar naoroi khāmtongshu*, (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Children under the care of the mother go to the storeroom; children under the care of a father go to the threshold

(148) *Kharei zatla kharāna kakapā (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

“(like) bossing around by wild cat while tiger is passing by” (Kasomwoshi)

para. “(like) small cats [hyena, leopard etc.] that mimics the roar of big cats [tiger]

when there's a rumour of them nearby”

(149) *Shipeilāli Ramshilāna hāngkhamachin (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. “(like) Ramshilā admonishes Shipeilā”

In (45), discussed earlier, the term *yirka* ‘to twist multiple strands of yarn together to make a strong thread’ is not widely known among the younger generation, instead the word *hoka* is used nowadays. The rustic imagery created by archaic words enhances the perceived authenticity of the

proverb. The proverb does not only feature the archaic term but also conjures a vivid, antiquated scene of preparing a string for a necklace, a practice less common in contemporary times. The proverbial phrase (148) is often used to describe individuals who exploit the authority and influence of those in power for personal gain. The word *kakapā* ‘roar’ is also not widely known. When there is a rumour, or if a tiger is indeed roaming in the vicinity, both people and other animals become apprehensive and avoid movement. The smaller cats (*khārā*) like hyena and leopard seizing this opportunity, mimics the bigger cats (*kharei*) like tiger’s roar to frighten smaller animals. In some instances, by imitating the tiger’s roar, the hyena can kill prey without being held accountable, since the blame falls on the tiger, tarnishing its reputation. Similarly, certain individuals align themselves with powerful figures, attempting to wield power, gain glory, or benefit from the association, while simultaneously damaging the reputation of the person in power.

The proverbial phrase ‘(like) Ramshilā admonishes Shipeilā’ is employed to mock an immoral individual who attempts to impart moral values to others. Ramshilā and Shipeilā are the names of two women known for their lack of moral integrity, making them unsuitable to admonish one another. The precise origin of this phrase or the tale from which it derives has been lost over time.

While the general meaning or concept of proverbs and proverbial phrases can be comprehended, deciphering some individual words poses a challenge. Words such as *yirka* ‘to twist strands of yarn together’, *shingnai* ‘stranger’, *kakapā* ‘to roar’, and *ramui* ‘storeroom’ have fallen into disuse. Proper names like Shipeilā and Ramshilā, representing immoral individuals in the last proverb, contribute to the obscurity of exact referents. The incorporation of these archaic words introduces an element of strangeness and complexity to the text, lending an air of quaint

antiquity. This implied connection to older generations, given the culture's emphasis on holding the words of elders sacrosanct, imparts authority and truth to the utterance. In particular (45) by conjuring up scenes of bucolic activity (such as necklace making) of an idyllic past, further enhances its traditional and historical appeal.

Sound and Lexical Repetition

[R]epetition itself is as much the servant of oral improvisation as it is of aural memory; it is the handmaiden of both permanence and change. If this function strikes the literate scholar as paradoxical, this must be because he has not yet truly come to think in terms of the oral nature of oral literature. (Gray 291)

Gray points out that repetition is not just merely a stylistic feature but plays a crucial role in the composition, transmission, and reception of oral narratives. Some of the proverbs discussed in other sections have delved into the exploration of consonance, alliteration, and assonance. Tangkhul proverbs exhibit repetition in various forms, encompassing lexical items, themes, structure, and rhythm. These repetitions not only infuse a musical quality but also serve as mnemonic devices, crucial for the preservation of oral texts. Moreover, repetition holds persuasive power, compelling listeners to acknowledge the conveyed truth. In Tangkhul proverbs, the recurrence of structural elements is accomplished through the skilful use of parallelism, as discussed in the preceding section. For instance:

(25) *Kashi mareo, hangkhā mareo* (Kanrei)

lit. Bad excitement, crow's excitement

The proverb employs the literary device of epistrophe, where the last word *mareo* (cheerfulness or excitement) is reiterated in the adjacent clause. The proverb encapsulates a vivid comparison between heightened human enthusiasm and the animated behaviour of a crow. It paints a

metaphorical picture of someone excessively excited, akin to the agitated demeanour of a crow, known for its loud and disruptive cawing. The repetition of structure and lexical items in this context accentuates the parallels between the irritating behaviour displayed by the crow and the individual. It also makes the proverb more appealing and aids in its retention in the users' memory.

Furthermore, the Tangkhul language exhibits the creation of words through reduplication, intensifying the emphasis on the underlying meanings. Reduplicative words are prevalent in the Tangkhul language, though they are not commonly found in proverbs. This linguistic feature enhances the expressive richness of the language, contributing to the overall depth and nuance of Tangkhul proverbs.

(42) *Hokna ot murmur āsāla fana, “Ina sāya” kachikathā* (Kanrei)

lit. “Pig does the strenuous work; but dog says, “I did it.””

(150) *Kharar ronron, kasār remrem* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. “Growing up is fast; ageing is swift”

In the above proverbs reduplicative expressive terms such as *murmur*, *ronron*, and *remrem* serve to amplify the significance of these sayings. This repetition not only adds emphasis but also enhances the proverbs' memorability. The initial proverb is analysed in Chapter Three within the context of animal proverbs. The term *mur* denotes the action of digging or moving something with an animal's snout. By reduplicating the term *mur*, the proverb highlights the strenuous nature of the pig's labour.

(150) addresses the swift passage of time, often invoked by the elderly to comment on the rapid growth of children while simultaneously expressing a wistful acknowledgment of their own accelerated decline. The expressive term *ron* signifies the quick rate of growth, whereas *rem* signifies the rate of decline. These terms can be used in reduplicative forms to emphasise the

intensity of their respective meanings. Furthermore, the pronunciation of *ronron* in a high tone corresponds with the concept of increasing height, while *remrem* pronounced in a low tone underscores the decline in both physical and mental fitness. Thus, the incorporation of such reduplicative terms not only enhances the proverbs' auditory appeal and memorability but also enriches their meanings.

Thus, we see that oral texts are crafted with memorability in mind, incorporating rhyming words, figurative language, and frequent use of rhetorical devices to not only capture listeners' attention but to captivate their imagination. Proverbs, in particular, exhibit a distinctive stylistic quality, marked by novel structures that play fast and loose with grammatical rules. The emphasis is on conveying the message effectively through rhetoric, prioritising suggestiveness. Figurative devices and prosody are commonly employed, enhancing the sweetness and impressiveness of the speech, making it more memorable and rhetorically effective.

The incorporation of imagery and allusions in proverbs vividly communicates with listeners, facilitating a deeper understanding of the intended message. Stylistic features contribute vibrancy to proverbs, arousing interest and excitement among those who hear them. In a predominantly oral culture like Tangkhul, the survival of a text relies on its memorability, wherein rhythm, imagery, sound patterns, and sentence structures play crucial roles. Ong's observation that colourless personalities cannot endure in oral mnemonics highlights the importance of lively and engaging content. Mieder, referring to Blerh (1973), asserts that stylistic features play a role in elevating a statement to proverbial status. Tangkhul proverbs exemplify this, often being concise through the use of ellipsis and arranged in parallel structures, both semantically and lexically. Contrast, repetition, and wordplay further contribute to their economy of expression and impact. The incorporation of poetic devices in proverbs enhances their aesthetic appeal, aiding in their oral

transmission. Poetic elements create vivid pictures and sounds that are easily remembered and reproduced. The musical quality they impart can elicit strong emotions or reactions from listeners. Ellipsis aids in word economy, repetition emphasises meaning, rhyme and rhythm add musical qualities, and the use of archaic words adds authenticity to these traditional texts. While these devices may not be essential features of proverbs, they undoubtedly contribute to the survival and enduring appeal of these texts and remain as important elements of historical and cultural heritage.

Proverbs at Play

This section focuses on understanding how the Tangkhul community employs proverbs in sociocultural contexts and everyday personal communication to enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of speech. Specifically, the analysis seeks to reveal how proverbs are used strategically to achieve the speaker's intended outcomes, i.e. to look at the pragmatics of the texts under discussion. This analysis also seeks to uncover the traditional wisdom of the society, revealing insights into various issues and aspects of life, and how the community recommends handling or addressing different situations. The functions of Tangkhul proverbs are studied under two subsections: sociocultural and communicative functions.

The function of proverbs is a widely studied area in the field of paremiology. Several scholars have investigated the functions of proverbs in various languages (Wolfgang Mieder, Neal R. Norrick (1982, 2015); Taylor (1931); Richard P. Honeck (1997), Lauhakanga (2008), Miruka Okumba (1994), Markos Medhin (2017), Ahmad Rezaeia (2012) and others). In order to formulate a framework for this analysis I rely on these secondary sources.

Okumba Miruka categorises the social functions of proverbs into four primary aspects: aesthetic, reflective, normative, and summative. The aesthetic function of proverbs is to enhance the richness and appeal of speech. Reflectively, proverbs offer profound insights into the values

and characteristics of a society. Normatively, they serve to correct behaviours deemed unacceptable within a community, guiding them towards socially acceptable norms. Lastly, the summative function of proverbs involves condensing and encapsulating broader concepts or issues into concise expressions (76–85).

James Obelkevich's essay "Proverbs and Social History" posits that proverbs serve as a consistent instrument for conflict management, aiding individuals in navigating persistent sources of strain and tension. He references their usage in legal disputes, such as their significant role in African cultures. Furthermore, Obelkevich underscores the social functions of proverbs, emphasising their capacity to indicate goodwill, reinforce shared values, and foster sociability, a function he aligns with Malinowski's concept of phatic communication. He also acknowledges the aesthetic appeal of proverbs, noting their utilisation for their pleasing form, phraseology, wit, imagery, and verbal style.

Seitel, in his insightful essay "Proverbs: a social use of Metaphor", has highlighted the importance of proverb study and proposed a heuristic model of proverb usage. He explores the usage of proverbs, focusing on the social context, the proverb situation, the social situation, correlation, and strategies. A person may know a proverb but may not know how and when to use it appropriately. His model can be used to understand how to understand, interpret and use proverbs in a socially acceptable way. Bascom puts it succinctly:

Because they express the morals or ethics of the group, they are convenient standards for appraising behavior in terms of the approved norms. Because they are pungently, wittily and sententiously stated, they are ideally suited for commenting on the behavior of others. They are used to express social approval and disapproval; praise for those who conform to accepted social conventions and criticism or

ridicule of those who deviate; warning, defiance or derision of a rival or enemy and advice, counsel or warning to a friend when either contemplates action which may lead to social friction, open hostilities, or direct punishment by society (347).

Sociocultural Functions

The previous analysis demonstrates that the brevity, metaphorical nature, and various stylistic features of proverbs facilitate their rapid acquisition and precise repetition. Moreover, they can be used on any occasion as they deal with various aspects of life and cultural experiences. “Compact and memorable, the proverb serves as the vehicle not only for moral but for practical wisdom, like occupational rules and weather lore,” says Obelkevich (213). Proverbs serve as a valuable repository of cultural knowledge and as a medium for expressing commonly held views and wisdom. They contain elements of traditional wisdom, ethics, experiences, and important social and political issues. In communities like the Tangkhul society, where oral tradition predominates, proverbs are vital tools for shaping and expressing the collective ethos, beliefs, and accumulated wisdom. As Seitel observes:

By pushing around these small and apparently simply constructed items, one can discover principles which give order to a wider range of phenomena. Proverbs are the simplest of the metaphorical genres of folklore—songs, folktales, folk play etc.—a genre which clearly and directly is used to serve a social purpose. By investigating the relatively simple use of metaphorical reasoning for social ends in proverbs, one can gain insight into the social use of other, more complex metaphorical genres (137).

As Seitel suggests, the study of proverbs can serve as a gateway to comprehending the broader social implications of various folklore genres, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of

cultural expressions and their societal roles. The selected Tangkhul proverbs are analysed to understand how metaphorical reasoning can provide insights into their social functions.

Transmission and reflection of cultural and social values

Proverbs are essential components of oral tradition, helping to preserve cultural heritage and history. They often encapsulate the collective experiences, folk knowledge, and ancestral wisdom of a community. By passing down proverbs orally from one generation to another, societies ensure the continuity of their cultural identity and narratives. Proverbs reflect the cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in which they are used. Societal values such as dignity, humanity, fairness, responsibility, honesty, justice, respect, and safeguarding the vulnerable play a crucial role in fostering a harmonious and virtuous community. Bascom highlights the fourth function of folklore, observing that it “fulfills the important but often overlooked function of maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns” (346).

Norrick recognises the didactic nature of proverbs, emphasising their potential for instructive use due to evaluative meanings (*How Proverbs* 70). While it would be an exaggeration to claim that all proverbs serve didactic and educational purposes, many proverbs indeed play this role. Proverbs serve as tools for teaching and correcting behaviour deemed culturally inappropriate or divergent from societal norms, which is referred to as normative functions by Miruka (80). Every society seeks to instil specific values, morals, ethics, attitudes, and behaviours in its younger generations to cultivate model citizens. In instances where certain behaviours are perceived as unacceptable or below established standards, proverbs are employed to guide, counsel, and instruct individuals on how to conduct themselves appropriately, both in specific situations and in everyday life (Coinnigh, “Structural Aspects” 116). A few Tangkhul proverbs are analysed here to see how they tried to promote such values through their proverbs.

Respect for Elders

In Tangkhul culture, like in some other societies, age is synonymous with wisdom. Consequently, community elders, characterised not necessarily by advanced age and grey hair but by their seniority, assume the role of educators. Due to the absence of formal education in the modern sense among the Tangkhul people until recent times, older individuals were automatically entrusted with the responsibility of transmitting cultural knowledge to the younger generations. A compelling illustration of this dynamic is found in the practice of *longshim*, where seniors actively engage in disseminating knowledge. The connection between age and wisdom is deeply ingrained, with any older person perceived as possessing a wealth of experiences, knowledge, and wisdom. Tangkhul culture places high value on learning from lived experiences. Somi Kasomwoshi also sees a proverb as practical wisdom (11). Many proverbs, such as (116), (117), (119), (136) draw attention to this perspective. While (136) expresses the complexity of the educational process, drawing parallels between guiding children and the challenges faced when ascending or going uphill, (116), (117), (118), and (119) can be invoked by elders aiming to impart wisdom to younger individuals, drawing upon their own life experiences to urge the younger generation to heed their counsel. Detailed interpretations of these proverbs are done in Chapter Three, offering deeper insights into their meaning and relevance. These proverbs encapsulate the cultural significance and pedagogical value of proverbial expressions within the Tangkhul community. They emphasise the importance of respecting and heeding the counsel of elders, thereby reinforcing social cohesion and the continuity of cultural values. The metaphors employed in these proverbs effectively convey complex ideas in a straightforward and relatable manner. For instance, comparing the wisdom of elders to the nutritional value of young vegetables powerfully highlights the long-term benefits of obedience and respect. They serve as a gentle reprimand for arrogant and hot-headed youths who dismiss the elderly. Additionally, these proverbs may be wielded in situations where older

individuals seek to exploit the naivety of the younger generation for personal gain. The aforementioned proverbs shed light on the Tangkhuls' perspective regarding the adult's role as an educator, emphasising the importance of imparting proper behaviour to the younger generation during their formative years.

Virtue of Labour

Rooted in their agricultural heritage, proverbs within the Tangkhul community emphasise the virtue of diligence, highlighting the intrinsic link between hard work (irrespective of gender roles) and sustenance. This is in ironic contrast to Pettigrew's view of Tangkhul men being lazy and unambitious (Solo and Maringthei 61). Several proverbs encapsulate this philosophy, illustrating the essential relationship between industriousness and access to food, shelter, and the amicable society of others: the three essentials of a fulfilled human existence. These proverbs, such as (42), (70), (126), (138), (139), and (147) either overtly or through suggestion, foreground the value of physical labour. The following also serve as potent tools for instilling and reaffirming the value of hard work within the community:

(151) *Pheipāngya, khamorya; pheipāngtheng khamortheng* (Kanrei)

lit. Wet limbs, wet mouth; dry limbs, dry mouth

ee. "No pain, no gain/ He who would catch fish must not mind getting wet"/ "No

Sweat, no sweet" (MK)

(152) *Pāngkhamarekna khamor shim* (John)

lit. Diligent hand has a sweet mouth

(153) *Shangkhana lem̄da shaiya, mikumona lem̄da mashaimana* (Sira)

lit. Tigers eat free meals; humans don't eat free meals

(154) *Seina ngachāda thingnā rāms̄hai, mikumova chi mathāpaimana* (Kasomwoshi)

“Buffalo feeds on available leaf by themselves while men cannot” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Buffalo feeds on leaves, man cannot

(151) serves as a gentle admonition directed towards individuals who aspire to live a comfortable life without putting in the necessary effort to realise their dreams. It has a similar meaning to the English proverb “No sweat, no sweet” (MK). A mother, for instance, may use this proverb to counsel her son, emphasising the importance of hard work for achieving future aspirations. In an agrarian setting, where terrace fields are cultivated, the proverb draws a vivid picture of someone working during the monsoon season, inevitably getting clothes and body wet in the process. The wet limbs serve as a symbolic representation of the strenuous labour involved. By depicting the hardworking farmer who does not shy away from the physical stress to ensure a bountiful harvest, the proverb conveys the message that, just like the farmer striving for a plentiful harvest, the son should not merely dream but actively engage in hard work.

Historically livelihood depended largely on agriculture for the Tangkhuls, and the expectation for everyone to contribute through hard work in the fields is evident. The proverbs work as mothers’ advice, conveying essential life lessons in language and imagery that resonates with the son’s understanding. In (152), the term *pāng* translates to hand, and *khamarek* signifies diligent. Therefore, the expression “diligent hand” is a metonym for a hard worker, while a “sweet mouth” similarly conveys having a good appetite or relishing the best food. In Tangkhul, possessing a hearty appetite is not frowned upon; it is, in fact, expected due to the physically demanding nature of their work that demands ample energy. It enticingly sells the idea that hard work leads to a satisfying and rewarding life.

