

University of Tartu
Centre for Karbi studies

Workshop
Place in Stories, Stories in Place:
Narrating Landscapes in Folklore
and (Indigenous) Oral traditions

January 16 - 17, 2024
Diphu, Karbi Anglong
Assam, Northeast India

Abstracts

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore
University of Tartu
2024

Organised by

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Diphu

Center for Karbi Studies, Diphu

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia

In collaboration with

Centre for Oriental Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia

16th – 17th January 2024, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

Editors

Margaret Lyngdoh

Winniefred P. Donn

Layout: Margaret Lyngdoh

The workshop is supported by:

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC),

Center for Karbi Studies, Diphu,

EEA Financial Mechanism Baltic Research Programme in Estonia

(project "Re-storied Sites and Routes as Inclusive Spaces and Places:

Shared Imaginations and Multi-layered Heritage" EMP340),

University of Tartu and

Estonian Research Council (project "Vernacular Interpretations of the Incomprehensible:

Folkloristic Perspectives Towards Uncertainty" PRG670)

ISBN 978-9985-4-1407-1 (pdf)



Foreword

This set of talks and presentations aims to bring students and scholars into the dense belief-environment of Diphu, Karbi Anglong. Funded primarily by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and organised in collaboration with the Center for Karbi Studies and the University of Tartu, this winter colloquium will focus on the centrality of place. Place as a critical concept has the capability to generate multiple narratives, not all of which have equal status. Storied places assume relevance in context of local histories and religious contexts and can be represented differently for different audiences, and for differing goals.

This 2nd Karbi Winter Workshop will be held at Diphu, the site of the oldest ethnic celebration in India, the Karbi Youth Fest. From 12–18 January, 2024, the Karbi Youth Fest will celebrate its golden jubilee. Historically, the festival has served to promote, maintain, and reinvigorate the rich culture of the Karbi community, through the creation of a forum for knowledge and tradition exchange across generations. Thus, “place” as a topic for academic discussions has a special meaning in the backdrop of the Karbi Youth Festival that would take place at the same time.

Northeast Indian tendencies of placemaking in a predominantly world-religions context are usually tied directly to the indigenous religion. For example, expressions of Karbi senses of place express discursively through the reoriented framework of new religious movements. Place as a category of the ‘sacred’ through the intervention of new religions becomes the domain of the new (religious) icons and the more secular perspectives that link with ecological concerns. Traditionally, places are not always located in the mundane landscape: the village of ancestors – *phu-phi arong* – is narrated to be somewhere in the high mountains; the invisible village, – *rongbin* – is the ever-shifting “domain of knowledge” and does not have a specific location but can be found anywhere; the place of liminality – *ritlo pharla* – is the place where souls go to rest before going to the final destination of the village of ancestors.

Place as an academic category, located in the backdrop of the Karbi indigenous religion is embedded in vernacular religious practice. We invite presentations to start discussions and

debate on place as a category of interpretation. But we do not limit presentations to this focus and any topic on relevant topics of storytelling, oral history, indigenous worldviews, and oral traditions are welcome. We encourage the participation from local Karbi scholars to interact with our international guests and to present their research material. As part of the Workshop, there will be a parallel roundtable discussion on the topic of the significance of indigenous research methods in contemporary scholarship. We welcome you to the Workshop!

Opening Lecture

Representing Karbi – Colonial Texts and Beyond

Dharamsing Teron

Centre for Karbi Studies

Oral stories and sacred verses, deeply embedded in traditional healing and cultural practices, continue to primarily define the Karbi society. Written texts describing Karbi, from the vantage points of the colonizers and the American Baptist missionaries, began to appear only towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Understanding the Karbi and their life-ways are severely hampered by inadequate indigenous initiatives which are further compounded by post-colonial texts that largely replicate colonial images. Rapid exhaustion of oral sources and growing influences of dominant narratives are part of the challenges that demand head-on attention. Evidently, Karbi are still essentially invisible in scholarly and popular histories.

This paper aims to deconstruct the colonial stereotyping of the Karbi image rooted in unequal power dynamics as a way to decolonize and grounding Karbi study.

