

Iris Odyuo 
irisodyuo@gmail.com
(Sao Chang College, Tuensang, Nagaland, India)

Crafting of Ornaments and Their Accessories in Folktales and Folksongs among the Nagas

ABSTRACT: Ornaments play a very important and specific role in the life of every Naga tribe; therefore in this paper, I refer to their differentiated meanings and roles. Focusing on the cultural meanings of ornaments, I also examine their crafting and accessories as reflected in the Nagas' folktales and folksongs, arguing for their indispensable role in the survival of the Nagas as an ethnic community.

KEYWORDS: Folktales, folksongs, ornaments, wisdom and identity, the Nagas

Introduction

Every Naga tribe has its unique varieties of oral stories and songs through which they impart accumulated knowledge from one generation to the next. Primary data on traditional ornaments discussed here was obtained from state museums and private collections during archival studies from 2008 to 2012. Additional data was collected during participatory observation fieldwork the author conducted in 2019–2023 in the remote rural and urban area of Eastern Nagaland. The Naga tribes mentioned are the Chang, Khiamniun-

gan, Phom, Sangtam, Yimkhiung (Yimchungrü), Konyak Ao, Angami, Lotha and Chakhesang. Easterine Kire elucidates the role of folktales and folksongs in Naga life in these words:

the role that folklore plays in Naga culture is irreplaceable. In the period when the morung or kichüki or baan was central to village life, youngsters would gather round the fireplace and listen to the storytelling of the elders. It is apparent from the abundance of the lore of the tribes that the elders had learnt the value of using stories as a means of teaching quite early on. There are different uses of folklore: as an instruction, as warning, as entertainment. The stories varied from simple tales for children to legends of the tribe where oral history was repetitively narrated and generationally transmitted. Some of the different categories of the folktales are origin and ancestry tales, tales of warning, tales of the supernatural, tales of warriors, tales of people, tales of tricksters, tales of horror, tales of love, tree and flower tales and tales of animals for children. (Kire 2019: 50–51)

In this paper, while examining the crafting of ornaments and their accessories as reflected in Naga folktales and folksongs, I argue that for the Nagas, ornaments are not used merely for decorating the body but play an important role in the adaptation and survival of the Nagas as ethnic communities. In such a context, Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton writes:

These tales that were known to the folk were no less than an enquiry into everyday life lived in intimacy with other human beings and with nature; they formed part of the oral curriculum of learning for life. In the absence of formal education, through oral narrations, they identified a very laudable way of educating themselves and their future generations. (Patton 2017:18–19)

Applying the approach of seeking information on cultural contexts of material culture and oral traditions (Somjee 2000), I focus on the cultural meanings of the ornaments, materials and functions of the ornaments as well as the songs and narratives related to them, and how they are perceived within the culture that produced them.

Ornaments play a very important and specific role in the life of every Naga tribe, therefore in this paper, I refer to their differentiated meanings and roles. Focusing on the cultural meanings of ornaments, I also examine their crafting and accessories as reflected in the Nagas' folktales and folksongs, arguing for their indispensable role in the survival of the Nagas as an ethnic community.

The Nagas

Nagas are an indigenous people, with their homeland stretching along the current northeastern Indian states of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and northwestern Myanmar (Burma). The state of Nagaland was created in 1963 becoming the 16th state of the Indian Union. Spread over an area of 16,579 square kilometres, the population of the Nagas in India is about four million, out of which 71.03 per cent of the population resides in rural areas and 28.97 per cent in urban areas as per the 2011 census. The Nagas belong to multi-ethnic groups and subgroups; though they have no common language, they have similar cultures and traditions. The 16 major tribes such as the Angami, Ao, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Khiamniungan, Chang, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Liangmei, Yimkhiung (Yimchungrü), Pochury, Rongmei and Zeme and numerous sub-tribes each with its own distinct local dialects, custom and dress inhabit the 15 districts of Nagaland: Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto, Longleng, Kiphiri, Tuensang, Mon, Peren, Phek, Noklak, Tsemnyü, Chümoukedima and Niuland with Kohima as its capital. Tribes such as the Khiamniungan, Konyak, Yimkhiung, Tikhir, Makuri and Tangkhul have villages in Nagaland as well as in Myanmar (Burma). Contact with the colonial powers and Baptist missionaries in the 19th and 20th century greatly changed the cultural life of the Nagas. It not only led to the abandonment of many social and ceremonial practices connected with traditional religion of the Nagas but it also greatly diminished the Naga dependence and allegiance to the *morung* system (men's ceremonial

house), the clan and the village. New forms of prestige derived from education, profession and livelihood have destroyed the prestige system that was sustaining the ceremonial art traditions.

