
Megaliths as Sacred Monuments in the Mao Naga Village of Makhel in Manipur, Northeast India

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Abstract: *Megaliths of the Naga communities in Northeast India are imbued with multiple meanings and social memories. However, due to the lack of studies on megaliths among the Naga communities, they are often neglected in the larger academic discussion. In this paper, I present the results of an archaeological and largely ethnographic survey undertaken in and around Makhel, a Mao Naga village located in Senapati District of Manipur. The survey documented and mapped 12 stone monuments considered sacred and historically significant by the residents. Mapping has revealed that these monuments are located in habitation and forest areas, where people could pass through and see them frequently. I interviewed the elderly residents and recorded the stories of the origin of Nagas and their migration, as well as the traditional belief system associated with these monuments. Though it is difficult to ascertain the validity of such oral stories, the monuments represent the material testaments of their pre-Christian worldview and belief system and crucial source for unpacking local histories.*

Keywords: Mao Naga, Sacred Monuments, Oral Histories, Cultural Preservation, Megaliths, Local Knowledge, Ethnography

Introduction

The Naga communities are settled in the Indian states of Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam, as well as in Myanmar. The Naga identity encompasses not just one group but a conglomeration of many ethnic groups of more than 40 with varying estimates (Jacobs et al. 1990: 20; Longkumer 2019: 16). These ethnic groups have distinct traditions, languages, practices, and cultures (West 1992; Kumar 2005; Stockhausen 2008). The Naga communities have a long-standing tradition of megalith building, which still exists among a few communities (Philip 2017; Devi 2019; Mepusangba and Changkiri 2019). While a few studies have ethnographically documented the megalith-building tradition among the Nagas (e.g., Singh 1985; Jamir 1998; Mutum 2002), and a few studies have interpreted them from various approaches such as diffusionist (Hutton 1923; Fürer-Haimendorf 1939; Devi 2011), autochthonous origin (Jamir and Vasa 2008), cultural landscape and social memories (Khongreiwo 2014; Wangjin 2014), and social organisation (Jamir and Müller 2022; Wunderlich et al. 2021), not much has been studied regarding the megaliths that are considered sacred.

What is intriguing is that recent scholarship has pointed out that among a few Naga communities, megaliths are imbued with social memories, continue to hold significance, and have social relevance even among the Christian generation (Wangjin 2014; Khongreiwo 2014; Jamir 2019). However, little research has been conducted on the megaliths that the Nagas consider sacred and significant in their local histories. The importance of researching such topics lies in two reasons: a) The stories associated with these monuments are at a higher risk of being forgotten or partially forgotten due to the growing conversion of the Nagas to Christianity, which has resulted in increasing disregard for pre-Christian or animistic beliefs and the desecration of some monuments in certain parts of the Naga Hills (Wouters 2019: 173-185; Blackburn 2008: 262); and b) the Nagas did not have a writing tradition; therefore, oral histories and surviving material remains are crucial for understanding their early history.

Against this backdrop, in 2021, I conducted a survey encompassing archaeological and ethnographic approaches to explore and map the sacred megaliths in and around the village of Makhel. This village and its surrounding areas hold great significance among the Tenimyi Naga group - which includes Naga groups such as Mao, Maram, Poumai, Angami Nagas, among others - that settled in the Indian states of Nagaland and Manipur as their place of origin (Nepuni 2010; Irene 2020). This area is one of the few areas in the Naga Hills that is significant for the Nagas identity, which is based on the claim of the common origin and the ongoing issue of Naga Nationalism and their pursuit of self-governance (Ao 2009; Vashum 2000; Wettstein 2012). Despite the historical significance of this village and its surroundings, limited research has been undertaken in the area to understand the monuments that are considered sacred.