Plenary Lecture I

Narrating the Folklore of Water in Karbi Oral Tradition

Maggie Katharpi

Diphu Government College

Västriik writes that folkloristic interest in placelore correlates with recent shifts in the humanities that have changed the research focus to include human relationships with the environment (Västriik 2012). The dynamic shift of Karbi research from something that is ostensible to something that's theoretical to empirical, focussing on the relationship between humans, human relationships with that of environment can be observed gradually gaining momentum. As Knuuttila writes that the environment is not a mere background or surrounding for stories, songs and other expressive forms, it is a sensed and intimately known reality. Places acquire meanings – both personal and shared – through lives, experiences and narratives (Knuuttila, 2006). In Karbi, multiple expressions of such human – environment connections may be found in localised place-lore. There is a story to tell. The home and hearth, the fields, the rivers, the lakes, ponds, the villages, names of villages, rocks, trees – as Mall Hiimäe writes that the very existence of these objects in the neighbourhood supports the continuity of the related placelore, which in turn attributes value to sites and objects, safeguarding them from destruction (Hiimäe 2007).

Water and water bodies play a crucial role in shaping collective experiences of the Karbi and thus are experienced, narrated, and reproduced through storytelling. This paper is an attempt to study place-lore specifically concentrating upon the waterbodies of *Amcheng Abi*, *Seme Langbi*, *Marle Abijon*, *Tiri Bormon Alangbi*, *Kampi Abi*, *Phung Abi* – and the folklore associated with each of the *bi* (lit. the deepest and broadest part of a river or a lake). This paper explores and analyses the connection of narratives with water which is in the Karbi oral history by employing the ethnographic approach.

Plenary Lecture II

The Multispecies Fairy-Tale Library Project

Mayako Murai

Kanagawa University

What kind of multispecies story-scape may emerge if we make a library of multicultural fairy tales by classifying them according to the experiences not only of human beings and their fictional alter egos in animal form, but also of other-than-human beings who perceive, experience, and inhabit the world in different ways from the ways humans do? In this talk, I will give an outline of the Multispecies Fairy-Tale Library Project, a project I have just started and would like to develop gradually by listening to old and new stories of multispecies entanglements emanating from particular places and worldviews. The aim of this project is to design a new framework for narrative research that would foster multispecies coexistence. I will first point out the anthropocentric biases in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale type index, which has been used widely by international researchers working on folktales and other kinds of traditional narratives. The reason I focus on the classification of tale types is that the way we classify things, be they stories or species, both reflects and defines the way we perceive our place in the world and relate to the world around us. I will then explore the possibilities of repurposing the existing classification system for designing a new framework that would better reflect other-than-human worldviews by shifting the focus from human-centred dramas to multispecies relationalities. Finally, I will explain my idea of making a Multispecies Fairy-Tale Library across different narrative traditions and suggest possible uses of this library for imagining a multispecies future.

Presentations

Jirkedam and Jirlong: Oral Narratives of Karbi

Amphu Terangpi

University of Hyderabad

The paper will discuss the oral narratives of the Karbi tribe of Assam. Karbi is one of the major ethnic tribes of northeast India who inhabit Karbi Anglong district in Assam. Linguistically and ethnically, they belong to the Tibeto-Burma group. Karbi knowledge is disseminated through the oral tradition. Oral narratives related to *Jirkedam* and *Jirlong* traditional institutions of cultivation among the Karbi will be analysed in this paper. This is one of the prominent practices in the Karbi society and it is said to be the first school of the Karbis. *Jirkedam* is associated with the tiger spirit called *suri konglong* communicated through the traditional music drum called *chengburup* and in this cultivation done by only male youth lead by the *Klengsarpo* (the chief) and *Klengdun* (chief's assistant). Whereas *Jirlong* is associated with the narrative of *Cheleng Athepai* (Cheleng cliff). In this practice, cultivation is done by both male and female youth. And through the narratives associated with these practices, the paper will study the legend of *Cheleng Athepai* and how the role of the *Klengsarpo* and *Klengdun* still impact the Karbi socio-religious dynamic.

Through the narratives it will also look upon the significance of material culture in Karbi.