Materials used for Naga ornaments

Nagas are closely related to their environment and natural materials like bamboo, cane, orchid stems, stone, glass, red dyed goat's hair, bones, teeth, horns, sea-shell beads, natural dyes, feathers and even beetle wings found their way into their ornaments (Odyuo 2008). From the carvings on individual houses including rice pounding tables, and rice beer vats to the village log drums and gates, intricate textiles, weapons, ornaments and their accessories, they all signify the strength and prosperity of the owner and the clan and the tribe s/he belongs to. Folksongs in praise of the creativity and entrepreneurship of parents' in being able to provide ornaments for their children can be seen from Khamniungan folksong sang while dancing during festivals:

Aniu oh to nela mon tsuphe thong thong ting ting chom thou ao

Your mother is very expert in weaving, she can purchase lots of neck bells as well as earrings

Apo oh to tsale mon tsuphe ting ting kiao kiao chom thou ao

Your daddy is a good businessman, he can purchase lots of necklaces.
(Khamniungan 1986)

Some materials for ornaments and accessories of the Nagas could only be obtained through trade. Ayinla Shilu Ao writing about the "Jewellery as Symbols of Identity and Status" of the Nagas recalls that her grandfather, Obu Marsosang, traded in beads, red wool, brass sheets and other products used by the Nagas for making their ornaments, by getting them from the mainland India. Eventually:

with a natural instinct for business and an enterprising spirit [he] did, indeed, grew rich by trade. He was at the right place at the right time; a fortuitous crossroads in the history of the Nagas when their traditional jewellery had no yet been devalued by the imposition of changing values and tastes brought about by conversion to Christianity and increased exposure to the modern mechanized world. (Shilu Ao 2008: 99–101)

Nagas tell the story of how the use of wearing bead necklaces came into being. One day, a young mother, in order to quieten the restless movement of her baby, tied a string of cotton thread around her neck. The child started playing with the cotton thread and after that mother had no problem feeding the child. And very soon, other young mothers also started using the same method, some even putting beads and in this way, the beads necklace, *azuk* or ‘child holding hands’ became popular among all women folk (Mongro 1999: 85). In another version, as narrated by Jupoi, a 74-year-old from Yokao village, women started stringing and wearing seeds or beads necklaces to cover their breasts so that they would not ‘wag like a dog’s tail while dancing’ during festivals or working in the fields (Jupoi, personal communication, 12.5.2022).

Throughout the world, people use different kinds of beads to decorate themselves. Chang and Khamniungan women crafted exquisite necklaces of multiple strands of yellow, red, orange and white glass beads called C: *chisiyak*, K: *lakthaoi phan*.¹ The white necklace is called C: *ngüma phenbü yak* (near the neck), the red necklace is C: *hip kümbü yak* (a necklace that covers the ribs) and the white tubular shells necklace with a brass bell as pendant is C: *loyak* (outer necklace). The *loyak* is distinguished by its length and is not constantly worn. Small disc shells (K: *lakhkit*) are used as claps at the back of the necklace. Women usually wear these necklaces while doing their daily household chores or working the fields, during social engagements and for ceremonies. *Chisiyak* is given to

¹ C: stands for Chang and K: for Khamniungan.

the daughter as a wedding present by her parents (Naong Chang, personal communication, 17.1.2018).

In case of being divorced by her husband, the wife can claim the ornaments purchased for her by the husband, along with all the things she brought along with her at the time of marriage. But in case of the death of her husband, she can only claim the ornaments given to her by her parents, which her daughter will inherit or if she has no daughter then her personal ornaments will go to her brother and his children (W. M. Müllong Chang, personal communication, 29.4.2018).

Found with slight variations throughout the Naga areas, ornaments were the most prized items socially, economically, politically and ritually among the Nagas. According to Julian Jacobs “for the Nagas, ornaments are more than a matter of aesthetics. They help make statements about, and to define, the identity of the individuals and groups” (Jacobs 1990: 103). Ornaments would follow the Nagas from birth until death.

Ornaments in folktales and folksongs

Nagas’ love for ornaments was expressed through an oral tradition of storytelling in the Chakhesang Naga folktale as narrated by Easterine Kire in *The Carnelian Necklace in Naga Folktales Retold* (2009). The story runs thus: Once it happened that a girl was gifted a beautiful carnelian necklace by her parents when she turned sixteen, for young women were considered marriageable from that age on. One day, the girl went to the village’s communal water source to wash clothes. After bathing herself and washing her clothes, she started looking for her necklace which she hid under a rock. But the necklace could not be found. In desperation, she cried out aloud, “Oh spirits take my life and, in its place, return my necklace!” As soon as she uttered these words, she found the necklace and after collecting her washing in her basket she went home. But a few days later, she became very sick. Before she died, she remembered what

she had said to the spirits and told her heartbroken mother. In this story, the girl expresses her sorrow over losing her necklace and urges the spirits to take her life in exchange for the lost carnelian necklace.