The Study Area

The village of Makhel (locally known as Makhrai Rabu) is situated in Senapati district in Manipur (Figure 1). The village is inhabited by the Mao Nagas, and the surrounding villages, namely Shajouba, Kaibi, and Tobufii, and the town of Tadubi are also settled by the Mao Nagas who speak the *Maola* dialect. According to the 2011 census, Makhel has 513 households and a population of 3,095 (Census of India 2011). Considering the population increase over the past decade, the population could exceed 3,400 at the time of the survey. The village is divided into three wards or sectors (*khel*), each occupied by one of the three major clans: Ozhuomai, Choroshumai, and Kapemai. Currently, the village chief retains a nominal role as the head of the village, and certain traditional rituals are still performed during religious festivals and ceremonial dates. Aside from the residents in Tadubi town, most people in Makhel and the surrounding villages rely on farming as their primary source of livelihood. Notably, there is only one non-Christian household or follower of traditional animistic religion in Makhel.

Previous Work

Hodson (1911) appears to be the first colonial administrator and ethnographer to record the origin stories of the Nagas in Makhel, along with a few archaeological features found in the village. He mentioned an upright stone (a monolith) in Makhel

that was considered “the place from which the common ancestors emerged from the earth” and “the centre from which migration took place” (Hodson 1911: 13, 189). It is only in Philip’s work (2017) that an apparent effort is made to document the stone monuments extensively. In locality-1, he documented 4 menhirs, 1 small menhir, 4 dolmens, and 2 stone seats, while in locality-2, he documented 13 menhirs, 18 small menhirs, 4 dolmens, 2 alignments (consisting of 8 menhirs), 4 avenues (comprising 29 menhirs) and 2 stone seats (Philip 2017: 126-127). Although these previous studies have enhanced our understanding of the monuments in this area, there remains a pending task to conduct a survey that delves into the specifics of the sacred monuments.