Narrations, Lore and Locality of Parshuram Kund

Baburam Saikia

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya

Parshuram kund is known to be a Hindu pilgrimage site situated in the Himalayan region of Arunachal Pradesh, India. Making Parshuram kund a popular Hindu pilgrimage place in the land of the Mishmi tribe, who inhabit the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh is an emerging concern for some locals. Also, it has an effect on the local folkloric and mythical beliefs of the place. The Hindu mythical belief associated with God Parshuram getting rid of his sin at the place, has influenced in the recent years, thousands of pilgrims across India and Nepal to come to Parshuram kund throughout the year especially during the time of *makara-sankranti* (12-14 January) - auspicious transition day of the Sun into Capricorn. The paper aims to analyze the significance of the pilgrimage site from both local and pan-Indian Hindu perspectives with a special emphasis on locals' interpretation. This will investigate folkloric association of the Kaman Mishmis with the place, residing near the Parshuram kund'area in the Wakro circle; including how they see the growing Hindu pilgrimage in their locality. This research intends to find out how the Parshuram story has overtaken the local story and made the place a popular Hindu pilgrimage site, leading the local folkloric tradition into a marginalized position.

Over There and Back Again: Cosmopolitical Dialogues in the Himalayas

Davide Torri

University of Rome

Indigenous mythologies of the Himalayas unveil a rich tapestry of narratives and rituals whose focus is the intricate interplay between human and non-human entities, shedding light on their entwined connections. This paper focuses on the themes of alliances and conflicts, crisis and disaster motifs within shamanic narratives, illustrating the profound links that bridge the divide between humans and the other-than-human. These indigenous mythologies, in fact, transcend the conventional boundaries of personhood, embracing mountains, waters, plants, animals, and diverse classes of beings within an enlarged understanding of personhood. The result is an ongoing dialogue with an animated landscape, imbued with multiple agencies and diverse voices.

Mythology and Place-Making: The Significance of Lum Sohpetbneng Among the Khasis of Northeast India

Eva Diengdoh

University of Tartu

Khasis are an ethnic community of Meghalaya, North East India who share social beliefs, norms, practices and speak an Austro-Asiatic language. The term 'Khasi 'is inclusive of groups such as the Pnar, Lyngngam, Bhoi, Khyntiam, War and Maram. Khasis transmit knowledge and tradition through orality. There is a place-making tendency involving stories among them. Lum Sohpetbneng is one such sacrosanct site of indigenous Khasi belief located 21 kilometres north of Meghalaya's capital, Shillong and has, over the years, emerged of primary importance in the ideation of a Khasi identity and history. According to the myth of Khasi origins, Lum Sohpetbneng (lit. Sohpetbneng hill) is the place where the ladder connecting heaven to earth is located and from which the seven Khasi families descended. This myth is now commemorated by an annual pilgrimage to the summit called "Ka Kiew Eh Rngiew" (lit. pilgrimage to strengthen one's essence or capability) and was organised by the Seng Khasi (indigenous religious organisation) in 2000. This pilgrimage led to a revival of rituals that were previously done by the people of Mawbuh village and more traditional rituals, being repurposed for a wider audience. This talk will look at how studying a ritual can be paramount to understanding the myth surrounding it and the means whereby it is utilised in contemporary times. What is the intentionality behind the exclusive emphasis on the Lum Sohpetbneng narrative? Why is this particular site significant and what are the means (rituals) whereby this hill is made sacred?

Bardwisikhla: An Analytical study

Faguna Barmahalia,
Gauhati University

The Bardwisikhla, which arrives shortly before the Bodo New Year, also known as the Bwisagu or Bihu, brings with it a fierce storm and thunderous downpour. Additionally, many begin to believe that the New Year has arrived. According to the Bodo community belief narrative, Bardwisikhla is a small child who is thought to be a Bodo woman who was married to a man from a far-off location in the West. Every year, at the beginning of spring, Bardwisikhla pays a visit to her mother's house in Bwisagw (Bihu), where she is revered as a female ghost. Just before the Bwisagw in the spring, the Bodo people are hit by two powerful gales brought on by Bardwisikhla. The Bodo people are reminded of Bardwisikhla's arrival, which announced Bwisagw, by the previous gale of Bwisagw or Bihu, and by the subsequent, frequently destructive storm, which reminds them of her return. The paper tries to highlight the myth and belief associated with the coming of Bardwisikhla. Moreover, the paper tries to analyze the socio-cultural significance of it in the Bodo society.

Liminal Placemaking: Fluid Identities within Shifting Geographies

Garima Plawat

Indiana University

This paper stems out of the narratives from my community and their migration from the state of Rajasthan to different parts of India. Home as a place is viewed as a marker of stability. Our identities bloom outwards from this space, navigating through their multiplicities, yet always anchored to this idea of home. What happens when home as a category itself is not fixed? What happens to the identities that are moored to the permanence of home as a place of stability? My paper will employ oral histories around the migration of my community as they settled in different states of India. This shifting aspect is most prominent within the oral histories and legends around their main village deity Khede Vali as they began to set up villages. Her identity is shrouded in mystery as it is believed that she arrived into the community's life as opposed to being established by the villagers themselves, mirroring the latter's changing geographies. Interestingly her shrine itself is not within the confines of the villages that worship her; instead, she sits at the intersection of three villages surrounding her. As her worshippers flock to her to pray, they leave their individual as well communal identities behind to mill with worshippers from different villages, even from different cities where the villagers had further migrated to. The shrine at once becomes a threshold of changing identities where an intimate relationship with a village deity breaks the bounds of identity inherent in class, caste, gender, and at times, sexuality. The paper will delve deeper into such shifting identities, taking Khede Vali deity as the central example inherent within movement and shifting geographies.

Storying Places of Massacre: The Examples of Mangadh Hill and Sand Creek

Gregory Alles

McDaniel College

In the words of the call for papers, “Storied places assume relevance in context of local histories and religious contexts and can be represented differently for different audiences, and for differing goals.” Arguably, one of the most traumatic examples of places that assume relevance in local histories are places where Indigenous people have been victims of massacre. Such events occasion multiple stories for multiple audiences told for multiple reasons: testimonies at legal inquests attempting to determine culpability, stories told in public and private by the perpetrators in order to celebrate their accomplishments or at least to justify their actions, stories told by survivors and relatives of the victims for purposes of accusation, mourning, and remembrance, stories told by historians and governments attempting to integrate places of massacre into a collective story. Inasmuch as one person’s massacre can be another person’s battle or police action, even using the word “massacre” presumes the telling of some stories and the rejection of others. Finally, for some, the most appropriate story, whether from respect, from a desire to forget, or from some other motive is to tell no story at all, that is, to maintain silence. The number of places about which such stories can be told is lamentably large, but this paper will focus on only two: Mangadh Hill (Rajasthan-Gujarat border, India), where on November 17, 1913, Bhils who followed the religious leader, Guru Govind, were massacred by British troops, operating at the behest of several princely states, and Sand Creek (Colorado, USA), where Cheyenne and Arapaho people were massacred by volunteer soldiers of the Colorado cavalry on November 29, 1864.

Storying the Space Around a Dead Body: Narratives From the
Funeral Nights

Henry Robert Goldsmith
University of Tartu

Most of the activities pertaining to death can be experienced in the funeral night wakes observed among the native Christian communities of Assam. These are the wakes that are held while the dead lie in the coffin in their home, surrounded by loved ones before the burial. This situation creates a space where family members and friends gather to keep a vigil through the night and “watch over” the dead body so it “does not walk off”. These artificial places that are created around a dead body in a coffin necessitates the generation of a fertile story-telling space where experience, emotions, memorates, legends, rumors, and stories are narrated. I try to explore how within this generative space, the narrative of death, grief, and loss are shared along with contradictory narratives of celebration and happiness that will be one of the foci of this presentation. Further, I will try to investigate how these “funeral nights” turn into journeys of discoveries for the individuals and community members, and how these shared narratives help shape their, and in turn, perhaps our understanding of the shared collective of grief and loss, coping and mourning, which then leads to the invention of new traditions.

No Place for Men: Negotiations Among People, Places,
and Other Entities in the Northwest Himalayas

Jane Orton

Independent Researcher

This paper will examine articulations of intra- and extramundane places in the Spiti region of Himachal Pradesh, a high-altitude desert in India's northwest Himalayas. Spiti's textured religious and cultural expressions arise from its history as a centre for firstly Bön and then Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the rich vernacular narratives in the area. The Bön religion that flourished in Spiti built upon pre-existing religious traditions in the area. Tibetan Buddhism was introduced in the latter half of the eighth century and Spiti remained important for the continuity of the Buddhist dharma following the dissolution of the Tibetan Empire. However, local religion was not wholly subjugated by the introduction of new religion, but rather survived alongside it. Local *lhas* (deities) are attached to the villages in Spiti. Although these are said to derive their power from Tibet, stories of these *lhas* transfigure from village to village in local placelore. Thus, places in Spiti are actively engaged in creating the spiritual environment by the people who reside in them. Extramundane places are also enlisted in this process. Narratives of *biyul* (hidden lands) include elements of the mundane, but also incorporate accounts of the spiritual state of para momo (to have fear). These accounts vary greatly across the Spiti region, with narratives from the Kibber valley area suggesting that those who are para momo are more likely to see and enter *biyul*, while in Pin Valley para momo is seen as being inauspicious and unlikely to help gain entry to such places. This paper will examine the symbiotic relationships between places in Spiti and the vernacular narratives that are bound to its topography, conceiving of place as a negotiation among landscape, people and other-than-human entities.

The Perception of the “Defeated Earth” in the Karbi Worldview

Kareng Ronghangpi

Diphu Government College

Place has a significant impact on culture; it is used to create identity, familiarity, a sense of belonging, or even seclusion and separation. In the Karbi worldview, places can be accommodating, unpleasant, and repulsive at the same time. Societies' concordance with places creates narratives, memories, and beliefs, which assist people in understanding and acknowledging their natural surroundings. Place lore is used to illustrate the stories and beliefs associated with a place that are deeply rooted in people's worldviews and religious practices. By studying the place-lore of a society, we can gain insights into its context.

This paper aims to investigate the narratives linked to the creation of inhabitable and repulsive places that are an essential part of Karbi cosmology. This paper delves into the concept of defeated or inhabitable earth known as *longle-kerem*. The Karbi society abandons such areas due to pandemics or animal attacks by ferocious animals such as tigers, lions, and elephants, which have rendered them repulsive and uninhabitable. The paper examines the concept of defeated earth (*longle-kerem*) and the state of trapped spirits or souls that reside there. It also explores the significance of *Ucha* (tiger spirit tamer) and its close relationship with the spirits of fierce animals. It sheds light on the *ucha's* role in the Karbi community, as well as the cultural and ritual practises that the *ucha* must follow and maintain in order to be their interactor and keeper. The paper presents ethnographic and descriptive narratives that depict the frequent interaction of the people from the realm of habitable and inhabitable places and the consequences of the connection. The paper also discusses the changes that the keepers have to go through to keep up with the modern world and preserve their traditions.

Placemaking through Vernacular Belief and Ritual Festivities:
The Case of Boiddonathpur

Malay Bera
Ashoka University

In this presentation, I will discuss placemaking as a dynamic generative process in the context of Boiddonathpur, a village located in the south of West Bengal. The village is named after Baba Boiddonath, the patron deity of the village. Baba Boiddonath is a vernacular manifestation of Lord Shiva. He is worshipped as a god who is *jagroto*, i.e., conscious or awake. In the old times, a three-nights-long ritual was well-known regarding the Boiddonath temple, called *teratti pora*, literally, “falling for three nights.” Anybody with a wish or prayer would submit themselves at the feet of Boiddonath for three consecutive nights when the god would put them through a series of tests. Since the ritual is not practiced anymore, stories about *teratti pora* are also disappearing. Drawing from my interviews with the elders of the village, I will discuss the disappearing oral narratives about such traditions regarding Baba Boiddonath that helped foster the communal identity of the people of Boiddonathpur for generations. Further, I will talk about the changing religious landscape to discuss how the younger people partake in placemaking through the new annual festival of *Chorok*, that goes on for three nights. By comparing the ritual of *teratti pora* and *Chorok* festival, I will demonstrate the structural similarities between the old ritual and the contemporary festival. Since the ritual of *teratti pora* has been discontinued and its narratives are gradually disappearing, it is the ritual practices at the annual festival now that regenerate and keep intact the sense of belonging, and contribute to placemaking for the village community of Boiddonathpur as a whole.

Narrative Clusters of *Mohan Phador*: A Functionalist Study of Sacred and Supernatural

Pallavi Dutta

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya

The monolithic stone of Mohan Phador, is clustered around several narratives in Tiwa society. This monolith is located at Bormarjong village of West Karbi Anglong district, Assam. Considering the different clustered narratives of Mohan Phador express that he is an immortal entity who has been sheltering the village people and protecting their land from the evil power from the olden days. Some narratives associated with him trace the history and the origin of the Tiwas. A figure of Mohan Phador is carved on the monolith which symbolises his power of strength and also as a supernatural entity in Tiwa society. Some villagers worshipped him as their forefather who was an emperor lived in Bormarjong. The different narrative versions linked with Mohan Phador present a scenario of inconsistency of belief. These inconsistencies in such belief narratives include the original identity of Mohan Phador, and the stories connected with him fabricating Bormarjong village as a sacred and ancient village of Tiwas as a result of the presence of his monolith. This paper will discuss the different narratives of Mohan Phador and how it reflects the culture and tradition of village people in their day to day life.

Walking and Listening: Indigenous Landscapes in O'odham Oral Traditions

Seth Schermerhorn

Hamilton College

Walking to Magdalena: Personhood and Place in Tohono O'odham Songs, Sticks, and Stories (co-published by the University of Nebraska Press and the American Philosophical Society, 2019) is both a study of walking and a study in listening. In the tradition of Keith Basso's path-blazing *Wisdom Sits in Places*, I ground the study of indigenous religious traditions, or more specifically, Tohono O'odham Catholicism, in a sense of place and deliberate movement across ancestral landscapes. In short, I explore how some O'odham have embedded or emplaced Christianity within these landscapes in songs, sticks, and stories. In listening to O'odham elders, songs emerge as maps and historical records, staffs and ribbons evoke Magdalena as a special place and (minimally) record O'odham walkers' number of journeys to Magdalena, and stories tie O'odham to particular places while simultaneously producing both place and personhood. By privileging Tohono O'odham accounts of the Christian past and present – which most historians would be trained to ignore through a narrowly documentary study of history – I offer a scholarly model for listening.

Multispecies Mutuality in Embodied Space: Analysing the Existential Reality of Gujjars and Bakerwals through Folklore

Tanu Gupta

Indian Institute of Technology Jammu

Transhumance pastoralism or long-distance herding, is ingrained in the collective cultural ideology of Gujjars and Bakerwals, a tribe that inhabits the Pir Panjal Range of Northwestern Himalayas. Gujjars and Bakerwals, accompanied by their domesticated animals, temporarily seek shelter in the forest, creating an embodied space of multispecies triangulation. It is further argued that this embodied space is celebrated in their oral traditions, such as in their myths, beliefs and folk narratives. In delineating the transhumant worldview of the tribe and understanding the significance of the embodied place, the research aims to examine how this embodied space has acquired a meaningful patterns of existence in the lived reality of Gujjars and Bakerwals focusing on one of their folk tales or *Dharshi*. It also becomes imperative to explore how the tribe maintains its transhumant identity through the performance of storytelling by recalling and recounting their folklore, which is significantly prevalent in their existential reality. The argument draws on substantive content from the ethnographic accounts of various indigenous narratives collected during the fieldwork conducted over a span of two months in the year 2022, involving twenty *dheras* (households) in the Rajouri district of Pir Panjal Range, where the majority of the tribal population resides. Drawing on the conceptual theory of Govindrajan's multispecies mutuality and Pettit's embodied communication, the study unpacks the pertinent role played by folklore in establishing a posthuman framework of identification in Gujjars and Bakerwals.

Ideology, Religion, Contested Territories and Places

Ülo Valk

University of Tartu

The paper starts with a short introduction to the role of ideological and religious conflicts in drawing political borders, dividing territories, and charging places with special meanings. The focus of the paper is on Northern Europe, once inhabited by indigenous peoples but later conquered and Christianized by foreign invaders. The historical boundary between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Christianity has marked Northern Europe as major cultural and political division. It is expressed in folklore, literature, education, shared values, worldviews, and contested territories and places. Next, the paper focuses on the placelore of North Eastern Estonia from the 19th to 21st centuries. During the early modern times, Estonia was a part of the Swedish empire, dominated by the Lutheran Church and German nobility, but was conquered by Russia in the 18th century, leading to the Russification of the country at the end of the 19th century and the spread of Orthodoxy.

The National movement in the 19th century led to the establishment of the Estonian Republic in 1918. In the course of the Second World War, the Soviet Union destroyed Estonian independence and established the Communist regime with atheism as its official ideology. In 1991, Estonia restored its independence as a democratic state. The paper explores the role of conflicting ideologies in shaping and manufacturing placelore in Estonian borderlands during the last centuries. We shall study the symbolism of placelore and strategies of building storyworlds – both for political domination and as forms of resistance to official ideologies.

The Roundtable: Indigenous (Religious) Research Methods from a Folkloristic Perspective

Reep Pandi Lepcha

Nar Bahadur Bhandari Government College

Talilula

RRaD (Project “Restore, Recover, and Decolonise”)

Margaret Lyngdoh

University of Tartu

The political, social, economic, environmental, and liminal landscapes in Northeast India exist in a circumstance fraught with complexities. So far, scholarship in the region is responsive and vital, challenging the colonial and neo-colonial narratives. While the stress on academic scholarship often veers towards the political-economic perspective, it tends to overshadow the folkloristic perspective. This means that ordinary, vernacular narratives are not the focus of scholarship because storytelling is not the primary objective of research. This roundtable therefore seeks to provoke discussions on the question of why do we need new methods to map indigenous cosmologies in the specific context of Northeast India? This roundtable discussion will be led by three scholars from Northeast India.

Talilula from Nagaland proposes “graphic ethnography” as a multi-modal approach to indigenous storytelling traditions from the Naga perspective. Graphic storytelling in its varied forms and combinations can be a powerful tool for indigenous representation because visualizing worldviews and cosmologies is transferred to the owners of tradition. It presents an opportunity to rekindle our attention to stories and ways of thinking that may have previously escaped our notice, while creating spaces for creative collaborations in the co-production of knowledge, and disseminating these ideas into the hands and minds of a more diverse demographic.

Reep Pandi Lepcha from Sikkim proposes archiving of indigenous narratives as the prerogative of every scholar or student at micro, and vernacular levels. In the past, archives although housing the knowledge systems and lifeways of the indigene have been inaccessible

to indigenous peoples. Owing to oral transmissions of knowledge it has become evident that an alternative indigenous archiving system needs to be devised. Proposing a sui generis format catering to conserving, co-sharing, and co-learning of knowledge, made accessible to the members of the respective indigenous communities and generated by the community.

Margaret Lyngdoh from Tartu/Shillong will question the viability of an alternative indigenous research method from the perspective of folklore theory. She will discuss an emic, ethical, alternative method for approaching indigenous ontologies.

We welcome students to come and contribute to this discussion during the Karbi Workshop.

List of Participants

Plenary Speakers

Dharamsing Teron Center for Karbi studies	dsterononline@gmail.com
Maggie Katharpi Diphu Government College	maggiekatharpi@gmail.com
Mayako Murai, Kanagawa University	mayakomurai@me.com

Participants

Amphu Terangpi University of Hyderabad	amphuart@gmail.com
Baburam Saikia Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya	saikia.baburam2@gmail.com
Davide Torri University of Rome	davide.torri@uniroma1.it
Eva Diengdoh University of Tartu	evakordordiengdoh@gmail.com
Faguna Barmahalia Gauhati University	fbarmahalia@gmail.com
Garima Plawat Indiana University	gplawat@iu.edu
Gregory Alles McDaniel College	galles@mcdaniel.edu

Henry Robert Goldsmith
University of Tartu henrygoldsmith1992@gmail.com

Jane Orton
Independent Researcher janeortonuk@gmail.com

Kareng Ronghangpi
Diphu Government College ronghangpikareng@gmail.com

Malay Bera
Ashoka University malayoffc@gmail.com

Pallavi Dutta
Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya dutta.pallavi@gmail.com

Seth Schermerhorn
Hamilton College jscherme@hamilton.edu

Tanu Gupta
Indian Institute of Technology Jammu 2020rhu1029@iitjammu.ac.in

Ülo Valk
University of Tartu ulo.valk@ut.ee

Round Table Discussion

Akar Rongphar
Guwahati University, IGNOU aouzkaphar@gmail.com

Jirdat Engleng
Independent Researcher jirdatengleng92@gmail.com

Klir Tissopi
Diphu Government College tissopiklir@gmail.com

Maggie Katharpi
Diphu Government College maggietharpi@gmail.com

Margaret Lyngdoh

University of Tartu

ninilyngdoh@gmail.com

Reep Pandi Lepcha

Nar Bahadur Bhandari Government College

ashidona@gmail.com

Serdihun Teronpi

Diphu Government College

dihun.teronpi1982@gmail.com

Talilula

RRaD, (Project “Restore, Recover, and Decolonise”) lulalongchar@gmail.com

Organising Committee: Margaret Lyngdoh, Dharamsing Teron, Kareng Ronghangpi, Winniefred P. Donn, Maggie Katharpi, and Serdihun Teronpi.