

The Role of Oral Tradition with Special Focus on the Lotha-Naga Community

Dr Widinibou Charengna¹, Sr. Dr. Thungyani Ovung²

^{1,2}Assistant Professor, Don Bosco College, Maram, Department of English

Abstract

This paper explores the Lotha (ISO 639-3 njh) proverbs and analyses their role as a tool for educating the younger generation about good behaviour and the norms and practices of the society. With the advent of modernisation and ongoing transformations, the oral literature of the Lothas, particularly their proverbs, is at risk of fading away. The Lotha people possess a diverse and extensive collection of folk literature encompassing various genres, including folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, rhymes, lullabies, war songs, and sacrificial chants. These forms of oral tradition within Lotha society convey significant insights into religion, history, customs, and communal genealogical information about families in the community. This wealth of knowledge has been passed down through generations via a rich tapestry of oral traditions. However, the rise of education, modern entertainment, shifting lifestyles, and advanced technology has led to a gradual decline in the appreciation and practice of these oral traditions among the Lotha people. This paper advocates for a collective effort among all community members to safeguard and preserve this invaluable oral heritage. Furthermore, the establishment of documentation and information centres, such as libraries, archival institutions, and museums, can play a crucial role in identifying, collecting, and preserving the information embedded in these oral traditions. The paper aims to examine the relevance of Lotha proverbs to the present generation and their educational value in helping them to stay connected to their culture and community¹.

Keywords: Oral literature, Lotha Proverbs and preservation

Importance of Proverbs in Maintaining Cultural Heritage

Proverb is also an effective weapon for convincing people, warning them, or even giving them advice, because they are the collective wisdom of the past and the popular convention is that the people in the past because of their honesty, piety and spiritual powers, were wiser than those in modern times and have prophesied on all matters leaving nothing to be added for the coming generations (Sabir, 34: 2011). Proverbs are concise, well-structured expressions that are widely recognized within a community, conveying traditional insights about human behaviour, natural events, moral lessons, satire, and cautionary advice (Simpson & Steve, 2000). They hold particular significance in oral cultures due to their brevity and memorable nature. As essential components of society, proverbs encapsulate and influence social dynamics through their succinct and authoritative language. They offer valuable

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linguistic insights for examining the cultural beliefs and social values of a specific community. Proverbs serve as effective communication tools, often presented in short phrases, anecdotes, or stories, and can be inscribed on various materials or even expressed through song and dance. The language of proverbs is rich with diverse vocabulary, including words, phrases, symbols, imagery, and comparisons. They draw from and reference all aspects of society, as well as natural phenomena. Consequently, proverbs are vital instruments for imparting values, cultural understanding, and social perspectives. Additionally, they embody the wisdom, moral principles, and cultural heritage of a community or society.

Proverbs serve as vital educational instruments, especially within oral traditions. They play a crucial role in imparting life lessons, cultural practices, and societal values to younger individuals. Umeasiegbu (1986) describes proverbs as expressions acknowledged by a community that encapsulate the wisdom and philosophies of their forebears. These sayings enable the transmission of knowledge and insight across generations, acting as a link between the older and younger members of society, thereby preserving traditional wisdom. Proverbs embody the values, customs, and historical narratives of a community, ensuring that cultural heritage is maintained through their continued use. Onuekwuso (2011) articulates that “a proverb is a philosophical, allusive, and metaphorical citation that validates traditional truths and wisdom. It is allusive and metaphorical as it points to truths beyond itself, and philosophical because it emerges from extensive reasoning and observation, conveying enduring truths.”

Social Use and challenges of Proverbs

The social aspect of proverbs is unmistakable. Just as an individual lacks a unique language, they also do not possess proverbs meant solely for personal use. While proverbs are indeed crafted by individuals, they gain significance and value only through social application. Furthermore, proverbs have consistently served as tools for social interaction.

In the context of society, our informants identify various areas where proverbs are utilized. Below, we outline some of the functions based on their insights:

1. *Didactic and moral function.* This is the most fundamental aspect, underlying all other functions and categories. Informants report that elders used proverbs to instill morals in the youth, educating them about cultural and religious values.
2. *Philosophical function.* Proverbs have the ability to "sharpen the mind and deepen knowledge." They serve as a form of education that goes beyond mere common sense, prompting inquiry and reasoning. This clearly leads us into the philosophical realm of human understanding.
3. *Therapeutic function.* A modern medical approach known as "logotherapy" emphasizes healing through the power of words. Respondents acknowledge that the inherent power of proverbs and their messages can alleviate human suffering and bring joy to troubled hearts.
4. *Humorous function.* Proverbs can also provide amusement and joy, serving as a source of entertainment.

Additionally, there is a significant connection between proverbs and the evolving contemporary landscape. Henceforth, ancient proverbs still hold relevance for today's generations.