Bead necklaces, especially when made of carnelian beads, were expensive, as recorded by Mills:

[...] a string of these beads is usually priced at one cow. [...] and every girl aspires to own one string or even two [...]. No one who does not possess a string may wear cotton wool in her ears or a cloth ornamented with cowries. It would be a “great shame” if she did. The beads descend from mother to daughter, and if a girl brings a string with her as dowry, her marriage price is accordingly higher. (Mills 1937, 1982: 35)

Role of women’s ornaments

Ornaments such as brass armlets, earrings, wristlets and bead necklaces not only enhanced the beauty and status of the owner but also protected her from unforeseen dangers. In the traditional Naga society, it was the men who engaged in headhunting expeditions² while womenfolk took care of the house in the village. But even in the village “there was always the fear of an enemy lurking nearby to chop off a woman’s head, valued among the Nagas for her long hair to decorate a warrior’s insignia such as hip ornaments” (Odyuo 2008: 158). Tainiu, who is in her 50s, recalled her grandmother narrating about the time when their village was attacked by enemy warriors. While many villagers lost their lives, some survived. Among the survivors was a woman whose bead necklaces saved her from

² “Violence and warfare were part and parcel of Naga culture. Headhunting was not only sanctioned by the society but was also held in high esteem. Successful head hunters were amply rewarded with prestige, influence and power. By early 1890s headhunting practice was stopped in the British administered areas of the Nagas; in the unadministered areas it was only in the late 1940s that headhunting practice was put to an end” (Lotha 1998b: 1).

being killed. After many attempts the enemy spared the victim's life because the *dao*³ kept slipping away as it came into contact with her bead necklaces (Tainiu, personal communication, 24.2.2022, Tuen-sang).

Another important accessory owned by the Naga women was the iron walking staff. The attachment to and value of this piece of ornament can be seen in the folktale of the Lotha Nagas about the widow and the boys of the *morung* (Mills 1922, 1980). In the story, the widow was promised baskets of rice in exchange for the pig which the boys from the *morung* took. But even on asking repeatedly for the promised baskets of rice, the boys refused to pay her. And so, one fine day she walked round the *morung*, tapping the ground with her iron staff which was endowed with a magic power. Suddenly the ground opened up around the *morung* and swallowed all the *morung* boys. The villagers tried to dig them out but were unsuccessful and from that day onwards the importance and the magical power of the iron walking staff was recognized.

Kongniu, a 68-year-old woman from Yokao village, recalls that when she got married, her father could not afford to include the *minyu lai* (iron walking staff) which forms a part of a Naga woman's wedding trousseau besides her rain shield, carrying basket, the textiles which she has woven herself or which were given to her by her parents, her weaving tools and her ornaments. It was only in the early 1970s, after the birth of her first child, that she received the *minyu lai* from her father who bought it for her from the neighbouring Shamator village. She says that when she first got the *minyu lai*, it was about 6 feet high but now that she has become older the *minyu lai* has also become shorter because of constant use (Kongniu, personal communication, 24.6.2022). The iron walking staff forms an indispensable part of a woman's attire and is still used as a support when carrying heavy loads from the fields as well as for self-defence and also as an ornament while dancing during festivals.

³ The *dao* or machete is the most important weapon for the Nagas. There are four main types of *dao* used for different purposes such as *dao* for hunting enemy's head or an animal, *dao* for daily use and the decorated *dao* for ceremonies.

The *ongkhe* belt

When a girl reaches puberty, she starts wearing a narrow wrap-around skirt called *nyecho* fastened by a belt called *ongkhe*. The *ongkhe* is a thin woven white belt with black vertical stripes. *Ongkhe* is also made from finely plaited cotton yarn which is dyed with bamboo leave ash mixed with the black soot from the bottom of earthen pots and black sesame seeds.⁴ In the olden days, a newly dyed black *ongkhe* belt was first made to put on willing young girls who did not mind if the black dye stained their skin as long as they got to show off the *ongkhe* for a day or two or until the dye dried up (Tainiu, personal communication, 12.5.2022). The *ongkhe* is also made from a fibre plant called *ongkhe ao* (*Cyperaceae*) dyed red with the bark of the *longpai* tree⁵ and the roots of the madder's dye plant which the Khamniungan Nagas called *wei* (*Rubia cordifolia*). The Nagas believe that the use of any indigenous dye has to be carried out by women who are not pregnant "less the foetus be effected by the colour" (Ao 1968: 8). The use of the red colour is more dangerous than other colours because the dyer is:

superstitiously believed to die a violent death or lose her head in a raid. Therefore, only an old women dye yarns in the red colour. Some other tribes such as the Lothas consider this a risky occupation likely to bring on dysentery, and therefore, only suitable for old women who are of less value to the community. (ibid.: 9)

⁴ Hutton also mentions these belts. He writes that Konyak women all "wear a very narrow petticoat some five inches deep, and above it a belt, or a series of belts, each consisting of a number of separate threads made up into a bound loop at each end and fastened in front. [...] the twisted threads are covered over with some sort of gum or wax, making them black and shiny like well-worn hide" (Hutton 1986: 22).