(153) implies a comparison between a non-working individual and animals, imparting a lesson in work ethics by highlighting the distinction between wild animals, here tigers, and human

beings. Tigers are depicted as opportunistic, enjoying free meals provided by nature without cultivating or raising their own food. It is interesting to note that the reality of the tiger working hard to hunt its prey, as well as the aspect of hunting animals for food among humans are suppressed. Perhaps this proverb is of later coinage, after the majority of the population settled down into predominantly agrarian life. I recall a song from my childhood that my mother would sing when I refused to eat vegetables. She mentioned that the song was written by Rungnung Suisa.⁶⁷ One line of the song reads, “*Kayānghanna sakmei, ramsā āman mavai,*” which translates to ‘mustard leaves are more valuable than game meat.’ The sentiment expressed suggests that while mustard leaves are cultivated and consumed widely, they are not freely available for anyone to take without permission, unlike wild game, which is not owned and can be hunted by anyone (at least as matters stood prior to the Wildlife (Protection) Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 1972 and its implementation). Similarly, in the proverb, individuals who rely on others for their livelihood without contributing through work are likened to tigers. When employed to teach the value of hard work to a child, this proverb carries an encouraging tone. However, when used by an adult to address another adult, it may take on a derisive undertone. These proverbs collectively indicate that in an agrarian society, the expectation is that everyone should earn their livelihood through diligent labour.

Kasomwoshi explains (154) by describing how it suggests that, unlike buffaloes that naturally consume grass for survival, humans require more substantial nourishment. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals cultivate resources rather than relying passively on nature.

Goodwin and Wenzel highlight that proverbs “endure not only because of their rhetorical effectiveness but also because of their substantive capacity to shape attitudes and actions”

⁶⁷ Suisa was elected to the Lok Sabha during the general election of 1957.

(142). In Tangkhul society, too, as in any other culture, there is a deep appreciation for the contributions of each individual in shaping cultural identity and fostering solidarity. The societal framework actively regulates and ensures adherence to established cultural norms. The examples discussed above demonstrate that society consistently strives to promote and guide individuals to conform to these norms. Any deviation from these standards is perceived as a potential threat to communal harmony.

Unity as Strength

The proverb's rhetorical potency is derived from its authoritative status, representing the accumulated wisdom of the elders. Simultaneously, there is a collective intent to transmit this knowledge to the younger generations, as noted by Yankah ("The Aesthetics" 71). This unanimous acceptance of proverbs as cultural truisms and the voice of authority from the past renders them remarkably effective in fortifying societal identity and unity. Some Tangkhul proverbs stand out as instruments for promoting unity and solidarity, exemplifying their role in shaping and reinforcing the shared values within the community, as much as strengthening the status quo and suppressing discord. (8), (9), and (47) are powerful examples of this stress placed upon standing together as a nation.

(47) 'Unity is pegs in dyke' is a powerful metaphor derived from the traditional agricultural practices of the Tangkhuls, particularly their terrace field cultivation near rivers with small water channels. The visual and embodied associations of installing water dykes using several small wooden pegs during the monsoon season serve as a tangible representation of the proverb's message. Given the hard work of tending the terrace fields, a farmer would feel anxiety at imagining a single peg holding up his dykes.

(8) and (9) are discussed earlier in Chapter One. Suffice to reiterate here that the symbolic use of rodents and bees, the contrast between natural elements and man-made objects, and the depiction of communal activities all serve to reinforce the value of collectivism. By privileging the strength and success of collectives in nature over the brittleness of human made objects, the call is to emulate the collective enterprise of bees and rodents when the aim is to achieve maximum success either in building or destruction, thereby promoting the ideology of togetherness. These proverbs also exemplify how Tangkhul society uses language to perpetuate and reinforce cultural values, particularly those related to unity and collectivism. The use of vivid natural imagery and everyday experiences in these proverbs makes them relatable and memorable, ensuring their continued relevance across generations.

The Transience of Material Goods

Some proverbs are formulated to protect the underprivileged, providing strict admonitions on the treatment of those who are weak and vulnerable. These proverbs emphasise the transient nature of riches and caution against arrogance stemming from one's economic status. They warn against haughty behaviour, reminding individuals that material riches are fleeting. Such proverbs underscore the importance of humility and respect towards all individuals, regardless of their economic standing, and designate such behaviour as god-like or like the semi-divine village or clan chief. Proverbs highlighting the stark differences between the rich and the poor and how labour transactions are organised most often as a reward system of goods for services have already been discussed in Chapter One. Below are a few examples that emphasise the transient nature of wealth:

- (155) *Kachām hi kapākor eina makhalaphaimana, kashāng makhangathā ngalung maningmana* (John)

lit. “Poverty is not bound with bamboo strips; wealth is not an immovable rock”

(156) *Mithu ronri, harwo khongpi* (Collected, Phalee)

para. Wealth passes on from one person to another, but a rooster always crows to its fullest

As noted in Chapter One, the Tangkhuls’ perspective on wealth unveils a dynamic understanding where neither affluence nor destitution is perceived as constant. In (155), the imbalanced bipartite structure highlights the constancy of neither wealth nor poverty, underscoring the inherent imbalance between the two states. In ancient times, people used thin bamboo strips to tie objects together. Securing something with bamboo strips appears to be feeble, but high-quality bamboo is strong and durable. Some continue this practice till today. The image of securing something with a seemingly weak object is used here as a metaphor for the vulnerability and fragility of poverty. Conversely, the metaphorical use of an immovable rock signifies the weighty accumulation of wealth. However, the proverb subtly negates both weakness and firmness, using irony to accentuate the point about the precarious quality of wealth. This proverb reflects on the unpredictability of fate, the inevitability of change, and the fundamental mutability of the world. It carries a comparable meaning to the English proverb “There is nothing permanent except change (MK).” It serves a dual purpose—offering solace to the economically disadvantaged by instilling hope while simultaneously serving as a cautionary reminder to the affluent about the impermanence of their prosperity. This proverb serves as a poignant tool for consoling the less fortunate and admonishing the arrogant wealthy, compelling them to acknowledge the fleeting nature of financial good fortune. Thus, it becomes a tool for both encouragement and admonishment, promoting a balanced perspective on the uncertainties of life and prosperity.

(156) articulates the idea that a person does not know when, how, and what will happen in one’s life and in those of others. It highlights the transience of fortune and warns of the potential

decline in familial wealth over successive generations, particularly in instances where accumulated wealth is squandered. The word *ronri* means ‘sharing’. So, wealth is perceived as continuously shifting from one individual to another, as in the Western construct of the wheel of Fortune. This concept is illustrated through the analogy of a rooster crowing. In Tangkhul culture, the beautiful, extended and melodious crowing sound of a rooster is referred to as *ākhon kapei* lit. ‘full or complete sound.’ This filled out sound is performed by a rooster singlehandedly, so to speak, unlike wealth, which passes on. The second clause *harwo khongpi* is somewhat ambiguous. It could mean that if a rooster starts crowing, all roosters in the village will eventually start crowing one by one. Hardly ever is there a rooster that does not crow. The roosters in the village are compared here with members of a family from different generations. However, unlike the cascading crow of the roosters, familial wealth does not endure through the ages. The roosters, representing family members from different generations, each crow in their turn, but wealth does not follow this pattern of continuity. The wealthy do not remain wealthy indefinitely, nor do the poor remain perpetually in poverty. This proverb serves as a reminder that wealth is impermanent and should be managed prudently. It illustrates that the wealth one accumulates does not last even as long as the crow of a rooster. Consequently, this proverb can be cited to directly admonish someone who acts arrogantly due to their wealth or achievements, or it can be used mockingly to critique a conceited third party.

(157) *marānthei chorda ngarā kasang (kathā)* (Karei)

lit. (like) soya beans swell when softened

In this proverbial phrase, soya beans symbolise individuals, particularly those who are experiencing poverty or challenging circumstances. The dried state of the soya beans represents the initial condition of these individuals, highlighting a state of lack or hardship. When soaked or

cooked, soya beans undergo a process of softening and expansion. It conveys the idea that, just as soya beans can transform and increase in size individuals, regardless of their initial condition, can experience positive change and potentially improve their economic status. It can be used to give reassurance, express support, and the provision of opportunities for individuals facing adversity instead of overlooking or disparaging their struggles. It can also serve as a cautionary reminder against demeaning or underestimating individuals based on their financial status. It teaches that one should refrain from insulting others for their economic situation, since the shoe might very well be on the other foot shortly.

The School of Virtue

The proverbs already analysed show that they contain cultural values and are used for imparting lessons in actual usage, although not all proverbs are inherently didactic. Nonetheless, a significant number of proverbs are valued for their instructive content and are employed accordingly. This section analyses various proverbs that warn against various vices and reflect the structure of values inherent in Tangkhul society. The analysis provides insights into how these vices are perceived and addressed within Tangkhul cultural and social contexts.

(158) *Lāngkaso kazing kāshung, ngalei zingshong yumma* (Angkang)

lit. Pride soars to the sky, sinks beneath the earth

ee. “Pride goes before fall” (MK)

(159) *Kachui kahārong vānaona tongteka* (John)

lit. Birds break the towering bamboo

(160) *Mi kathi, kashong kaphung ngalang machingmana* (Sira)

lit. There is no schedule for death and crime

ee. “Death keeps no calendar” (MK)

(161) *Parki kachina shupa, shupki kachina para* (Sira)

lit. Those who aim for a handful get a pinch; those who aim for a pinch get a handful

(158) implies the idea that excessive pride or hubris can lead to a fall. The metaphorical orientation for pride is “up” like in English, so also for perishing is “down”. The clause “pride soars to the sky” signifies that pride often leads individuals to feel superior or elevated, as if they have reached great heights. The clause “sinks beneath the earth” shows a downfall or a humbling experience, where one’s pride leads to a metaphorical “submersion” or downfall. This duality of up and down and the juxtaposition of the two clauses reinforce the idea that excessive pride elevates an individual and simultaneously it can lead to a downfall or a humbling experience, bringing one back down to earth after reaching great heights of arrogance or self-importance. The proverb warns against the perils of arrogance, emphasising the inevitable fall that follows unchecked hubris. Such proverbs serve to foster humility and remind individuals of the consequences of arrogance, thereby promoting self-awareness and temperance.

(159) serves as a reminder to the wealthy not to be overly arrogant. Just as a bird can fracture a tall and slender bamboo that once stood proudly, this metaphor applies to individuals who believe in their wealth and reputation as unassailable. Like the fragile bamboo, their status may crumble unexpectedly at any moment. It teaches that even small or seemingly insignificant factors can have a significant impact or influence on something larger or more robust.

(160) conveys the idea that both death and criminal actions are uncertain events with no predetermined schedule. It emphasises the unpredictable nature of life and the potential for unexpected challenges or choices, such as getting involved in a crime. The statement serves as a reminder that these aspects of existence are not bound by a set timetable, urging caution, mindfulness, and an awareness of life’s uncertainties. It states that unforeseen events can transpire

at any moment, and everyone is ultimately under the providence of God, emphasising the need for caution and mindfulness in our actions.

(161) is often employed to convey the lesson that excessive greed can lead to disappointment. If one seeks to attain or acquire more than necessary or deserved, it may result in unmet expectations and frustration. Conversely, setting modest goals or having lower expectations is better, and surpassing these goals can lead to greater satisfaction. This proverb employs a perfectly balanced bipartite structure, incorporating the repetition of words and ideas to emphasise its core message through its mirror image construction. By juxtaposing two opposing outcomes based on different levels of ambition, the proverb highlights the contrast between these outcomes. The ironic twist in each clause serves to underscore the lesson, as the unexpected results caution against greed and encourage modesty and realistic goal setting.

When I was young, I played mancala games with my friends. In this game, the players distribute pebbles into pockets or holes, and the player who collects the most pebbles wins. To succeed, players must strategically place the pebbles. Occasionally, the pebbles are distributed in a manner that allows a player to collect many at once. However, this strategy can sometimes fail. In one such incident, an adult observing our game quoted this proverb. In one sense, the speaker was using the proverb literally but also metaphorically to suggest that one should not be overly ambitious, as life often has its own plans.

These proverbs intentionally teach the importance of humility, the vulnerability of human constructs (wealth, power), and the unpredictable nature of life. They remind individuals of the potential consequences of arrogance and wrongdoing, promoting a cautious and mindful approach to life. By fostering self-awareness and temperance, these proverbs serve to guide individuals towards more virtuous and prudent behaviour.

Some Tangkhul proverbs encapsulate the concept of consequences of one's action and the insight that life reciprocates according to one's actions.

(162) *Seiyum zangda seiyum; miyum zangda miyum* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Cattle thief will have no cattle; people who murder will have no people

ee. "As you sow, you shall mow"/ "Tit for tat" (MK)

(163) *Tuirei hāt mirei thi; tuinao hāt minao thi* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. When a big promise is broken, an important person dies; when a small promise is broken, a less important person dies

ee. "What goes around comes around" (Oxford)

(164) *Minao thiranu chikha ichānao thi* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. One who wishes to harm somebody's child, loses one's own child

ee. "He who spits towards the sky gets it back into his own face"/ He falls himself that digs another's pit / Caught in his own toils" (MK)

Proverb (162) employs parallelism and exhibits a perfectly balanced bipartite structure. It consists of three words, each with two syllables, and each word is repeated twice, creating a highly musical tone. Additionally, each clause utilises a palindrome, ensuring that reading it forward or backward yields the same sound and meaning. This structural composition underscores the inevitability of the consequences of one's actions, whichever way one looks at it. Similarly, (165) also employs parallelism and features both internal and external rhyme. The proverb consists of twelve syllables, with each syllable repeated twice, enhancing its rhythmic and musical quality. This structure reinforces the proverb's theme of the inevitability of the consequences of one's actions. This proverb can be used to warn or advise people not to make promises without much consideration because violating the promises could harm not only the individual who makes the promise but also

his entire family. The proverb (162) also reiterates the same theme as (163) and (164). It conveys a moral lesson about the repercussions of harmful actions. It warns against plotting harm or deceit against others, as such actions can ultimately harm oneself.

The Tangkhuls firmly believe that whatever one does to harm others will inversely come back to him as there is *Āmeowo* who makes sure every man gets his own measure. The proverbs (48) ‘The chopping sound of the axe reaches till heavens’ and (49) ‘The cry of the stolen rooster reaches till heavens’ also talk about the belief of justice in *Āmeowo*. The above proverbs are a very effective tool to inculcate socially acceptable values as they also highlight the possible consequences of misconduct. These proverbs encourage people to live an honest life. The proverb teaches that harmful actions, especially those driven by malice or arrogance, often backfire. It articulates a philosophical view akin to the principle of karma or the ethical concept that negative actions return to the perpetrator.

The Lives of Others

(165) *Hāncham nhānchacham, hānthar nhānthathar* (Collected Phalee)
para. It’s easy to rekindle old friendships but difficult to start a new one
ee. “Old friends and old wine are best /Forsake not an old friend, for the new is not comparable to him” (MK)

(166) *Khongnai khanai, chinao kato* (Collected, Phalee)
lit. Near is the neighbour, far is the kinsfolk
ee. “Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off” (MK)

(167) *Sā rengkathei khongnainaola kashai samphanga* (John)
lit. The skilled hunter’s neighbour also gets to eat
ee. “When a great oak falls, every neighbour may scuffle for a faggot” (MK)

(165) is challenging to translate into English without compromising its rhyme, structure, and literal meaning. The archaisms, as well as the use of rhyming and reduplicative words, are difficult to transfer effectively. This proverb highlights the value of longstanding friendships, which go beyond the relationship between two friends to encompass any enduring relationship between individuals. Such relationships have weathered the highs and lows of life, allowing those involved to easily reconnect in warm conversations or understand each other effortlessly. In contrast, initiating a new friendship or relationship requires more effort and can be demanding. This proverb is used to advise on the importance of cherishing relationships with friends, family, neighbours, or any individuals.

The proverb (166) offers insight into how individuals perceive their neighbours. It suggests that siblings may share a close bond before starting their own families, but this bond often weakens if they stay apart from each other over time. In times of adversity, such as during unfortunate events like death or fire, neighbours are often the first to come to one's aid, prioritising friendship over blood kinship. This does not imply that familial ties are unimportant or severed entirely. Humans hold deep affection for their families, but the proverb tries to bring out the significance of neighbours by juxtaposing the neighbour against the blood relative to give a point to the comparison. Similarly, a Phalee children's song Appendix II (14) echoes this sentiment, highlighting the value placed upon neighbourly relationships. Unlike the Tangkhul people's strict meat distribution culture, where specific body parts have designated owners, this song demonstrates a clear willingness to share with neighbours.

The proverb 'The skilled hunter's neighbour also gets to eat' reflects the same custom. While this proverb may not strictly qualify as a proverb due to its lack of figurative meaning, it serves as a cliché, observing the Tangkhul tradition of sharing with neighbours. However, it could

acquire a proverbial meaning in another context, such as praising their skill and generosity upon receiving a gift from a neighbour.

Thus, we see that these proverbs, imbued with metaphorical richness and grounded in the lived experiences of an agrarian society, serve multiple functions. They act as educational tools, reinforcing the community's respect for elders and the transmission of wisdom. They emphasise the importance of hard work and diligence, crucial virtues in an agricultural society, and remind individuals of the impermanence of wealth, advocating for humility and prudent management of resources. The proverbs also underscore the value of unity and collectivism, reflecting the community's deeply rooted belief in the strength found in togetherness. Through vivid natural imagery and relatable analogies, these proverbs effectively convey complex ideas, ensuring their continued relevance and resonance across generations. By promoting a balanced perspective on life's uncertainties, they provide both encouragement and admonishment, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual respect within the community. They are not merely linguistic expressions but powerful rhetorical devices that shape attitudes, actions, and social cohesion, ensuring the continuity of cultural values and the maintenance of social harmony. They encapsulate cultural wisdom and serve as reminders of the potential consequences of one's actions, fostering a sense of accountability and moral responsibility within the community.