The Role and Importance of Proverbs in Lotha

In Lotha culture, proverbs transcend mere linguistic expressions; they serve as vibrant repositories of cultural wisdom and knowledge. These succinct, often metaphorical phrases encapsulate the shared experiences, values, and traditions of the diverse Naga tribes. Proverbs are intricately woven into the

daily lives of the Lotha people, fulfilling multiple functions. They preserve cultural values, ethics, and norms, passing these down through generations to ensure their survival. Additionally, they act as educational tools, imparting moral lessons and ethical principles to younger audiences. Proverbs are essential to the Lotha identity.

Exploring Lotha Naga proverbs offers valuable insights into the cultural and social fabric of society. These sayings illuminate the deep-rooted traditions and philosophies that shape Lotha society. They facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and enhance our understanding of indigenous knowledge systems. Furthermore, Lotha Naga proverbs play a crucial role in preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of Nagaland. However, it is important to note that there is a significant lack of documentation and research specifically focused on Lotha Naga proverbs. A major step toward preserving the richness of these proverbs was taken with the publication of the book “Compendium of Proverbs and Sayings of the Nagas” by the Department of Arts and Culture, Government of Nagaland, in 2019. This comprehensive collection features proverbs and sayings from all 16 officially recognized tribes in Nagaland, representing a substantial effort in documentation. Similarly, this paper aims to document Lotha proverbs, striving to preserve the rich cultural essence inherent in each saying. It also seeks to analyze the presented proverbs to demonstrate how they serve as repositories of knowledge, wisdom, and cultural values.

Introduction

Before examining Lotha proverbs and their role in society, this section offers a brief overview of the Lothas, including their language, religion, and social and cultural life.

The People of Lotha

Lothas are ethnically classified within the Mongoloid group and inhabit the states of Nagaland and Assam in India. Large populations of the Lotha reside in Wokha District, as well as in Kohima, Chümoukedima, Dimapur, and Medziphema. The Lotha, also referred to as *Kyongs*, constitute a major indigenous Naga ethnic group in Wokha District, Nagaland, a state in northeastern India. The term translates to term enigmatic and has been subject to various interpretations. According to Mozhui (2004, p. 4), can be broken down into "lo," which signifies a sacrifice or offering, and "tha," meaning complete or satisfying. Thus, denotes individuals who have wholly dedicated themselves to appeasing the gods through sacrifices. In contrast, Kikon (1993, p. 5) offers a different perspective, suggesting that the term derives from the Khuza language word "Latha," which means "gone to a far-off region" or "moved forward." It is believed that the name may have originated from the Khuza word "Latha" during the British exploration of the Khuzas and Angamis in the 1930s. Reason: The revised text corrects grammatical errors, improves clarity, and enhances vocabulary while maintaining the original meaning.

Wokha: The Home of the Lothas

The Lotha tribe inhabits Wokha, a name derived from the words "*wo*," meaning "number of people," and "*kha*," meaning "count." Therefore, Wokha translates to "counting the number of people." According to the oral history of the Lotha people, their ancestors originated from a distant land. Upon arriving at what is now Wokha, they sought to determine their population by counting the individuals present. It is believed that during their extensive journey, the Lothas may have lost track of their numbers, prompting them to gather in one location for a headcount. This led to the naming of their settlement as Wokha.

Wokha district is located adjacent to the Golaghat and Jorhat districts of Assam in the midwestern region of Nagaland. To the north, it borders Mokokchung district, while Zunheboto district lies to the east. The southern boundaries are shared with Tseminyu and Kohima districts, and the Assam Plains are situated to the west. The district's landscape is characterized by hilly terrain, which includes numerous long ridges, mountains, and seasonal streams.

The Lothas' Social Organization and Culture

Traditionally, it was believed that both men and women wore simple clothing often adorned with beautiful elements. They donned jewelry and garments that served as important status symbols and held significant meaning. Like many other Naga tribes, the Lothas have distinctive traditional attire for both men and women. Traditionally, men wore a long, narrow piece of durable fabric that ended in a large flap. It was wrapped around the waist, allowing the wide strap of cloth to hang between the legs in front. Depending on the number of the wearer performed, some prominent textiles (shawls) worn by Lotha men included the *phanghrüip-sü*, *longpen-sü*, *jümthe-sü*, *etha-sü*, *eshüm-sü*, and *rükyu-sü*.

A man's shawl patterns and designs reveal the number of social gennas he has participated in. For example, a man who has not participated in any social gennas might wear a *sütüm*, which is a piece of white fabric adorned with horizontal dark blue stripes. During the first genna, he wears a *phangrüp*, a scarlet or dark crimson shawl featuring black and white stripes. After attending several gennas, a man may wear a *longpensü*. The most expensive shawl, known as *rükyusü*, is typically worn by men of high social standing.

The *serüm* is a type of skirt worn by women, wrapped around the waist and tucked in on one side of the hip. The *serüm* may or may not be embellished. Young ladies typically wear the *loro serüm* before marriage, while the *konro serüm* is worn after marriage. In addition to the *serüm*, women often wear shawls such as the *tepkasü*, *obveramve*, or *etsoksü*. Women commonly accessorize with bracelets, necklaces, armlets, earrings, and additional bracelets made from shells and beads, as well as metal bracelets. Both men's and women's earrings are crafted from feathers and colored wool.

Additionally, women wear necklaces made from plantain seeds and large conch shells called *laküp*, while men adorn themselves with bracelets known as *khoro* and *khe-khüp* on their wrists, as well as armlets on their elbows. Lotha women also wear various traditional jewelry pieces, including thick, round pewter armlets (*tivü*) and small, flat brass bracelets (*rümbüm*). Furthermore, Lotha men don the complete Lotha warrior costume, which includes a leg guard (*jorü*), cotton wool pads, a sash (*rhutsen*), a small basket with human hair attached (*tssükyip*), a wig (*tengkho*), king-tail crow feathers (*wotsü-emhi*), and hornbill tail feathers (*rüjüng-emhi*).

Nowadays, full traditional attire is often reserved for official occasions or the *Tokhu Emong* festival. As a result of increased market exposure and diversification, modern and traditional designs are increasingly being blended. Traditional clothing and adornments are no longer significant status symbols; instead, individuals can wear whatever they prefer based on availability and accessibility.

Status of the Language

Lotha is one of the primary languages spoken in Nagaland. The Lotha community boasts a rich oral tradition, relying on stories, legends, and songs to transmit knowledge and history across generations. It is believed that the Lothas once utilized the Naga script, which was reportedly inscribed on dried animal skin and carried by their ancestors during migration. Unfortunately, due to inadequate preservation, this

script was ultimately lost when it was consumed by a dog. According to tradition, the ability to write in this script vanished with the passing of the elders who possessed knowledge of it (Ghosh 1979, p. 31). The introduction of the Roman script as a writing system for Lotha occurred in the late 1800s, following the arrival of American Baptist missionaries.

In educational institutions, Lotha is taught up to the secondary level. Written resources include a translated Bible, dictionaries compiled by missionaries, hymnals, short stories, folk tales, basic grammar books, and various instructional materials. The language is used in speeches, public events, churches, festivals, and other rituals.

Language choice is influenced by various social, religious, cultural, and educational factors. While Lotha is predominantly spoken at home among the Lotha people, English or Nagamese is often used in mixed marriages or unions with individuals from other tribes or communities. In public settings, such as the legislature, panchayat, or *Hoho Lotha*, English is the preferred language, with Nagamese used as needed. Both Lotha and English are utilized in religious contexts, particularly in churches, while Lotha and Nagamese are commonly spoken in marketplaces. Lotha is exclusively used in cultural contexts, including festivals, ceremonies, and rituals.

Lotha Indigenous Religion

The Lothas, who traditionally practice animism, prioritize material achievements over spiritual fulfillment and perceive God, or *Potsow*, as a supernatural entity. To maintain the favor of various spirits, individuals are expected to offer sacrifices. They believe that failing to make sufficient sacrifices in a timely manner may result in the spirits withholding blessings and potentially exhibiting hostility. The spirits with which they are most familiar include *longkomvü* (dwarfs), *tsüngrham* (evil spirits), *sükhyingo* (forest spirits), *jüpvuo* (water spirits), and *ronsyu* (harvest spirits).

Historically, the Lothas practiced headhunting, a tradition common among many Naga tribes; however, this practice ceased with the advent of Christianity. While various denominations of Christianity are present, including Catholicism, the majority of the Lothas identify as Baptists. Wokha is noted for having a higher population of Catholics compared to other regions in Nagaland.

The positive effect of Christianity and modernization on Lotha culture was the introduction of education in the society. The improvement in the education system among the people has reformed the society and many important physical and social infrastructure developments have taken place. However, many beliefs and practices which are indigenous to Lotha's have vanished while accommodating other culture. Thus, it has been observed that the Lotha tribe is blindly copying Modernity and Christianity. This blind copying of other culture while neglecting one's own culture is dangerous because it will lead to the extinction of one's own culture. Thus, it is suggested that the Lotha tribe should keep their culture intact while flowing along with Modernity and Christianity (Ezung & Ovung, 2023, p.279).

Social and Cultural Life

The Lotha people possess a unique culture and tradition. Rice serves as their staple food, accompanied by meat and various vegetables. Their primary occupations include fishing, hunting, and jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation), making their economy predominantly agrarian. The Lotha consume meat from a variety of wild, domestic, and avian species, as well as fresh and dried fish, honey, cultivated vegetables, bamboo shoots, and an abundance of berries and forest leaves. However, certain foods are prohibited, and not all meals are consumed. They adhere to the traditional belief that eating

foods considered unlucky can bring misfortune or dire omens to the individual. Children, in particular, are forbidden from consuming such foods.

Oral Literature in Lotha Society

The Lothas possess a diverse array of oral literature encompassing various genres, such as folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, lullabies, war songs, and sacrificial chants. In earlier times, after a long and exhausting day, community members would gather around a fire to share stories from their ancestors, simultaneously creating new narratives that reflected the current actions and experiences of their community. Younger individuals memorized these stories, as there was no written form to preserve them, thus passing down their history orally to the next generation. The anticipation of storytelling moments, particularly when grandparents recounted tales, was cherished by the youth, making storytelling a vital aspect of socialization for children. Through these communicative practices, cultural knowledge was imparted, including societal expectations regarding roles and relationships.

Moreover, numerous bedtime stories for children often conclude with a moral lesson. There are also explanatory tales that delve into cosmology and the universe, providing both entertainment and education, rich in moral significance. Common themes found in these narratives include enduring love, moral lessons, the value of hard work, the triumph of good over evil, the rewards of perseverance, the importance of sharing, the assistance of nature to the less fortunate, and the significance of love and unity within families. Embedded within these stories and proverbs are instruments of social control, designed to instill moral values and ethical principles in the younger generation. Consequently, oral tradition, in its many forms, has played a crucial role in the lives of the Lotha people.

Data and Methodology

This is a descriptive and analytical research. The data for preparing this paper was collected mainly from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from Wokha district, Kohima and Dimapur, Nagaland. In addition to this, data was also collected from social media like Facebook; WhatsApp groups of Lotha.

Proverbs in Lotha

Proverbs in Lotha are referred to as *yijak yizen*, which translates to 'advice' or 'statement.' Therefore, *yijak yizen* signifies advice, information, or a statement that is deemed acceptable. These proverbs are predominantly utilized by older individuals or those with extensive and diverse experiences. They often employ proverbs to provide suggestions regarding the relative values of various matters or to offer criticism. Elderly individuals particularly enjoy using proverbs when communicating with younger people, as a means of imparting wisdom and persuading them on certain issues. However, when proverbs are exchanged among peers, they can potentially offend the listener's pride, possibly resulting in a negative impact on their relationship.

Lothas have a rich collection of proverbs, covering different aspects of living harmoniously in society. Proverbs are found in every interactional setting in Lotha society ranging from casual conversation to formal speech. They are often used by elders of the community and invariably targeted to young listeners. The user of proverbs is often found to be superior in terms of age or kinship hierarchy. They make use of a large number of proverbs in their day-to-day conversations, contact situations and social gatherings. Proverbs in Lotha occupy an important place both in the family and social life. They have

their own distinct cultural traditions, social customs, festivals, language, religion, customary laws, traditional costumes, folklore and a rich tradition of folk literature like folk tales, legends, songs, proverbs, riddle and charms which have been transmitted to them by their ancestors from generation to generation and have shaped nurtured them till the present day. Proverbs circulating among the Lotha society have been taking a significance role in the society as it helps in socialization and integration. These are used according to the time and situations.

Lotha proverbs are inspired by a diverse array of sources, including flora, fauna, human behaviors, cultural practices, professions, and belief systems, as well as social and political structures. These proverbs emerge from keen observations of societal events and the experiences of both people and animals. Additionally, they reflect insights gained from various occupations such as agriculture, hunting, and weaving. Many proverbs address themes related to family dynamics, human relationships, morality, wealth and poverty, as well as joy and sorrow. Each proverb conveys a moral lesson. They often serve as metaphors derived from everyday life or nature, encapsulating collective experiences. Lotha proverbs frequently follow established patterns and, like all forms of folklore, exhibit numerous traditional variations that encapsulate the essence of daily life and navigating the world. Frequently, they draw parallels from social, legendary, mythological, and historical contexts to illustrate specific traits of individuals, whether virtuous or flawed. A significant number of these comparisons are rooted in the natural world, effectively highlighting human experiences.

Characteristics of Lotha Proverbs

The Lotha society has a rich oral tradition. In the Lotha, a simple short word and phrase carry so many deep insights and meanings. Since literacy came only with the advent of the British missionaries, the traditional Lotha village depended on orality as a medium of transferring knowledge and culture from one generation to the other. Hence, proverbs which were handed down orally from one generation to the next became an invaluable source of education and transmitting knowledge. The elder generation used proverbs to educate and instruct their children. A society or a community can be studied by studying the proverbs and folktales created and transmitted within the community. There are proverbs that talk about family and human relations, good and evil, poverty and riches, joy and sorrow with moral teaching.

- a. Situations having social, legendary, mythological and historical bases are drawn, as comparisons, to reflect a particular quality of a person, whether good or bad.
- b. There is a lot of didacticisms in these proverbs in which vices are portrayed and their consequences elucidated.

Classification of Lotha proverbs

The using of proverbs is a part of daily activities in the Lotha society and it is like forefather's knowledge which has given for their offspring as a treasure and hidden knowledge. The proverbs which are used in Lotha society has played a crucial role and even it has form as like folklore and these are importance for encouragement among themselves. Lotha proverbs are divided into different kinds and discuss in the following:

Proverbs Relating to Women

In Lotha society, women take important role and place in the family, village and in their area and even as an individual. To be a matured and expert for domestic work and in culture the Lotha women need to

learn and acquire knowledge so that they can adjust morally. Women can mingle and build up their society. Therefore, there are many proverbs relating to women which can be seen in the following:

Lotha: *Eloe jo phophi limho*

Literal Translation: Girls are jhum leaves.

Meaning: Girls are like the leaves of jhum cultivation which are slashed, get dried very fast and are carried away quickly anywhere, anytime by the seasonal wind. It is hard to know where the leaves have been blown off. So too girls are liable to get married even to the most unexpected person at the farthest ends of the world. They will be taken away by men through marriage. This phrase not only suggests the uncertain future of women but also serves as a metaphor and an allusion to the patriarchal society of the Naga people.

Lotha: *Loniro*

Literal Translation: A newly married young woman or Hummingbird

Meaning: The young teenage girls are compared to a hummingbird because the bird is known to be tiny, cute, beautiful and loveable. The newly married woman is considered inexperienced, tender and a fledgling, and so she needs to be loved, understood and cared for, especially by the husband's family. But a spinster or a woman who marries late and elderly is not entitled to be called *Loniro* because she is mature and is expected to do well. Hence, she might not get so much consideration and compassion like the "Loniro".

Lotha: *Eloe nmhon soa vancho jo chokup pi along nchae nntsa checho esua tvu*

Literal Translation: Marrying a cruel woman is like a stone in your shoes that makes walking difficult.

Meaning: Women are required to be kind, soft-spoken and good. A woman who does not possess these qualities is often scorned by the society.

Lotha: *Hapvuro lantsa ka*

Literal translation: If the mother crab crawls in the wrong direction, so will the baby crab.

Meaning: Bad mothers produce bad children. All the crabs' nature is to move in a slightly tilted manner. Similarly, the way parents live their lives, their children spontaneously will inherit their manner. This idiom hints at parents leading a good, responsible life. If not, children will go wrong or become worse than their parents because of the misleading of the parents.

Proverbs Relating to Men

In Lotha society, men hold significant positions as heads of their families, leaders within their villages, and influential figures in their communities. To become mature and proficient in both work and cultural practices, Lotha men must seek knowledge and develop their moral understanding. This enables them to engage with others and contribute to the development of their society. Consequently, numerous proverbs pertaining to men can be observed in the following examples:

Lotha: *Rhujung hanpong*

Literal translation: Hornbill bird

Adult males are generally looked upon as manly, healthy and handsome, and so they are associated with the handsome, godly and revered bird Hornbill, the "*Rhujunghanpong*" in Lotha. Just as the hornbill has

been good-looking to the people since ancient times, males' vigour and exquisiteness have been admired in the indigenous community of Lothas since times past.

Lotha: *Mmhoru ejankhe*

Literal translation: Have the courage of tiger

Meaning: Even after being wounded by a spear or a gun pellet, the tiger's instinct would propel him to run and escape from death. Hence, this phrase is spoken to someone in order to motivate her/him to have the courage to face trials and tribulations even before the mouth of the hardest fortune.

Lotha: *Limha chum janana kyon na kvuso-yakso von khvuta yivka*

Literal translation: In the end days people will make noise like monkeys

Meaning: Forefathers refrained from eating certain animals and birds. But in these days people do not refrain from eating even those animals and food of our forefathers. At present people eat everything and behave the way they like, and there are no observations of antique ceremonies and social control as in the days of our elders. Therefore, the end days are approaching soon.

Lotha: *Nju khoka je*

Literal translation: The spittle is bitter

Meaning: Forefathers believed that there are certain people whose evil intentions, utterances and curses cause ill effects. If that somebody endorses evil and spite in despise against someone, the targeted person would be certainly tormented until the curse is blotted out.

Proverbs relating to agriculture

The mainstay of the Lotha economy is agriculture, with about 70 per percent of the population directly or indirectly depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, proverbs relating to agricultural life and practices in Lotha society are circulating among them through word of mouth. Some of them are given below:

Lotha: *Nina enungu yingna enungu pokvii osi nina ethem yingna ethem pokvii*

Literal translation: If you sow sweet seed, sweet plant will germinate

If you sow sour seed, sour shrub will sprout.

Meaning: Everyone will be rewarded according to her/his deeds. We must always give the best to others, just like the Bible says, 'Do to others what you want others to do for you.' We need to sow only good seeds so that we have only the good harvest that we wish for. The logic and philosophy here are that when we hurt others, we in turn hurt ourselves and do not experience peace inside us.

Lotha: *Elhi lo lum nnthe kyon shiang jo onte tso lepok jiang lo ntanala*

Literal translation: Bad workman blames their tools.

Meaning: This proverb is often used to refer to a person who has done something badly and tries to put the blame on his/her equipment rather than admitting his/her own lack of skill. For instance, when a farmer blames his equipment for his poor harvest, this proverb is used to refer to such a person.

Proverbs having Moral Lessons

Proverbs are like treasures in Lotha society. Proverbs are essential for common people and through this human culture remain alive. With regards to Lotha proverbs are special and important tool for imparting knowledge and wisdom. Some of the common proverbs, which are still prevalent and relevant in the

present day, are listed in the following section along with their literal translation and usages. Accurate translation is difficult, as proverbs are context dependent. To understand the meaning of these proverbs, it is important to understand the context in which they are used and the culture of the people. Nonetheless, attempts have been made to translate the meaning of the proverbs. Examples are given below:

Lotha: *Kyong nlyi lojo oryu unju*

Literal translation: The tongue has no bones

Meaning: An individual can change for good or for bad, right or wrong, according to one's advantage and evil devices within a short period of time. one's tongue, which has no bone, which can be twisted to impact and convince for better or for worse. Every human person is proficient at spreading virtuosity or wickedness.

Lotha: *Myhik-kuk don-kuk echumpo*

Literal translation: A person, whether good or bad, is visible in facial expression.

Meaning: The journey of life is not always the same; sometimes happiness, sadness, worries, fear, etc., and all these are visible in the countenance of a person. The expression of either good or bad is very obviously visible in our facial expression; so too, good and bad people are known by looking at the face.

Lotha: *Unkhying cholo nshukacho*

Literal translation: Misfortune after misfortune consecutively within a short period of time

Meaning: Sometimes several misfortunes occur in the life of a person within a short period of time consecutively. It is a brief saying cautioning us to be careful because once one bad event, like the death of dear ones, occurs in our family or clan or even in personal life, it can continue at least up to three times or a greater number of times. In these kinds of situations, this idiom is used.

Lotha: *Echo emhi iinpa*

Literal translation: Without wing and tail

Meaning: Someone may greatly desire to achieve great ambitions and dreams in life, but due to lack of money and resources, he or she is unable to attain them. In such circumstances, this proverb is attributed to the person who could not achieve heights not because of his/her incapacities but due to poverty and financial difficulties.

Lotha: *Hapvuro roso ka*

Literal translation: Crabs' misleading style of leading her children

Meaning: When couples have a lot of children and are unable to give them sufficient love and attention, children, even after having grown to maturity, would still be overdependent on their parents.

Lotha: *Enggvu tyucho eyantsacho khetai*

Literal translation: Enlarged goitre sickness and poverty are the same.

Meaning: Those who are suffering from goitre find it difficult to speak. In the same manner, those who are poor are not able to speak their mind in public because they have no face in front of the civic. Therefore, the poor are like those who are suffering from an enlarged goitre. In the world the rich and the affluent are favoured, and the disadvantaged go unheeded.

Lotha: *Kyong ekum ha juran esua ekhophiala*

Literal translation: Human life changes like a riverbed

Meaning: Rivers change their course from time to time, and the riverbed changes accordingly, and therefore human life is compared to the riverbed because our lives as well are liable to alteration

anytime, anywhere. Wealth or lifestyle vicissitudes completely at an unexpected hour of time. Today's millionaire and the greatest sponsor can be tomorrow's vagabond.

Lotha: *Ozhu unkhi han*

Literal translation: Have not grown to maturity

Meaning: In our Lotha tribal community, respect and love for friends, relatives, the elderly, the weak, the poor and invalids are supposed to be valued, and somebody who has not learnt to respect them is looked down upon as immature.

Lotha: *Mani vou lo oju phyanka cho tvu ka*

Literal translation: Like pouring water on yam leaves.

Meaning: Some people do not pay heed to wise advice, corrections and reminders, and even if they hear, they don't keep it in their heart. They oftentimes pretend to be not hearing at all, and their life is indifferent and not steady as they do not take to heart the good admonitions. Therefore, their life is very shallow and greasy, unable to contain good.

Lotha: *Sola kya pvu la kya*

Literal translation: Whether carrying on the lap or at the back, a child cries.

Meaning: Some are unreliable, non-cooperative, always complaining and grumbling. We don't know what is to be done to them and with them since we don't know what is in their hearts. At the same time, such individuals are frequently headstrong and unconsolable when tragedy strikes them and easily become victims of disappointment and impossibility.

Lotha: *"Asha" to phyoa na ete eru shai benthakcho tvu*

Literal translation: When a person utters the regret sigh of 'asha', that person is already in downright helplessness and compunction beyond redemption.

Meaning: Due to grievous error or wrongdoing, someone has lost great fortune in life but cannot mend it, as the act is greatly grievous, and so she/he is in great misery. At any cost, it cannot be relented. And so, the anguish expression 'asha'.

Lotha: *Mmhoru na tia oso te untso*

Literal translation: Even tigers do not eat meat everyday

Meaning: It is believed that tigers eat meat in the beginning and end of the month only. Sometimes six months eating meat and six months eating mud. Those who wish to eat only meat or good food are told this idiom. The lesson embedded in the proverb is similar to the Bible verse that says, 'There is time for everything' (Ecc 3:1-11). We should not only demand good days always but also expect and accept hard times in life.

Lotha: *Tsothe yuthe man ntea unli*

Literal translation: We cannot store in the body all that we eat and drink.

Meaning: Even if we eat a lot, we feel hungry after a few hours, and so we need to eat only what we require and save food for many days. We cannot eat to the brim and refrain from eating for a month or lifetime, and we gain nothing from eating too much. Rather, we need to eat daily in small quantities or, at the most, only that which is needed for good health. And therefore, this idiom is spoken to those who eat too much.

Lotha: *Efvui menkirang tsupho*

Literal translation: The walking stick of a thief is bigger

Meaning: Someone steals the things or does wrong to others and then defends with greater might, dominating everyone in the community, trying to prove themselves right. It is useless to argue with such

persons because they will never acknowledge their wrongdoings, and they know how to justify. Therefore, such people are sidelined and disliked, and people talk among themselves that ‘the walking stick of a thief is bigger’.

Lotha: *Ejung phycho efvucho kheti*

Literal translation: To tell a lie and to steal is the same

Meaning: ‘To lie’ and ‘to steal’, both hurt and offend the victim. Therefore, the habitual liars are also called thieves, and those habitual thieves are also called liars. The intensity of guilt is the same and one. Those who do not steal but lie is subjected to the same level of scorn before the righteous.

Lotha: *Epierai jo ntsonshi hungala.*

Literal translation: Greedy people get divine retributions

Meaning: Greedy people have been hated since the beginning of tribal civilisation. They believed that such people would be punished by the Divine. The wages of greed are divine vengeance.

Lotha: *Okhe suphoa*

Literal translation: Longhand

Meaning: Thieves are called persons with long hands. Those who have long hands can reach different places in no time to snatch many valuables from different unexpected places.

Lotha: *Menzen menria*

Literal translation: Pointed lips

Meaning: Those who speak ill of others, gossip, spread rumours and cause conflicts, divisions and fights are compared to people with pointed lips. Anything pointed is believed to poke and pierce.

Lotha: *Yoothi choka to choka je*

Literal translation: Even the most hidden secret gets revealed to the public, like the banana flower.

Meaning: Someone foretold some occurrences in the future, and it happened. Or someone does something in secret, and it cannot be hidden anymore; instead, it gets revealed to the public and becomes known to many in no time or at the right time. An expression of kindness and sympathy from deep within the heart. Sometimes, we do not feel like loving and showing empathy to others at the first reaction or response, but given a second thought, we can put ourselves in the shoes of the other and be kind. But those who do not have such hearts are said to have no “e...hum”. It is an expression of deep satisfaction and contentment deep within the heart.

Importance of Proverbs in the Society

The critical importance of proverbs in the Lotha society is used to instruct and advise as a form of social control. Lotha uses different proverbs to educate and instil discipline in its young populace on different life occasions. The elderly in the society had the exclusive knowledge of the proverbs and used to teach the community’s moral principles and educate them on important aspects of life. Based on the nature of Lotha social structure, proverbs are a critical aspect in the moral development of a child.

Without proverbs, the language would be like a skeleton without flesh, a body without a soul, and speech sounds good when it is interspersed with proverbs; food tastes good when it is cooked with butter. These examples clearly show the important place of proverbs in Lotha society; they elevate speech from the mere nominal value of words to a higher aesthetic plane.

Functions of Lotha proverbs

Lotha proverbs have different functions in different contexts. They mean different things to different

people in different contexts, and they are still used in every domain of life. It may be claimed that they have not lost their popularity and they are continually present in society. Some of the important functions of proverbs are discussed in the following

- Lotha proverbs had and still have a didactic function. By using them, people wish to teach people, give advice, help in difficult situations, show people what the most important things in life are, and show the proper way in life. Most Lotha proverbs have this instructive function as they educate and teach morals. For instance, on the importance of obedience to parents, there is a popular proverb relevant till today.
- '*Opvii opo jancho nzoe jiang jo potsow mmha nnliala*' which means a person who does not obey his/her parents. This is a proverb often told to children to teach them the importance of obedience to parents. One can never be successful without obedience to his/her parents. This is one proverb everyone comes across as a child.

On values of goodness and kindness and reward for good and punishment for evil there are many proverbs. One such popular proverb still prevalent today is: (b). '*Etena ntio yingthechia sana hoji esiia tsungthi ethiala*' 'We reap what we sow. This proverb is similar to the English proverb, 'As you sow, so shall you reap. This is used to teach children to do good so they reap the fruit of their deeds. In other words, if you do good things, you will receive good things and if you do bad deed, bad things will happen to you. Lotha proverbs also cover aspects of patience and perseverance. (c) *Tumjak nnlia riipaka elhi tso jilo ekhyo or eman hunggala*, 'Perseverance leads to victory in the battle'. Through patience and perseverance, success is obtained or a battle is won. Children are taught the importance of endurance and perseverance through this proverb.

Proverbs are also a tool by means of which we can discredit or mock someone or criticise someone or a situation. Using politeness, in a short, pithy sentence, we can hide our own thoughts and say something we would not dare to say in a direct manner. A person who loves to praise himself is often mocked by saying (d) *Rakziirakno osi jakthana tsoyuo jijo kyong na tsakala*, 'Laziness and gluttony are scorned in the society'. A lazy person can be satirically told (e) *Rakziirakno jo mozii nnli*. There is no medicine for lazy people. A greedy person may also be warned by saying (f) *Ntio hunga sana tsoyuoa na nmhovii na tsorha kala*. Consuming whatever you find can also lead to consuming the venom of a snake. This also shows that gluttony is despised in the society. A greedy person loses self-respect. A stubborn person who does not listen to anyone is often criticised by comparing him to a wild mithun whose nose has not been pierced. (g) *Jancho nzoe jiang jo tsiro khen nveyi hancho esiia tvii ka*. Stubborn and disobedient people are like mithuns whose nose is not pierced.

From the above discussions, we see that proverbs perform several important functions. They can perform different roles depending on the communicative setting they are used in. There are different proverbs for different situations. Meanings are generated by contexts, and the same holds true for proverbs as well.

Significance of Lotha proverbs

In Lotha society, proverbs form an integral part of Lotha oral tradition. Although these proverbs have been transmitted orally for generations from time immemorial, they have not lost their relevance and importance till the present day. Proverbs still serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. Moreover, these fragments of wisdom offer many interesting insights into the past of the people. Proverbs provide a vehicle through which social expectations are passed on and preserved for many

years. Proverbs are very effective in exercising social control in most Lotha societies.

As Lotha proverbs have been transmitted orally for generations, they bear the socio-cultural traces from the past. Proverbs also reflect the collective perception and attitude of the community towards life and all the phenomena of the world around them. In addition, Lotha proverbs are also a manifestation of their ancestral knowledge that has relevance till today. This is evident from the way proverbs have been preserved as a rich piece of oral tradition and used widely by Lotha in their everyday conversation. Lotha proverbs also have high moral content and are often used by the older members of the society to impart social and cultural values to the younger generation.

Lotha use proverbs as a source of inspiration, information and enlightenment, and their way of life is often guided by them. Proverbs also provide us with rich linguistic data for the study of cultural beliefs and social values of a particular society. Proverbs form an integral part of the society, reflecting and shaping social life in their concise form and authoritative style. Through these proverbs, history, culture and the inner experience of the people can be understood. Furthermore, proverbs provide an insight into their socio-cultural life and a glimpse of their way of life. Thus, in Lotha society, proverbs are essential for a deep understanding of the communal bases of the society and the bonds which tie them together.

Conclusion

Lotha proverbs are like treasure in their society and culture. Through this, the behaviours and characters – one can feel the influence of proverbs in Lotha society. These proverbs are essential for common people, and through this, human culture remains alive. Proverbs have not lost their popularity, and they are in continual existence in the present Lotha society. Proverbs are not merely a part of their folklore but a very much part of their life. In Lotha society, proverbs have been and will remain a dominant and valuable instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas from one generation to another. This is because proverbs are wise sayings of the people based on their experiences and are reflections of their social values, norms, customs and world view.

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