⁵ Only when small ferns start to grow on a matured *longpai* tree (unidentified) are the barks from the tree taken as fixative for making the red dye. Thin slices of the *Cyperaceae* plant are soaked and boiled with shreds of the *longpai* bark and *wei* roots to get the red dye (Khomong Khamniungan, personal communication, 15.10.2018).

Ornaments on skin (tattooing)

Tattooing was confined to the northern and central Nagas such as the Chang, Sangtam, Ao, Phom, Yimkhiung, Khiamniungan and the Konyak. For the Nagas tattooing “serves to make statements about membership of groups and status within groups” (Jacobs 1990: 114). When children reached the adolescent period they were given their first tattoo in order to identify their gender and age group. If a child dies before reaching the tattoo-receiving age, the child’s mother makes a mark with black soot on the forehead to identify their gender group and to guide their spirit to the land of the dead, where their relatives would recognise them (L. Lumong, personal communication, 19.10.2022). Among the Nagas, only elderly women who are expert textile weavers with good eyesight can become tattooers.

Male tattoos on arms and chest, with human figures and various zigzag patterns, were associated not only with headhunting but also enabled a man to differentiate between a friend and an enemy (See also Mills 1926, 1973, 2003; Hutton 1921, 1969, 2003; Saul 2005; Chingmak 2020). The V-shaped tattoos, with slight variations, on the chest of men are commonly known as a ‘tiger chest’ indicating that the wearer could “act like a tiger and kill his enemies” (Saul 2005: 36). Temsula Ao writes that female tattoos were the result of:

[...] an elaborate process of ornamentation and took as many as five years to complete. Apart from the purpose of ornamentation, tattooing was considered a part of the coming-of-age rituals in a girl’s life. When the first year’s tattooing was completed, a girl was considered to be full-fledged member of the community. (Ao 1999: 5)

Phom Naga folklore narrates the story of a brave woman called Bangila of Yachem village who beheaded an enemy who was hiding behind her house while she was weaving. To mark her brave deeds, the villagers allowed her to weave and wear a special shawl called *mukho shungnang* and a special tattoo marking on her legs (Phaphen Phom, personal communication, 27.5.2006). Tattoo marking on the leg was so cherished that Khiamniungan women wrapped their legs

with *hokning*, a narrow white cloth with a black longitudinal pattern composed of thin strips at the sides. These were wrapped around the legs for protection against insect bites and thorny plants while working in the fields. Shangjiu from Kingniu village who is in his 60s narrated that *hokning* is never worn while dancing during festivals because it will cover up the beauty of the leg tattoo (Shangjiu, personal communication, Tuensang, 24.6.2022). Female tattoos marked the transition from girlhood to womanhood while men's tattoos signified prowess in war.

Ornaments for war

Heavy shields (Odyuo 2008) made of buffalo or *mithun* (*Bos frontalis*), rhinoceros or elephant hide, poison arrows, spears and *daos* were used in the war between different villages, but for skirmishes within the village among the *khel* (wards), the Khamniungan and Chang Nagas like the Tangkhuls and the Lothas were restricted from using actual *daos* and spears. Weaponry was restricted to a wooden sword and a light shield fashioned from seasoned bamboo. A sturdy war helmet with the inside cushioned with nettle fiber cloth to protect the head, arm guards and leg guards made of heavy cane works were worn to fend off blows to the body. And in praise for their war ornaments, the Khamniungan Nagas sang:

Melo leng to kaopa holeya

Man dancing gear is like a tiger's teeth

Melo leng to osa holeya

Man dancing gear is like a bear's teeth

Melo leng nou kaopo hoche che

Man dancing gear is as white as a tiger's teeth

Melo leng nou osa ho mei mei

Man dancing gear is as good as bear's teeth.

(Khamniungan 1986)

The tiger's tooth, claws and the boar's tusk which are stitched on to men's hats and necklaces have significance for they are "considered to be of high magical value and the possessor of it is powerful, respected and feared" (Muensterberger 1971: 113). Nagas also believe that the owner of such materials attracts to themselves certain characteristics of the animals such as the swiftness and fastness of the tiger, the strength and fearlessness of the bear and the aggressiveness of the wild boar while attacking and killing their enemies. And these materials were believed to possess certain power that required careful handling involving ritual treatment. When buying the pendant of a pair of tiger's teeth decorated with brass spiral much coveted by the Yimchunger, Chang, Sangtam, Phom and Khiamnungan Nagas, the buyer "must observed five days *genna*⁶ before he can put it on" (Mills 1937: 30). The tiger according to Lotha:

is a symbol of the spirit world and also a symbol of valor and strength. Nagas are lycanthropists and they have a love and hate relationship with the tiger. There is a very strong association with the tiger in the Naga's belief system. Some tribes believe the tiger is a brother. [...] most Nagas believe that the tiger is the protector spirit of a man or a woman. (Lotha 1998a: 18–19).

