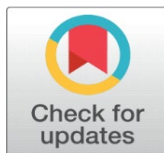


# PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY CRITICISM AND NAGA FOLKLORE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO TEMSULA AO

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the integration and application of psychoanalytic literary criticism within specific folklore in Nagaland, India. The framework for analysing Ao-Naga cultural narratives from a psychoanalytical perspective is derived from a combination of models present in Temsula Ao's *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* and Freudian constructs. Further expanding upon this concept of psychoanalytic literary criticism situates the study of folklore within specific parameters of Naga consciousness. Such application of psychoanalytic literary criticism makes it possible to visualize its scope and limitations regarding Naga folklore and folkloristics, while also focusing on oral tradition and its manifestation in literature.

Temsula Ao's *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* provides essential analysis of myths such as Lungterok (origin of the Ao-Naga ancestors from six stones). Here, Temsula Ao critiques the limitations of Western models, proposing that Naga folklore transcends conventional narrative structures to embody the collective psyche, cultural identity and legacy of its people through memories and oral tradition.

This study addresses the challenges of applying psychoanalytic literary criticism to folklore studies, highlighting its divergence from conventional/canonical literature due to the absence of distinct authorship and its open-ended narrative structure. By juxtaposing psychoanalytic theory with oral traditions, it reveals how the subconscious dynamics of storytelling contribute to the formation and distribution of folklore within Naga communities.

**Keywords:** Ao-Naga, Ego, Folklore, Id, Oral, Psychoanalysis, Superego, Tradition

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Psychoanalysis is a theory that exists within the field of psychology. It has served as the basis for several psychodynamic theories implemented in the clinical practice of psychology. Its history can be traced to one of the most prominent figures in the discourse of psychology and psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Freud, born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1856, was an Austrian neurologist who pioneered the concept of dialogue within the field of psychology in the early 1890s as a means of treating

psychopathology. This method came to be known as psychoanalysis which was further developed by Freud and his collaborators into applied psychoanalysis.

The methodology behind psychoanalysis involved a combination of dialogue and analysis that took place between the psychoanalyst and the patient in concern. It was primarily derived from Freud's model of the human conscious and unconscious psyche that comprised of the Superego, Ego and Id. Freud stated that although these segments of the human psyche existed as part of the conscious mind, they were located outside our cognitive perception and existed as conscious, unconscious and preconscious processes. Freud further elaborated that these unconscious processes influenced behaviour at a subconscious level. The effect of these unconscious processes on the subconscious were observed to vary from individual to individual, which was later elaborated in Freud's introductory lectures on psychoanalysis known as *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* or *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*.

In order to understand the function of psychoanalysis and its relevance to folklore and literary criticism, it is also important to understand the underlying principles of the id, ego and superego proposed by Sigmund Freud.

The Id, Ego and Superego are said to operate at different layers of human consciousness and unconsciousness. Firstly, the Id is defined as the forefront of the conscious mind that comprises of the collective biological instincts. It is associated with the human psyche's affinity for pleasure and the impulses that revolve around the immediate needs, vices and urges. This layer of the human psyche was primarily associated with infancy, which acted as a foundation for the ego and superego to develop in the latter stages of life. The id is specifically located within the unconscious part of the psyche as it operates primarily on the immediate desires of the individual and does not undergo thorough conscious investigation as it is irrational and lacks objective coherence.

The second layer, Ego, is defined as an extension of the id that has been influenced through the individual's interaction with his or her environment. This component is located within the preconscious and conscious part of the psyche as it regulates most of the impulses put forward by both the Id and the Superego. This regulation takes place on the basis of interaction between external stimuli and human consciousness, due to which rationality and rational decisions are associated with the Ego. However, similar to the Id, the Ego is said to also exhibit a desire for pleasure, which is processed through rational thought.

Lastly, the Superego represents ethics and morality in the human psyche. It is located across the conscious, unconscious and preconscious parts of the human psyche. It is closely associated with the development and establishment of the human conscience that governs subjective concepts of good and evil or right and wrong. The development of the Superego is also associated with the environmental and cultural rules that begin to influence the psyche during the phallic stage of psychosexual development.

These components of the human psychological structure have played an important role in understanding the conscious and unconscious processes that affect the development of human psyche. Although Freud's approach towards psychanalysis and its application in literary criticism has been subject to criticism, the function of psychoanalysis in literary criticism may still be relevant in the context of narratological and cultural criticism.

## 2. PSYCHOANALYSIS AS A LITERARY DEVICE

Psychoanalytic literary criticism originated from the concept of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud. In order to understand the context of psychoanalytic literary criticism, it is essential to first understand the purpose of the therapy involved in psychoanalysis as a means of treating neurotic symptoms. This form of therapy consisted of interaction, dialogue and analysis, which served as a basis for both diagnosis and treatment. The memories of the patient played an important role in the therapy as it was observed that the neurotic symptoms were deeply rooted in the infantile sexuality and the memories or events associated with it. The childhood memories associated with the patient, in most cases, contained either repressed or traumatic memories that were observed to affect speech, mannerisms and personality. These observations played an important role in diagnosing the neurotic symptoms as well as forming the base structure for dialogue concerning the patient's psyche. The treatment, on the other hand, required the patient's complete cooperation in deconstructing his or her memories, which range from pleasant to traumatic experiences. This transferred both the patient and the psychoanalyst into different segments of the aforementioned memories, while acting as proxies for several experiences within them. Here, Freud established the relationship between what is perceived as unconscious activity and the outcomes within the conscious parameters of the human psyche.

The concept of this therapeutic treatment paved the way for critical theories concerning the human psyche and interpretation in terms of art, literature, culture and religion. Dreams and memories also played an important role in the interpretation within psychoanalysis, which dealt with variations of human psychological behaviour such as cognitive dissonance, speech, motor functions and perception over time. Here, Freud mapped the human psyche through the model known as the 'mental apparatus' or 'psychical apparatus,' a model that outlines specific parts of the human mind involved in the process of relaying, processing and distributing information within a given time and space.

Taking these aspects of psychoanalysis into account, it is possible to visualize the scope and limitations of its application in different fields of literary criticism. Here, psychoanalysis is segregated into more than one segment of literary criticism because the concept of psychoanalytic literary criticism is not limited to a single umbrella term. Psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary criticism have influenced different domains of literature and literary criticism. Despite this fragmentation in association, almost every literary aspect of this mode of analysis converges on the idea that human psyche and literature are closely related. However, the object of analysis in this theory is usually divided into three categories, namely, the reader, the author and the characters within the narrative. This particular form of analysis carries a biographical approach as it focuses on the early life of the individual in concern, which may include the exploration of the relationships between the ideologies, the readers, authors and characters within a literary work. The most apparent application of psychoanalytic literary criticism, in what could be considered canonical literature, is exemplified in Marie Bonaparte's critique of Edgar Allan Poe *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*.

Here, Bonaparte draws and traces a clinical portrait of Poe based on the authorial presence within his literary works. Bonaparte not only questions the themes in Poe's writing but also critically analyses the relationship between Edgar Allen Poe and his respective works in Book IV titled, 'Poe and the Human Soul'. This

analysis is introduced as Bonaparte quotes, "Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creators' psychology and, as Freud has shown, their construction resembles that of our dreams. The same mechanism which, in dreams or nightmares, govern the manner in which our strongest, though most carefully concealed desires are elaborated, desires which often are the most repugnant to consciousness, also govern the elaboration of the work of art." (Bonaparte (1949) 639) With reference to Poe's personal life and literary work, Marie Bonaparte states that the subjective nature of works are most likely to contain the author's unconscious memories that represent significant aspects of his or her personality. The association of dreams within literary works is defined as an inevitable phenomenon that occurs after an external perception following the product of conscious and unconscious processes.

Another example of Bonaparte's psychoanalytic critique in *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* is the analysis of Poe's short story, *The Man of the Crowd*, which traces biographical details revolving around John Allan, Edgar Allan Poe's foster father. Bonaparte conducts an analysis of the avarice of the hero in Poe's writing as a direct comparison to his foster father. This can be observed in Bonaparte's observation where she states, "The reader, however, will already have guessed that, again, we have John Allan before us. One feature alone, "avarice", would almost suffice to suggest it for, this, in his foster-son's eyes, was the main protagonist of the Scotch merchant who was dead six years when Poe wrote this tale." (Bonaparte (1949) 418)

Despite these psychoanalytical applications and observations, Marie Bonaparte's critique and analysis are considered to be limited in its assumption of the writers' work as the entire sum of his or her biographical and psychological profile. Due to the criticism of this limit in the scope of applied psychoanalysis, early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars and critics such as Peter Brooks have defined the problems of psychoanalytic criticism through its lack of engagement with the structure and rhetoric of literary texts. In retrospect, Brooks also provides a brief solution concerning the psychodynamic structure by stating that, "Psychoanalytic criticism can and should be textual and rhetorical." (Brooks (1987) 335). Most of these concerns surrounding psychoanalytic criticism, in the context of Naga folklore, are debateable as the object of analysis in folklore is unique (due to the absence of a monopoly on authorship) and can be considered an exception when observed closely.

### 3. MODELS OF ANALYSIS IN FOLKLORE

Folklore and oral tradition in the context of Nagaland cannot be generalized as each community or tribe has different forms of expression, narration and distribution concerning cultural artifacts such as folklore. The subject of analysis, however, can be defined as a representation of the people's cultural history, as this perception is shared between the general scope of folkloristics and the works of Temsula Ao.

Temsula Ao is a Naga scholar and a prominent figure in folkloristics and poetry. She was born in October 1945 at Jorhat, Assam and began her teaching career in 1975 at North Eastern Hill University, where she was a professor as well as the Dean of the School of Humanities and Education until 2010. She is also the recipient of the following awards; Padma Shri (2007), Governor's Gold Medal (2009) and the Sahitya Akademi Award (2013).

Temsula Ao's work in oral tradition and folklore provide relevant context towards oral tradition of the Ao-Nagas, which also holds the potential to act as a frame of reference for other Naga communities. It is important to understand that the source of Temsula Ao's inspiration for exploring of culture and heritage stemmed from her interaction with the Native Americans, which took place during her Fulbright scholarship at the University of Minnesota. In her book titled *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Temsula Ao utilises specific models and diagrams to explain and trace the distribution of narrative hierarchy within the social structure of the Ao-Nagas. This model of analysis also outlines the genealogy of oral tradition within the Ao community on the basis of the cultural and political divisions. Concerning the Ao-Nagas, Temsula Ao states that general western models of definition cannot be fully utilised to identify what constitutes as oral tradition. Ao elaborates on this topic by stating that, "While this may be an acceptable definition of oral tradition in many cases, in the Ao-Naga context, a new dimension has to be added which includes the collective history of the people, the belief system and all the principles governing community life of the tribe." (Ao 7)

Here, it is observed that western models of analysis of definition, in the case of oral tradition and folklore, lack the consideration for social elements due to the focus on narrative formation and structure. Temsula Ao takes these social or communal elements into consideration through the exploration of genealogy with respect to the origin myth of *Lungterok*. *Ungterok* or *Lungterok* literally means 'six stones/six *Ung* (Leaders)' and it is a significant part of the Ao-Naga folklore, which narrates the origin of the ancestors of the Aos from six stones. This story is alternatively known as the origin from stone and variations of this myth are also shared across other Naga clans such as the Konyak, Phom, Sangtam and Chang. However, *Lungterok* is most prominent within the oral tradition of the Ao-Nagas as it plays an important role in defining "the three major Ao clans and the exogamous marriage of the three patriarchs to the three females." (Ao 7)

The myth of *Lungterok* is utilized within the aforementioned model of analysis as Temsula Ao navigates the direction of the myth as well as its development and establishment through oral tradition within different segments of the Ao-Naga community. The structure depicted in Ao's flowchart implies that oral tradition acts as the vehicle that enables the movement of myth and folklore within a community and even across different communities. This movement is shown to enable the beginnings of oral tradition through the origin myth of *Lungterok*, which later influences clan distinctions.

This influence develops into an elaboration when the history of the Ao-Nagas is traced back to the site of *Chungliyimti*, which is considered the location of the first village established by the Ao-Nagas. In this manner, oral tradition is considered a stepping stone towards the formation of major community systems such as clan divisions, political institutions, social norms and belief systems.

The relevance of *Lungterok* and *Chungliyimti* is central in nature as most Ao oral traditions and historical narratives revolve around this myth. However, while dealing with the myth of origin from stone, in the context of the Ao-Naga, it is also important to take into account that the story of *Lungterok* consists of a discrepancy between the narrative of the *Mongsen* and *Chungli* sub-communities of the Ao-Nagas. The major difference between the narrative of the *Mongsen* and *Chungli* concerns the reference of the *Lungterok otsu* itself. On one hand the oral traditions of the *Mongsen* do not refer to any aspect of the origin from stone whereas, on the other hand, the *Chungli* narrative specifically associates the origin of their ancestors at *Lungterok*.

These distinctions and definitions displayed in the models of oral tradition and structure by Temsula Ao act as a historical representation of a community's journey into the present world. Similarly, the various branches of systems and institutions that develop through the practice of oral tradition further emphasises its role in the formation of a functioning cultural identity. In this context, Folklore appears to contain ethical, genealogical and epistemological reserves that supplement a community with the foundation of its social structure. In other words, folklore and the practice of oral tradition exists within the conscious, unconscious and preconscious segments of the human psyche. It may also be observed that there is merit in considering the moral or ethical guidelines that exist within the narrative of Naga folklore. This is because the historical effect of Naga folklore and the practice of oral tradition have also been observed to contribute to the formation of ethical institutions within a community such as belief systems and social norms, as mentioned in Temsula Ao's *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*.

Taking these observations into account, it can be considered that the narrative surrounding Naga folklore, and the practice of oral tradition originates at a psychological space similar to the superego. The elements of ethics, social and cultural norms seem to be important parts of an oral narrative structure when folklore is concerned. These elements further seem to align with the function of the Superego, however, there are other contemporary domains of psychoanalytic criticism where most of these values may be located depending on the context of the folklore in concern.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Early models of psychoanalysis have played a role in the development of psychoanalytic theory and literary criticism. However, A significant portion of 21st century neurology and biochemistry studies, concerning brain activity, have a method of explaining human behaviour in greater detail compared to the hypothesised construct of the 'mental apparatus' provided by Freud. This is achieved by monitoring specific sections of the human brain such as the visual cortex.

For example, a 2011 study led by Shinji Nishimoto titled, "Reconstructing visual experiences from brain activity evoked by natural movies", managed to reconstruct images from brain activity using a functioning magnetic resonance imaging system. A computational model was used to predict how neurons responded to visual features like motion, direction, and shape. Brain activity patterns were compared with the model's predictions and the visual content of the movies were reconstructed. The accuracy of the reconstructions was tested by comparing them to the original movie clips. As a result, the potential of using brain activity to infer and reconstruct perceptual experiences was established.

It is essential to consider the potential for application of such methods when expanding upon theories such as psychoanalytic folklore theory in the contemporary context. The primary concern of a psychoanalytic study of folklore is to locate the point where the 'folk' and 'lore' meet and converge. This point of convergence may be through the narrative, the community or even through the language used to convey the story in concern.

The use of psychoanalytic criticism in genres such as poetry, prose and novels maybe limited by either risking the alienation of the author or an incomplete portrait of the author's biography. In contrast, these limits of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic criticism are not necessarily dominant when folklore is concerned.

This is because in most instances of folklore, specifically in Naga folklore, the authorial presence and point of origin are almost non-existent or ambiguous in nature. Most narratives within the Naga folklore and mythos are without exclusive ownership as it is quite challenging to establish authorship over narratives that are shared across multiple tribes and communities. Thus, allowing an open-ended form of interpretation and distribution in the oral context.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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