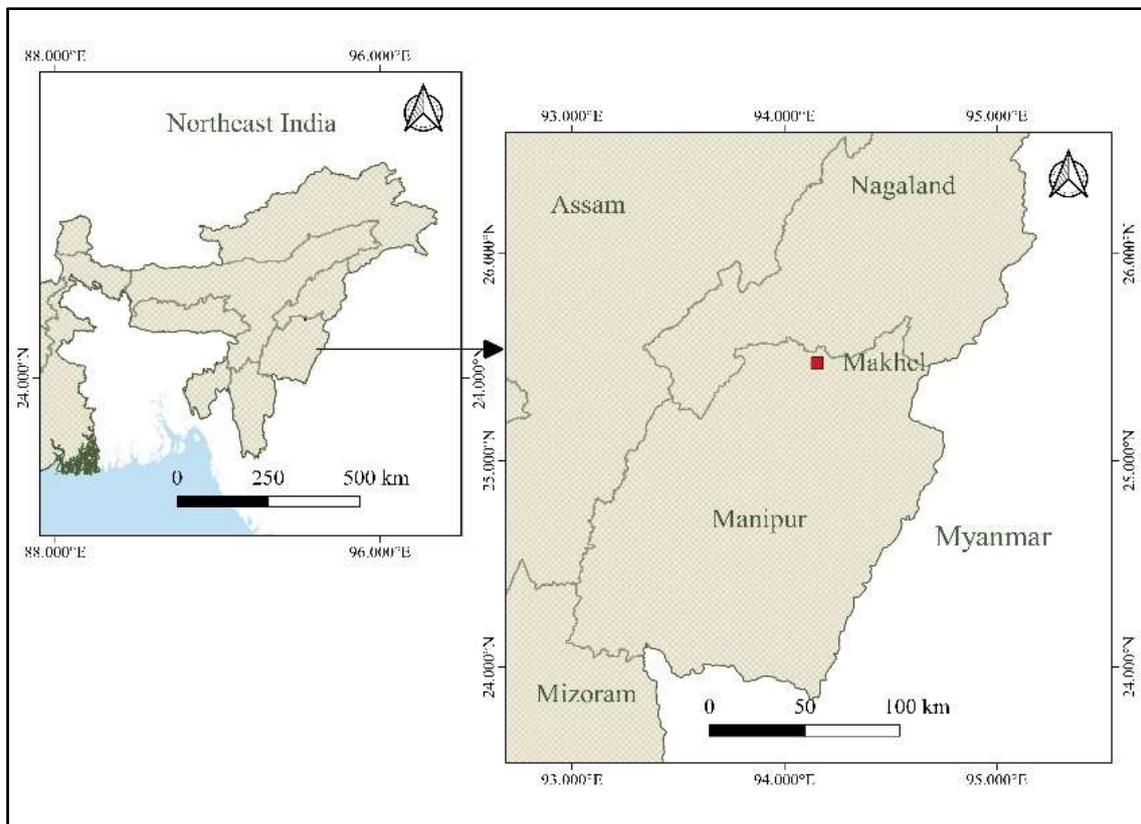


Figure 1: The study area

Survey Methods

The survey area encompassed Makhel and its adjacent villages, namely Shajouba, Koide, Tobufii, and a small portion of Tadubi town and forest area. The habitation areas and forest were traversed following the course of the footpath. The survey was conducted in collaboration with the residents, and detailed information regarding the monuments, including their shape, size, physical characteristics, and precise geo-coordinates, was meticulously documented. As part of the survey, I interviewed the residents to gather oral histories associated with the monuments. The survey aimed to understand local knowledge as incorporating local knowledge has proven valuable in archaeological and ethnographic investigations in the Naga Hills (Jamir and Vasa 2008; Wunderlich 2019; Singh 2021).

Before conducting the interviews, I obtained permission from the village authority and informed consent from the participants for engaging in structured and semi-structured interviews. The informants, predominantly elderly individuals of both genders, were encouraged to express their perspectives freely. In instances where discrepancies arose in the oral accounts, immediate requests were made to clarify doubts and elicit the most accurate rendition of the narratives. The interviews were conducted in the Manipuri language (*Meiteilon*), which serves as the lingua franca among the Naga communities in the state, and the Mao Nagas are proficient speakers of this language as well.

Documentation and Mapping

The survey documented 12 sacred stone monuments, including monoliths, stone slabs, stone circles, and clusters of small stones. Some of these monuments exhibit long-term exposure to the atmosphere, as evidenced by weathered stone surfaces. However, except for the monuments in the forest, the surrounding habitation areas have experienced significant disturbances due to human activities. To maintain contextual integrity and ensure their long-term preservation, residents have undertaken fencing and renovation for the monuments within the habitation areas.

The mapping of the megaliths has revealed intriguing patterns on the hilly landscape (Figure 2). The sacred stones are strategically positioned in the habitation areas and near footpaths, making them more easily visible to the people. Within the habitation areas, the monuments are in courtyards close to footpaths and the community ground in the habitation area. Some monuments can be found near recently constructed roadsides and footpaths along the ridge of the hill. Most of the monuments in the forest can be witnessed by walking on the footpaths or newly constructed roads (Figure 2).

Oral Stories of the Stone Monuments

The Mao Nagas residing in Makhel and surrounding areas possess a rich collection of oral stories associated with stone monuments. Despite most of the population in these villages embracing Christianity, the oral accounts of the monuments are still popular. However, the detailed versions of these oral stories can only be narrated by elderly residents. Although aware of the stories, the present generation cannot provide comprehensive narratives. They can only offer partial accounts or detailed narratives of a few specific monuments. Since the Mao Nagas did not have a writing tradition, the transfer of indigenous knowledge has traditionally relied on oral tradition, ensuring its preservation and transmission from the elderly to the younger generation.

In present times, the Mao Nagas have adopted Roman scripts in their writing, and efforts are being made to preserve their oral history by publishing them in the souvenirs of churches. However, the village of Makhel and its surrounding areas predominantly consist of Christian communities. This has increased tension and friction between pre-Christian beliefs and Christian values. Some Christians interpret the stories and belief systems associated with the monuments as mere legends that

should be discarded. Similar sentiments have been observed among other Naga groups or villages (see Blackburn 2008, Wouters 2019, Jamir 2019).