Some ornaments can be worn by anyone, but "most Naga ornaments have a particular meaning and they are therefore 'powerful'. Not surprisingly, the right to wear them is strictly controlled" (Jacobs 1990: 103).

As much as bravery and personal achievements were recognized, there were also folk songs sung by women to "discourage and shame the cowards and shirkers" (Ao 1999: 174).

Shari maoba
O nu jong agi akru kidangstu
Nu nu Kirtsu:
Nu nok anki kupstu,

⁶ *Genna* is a misnomer for the indigenous word *kenyü* which means forbidden, else prohibitions and restrictions.

Nuko rangmenjipo sungrong pangko

Enstu komentsu

Those who do not go to fight enemies,
Their shields will be used as door-flaps in pig-sty,
Their spears will be used as bars to close doors,
Their *daos* will become flaps in chicken cages,
and their helmets will be kept on the wood-pile
as baskets where the hens incubate their eggs.
(Ao 1999: 174)

The most important weapons for fighting the enemy were the *dao* and the spear, and for defence, the shield made of bamboo or animal hide. Mongro (1999) notes that only ritually consecrated *dao*, spears and shields were used in killing an enemy or an animal and such weapons were never used for any other purposes. Immediately after use, the weapons were kept in a special spot near the fireplace in the kitchen till they were needed again. Therefore, to the Nagas, the employment of their war weapons for purposes other than the war was unthinkable.

Ornaments for ceremonies

Among the Chang Nagas, on the day of the ears piercing ceremony which is performed on the fifth or sixth day after birth according to the gender of the child,⁷ a small chicken is sacrificed. A dab of the chicken's blood is smeared on the earlobes, which are then pierced with a bamboo needle. As the child grows the ear holes are gradually enlarged with cotton threads to receive ear ornaments (Mongo Chollen, personal communication, 27.2.2018). Nagas believed that the "piercing of ears is to denote that the child belongs to 'man' and therefore the hole in the ear is the 'mark' of this 'appropriation'" (Ao 1999: 51). On the name-giving ceremony day, a necklace made of cotton yarn or beads is put on the child so that the child would be

⁷ For a boy child the ceremony is performed on the sixth day after the birth and for a girl child on the fifth day.

protected from sickness and unfortunate accidents (Mongo Chollen, personal communication, 12.5.2020). In a society without written history such as the Nagas, the details regarding even the simple naming ceremony of a child provide valuable information on the importance of ornaments in one's life.

Nagas recognize many distinctive ornaments for ceremonial occasions. One of the most prominent accessories for decorating headgears of the warriors are the hornbill feathers. The hornbill, writes Lotha,

is the biggest bird seen in the Naga country. Its magnificent appearance and graceful movements makes it a beautiful bird to look at. It makes a great impression soaring overhead slowly and majestically, with very loud whirring wings, audible even at a distance and height. This bird courageously chases away its enemies and eats only the best fruit in the wild forests. The hornbill has a multiple symbolism. It is the symbol of valour. Successful warriors are entitled to wear the tail feathers of the hornbill as an emblem of their bravery, one feather for each head taken. [...] and finally, the hornbill is the symbol of the youth of the village especially the brave, young warriors of the *Morung*. The carving of the hornbill on the central post and side beams symbolized the youth of the *Morung*. It also was stating a hope that the village may have many young men of valor and able leaders like the hornbill. In short, we may say that the hornbill is the symbol of valor, beauty (especially of men), grace, wealth, youthfulness and the youth of the village and the tribe. (Lotha 1998a: 18)

Apart from the husband, wives and daughters of a man who had done the *mithun* sacrifice can wear the feather on their headdress.

Feast givers and warriors were also entitled (Odyuo 2008) to wear the well-known ceremonial conical hats, wristlets and leg guards made of a dichromatic weave done in red dyed cane and yellow orchid stem. Besides the ear ornaments, necklaces, and arm-band made of ivory, brass, cane and wood, successful warriors could decorate their *dao* handle and *dao* holder, and the spear with red

dyed cane and goat's hair⁸ and yellow orchid stem. Angami warriors' shields of cane matting are decorated with red-dyed goat's hair and vertical line of human heads made of bear skin. Sometimes the shields were covered with leopard, bear and tiger skin. Even drinking cups, smoking pipes, *panji* (bamboo spike) basket of warriors were elaborately decorated. The Konyak, in addition to incised and carved wooden and bone hairpins, brass and wooden representations of human heads worn as chest ornaments, carry a hip basket known as *dangsa*, richly decorated with carved wooden human heads, monkey skulls, boars' tusks and cane balls to indicate the warrior status.