Communicative Functions

It is a truism to state that proverbs are basically communicational. Apart from their moral and educational value, proverbs are “ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication” (Mieder, *Proverbs* xi). They are part of language and are often used for rhetorical purposes because of their figurative, evocative, and allusive constructions. As already noted, apart from transmitting cultural beliefs, norms, values, and traditions, like all other genres of oral

literature, proverbs function to instruct, entertain, and regulate the behaviour and moral conduct of members of society. It helps the users express and convey messages and various emotions that cannot be done easily in everyday language. According to Brunvand, it is through proverbs that a culture expresses most of its value judgements and moral condemnations. In other words, proverbs express praise, criticism, advice, persuasion, and teaching (8). Proverbs are also cited or quoted when the speaker wants to avoid sharing his or her opinion directly and to express their opinion more concisely. In a sense, the speaker is transferring the responsibility of his words to the anonymous voices of the community or to common sense, which speaks through him (Obelkevich 214). A proverb is pressed into service of specific communicatory intentions, to suit a situation in which both the speaker and the listener commonly agree upon something as being both logical and true. Citing Hargie et al. (1995), Lauhankanga writes, “[p]roverbs not only represent social knowledge learned from previous generations. Their use tells about an ability to be equal to the occasion, a skill to optimise one’s aims and means, an ability to control one’s own behaviour and interpret other people’s intentions. All of these are constructed in social interaction” (“Functions” 130). Proverbs are used to hint at, conceal, embellish, and express general truths. A proverb is an effective means of communication, though its effectiveness depends on the situation in which it is used and the creativity and emotional astuteness of the user. At each moment of effective use of a proverb, the speaker turns into an artist. The efficacy of proverb application, like any literary form worth its salt, makes demands upon the imagination and intellect simultaneously, and its inherent plasticity takes the impression of the personality of the speaker. Community texts like these are remarkably democratic and make no distinction between the figure of the reader/interpreter and the writer/speaker.

The categorisation of the functions of proverbs that follows is based upon Outi Lauhankanga (2008), Goodwin & Wenzel (1981), Westermarck (1930), and Yankah (1989) along with a reading of the collected primary sources. Tangkhuls also use proverbs to reinforce, illustrate or summarise ideas, express humour through proverbs, warn, advise, exhort, persuade, influence, manipulate, defamiliarise and reduce conversation tension. Through proverbs, the speaker can connect to the psychological and emotional states of others rooted in a similar cultural ethos.

Buttressing Arguments

Proverbs are cited to validate one's argument. If a person can quote a proverb accurately, it adds authority to their claims because its significance comes "from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms" (Arewa and Dundes 1964, 70). Thus, a proverb may serve as an effective impersonal vehicle for personal communication. Proverbs can be used during an argument or discussion when the speaker does not want to talk about it at great lengths or wants to have the last word, effectively shutting up the opposition by sheer force of shared beliefs. This is called a summative function by Miruka (82). When it is difficult to share one's opinion directly, a proverb can be of great help. For instance, if someone is arguing for the significance of unity in achieving collective goals, she could invoke the proverb, "United we stand, divided we fall," to underscore the importance of cooperation and solidarity.

The following is an illustration of how someone can reinforce her argument:

(168) *Mafathingli paishāra mangarei mana* (Kanrei)

tran. *Paishāra* doesn't climb on *mafathing*⁶⁸

ee. "Marry your like" (Penguin)

⁶⁸ *Paishāra* is unidentified. *Mafathing* is Phoebe hainesiana. See Appendix III.

This proverb finds application when someone seeks to express disapproval of a marriage between individuals of different social status and wishes to persuade them to follow the traditional custom of selecting a life partner from a comparable social status. As described in Chapter One, Tangkhul society is stratified into three distinct categories: *āmei*, *āchui*, and *āchei*. *Āmei* families, also referred to as *khalāknao* usually have substantial paddy fields, land holdings, and domesticated animals and have *lengchengshim*. In the past, the members of the *āmei* family, analogous to the *mafathing* in the proverb, typically avoided unions with commoners, or *vāhongnao*.

A father might invoke this proverb to convey his disdain for his son marrying a girl from a less privileged background without explicitly stating his reasons or directly criticising the girl. The analogy compares the boy's family to a mighty tree (*mafathing*) and the girl's family to a parasitic creeper (*paishāra*) dependent on other plants for sustenance. Observing that *paishāra* never intertwines with *mafathing* in nature, the father obliquely communicates the cultural unacceptability of his son marrying someone of lower status. The underlying message is based upon naturalistic logic: as in nature, the creeper is unlikely to bring any benefit to the mighty tree, so in culture, the lower-class bride will not be valuable to the groom. The proverb may also be employed in a third-person context, adding a touch of sarcasm when discussing someone not present, amplifying its impact. By citing the proverb, the father could summarise and conclude his argument with his son without much explanation. Ng and Basu also provide an example from their fieldwork where a nonagenarian cited a proverb to reinforce his argument (57).

For a Laugh

Humorous proverbs frequently function as a form of social critique, enabling people to discuss sensitive issues or voice dissent without being confrontational or descending into a quarrel. “Humour is a convenient conveyance of satire,” notes Miruka (74). The use of proverbs in speech

provokes excitement and interest. They can be used ironically or satirically, thereby creating a comical situation. Some proverbs contain intrinsic humour, but some are humorous only when used in specific contexts.

(169) *Kachāmana mahai eina katham mevā thi* (John)

lit. A poor man can kill a buck with a piece of charcoal

ee. “An unlucky man would be drowned in a teacup” (MK)

Generally, the condition of being poor is sad, but this proverb also provokes a sense of levity. The hyperbolic expression, the ability to kill a goat with charcoal, makes the situation as amusing as it is pathetic. The utter hopelessness of the poor man’s condition is too overwhelming, and he cannot think of any meaningful solution at the moment except to respond with a contemptuous laugh. This proverb is used when someone is very unlucky. It can be used in first, second and third-person correlations.

(87) *Naoyong nnishoi kasing (theka)* (Collected Phalee)

lit. (like) monkeys touching birdlime

In a WhatsApp group discussion about ongoing ethnic conflicts, a user shared a video portraying the aftermath of the fighting, revealing the chaos and hardship faced by the citizens. Amidst the somber discussion concerning the government’s ineffective handling of the situation, one participant introduced a moment of levity by commenting, *Naoyong nishoi kasing theka shurikho*, which translates to, ‘It is like a monkey touching birdlime.’ This humorous proverbial phrase instantly elicited laughter from the group members, painting a vivid mental image of confused monkeys ensnared in sticky birdlime. Without needing an explanation of the proverbial phrase’s meaning, its imagery spoke volumes, symbolising the tangled mess of the situation and the time and effort it would take for resolution. Even though it was unfamiliar to some members of the

group, the evocative quality of the proverbial phrase made interpretation unnecessary, enriching the conversation with cultural depth.

(170) *Rikashinaoshew harchaira thui* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Even the lover's chicken coop looks beautiful

ee. "Beauty lies in lovers' eyes" (MK)

This underscores the universal theme "Love is blind," portraying the tendency of love to blind individuals to their lover's imperfections. The use of hyperbole in describing the lover's chicken coop as beautiful vividly captures the intensity of love and adds humour. Normally, a chicken coop would be covered with fowl droppings, making it unpleasant and malodorous. However, in the eyes of someone madly in love, even the unsightly aspects appear charming. The proverb humorously mocks the person's infatuation by highlighting their inability to see the obvious flaws in what belongs to their lover. This proverb serves as a cautionary tale, advising against making important life decisions solely based on superficial qualities and humorously highlighting the tendency of love to blind individuals to the imperfections of the beloved. This proverb is frequently employed among friends when someone perceives their lover's actions as flawless and cannot cease expressing admiration for them.

(171) *Fakapai thingtung kāula āzingshong khaihāng ngayappa* (Pheirei)

lit. One who breaks wind climbs up a tree but those who sit beneath the tree hit each other's thigh

The proverb presents as an intriguing and humorous scatological metaphor, vividly illustrating a scenario in which an individual cannot control flatulence and subsequently ascends a tree to escape humiliation, leaving those beneath to react. In this context, the individual responsible for the disturbance symbolises someone who creates issues, while ascending the tree represents the act of

distancing oneself from the problem, thereby avoiding accountability for their actions. The people beneath the tree, who respond by striking each other's thighs, represent those affected by the disturbance, misdirecting their blame towards each other rather than addressing the root cause of the problem.

Here is an incident in which I saw this proverb in action. One of our friends suggested that we go for a picnic at a beautiful but remote location. Initially, everyone was hesitant due to the distance, but we were eventually convinced because it was one of the best picnic spots, and we had not visited it before. On the designated date, however, the person who had suggested the location did not show up. Given the distance, everyone was exhausted by the time we returned in the evening. Despite the enjoyable experience, it was a strenuous day for all. One of us commented, "One who breaks wind climbs up a tree, but those who sit beneath the tree hit each other's thigh. He suggested this place and then did not attend."

This proverb encapsulates a common human behaviour in which individuals tend to avoid confronting the actual source of their problems and instead engage in conflicts with those around them. In various settings, such as within families, workplaces, or social groups, this proverb can be particularly useful when individuals begin to blame each other without genuinely seeking to identify the underlying cause of the issue. The humorous nature of the metaphor has the potential to diffuse tension, making the situation less confrontational.

To Warn and Admonish

When someone is at risk of ruining oneself or others, cautionary advice is given to save them from possible danger. It can be a warning against a disobedient child, someone who rejects the counsel of others, or to warn against any evil deeds that can bring harmful results.

(172) *Ngawurna chungnā haida ālangkham mashungkapam (kathā) (Sira)*

lit. (like) bamboo rats neglect to block the entrance when many

(45) *Cho marurira chorui mayiraro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Twist not the thread before buying the beads

Ngawur, part of the rodent family, typically resides together in a communal burrow. As a defence against snakes and predators, they construct passages and seal entrances with stones. However, when their numbers swell, they become negligent in blocking these entrances, making them vulnerable to harm. Drawing on this metaphor of careless rodents, the proverbial phrase serves as a reminder for individuals to exercise caution in their speech, preventing others from exploiting their words later. According to Sira, this proverbial phrase is used to describe disunity and the failure to maintain confidentiality (1). This advice becomes particularly relevant in situations such as clan or group meetings, where maintaining secrecy or reaching a unanimous decision becomes challenging amidst a large gathering. In such instances, an elder or leader may caution the attendees to be vigilant, ensuring that the information discussed remains within the confines of the group and does not reach outsiders.

However, according to Somi Kasomwoshi, this proverbial phrase is employed to describe situations where everyone assumes that someone else will complete the task, resulting in no one actually doing the work. For instance, a mother might use this proverb to admonish her irresponsible children who neglect their own duties, relying on their siblings to perform them instead. She warns that such behaviour could become habitual and potentially ruin their lives in critical situations.

Some proverbs are imperative sentences, and their main function is to give warning. Proverb (45), 'Twist not the yarn before buying the beads,' emphasises the importance of thoughtful planning and evaluation to avoid potential pitfalls or regrets. This proverb can also be

used to caution individuals against celebrating prematurely. An illustrative incident involves my mother using this proverb with my father. My father was expressing his desire to purchase a piece of land, but the owner was unwilling to sell it to him. He enthusiastically described his plans to create a pond on the land, detailing how it would be one of the best in the village and how he would stock it with various types of fish, speaking as if the pond already existed. My mother interjected with the proverb, “Twist not the yarn before buying the beads” to caution my father against exaggerating his plans since he did not yet own the land.

To Mock and Ridicule

Proverbs are frequently utilised as a mechanism to correct or mock an individual’s behaviour, either because it is deemed unacceptable according to societal norms or to ridicule someone for personal gain. Certain proverbs explicitly highlight the objectionable behaviour of an individual.

(173) *Ruikashi ruinrao kashi, arunkashi nthong kashi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Bad rice wine produces more froth; bad looking person is more flamboyant

This proverb draws a comparison between an individual who is not aesthetically pleasing yet behaves flamboyantly and a rice wine that produces an excessive amount of bubbles. During the fermentation process of rice wine or beer, air bubbles are produced; however, a spoiled batch produces more bubbles, giving the false impression that the fermentation is proceeding well, when, in fact, it indicates spoilage. Similarly, the individual in this proverb is also described as a person who is not physically attractive but behaves, speaks, or dresses in an attention-seeking or ostentatious manner. Excessive bubbling is indicative of putrefaction rather than successful fermentation, thus creating an analogy for deceptive appearances. This proverb is rarely used in direct reference to the listener (second-person correlation), as it would be considered impolite and could potentially harm the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. Additionally, it is

unlikely to be used in self-reference, as individuals rarely perceive themselves as being showy or attention-seeking. This proverb is usually used in a third-person co-relation to ridicule that the person's ostentatious behaviour or style is making other people uncomfortable. The proverb employs the literary device of parallelism and features a perfectly balanced bipartite structure. Furthermore, the term *kashi* (bad) is repeated four times within the proverb, intensifying the portrayal of the negativity associated with the objects or person described. This repetition not only lends a musical quality to the proverb but also enhances its appeal to listeners, thereby conveying a strong message.

In an incident, a woman cited this proverb in reference to a girl who had returned to the village for the Christmas vacation after studying elsewhere. The girl's attire and makeup were perceived as inappropriate by the villagers. Annoyed by her unconventional appearance, a woman remarked, "Bad rice wine produces more froth; a bad-looking person is more flamboyant." The girl's attire and makeup, seen as inappropriate by the villagers, indicated a clash between modern influences and traditional values. Her appearance was perceived as an attempt to stand out, much like the excessive bubbling of spoiled rice wine. This proverb, rich in metaphor and cultural significance, provides insight into societal values and mechanisms of social regulation. It serves as a tool for maintaining conformity and expressing collective disapproval of behaviour deemed inappropriate.

The relationship between proverbs and folktales has been discussed in Chapter Three. It is observed that many proverbs and proverbial phrases are the condensed message of folktales. Such proverbial statements, particularly those connected to folktales, can be effective in reinforcing the intended meaning. Similarly, by employing proverbs or proverbial phrases, a speaker can succinctly summarise or convey their message without the need for elaborate explanation, as

individuals from the same cultural background are expected to understand the allusion. However, these references can sometimes be perceived as insulting, as many folktales and proverbial references involve animals, and comparing someone to an animal may be regarded as demeaning. Therefore, caution must be exercised when using proverbs as metaphorical references.

(174) *Shangrithān shimshe* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Cheerful in public; grumpy at home

This proverb is used to describe an individual who projects an easy going and cheerful demeanour in public, making everyone around them happy, but who treats their family members very poorly. The proverb encapsulates the complex and dualistic behaviour of such individuals and is used in a negative sense, often referring to those who abuse their family members, but hypocritically put up a virtuous front in public. In many cultures, maintaining a cheerful demeanour in public is highly valued and encouraged. This proverb, however, specifically highlights individuals who go beyond merely being pleasant; they are often the most agreeable, cracking jokes, and becoming everyone's favourite.

I once encountered a person who was exceptionally funny and charming, speaking eloquently and making everyone around him feel happy with his great sense of humour. We all laughed at his jokes and admired his pleasant nature. After he left, we praised his good nature and lovable demeanour. However, one person who knew him well remarked, “*Shangrithan shimshe.*” For an extended period of time, I believed this to be a compliment. Later, I discovered that I had misheard the second word, *shimshe*. Phalee is a tonal language, and the slight mispronunciation of the first syllable from a mid-tone to a high-tone can change the meaning. When pronounced with a high tone, it means ‘sweet person,’ but with a low tone, which is the original tone of this proverb, it refers to a person who behaves badly at home. I later learned that the speaker was referring to

the man as someone with a very bad reputation at home due to his cruelty towards his family members. The individual who cites this proverb can succinctly convey the personality of another person through a brief, culturally familiar statement, rather than using personal words. By doing so, the speaker can effectively depersonalise their commentary.

Although proverbs are generally seen to work due to the shared language and culture of both parties, they can also be strategically employed to introduce an element of strangeness, alienate others, or obscure the speaker's true intentions. As Miruka notes, proverbs are “a kind of code language. Specialists in their usage can deliberately employ rare ones to cut out amateurs from their conversation” (82). In the above example, the speaker might not intend to defamiliarise anyone, but a lack of knowledge of the proverb could easily mislead an individual unfamiliar with its meaning. Consequently, if one seeks to conceal their true intentions or alienate someone who does not belong to the community, the use of proverbs can effectively defamiliarise or obscure the message.

When people, especially young people, encounter proverbs, they do not just absorb ethical or cultural values; they also dive into the linguistic richness embedded within these sentences. Proverbs are not mere strings of words but carefully crafted linguistic artefacts that employ various verbal elements to convey deeper meanings and aesthetic appeal. One aspect that young speakers pick up on is vocabulary expansion. Proverbs introduce them to new phrases, words, and sentence structures that might not be common in everyday language. As they encounter these linguistic elements within the context of proverbs, they naturally incorporate them into their vocabulary, enhancing their linguistic proficiency. Furthermore, the structure of proverbs is often intricate and elegant, possessing a beauty and music-like charm that captivates the mind. Through exposure to these complex yet beautiful sentence structures, users develop an appreciation for language as a

tool for artistic expression. They learn that language can be more than just a means of communication; it can be a form of art. Moreover, proverbs frequently employ metaphorical language to convey abstract concepts in a vivid and memorable way. By deciphering the metaphors embedded within proverbs, people not only grasp the literal meaning of the phrase but also understand the underlying symbolism, fostering their ability to think creatively and imaginatively. Numerous scholars, including Honeck, have delved into the cognitive dimensions of proverbs. This illustrates that the function of proverbs as an educational instrument extends beyond imparting moral and cultural values. It also contributes significantly to the advancement of language skills and cognitive abilities in individuals.

As Mieder notes, “[m]any proverbs refer to old measurements, obscure professions, outdated weapons, unknown tools, plants, animals, names, and other traditional matters. Often it is not clear any longer what exactly is meant by certain words in a proverb, even though the actual sense is understood” (*Proverbs* 137). It is not wrong, therefore, to claim that proverbs constitute a repository of cultural knowledge from past generations, and the very unfamiliarity is the route through which curiosity about the past is piqued and the first step in heritage conservation is taken. They reflect the values a certain society upholds and provide deep philosophical insights into the lives of the people who use them. Some proverbs paint rustic imagery or use archaic words, which contain the remnant of the past generations.

Moreover, many proverbs summarise the experience of people’s daily life. They reflect the information accumulated over the years and prove acceptable and applicable to various situations in life. Proverbs provide insight into the community’s memory, lifestyle, culture, and past life. It may be considered the residue of the collective knowledge and experience of the past. It is an excellent place to start looking into the authentic life of the people. It is a poignant and eloquent

record of the life of ordinary people coping with the unremarkable quotidian. It may be seen by some as primitive and lacking in logical reasoning in the modern sense, but the oral culture reveals that the society once had socio-logic, which is “a socially developed sense of practical reasoning” (Goodwin and Wenzel 140). To understand cultural identity, one must investigate this residue in oral cultural texts. However, Mieder also correctly warns that “care must be taken, when looking at proverbs as expressing aspects of a certain worldview or mentality of a people, that no stereotypical conclusions about a so-called “national character” are drawn” (*Behold* 1).

Proverbs also gain the weight of authority through archaisms that are not intentional but become so through usage. Society and culture evolve, but proverbs must be unchanging like a line of verse by virtue of their dependence on formal integrity and craftedness. Of course, the fixedness of the form and meaning of a proverb is debatable. Although changes may occur as an oral text, like the ship of Theseus, the proverb retains its ontological unity. People use proverbs as a communicative device to persuade, motivate, or manipulate others. Through the use of proverbs, the speaker can connect to the minds, thoughts, and hearts of others rooted in the same cultural soil as themselves.

Conclusion

This research explores the multifaceted facets of the Tangkhul worldview, as elucidated by the community through their proverbs. The primary objective, as outlined above, has been to scrutinise the stylistic elements, including figurative language, symbolism, poetics, cultural allusions and references, that collectively contribute to the aesthetic allure and enhance the persuasiveness of an argument or the impact of a message, thereby enriching their overarching significance. The study analyses each proverb as a cultural text and shows how it operates within a language structure and exploring its rhetorical characteristics, metaphorical dimensions, and linguistic features.

Woven with intricacy, Tangkhul proverbs seamlessly capture the agrarian essence of society, utilising vibrant nature imagery encompassing animals, plants, and agricultural traditions. Rooted in the Tangkhul people's daily interactions with nature and farming, the proverbs reflect the ordinary lives of individuals, highlighting the interconnectedness between people and their surroundings. It can be argued that the proverbs harbour a rich source of information about the Tangkhul community, providing valuable insights into their philosophy, attitudes towards interpersonal relationships, and their connection with the environment. Crafting these proverbs demands a skilful balance of criticism, often expressed through poetic and sometimes humorous language. The careful selection of words not only imparts meaning but also brings clarity to situations and, at times, veils the speaker's true intentions. Each proverb uses stylistic devices that provide aesthetic quality and freshness to the texts and add meaning to the proverbs. They are packed with culturally meaningful words and allusions. Moreover, the corpus of collected proverbs discussed in this thesis reveals that Tangkhuls also use proverbs as a communication strategy like

in any other language. Speakers often use proverbs to add depth, resonance, and persuasive power to their expressions.

This research enhances the comprehension of Tangkhul culture, elucidating how proverbs significantly contribute to character development and ethical awareness. It underscores the role of language in conveying moral and ethical principles within an oral culture without written laws. Proverbs distil insights into human behaviour, ethics, and social norms, reflecting the values of a society. Moreover, this study recognises the philosophical underpinnings embedded in proverbs, contributing to broader inquiries and discussions. By delving into Tangkhul proverbs, the study provides valuable historical and cultural insights, offering a glimpse into the collective memory and experiences of the Tangkhul community. It serves as a platform for acknowledging the commonalities and distinctions in how diverse societies articulate wisdom and cultural values through language, especially proverbs.

The Tangkhuls' understanding of proverbs encompasses a broad range of figurative and fixed expressions, all referred to as *chāncham*, without distinguishing “true proverbs” from other forms. Although there are few wellerisms and dialogue proverbs, proverbial phrases are abundant and treated as proverbs by the natives. Traditional taboos, superstitions, and moral dictums are integrated into their proverbs, which are primarily didactic but lack the refined qualities often associated with proverbs. They are often marked by the word *shārra* at the end, and I identify them as “*shārra* proverbs.” While these traditional beliefs and practices may seem outdated, they persist in the community's attitudes and are being re-evaluated for their contemporary relevance.

The study reveals that the most fundamental aspect of the Tangkhul value system seems to be moderation, in the service of the supreme value of conflict avoidance. Almost every proverb in the collection may be distilled into the quintessence of a message of hard work and self-restraint.

None of the ways in which these proverbs function can be separated from this strong sense of integrity and a trust in the golden mean, and adjacent exhortations for self-control and abstemiousness, judiciousness in speech and act, tolerance for the different, compassion for the vulnerable, hard work for the benefit of blood kin and the extended family of village and clan, and last but not the least, commensurability between the inner individual and the public persona (and thus the weeding out of hypocrisy).

In the dominant discourse, haunted by the spectre of British Imperialism and colonial modernity, the Naga people in general (and the Tangkhuls are no exception) have been depicted as warlike, primitive, and lazy. It has been difficult for the Tangkhuls to emerge from the combined shadow cast by the filters through which Pettigrew, Hodson and others looked at the people and read and wrote them. As this study has hopefully been able to show, the value system of the Tangkhuls cannot be farther from this representation. Although unique in many ways, as it must and should be, the morality and the hierarchisation of values within the social fabric that a study of Tangkhul proverbs reveals is surprisingly similar to and comparable with any patriarchal community and are arguably not as alien to the Western mind as many have held it to be. This study has tried to contribute to the alternative readings of Tangkhul and other 'tribal' and ethnic cultures that have emerged and are emerging in recent times from within these communities to offer a variant vantage point so that, like the rooster's *ākhon kapei*, a fuller understanding of the people may be achieved in the future.

This research has been visualised as the first phase of a long-term project. Due to constraints of time and resources, several limitations remain, which have been indicated in Chapter One. The extension of the database of proverbs to be as comprehensive as possible is a primary future aim. Another piquant aspect is the ambiguous attitude to gender that the proverbs seem to

show. This corpus may be read more closely and against the grain to formulate a more nuanced and in-depth account of the modalities of gender relations, by default, conservative values that proverbs convey. More fieldwork needs to be done in Phalee and Thoyee villages to collect and document not only proverbs and other oral texts but also the traditional practices and the objects that reflect the material culture of the people. A preliminary sample survey was carried out in Shillong, Meghalaya, during the course of this research in order to understand the *chāncham* knowledge of Tangkhul college students. The sample size was too small for useful quantitative analysis, and focusing on this aspect was felt to be a distraction from the primary objectives of this research. A total of 129 participants of both genders were presented with a questionnaire containing a list of 59 ‘most commonly used’ proverbs and proverbial phrases in Tangkhul. Each proverb had four options for participants to choose from, reflecting their level of familiarity with the given proverb or phrase. Additionally, a fifth column was included in case participants were aware of any variant or version of the provided proverb. This questionnaire was modelled upon Peter Ďurčo’s questionnaire that he uses in his work “Empirical Research and Paremiological Minimum.” No further work was carried out subsequently due to constraints of time and other resources. A part of the future activities stemming from the present study will be to extend this survey among a larger number of the young Tangkhul urban diaspora to establish a proper paremiological minimum in the community in the present.

I have tried in this work to primarily lay the groundwork for developing a comprehensive dictionary of proverbs, which will be an invaluable resource for preserving and disseminating this cultural heritage, especially for Phalee, which is as yet unrecorded. I would like to build upon this by creating an online resource, based upon the collected database. It is also envisaged that a participatory digital heritage documentation and conservation initiative may be incorporated into

this Internet resource. The resource may also be extended into an archive of not only primary cultural texts but also into a platform for and repository of theoretical and scholarly study of Tangkhul cultures. As it stands, this study hopes to be an initial resource for scholars interested in investigating the evolution of language, the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the intricate dynamics of oral traditions of the Tangkhuls, Phalees, and possibly other oral cultures through the lens of proverbs.



List of Publication

Ng, Mawonthing and Debapriya Basu. ““Animals are Killed by their Tracks and Men are killed by their Words” The Rhetoric of Speech and Silence in Phalee Proverbs.” *Proverbium*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2024, pp. 50–72. doi.org/10.29162/pv.41.1.537.

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Appendix I

List of Tangkhul and Phalee Proverbs

1. *Lan kachungkha khuiki kachiwui vānga kaphā āming kazat phāmei* (Sira)
lit. It's better to have a good name rather than riches
ee. "Better a good name than riches" (MK)
2. *Morkasāp shānaowui khamor kathuka chikhurna* (Sira)
lit. The mouth of a gossipmonger woman is a deep grave
3. *Khamor yāzan kasangbing ringa* (John)
lit. Those who guard their mouth survive
4. *Kharar sākui, sāphei-āpāng ngapai shārra* (Pheirei)
lit. One shan't contend with the senior's share (head or legs of an animal)
5. *Thari phurshārra* (Angkang)
lit. One shan't remove the boundary stones
6. *Ngalei rarmeiya, ngapaisharra* (Kasomwoshi)
"Land is older, thou shall not plunder (infringe) land" (Kasomwoshi)
7. *Longpet sāmakhao shārra* (Pheirei)
lit. One shan't destroy the sanctity of the *longpet*
8. *Ngalengkha shilengthā, ngayurakha ngawurthā, yangakha ngayangthā* (Kanrei)
lit. Like rock bees when united, like bamboo mice when together, like a sieve when sieved
9. *Khāngrip ngavengmei; shairip shaiphāmei* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. Carrying together is lighter; eating together is tastier

10. *Siluli nāreng sanglaga shichinpai, mafala kateo mina shichin pai, kha makaphā shanaoli marākpaimana* (John)

lit. A bull can be used by piercing its nose, an elephant can be used by a small man, but an evil woman cannot be tamed

11. *Ngalānao shingnairaona* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Women are strangers' servants

12. *Wuiri naoroi ramuiyei, gahar naoroi khamtongshu* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Children under the wife's care go inside the storeroom; under the husband's care go beyond the threshold

13. *Kazingrek, wungnaorek* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Heavens' wisdom, *wungnao's* wisdom

14. *Khi yangnaona saho rākshi, khi phuirina nru ?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What *yangnao* speaks impolitely, what python bites?

15. *Khi yangnaona ayao rāthomrai par?* (Collected, Phalee)

tran. What *yangnao* picks from the *ayao rāthom*?

16. *Khi khongri harwo na rangphewrai nru?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What matured rooster pecks on sun-drying grain

17. *Mi ākhali phumphor phorshārra* (Pheirei)

lit. One shan't be called names

18. *Vāhongnao kashāng hanremhan katim sāngmei* (Sira)

lit. The buckwheat flourishes longer than a commoner's wealth

19. *Vāhongnaoshān rengruichān* (Sira)

lit. The wealth of a commoner; the burning of small twigs

20. *Seinao thangkha chānga, wungnao thangkha chānga* (Kanrei)
lit. Sometimes a calve is scrawny, sometimes *wungnao* is scrawny
21. *Ayaiwui thithang paihuirukrai sheroiyei* (Collected, Phalee)
lit. When the rich man dies, even the chamber pot is filled with food
22. *Kathai kachām kathanrarām, kashāng khari nkoiriri* (Collected, Phalee)
tran. The poor are *kathanrarām*, the rich keep prudently
23. *Makhalei malaothaya* (Arokianathan)
lit. One who has nothing boils over
ee. “No pride like that of an enriched beggar” (MK)
24. *āva thila āshāmali chapkazat (kathā)* (Sira)
lit. (like) crying for the lover when her mother died
25. *Kashi mareo, hangkhā mareo* (Kanrei)
lit. Bad excitement, crowd excitement
26. *Malum thāda chāmkathi* (Sira)
lit. rush to death like flying termites
27. *Rikruina nkimamānka, “Iya mursu makāka mankenei” chiyichei* (Collected, Phalee)
lit. “I can’t bite as I have no mouth”, says the nit as it bites
28. (i) *Zingsho philāvāli āchon hoakha “Ili āyai mahola”, āyai hoakha “Ili āchon mahola” da āmaili shaokatā* (Sira)
tran. When people call *zingsho philāva* “*āchon*,” she responds, “Why don’t you call me *āyai*?” When they call her “*āyai*,” she retorts, “Why don’t you call me *āchon*?” and tumbles down the slope

(ii) *Zingsho philāvali āchon hola āmaili saokatā (kathā)* (Pettigrew)

lit. (like) *zingsho philava* tumbles down a slope for calling her *āchon*

29. (i) *Purhumna kaphung ngalei minakha khi zāsito kaji thadā, kala khābungli yongsangakha khi mangsito kaji thāda* (Kasomwoshi)

“Like the toad frog wandering what to eat during landslide and what to drink while jumping inside the pool” (Kasomwoshi)

(ii) *Purhumna kaphung ngalei minakha “Khi zāsito” kaji thadā, kala khābungli yongsangakha “Khi mangsito” kaji thāda*

lit. During landslide, the toad says, “What shall I eat?”, while jumping into a pond it says, “What shall I drink?”

30. *Kafanaobingna āvali manakashi “Nawui āhā āpāk khanina”* (John)

tran. Baby *kafā* laugh at their mother and say, “You have only two teeth”

ee. “The kettle calls the pot black arse” (MK)

31. *Khaireonaobingna “Āva nawui kazat makheiya chi* (John)

lit. Baby crabs say, “Mother, you are walking sideways”

32. *“Irihāva baizālu.” “Mazāngaiga āni” chilaga baihiḱ manākazā* (Kasomwoshi)

“Eat yam, daughter-in-law.” “No, I won’t, mother-in-law,” but she ended up eating the husk yam at night. (Kasomwoshi)

33. *Rachangli — Thei nguishailu; Ritli — Ngalung khāngsanglu* (Kanrei)

lit. (I’m) thirsty — Eat roasted nuts; It’s heavy — Add rocks

34. *Shanāle —Pharonsanglu; Sāngnāle— katathaolu* (Sira)

lit. It’s too short— Join it; It’s too long— Cut it

35. *Siluiḱ fana shalaka ākhamei makakhayit (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a buffalo not wagging its tail at the dog's barking

36. *chiklen kakachāk (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) the cry of the wren

37. *Shiwok khamei khamayut (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) grabbing the rat's tail

38. *Āva-āvāli khayāshikathei hiya sokhami kahakka ākhana* (Pheirei)

lit. Showing respect to the parents is a great blessing

39. *Konkathemma mi chiliva mibingna ningkachai* (Pheirei)

lit. Everyone hates arrogant people

40. *Malung vātkazār mangkhama āchamna* (Angkang)

lit. Quick to anger is a foolish act

41. *Mili khayoma chili mina yomra* (Angkang)

lit. Those who look down upon will also be looked down upon

ee. "What goes around comes around" (Oxford)

42. (i) *Hokna ot murmur āsāla fana ina sāya kachikatha* (Kanrei)

lit. Pig did the strenuous work; but dog says, "I did it"

(ii) *Hokna luiot murmur āsāla fana ina sāya kaji* (Kasomwoshi)

"Though pig laboured the field, dog claims the workmanship. Only pig works hard in the field but dog says I did" (Kasomwoshi)

(iii) *Hokna lui vāya chiakha, fana ina vāya ngapaihaowa* (Sira)

lit. Pig says, "I did the work"; dog claims, "I did it"

(iv) *Hokna ot sā, fana sāman samphang* (John)

lit. Pig does the work; dog gets the reward

(v) *Hākna wot so, huina kathongshe* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Pig does the work, dog flatters

ee. “Asses carry the oats, horses eat them” (MK)

43. *Mi sokha mikhutphalungei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. If (you) make fire, there will be smoke

ee. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire” (MK)

44. *Khanranada khayina ror* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Aphids attack the weak ones

ee. “Flies haunt lean horses” (MK)

45. *Cho marurira chorui mayiraro* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Twist not the threads before buying the beads

“Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched” (Penguin)

46. *Wuishui wārui anao khānrāngei* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Like mother, like father, the child gets variegated pattern

ee. “Like father, like son” (MK)

47. *Khokha kasā karhuina* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Unity is pegs in the dyke

ee. “Union is strength” (Penguin)

“United we stand, divided we fall” (Penguin)

48. *Rarung hikha nhokhon karingram shokoi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. The chopping sound of the axe reaches till the heavens

49. *Harwo yumshaikha harwokhon karingram shokoi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. The cry of the stolen rooster reaches till the heaven

50. *Ningchangda pāng, ningrida ngaphiya* (Sira)
lit. One marries not the beloved, one marries the unloved
51. *Thing mashoda marikalu tui mashoda matuiya* (Angkang)
lit. Don't place the firewood upside down, lest you speak upside down
52. *Kazei mashoda singshārra* (Pheirei)
lit. One shan't hold a spear upside down
53. *harwui kakhuwui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)
lit. (like) a crowing hen
54. *Manaothei mashaialu, shaishārra* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. One shan't eat fruit that bears out of season
55. (i) *Ningai shida matheimila naovai* (Sira)
lit. Out of courtesy, (she) lies down and becomes pregnant
(ii) *Saho makharanngāka nao waikhew* (Collected, Phalee)
lit. Unable to decline a prayer (she) gets pregnant
56. *Mayarnao meithalungna, shānao machui (mazung) muiyāna* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. Man is hearth; woman is fog/mist
57. *Shānao ning harna sheithui* (Kasomwoshi)
lit. "Women's mind is snatched away by hens"
58. (i) *Shanaowui eina philā-wungnao kuitai; shanaowui eina zamshei khamaying, sāpher khamahor ngathaya* (T. Luikham)
(ii) *Shanaowui eina zamshei vaitei khamayingyinqva ngaronmanga, sāpher khamahorhorva ngathayshai, Shanaowui eina philā-wungnao ākuitai* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Over a woman, *philā-wungnao* behead one another; over a woman, wine and meat are exchanged

ee. “No war without a woman” (Penguin)

59. *Sāsā-vāvāda yorlā kachangmei* (Arokianathan)

lit. *Yorlā* is better in many ways

60. *Rāmshi khumshili machinhaialu, yorlāshili machinhaialu* (Sira)

tran. Don’t despise old huts and old *khum*, don’t despise *yorlā*

61. *Samsa kuitungli sāmning phokshārri* (Sira)

lit. One shall not call a married woman by promiscuous names

62. *Wuiri malung, shāngkhu malung* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Married women’s courage, tiger’s courage

63. *Wuiri malung, kongro maroi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Married women’s courage is a small brook

64. *Shanao shānrop katham (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a girl who tucks her skirt properly

65. (i) *Ngasankasā eina nao vaikhui* (Kanrei)

lit. (Saying/doing) in jest gets pregnant

(ii) *Meili ngareo ngator, shangli ngareo naovai* (John)

lit. Playing with fire gets burned, playing with a penis causes pregnancy

(iii) *Mei eina ngareo ngator, sem eina ngareo naovai* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Playing with fire gets burned, playing with a woman (body) causes pregnancy

(iv) *Shangrada nreokha ntor* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Playing with a penis gets burned

66. *Sā kharengli pharkharena khui, shanaoli khanaona khui* (Sira)

lit. In hunting, the one who hurls the spear first gets it; in women, the last one gets it

67. (i) *Muilā hai makhui u |thuk āzara hai ungakhamā yāron āngarit makapei* (John)

lit. Unable to bed with his lover; fondles his sister's genital is an ungentlemanly action

(ii) *Araiwuida makhewthuk, ararui hai yekathup* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Unable to defeat the enemy but fondles his sister's genital

68. *Yāron mathālala ngalā mahui u |thēi akha mangasāmrramana* (John)

lit. Handsome man with no courtship skill cannot consummate love

69. *Manao luisom lākhot* (Sira)

para. Late marriage is similar to a late paddy transplantation

70. *Khamathā chi mamalekmana* (Arogianathan)

“Beauty is not for one to lick” (Arokianathan)

lit. “Beauty is not for licking”

ee. “Beauty doesn't make the pot boil (Mieder, *Proverb* (103))

71. *Shimpān yaronlā kapangnākha rameinao ngarokka* (John)

lit. Extreme pickiness in choosing a partner gets a widow

72. *Phashāk-pharokhui atamrai lo sokha wuirinao/kaharnao samphangei* (Collected Phalee)

lit. One who sings while eating marries a person who is already married

73. *faphei meikachui (thāda)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) a dog's feet on fire

74. *Hampai kaikha fana manaya* (Sira)

lit. Dog smiles when the earthen pot breaks

75. *Fana, “Sāchao Shirui kashong rikha mashaiphalunga” kaji* (Kanrei)

para. Dog expresses a fervent desire, stating, “I’ll undoubtedly eat *sāchao* of as big as Shirui kashong”

(ii) *Fana*, “*Sāchao shingkhur rikha mashaiphayola*” *kachikathā* (Sira)

tran. Dog says, “*Sāchao* as big as *shingkhur* is not enough”

76. (i) *Khamathā sākhuisi chila favā on* (Kanrei)

lit. Mending to make it better turns into a dog

(ii) *Kaphā sāsichila fahā sāthuihaowa* (Arokianathan)

“Care in good action protrudes like dog’s teeth” (Arokianathan)

ee. “Excess mars perfection” (Routledge)

77. *fakhanāli pai kakā (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a dog with excrement on its ear

78. *Fali tolaili ngavazatlala sārakui theiakha ngawoktai* (John)

lit. Though the dog is carried on a palanquin, it jumps down if it sees a bone

79. *Kasik makathei sei, kakhayak makathei fa* (John)

lit. Buffalo knows no cold; dog knows no shame

80. *fana paila harna khangayā (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a dog defecates, and a hen scratches it

81. *Khi sahuithi raida huishiman shuro?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What hunting dogs breed ordinary dogs?

ee. “Like begets like” (MK)

82. *rarāli har kachiphun (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) sending chicken through a civet cat

83. (i) *harvā eina rarā lā khanganui (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a rooster and a civet cat singing a song
(ii) *harvā eina rarā shongzā khangakhui (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) a race between a rooster and civet cat

84. *puwung mashuithei kahon (kathā)* (Kanrei)

tran. (like) an owl waiting for *mashuithei*

85. *Nāyong shimsak zurli ngathānna* (Angkang)

lit. Monkeys' house gets scattered in monsoon

86. *Nāyong khamā kaphar (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) monkey poking at wounds

87. *Naoyong nnishoi kasing (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) monkeys touching birdlime

88. *chaothi makathangui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. having no gallbladder like deer

89. *Chao malung thāda malungrāplāka* (Kasomwoshi)

“Coward like the heart of a deer” (Kasomwoshi)

90. *chaona hipairaka kharatka kasewkhui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) a deer getting startled by its own fart

91. *Tuihi lāna, lāhi tuina* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Word is song, song is word

92. *Khi lona kup, khi tewna kup?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What song ends, what word ends?

93. *Phāra maphāmara ākhon eina thei* (John)

lit. One's character can be known from one's voice

ee. The bird is known by its note, the man by his words (MK)

94. *Kharam shimzunli chānhān lāāhān mathā akha thingnāhan hangmilala shaiphai, chānhān maung akha sā hangmilala mashaiphā mana* (John)

para. If the host is friendly, even leafy vegetables taste delicious; if the host is unfriendly, even meat tastes bad

95. *Shimna ngashi eina fakhama, shimpānna tui eina fakhama* (John)

lit. House is roofed with thatch; family is roofed with words

96. *Khi miroyungna mpār, khi tewna mpar?* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. What fatwood decays, what word decays?

97. *Fāna maloshokhailaka zālui* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Dog throws up and eats it again

ee. “Dog returns to its vomit” (MK)

98. *Thumkhai tui wuklungwui lanna* (John)

lit. Keeping secret is the treasure of the heart

99. *Mashun tuirun, harra ngaron* (Arokianathan)

“Speaking truth is stretching one’s hand with an egg” (Arokianathan)

lit. Speaking truth, sharing an egg

100. *Matuingainā akha khayon shurzatta* (John)

lit. Fault follows much talk

ee. “Talk much, err much” (Penguin)

101. *Matuinā akha kakapik shokka, kasaikha pamakha mangkhama tai* (John)

lit. Much talk leads to lying; saying nothing is foolishness

102. *Lengthui male mithikhana* (Kasomwoshi)

“As witty as Lenthui’s venomous tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. “Lenthui’s tongue is deadly”

103. *mazui male (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

“like the musical string of mazui (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) the tongue of *mazui*

104. *Sāham male sui kazā (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) pangolin traps food with its tongue

105. *Male chaoli suilala ungra* (Kasomwoshi)

“A deceitful tongue could entice a wild deer” (Kasomowoshi)

ee. “A soft tongue may break down solid bone” (MK)

106. *Maleakha male ngapaowa* (Kasomwoshi)

“Telling lie casts slurred tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

para. If you use your tongue deceitfully, you’ll end up with a slurry tongue

107. (i) *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina mituili thi* (Kanrei)

lit. Animals are killed by their spoor and men by their words

(ii) *Sāna sāchonli thi, mina maleli thi* (Kasomwoshi)

“Animals die from their foot print, men by their tongue” (Kasomwoshi)

ee. “Birds are entangled by their feet, and men by their tongues” (Penguin)

108. *Suikaphaneptui saikora mashungser machimana*

lit. All the persuasive words are not true

109. *Khamorli shim, ālungshong khā* (Kasomwoshi)

“Sweet talk with a bitter heart” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Sweet in mouth, bitter inside

- ee. “A honey tongue, a heart of gall” (MK)
110. *mikpeoana āwungashi shimwui maram pheikachithei (kathā)*
lit. (like) the blind narrates what happens in the king’s house
111. *Paoyi rakhan shai (kathā) (Kasomwoshi)*
tran. (like) a person who eats *rakhan* at Paoyi
112. *Zaimukna machārongli kāpalaga “Meitei leiwuk theiya” chi (Kasomwoshi)*
lit. Quail perches on a fern and says, “I can see the Imphal valley”
ee. “Empty vessels make the greatest sound” (Penguin)
113. *Kashu miru miphungraida yātkhew (Collected, Phalee)*
lit. One scratches out trouble from the hearth
114. *Kashong meirong khamongli zokakhui (kathā) (Kasomwoshi)*
lit. (like) getting into trouble right at the threshold
115. *Tham khangarok ngalungui mawātmana (John)*
lit. There is no shortage of stones for throwing at each other
116. *Hanna hannui shaiphamei, tuiva āartui phāmei (Sira)*
lit. Young greens are tastier, but the wisdom of elder is superior
117. *Kharartew nniro kaphunghan shairo (Collected, Phalee)*
lit. Heed elder’s words, eat greens
118. *Hākpai huipai thikhareda khayō shiro (Collected, Phalee)*
“Respect the person who saw the animal’s waste earlier than you”
119. *Amik aho somkhareda khayō shiro (Collected, Phalee)*
lit. Respect the person who gets eyes and teeth before you
120. *Ningrinao mikhōt (theka) (Phalee, collected)*

lit. (like) the way Ningrinao borrowing fire

121. *chikren eina kafa kongkân khangathei (kathā)*(Kanrei)

lit. (like) *chikren* and *kafa* compete crossing a river

122. *Hurshung phākhok (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) futile search for *Hursung*

123. *Chālingthi kaphā (thāhaira)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (It's like) searching for an ant's appendix

124. *Maremrazaina rakhong kakhon makazang kathā* (Kanrei)

lit. like *Maremrazai* not taking part in the construction of a well

125. (i) *Huira chithang thāk, thākra chithang hui* (Sira)

lit. Early when expected to be late, late when expected to be early

(ii) *Singom tantak (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. “(like) a bear’s schedule” (Kasomwoshi)

126. *Sānglina zeisanao tungli kala seipai tungli ngalong kazat (kathā)* (Kanrei)

lit. (like) Sāngli balancing on the tip of a spear and a pile of cow dung

127. *Naoyong khana tharam pheiwokhui (theka)* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. (like) the friendship of a monkey and an otter

128. *Kharei eina kotkalā yarthot masākapai (kathā)* (Kasomwoshi)

“(like) squirrel and prawn don’t get along” (Kasomwoshi)

129. (i) *zenvāpai khamalek (kathā)* (Kanrei)

tran. (like) licking the dung of *zenvā*

(ii) *khareina zenvāpai malek kakhui (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

“(Like) the tiger that licks the droppings of magpie robin” (Kasomwoshi)

130. *Kafa thāda kumkha thang, kumkha ngayā* (Kasomwoshi)
 “Like gopher calendar, a whole year for night, a whole year for a day” (Kasomwoshi)
 para. Like *kafa* (wants to turn) a whole year into a day and a whole year into a night
131. *kongriksei thāda kazei mashoda kasing* (Kanrei)
 lit. holding a spear upside down like water beetles
132. *Mayonlu, mangonlu* (Kasomwoshi)
 lit. Protect it; devour it
133. *Chihānla ngamānna* (Sira)
 lit. Expectantly disappointing
134. *Chihānda mān, maphaninda nkinanin* (Collected, Phalee)
 para. Expectantly disappointing; unexpectedly tender
135. *Shakmalai, zāmalai* (Kasomwoshi)
 lit. Eat forget, drink forget
 para. What has been eaten and drunk is soon forgotten
 ee. “To do good to an ungrateful man is to throw rosewater in the sea” (MK)
136. *Āshanli shaopaiya, ātunli mashaopaimana* (Sira)
 lit. Can beat while going uphill; can’t beat while going downhill
137. *Nro khani, chaowui khani* (Collected, Phalee)
 lit. Orphan’s ears, deer’s ears
138. *Sakathi chonshi nvi, shukharu lāngsu* (Collected, phalee)
 lit. Adept wears worn clothes; inept wears attitudes
139. *Mareklāna mareka, yāreklāna yāreka, yāninglāna nganingung* (Sira)

lit. Miss Hardworking works hard, Miss Idle idles away (the time), Miss Arrogant becomes ignorant

140. *Khamana eina kachapva chinaonina* (Pheirei)

lit. Crying and laughing are siblings

141. *Masimaphanla thingnā manganukmana* (John)

lit. Without wind, no leaves quiver

ee. “There is no smoke without fire” (MK)

142. *malum thāda chāmkathi* (Sira)

lit. rush to death like flying termites

143. *mangkhamā hampā hampai (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. as stupid as a black pot in the *hampā*

144. *hangkornāli tarā heikharor (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) pouring water over yam leaves

145. *Phaklāngla khanā kāya*

lit. Walls have ears

146. (i) *Lāmina kazing sirā shānkhuithailaga meithalung kathum mashānkhui kathei (thāda)* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. (like) a cat that knows how to tally the number of stars in the sky but doesn’t know how to tally the three stones of the hearth

(ii) *Lāmina kazing sirā shānkhuithailaka meithalung kathum mashānkhuithaimana*

lit. Cat knows how to tally the number of stars in the sky but doesn’t know how to tally the three stones of the hearth

147. *Mahai ida āhai matātunghaisāmana* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. By luck, one won't find a lucky charm casually lying on the ground

148. *Shangkha kharei zatkum kharāna kakapā* (kathā)

“(like) bossing around by wild cat while tiger is passing by” (Kasomwoshi)

para. (like) small cats [hyena, leopard etc.] that mimics the roar of big cats [tiger] when
there's a rumour of them nearby

149. *Shipeilāli Ramshilāna hāngkhamachin* (kathā) (Sira)

lit. (like) Ramshilā admonishes Shipeilā

150. *Kharar ronron, kasār remrem* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Growing up is fast; ageing is swift

151. *Pheipāngya, khamorya; pheipāngtheng khamortheng* (Kanrei)

lit. Wet limbs, wet mouth; dry limbs, dry mouth

ee. “No pain, no gain”/ “He who would catch fish must not mind getting wet” (MK)

152. *Pāngkhamarekna khamor shim* (John)

lit. Diligent worker has a sweet mouth

ee. “No sweat, no sweet” (MK)

153. *Shangkha lemda shaiya, mikumona lemda mashaimana* (Sira)

lit. Tigers eat free meals; humans don't eat free meals

154. *Seina ngachāda thingnā rāmsai, mikumova chi mathāpaimana* (Kasomwoshi)

“Buffalo feeds on available leaf by themselves while men cannot” (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Buffalo feeds on leaves, man cannot

155. *Kachām hi kapākor eina makhalaphaimana, kashāng makhangatha ngalung
maningmana* (John)

lit. Poverty is not bound with bamboo strips; wealth is not an immovable rock

ee. “There is nothing permanent except change” (MK)

156. *Mithu ronri, harwo khongpi* (Collected, Phalee)

para. Wealth passes on from one person to another, but a rooster always crows to its fullest

ee. “From clogs to clogs is only three generations” (Oxford)

157. *marānthei chorda ngarā kasang (kathā)* (Karei)

lit. (like) soya beans swell when softened

158. *Lāngkaso kazing kāshung, ngalei zingshong yumma* (Angkang)

lit. The pride reaches the heavens, sinks beneath the earth

ee. “Pride goes before fall” (MK)

159. *Kachui kahārong vānaona tongteka* (John)

lit. Birds break the towering bamboo

160. *Mi kathi, kashong kaphung ngalang machingmana* (Sira)

lit. There is no schedule for death and crime

ee. “Death keeps no calendar” (MK)

161. *Parki kachina shupa, shupki kachina para* (Sira)

lit. Those who aim for a handful get a pinch; those who aim for a pinch get a handful

162. *Seiyumzang seiyum, miyumzang miyum* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. Cattle thief will have no cattle; people who murder will have no people

ee. “As you sow, you shall mow” / “Tit for tat” (MK)

163. *Tuirei hāt mirei thi; tuinao hāt minao thi* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. When a big promise is deceived, an important person dies; when a small promise is

deceived, a less important person dies

ee. “What goes around comes around” (Oxford)

164. *Minao thiranu chikha ichānao thi* (Kasomwoshi)

lit. One who wishes to harm somebody's child, loses one's own child

ee. "He who spits towards the sky gets it back into his own face"/ "He falls himself that
digs another's pit / Caught in his own toils" (MK)

165. *Hāncham nhānchacham, hānthar nhānthathar* (Collected, Phalee)

para. It's easy to rekindle old friendships but difficult to start a new one

ee. "Old friends and old wine are best"/ "Forsake not an old friend, for the new is not
comparable to him" (MK)

166. *Khongnai khanai, chinao kato* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Near is the neighbour, far is the kinsfolk

ee. "Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off" (MK)

167. *Sā rengkathei khongnainaola kashai samphanga* (John)

lit. The skilled hunter's neighbour also gets to eat

ee. "When a great oak falls, every neighbour may scuffle for a faggot" (MK)

168. *Mafathingli paishāra mangarei mana* (Kanrei)

tran. *Paishāra* doesn't climb on *mafathing*

ee. "Mary your like" (Penguin)

169. *Kachāmana mahai eina katham mevā thi* (John)

lit. A poor man can kill a buck with a piece of charcoal

ee. "An unlucky man would be drowned in a teacup" (MK)

170. *Rikashinaoshew harchaira thui* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Even the lover's chicken coop looks beautiful

ee. "Love is blind/ Beauty lies in lovers' eyes" (MK)

171. *Fakapai thingtung kāula āzingshong khaishāng ngayappa* (Pheirei)

lit. One who breaks wind climbs up a tree but those who sit beneath the tree hit each other's thigh

172. *Ngawurna chungnā haida ālangkham mashungkapam (kathā)* (Sira)

lit. (like) bamboo rats neglect to block the entrance when many

173. *Rui kashi ruinrao kashi, arun kashi nthong kashi* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Bad rice wine produces more froth; bad looking person is more flamboyant

174. *Shangrithān shimshe* (Collected, Phalee)

lit. Cheerful in public; grumpy at home



Appendix II

Folksongs

The songs referred to in the study are listed first then followed by the full text of the songs with line-by-line literal translation:

No.	Song Title (Chapter Reference)	Singer's Name	File Name in Database
1	<i>Irai Roningningka</i> (One)	Ngamreila Raman	001_PH_19-12-21_RM.N_M.WAV
2	<i>Iphaoshi Shimsherrei</i> (One)	Lt. Maninglum Jagoi and Lt. Raingam Ningkhalem	006_PH_23-03-22_J.M,RN.N_M.WAV
3	<i>Mani Mapewthew</i> (One)	Chirila Jagoi	003_PH_14-12-21_J.C_M.WAV
4	<i>Iyar Manam Rikha</i> (One)	Lt. Maninglum Jagoi and Lt. Ningkham Raingam	006_PH_23-03-22_J.M,RN.N_M.WAV
5	<i>Khui kachi lairik matammanei</i> (One)	Lt. Maninglum Jagoi, Lt. Ningkhalem Raingam	002_PH_23-03-22_J.M,RN.N_M.WAV
6	<i>Raiying Shuisorlo</i> (One)	Lt. Maninglum Jagoi, Lt. Ningkhalem Raingam	002_PH_23-03-22_J.M,RN.N_M.WAV

7	<i>Yipsui Chiro</i> (One)	Yarkao Ngashangva	001_PH_03-11-22_NG.Y_M.WAV
8	<i>Petna Niruni nei</i> (One)	Suisaphi Raman	001_PH_14-11-22_RM.SUI_M.WAV
9	<i>Phungkha Phungrui</i> (One)	Varamla Ngashangva	028_PH_30-03-22_Ng.V_M.WAV
10	<i>Ina Rengra Maiyei</i> (One)	Ngamreila Raman	005_PH_19-12-21_RM.N_M.WAV
11	<i>Iya Katew</i> <i>Paishunaonei</i> (One)	Lt. Maninglum, Lt. Ningkhalem Raingam	007_PH_23-03-22_J.M,RN.N_M.WAV
12	<i>Awaishiya Rewmai</i> <i>Kauwara</i> (One)	Ngamreila Raman	009_PH_28-02-22_RM.N_M.WAV
13	<i>Ishewana Rimew</i> (Three)	Varamla Ngashangva	028_PH_30-03-22_Ng.V_M.WAV
14	<i>Ishew Rewmairai</i> (Four)	Author	(unrecorded, in memory)

1. *Irai Roningningka*

Phalee	English
<i>Irai roningningka; oh, pasho tankha kanaiye.</i>	Wishing she would come to me; oh, a bundle of bamboo slits was used up.
<i>Pasho tankha kanaiyei, oh, pasho rukhamariwui.</i>	A bundle of bamboo slits was used up, oh, the accurate one.
<i>Pasho rukhamari, oh, kasārarai wowayei.</i>	The accurate one, oh, she went to the old man.

<i>Kasārra rātre royei, oh, yārwon yo I khumthiraojo?</i>	The old man eats rice, but will I, the young man, die of starvation?
---	--

In this song, a young man articulates his anguish over his inability to marry the woman he loves. He recounts consulting bamboo divination, seeking answers to his predicament. He exhausts an entire bundle of bamboo slits but still doesn't get the answer he wants. Consequently, in accordance with the prediction of the bamboo divination, the woman marries an elderly man, presumably a wealthy old man. The young man then complains to the bamboo, questioning whether only the old man can provide food, while he himself will starve to death.

2. *Iphaoshi Shimsherrei*

Phalee	English
<i>Iphaoshi shimsherrei.</i>	My lover's family is observing <i>shimsher</i> .
<i>Khi shimsherno?</i>	What might be the reason?
<i>Thingni raoshunei, reklayei,</i>	Planted branches, how magnificent
<i>Oh rekraiyei, yangnao sokhamayiya.</i>	How magnificent, what a befitting <i>yangnao</i> .

In this song, the narrator, presumably a woman, describes her lover's family observance of a *shimsher*. While the specific reason for this observance is not mentioned, it is likely for a joyous occasion. She exclaims that her beloved is a fitting nobleman.

3. *Mani Mapewthew*

Phalee	English
<i>Mani mapewthew; manida khithina mewlo?</i>	We eloped; what fruit poisoned us?
<i>Amishew rampona mewwei.</i>	<i>Amishew</i> wine dregs poisoned us.
<i>Tharunruina phongshirongei,</i>	<i>Tharun</i> River is huge,
<i>Imani ruiphān sakoyei.</i>	We make a rope bridge.
<i>Imani konghāngrai kachonshuphewei,</i>	On the riverbank, we dry our clothes,

<i>Hantemhan sinkha raokhewei.</i>	Gather a handful of buckwheat.
<i>Imani ramsom phowātasei.</i>	Let's search for a new place.
<i>Thisitphung shimpfung shangkhangei,</i>	<i>Thishitphung</i> is too tiny,
<i>Mahusom chāmphungni chiyei.</i>	<i>Mahusom</i> is a land of poverty.
<i>Makhokphung kongyaowonikui,</i> <i>raiyeuiraowei.</i>	If <i>Makhokphung</i> were <i>Kongyaowon</i> , I would've plucked it.
<i>Rarponi shimpfung khayonao!</i>	How luxurious the land of the siblings!

This song narrates the story of two lovers, who, being cousins, were alleged to be involved in incestuous relations, resulting in their expulsion from the village. The story reflects on the adversities and challenges encountered by the lovers following their elopement. The female protagonist attributes their misfortunes to the wine dregs from her lover. Despite the vast expanse of the Tharun River, they exhibit resourcefulness by constructing a rope bridge and drying their clothes on the riverbank. They gather buckwheat and articulate a longing to find a new place to settle. The locales of *Thishitphung* and *Mahusom* are deemed inadequate due to their small size and poverty, respectively. The girl laments that if *Makhokphung* were a flower (*kongyaowon*), they would have plucked it. The song concludes by expressing admiration for the opulent land of the siblings, likening it to the beautiful flower *kongyaowon*.

4. *Iyar Manamrikha*

Phalee	English
<i>Iyar manamrikha ramchihoirai yekarew,</i> <i>ringkum karāno.</i>	When we were young, we sang together in fields. When were those days!
<i>Ringkum karān ngalāwon unkgarewei.</i>	When were those days, the beautiful maidens sang blissfully!
<i>Unkgarewei, Phalee mahonna rampengei.</i>	Sang blissfully, their [Phalee] singing and chanting reached miles away.

<i>Rampengika amishi tengwo katāknei.</i>	Reached miles away, resembling the voice of <i>tengwo</i> .
<i>Rishiyei ishiyarnao marānmei Shairitun toroishitngailo.</i>	Wish we could walk side by side on the path of <i>Shairitun</i> again
<i>Toroishitngailo arewwa sārānriyei.</i>	Wish we could walk side by side again; now we are ageing.
<i>Sārliye arewa masoluiyaiyei.</i>	We are ageing, it's just a forlorn hope.
<i>Matororaowe arewa, peithewraowei.</i>	Again, we won't walk the path together; our departure is imminent.
<i>Peikum peirip chisei.</i>	Let's depart this life together.
<i>Peikhari peikhanao marungre ringrei.</i>	For it's sorrowful to journey alone.

The speaker nostalgically recalls their youth, when they sang together in the fields with beautiful maidens, whose blissful singing and chanting could be heard miles away, resembling the voice of the *tengwo*. The speaker expresses a longing to walk side by side on the path of *Shairitun* once more but acknowledges they are aging and that this hope is forlorn. He recognises that their departure from life is imminent and wishes to depart together, as it is sorrowful to journey alone. The sentiment is similar to the Scottish song “Auld Lang Syne.”

5. *Khui Kachi Lairik Matamanei*

Phalee	English
<i>Khui kachi lairik matammanei</i>	In the villages, not everyone studies.
<i>Khi ngalonaolairik katamno, Ningchuirea?</i>	What kind of girl studies, Ningchuirea?
<i>Ningchuirea, mangshongrai khimang shimanro?</i>	Ningchuirea, what did you dream about?
<i>Khimang shimanraoro, arui ngayo</i>	Last night what else would I dream about,
<i>Lairik, Bible, lo shimanei.</i>	I dreamed about books, the Bible, and hymns.

This song reflects historical attitudes towards women’s education in rural areas, where education was not widespread. The speaker remarks on the rarity of educated women and sarcastically asks about Ningchuire, a girl who pursues education, what she dreamed about the night before. Ningchuire replies that she saw books, the Bible, and hymns in her dream.

6. *Raiying Suisorlo*

Phalee	English
<i>Raiying suisorlo!</i>	Put on the <i>raiying</i> !
<i>Rānkathatana suisorrei.</i>	Whoever defeats the foe puts it on.
<i>Rānkathata oh, are marilo.</i>	One who defeats the foe hasn’t returned yet;
<i>Yaron rāntho ngapaiyei.</i>	The gentleman tries to claim the honour.

This folksong reveals a cultural practice in which brave warriors wear *raiying* and is in dialogue form. The audience or speaker appears to be encouraging someone to don it. In response, another individual remarks that the one who actually defeated the foe has not yet returned. Subsequently, another person observes that a different man is claiming to have vanquished the enemy. This suggests that a man who did not actually defeat the enemies is attempting to wear the *raiying*, although he does not deserve to.

7. *Yipsui Chiro*

Phalee	English
<i>Oh, yipsui chiro, nakhi thewchong soro.</i>	Sleep comfortably; why do you sit up?
<i>Yarwon lāngsuwata oh khumyu somathisei.</i>	Let’s snuggle together in front of Mr. Arrogant.

<i>Oh, somathiro marumra,</i>	Oh yes, show off, dear.
<i>Thumro makoyei, makuirang khaye,</i>	It's less than thirty but more than twenty,
<i>Oh, marumra nale ishāmnei.</i>	Oh dear, you were also my lover.
<i>Oh, mangashāmei yārwonno.</i>	Oh, I never slept with you, Mister.
<i>Imuiro soso mataihui.</i>	You'd been adding my <i>muiro</i> to boost the count.
<i>Oh, waotunroiraowei.</i>	Oh, it will break down again.
<i>Oh, mawaoraowei marumra,</i>	Oh dear, it will never break down,
<i>Na muiro chirai chengkuiira karew</i>	I'll add <i>changkui</i> on top of your <i>muiro</i> .
<i>Oh, yarwon marong yuyuye.</i>	Oh, and I'll dance gracefully.

The song is about a woman who attempts to make her former lover, whom she calls Mr Arrogant, jealous by initiating sexual relations with a new man. Her new lover turns out to be Mr Arrogant's friend. The girl urges her new lover to relax and display affection in front of him. Mr. Arrogant counters by nonchalantly denying any cause for jealousy (although he does seem somewhat uneasy), since he has already been privy to the body that she is now offering to the new man. When she vehemently denies any sexual relations with him during their past courtship, he brings up the *nromui* (*ngalāma* in Tangkhul) as proof of sexual intercourse. He boasts that he has had around thirty women as sexual partners, has added a symbolic ornament (the abovementioned *nromui*) for each conquest, and he can show the one he has for her. The woman maintains that she has never been in bed with him and accuses him that he adds her *nromui* just to boost his body count, and as proof of her own truth predicts that the *nromui* will eventually fall off because of his false boasting. Undeterred, he bets that even if he fastens a *chengui* on top of the *nromui* and dances gracefully, it will not fall off.

8. *Petna Niruninei*

Phalee	English
<i>Oh, petna niruninei, shimna marikhon khong, chi huiwo chingāmmei</i>	Oh, bed is like <i>niruni</i> , house resonates with a strong, iron-like echo, and dog's bark is deep and resonant.
<i>Oh, huiwo chingam chihairo; oh, saroi khorkha chi kachoi, ngareksei ngashensei</i>	Oh, forget about the dog; let's focus on the herd of buffaloes and count the magnificent bulls.
<i>Oh, ngareksei khanichi mayoraro, Oh, yarwonnao shimshin sawainei.</i>	Oh, don't sell those two magnificent bulls; those are refined man's valuable assets.

The song is talking about a noble man, whose *petkhok* is exceptionally beautiful like a *niruni*. The house has a robust echo like that of the deep clang of struck iron, and the dog's bark is deep and resonant. Then, the narrator states that rather than focusing on the dog, their attention should shift to the herd of buffaloes and should count those impressive bulls. He remarks that the two magnificent bulls should not be sold, as they are valuable assets of a refined man.

9. *Phungkha Phungrui*

Phalee	English
<i>Phungkha phungrui, yāmkha yāmrui sayeisei.</i>	Whether fall into debt or give up, let me try it.
<i>Sayeishika kaphung khari thing shekhāmmei</i>	With determination, ventured into the dense forest to mark a tree.
<i>Kaphung khari thing shekhām, salu khani rāmphewei</i>	Ventured into the dense forest, marked the tree, two bulls were slaughtered.
<i>Salu khani rāmphew, waiwui mingsho thu chilo?</i>	Two bulls were slaughtered; What is the name of <i>waiwui</i> ?

<i>Waiwui mingsho thuchi? waiwui mingsho Yorchewla</i>	What's the name of <i>waiwui</i> ? <i>Waiwui</i> 's name is Yorchewra.
<i>Waiwui mingsho Yorchewla, Yaokhalek shimpum tayeisei.</i>	<i>Waiwui</i> 's name is Yorchewra, Let's go and see Yorkharek's house.
<i>Yaokhalek shimpum taye, nanao mingsho thu chilo?</i>	Go to see Yorkharek's house; what's the name of your son?
<i>Nanao mingsho thu chi? Mingshowairada Loilaiya.</i>	What's the name of your son? His nickname is Loilaiya.
<i>Loilaiya hu mayiyei, limaphuilai khavangrei.</i>	Loilaiya is a perfect name, as your house is in the heart of the community.

This song narrates the story of a man who desires to host a *marān* and therefore approaches the chief and his court with his request, only to be declined. Determined to pursue his goal, he declares that even if he incurs debt or falters midway, he still wishes to make the attempt. Consequently, he ventures deep into the jungle and marks a tree by slaughtering two animals, likely bulls.

The latter part of the song features a conversation between the tree's spirit and the man. According to Tangkhul tradition, one of the finest trees is selected as the leader of the *tarung*, called *ākhoka* (*waiwui* in Phalee). Offerings and rituals are conducted to invite the spirit to his house to become the *waiwui*. In the song, the man enquires about the name of the tree that is supposed to become *waiwui*. The spirit replies that her name is Yorchewra, which literally means "one who has many *yorlā*." She addresses the man as Yaokhalek which indicates 'a name typically associated with noble families' and suggests visiting his house and compound. She also inquires about the name of his son, to which he responds that his son's nickname is Loilaiya 'one who stays at the centre or core of the locality.' She remarks that it is a fitting name, as his compound is situated in a bustling area. In fact, the man in the song has no heir and thus cannot provide his

son's name. Instead, he offers a nickname. The spirit, aware of his lack of an heir, sarcastically comments that the name is indeed appropriate for his son.

10. *Ina Rengra Maiyei*

Phalee	English
<i>Ina rengre maiyei.</i>	I sought your affection; you turned me away.
<i>Ina pure maiyei, marumra rengkashiwui.</i>	I begged for your acceptance; you refused, hard-to-get lady.
<i>Rengkashiwui, I katherai mawauworo.</i>	Hard-to-get lady don't settle for someone like me.
<i>Maworaro, rānri kakhāngarai woro.</i>	Don't; instead choose a man who has hosted <i>rānri</i> .
<i>Rānri kakhāngarai maworuikha kuirumra na maichopraoewei.</i>	You'll feel embarrassed if you don't marry a man who has hosted <i>rānri</i> .
<i>Maichoprare tharo maruishichika, ngamākshichika tewkarewna chungrānei.</i>	Despite my embarrassment, try to become a family; yet there are still many objections.

The speaker expresses unrequited love for a woman who refuses his advances. He calls her a hard-to-get lady and advises her to seek a man of greater social status, one who has hosted the prestigious *rānri*. He warns that she might feel ashamed if she marries someone who has not achieved this honour. Despite his own feelings of embarrassment, he still hopes they can become a family, although there are numerous objections to this union.

11. *Iya Katew Paishunaonei*

Phalee	English
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<i>Iya katew paishunaonei,</i>	I'm a commoner.
<i>Tarongpamrai langphew</i>	I sit beneath the <i>tarong</i> while tending to the paddy drying in the sun,
<i>Kuliwon chuirorei</i>	Orchids fell upon me.

In this song, a woman born into a non-aristocratic family marries a nobleman. She says that she sits beneath the *tarong* (*tarung* in Tangkhul), tending to the paddy drying in the sun, while orchids fall around her.

12. *Awaishiya Rewmai Kauwara*

Phalee	English
<i>Awaishiya rewmai kouwayei;</i>	Theirs have reached the top of the hill;
<i>Khukmanukei, maphungthuka rewpheirai rāmmei.</i>	Knees are trembling, unload near the field because (he) can't carry.

This folksong narrates the capabilities of two strong men competing to carry *lengvei*. The singer likely indicates that the man from another group has reached the hilltop, while the other man, unable to bear the load, is compelled to unload the pack of rice near the field.

13. *Ishewana Rimew*

Phalee	English Free Transaltion
<i>Ishewana rimew,</i>	My lover is allergic to soil,
<i>Sahuising shongtun kewriyei</i>	Accompanying his dog shouts at various vantage points.
<i>Shongtun shongtun shukahai</i>	Huntsman's cry resonates from various vantage points;
<i>Ishewa roiraowei</i>	Perhaps it's my lover again.

The speaker describes her lover as being allergic to soil, which means the man is not interested in working in the field. Thus, accompanied by a dog he often goes hunting and shouts a huntsman's cry from different vantage points. The wife could hear the cry of the huntsman echo from various locations, making her think it might be her lover again.

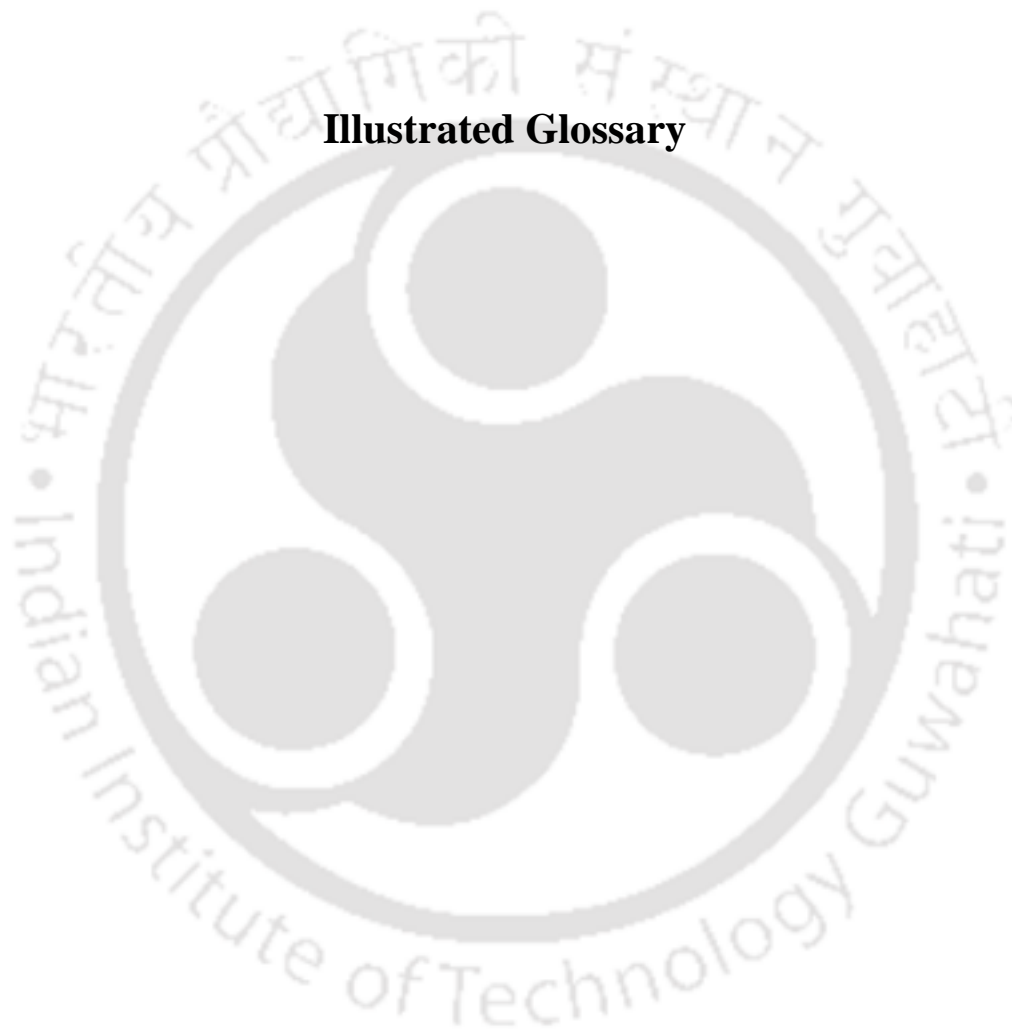
14. *Ishew Rewmairai*

Phalee	English
<i>Ishew rewmairai chaowuimi, chaowono toriyei.</i>	A buck or a doe is descending the hillside close to our field.
<i>Rengthangsei, shaithangsei.</i>	Let's hunt often, let's eat often.
<i>Khongnai ruihaida yaothangsei, shaithangsei.</i>	Let's share with our neighbours often, let's eat often.
<i>Nyamtam, rishiri.</i>	It's delicious, it's lovely.

This is a children's song that depicts a scene of hunting and community sharing. The singer spots a buck or doe descending a hillside near his field and suggests hunting it. He emphasises the joy of sharing the bounty with neighbours, describing the experience as delicious and lovely.

Appendix III

Illustrated Glossary



Term	Explanation	Image/ Link
<i>Āchei</i>	A social category that represents the male descendants of a bloodline belonging to the youngest group of the clan lineage. There are three social categories in Tangkhul— <i>āmei</i> , <i>āchui</i> , and <i>āchei</i> . However, this categorisation is not rigid in certain Tangkhul villages. For example, in Phalee, the society is broadly divided into two groups— the aristocrats (<i>chonthrui-mitharrashi</i>) and the commoners (<i>ayao</i>).	
<i>Āchei-ārei</i>	etiquette	
<i>Āchon</i>	In traditional contexts, the term is used to refer to the wife of an <i>āmei</i> and all females within the <i>āmei</i> category. In modern usage, it serves as a term of endearment for any older female and can be used affectionately by her lover. The title <i>āchonkharar</i> is reserved for the eldest daughter of the chief of a clan or village, signifying her special status. This title is not granted to an ordinary woman who marries an <i>āmeikharar</i> , although her eldest daughter would receive it. The term and title reflect important cultural and social hierarchies within the community.	


<i>Āchui</i>	All males, except for the eldest son, born into an <i>āmei</i> family are classified as <i>āchui</i> . Their descendants also belong to this category. The <i>āchui</i> status is higher than <i>āchei</i> but lower than <i>āmei</i> .	
<i>Āmei</i>	A social category that represents the male descendants belonging to the eldest group of the clan. He is the eldest son of the chief of the clan. This term also applies to any male who is considered a brother due to his age. It is used as a term of endearment by his lover. If he is the head of the clan or village, he is given a special title indicating his leadership role.	
<i>Āmeowo</i>	the name of the Supreme God in the old Tangkhul religion.	
<i>Ārhā</i>	the name of the Supreme God in the old Tangkhul religion in Phalee.	
<i>Āwunga</i>	literally meaning king. He is the chief of the village.	
<i>Āyao</i>	citizen	
<i>Chamsam</i>	Phalee word meaning comparison, figurative speech, reference, or having an intimate conversation. It can also denote a metaphor.	

<p><i>Chāncham/</i> <i>Chānjam</i></p>	<p>Umbrella word for a group of concepts ranging across symbol, simile, similitude, emblem, metaphor, and figurative expression. The Tangkhul people regard these expressions as tools that enhance speech, draw comparisons through analogies, and serve as repositories of communal experiences reflecting the wisdom of past generations which are used for imparting <i>āchei-ārei</i> (etiquette).</p>	
<p><i>Chāngpopap</i></p>	<p>Refers to a person who is slightly crazy. During a full moon, it was believed that some people might act a little mad (as in the etymology of ‘lunatic’ in English), and this term was used to describe such individuals.</p>	
<p><i>Chānsam</i></p>	<p>example</p>	
<p><i>Chengui</i></p>	<p>(unidentified) Possibly refers to the wild job’s tears. It is a type of nut which is commonly utilised as a decorative element, particularly in the headdress traditionally worn by men.</p>	<p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Job%27s_tears.</p>


<p>Chiklen/ Chikren/ Chakren khanganā</p>	<p>Literally ‘listening to the wren’. <i>Chiklen</i> is a species of wren. This practice ‘wren augury’ involves interpreting the will of the gods through the observation of wren behaviour. It constitutes a significant aspect of religious and divinatory practices among the ancient Tangkhul. In this tradition, the flight patterns, calls, and other behaviours of wren were believed to offer insights into future events or divine intentions. Upon exiting the village gate, individuals listened for and observed the movements of these birds. Based on the augury, they decided whether to postpone or proceed with their activities.</p>	
<p>Chipee (low tone)</p>	<p>Satan or the devil</p>	
<p>Chipih (high tone)/ Nri (Phalee)</p>	<p>saw sedge. It belongs to the <i>Gahnia</i> genus.</p>	<p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gahnia.</p>

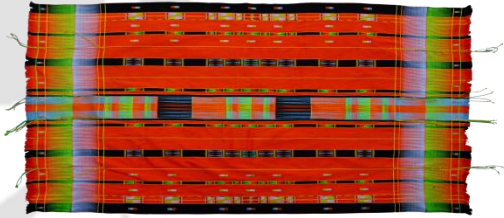
<u>Chumphā</u>	<p>The Tangkhuls celebrate this festival after the harvest to mark the beginning of consuming the new harvest.</p> <p>In the past, during this festival, the mother entered the granary to perform all necessary rituals and sacrifices to the <i>Āmeowo</i> for safe storage and sustaining the family throughout the year. For two nights, the husband slept in the field due to the belief that it was taboo for a man to stay at home while his wife performed the rituals. As soon as they started using the sickles during the harvest season, blowing trumpets was strictly prohibited because it was believed to drive away the best harvest. Similarly, women were not allowed to weave during the harvest season. After this festival, it became permissible to blow trumpets and weave.</p>	
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<p><i>Chumsinsā/</i> <i>Ponsinsā</i></p>	<p>Refers to the rituals and a ceremonial feast held for the entire clan or close family on the day following a wedding. During this event, the mother-in-law, acting as the current household owner, formally introduced the daughter-in-law as the new propitiator of the household deity (<i>shimkameo</i>). According to T. Luikham's account, the parents or a brother of the bride provided a pig or a bull for this occasion to offer as a sacrifice to the spirit. It was believed that the wealth and prosperity of the family stemmed from the bounty flowing from the daughter-in-law (52).</p>	
<p><i>Hampa</i></p>	<p>Cupboard usually used for storing cooking pots which is usually located at the extreme corner in a traditional house</p>	
<p><i>Hangva</i></p>	<p>a representative in <i>hangvashim</i>, who is also usually the chief of a clan</p>	
<p><i>Hangvashim</i></p>	<p>village council</p>	

<p><i>Hao/ Hau</i></p>	<p>Historically, the Tangkhul community used this term to describe individuals practicing the traditional religion, distinguishing them from Christians. In contemporary times, some natives have adopted the term <i>hao</i> or <i>hau</i> as a self-identifier. This term is also employed derogatorily by the Meitei community to refer to all tribal populations residing in the hilly regions of Manipur.</p>	
<p><i>Haorā</i></p>	<p>a type of shawl worn by men. The seven-panel shawl is usually worn by aristocrats. Moreover, the older shawl contains a motif called <i>phorrei</i> only on one side. (See <i>nyārchonphor</i>).</p>	 <p>Haorā (Personal Collection) Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>


<i>Hara khayang</i>	It is a traditional divination practice that involves placing an egg with a small opening on a fire made from paddy husk. It literally means ‘observing an egg’. This practice is primarily used to determine the suitability of a location for cultivation and to predict the abundance of the year’s harvest. The direction and manner in which the egg boils over are used to make decisions regarding where to cultivate.	
<i>Harkho khayang</i>	This is a traditional divination method involving predicting the future by strangling a rooster. It literally means ‘observing chicken leg,’ The prognosis of favourable or unfavourable outcome is determined by the position of the strangulated rooster’s leg, along with the placement of its wings and droppings. For further details, see T. Luikham (82–83).	
<i>Huirui</i> (<i>Phalee</i>)	The practice of a small group of professional hunters who co-owned a dog. In the past the bounty of the hunt was distributed evenly among the hunters.	
<i>Kacho</i>	a fool, a stock character in Phalee folktales.	

<i>Kafa</i>	hoary bamboo rat	 <p>Courtesy: https://indiabiodiversity.org/observation/show/17743099.</p>
<i>Kameo</i>	spirit that inhabits every natural object	
<i>Kapā khayang</i>	Bamboo divination is used to seek guidance before undertaking significant activities such as hunting, warfare, journeys, or major life events. The task of performing this divination was assigned to individuals renowned for their precision, and the person performing it is referred to as <i>kapo kaso</i> in Phalee. Only the <i>pāshā</i> variety of bamboo was considered suitable for this practice. T. Luikham has documented thirteen distinct predictions associated with bamboo divination (80–82).	
<i>Kaphani</i>	Communal and individual prohibition or abstinence observed during times of personal loss or natural calamities, such as death or sickness, or during specific preparations within a village or family. T. C. Hodson	

	<p>uses the Assamese term <i>genna</i> to refer to this practice. During such days, various daily activities were restricted to prevent potential disasters, including prohibitions placed upon consuming certain foods and on entering or leaving the village or households. The practice aimed to appease deities and purify any inadvertent wrongdoing (proved by current misfortune) through religious rites and sacrifices. Prior to major events like festivals or key agricultural activities, village chiefs would declare a day to seek blessings from deities such as <i>Āmeowo</i> or others.</p>	
<p><i>Kashan</i> (<i>Tangkhul</i>)</p>	<p>traditional wrap-around skirt. It is called <i>ruisum</i> in Phalee.</p>	 <p>Phalee <i>ruisum</i> (Personal Collection), Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>

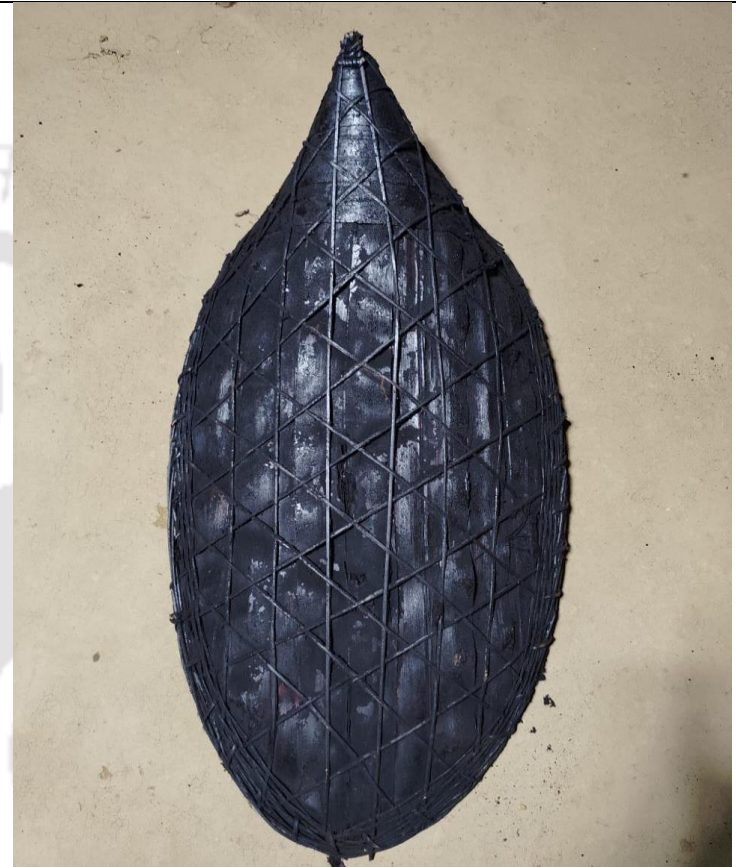
<i>Kashār</i>	closest in meaning to ‘taboo.’ It refers to prohibitions or restrictions within a community or culture, often related to social, religious, or ritualistic practices.	
<i>Kazei katā</i>	The final ritual which is performed to facilitate the soul’s departure to the land of the dead on the last day of Thishām.	
<i>Kazei kazang/</i> <i>(Tangkhul)</i> <i>Mangwot</i> <i>khawo</i> <i>(Phalee)</i>	The practice of a medicine man undertaking a journey to the realm of the deceased. This practice was utilised in cases of sudden deaths, where the living sought to understand the circumstances surrounding the event. Similarly, when individuals fell critically ill and it was suspected that their soul was trapped by the departed, a medicine man was dispatched to investigate the underlying causes of the soul’s perceived captivity.	
<i>Kazeiram</i>	land of death	
<i>Kazingram</i>	Heaven/heavens and sky	
<i>Khalāknao</i>	aristocrats/ nobility	
<i>Khamahon</i>	This is considered more like a chant than a song proper. The word does not have an English equivalent. It is the rhythmic chanting while working, singing or dancing.	

It may simply refer to the 'hei ho' exclamation similar to the nautical 'heave ho' sound while doing physical labour. It also refers to the elaborate musical chanting of non-lexical words like *hei*, *ho*, *oh*, *ei*, etc., in singing and dancing. These words are chanted rhythmically in four voices: *okrei*, *okla*, *oklao*. and *khakrei* (T. Luikham 245). Luikham identifies various types of *khamahon*, including those related to war, Thishām, dance, and tree felling for Tarung. He notes that the presence of *khamahon* typically signifies a celebration of positive events. However, the *khamahon* associated with someone's death is the sole exception, marking a sorrowful occasion (157).

<p><i>Khongsāng</i></p>	<p>Traditional glass bead necklace, especially worn by women, and considered an heirloom. It consists of multiple strands of variously coloured beads. The names of these beads include <i>khairum</i> (white beads), <i>chohok</i> (yellow beads), <i>chokoi</i> (ivory pieces used to hold and align the stings), <i>khaying</i> (blue beads), <i>rāmthi</i> (large, brownish oval-shaped beads), <i>khairikew</i> (the smallest beads that resemble the head of an Asian giant hornet), <i>khongsāng</i> (brown cylindrical beads). The names of the beads are in Phalee.</p>	
<p><i>Khongri harwo</i></p>	<p>Literally, ‘the rooster of a big locality,’ which refers to a matured, well-built, and beautiful rooster, typically the leader among the fowls. Metaphorically, it describes a man of noble qualities.</p>	<p><i>Khongsāng with ivory chokoi</i> (Personal Collection), Courtesy: Philathing Khamrang</p>

Khum


It is a traditional rain shield crafted from bamboo and *khumni* (Himalayan screw pine).





Khum (Personal Collection), Courtesy: Vareishang Ramsan

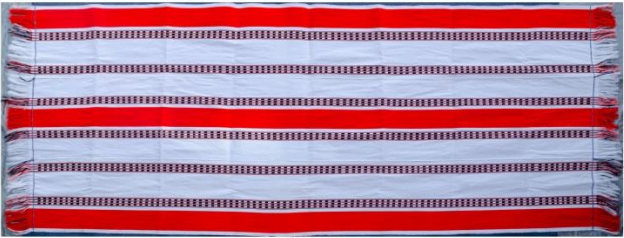
Himalayan Screw Pine:

https://indiabiodiversity.org/group/Rainforest_Biodiversity_of_Phalee/observation/show/18438294.



<i>Khumkui Khangarin</i>	The traditional custom in which male peers participate in <i>longshim</i> until all members of the peer group are married.	
<i>Kokto</i>	king of the land of death	
<i>Leikaiyaosā</i>	The term used to signify the bull that was traditionally slaughtered to distribute its meat to the entire village or locality during significant events such as a death or <i>marān kasā</i> .	
<i>Lengchen- shim</i>	House roofed with wooden planks, typically inhabited by affluent families. Depending upon the status of the owner, a number of designs and motifs could be added.	https://youtu.be/v-dIszP5GwY?si=ZW8bgcjRhy_mFWHg .
<i>Lengthui</i>	In Tangkhul folklore, the name of a notorious trickster and adventurer figure.	
<i>Lengvei kaphung/ Otrei kaphung</i>	During harvest season, in the field of affluent individuals, the strong men of the village compete to carry a load of paddy weighing around 200 kgs and above, bundled in traditional shawls. The one who could carry the load the longest stretch and take the least number of rests from the field to the owner's house won the competition and was considered the distinguished gentleman.	

		 <p>Courtesy: Author</p> <p>https://youtu.be/ILRfYM1KbEs?si=aIVTXQG4swBmuUK9</p>
Long	organisation or group	
Longmarān	<p>The smaller-scale feast of merit is hosted by the owner of the <i>longshim</i>, with participation limited to members of the specific <i>longshim</i> and his relatives. In this version of <i>marān</i>, fewer animals were slaughtered and fewer totemic <i>tarung</i> were installed to commemorate the event. According to T. Luikham only three buffaloes and three pigs were slaughtered, and no more than three <i>tarung</i> were installed during this feast.</p>	


<i>Longshim</i>	It is the traditional single-gendered dormitory in which the male (<i>mayarlong</i>) and female (<i>ngalālong</i>) slept at night in the olden days.	
<i>Longpet</i>	the bed shared by all the members of the <i>long</i> .	
<i>Luirā</i>	seed sowing festival	 <p>Phalee Luirā festival, Courtesy: Shimreishang Ngashangva</p>



<p><i>Luirim</i></p>	<p>Type of shawl. Some Tangkhuls claim that this shawl was worn by their aristocrats. It is called <i>roirum katipa</i> in Phalee. In the past, Phalee women primarily produced these shawls of simpler design for commercial purposes, especially to sell to the Meiteis. The shawl features minimal motifs, making it low labour intensive and particularly suitable for commercial production. However, the ownership of this shawl is controversial because the Meiteis claim that it belongs to them.</p>	 <p><i>Roirum Katipa</i> (Personal Collection), Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>
<p><i>Machung muiyā</i></p>	<p>The mist that hovers in the air for a while during the dry season in the early mornings and evenings.</p>	
<p><i>Mafathing</i></p>	<p><i>Phoebe hainesiana</i> is a tree species of Lauraceae family. It is the state tree of Manipur. It is called <i>uningthou</i> in Manipuri, lit. ‘king of tree’</p>	<p>https://indiabiodiversity.org/observation/show/17794049.</p>
<p><i>Makho</i></p>	<p>A ceremonial site akin to an altar, located outside the village gate within a woodland setting. It consists of an earthen pot with a lid buried underground. In certain villages, the pot is placed in the fork of a tree. Annually, the priest known as the <i>shārra</i>, examines this pot to divine the fortune of the community for the upcoming year. Interpretations of the pot’s contents are</p>	


	<p>significant: moisture portends excessive rainfall, the presence of insects forewarns of impending diseases, an empty husk suggests a diminished harvest, while full grain predicts an abundant yield. Discovery of blood within the pot signifies the potential for conflict or war. The act of the <i>shārra</i> entering the <i>makho</i> marks the inaugural ritual of the year.</p>	
<i>Māklā</i>	a type of folksong	
<i>Mākri</i>	archaic word for paddy.	
<i>Marān</i>	<p>Often translated as ‘feast of merit.’ In the olden days affluent families hosted feasts when they wanted to install monoliths, <i>tarung</i>, wanted to build <i>lengchengshim</i>, add <i>lengchengui</i> or adorn their houses with other motifs. There are three types of <i>marān</i>—<i>rānrei</i> (also known as <i>rānri</i> or <i>kapaiwon</i> in Phalee), <i>longmarān</i> and <i>rāntakka</i> (in Phalee).</p>	
<i>Maremrazai</i>	<p>A lazy bird that fails to participate in the communal activity of well-boring in Tangkhul folktale. Unidentified.</p>	



<i>Mashuithei</i>	needlewood. Its fruit becomes increasingly hard as it ripens, and it becomes difficult to crack it when it is fully matured.	https://www.gbif.org/species/7493943 .
<i>Mayarlong</i>	a group of males who stay together in the <i>longshim</i>	
<i>Mayongchā/</i> <i>Maiyongchā</i>	traditional necklace worn by the Tangkhul warriors. It is adorned with the hair of their victim. (For an image see Gachui 88)	
<i>Mazui</i> <i>(Tangkhul)</i> <i>Pharew (Talui)</i> <i>Nrew (Phalee)</i>	oral stringed musical instrument traditionally played by women.	 <p>Photo Courtesy: Pharew Productions https://youtu.be/2kjuwZFRRm0?si=0JKXakJER5kTVzp8.</p>  <p><i>Pharew</i> (Personal Collection), Courtesy: Reisang Kachui</p>


<p><i>Mitharra</i> (<i>Phalee</i>)</p>	<p>Honorific title used to respectfully address a male of an age to be considered a brother. This title is exclusively bestowed upon the <i>yangnao</i>, the chief of the village or clan. Conversely, the opposite of <i>mitharra</i> (<i>āmeikharar</i> in Tangkhul) is <i>chontharui</i> (<i>āchonkharar</i>).</p>	
<p><i>Mputnrang</i></p>	<p>The term is derived from the combination of <i>mpuka</i>, meaning spying, and <i>nrang</i>, meaning labour. It refers to the labour dedicated to paying the wages of those engaged in espionage activities. Historically, a penalty known as <i>mputnrang</i> was imposed on individuals caught performing physical labour during <i>kaphani</i> days. This punishment typically involved mandatory work in the village chief's field.</p>	
<p><i>Ngalālong</i></p>	<p>a group of females who stay together in the <i>longshim</i></p>	

<p><i>Ngālāma</i> (<i>Tangkhum</i>)</p> <p><i>Nromui</i> (<i>Phalee</i>)</p>	<p>A traditional yarn motif that is added to the male's headwear (<i>pāsi</i> in Tangkhul and <i>rāngkhān</i> in Phalee) which is a symbol and enumerator of sexual conquests.</p>	 <p><i>Nromui</i> (Personal Collection), Photo Courtesy: Vareishang Ramsan</p>
<p><i>Ningri</i></p>	<p>A small squirrel type animal, also often found in Phalee folktales as a trickster. Unidentified.</p>	
<p><i>Nkoiriri</i></p>	<p>The act of carefully safeguarding something precious often involving the practice of saving small amounts, as in a piggy bank.</p>	
<p><i>Ngashishim</i></p>	<p>It is a traditional thatched-roof house, typically inhabited by commoners.</p>	
<p><i>Nni</i></p>	<p>(<i>L. scurula parsitica</i>) The fruit of this plant is boiled until it becomes soft so that it can be easily removed from the covering. It is then pounded into a paste and washed in water until all tiny specks are removed and then used as birdlime.</p>	<p>https://indiabiodiversity.org/observation/show/1845011.</p>

<p><i>Nyārchon-phor</i></p>	<p>In contemporary Tangkhul culture, this motif is referred to as <i>phorei</i> and <i>phorri</i> in Phalee. It is typically spear-shaped and often incorporated into the edges of shawls or <i>kashan</i>. In the past, in Phalee this motif was added exclusively to the exposed end of the garment, while the concealed side remained plain with just an edge stitch. The reason for this practice could be attributed to the scarcity of yarn.</p> <p>Earlier, <i>phorri</i> referred to a different motif, specifically found in the middle panel called <i>phorpung</i> of the <i>Phongyai kashan</i>. However, today the <i>phorri</i> motif is commonly known as <i>phorpung</i>.</p>	 <p><i>Nyārchonphor</i> (now called <i>Phorri</i>), Courtesy: Author</p>  <p><i>Phorri</i> (now called <i>Phorpung</i>), Courtesy: Author</p>
<p><i>Paishāra</i></p>	<p>a creeper plant (unidentified)</p>	
<p><i>Philā-wungnao</i></p>	<p>princesses and princes or nobility</p>	



<i>Phokaphā</i>	engaging in sexual relations with a married woman or man/ adultery	
<i>Raihai</i>	It is a stone talisman believed to bring good fortune in wartime. It is placed atop a stack of stones, resembling a human head.	
<i>Raiphunga</i>	a person who can possess others, causing sickness and harm to the host.	
<i>Raiying</i> <i>Phalee/</i> <i>Yāngying</i>	a particular type of orchid, notable for its beautiful leaves, was translated by T. Luikham as ‘laurel.’ This translation may stem from the association of the orchid with laurel, as it is similarly used as an adornment in the headwear of warriors. Unidentified.	
<i>Rammui</i> <i>(Phalee)</i>	a dark storeroom typically adjoined to the rear of a kitchen. Usually, all the valuable items are kept in this place.	
<i>Ramphātlui</i>	ancestral land	
<i>Rangho</i> <i>kachon</i> <i>(Phalee)</i>	shawl that is typically used during harvest such as <i>shukhom</i> , <i>phingew</i> , and <i>shimchang</i> .	

		<p><i>Shukhom</i> (Personal collection), Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>  <p><i>Phingew</i> (Personal collection), Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>  <p><i>Shimchang</i> (Personal collection), Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>
<i>Rangteokoka</i> <i>(Phalee)</i>	A meal that was eaten on the evening preceding the significant event <i>lengvei kaphung</i> . All the participants of the competition gathered at the house of the field's owner and engaged in consuming nourishing food and beverages to fortify their bodies.	
<i>Rānrei</i>	It is the grandest type of feast of merit and is an opulent celebration hosted by affluent aristocrats, which involves the participation of the entire village community.	

<p><i>Rāntāka</i> (Phalee)</p>	<p>A practice in which affluent individuals involved in a personal dispute or perceived insult engage in a reciprocal challenge to host successive feasts for the community as a form of resolution or competition. It is one of the types of <i>marān</i>.</p>	
<p><i>Risit</i> (Phalee)/</p>	<p>Festival celebrated by the Phalee after paddy plantation. A fatwood fire is made outside every household on the first day of the festival. Some villagers claim that this burning of fatwood is not related to the old practice but is a recently introduced tradition after their conversion to Christianity. This festival is called Mangkhap in Tangkhul.</p>	 <p>Burning fatwood during Risit Phanit, Courtesy: Worngahan Awungshi</p>
<p><i>Sāchao</i></p>	<p>a traditional snack made of glutinous rice, perilla seeds, chili and salt.</p>	
<p><i>Sāfa</i></p>	<p>dogs that are domesticated for hunting and tracking.</p>	

<i>Sākreika</i>	Old practice in which women went to the jungle or other villages to weave during the <i>kaphani</i> days, a period when they were prohibited from engaging in any physical work.	
<i>Sāmkasā</i>	the act of couples engaging in premarital sex.	
<i>Sāpher</i>	a large slab of meat	
<i>Shārra</i>	fWord that is often used as an imperative sentence meaning ‘It is taboo/ prohibited/forbidden.’	
<i>Shārra/</i> <i>Shārvā</i>	priest, also known as <i>kasārra</i> in Phalee. Each clan has its own <i>kasārra</i> . After being ordained (<i>pānthar yemika</i>) to become the priest, he performs all the rituals required by the clan.	
<i>Shimluikat</i>	heir	
<i>Shimkameo</i>	spirit of the house	
<i>Shimkasher</i> (Phalee)	The set of rituals and sacrifices performed as offerings to the <i>kameo</i> during times of familial misfortune or auspicious occasions. On such occasions, strict observance prohibits household members from venturing outdoors or allowing entry of outsiders into	

	the premises. This was undertaken to avert misfortunes or seek blessings from the <i>kameo</i> .	
<i>Shingkhur</i>	a mortar for pounding paddy	
<i>Shirui</i> <i>Kashong</i>	the abode of the Shirui lily, the State Flower of Manipur.	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilium_mackliniae .
<i>Shiyan chikan</i>	A term encompassing various aspects of social conduct, including etiquette, norms, ethics, values, and manners. It refers to the guidelines and principles that govern proper behaviour and interactions within a society, emphasising respect, politeness, and moral integrity.	
<i>Shokhalā</i>	Violation of the prohibition against marriage within the same clan. People engaging in such relationships were expelled from the village as it was believed that the entire community could be punished for the immoral actions of these few. The Tangkhul held the conviction that allowing such individuals to remain in the village would jeopardise the community's prosperity in terms of war, hunting, harvest, and all other aspects of existence.	
<i>Sumkok/</i> <i>petkhok</i>	a huge bed hewn out from a single tree.	https://youtu.be/ZQi9TSo_IeE?si=U6_QmgmJYX04Oid2 , see timestamp 04:00 –06:00

<p><i>Tarung</i></p>	<p>A large totemic tree trunk with a few remaining branches was erected after the hosting of <i>marān</i>. It is typically adorned with various types of orchids. Some translate it as a “Y-post” due to its resemblance to the shape of the letter Y.</p>	 <p><i>Tarung</i>, Courtesy: Ringlan Ngashangva</p>
<p><i>Tewru</i> (Phalee)</p>	<p>The literal translation is ‘a bone of a language’. It means the most significant word or point.</p>	
<p><i>Thangkang</i></p>	<p>a shawl particularly worn by the aristocrats or the eldest of the family</p>	 <p><i>Thangkang</i> (Personal Collection), Photo Courtesy: Mingreingam Raman</p>
<p><i>Thishām</i></p>	<p>A festival derived from the combination of the words <i>kathi</i> (death) and <i>khangashām</i> (farewell), celebrated to</p>	

	bid farewell to the deceased. The exact duration of the celebration is unclear, with T. Luikham indicating that it lasts twelve days. Traditionally observed at the end of the year, during the month of <i>Khayon</i> (December to January), according to Phalee. T. C. Hodson notes that the festival occurs around the end of January each year (153).	
<i>Vāhongnao</i>	commoners	
<i>Varei</i>	refers to one's maternal family, particularly the maternal uncles.	
<i>Varivarā</i>	One of the names used to refer to God, first employed in this context by William Pettigrew, the British Christian missionary who introduced Christianity and Western education in the late nineteenth century.	
<i>Wonrā</i>	It is a type of cenotaph, serving as a resting place constructed by piling up stone slabs. Typically, it is situated near the main village path and is erected by a wealthy family to commemorate the deceased. According to T. Luikham, this place is cleaned once a year for six consecutive years by slaughtering animals (79). Chinaochin Raingam said that none of the leftover	

	food was allowed to be taken home, and everything was buried in the ground.	
Wung	According to T. Luikham in his seminal book <i>Wung Tangkhul Okthot Mayonzā</i> (1961), this is the original name of the Tangkhul.	
Wungnao (Tangkhul)/ Yangnao (Phalee)	The title used for the chief of the clan, sub-clan, or village. They are addressed as <i>āmeikharar</i> (or <i>mitharra</i> in Phalee). If the chief is of an age to be considered an uncle or grandfather, they are addressed as <i>āwokharar</i> (or <i>wutharra</i> in Phalee).	
Wutharra (Phalee)	An honorific title used to respectfully address an uncle, grandfather, or elder who is of an age to be regarded as such. Additionally, this title is bestowed upon only the <i>yangnao</i> , the chief of the village or clan. The opposite of <i>wuthara</i> is <i>nitharui</i> (aunty) and <i>witharui</i> (grandmother).	
Yārkhoka	distinguished gentleman or alpha males	
Yārronga	A term used to describe a man who remains unmarried while his peers tie the knot. It literally conveys a sense of not yielding a fruitful outcome in terms of marriage.	

<i>Yarthewka</i>	A system of working together as a group in the field, where tasks are performed in a rotational manner among members.	
<i>Yorlā</i>	A married woman is a <i>yorlā</i> of her natal clan, family, father and brothers and they are <i>varei</i> for her and her children.	
<i>Zamshei</i>	the best rice wine	
<i>Zarpāni</i> <i>Shokhalā</i>	The term refers to the marriage between a brother and sister or between a man and woman of the same clan. Such a marriage is considered taboo and is strictly forbidden within the community, as it is believed to bring ill fortune to the village. Those who engage in such relationship face severe repercussions, including exile from the community, as their actions are seen as highly detrimental to the well-being and harmony of the village.	
<i>Zeirun karung</i>	It is the last feast for the deceased prepared by the family during Thishām festival.	
<i>Zenvā</i>	small bird that outwits a tiger in folktales. Unidentified.	