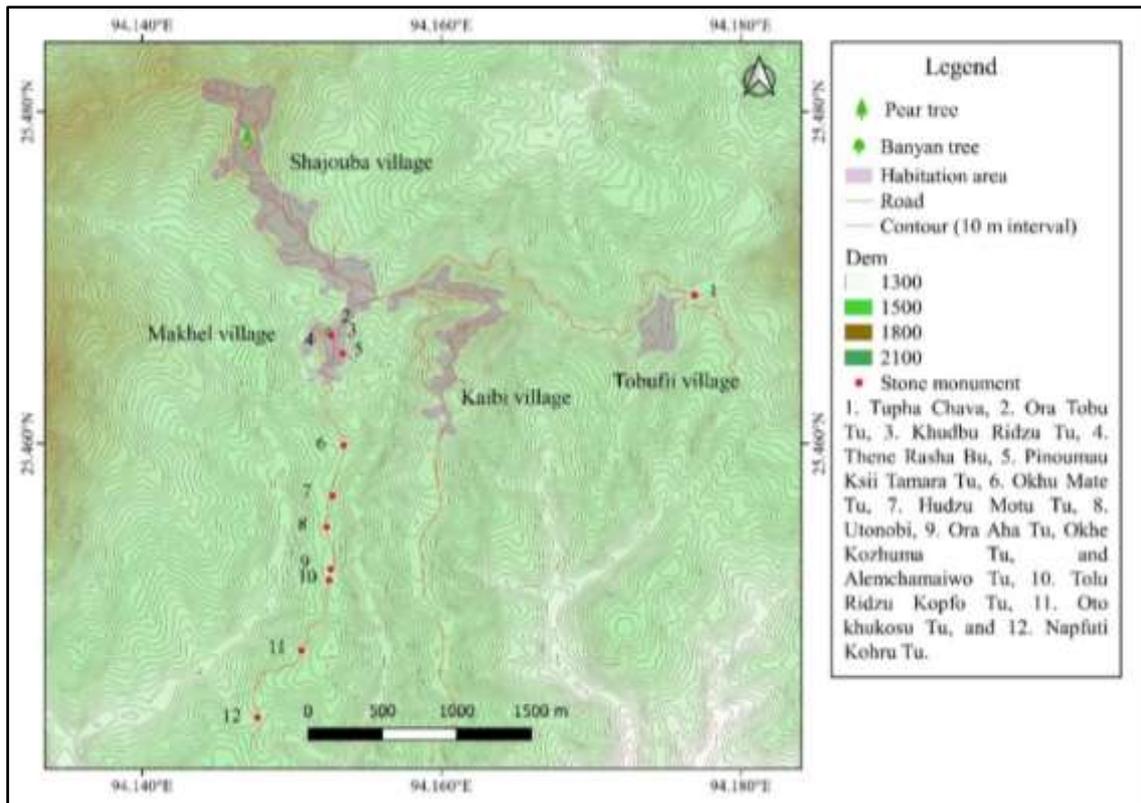


Figure 2: The locations of sacred monuments in the survey area

This prevailing dynamic is a significant reason why the younger generations are unaware of the oral stories surrounding the sacred monuments. On the one hand, Makhel and its surrounding areas are considered the place of origin for several Naga groups. Therefore, the village authorities in these villages are undertaking actions to preserve best the monuments and the sacred pear and banyan trees that hold symbolic value in the origin history of the Nagas. The village authorities have acknowledged the increasing disregard among the Christian locals in considering these elements as sacred, as they were in the past. Therefore, stringent measures have been implemented to safeguard them. Recently, fines in the form of cash or livestock, such as cows or buffaloes, have been imposed on individuals who engage in demolition. The details of the monuments and stories are listed below:

Tupha Chava (The Charmed Stone)

It consists of a perfectly smooth and oval-shaped flat stone located near the roadside (Figure 3a). The survey documented the presence of modern debris, specifically sweat covers, chewing gum covers, and fragments of plastics, both at the site and in its surrounding areas. The stone surface of this structure exhibits signs of meticulous dressing, and the monument itself is well-preserved. However, the areas surrounding the stone structure have suffered damage due to road construction activities. This

monument is a round-shaped stone slab revered for its perceived magical properties. It measures 2.62 meters in length, 2.36 meters in breadth, and 0.32 meters in thickness.