The *panji* basket is an important item in a man's paraphernalia. Mongro notes that

every warrior had to plan for thwarting the enemies who chased them. For this purpose bamboo spikes were considered useful for they were sharply pointed at one end and they were fixed along the path of the attackers [...] to carry these spikes, the warrior require a special cas- ket, a small conical basket Sukhu means carrier of spikes [...] Sukhu has two parts; the main basket and the tail; decorated with goat's hair and woman's hair. (Mongro 1999: 47)

Yimkhiung folktales tell how man discovered the use of hair for decorating their hip baskets. Once a hunter named Toshi killed a *kurupe* (Fig. 4), a short two-legged creature with flowing black hair, that live in the jungle. On seeing their fallen friend, the other *kurupe* started wailing:

⁸ Ganguly writes that a special species of goat was reared in some Yim-chunger village: "the long hair from the goat's chin is pulled out by hand one by one after warm ashes have been applied to it. Then the hairs are tied in bunches; no cotton thread may be used for tying but only a string made of the stem of palm leaves. Twigs of a creeper called *yailel* are cut and dried, then crushed and boiled together with the bunches of the goat's hair. The hair is kept in the solution over- night-shiny, bright red hair results" (Ganguly 1993: 79).

Tosh He-e To

Tosh He-e To

Akoba Nü Hiushe-A

He Mülo He

He-A-Ye Ha

Toshi was the one

Toshi was the one

He used the *Akoba* (crossbow)

And now we are all sad.

(Longkumer 2017: 238–241)

After the *kurupe* had gone back into their hole, Toshi quickly came out of hiding and went over to where the dead *kurupe* was buried, cut off its long hair and hurried home. He decorated his hip basket with the long hair and people were enchanted by it and started copying him. And “even today, people attach long black hair, usually their eldest daughter’s or their wife’s, to the small baskets they wear at the back and the hair waves from side to side in a most entrancing way every time they get up and dance” (ibid.: 241).

During festivals, some neighbouring villages are invited to take part in the festivities. On such occasions, while dancing, Nagas never fail to compare their colorful attires with each other. One such song sung by Khiamniungan Nagas goes like this:

Ale waivcheng tejo lo le yah

Is your village only these many beautiful girls?

Chalev waivcheng nyukai apya noih

In our village there are many beautiful girls

Lemeh chhou noh tejo lo le yah

In your village only these many ornamented birdlike girls?

Lemeh lemeh sangnyu nya koh yah

We are ornamented and ornamented like the beautiful *sangnyu* crane

Aiyah naeh to nyi the ka neh koh

What will you take back after this dance?

Aiyah naeh to chaking cha leh noh

What else but empty baskets will we carry home.

(Sardeshpande 1987: 64)

This song is sung in praise of the beauty of the ornaments of the dancers, but at the same time, to remind oneself that just possessing and flaunting these ornaments is vanity. Unlike when returning home from the fields with carrying baskets laden with food or wood, on returning home from village dances, the baskets are always empty.

The artistic skills and creativity of the Nagas can be seen in the ceremonial bamboo rice beer mug called *dobü thong*⁹ which forms an important part of a man's ceremonial attire. The pattern on the rim of the *dobü thong* portrays the hornbill feathers; the pattern at the center portrays the tattoo symbol on the chest and the pattern at the bottom, the tiger's claws and the leg guard of warriors. Chang oral history talks about the origins of the *dobü thong*.¹⁰ Every day, children and old people coming from the fields would get lost, so Nasset Mongo, the bravest man from the village of Chendang, covered his body in soot and tobacco water and lay near the field path pretending to be dead. The jungle spirits carried him to their cave but the man stretched his hands and legs so wide that they could not pull him inside the cave and left him outside. Getting up he saw an old woman spirit coming out of the cave carrying a big basket full of human heads. On killing her, he discovered tattoo designs on her thighs and started copying the design on bamboo mugs.

⁹ After selecting and cutting suitable bamboos for the cups, the bamboo is left to dry for two months and when the bamboo is still pliable, designs are made on the cups with a thin iron wire or iron pokers, and the bark of a local tree called *langchibu* (unidentified) is then made red hot by blowing air into a bed of charcoal. The heated bark is then introduced into the freshly cut design which is similar to the warrior chest tattoo; nimble fingers and concentration are crucial at this stage before the oily substance from the bark melts onto the cut surface leaving permanent poker designs on the bamboo cups. If a slight mistake occurs the cup will have to be rejected because the Changs believe that drinking from such an imperfect *dobü thong* brings ill luck to the one who uses it (Yongkong, personal communication, 10.11.2004).

¹⁰ See also Ganguly 1993, Odyuo 2018.

The tattoo design on the mug signifies that the owner has taken a head and so only a warrior could drink from the *dobü thong*¹¹ (Imlong Chaba, personal communication, 23.11.2010).

Funerary ornaments

For the Nagas, ornaments played an important role in accompanying the dead to the Land of the Dead.¹² When people died their bodies were buried or put inside a wooden coffin or wrapped up in a cloth or mat and exposed on a platform in the village cemetery (see Saul 2005, Mills 1926, Jacobs 1990). In the case of a man, his ornaments, weapons and skulls of animals he had slaughtered for feasting the village or hunted for games, and for a woman her weavings tools, carrying baskets and ornaments, are placed near the graves.¹³ Among the Chang Nagas, it was during the *Küphelet* festival which is celebrated in the month of February (Chingmak 2020) that the skulls of those who have died during the year are detached from the bodies and the second burial known as *Lölüm* (bone festival) is observed.¹⁴ The detached skulls are then washed, cleaned and mourned for a day. The next day, the skulls are taken and placed in

¹¹ Chendang, Chingmei and Yangpi are *dobü thong* which was traded over a large area and even today the *dobü thong* are still made and sold. The *dobü thong* is made only during the winter season, the period between harvest and the next sowing of crops in the fields that is from October to January.

¹² When a person dies a dog is slaughtered because according to the Chang Nagas, “the dog is the cleverest animal and the killing is done in the belief that the dog will lead the dead to *yemlan*, the path towards where the souls live without any hindrance” (Chingmak 2020: 172).

¹³ See also Saul 2005, Mills 1926, for rituals and ceremonies regarding burial or exposure of the dead bodies.

¹⁴ It is also during the *Küphelet* festival that people clean their kitchen. The ash from the hearth is swept completely. The Chang Nagas believed that “the fire that was used to cook or burn all kinds of clean and unclean or ritualistic food is made to be doused and the ashes properly cleared. In this observance fresh fire making is done through indigenous fire making called *küngkhang wanse*” (Chingmak 2020: 343–134).

their respective skull caves known as *lempong khulo apshang* (ibid.). In the second burial among the Yimchunger Nagas,¹⁵ the skull of the deceased person is placed inside an earthen pot and re-buried.¹⁶ Ornaments (Odyuo 2013) of blue glass beads are put on to the skulls of females and that of a spiral metal wire in that of males for identification. These funeral ornaments called *chinong* by the Chang Nagas are made to be worn only on elderly corpses.

Conclusions

The intention of this essay was to illustrate that for the Nagas, ornaments played an important role in their survival as an ethnic group. The values and symbolism expressed by the Nagas in their ornaments and accessories and the stories and songs relating to them could be understood by the members of that group and community. Lotha shares the most important observation that:

in the Naga society the hope of gaining prosperity, blessing, bumper crops, prestige, influence and power were added incentives to produce strong men and brave warriors by inculcating the values of warriorhood but they were not the primary cause of warfare. These were essential for the survival of the village or the tribe. In such cultural contexts, bravery was an esteemed value. The social, magical and religious sanctions were added incentives to the braves of the tribe to uphold the sociopolitical standing of the tribe. And anyone who killed an enemy was doing for the good for the village and the tribe, and so was amply rewarded with prestige and influence. [...] such motivations were essential for the village for the tribe's very existence. (Lotha 1998b: 19–20)

To conclude, the role and function of ornaments and their accessories in the Naga society, as reflected in the folktales and folk-songs, can be rightly described using the words of Radcliffe-Brown:

¹⁵ Muri Yimchunger, personal communication, 4.10.2006.

¹⁶ See also Hutton 1986 for similar second burial among the Konyak Nagas.

"(it) is to emphasize the importance of society, thus contributing to its integration by reinforcing the notion of the individual's dependence upon society [...] and of man's behavior in creating and using it" (after Merriam 1971: 104).

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Fig. 1. Map of Nagaland



Fig. 2. Female necklace. IC 28289. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

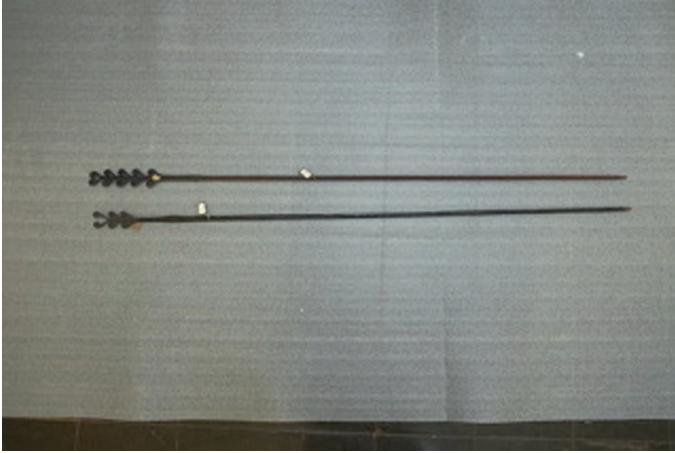


Fig. 3. Iron walking staff used by women. IC28371. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Fig. 4. Konyak warrior tattoo. Lars Krutak 2018