According to local beliefs, a basket of paddy (rice) dried on this monument while pounded double its quantity. This boon brought great prosperity to the villagers, significantly enhancing their food resources and overall wealth. As per the village customs, each household had its designated day to dry the paddy on the stone, and this practice was strictly adhered to. However, a dispute arose between a woman and her daughter-in-law regarding the assigned turn for drying the paddy. In the heat of the argument, the mother-in-law, overwhelmed by anger, resorted to an inappropriate act of taking off her lower undergarments and striking the stone slab with them. This act was perceived as scandalous and indecent, transgressing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for a woman in public. Ever since that fateful incident, the stone slab lost its power to double the quantity of paddy, marking the end of its magical power.



Figure 3: a) Tupha Chava, b) Ora Tobu Tu, c) Khudbu Ridzu Tu, d) Thene Rasha Bu, e) Pinoumau Ksii Tamara Tu, and f) Okho Mate Tu

Ora Tobu Tu

This monument consists of a stone slab raised over small stones. It is located in the village ground near the sacred banyan tree, measuring 2.12 meters in length, 1.45 meters in breadth, and 0.86 meters in thickness (Figure 3b). The stone on the top of the raised platform shows signs of weathering and age. Nevertheless, the overall structure of the monument is well-preserved. The site can be easily accessed via the approach road to Makhel. The residents hold this monument as sacred and essential for performing rites during the pre-Christian period. It was believed to possess magical powers that could increase the number of cattle in the village. This monument was

believed to be able to cure animals of diseases. According to legend, this magical stone brought prosperity to the village by multiplying the cattle and thus increasing the wealth of the villagers. An informant shared an intriguing recent incident he witnessed:

“A few years ago, a truck loaded with goods accidentally hit and partially damaged this stone monument, considered sacred and preserved by the villagers. To our surprise, the blue sky suddenly became covered with clouds, and there was thunder, storms, and rainfall all of a sudden. After this incident, the village authority renovated and restored the stone to its original place and design. This stone still possesses some magical powers, and its destruction could lead to natural calamities.”

Informants shared that touching this magical stone with bare hands was strictly prohibited in the past, and fines were imposed on those who intentionally touched it. During the survey, it was common to observe children touching the stone while playing in the playground. However, any physical damage to the stone would result in fines by the village authority.

Khudbu Ridzu Tu

It consists of a stone slab supported by small stones. The monuments at this site are in a good state of preservation, measuring 2.65 meters in length, 2.36 meters in breadth, and 0.32 meters in thickness (Figure 3c). The stone slab placed above the raised small stones appears to be old. This site is significant as it was where the village chief made key announcements. Recently, residents have placed or renovated a few small stones that support the rectangular stone slab known as Khubu Ridzu Tu. The surface of the flat stone slab shows moderate weathering. The areas surrounding the monuments have been greatly disturbed by habitation, prompting village authorities to erect iron rods and chains as fencing to protect the stone structure from further damage.

Legend has it that beneath this monument lies a powerful gun. The monument bears signs of weathering, indicating a long period of exposure to the atmosphere. According to belief, Alemchamaiwo, one of the sons of Dzuliamosuro (the mother of the Makhel Nagas), received this mysterious weapon from his ancestors. It was a peculiar and enigmatic weapon used for defence against enemies. This extraordinary weapon, passed down through generations, could strike any chosen target at any time and from any location. Once the owner commanded, the bullet would burst and hit its intended target and return to the owner. Informants claim that this was the most dangerous weapon ever known. Out of fear that it could bring humanity devastation, it was buried beneath the earth in the village's hearth and covered with a massive stone slab.

Thene Rasha Bu

It is a flat stone slab located in the habitation area of Makhel (Figure 3d). The monument at this site is in a good state of preservation. It measures 2.5 meters in length, 1.75 meters in breadth, and 0.55 meters in thickness. The areas around the stone

have been largely disturbed by habitation activities. This monument served as the platform for the village chief to declare the ritual days for each month. In cases where the chief could not do so personally, an elderly man from his clan would announce on his behalf. It was strictly forbidden for any female member(s) to sit or stand on the stone. Adjacent to the stone slab is a larger stone circle called Rashaba, upon which a monolith has been erected. The smaller stones, known as Thene Rasha Bu, served as the platform for the chief's crucial announcements and have been cemented and renovated.

Pinoumau Ksii Tamara Tu (The departure stone of three brothers)

Structurally, this monument is a menhir/monolith (Figure 3e). It measures 2.14 meters in length, 1.4 meters in breadth, and 0.31 meters in thickness. The stone surfaces exhibit signs of weathering, indicating prolonged exposure to the atmosphere over time. According to local legend, three brothers named Alechameiwo resided together in Makhel in the past. Due to the overpopulation in Makhel, the brothers decided to disperse and establish their homes in different locations. Before their departure, they agreed to hold farewell feasts at their respective homes and invite each other. The eldest brother, Asupfualapha, cooked a rooster for his siblings, the middle brother, Tuttowo, cooked fish and the youngest brother, Khephio, slaughtered a small *mithun/mithan* (*Bos frontalis*). After the feasts, the three brothers erected a monolith to commemorate their departure from Makhel. They pledged to maintain regular contact with one another. Over time, this monolith came to be known as the departure stone. Informants report that the monolith fell to the ground during World War II. However, the local community reinstated it to its original location. It was said that the monolith bore engravings of a bull, a cock, a fish, a *mithun*, a Naga shield, and a tiger, as well as some footprints and inscriptions. These markings are no longer visible today.

Okho Mate Tu

This monument is a flat stone slab (Figure 3f). It measures 1.42 meters in length, 1.12 meters in breadth, and 0.36 meters in thickness. The stone slab, which is rectangular, exhibits a smooth and neatly dressed surface. It has a blackish colouration. The surrounding areas of this site show signs of disturbance due to human habitation and recent road-cutting activities on the adjacent hill slope. Residents hold this monument as religious and sacred. They assert that after engaging in community fishing events, the fish caught would be placed on top of this monument, doubling the quantity with its supernatural power. It was believed that when fish were placed on this stone slab, each member of the fishing group would return home with their containers filled with fish.

Hudzu Motu Tu (Cock Stone)

The monument at this site is structurally a menhir or monolith. It is located near the roadside in the survey area (Figure 4a). Small pebbles are scattered around the site, and the surrounding areas are covered with vegetation. The overall appearance of the site indicates its age. The monolith itself is in a well-preserved and upright condition,

although the stone surfaces of the monolith exhibit rough dressing. The monolith at this location is locally known as Hudzu Motu Tu, which translates to cock stone. It measures 2.32 meters in length, 2.11 meters in breadth, and 0.37 meters in thickness. According to residents, these monuments were constructed near a footpath near a natural brine (salt) spring. It was customary for every girl or woman to fetch water from the spring early in the morning before engaging in household chores and working in the paddy fields. After collecting the water from the spring, the residents would stop near this monolith known as Hodzu Motu Tu, named for its resemblance to a cock's crown. As the women approached the monolith, they would address it with queries to ensure the absence of any lurking adversaries. They would ask, "Are you there grandfather, Hodzu Motu Tu?" If anyone else responds from behind, it would indicate the presence of hidden enemies, and women immediately would flee to escape from the adversaries.

Utonobi (Rain-bringing Stone)

This particular site comprises a group of small stones arranged in a mound or cairn-like formation, located close to the roadside in the forest (approximately 10 meters away from the road) (Figure 4b). A layer of dry leaflets covers the surface soil, indicating a thick accumulation. The stone measures 1.45 meters in length, 1.23 meters in breadth, and 0.26 meters in thickness. The site exhibits partial damage, and the stone structure itself displays a moderate level of weathering. This monument was believed to possess magical powers that could induce rainfall. Therefore, it is recognised and referred to as the "rain-bringing stone" by the villagers. According to local beliefs, touching this monument will bring rain to Makhel and the surrounding areas. Traditionally, rituals were performed when the villagers faced droughts or when the villagers faced water scarcity.



Figure 4: a) Hudzu Motu Tu, b) Utonobi, c) Ora Aha Tu, Oke Kozhuwo Tu, and Alechamaiwo Tu, d) Tolu Ridzu Kopfo Tu, e) Oto Khukosu Tu, and f) Napfuti Kohru Tu.

Ora Aha Tu, Oke Kozhuwo Tu, and Alechamaiwo Tu (The Departure Stone of Three Brothers)

At this site, the survey identified two monoliths and one fallen stone slab, which appears to be a fallen monolith (Figure 4c). These monuments are positioned on a rectangular raised platform, with a height ranging from 50 to 70 cm. The weathering marks on the stones' surfaces imply prolonged exposure to the atmosphere. The sizes of the three stones are as follows: Ora Aha Tu (spirit's stone) measures 0.82 meters in length, 0.43 meters in breadth, and 0.25 meters in thickness; Alemchamaiwo Tu (man's stone) measures 1.74 meters in length, 0.83 meters in breadth, and 0.32 meters in thickness; Okhe Kozhuwo Tu (tiger's stone) measures 1.45 meters in length, 0.62 meters in breadth, and 0.41 meters in thickness.

According to residents, in the past, Dzuliamosuro, the mother of the Makhel Nagas, had three sons named Okhe Kozhuwo (tiger), Ora Aha (spirit), and Alemchamaiwo (man). Each son erected their respective stone to mark their departure. These stones are approximately 2.5 to 3 kilometres south of Makhel in an area locally known as Chazhelophi. Ora Aha Tu stone is located east of the three stones erected by the brothers, while Oke Kozhuwo Tu is on the westernmost side. Alechamaiwo Tu stands in the middle of the three stones. The three sons, Okhe Kozhuwo, Ora Aha, and Alemchamaiwo, erected these stones to commemorate their departure from Makhel and symbolise their interconnectedness before embarking on separate paths.

Tolu Ridzu Kopfo Tu

This monument is structurally a monolith. It is located near the cultivation area and a footpath (Figure 4d). It measures 1.15 meters in length, 0.45 meters in breadth, and 0.37 meters in thickness. The monument found at this site is well-preserved. According to legend, a lizard and a bird named Lisie engaged in a feud after the lizard consumed the bird's eggs. This dispute escalated, involving the lizard and bird families. Lizards aligned themselves with the reptiles, while the latter sided with the bird family. The conflict intensified, leading both parties to seek a resolution through combat. The birds convened a meeting, and a kite named Tolu Locho, emerged as their leader. However, tensions gradually reached a boiling point, and the kite sought revenge by targeting a snake named Thakru.

In the ensuing confrontation, the snake managed to kill the kite while the latter attempted to harm the snake. This incident further complicated the bird's family, as the kite died in the fight, leaving a baby kite behind. Caring for the orphaned baby bird became an immediate concern for the birds. A crow volunteered to collect a small basket of dung from a distant forest, followed by a bird named Khibo Muka offering to collect flies from the forest for the baby bird. Sude, a woodpecker, stepped forward and promised to provide larvae for the young bird. The birds decided to assign the task of looking after the baby bird to Sude. During this period, the ongoing conflict between the reptiles and birds was temporarily suspended, allowing the young bird to grow in strength and size. He was trained to increase his strength and stamina by lifting a large

stone known as Tolu Ridzu Kopfu Tu. The young bird was also encouraged to consume more food and exercise further to fight the snake. After the young bird attended their strength, the confrontation between the reptiles and birds resumed. The kite captured and killed the largest and most powerful snake and demoralised the entire reptile family to fight with him and the other birds. Thus, the bird finally won their battle over the reptiles.

Oto Khukosu Tu

This monument is structurally a monolith. It is located in the forest, approximately 2 kilometres south of Makhel (Figure 4e). It measures 0.82 meters in length, 0.61 meters in breadth, and 0.31 meters in thickness. The stone surfaces display a smooth dressing, suggesting that they were deliberately selected from naturally occurring stones. According to local beliefs, reaching the height of this monument was considered a significant milestone for male children, as it symbolised their readiness to take on the responsibility of tending cows and buffaloes. These animals held great importance in the traditional economy and were utilised for feasts and ploughing the fields. It was also believed that if an infertile couple desired to have a child, the man had to ascend to the top of the stone while holding an earthen pot without any support from his hands. Residents of the area recount a recent incident in which a couple struggling with infertility attempted numerous climbs to the top of this monument.

Napfuto Kohru Tu

This monument consists of a slab elevated above the ground, supported by stone pebbles. It is located near the roadside (Figure 4f). It measures approximately 2.52 meters in length, 1.08 meters in breadth, and 0.66 meters in thickness. The surrounding area where this elevated monument is located shows signs of damage resulting from road cutting. However, it is noteworthy that the monument is still in its original position. According to local beliefs, ascending the pinnacle of this monument without relying on hand support was believed to bring forth a blessing of seven sons. It held great prestige among the male members of the village, and engaging in this feat was also considered a form of sport.

Discussion

Blackburn's (2008) study on the megaliths of Angami Nagas highlights the multiple stories associated with monuments that serve as a medium for transmitting social memories. This, however, raises a pertinent question regarding the reliability of oral narratives, given their subjective nature and propensity to vary among individuals. In this regard, Khongreiwo (2014: 305) asserts that the significance of these legends and stories surrounding the monuments lies not in their truth but in understanding the Nagas' worldviews and nature. He contends that to pre-Christian Nagas, all elements of nature were believed to house spirits, leading them to ascribe sacredness to these monuments, ensuring their enduring presence over time. For him, megaliths in Naga society express their socio-political system, religious beliefs, and social practices (Khongreiwo 2014: 305). Wangjin (2014) emphasises the connection between

monuments and the identities of the Nagas. He suggests that stones are a medium through which feelings, emotions, and past events are captured and transmitted to the younger generation. Thus, the stones serve as a repository for many interrelated and intertwined issues experienced and understood in various ways among the Nagas.

In Makhel, legends or myths associated with these monuments have contributed to preserving social memories. The oral stories associated with these monuments are also crucial as they support the claim of origin of the Mao Nagas and other Nagas and non-Naga communities from Makhel. Some monuments continue to narrate the origin stories of the Nagas and their migrations to different locations. The origin narrative also plays a crucial role in constructing the collective identity of the Nagas. The origin story has been strategically employed to justify the Nagas' origin and establish a shared narrative (Wettstein 2012). While the origin story of other communities, such as the Meiteis, Nagas, and non-Nagas, migrating as brothers to different areas from Makhel (see Hodson 1911: 11-12), remains a relatively less popular narrative in the Nagas' origin narrative and identity formation.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the sacred monuments in Makhel embody various pre-Christian belief systems, similar to other Naga communities (Blackburn 2008). Firstly, some monuments are regarded as magical stones possessing supernatural powers to bless the villagers and bring prosperity and rainfall. Secondly, a particular monument in the village marks the burial site of a highly potent weapon. Thirdly, some monuments signify stories from the past where conflicts between birds and animals took centre stage, providing a rationale for naming the monuments after the animals. Lastly, a few monuments represent the Nagas' historical migrations. In essence, the stories associated with these monuments convey the pre-Christian belief system and worldviews of the Mao Nagas.

Conclusion

To conclude, the megaliths in Makhel and its surrounding areas possess a wealth of oral stories and hold profound meanings for both past and present generations. These monuments were essential for the previous generations in reinforcing their belief system and worldview. For the current generation, the oral stories passed down through the ages constantly remind them of their sense of belongingness and identity. The origin stories linked to these stones, in a way, continue to shape and strengthen the identity of the Mao Nagas and other Naga ethnic groups by connecting them through shared origin narratives. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to verify the accuracy of such stories, it is undeniable that these narratives are continuously transmitted across generations, carrying echoes of the pre-Christian worldview and belief system to the present Christian generation. Although the stories associated with these sacred stones often revolve around magic, migration, and origin, there is still ample opportunity to unravel the local and interconnected histories of the Naga communities, especially in the absence of well-documented written records. By delving into these narratives, we can better understand the rich tapestry of Naga heritage.

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