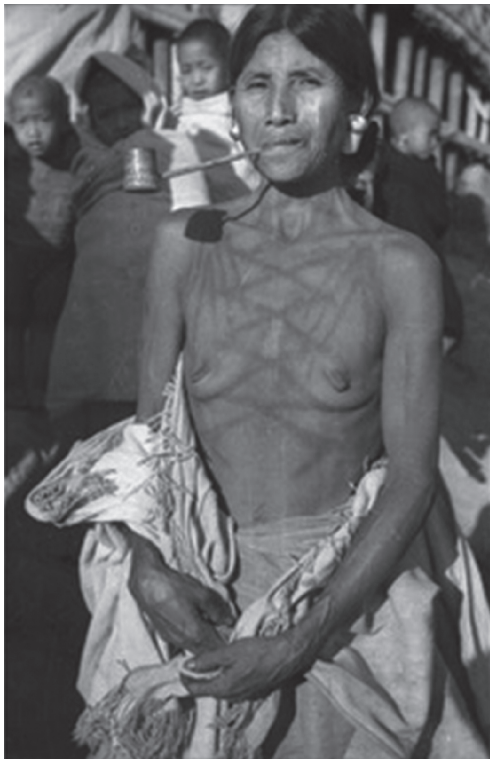


Fig. 5. Phom Naga Women tattoo. HEK 0932-24-39 (Kauff 24-39)



Fig. 6. Necklace made of boar's tusks, Ao Naga. IC 8474. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Fig. 7. Warrior's helmet decorated with hornbill feathers, Ao Naga. IC 28388.
Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museum zu Berlin



Fig. 8. Conical ceremonial warrior's helmet decorated with tiger's tooth and boar's tusks IC 8373. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

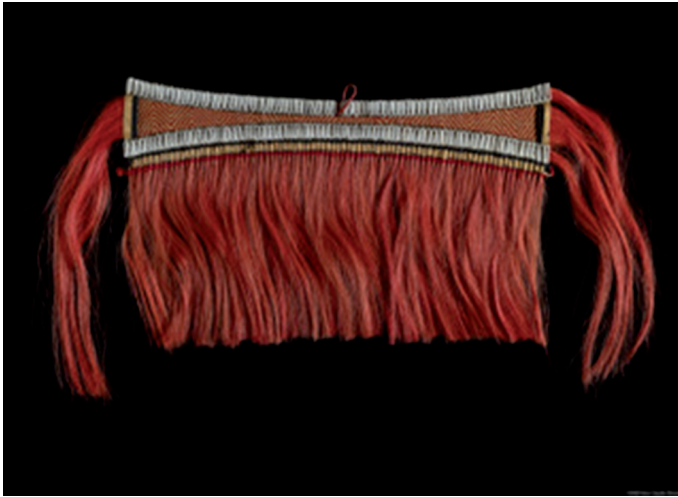


Fig. 9. Chest ornaments for warriors. IC 28461. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museum zu Berlin



Fig. 10. Hip Panji basket. IC 28472. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Fig. 11. Dobü thong,
Chang Naga warrior's
bamboo mug. Photo Iris
Odyuo



Fig. 12. Ceremonial spear.
IC 28597. Ethnologisches
Museum-Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin





Fig. 13. Ceremonial dao. IC 28009. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

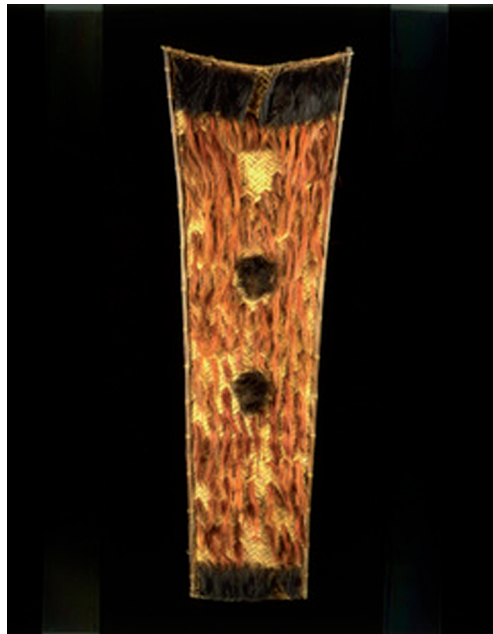


Fig. 14. Warrior's shield, Angami or Rengma Naga. IC 28130. Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin