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UNDERSTANDING CHATGPT ADOPTION AND ITS ACADEMIC EFFECTS AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS: PERCEPTIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Nzanbemo Tungoe
&
Lumchirhoni Tungoe

Abstract

The accelerating incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into higher education settings has opened new avenues for teaching and learning, with generative tools such as ChatGPT attracting growing interest among students. This study examines undergraduate students' perceptions of ChatGPT across four dimensions- perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, academic impact, and overall adoption with particular attention to ethical awareness and gender-based differences. A quantitative, descriptive research design was employed, drawing on survey data from 180 undergraduate students at Unity College, Dimapur. A structured questionnaire was used to gather responses, and internal consistency was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha values of 0.75 or above for all constructs. Descriptive cross-tabulation revealed that students with stronger ethical awareness tended to use ChatGPT as a supplementary resource, whereas those with lower ethical awareness showed a tendency towards direct reliance for assignments and exam preparation. Independent sample t-tests found no significant gender differences in all the dimensions except in Academic Impact dimension, where statistically significant gender difference was found ($t = 2.26$, $df = 179$, $p < 0.05$), with male students reporting a marginally higher perceived academic impact. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses confirmed that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are strong predictors of adoption, collectively explaining 41.1% of the variance when combined with academic impact. These findings call attention to the need

for structured digital literacy initiatives, ethical AI guidelines, and institutionally-grounded adoption policies in higher education.

Keywords: *Academic impact, Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, Ethical Awareness, Higher Education, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness.*

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed higher education in fundamental ways, reshaping instructional methods, student engagement patterns, and academic support mechanisms. Within this broader transformation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands out as a particularly consequential development, given its capacity to deliver adaptive feedback, support independent study, and assist in complex cognitive tasks (Dempere et al., 2023). Among AI-based platforms, ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI has attracted particular interest from both students and educators. Its capacity to generate coherent text responses, explain concepts, assist with writing, and simulate dialogue makes it a versatile academic aid, potentially complementing traditional instructional approaches (Vieriu, 2025; Sergeeva, 2025).

Despite the growing use of ChatGPT among students, the nature and scope of its acceptance in higher education settings remain inadequately documented. While some students approach these tools with enthusiasm for the efficiency gains, they offer, others remain cautious due to concerns around academic integrity, potential over-reliance, and unfamiliarity with generative AI systems (Aldreabi, 2025). An in-depth understanding of how students perceive and interact with ChatGPT is therefore essential for educators and policymakers seeking to utilize its benefits while mitigating associated risks (Klimova, 2025).

The motivation for this study originates from the recognition that digital literacy and AI competence are increasingly integral to academic success. Evaluating the extent to which students accept ChatGPT and the factors that shape this acceptance can offer

practical guidance for curriculum design, institutional policy, and faculty training. Furthermore, understanding how ChatGPT is perceived to affect academic outcomes can provide an empirical basis for making informed decisions about AI integration in classroom and assessment contexts (Dempere et al., 2023).

This study focuses on undergraduate students at Unity College, Dimapur as the primary users of educational technologies. By examining their perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and academic impact, this research seeks to map adoption patterns, identify challenges, and offer evidence-based guidance for responsible AI integration in higher education.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To investigate the effect of ethical concerns and potential misuse on students' adoption of ChatGPT.
2. To examine gender-based differences in perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, academic impact, and overall adoption of ChatGPT.
3. To determine the nature of the relationship between students' perceptions of ease of use, usefulness, and academic impact, and their likelihood of adopting ChatGPT.
4. To assess the influence of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and academic impact on students' overall adoption of ChatGPT.

Research Question

How do ethical concerns and perceived risks of misuse influence students' adoption of ChatGPT?

Hypotheses for the Study

H01: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of Perceived Ease of Use of ChatGPT between female and male students.

H02: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of Perceived Usefulness of ChatGPT between female and male

students.

H03: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of Academic Impact of ChatGPT between female and male students.

H04: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of Overall Adoption of ChatGPT between female and male students.

H05: There is no significant relationship among Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Academic Impact and Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students.

H06: Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Academic Impact do not significantly predict the Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students.

Review of Literature

The body of research on Artificial Intelligence in education underscores the wide-ranging potential of AI tools to reshape student engagement, learning outcomes, and instructional delivery. Generative models such as ChatGPT have moved from the margins to the centre of these discussions, largely because of their accessibility and the breadth of tasks they can support from summarising complex content to guiding learners through problem-solving exercises (Dempere et al., 2023).

AI in Higher Education

AI-based tools have increasingly been embedded into higher education environments, serving functions that range from personalised tutoring and adaptive content delivery to administrative automation and student feedback. Empirical work in this area consistently highlights the positive effects of AI on cognitive engagement and academic performance when students use such tools in structured, guided ways (Vieriu, 2025). AI systems can tailor content to students' existing knowledge and learning pace, thereby potentially bridging gaps that conventional classroom instruction may not address (Dempere et al., 2023).

The integration of AI in education is not without its challenges. Among the concerns most frequently raised in the literature are threats to academic integrity, risk of students

becoming excessively dependent on AI-generated outputs, and the possibility that access inequities may deepen existing disadvantages (Aldreabi, 2025). These issues bear directly on how and how many students choose to use AI tools in their academic work.

Student Acceptance of AI Tools

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), offers a conceptual anchor for studying how students respond to new technologies. According to this framework, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two primary determinants of whether a user adopts a technology. In the context of AI, research has consistently found that students are more inclined to incorporate ChatGPT and comparable platforms into their study routines when they can identify pleasant academic benefits such as improved writing quality, faster comprehension of difficult topics, or more efficient assignment preparation (Sergeeva, 2025; Vieriu, 2025).

Demographic factors, including prior technology exposure, digital literacy, and to a lesser degree gender, have also been examined as moderators of AI adoption. While some studies report gender differences in technology adoption behaviour, the evidence is mixed; several investigations suggest that the perceived utility of a tool tends to override demographic considerations in predicting adoption (Dempere et al., 2023; Aldreabi, 2025).

ChatGPT and Generative AI in Learning

ChatGPT's design enables it to produce contextually appropriate, human-like responses across a wide range of academic topics, making it a flexible resource for learners with varied needs. Students frequently report using ChatGPT to generate initial drafts, seek explanations for unfamiliar material, or verify their understanding of concepts (Sergeeva, 2025). This pattern of use aligns with a broader movement toward self-directed learning; in which students take greater ownership of their educational pathways with the assistance of digital tools (Klimova, 2025).

A counterpoint that appears consistently in the literature is the concern that generative AI may, if used unreflectively, ruin students' capacity for independent critical thinking. Scholars have argued that when learners habitually outsource reasoning tasks to AI, they may not develop the depth of understanding that comes with effort and challenging material (Vieriu, 2025). This concern is amplified in academic context where assessment relies on original analysis and argument.

Impact of AI on Academic Performance

The empirical record on AI's effect on academic performance is broadly positive, with numerous studies documenting improvements in assignment quality, engagement with course material, and overall academic confidence among AI users (Dempere et al., 2023). Immediate personalised feedback, a defining feature of tools like ChatGPT appears to help students identify knowledge gaps and revise their work more effectively than they might in the absence of such feedback (Sergeeva, 2025). Klimova (2025) found that AI tools correlate with heightened cognitive engagement, particularly in tasks requiring synthesis and creative thinking.

The extent of these benefits, however, depends on the degree to which students bring digital competence and critical awareness to their interactions with AI. Learners who understand both the possibilities and the limits of generative AI appear to extract more meaningful academic value from its use, while those who engage with it uncritically may experience a superficial performance boost without corresponding gains in understanding (Vieriu, 2025).

Research Gap

A review of the existing literature reveals that while AI adoption in education has been extensively studied and modeled, empirical research focusing specifically on undergraduate students' lived experiences with ChatGPT in non-Western, resource-constrained institutional settings remains limited. Much

of the published work draws on samples from technologically advanced environments, potentially limiting the generalisability of findings to institutions such as those in Northeast India, where device access and digital infrastructure pose distinct challenges. Moreover, few studies examine the interplay between ethical awareness and adoption behaviour alongside standard TAM variables. This study aims to address these gaps by gathering primary data from a specific undergraduate population, offering empirical insight grounded in the local context.

Methods of the Study

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of ChatGPT at Unity College Dimapur. A cross-sectional approach was deemed appropriate given the study's aim to describe the current state of ChatGPT adoption and to identify associations among key variables at a single point in time. The quantitative framework facilitated the application of standardized statistical procedures, including t-tests, correlation analysis, and regression to test the stated hypotheses.

The study population comprised undergraduate students enrolled across various academic disciplines and semester at Unity College, Dimapur. A simple random sampling procedure was employed to ensure representation across gender, academic year, and programme. A sample of 180 students was determined to provide adequate statistical power for the planned analyses, in accordance with sample size considerations for inferential statistics in social science research (Cochran, 1977).

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The instrument comprised four sections:

1. Demographic information, including gender, semester, locality of residence, technology access, and frequency of internet use.
2. Perceived ease of use, measuring students' familiarity with and

ability to navigate ChatGPT.

3. Perceived usefulness, assessing students' appraisal of ChatGPT's value for academic tasks, drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model.
4. Academic impact, determining students' views on ChatGPT's influence on learning outcomes, critical thinking, and academic performance.

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree). The instrument was pilot-tested with 50 students to evaluate clarity, readability, and item consistency prior to the main data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

The finalized questionnaire was administered through digital and paper-based channels. The digital version was circulated via email and WhatsApp group, while printed copies were distributed directly to students on campus. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each respondent before they engaged with the questionnaire. To improve the response rate, follow-up reminders were issued one week after the initial distribution. The main data collection phase extended over two weeks, yielding 180 valid responses after excluding those collected during the pilot phase.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing data collection, institutional approval was sought and obtained from the Principal, Unity College, Dimapur. All participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained by removing all personal identifiers from the dataset prior to analysis. The research was conducted in accordance with principles of data integrity, ensuring that findings reported here accurately reflect the collected data.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Version 22. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentages, mean, and standard deviations were used to profile the sample and summarize responses across the questionnaire dimensions. Cross-tabulation was applied to explore the relationship between ethical awareness and adoption behaviour. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to assess gender-based differences across each dimension. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to quantify the associations among the key variables. Multiple regression analysis was then used to determine the extent to which perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and academic impact collectively predicted overall adoption.

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, a widely accepted measure of scale reliability in social science research. A threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was applied, consistent with established guidelines (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Split-half reliability (odd-even) was additionally computed to corroborate the findings. Table 1 below presents the reliability coefficients for each construct.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half Reliability (Odd-Even)
Perceived Ease of Use	9	0.78	0.76
Perceived Usefulness	8	0.81	0.79
Academic Impact	8	0.75	0.73
Overall Adoption	25	0.83	0.81

Note: Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70 indicates acceptable internal consistency. Split-half reliability (odd-even) further corroborates the stability of the scale

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Profile

Frequency distributions and percentages were computed to describe the demographic composition of the sample. The sample consisted of 180 undergraduate students, of whom 95 (52.8%) identified as female and 85 (47.2%) as male. Regarding academic semester, 50 students (27.8%) were enrolled in Semesters 1–2, 68 (37.8%) in Semesters 3–4, and 62 (34.4%) in Semesters 5–6. In terms of technology access, 142 students (78.9%) reported having access to a smartphone only, while 38 (21.1%) had access to both a laptop and a smart phone. Percentage totals for each variable sum to 100.0%, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Students (N = 180)

Demographic Variable	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	95	52.8
	Male	85	47.2
	Total	180	100.0
Semester	Semester 1–2	50	27.8
	Semester 3–4	68	37.8
	Semester 5–6	62	34.4
	Total	180	100.0
Technology Access	Laptop+Smartphone	38	21.1
	Smartphone Only	142	78.9
	Total	180	100.0

Descriptive Analysis of Ethical Concerns and Adoption Patterns

Ethical awareness was operationalized using a ten-item subscale embedded within the questionnaire, with scores aggregated to produce a total ethical awareness score ranging from 10 to 50. A threshold score of 40 was used to classify respondents: those scoring 40 or above were categorized as having high ethical awareness, while those scoring below 40 were categorized as having low ethical awareness. This threshold was established based on the scale's midpoint and distributional properties of pilot test responses, and is consistent with classification approaches used in comparable ethical awareness studies in educational technology research (Aldreabi, 2025). Table 3 presents the cross-tabulation of ethical awareness levels, mean adoption scores, and usage patterns.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Cross-Tabulation for Ethical Concerns and Adoption of ChatGPT

Ethical Awareness Level	N	Mean Adoption Score	SD	Predominant Usage Pattern
High Awareness (score ≥ 40)	105	152.35	14.42	Used primarily for reference and supplementary learning
Low Awareness (score < 40)	75	163.87	12.96	Used directly for assignments and exam preparation
Total	180	158.20	15.11	Mixed usage depending on awareness level

Note: The “Predominant Usage Pattern” column reflects qualitative patterns observed in student responses during cross-tabulation analysis. “Mixed usage” in the total row indicates that the full sample exhibited both cautious and direct adoption behaviours, depending on awareness level.

Objective 1: Ethical Concerns and Adoption of ChatGPT

Research Question: How do ethical concerns and perceived risks of misuse influence students' adoption of ChatGPT?

Table 3 reveals a notable divergence in ChatGPT adoption patterns between students with differing levels of ethical awareness. Students classified under the high ethical awareness group ($n = 105$) recorded a mean adoption score of 152.35, compared to 163.87 among those with low ethical awareness ($n = 75$). This mean difference of approximately 11 points, considered alongside the cross-tabulated usage patterns, suggests that ethical awareness meaningfully shapes how students engage with the tool.

Specifically, high-awareness students tended to adopt ChatGPT in a supplementary capacity primarily for reference and concept clarification, whereas low-awareness students were more inclined to use it directly for completing assignments and preparing for examinations. These contrasting usage patterns indicate that students who are more conscious of the ethical implications and potential risks of misuse exercise greater deliberateness in their engagement with the tool.

The findings thus provide a substantive answer to the research question: ethical concerns and perceived risks of misuse do influence students' adoption of ChatGPT, not necessarily by discouraging use altogether, but by shaping the nature and intent of that use. Students with heightened ethical consciousness appear to engage with ChatGPT more responsibly, treating it as a learning aid rather than a substitute for independent academic effort.

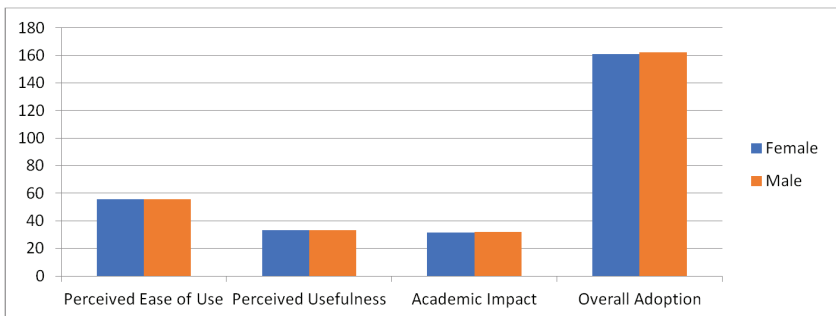
Objectives 2–5: Gender Differences in ChatGPT Perception and Adoption (H01-H04)

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine whether statistically significant gender differences existed across the four measured dimensions. Degrees of freedom (df) for all tests were 179 ($N - 1 = 180 - 1$). Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4. Independent Sample t-test for Gender Differences (df = 179 for all tests)

Sl. Dimension	Gender	N	M	SD	SED	t-value	p-value
1. Perceived Ease of Use	Female	95	55.48	6.10	0.51	0.32	0.75 @
	Male	85	55.64	6.42			
2. Perceived Usefulness	Female	95	33.23	3.21	0.25	0.22	0.83 @
	Male	85	33.28	3.09			
3. Academic Impact	Female	95	31.46	3.82	0.29	2.26*	0.025 *
	Male	85	32.12	3.38			
4. Overall Adoption	Female	95	160.90	15.15	1.19	1.53	0.55 @
	Male	85	162.27	13.70			

Note, @ = Not Significant; * = Significant ($p < 0.05$); * t-critical value at $df = 179$, $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) = 1.96



H₀₁: Perceived Ease of Use: The t-test yielded $t = 0.32$ ($p = 0.75$), indicating no significant gender difference in perceived ease of use. Therefore, H₀₁ “*there is no significant difference in the mean*”

scores of Perceived Ease of Use of ChatGPT between female and male students” is accepted. Female and male students reported comparable levels of familiarity and navigational ease with ChatGPT, suggesting that ease of access is not gendered in this population.

Ho2: Perceived Usefulness: With $t = 0.22$ ($p = 0.83$, NS), there is no significant gender difference in the extent to which students perceive ChatGPT as useful for academic purposes. Therefore, Ho2, *“there is no significant difference in the mean scores of Perceived Usefulness of ChatGPT between female and male students”* is accepted. Both groups expressed similar appraisals of ChatGPT’s utility, reinforcing the idea that perceived benefit from AI tools is not notably differentiated by gender.

Ho3: Academic Impact: The t-test produced $t = 2.26$ ($p = 0.025$, S). Since $t = 2.26$ exceeds the critical value of 1.96 at $df = 179$ and $\alpha = 0.05$, this difference is statistically significant. Therefore Ho3 *“There is no significant difference in the mean scores of Academic Impact of ChatGPT between female and male students”* is rejected. Male students ($M = 32.12$, $SD = 3.38$) perceived a marginally greater academic impact from ChatGPT compared to their female counterparts ($M = 31.46$, $SD = 3.82$). This finding may reflect differences in disciplinary contexts, prior technology exposure, or the specific academic tasks for which each group employs ChatGPT.

Ho4: Overall Adoption: The result $t = 1.53$ ($p = 0.55$, NS) indicates no significant difference in overall adoption between female and male students. Therefore, H04, *“there is no significant difference in the mean scores of Overall Adoption of ChatGPT between female and male student”* is accepted. Despite the difference observed in academic impact, the overall pattern of adoption across the full set of items remains broadly similar between genders.

Correlation Analysis

Objective 3. To determine the nature of the relationship between students' perceptions of ease of use, usefulness, and academic impact, and their likelihood of adopting ChatGPT.

Ho5: There is no significant relationship among Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Academic Impact and Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for all four variables. Table 5 presents the correlation matrix.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Matrix of Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Academic Impact with Overall Adoption

		Overall Adoption of ChatGPT	Perceived Ease of Use	Perceived Usefulness	Academic Impact
Overall Adoption of ChatGPT	Pearson Correlation	1	.623**	.581**	.470**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	180	180	180	180
Perceived Ease of Use	Pearson Correlation	.623**	1	.511**	.489**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	180	180	180	180
Perceived Usefulness	Pearson Correlation	.581**	.511**	1	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	180	180	180	180
Academic Impact	Pearson Correlation	.470**	.489**	.388**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	180	180	180	180

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

All correlations are positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Overall adoption of ChatGPT is most strongly correlated with perceived ease of use ($r = 0.623$) and perceived usefulness ($r = 0.581$), both of which represent strong positive associations. The correlation between overall adoption and academic impact ($r = 0.470$) is moderate, indicating that while academic outcomes matter to students, functional usability perceptions drive adoption more directly. Among the predictors themselves, perceived ease of use and academic impact share a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.489$), as do perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness ($r = 0.511$). Perceived usefulness and academic impact are also positively correlated ($r = 0.388$). Given these significant relationships, H_05 —“*there is no significant relationship among Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Academic Impact and Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students*” is rejected. The findings confirm that the three predictor variables are meaningfully and significantly related to overall adoption.

Objective 4: Regression Analysis (H06)

To assess the influence of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and academic impact on students’ overall adoption of ChatGPT.

H₀₆: There is no significant relationship among Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Academic Impact and Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive power of the three dimensions. Table 6 below presents the model summary.

Table 6. Model Summary for Regression Predicting Overall Adoption of ChatGPT

Predictor(s)	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate	F-value	p-value
Perceived Ease of Use	0.623	0.388	0.386	11.91	112.6	<0.001**
Perceived Usefulness	0.581	0.338	0.336	12.36	91.2	<0.001**
Academic Impact	0.470	0.221	0.218	13.58	51.2	<0.001**
Ease of Use+ Usefulness+ Academic Impact	0.641	0.411	0.405	11.66	41.3	<0.001**

** Significant at the 0.01 level

The combined regression model ($R^2 = 0.411$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.405$, $F = 41.3$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Academic Impact together explain 41.1% of the variance in Overall ChatGPT Adoption. Each predictor contributed a statistically significant and independent share of explanatory power, with Perceived Ease of Use emerging as the dominant predictor ($R^2 = 0.388$), followed by Perceived Usefulness ($R^2 = 0.338$) and Academic Impact ($R^2 = 0.221$).

This outcome provides strong empirical support for the conclusion that students' adoption of ChatGPT is driven, in large part, by how easy and how useful they perceive the tool to be. Academic impact further contributes to this prediction, touching to a somewhat lesser degree. Therefore, Ho6- "*there is no significant relationship among Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Academic Impact and Overall Adoption of ChatGPT among students*" is rejected.

Findings and Discussion

The study yields several findings that both confirm and extend the existing body of research on ChatGPT adoption in higher education. The descriptive analysis confirms a relatively high level of ChatGPT awareness among undergraduate students at Unity College Dimapur. Students across all semester levels and both genders demonstrated familiarity with the platform's core capabilities, including text generation, content summarization, and assignment assistance. This pattern is consistent with findings from Dempere et al. (2023), who observed high AI awareness among students in settings where generative tools are actively discussed. Sergeeva (2025) similarly noted that students with existing technology exposure are more predisposed to exploring generative AI tools. The prevalence of smartphone access (78.9%) in the present sample likely facilitates this awareness, as mobile devices offer a convenient entry point for engaging with web-based AI platforms.

The ethical awareness analysis offered particularly informative insights. Students with higher ethical awareness scores (≥ 40) recorded a mean adoption score of 152.35, compared to 163.87 for those with lower scores. This difference suggests that ethical consciousness acts as a moderating influence on adoption behaviour rather than a prohibitive barrier. High-awareness students do not necessarily avoid ChatGPT; rather, they use it differently—more cautiously, and with a clearer understanding of where the line between assistance and academic misconduct lies. This finding resonates with Aldreabi (2025), who described ethical concerns as a moderating rather than suppressive force in AI adoption. It reinforces the argument that targeted instruction in responsible AI use could yield more reflective and academically sound adoption practices.

The gender-based t-test results present a little distinct picture. For three of the four dimensions namely perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and overall adoption, no significant differences were found, suggesting that both male and female students engage with ChatGPT on broadly similar terms. This

is consistent with Dempere et al. (2023) and Vieriu (2025), who reported minimal gender effects in AI tool adoption. However, the significant finding for the Academic Impact dimension ($t = 2.26$, $df = 179$, $p < 0.025$) merits attention. Male students in this sample perceived a marginally stronger academic impact from ChatGPT, a finding that may reflect differences in the types of tasks for which they use the tool, or differences in disciplinary contexts across the sample. This is an area worthy of further investigation in future research.

The correlation and regression findings collectively affirm the explanatory power of the Technology Acceptance Model in an AI adoption context. Perceived ease of use ($r = 0.623$) and perceived usefulness ($r = 0.581$) are the two strongest correlates of overall adoption, consistent with Davis's (1989) theoretical predictions and with empirical work by Sergeeva (2025) and Vieriu (2025). When all three predictors are combined, the model explains 41.1% of the variance in adoption, a practically meaningful result, given the multifaceted nature of technology adoption behaviour.

Challenges and Ethical Concerns

Notwithstanding the generally positive perceptions reported, students in this study also acknowledged significant risks associated with ChatGPT use. The dominant concerns centred on over-reliance, plagiarism, and the erosion of independent thought concerns that appear across the international literature (Aldreabi, 2025; Klimova, 2025). The cross-tabulation findings make clear that ethical awareness is the key variable differentiating responsible from potentially problematic adoption. This has direct implications for institutions; rather than restricting access to AI tools, there may be greater benefit in investing in programmes that develop students' ability to evaluate, contextualize, and use AI outputs critically.

Implications of the Study

The findings carry several practical implications. For institutions, the results support the incorporation of AI

literacy modules within curricula, alongside the development of institutional guidelines that clearly delineate acceptable and unacceptable AI use in academic work. For educators, the data suggest faculty who model ethical and purposeful ChatGPT use are likely to positively influence their students' adoption practices. For students, the study's message is that perceived usefulness alone should not drive adoption, rather students benefit most when they engage with ChatGPT critically and ethically, using it to augment rather than substitute for their own intellectual effort.

Recommendations

For Higher Education Institutions

- Integrate AI literacy and responsible use modules into undergraduate curricula across all programmes.
- Establish transparent institutional policies that distinguish between permitted and prohibited applications of generative AI in assessments and coursework.
- Design learning activities that exploit AI's collaborative and inquiry-based potential, rather than those that reward rote production.

For Educators

- Pursue professional development opportunities focused on understanding and pedagogically applying AI tools.
- Discussions of academic integrity and ethical AI use in course-level instruction, framing these not as warnings but as core competencies.

For Students

- Approach ChatGPT as a learning platform rather than a productivity shortcut, using it to deepen understanding rather than to bypass it.
- Verify AI-generated content against authoritative sources, and maintain the habit of independent reasoning.

For Policy Makers

- Develop sector-wide guidelines for the ethical integration of AI

in higher education, with provisions for equitable access.

- Fund research into the long-term effects of AI adoption on learning outcomes, academic integrity, and digital equity.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how undergraduate students at Unity College, Dimapur perceive and engage with ChatGPT, with a focus on adoption patterns, gender-based differences, and the influence of ethical awareness. The findings paint a broadly positive picture of student engagement with generative AI, while also drawing attention to the ethical dimensions that shape how this engagement unfolds. Students who bring a higher degree of ethical awareness to their use of ChatGPT tend to do so more deliberately and responsibly, approaching the tool as a supplement to their own work rather than a substitute for it. Those with lower awareness, by contrast, are more likely to rely on ChatGPT in ways that raise concerns about academic integrity.

Gender differences were largely absent across most dimensions of ChatGPT perception and adoption, with the notable exception of academic impact, where male students perceived a modestly greater effect. This is a finding that warrants continued attention in future studies, particularly those designed to explore how disciplinary and task-specific factors interact with gender in shaping AI usage.

The regression analysis confirmed that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are the principal drivers of adoption, collectively explaining a substantial portion of the variance alongside academic impact. These results, grounded in the TAM framework, affirm that students' functional experiences of ChatGPT are central to whether they adopt it, and how extensively they do so.

Taken together, the findings from this study make the case for a more structured, institution-wide approach to AI integration, one that goes beyond simply permitting or prohibiting use, and instead equips students, educators, and administrators with the knowledge, skills, and frameworks needed to engage with generative AI responsibly, critically, and productively.

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LOOMS OF HERITAGE: NEGOTIATING NAGA IDENTITY THROUGH TEXTILE TRADITIONS

Kevino Krose

Abstract

This study examines the development of Angami Naga textiles as fluid representations of cultural identity, historical narratives, and socio-political discourses. The research delineates the evolution of textiles into pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial epochs, emphasizing transformations shaped by indigenous customs, colonial interventions, Christianity, and globalization. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates historical and ethnographic lenses, the study explores how textiles go beyond their practical uses, serving as symbols of social status, cultural resilience, and identity negotiation. Traditional clothing holds the silent conversations of history, telling us a lot about how cultures have changed and stayed the same. They connect the past and the present across generations and raise important questions: Who bears responsibility for the changes? How do age-old techniques survive the tide of modernity, and what silent dialogues do these fabrics hold between the past and the present? This study seeks to offer an analytical viewpoint on the nuanced aspects frequently neglected, highlighting the intrinsic reverberations present in cultural artifacts. It looks at how cultural resilience and identity are not only kept alive but also actively rebuilt and rethought. Ultimately, this paper emphasizes the lasting importance of Angami textiles as a living heritage, essential to the formation, preservation, and articulation of Naga cultural identity throughout historical periods.

Keywords: *Textile, Identity, Cultural hybridity, Heritage.*

Introduction

Textiles, far beyond their tangible form, weave together the intricate stories of human civilization. They are not just pieces of

cloth; they are living symbols full of cultural identity, historical depth, and socio-political narratives. Since the dawn of humanity's transition during the Neolithic era, when societies evolved from nomadic lifestyles to established communities with intricate social frameworks, textiles and clothing have served as significant markers of our development (Sokoly, 2017). Clothing serves as more than personal adornment; it mirrors and molds societal dynamics, acting as a powerful non-verbal communicator. Dress trends echo the enduring dialogues of identity and modernity, resonating from the intimate spaces of local villages to the expansive realms of nations; this sartorial expression is not merely aesthetic but a sophisticated language through which identities are both negotiated and performed, bearing aesthetic and political significance (Wickramasinghe, 2018). Traditional clothes tell us a lot about how cultures have changed and stayed the same over time. They bridge generations, connecting the past with the present, and raise critical questions: Who bears responsibility for the changes? How do these age-old techniques withstand the pressures of modernity? What stories do these fabrics whisper across time and space? It is within these threads that we find not only the art of dress but also the very fabric of human connection.

The research examines the Angami community in Nagaland, northeast India, investigating the role of traditional Naga textiles, both as cultural artifacts and ongoing traditions, in balancing the preservation of culture with modern adaptation, thereby shaping the formation and persistence of Naga cultural identity throughout various historical epochs. The evolving nature of Angami Naga textiles illustrates the intricate interplay between cultural identity, historical narratives, and socio-political transformations. These textiles are living artifacts that connect the past and the present. However, there is a big gap in our understanding of how colonialism, the spread of Christianity, and globalization have changed traditional textile practices and cultural expressions. The problem lies in the subtle erosion and transformation of indigenous textile traditions, which, although resilient, face the risk of cultural dilution amidst modern

influences. Additionally, the gendered dimensions of textile practices, particularly the central role of women as both preservers and negotiators of cultural identity, remain underexplored. This study aims to fill these gaps by examining how Angami textiles have not only endured but also adapted and resisted external pressures. They serve as potent symbols of cultural resilience, identity negotiation, and socio-political agency in a rapidly globalizing world. To comprehend the evolution of textiles and the negotiation of identity, the study categorizes them into three distinct periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. This categorization highlights the integrated dynamics across these eras.

- I. Pre-Colonial Period: Textiles were deeply rooted in indigenous practices, featuring traditional techniques, natural dyes, and handwoven fabrics that embodied local identities and craftsmanship.
- II. Colonial Era: This period introduced new materials, industrial production methods, and foreign influences, leading to a fusion of styles and altering textile commerce and consumption patterns.
- III. Post-Colonial Period: Marked by a resurgence of cultural pride and heritage, this era emphasized reviving traditional textile arts while embracing contemporary designs.

This paper offers an in-depth analysis of the formation and preservation of Naga cultural identity through its textile traditions. Employing a multidisciplinary framework that integrates historical and ethnographic perspectives for a comprehensive analysis of Angami Naga textiles. The historical perspective demonstrates the evolution of clothing from mere utility to a reflection of societal transformations. The ethnographic methodology contextualizes the research within contemporary cultural paradigms. This framework enables a nuanced understanding of how traditional textiles balance cultural preservation and modern adaptation, shaping Naga cultural identity across historical epochs. This research integrates both primary and secondary data to construct a comprehensive analysis. The primary data were gathered through

participant observation and engaged conversations with village elders. This approach not only facilitates the documentation of living traditions and oral histories but also emphasizes the active role and voices of the communities in articulating their historical narratives. In addition to these firsthand accounts, a thorough examination of secondary sources was undertaken, including a diverse range of academic books, journal articles, and magazines.

Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) introduces key postcolonial concepts such as hybridity and the Third Space. Hybridity refers to the fusion of indigenous and foreign cultural elements, which destabilizes the idea of a pure, singular culture. The Third Space is a conceptual area where these hybrid interactions occur, enabling new forms of identity and cultural expression. Bhabha's work challenges traditional narratives of cultural dominance and emphasizes the dynamic, evolving nature of cultural identities. Incorporating Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial ideas, in Naga textiles, this hybridity manifests through the fusion of traditional patterns with materials and motifs introduced during the colonial era, the spread of Christianity, and the pervasive influence of globalization. This intermingling results in textiles that are dynamic and reflective of both continuity and transformation. Examples include the integration of synthetic fibers alongside traditional weaves and the incorporation of contemporary symbols, which illustrate an adaptive culture resilient to colonial impositions. The concept of the Third Space refers to an abstract domain where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined. Within the Naga context, this space emerges where traditional aesthetics and modern influences converge. Naga textiles serve as mediums through which identity is continuously reshaped, reflecting elements of resistance, adaptation, and the reimagining of gender roles. The Mekhala Movement exemplifies this dynamic, blending traditional attire with modern fashion sensibilities to challenge colonial stereotypes and redefine gender norms. Examining Naga textiles through the lenses of hybridity and the Third Space reveals how cultural identities are not static. Instead, they are fluid, shaped by ongoing cultural dialogues,

historical intersections, and contemporary reinterpretations.

Furthermore, scholars like Wickramasinghe (2003), Heidari and Ravindranath (2014), Svensson (1992), Temjensonang (2017), Fanon (1967), and Damhorst (1990) emphasize the significance of clothing as a medium of power and identity. Naga shawls and attire transcend their functional purpose, serving as symbolic representations of social status, cultural heritage, and personal narratives. The colonial influence, as analyzed by Wickramasinghe (2018) and Shils (1981), transformed textile practices into sites of cultural negotiation, harmoniously blending tradition with innovation. Additionally, Aris (2007) underscored that dress functions as both a tool of colonial control and a medium of resistance, aligning with the primary objective of the Mekhala Movement and AWO (Angami Women Organization), which embodies cultural defiance and pride. Collectively, these theories unveil Naga textiles as vibrant manifestations of identity, adaptation, and resistance.

Nagas on the eve of Independence

The historical trajectory of the Naga people is deeply interconnected with pivotal events that reshaped their socio-cultural fabric. This narrative begins with the Treaty of Yandabo on February 24, 1826, when Burma ceded claims to Assam and Manipur, granting British India access to the Naga hills (Oppitz et al., 2018). This event set the stage for the British annexation in the 19th century, followed by key milestones such as the Battle of Kohima during World War II and the conversion of approximately 80% of Nagas to Christianity (Joshi, 2000). The arrival of colonial administrators and missionaries marked the onset of profound transformations. Local communities found themselves subject to external forces that altered their traditional lives. Colonization brought about land occupation, changes in village structures, and the erosion of cultural practices. These effects were magnified during World War II and the famine of the 1930s and 1940s, highlighting the Nagas' vulnerability to global events beyond their control (Thomas, 2016). Central to this transformation was the influence

of Christianity, introduced by American Baptist missionaries. The discourse surrounding Naga material culture evolved significantly. Before the 19th century, traditional attire reflected indigenous customs. However, British colonial rule introduced Western sartorial influences, as seen globally among colonial subjects. Prior to the advent of colonialism and Christianity, the Nagas did not distinguish between converts and non-converts. They all adhered to a unified religious belief system known as *Tsana* or *Nanyü*¹. With the advent of colonialism and the influence of Christianity, it has significantly shaped the perspectives of new converts. This transformation instilled distinguishable traits in their worldview. Converts often regarded non-converts as primitive, a perception deeply rooted in colonial narratives. These narratives framed indigenous cultures within a civilizational hierarchy, perpetuating a sense of cultural superiority among the converted (Thomas, 2016). Despite these shifts, traditional textile practices like loom weaving have shown remarkable resilience. Influenced by Gandhi's Swadeshi Movement, which promoted self-reliance and domestic production, these practices endured. Although traditional materials have largely been replaced by synthetic yarns, the patterns and techniques continue to thrive, reflecting a blend of heritage and contemporary innovation.

Homi Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory, particularly his concepts of hybridity and the 'third space,' offers insights into Naga weaving practices. The fusion of traditional motifs with modern materials exemplifies cultural hybridity, illustrating the Nagas' adaptability and resistance to colonial narratives. This dynamic space fosters a fluid cultural identity where heritage and modernity coexist, ensuring the enduring legacy of Naga traditions amidst evolving socio-political contexts.

Gendered Dimensions and the Politics of Dress

Clothing serves not just as a personal statement but as a symbol of power dynamics. Power manifests in various forms, and dress stands out as an influential tool that has historically shaped societies and ideologies. The strategic use of clothing

by both colonial powers and anti-colonial leaders illustrates its significant role in the broader discourse of power. This is evident in the choices made by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. By rejecting Western attire and adopting the simple khadi loincloth, Gandhi made a profound political statement. His attire embodied resistance against British colonial rule, promoting self-reliance, simplicity, and the rejection of foreign goods. The khadi cloth became more than just fabric; it transformed into a symbol of Indian identity and autonomy, directly challenging the colonial narrative. In the tumultuous political landscape of India during the 1920s, dress held a pivotal role in fostering unity and resisting foreign dominance. During the First Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-21), Gandhi boycotted foreign goods and championed the Swadeshi movement. He redefined the norms of dress by wearing loincloths to meet and negotiate with the British viceroy, Lord Curzon. This act of defiance offended Curzon's sense of sartorial respectability, leading him to refer to Gandhi as a "half-naked fakir" and describe his dress as "nauseating" and "humiliating" (Nandy, 1987, in Wickramasinghe, 2003). Despite such criticism, Gandhi's contributions significantly influenced the continued existence of the traditional loin-loom machine. The significance of the traditional loin loom has endured, maintaining its value and relevance over time.

The acceptance of Western and European cultural influences had distinct implications for Indian men and women. Women's attire carried political significance, reflecting the control exerted by nationalist and patriarchal institutions. Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) highlights how national identity manifests through control over women, asserting that modernity held different meanings for men and women. Women's bodies symbolized national and cultural identity, with their dress pivotal in projecting this image, positioning them as pillars of traditional values. In the context of the Nagas, significant changes have transpired over time. Naga textiles are woven exclusively by women, showcasing an art of traditional culture actively practiced using the traditional loom. Gender played a pivotal role in shaping sartorial identities. Prior

to the late 1990s, women were generally expected to wear their traditional wrap-around attire both within and outside their homes. Conversely, many men had begun adopting Western-style shirts and trousers, although they occasionally retained traditional elements such as draped shawls. The delayed political participation of Angami women correlates with their continued adherence to traditional dress, reinforcing conservative gender norms. In contrast, men's swift adoption of Western attire paralleled their more prominent public roles. This dichotomy reflects broader patriarchal structures where clothing not only signifies gender roles but also reinforces them within societal hierarchies.

Globally, colonial powers strategically utilized fashion to colonize the hearts and minds of individuals in their conquered lands. In Africa, dress provided a powerful arena for colonial relations to be enacted and challenged, serving as a method of cultural expression and resistance (Aris, 2007). This cultural imposition was not merely aesthetic; it was a deliberate act of influencing the colonized, reinforcing the colonizers' superiority and control. In Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Western clothes were a status symbol to the extent that Europeans began to feel that native dress, when worn ostentatiously, symbolized disobedience or contradicted submission to superior colonial power and Christian demeanor (Wickramasinghe, 2003). In India, particularly Bengal, foreign clothing was seen as impure and removed by men before entering their homes. Although Europeans were admired for their scientific and educational achievements, Indians were critical of other cultural aspects and selective about adopting them. However, unlike Ceylon, a vast proportion of the rural population and almost all the female population in India continued to dress predominantly in Indian styles throughout British rule (Wickramasinghe, 2003). In the Angami context, traditional attire among women remained dominant despite British influence, with cultural pride fostering the continued use of indigenous dress. This reflected selective adoption of foreign elements, much like in Bengal and among Indian women. Dress has transcended its basic functions, acting as a powerful medium through which authority

is both asserted and resisted. The evolution of attire reflects broader societal shifts, encapsulating the intersections of power, identity, and cultural resilience.

Negotiating Identity: Transformation of Sartorial Practices

Traditional textiles play a pivotal role in fostering cultural awareness and safeguarding cultural heritage and identity. The process of identity formation is shaped, transformed, altered, and reproduced (Ozdil, 2021). The impact of socio-cultural transformations on the arrival of British administrators and Christian missionaries has led to changes in traditional textiles across various spheres of influence. Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory on hybridity aligns perfectly with the goals of this study, which aims to investigate the various stages of the period, as detailed below. The historical development of Angami attire illustrates a multifaceted tapestry interwoven with socio-cultural, political, and colonial influences. The study rigorously examines the evolution of Angami sartorial practices through three distinct phases: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras.

I. Precolonial Period (Before 1832): Indigenous Identity and Textile Traditions

In the precolonial period, Naga clothing practices were deeply intertwined with environmental adaptability, cultural traditions, and limited trade interactions. This era highlighted a self-sufficient textile culture where traditional craftsmanship thrived. The materials used were locally sourced, and garments served purposes beyond mere utility; they symbolized cultural identity, social status, and personal achievements. Clothing had a lot of symbolic meaning, showing differences in tribe, community, gender, and social status. Specific textiles, such as the *Zhadi Pfe* and *Zhatho Pfe* shawls, were emblematic of merit-based accomplishments. The *Zhadi Pfe*, adorned with motifs like elephants, tigers, the sun, and the moon—representing strength and wisdom—was reserved for men who had performed multiple feats of merit. In contrast, the simpler *Zhatho Pfe* shawl marked

the wearer's transition into social acknowledgment through initial Feasts of Merit. These textiles served as tangible narratives of social hierarchy, spirituality, and community values, with status shawls clearly distinguishing between status and non-status individuals. Strict cultural norms governed the usage of these garments. For example, only men who demonstrated valor in battle were permitted to wear the warrior's cloth, while the elaborate 'rich-men's' cloth was reserved for those who had contributed to the merit feast. It was strictly prohibited to wear a cloth belonging to another community or to interchange the patterns on shawls, emphasizing the deep cultural and societal significance woven into each garment. Violating these norms was seen as a transgression of customary laws and moral codes, leading to appropriate retribution (Sangma, 2018). Thus, not all villagers had the opportunity to don certain traditional clothes due to their profound cultural significance. Furthermore, clothing specifically designed for young boys and girls, men and women, and older individuals clearly signified age and gender, as these garments were traditionally worn by specific demographics. The system of wearing these textiles was highly restricted, reinforcing societal roles and identity. Anthropologically, as Tarlo (1996) suggests, clothing in precolonial societies often served as a "second skin," intrinsically linked to the wearer's identity. For the Angami, garments were expressions of cosmological beliefs and societal roles, demonstrating how dress codes were both restrictive and empowering within traditional frameworks.

II. Colonial Period (1832–1947): Syncretism and the Disruption of Traditional Textiles

The onset of British colonial rule marked a transformative epoch, introducing Western fabrics, tailoring techniques, and fashion ideologies. Colonialism was not merely a political phenomenon but also a cultural imposition, particularly evident through clothing, as the introduction of Western attire symbolized both modernity and subjugation, creating a sartorial dichotomy between colonizers and the colonized (Tarlo, 1996). During this

period, significant transformations occurred. Colonial officials supported American Baptist missions in the Naga hills to pacify indigenous tribes, while missionaries relied on colonial security to spread the gospel; figures like Major Jenkins in the 1830s, Butler, and Johnstone in the 1870s played key roles in this collaboration (Thejallhoukho, 2024). The initial conversions to Christianity were accompanied by the abandonment of traditional ceremonial customs and rituals, which had a direct impact on the Naga's attire, as certain garments were associated with rituals and indigenous religious beliefs. Christian missionaries established mission schools, and sanctions against traditional clothing were applied to all Naga students enrolled in these schools (Joshi, 2000). They were prohibited from wearing traditional attire and ornaments and were encouraged to wear Assam-style dhotis or Western-style shorts and shirts. The influence of education on the transformation of attire persisted. By the 1920s, women had already begun to wear blouses and skirts over their sarongsⁱⁱ, while men had adopted shirts and shorts. Simultaneously, dynamic changes were occurring, as many Christian converts preferred to wear Western clothing (Joshi, 2000). Nevertheless, they could also be observed wearing garments that were traditionally worn only by those who had earned the right by taking a human head in raids or offering a series of feasts of merit (Joshi, 2000). During my fieldwork in Jakhama village in August 2025, Iⁱⁱⁱ encountered a deeply poignant and challenging situation that underscores the complexities of cultural transformation and identity. I was informed by the villagers that the remarkable shawl, *Zhatho pfe*, which is originally plain white in color and traditionally more discolored due to organic products, no longer seems to be valued. This is because of the impact of Christianity and the changes that have occurred. Consequently, individuals who previously owned these traditional shawls have opted to discard and incinerate them. When inquired about the rationale behind discarding and burning these garments, they expressed that they no longer perceive them as significant shawls. They attributed this shift in perception to their Christianization, leading them to devalue clothing associated with

Nanyu or *Tsana*. Clothing has implicitly or explicitly colonized intergenerational minds, leading to confusion and the erosion of values embedded in traditional textiles. In addition, the impact of colonialism and westernization has led to the development of stereotypes associated with the wearing of the *Mekhala*^{iv}. The arrival of colonials and Baptist reformers portrayed the Nagas as “naked, savage, barbaric, and uncivilized” based on their clothing and cultural practices. From the works of colonial ethnographers like Hutton (1921), Mills (1922), Haimendorf (1939), and Elwin (1969), it is evident that the traditional life of the Nagas was often portrayed as primitive and in contrast to Western life and culture. These ethnographers recorded societal structures, rituals, and customs, often analyzing them through a colonial framework that highlighted a linear transition from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilised.’ Men’s adoption of Western suits, shirts, and trousers signified their assimilation into newly established administrative, educational, and political domains governed by colonial authorities. This change showed that the strategy was able to adapt to new power structures. In contrast, many Angami women retained traditional attire, particularly the *Mekhala*, demonstrating cultural resilience amidst evolving societal norms. This gendered disparity in clothing styles highlights the stringent societal expectations imposed upon women, consistent with Tarlo’s (1996) analysis that women’s dress frequently serves as a battleground for cultural purity and national identity. This spirit of evolution is palpable in Angami textiles, where change has not only resulted in the diminishing of traditional cultural values and their associated significance but has also engendered enhanced adaptability. Consequently, women have emerged as powerful agents in shaping identity between tradition and modernity through their sartorial practices—an influence that remains largely unexplored, despite its enduring significance.

III. Postcolonial Period (1947–Present): Globalization, Continuity, and Cultural Revival

The postcolonial era ushered in an era of introspection, where the Angami community grappled with reclaiming its cultural identity amidst the forces of globalization. Globalization has significantly shaped the fashion preferences of younger generations. Western fashion, accessible through media, social platforms, and global brands, appeals to the youth due to its modernity and versatility. This preference often leads to the decline of traditional attire like shawls and Mekhalas, which are now reserved for special occasions. Western fashion's association with modernity and progress overshadows the cultural heritage of traditional clothing. Therefore, clothing became an essential medium through which historical consciousness and contemporary identity were negotiated. In the post-colonial era, the liberation of traditional textile restrictions occurred through the intermixing and interchanging of designs and patterns between communities, resulting in contemporary textiles. "Most of the Nagas and tribals in Northeast India are trying to keep alive their traditional costumes by way of modifying them to suit the contemporary style of dressing and designs" (Pillarson, 2022). Globalization continues to shape hybrid identities in textiles, blending traditional patterns with contemporary fashion aesthetics in today's dynamic world. Modern reinterpretations of merit shawls, for instance, now symbolize academic achievements, merging historical prestige with present-day educational milestones. This evolution illustrates how fashion adapts to societal changes. For instance, during festivals or other significant events, individuals with high esteem and respectable occupations, such as officers, are typically invited as chief guests. A notable transition in sartorial practice is the emergence of chief guests draping status shawls during these events. However, status achievement has been reinterpreted in a contemporary context, with the aim of surviving and thriving within the evolving social landscape. Similarly, waistcoats and coats are undoubtedly Western attire that was likely brought along with the arrival of

colonials. In the context of clothing, they have undergone a significant transformation. While traditional men's attire was once overshadowed by Western clothing, the rise of political movements and a renewed emphasis on cultural preservation led to a revival. Today, traditional motifs are seamlessly integrated into Western-style coats, waistcoats, and neckties, reflecting a unique fusion of heritage and modernity. These traditional waistcoats exemplify a resilient cultural identity, embodying both historical significance and contemporary relevance. This adaptation reflects Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) perspective within postcolonial theory, highlighting how postcolonial fashion frequently reclaims traditional motifs as expressions of cultural identity and resistance. This phenomenon is evident in the contemporary global fashion scene, where the interplay of cultural heritage and modern design fosters a dynamic, hybrid aesthetic.

However, contemporary anthropological research challenges the early narratives, highlighting the dynamic and complex nature of Naga societies. Modern scholars argue that the Nagas possessed sophisticated social systems, intricate political organizations, and rich oral traditions that resist simplistic categorizations. Additionally, the Nagas' interactions with colonial forces were not merely passive; they actively negotiated, adapted, and sometimes resisted external influences, maintaining distinct cultural identities.

Negotiating Identity: Women's role in cultural preservation and revival

From sourcing fabrics to weaving and decision-making, women have been integral in navigating and negotiating cultural identity. Their pivotal role as agents of change is evident in the revival of traditional attire and textile practices, seamlessly integrating heritage with contemporary expressions. Through these efforts, women not only preserve cultural identity but also strengthen and redefine it for future generations. This agency is exemplified by figures such as Theyiesinuo Kreditsu, whose advocacy for Indigenous Naga textiles, especially the Mekhala, has

spurred a powerful cultural resurgence. Her personal journey in the Mekhala movement started in the year 2017^v. Kreditsu's efforts have not only supported local artisans but have also reinforced cultural identity among the Naga people. Her efforts have inspired women-led initiatives and movements like Mekhala Wednesday, which leverages social media to encourage women to embrace their heritage by wearing Mekhalas to work, fostering a strong sense of community and cultural pride (Roots and leisure, 2018). This movement originated from the Nagaland Civil Secretariat in Kohima, encouraging women to embrace their heritage and wear the Mekhala to the workplace every Wednesday (Akangjungla, 2024). As Khokar (2023) highlights, the Mekhala has become a symbol of resilience, confidence, and the strength of women in society. It represents more than aesthetic value; it embodies historical narratives and the vital role of women in maintaining these traditions. Prominent women's organizations, such as the Angami Women Organization (AWO)^{vi} and its affiliated units (WAWO, SAWO, NAWO, and CAWO), have been instrumental in this cultural negotiation. These organizations actively promote textile traditions, educate younger generations about their cultural significance, and engage in preservation efforts.

Recently, the AWO organized an event on 10th March 2026 under the theme titled "*Utsiepfumia zho Phisie: Khakeshü Kemevi*," which underscores "the significance of our ancestors' legacy and its benefits". A session has been organized with a particular focus on the correct methods of wearing Angami traditional attire, emphasizing gender-specific draping techniques for shawls and the wrapping of Mekhalas by Angami women. Through these initiatives, women assert their agency not just as preservers of culture but as dynamic negotiators of identity, blending tradition with modernity to foster a strong, culturally rooted society. Therefore, AWO stands as a powerful force, not only preserving cultural heritage but also significantly influencing decision-making and policy-making related to textiles. It ensures the thriving of textile traditions in the modern world while steadfastly preserving their originality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the complex interrelationship between Angami Naga textiles and cultural identity, traversing pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. Traditional textiles emerge not merely as utilitarian objects but as dynamic carriers of historical narratives, markers of social status, and expressions of resilience amidst socio-political transformations. The research highlights how colonialism and globalization have influenced sartorial practices, leading to both the erosion and adaptation of indigenous designs. Yet, this very evolution has fostered a renewed cultural consciousness, evident in contemporary revivalist movements like the AWO and Mekhala Wednesday, which underscore the importance of preserving traditional artistry while navigating modern identities. The resilience of Angami textiles is rooted in their role as living heritage - sustained through intergenerational knowledge, oral traditions, and communal practices. They continue to symbolize not just aesthetic heritage but also the socio-political agency of the Angami people. By critically examining these textiles through historical and ethnographic lenses, this study contributes to a broader understanding of cultural sustainability within indigenous communities. As Angami society continues to evolve, traditional textiles remain vital conduits for cultural pride, historical memory, and identity negotiation, reinforcing the enduring significance of material culture in shaping and reflecting the complexities of human societies.

End Notes

ⁱ Nanyü or Tsana, the ancient religious system of the Angami Nagas, served as the spiritual foundation of their community. The advent of Christianity brought about a significant shift, leading the Angami people to identify themselves as either Nanyümia (non-converts) or Kehoumia (converts). Despite these changes, there are still nanyümia in villages like Viswema and Jakhama who continue to uphold the Nanyümia tradition. They have formed organizations to preserve their ancestral beliefs, maintaining a vital connection to their historical and cultural roots.

ⁱⁱ A sarong is a rectangular piece of cloth worn by wrapping it around the waist or body. They are widely used in Indonesia, Malaysia, India (especially coastal regions), Sri Lanka, Parts of Africa and the Pacific Islands. They are very similar with Mekhala, the traditional wrap skirt.

ⁱⁱⁱ This paper is co-authored, reflecting the collaborative effort in developing the theoretical framework, conducting the analysis, and structuring the overall paper. However, the data collection was conducted exclusively by me, the first author, through ethnographic fieldwork. Consequently, I have utilized the singular first-person pronoun when describing specific experiences and observations gathered during this fieldwork. This distinction is intended to clarify the authorship of the ethnographic data while acknowledging the collective contributions to the paper's broader academic context.

^{iv} Mekhala, a traditional wrap skirt worn by Naga women, derives its name from the Assamese word "Mekhola chaddor." In this context, the word "Mekhala" will be used for the naga traditional wrap skirt.

^v Kreditsu utilizes Instagram popularly known as 'Mekhalamama' as a powerful platform in promoting and preserving Northeast textiles. Her inaugural Instagram post in 2017 mark the commencement of her mekhala movement journey.

^{vi} The Angami Women Organization (AWO) plays a pivotal role in contemporary civil society. As the head of other affiliated units, AWO comprises Western Angami Women Organization (WAWO), Northern Angami Women Organization (NAWO), Southern Angami Women Organization (SAWO), and Chakhroma Angami Women Organization (CAWO).

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A STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PFUTSERO TOWN, NAGALAND

Vedulu Tetseo

Abstract

Mental illness is an important public health concern that may disturb many individuals at some point in their lives, particularly adolescents who are just starting to navigate the struggles of life. Therefore, early identification of mental health issues is crucial to monitor timely treatment and reduce the signs of mental disorders. Pfutsero town, being one of the prominent towns in the Phek District with the highest number of secondary school students, was selected for the present study to determine the mental health condition of secondary school students studying in Pfutsero town, and also to find out the variations in the level of mental health between genders, types of family, and parental status. In the present study, the 'Mental Health Scale' designed by Sushma Talesana and Akhtar Bano (2017) was utilized, covering a sample size of 163 secondary school students. The collected data were analyzed using Frequency distribution tables, Mean, Standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA. The findings point out that the mental health conditions of secondary school students in Pfutsero town range within moderate and above levels. Furthermore, no remarkable variations were observed in the mental health levels of students based on gender, type of family and parental status.

Keywords: *Mental health, Gender, type of family, parental status, secondary school students.*

Introduction

In the schooling system, the secondary school stage is considered most important as the courses at this stage introduce the students to various disciplines and their scopes of further study. The secondary stage is also a terminal stage for many students, as some start acquiring productive work skills and some leave the

school because of socio-economic circumstances (NCERT, 2005). According to the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), the age group of 14-18 years old usually enters the secondary stage. This age group is also considered as adolescence period, which is the most critical and difficult period of life because the development of self-identity starts in this period (Erikson, 1968). Stanley Hall (1904), who studied the developmental process of adolescence, also conveyed the period of adolescence as the period of storm and stress, confusion and opposition. He also wrote that in this stage, children are random and not reliable, sentimental, insecure and unpredictable. They are not mature enough to handle issues and responsibilities. According to The Morung Express (2026), Pongen states that approximately 46% of adolescents experience mental health issues, and about 50% of mental problems start emerging around the age of 14. Therefore, the mental health of the adolescents should be protected and nurtured. By possessing good mental health, an individual can effectively adapt to their environment and contribute meaningfully to the progress and well-being of themselves, their family, and society (Lemkau, 1955).

With digital technology around us in this information age, many youths are addicted to smartphones, which also affects their mental health (Sharma et al., 2023). Students with mental health problems often demonstrate low levels of adjustment in school, impaired concentration, poor scholastic accomplishment, inadequate social competencies and possess behavioral disorders, such as dependence on substance and premature school leaving (Valdez et al., 2011; Suldo et al., 2014; Farina et al., 2021). Individuals experiencing mental health problems gain nothing beneficial from unsolicited, uninformed advice or from offensive content such as internet memes (Pace, 2018). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) states that adolescence is a developing and formative phase. So, when they are exposed to hardship, abuse or brutality, many adolescents become vulnerable to mental illness, and that hinders their education and development of appropriate behaviour. WHO (2025) further stated that if the

mental health of adolescence is not addressed appropriately, it will extend to adulthood, limiting the advantages of leading a good life. Pace (2018) expressed that a major concern today is that many individuals fail to recognize mental health issues for what they are. Rather than understanding them, they rely on stereotypes and preconceived notions to judge others without knowing their circumstances, simply because it is the easier thing to do. Therefore, mental health issues need to be identified first, and based on these issues, proper guidance, encouragement and support need to be given to adolescents for the wellness of mental health.

Mental health means how an individual responds, adapts, and adjusts to the challenges of life. A person is considered to have good mental health when their mentality is working effectively, and there is no emotional imbalance. Overall, a person is happy with life and can understand the hardships of life. Mentally healthy people are confident and optimistic about the future. They also have trusted companions, can maintain good relations with many people they come across, and they can generally mingle well with everyone they interact with, both in their personal and professional lives. They can handle their problems calmly, with fears and anxieties that remain within normal limits. They channel their anger in a manner that is socially appropriate. They possess emotional maturity, stability and balance. Mentally healthy people remain calm and composed, reflecting inner confidence, security, and a feeling of personal accomplishment (Bhatnagar et al., 2008). Hadfield (1952) defines good mental health as the complete and peaceful functioning of an individual's nature. Menninger (1963) expressed mental health as an individual's ability to adapt effectively to environmental demands and maintain harmonious relationships with others, thereby achieving optimal functioning and overall well-being. It encompasses emotional stability, intellectual alertness, socially responsible behavior, and a positive and balanced disposition. He also stated that the fundamental characteristic of mental health is one's capacity for adjustment. The higher the level of successful adjustment, the better an individual's

mental health will be. Conversely, poor mental health results in lower adaptability and increased internal conflict. A mentally healthy person can understand new situations and modify their behavior accordingly. Such a person maintains a positive and compassionate outlook on life, recognizing that challenges are a natural part of human experience. Rather than avoiding them, they confront difficulties with courage and resilience. According to Ladell (1951), mental health is the capacity to adjust well to the environment while remaining rational and practical. A person with poor mental health has low endurance, self-belief, emotional maturity, adaptability, judgment capacity, dignity, aspirations, self-transformation and mental strength. They also lack a reasonable doctrine of life, awareness of their surroundings and physical health, and tend to live in a world of illusion. Boehm (1955) said that mental health can be described as a state of social adjustment and functioning that aligns with societal expectations and provides personal satisfaction. According to WHO (2022), Mental health is an important component of overall well-being. It represents a state of mental well-being that helps an individual to monitor the difficulties of life, recognize their potential, acquire knowledge and implement it in their work and make purposeful contributions to society. Mental health is an essential human entitlement and plays an important role in personal well-being, community strength and socio-economic progress.

Review of Related Literature

Keyho et al. (2019) found that in Kohima, Nagaland, a larger group of students in adolescence had mental health concerns. Patel (2020) evaluated the mental health of secondary school students using a Sample of 60 boys and 60 girls. The 'F' test was applied for statistical analysis, and the results indicated that boys possess a higher mental health level than girls. Törrönen (2021) interviewed 74 respondents to examine the psychological well-being of young adults. The researcher used the techniques of participatory action research. The interview schedule comprised 71 statements, and the data were analyzed through SPSS software and

excel sheet. The researcher conveyed that male students displayed stronger indicators of psychological well-being compared to female students. Sakthivel et al. (2021) examined the mental health problems of high school students and found that female students' mental health is higher than that of male students. They also observed that there is no remarkable difference in the mental health of high school students based on parental relationship. NCERT (2022) surveyed the mental health of secondary school students, where 2,21,261 secondary school students from 28 states and 8 union territories participated in the survey. The analyzed data predicted that most of the school students' mental health is good. Bhat & Jan (2023) examined the mental health of adolescents and found that female adolescents' mental health level is higher than that of male adolescents. Jacob et al. (2024) study indicates that the range of mental health of students studying in secondary school is high. Husain and Khan (2024) explored the mental health of students at the secondary level and examined the influence of gender on this variable. The study analyzed a sample size of 200 students from New Delhi, and the findings revealed a significant gender variation in mental health, with female students exhibiting higher levels of mental health compared to boy students. Mahanta et al. (2025) study declared that a wide proportion of Indian school-age youth, estimated between 3.8% and 50%, experience mental health challenges, most frequently involving depression, anxiety, excessive internet use, and behavioural issues. Duwarah and Sharma's (2025) findings exposed that most of the students studying in class IX have a moderate level of mental health, and no considerable differences were found between male and female students.

Significance of the Study

Pfütsero is one of the towns of Chakhesang tribe, located in Phek District of Nagaland, India. It is situated at the heart of the district. So, the inhabitants come from different villages across the district (Wikipedia, 2024). The town is seen as a pioneer, setting both positive and negative examples for others to follow in various

domains, including economic activities, lifestyle patterns, and most notably education. In recent years, the people of Pfutsero have made significant progress in the field of education. However, the town, being still backwards, adolescents face challenges such as limited access to quality education, healthcare and employment. Traditional support systems are weakening while modern pressures (academic, social media, peer competition) are rising (Department of Planning and Coordination, Government of Nagaland, 2009). These socio-economic factors increase vulnerability to stress, anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Although studies on the mental health of adolescents have been conducted in other states and in Kohima district, Nagaland, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, no studies have been conducted specifically focusing on the mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town. This lack of area - specific data underscores a notable research gap. The adolescents studying in secondary schools are the backbone of society; their mental well-being influences the future workforce and social harmony. Mental health, if not addressed promptly, can have cascading effects on individual well-being, family stability, and community development. Therefore, early identification, awareness programs, school-based interventions, and accessible counselling services are crucial to prevent these outcomes (Talesara and Bano, 2017). In this context, the appraisal of the mental health status of the secondary school students studying in Pfutsero town is important. The output of the study will be beneficial for various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, school administrators, policymakers, and mental health counsellors, to decide appropriate mechanisms to improve the well-being of the students.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are outlined in the following:

1. To examine the level of mental health among secondary school students in Pfutsero town, Nagaland."
2. To investigate the mental health condition of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, Nagaland, based on:

- a) Gender - male and female
- b) Type of family- nuclear family and joint family
- c) Parental status - together, single parent, Remarried, one dead and both dead

Hypothetical Framework of the Study

1. There will be no significant variation in the Mental health status of secondary school students in Pfutsero town based on gender
2. There will be no significant variation in the Mental health status of secondary school students in Pfutsero town based on the type of family
3. There will be no significant variation in the Mental health status of secondary school students in Pfutsero town based on parental status.

Methodology

For the present study, the descriptive survey method has been employed. Using a stratified random sampling approach, 163 secondary school students were taken as the study sample. The researcher implemented the 'Mental Health Scale' framed by Sushma Talesara and Akhtar Bano (2017). The data collected were analyzed with the help of microsoft excel. Preceding the analysis, data normality was checked using skewness and kurtosis values (skewness = -0.386: kurtosis = 0.004), which denote that the data were approximately normally distributed. Therefore, parametric tests, in particular the t-test and ANOVA, were used, in conjunction with descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, to facilitate data interpretation.

Examination and Interpretation of the Collected Data

Data examination and interpretation were done in line with the objectives of the study. The results obtained have been systematically presented in the following

Table – 1: Frequency distribution table of mental health data of secondary school students

Range	Frequency	Percentage %	Level
170 & above	10	06	Extremely Good
155 to 169	20	12	Very Good
140 to 154	52	32	Good
120 to 139	52	32	Moderate
105 to 119	15	09	Poor
91 to 104	11	07	Very Poor
90 & below	03	02	Extremely Poor
Total	163	100%	

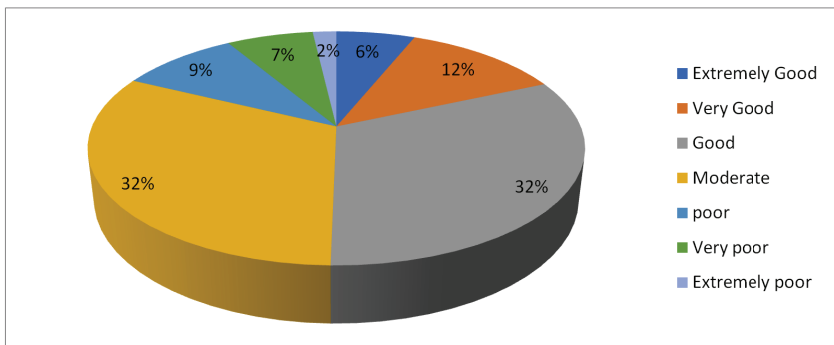


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of mental health levels of secondary school students.

Based on Table – 1 and Figure 1 which presents the frequency distribution of the norms for interpreting the mental health levels of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, shows that 6 % of students exhibit an extremely good level of Mental Health, 12 % a very good level, 32 % a good level, another 32 % a Moderate level, 9 % a poor level, 7 % a very poor level, and 2 % an extremely poor level of Mental Health. Overall, the majority of secondary school students in Pfutsero town (82%) fall within moderate and

above levels of Mental Health and 18% fall below the moderate level. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of mental health among secondary school students in Pfutsero town is within Moderate and above levels.

Table – 2: Comparison of Secondary School Students' Mental health based on Gender.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' - value
Male	80	137.73	22.36	0.52@
Female	83	135.65	19.61	

Note: "@": denotes results at the 0.05 level of significance as statistically not significant.

Table – 2 depicts that statistically there is no significant contrast in the Mental Health of male and female secondary school students in Pfutsero town, since the calculated t-value (0.52) is less than the table t-value (1.96) at 161 df and 0.05 level of significance.

Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there will be no significant variation in the mental health status of secondary school students based on gender is accepted. This finding indicates that the mental health status of male and female secondary school students does not contrast.

Table – 3: Comparison of Secondary School Students' Mental Health based on type of family

Type of family	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' - value
Nuclear family	143	136.37	21.59	0.62@
Joint family	20	138.85	16.09	

Note: "@": denotes results at the 0.05 level of significance as statistically not significant.

Table – 3 indicates that statistically there is no significant contrast in the mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town with respect to type of family, namely nuclear and joint families. This is evident as the calculated t-value (0.62) is lower than the tabulated t-value (1.96) at 161 df and the 0.05 level of significance.

Therefore, the formulated null hypothesis stating that there will be no significant variation in the mental health status of secondary school students based on type of family is accepted. Hence, it can be declared that the mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town does not contrast significantly based on family type.

Table – 4: Comparison of Secondary School Students’ Mental health based on Parental status.

Parental status	N	Mean	SD	Sources of variation	Sum of square	df	Mean of 'F'-value square
Together	138	138.08	20.24	Between groups	2172.50	4	543.125
Single parent	8	131.87	26.88	Within group	69069.26	158	437.147
Remarried	2	116.5	17.68	Total	71241.77	162	1.242@
One dead	15	128.93	23.26				
Both dead	0	0	0				

Note: “@”: denotes results at the 0.05 level of significance as statistically not significant.

Table – 4 reveals no significant contrast in the mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town with regard to parental status, since the total calculated F-value (1.242) is less than the critical F-value (2.43) at 4 and 161 df and the 0.05 significant level.

Therefore, the drafted null hypothesis, formulating that there will be no significant variation in the mental health status of secondary school students based on parental status, is accepted. Consequently, it can be declared that mental health conditions of

secondary school students in Pfutsero town, regardless of their parental status, are similar.

Results of the Study

Based on the preceding analysis and interpretation of the data, the results are summarized below:

1. The mental health conditions of secondary school students in Pfutsero town is at a 'moderate and above' level.
2. The mental health conditions of male and female secondary school students in Pfutsero town have no considerable difference.
3. The mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, whether they come from a nuclear or joint family, has no statistically considerable difference.
4. The mental health conditions of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, regardless of their parental status, are at a similar level.

Discussion of the Results

The current study highlights that secondary school students in Pfutsero town, Nagaland generally exhibit a moderate and above level of mental health. This result is consistent with the findings of NCERT (2022), Jacob et al. (2024), and Duwarah and Sharma (2025) studies, which indicate that the range of mental health of students studying in secondary school is at a moderate and above level. But it contrasts with the result of Keyho et al. (2019), who showed that there are mental health concerns. This result may be attributed to students' access to resources such as counseling provided by some teachers and church leaders, as well as extra-curricular activities organized in the schools. This study also got the result that The Mental health conditions of male and female secondary school students in Pfutsero town have no considerable difference. This result is in sync with the result of Duwarah and Sharma (2025) and in contrary to the result of Sakthivel et al. (2021), Bhat & Jan (2023) and Husain and Khan (2024) studies who exhibits girls to have higher mental health

status than boys, and Patel (2020) and Törrönen (2021) studies output depicts male students to have higher mental health level than female students. However, the reason for this present study result may be attributed to the fact that both male and female secondary school students in Pfutsero town have equal access to education and support. This present investigation also found out that the mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, whether they come from a nuclear or joint family, has no statistically considerable difference. The reason for this finding may be because in both types of families, educational values, cultural norms, and community values are emphasized. This research also found that the mental health conditions of secondary school students in Pfutsero town, regardless of their parental status, are at a similar level. This result aligns with the finding of Sakthivel et al. (2021). The reason may be due to students having similar access to educational opportunities in schools and spiritual guidance from church teachings, in addition to the moral instruction provided by their parents or guardians.

Educational Implications

Basing conclusions on a single study may not be sufficient to propose educational implications. However, considering the findings of the present research, certain implications can be suggested to promote and improve the mental health of secondary school students within the school setting in Pfutsero town.

1. Mental illness is a significant public health concern that is likely to affect most individuals at some point in their lives, especially adolescents who have just started stepping into the ocean of life and are confused, and may result in distorted personalities, maladjustment, and poor decision-making. Therefore, early recognition of the mental health status of school students should be carried out to seek timely treatment and prevent the progression of mental disorders.
2. In the present study, the mental health status of secondary school students in Pfutsero town is found to be good and satisfactory. However, coping mechanisms or mental health

programs should be organized in the schools regularly to promote emotional resilience and overall well-being and to help the students become strong, positive, and well-prepared to fight the potential mental health challenges.

3. Different types of co-curricular activities should be conducted in schools, such as sports and physical activities, art and craft programs, music and performing arts, mindfulness and meditation sessions, debates and public speaking, clubs and societies, community service and volunteering, peer support system, leadership and team-building activities, stress-management workshops, and others.
4. Schools should organize guest lectures by experts on specialized topics such as emotional intelligence, positive psychology, and anger management for promoting resilience to mental health issues.
5. WHO (2005), during the European Ministerial Conference, emphasized that without good mental health, there is no health. In alignment with this perspective, NEP 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020) underscores the necessity of addressing students' mental well-being as an integral component of holistic education. The policy advocates for the provision of nutritious meals, the appointment of trained social workers and counselors, and active community participation within the schooling system. These measures collectively aim to foster the development of morally upright, emotionally resilient, and socially responsible individuals in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Therefore, schools in general and particularly the schools in Pftusero town should prioritize the implementation of these recommendations to enhance students' resilience and overall well-being.
6. Parents, guardians and teachers play a vital role in promoting and maintaining the mental well-being of children. Therefore, parents of the students should be encouraged to participate in school-based mental health programs, and all teachers should attend these programs without exception.

Conclusion

Adolescents in Secondary schools are a vital part of society's future. Schools play an important role in shaping their character and mental health, which will later influence the future workforce and social cohesion. However, if mental health issues are not addressed promptly, they may affect individual well-being, family stability, and the community. In this context, the assessment of the mental health status of secondary school students in Pfutsero town was taken up. The result of the study is encouraging, as the level of mental health of secondary school students in Pfutsero town is at moderate and above levels. The study also revealed that there is no significant variation in the mental health of these students based on gender, type of family, or parental status.

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UNCOILING PATRIARCHY: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF KARNAD'S PLAY NAGA-MANDALA

Limala Longchar

Abstract

This paper offers a feminist critique of Karnad's play *Naga-Mandala*, revealing the play's depiction of women's representation, desires, aspirations, and resistance within a patriarchal framework. This study offers a close examination of the female protagonist Rani and her journey, through which we explore how Karnad destabilizes and strengthens the identity and mark of women within the larger context of the patriarchal system. By centring Rani's journey from subjugation to symbolic empowerment, the study explores how patriarchal domestic spaces restrict female desire, agency, and selfhood. Karnad's reworking of oral legends becomes a site where silence, obedience, and marital fidelity are culturally inscribed upon women's bodies, while male authority and suspicion operate as tools of control. The serpent-lover motif serves both as a metaphorical critique of patriarchal inadequacy and as a subversive force that enables Rani's self-articulation. Through the interplay of myth, performance, and gendered power, *Naga-Mandala* destabilizes rigid binaries of purity and transgression, highlighting the complex negotiation between tradition and female subjectivity. While Rani's final status remains ambivalent—caught between reverence and confinement—the narrative foregrounds her emerging voice and the possibility of resistance within patriarchal frameworks. This paper argues that Karnad neither completely liberates nor confines his heroine; instead, he exposes the paradoxes of cultural femininity, inviting a re-imagining of women's agency in Indian socio-theatrical discourse.

Keywords: *Gender, feminism, oral tradition, patriarchy, chauvinism, Naga.*

Introduction

The play *Naga-Mandala* (1988) weaves a rich tale in Kannada folklore. Here, Karnad provides cognizance of the personal lives of the women in the village. He ingenuously uses ‘flames’ as a metaphor for women, representing their diverse lives in the village. The flames gather like women at midnight, sitting together and narrating tales about the private lives of couples and reveling in all the findings that they can collect. Karnad’s portrayal of women, especially Rani, the focus of this study, is skillful. The world that Rani lives in is patriarchal, where the menfolk make all the decisions and women are supposed to be subordinate, submissive, and silent followers. This paper analyses the ordeal faced by the protagonist Rani through the lens of Indian feminist writers, thinkers, and social reformers. Unlike feminism in the West, Indian feminism is more community-centered, focusing on family, religion, and caste, while the class hierarchy gains strong momentum, influencing the lives of women in a Hindu-dominated society.

Influence of Kannada Folklore

Naga-Mandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman. The play manifests Karnad’s concerns with the issue of gender identity. Karnad’s plays are not just mere imitations of life but representations of existential predicaments. Karnad has merged two plays into one, making it a tale of love, yearnings, and psychological manifestations. The character of the Naga, inspired by the King Cobra from Kannada folklore, employs magic realism in the play. The Naga has often been interpreted as the manifestation of the repressed urges and needs of a neglected wife. Rani lives a life that is dictated by fiction and half-truth.

The play begins with a man who hears female voices outside the temple. The voices are made by the flames; they enter in multitudes, giggling and talking to each other in female voices, and they spend the whole night together gossiping. These flames stand for female society. Each flame is assigned the role of a female storyteller, yarnning stories and sharing them with others while

bringing new experiences and observations. The flames are the alter egos of women with no ambition, desire, or passion to lead an honourable life. In fact, the flames are androgynous in nature, which, to a certain extent, represents the collective subconscious of the female mind. The flames are identified with young and 'vocal' women; Karnad has used their knack for storytelling as an efficient device. This is particularly true for bringing in a female context and laying forth the foundation of female content in the seemingly 'male-oriented' folktales, which is also the basis of this paper.

The flames narrate different stories owing to their own personal experiences; their tales are vibrant and intriguing. The New Flame brings an odd story about an old woman who suspects her husband of an illicit affair. This becomes the reason for her despair; she hallucinates and sees a woman coming out of her husband's room. To counter that, she weaves a story and a song that transform into a woman and a sari, respectively. The woman wrapped in a sari becomes a story that must be told to someone to avoid choking to death; the flames are incapable of passing the story, as they cannot hear it due to their non-human form. In the 'Author's Introduction,' Karnad points out how these oral tales' function in the family:

The older women in the family narrate these oral tales, especially when children are being fed in the evenings in the kitchen or being put to bed. The adults present on these occasions are also women. Therefore, these tales, though directed to children, often serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family (Karnad, 2002, p. 22).

These stories provide women with a platform to express their perspectives and experiences, which the patriarchal structure of society may not allow. In Karnad's view, these stories represent a unique understanding of the women's reality around her and the lived counterpoint to the patriarchal structures of classical texts and institutions. Therefore, Rani's predicament in the main plot of the play can be viewed as Karnad points out in the 'Author's

Introduction':

The position of Rani in the story of *Naga-Mandala*, for instance, can be seen as a metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles—as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night... (Karnad, 2002, p. 17).

The story of the flames also remarks on the “paradoxical nature of oral tales” because

They have an existence of their own, independent of the teller and yet live only when they pass from the possessor of the tale to the listener. The status of a tale becomes akin to that of a daughter, for traditionally, a daughter too is not meant to be kept at home too long but must be passed on (Karnad, 2002, p. 17).

A woman's life is akin to a story in the play, intended for transmission. A woman has her existence, but it is only complete when she is with her husband. Like the stories of the flames, when she is kept a secret, she transforms into a mystery, as demonstrated by Rani's case, which leads to various interpretations and exposes her to supernatural forces. Karnad has made use of 'the Story' and 'the Flames' as extended metaphors to prepare the mind of the audience for what lies next, a device that is generally used in folk theatre.

In the main plot of the play, Karnad has made use of 'gender' as something that stops a woman from being the best version of herself, failing to create an identity and free herself from the web of patriarchy. To remove these socio-evils, he laboriously makes use of myths and folk tales. He ventures to show through the story of the female protagonist, Rani, that her identity formation is curbed by patriarchy due to her failure to see the full potential of herself. Simone de Beauvoir agrees with the view that “in patriarchy the young girl does not accept the destiny assigned to her by nature but by society, and yet she does not repudiate it completely.” Thus, she is 'divided against herself' (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 295). In India, a woman has very high endurance; she succumbs to the needs of

her husband and family, at times bearing injustice too. Karnad is concerned with the pitiable condition of women in a patriarchal society, with limited privileges, while for a man, it is in excess.

The complex socio-cultural history of India, marked by caste, religion, and economic disparity, intertwines with the Indian feminist movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar laid the foundation of women's empowerment, enabling the future generation of women to fight and demand what is rightfully theirs. The seeds of Indian feminism were sown during the colonial period, which introduced new ideologies and value systems, challenging the orthodox Hindu society. The British colonization brought Western liberal ideas like individual rights and freedom, which impacted some groups of Indian society. These social reformers had to break the taboo and stigma surrounding married women and widows in Hindu society, which Karnad skillfully unravels through the character of Rani in the play, who undergoes the hazing ritual of shame and humiliation to prove her innocence.

Patriarchy is considered a force that has enslaved women for ages. These chains are powerful yet discreet. Karnad's portrayal of the agony and misery faced by Rani supports the paradoxical predicament of a young girl enslaved in the web of patriarchy. She perceives her husband in two distinct roles: as a lover at night, represented by Naga in the guise of Appanna, and as a stranger during the day, who is her actual husband. Act I of the play introduces the story of Rani to us:

A young girl. Her name...it doesn't matter. But she was an only daughter, so her parents called her Rani. Queen. Queen of the whole wide world. Queen of the long tresses. For when her hair was tied up in a knot, it was as though a black King Cobra lay curled on the nape of her neck, coil upon glistening coil (Karnad, 2002, p. 27).

Rani, a queen in her own right, has very little freedom in choosing her life partner; her parents arrange a suitable groom for her, leading to an arranged marriage. Her father finds her a groom, Appanna, which means 'any man,' a rich orphan. Like most young

girls, Rani enters the marriage with many hopes and expectations, only to face neglect and disappointment. The couple is awkward from the beginning; neither of them can relate to the other. The very first dialogue between them reveals the future of Rani:

APPANNA. Have we brought in all the bundles?

RANI. Yes.

APPANNA. Well, then, I'll be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go (Karnad, 2002, p. 27).

Rani is perplexed by the attitude of her husband, who pays no attention to her, goes out, shuts the door, and leaves. She runs to the door, only to find it locked. He shows indifference to her by leaving her alone. She is always by herself, in despair, questioning her fate. At times, she talks to herself. She creates a world of imagination to keep herself happy and preoccupied at the same time. She indulges in a reverie to calm her trouble. She asks Appanna in her reverie, "Where are you taking me?" (Karnad, 2002, p. 27). To which she gets an answer from the eagle in her dream: "Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles" (Karnad, 2002, p. 27). Rani, obviously, is mentally a child craving parental affection. She longs for her parents and utters. 'Oh Mother!' and 'Oh Father!' in her sleep.

In the play, Appanna exhibits the typical male chauvinist traits of one who does not care for his wife and forces her to comply with him. He treats her like a non-human entity and displays utter contempt for her, which eventually becomes the cause of Rani's mental anguish and forces her to escape to her parents. He confines her to the four corners of their house; she is a prisoner in her house. Through Rani's adversity, Karnad shows how a woman becomes a victim of patriarchy, mirroring the real situation of women trapped in marriage, bound by the patriarchal culture.

Karnad explores the ordeal that young Indian brides are oblivious to regarding their rights within a family through the relationships of Rani and Appanna. This line captures Rani's confusion about her role as a wife: "I am his wife already" (Karnad, 2002, p. 34). In an Indian family, the wife carries out all the orders of her husband; she has a multifaceted role as a maid,

cook, and cleaner with no reward, and she is expected to carry on all these roles without any questions. They are victims of tyranny, as they are not even allowed to form social circles, a fact that is clear in Rani's situation. Sarat Babu comments on Rani, "Solitary confinement... symbolises the chastity belt of the Middle Ages, the reduction of women's talents to housework and the exclusion of women from enlightenment and enjoyment" (Babu, 1999, p. 239).

Niketa Menon's *Seeing Like A Feminist* questions the sexual division of labour, which has nothing to do with 'sex' (biology) and everything to do with 'gender' (culture). She cites examples of low-paying jobs like nursing and teaching, which, in comparison to other white-collar jobs, are part of domesticity and nurturing work that come naturally to women. Menon counters that jobs should never be limited to gender, as women are just as capable as men of taking up different professions. Menon notes that a significant number of professional chefs are men, which leads women to prioritize unpaid domestic work over paid employment; this professionalization of 'women's work' results in a monopoly. Menon's point of contention here is the ideological assumption and not the biological difference that leads to division in labour. It's ironic how women are not meant for labour-intensive work, yet they carry heavy loads of water and firewood, grind corn, and carry heavy loads in mining and construction work. Menon further talks about industrial advancement, marked by reduction in heavy work and better wages, but it is always men who receive training to use new machinery, and the women are left out, segregating men and women by creating division in the labour process and wages, where it's the other sex that takes the lesser pay while catering to the domestic chores at home, which is unpaid, undervalued, and most of the time invisible.

Kurudavva in the play acts as a mediator for Rani's problem, offering her the larger piece of magical roots, saying, "Feed him this larger piece of root" (Karnad, 2002, p. 36). Rani initially consents to get the affection of her husband, which she abandons due to her sense of guilt. Advised by the Story, an allegorical character at

the beginning of the play, she pours the aphrodisiac into an anthill in front of her house, which is consumed by the King Cobra. The King Cobra is called Naga, who, after consuming the paste, falls in love with Rani, who shapeshifts himself into Appanna, enters Rani's household through the drain in the bathroom, and pitied by Rani, showers paternal affection. This brings a sense of relief and comfort to Rani, who has never experienced the true affection of her husband.

The different versions of Appanna by day and night confuse Rani. She says to the Naga, "You talk so nicely at night. But during the day I only must open my mouth, and you hiss like a...stupid snake" (Karnad, 2002, p. 42). We see a complete reversal of the roles here. Appanna seems to possess more snake-like qualities than the Naga, who, at least in his dealings with Rani, exhibits more humane traits. The gentleness of Appanna is incomprehensible to Rani, but Naga often assures her that it's not a dream, nor is it a figment of her imagination; he even says that if his contradictory behavior upsets her, he'll stop coming. This kind of affection and tenderness reassures Appanna's love for her.

Naga tends to exhibit a chauvinistic attitude; he asserts to Rani, "I am afraid that it is going to be like that during the day, like this at night. Don't ask me why" (Karnad, 2002, p. 43). This commitment to Naga proves to be a milestone for him. He succeeds as a male chauvinist, demonstrating that women are foolish and ignorant; this also reflects how patriarchal society suppresses women's intellect and allows men the freedom to act as they wish. Mary Wollstonecraft expresses, "These fellow creatures are deprived of education and are rendered weak and wretched" (Wollstonecraft, 2004, p. 65). Beauvoir also supports the same view and asserts, "To see things clearly is not her business, for she has been taught to accept masculine authority. So, she gives up criticizing, investigating, judging for herself, and leaves all this to the superior caste" (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 604).

The masculine world seems to Rani to be a transcendent reality, an absolute. Naga continues to visit Rani at night until she becomes pregnant. She says to Naga, "I am pregnant... There is a

baby in my womb...we are going to have a baby” (Karnad, 2002, p. 52). This news did not have the desired effect on the Naga; he did not seem happy. In fact, he is worried that his identity will now be exposed. He urges Rani to keep the pregnancy a secret from him as long as possible, much to Rani’s disbelief, which further shows Rani’s helplessness. The real Appanna is beyond shocked to see Rani’s inflated belly and spares no effort in accusing her of adultery. He throws her to the floor and says, “Aren’t you ashamed to admit it, you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is. Who did you go to with your sari off?” Rani, who is equally shocked, says, “I swear to you I haven’t done anything wrong!” (Karnad, 2002, p. 52).

Naga provides redemption to Rani when she is summoned by the Elders of the village. She assures Rani everything will be right and advises her, “When you face the Elders, tell them you will prove your innocence. Say you will undertake the snake- ordeal” (Karnad, 2002, p. 53). This episode of the ordeal undertaken by the elders demonstrates that women have no place in matters of judgment. All these are byproducts of patriarchy, which always works in favour of men. Judgements were and are still given by men, and women are not given fair trials. Rani’s pleas are met with protest and treated trivially.

In the snake-ordeal, the Naga tries to correct things for Rani and ensures that she gets a fair trial. Rani herself chooses to undergo the process; she was given the choice to pull red-hot iron or plunge her hand in boiling oil, and she chooses her own, to which the elders also consent. She puts her hand in the anthill and says:

Since coming to his village, I have held by this hand, only two...My husband and...this cobra. Yes, my husband and this King Cobra, except for these two, I have not touched any of the male sex. If I lie, let the Cobra bite me (Karnad, 2002, p. 58).

This chastity test undertaken by Rani goes in her favour. The cobra didn’t bite her to the utter surprise of all the onlookers; it slid up her shoulders and spread its hood gently like an umbrella over her

head, swaying its hood and forming a garland around her neck. The elders in the village exclaim that she is innocent, saying, “A miracle! A miracle!”, “She is not a woman. She is a Divine Being!” Appanna falls motionless at her feet and says, “Forgive me, I am a sinner. I was blind...” (Karnad, 2002, p. 59).

Appanna also undergoes his share of plight. He is fully aware that the child is not his; the ideas seem to torment him. The elders in the village encourage him that he is very fortunate to be in the service of this miraculous lady; it is only the chosen ones who get such opportunities. We see a reversal of fate here. Appanna is now subdued and compelled to comply with Rani, indicating a shift in their roles that helps contextualize the gender study. However, he is in a conflicted state:

What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even Nature should laugh at me? I know. I haven't slept with my wife. Let the world say what it likes. Let any miracle declare her goddess (Karnad, 2002, p. 60).

The hurt and mortification of the male ego are noteworthy here. A woman is justified through the intervention of divine forces. The same elders have no admonition for Appanna. This elimination of patriarchal attitude in Appanna by his readily favoring and submitting to the wish of his wife, which was absent in the beginning of their marriage, reflects the emergence of justice in the man-woman relationship at the end of the play. Menon mentions the movie *Mrityudand*, played by Madhuri Dixit and Shabana Azmi. Azmi's husband's impotence is not hidden to anyone in the village. Azmi becomes pregnant through an affair, leading to an interrogation by her sister-in-law, played by Dixit, who questions her about the identity of the child's father. Shabana's nonchalant reply, 'Mera' (mine), dispels the patriarchal connotation associated with a child who comes from a woman's womb. Becoming a mother is a 'biological fact' while fatherhood is 'a sociological fiction'; this knowledge creates “permanent anxiety for patriarchy, an anxiety that requires women's sexuality to be strictly policed” (Menon, 2012, p. 7). Rani is placed in the same frame of mind as

Shabana's character in the movie; the question about the child's father is absurd, as she has only had her husband by her side. She can never imagine having another man by her side.

Uma Chakravarti's essay "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" mentions Raja Ram Mohan Roy's fight for sati along with Mritunjay, who proactively supported the plight of Hindu women. Roy's questioning of 'pativrata dharma,' which is devotion to the husband, and the ingenuous use of the 'Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya' episode provide a strong instance from the past to reinforce that women pursued the highest goal of the Hindu religion. Roy further opines that the pandits distorted the Shastras over time, establishing a narrative that portrayed women as having a lower status, in contrast to the high regard in which women were held during the Vedic age.

There are multiple works that attest to the high position of women during the Vedic period. Chakravarti mentions writers like R.C. Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who accurately portrayed women as educated, exercised free will in choosing partners, and even contracted second marriages and acted as a helpmate to the husband, accounting for their bravery in war, which aligned with the Kshatriya value of courage and bravery that made no demand on the menfolk, which the western writers failed to capture.

Chakravarti further illuminates the equal position of women during the Vedic era, discussing the character Shanti from Bankim's novel *Anandmath*, who dons the guise of a sanyasi (mendicant) and fights beside her husband. This dramatizes the golden period of women in the Vedic era, who were at par with their husbands and who fought for the liberation of the country, providing a model of womanhood for women in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also mentions work by female writer Ramabai, who contradicted the golden era of the Vedic period, reducing the glorious Aryan woman to a myth, associating her with men who would forcefully take women as their property, suppressing her freedom, which is like Rani, whose individuality, freedom, and independence rest with her husband.

Rani's triumph in the snake-ordeal mirrors the increase in feminist consciousness during the post-independence era, where women proactively demanded their rights, marked by several landmark legal reforms towards addressing gender-based violence and protecting women's rights. In 1975, the report *Towards Equality* was published by the Committee on the Status of Women in India, which brought to light the low women's participation in the workforce, high rates of maternal mortality, and the blatant practices of dowry and child marriage, which prompted the new generation of feminists to address these issues through activism and policy change.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's *Naga-Mandala* emerges as a powerful uncoiling of patriarchal social order through the prism of folklore and feminist consciousness. The play exposes how marriage, chastity, and silence are culturally enforced as moral obligations upon women, rendering female agency both feared and suppressed. Yet, in reinscribing myth with a woman-centred narrative, Karnad enables a subtle yet significant rupture in patriarchal discourse. Rani's journey—from confinement and innocence to self-assertion and symbolic autonomy—reveals the fluidity and complexity of feminine resistance within traditional frameworks. Her transformation is not depicted as a complete liberation but as a negotiated assertion of selfhood, suggesting that empowerment in deeply patriarchal systems is gradual, contextual, and layered. By positioning folklore as a site where suppressed voices acquire power, Karnad interrogates gendered hierarchies while honouring the cultural spaces that shape identity. Ultimately, the play underscores the paradox of women's existence in patriarchal societies—revered yet restricted, mythologized yet marginalized—and invites a re-evaluation of female subjectivity in Indian narrative and performance traditions. Karnad's dramaturgy thus serves not only as a critique but also as a transformative space for imagining new possibilities of feminine agency.

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INDIGENOUS GAMES: SOCIETY AND GENDER ROLES

Kelesünnü Mekro

Abstract

Gender is a social structure constructed on the attributes of the roles played by men and women. It has been culturally designed to act as a socializing tool of the society rooted in the traditional scheme of masculinity and femininity. The paper presents the Angami and Chakhesang tribe featuring their cultural distinctiveness. Attention is given to an ethnographic study of the gender role in society, with motives to be performed through indigenous games. Focus is given on the traditional games that are specifically associated with gender taboos, male and female role expectations, division of masculine and feminine activities. An intriguing factor the study brings to light is that the traditional taboos were strictly adhered to in society, even in the day-to-day recreational pursuits by both young and old, men and women, the fear of going against taboos and the reverence the people have for it. Gender role division in traditional games itself has a rich ancestral cultural heritage. The knowledge keepers from the study area were the chief informants during the groundwork analysis. In conclusion, the study delves into the influence of gender roles in society through indigenous games

Keywords: *feminine, gender, gender role, indigenous games, masculine.*

Introduction

Gender is a cultural component with cultural expectations that involve the role of masculinity for men and femininity for women. The assignment to play within the norms of society and how individuals interact. It is a social structure constructed on the characteristics of the roles to be played by men and women. According to Giddens (Risman, 2004, p. 432), social structures not only act on people: people act on social structures and social

structures are created not by mysterious forces but by human action. Gender itself was a structure and would not disappear when men and women were distributed across the variety of structural positions that organize our social world. The concept of gender is always present in the process of daily interactions; thus, it becomes difficult to ignore the gender roles existing within the social norms. According to Jhpiego (Yuliasari et al., 2024, p. 117), gender refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being men and women. It encompasses the roles, responsibilities, and expectations placed on individuals based on their perceived sex within a society. A social framework deeply implanted in the society that has existed since the beginning, with different societal roles, with the ability to choose their gendered paths within social-structural constraints. Through social interactions, women are held accountable to society's expectations, playing the gender roles. Risman mentions that while we do gender in every social interaction, it seems naïve to ignore the gendered selves (Risman, 2004, p. 430) and goes on to mention how social structure creates social behaviour.

Gender role is a long process. According to Sulistyowati (Nasution et al., 2023, p. 21), gender roles can be influenced by various factors, including biological, social, and cultural factors. In the distant past, gender roles were traditionally and culturally positioned, where customs and traditions determined individuals' thinking and activity. According to Wilson, "Cultural expectations are the messages we internalise about what is and is not acceptable, given the standards of behaviour and cultural norms put forth by our social systems. Social groups come in many forms, including our family, community, friends, workplace, and even affinity groups. The role determines suitable actions of men and women during social interaction, where men are expected to be brave, courageous, charismatic, possess power and status, while women are expected to be careful of their activity, submissive, obedient, gentle, nurturing, expressively emotional and largely confined to household roles.

Indigenous games have always been an important socializing tool in society. Throughout its existence, it has acted as an important mechanism for reinforcing gender roles and reflecting social norms and behaviours in the social context. In the distant past, Indigenous Games functioned in the depiction of societal gendered history, culture and the dimensions of life explored with different roles played by men and women. This elaborates on how society functions in communicating and directing individuals' minds and behaviour, and the roles to be performed. The knowledge of Indigenous games, a cultural heritage of the society, can be taken as a representation of gender-based activity, strictly adhering to the social concepts of masculinity and femininity.

The research paper presents the ethnological accounts of gender stereotypes through indigenous games. The manuscript depended on both the primary and secondary sources; however, heavily inclined towards primary data through oral narration. Interviews with the knowledge keepers from the community were the chief source of information. The sample areas taken are the Angami and Chakhesang tribes of Nagaland, situated in the northeastern part of India. The two tribes share a boundary alongside the *sidzü* river, a tributary of the Doyang River. Though Chakhesang speaks mostly of *chokri* and *khezha*, a common dialect called *tenyidie*, which is spoken by the Angamis, is generally the medium of communication between the two tribes.

Indigenous Games and Gender role

In the distant past, traditional games acted as an important instrument to follow the customs and norms of society. Indigenous games are played for recreation, to spend leisure time, for status and honour, to guard and protect the village from wildfire or enemy, to show manhood and to establish friendship. Thus, the activity takes place with a different motivation. Almost all games are culturally gender oriented, and society adheres to the norms with respect and honour. Popular traditional games are played during the year-end and continue till the third month of the new year. Rituals are performed by the elder of the village for

the commencement and ceasing of popular games and it becomes taboo once observed. Male gender, who is the eldest man or his male subordinate takes responsibility in performing the rituals of the society.

Games associated with masculinity and honor

Naga traditional Wrestling – Traditionally called *kene* by the Angamis and *küine meno* by the Chakhesangs. It is considered the most honorable game. The significance of the game is name and honor. Naga traditional wrestling is originally played by the three Tenyimi groups comprising of Angami, Chakhesang and Zeliang. It is a men's game since the ancestral era. To be a participant, the player should have masculine features, well built, mighty, strong and brave, courageous with tactics and agility. Elders of the village, particularly men examine the physical features of young boys whether he possesses the characteristics deem fit for the game to represent the society. Adolescent boys who have attained maturity in terms of manhood around 14 to 15 years of age is introduced to the game and is taken in consideration if he has the potential to be a man of honor for the society.

The day of wrestling is fixed by a village male elder who is probably the eldest man. On the day of wrestling, two elder men of the village who had good dream the night before or with good names is selected from both groups to act as mediator. It is only through the two elder men that challenges are made from one wrestler to the other as open challenges were not allowed. The two elder men keeps standing the whole day. If at all he wants to take break another male member from his group is appointed to take his place. It is also mentioned that the father or family male members of the wrestler stands whenever the wrestler is about to play. Some fathers even stand the whole day without having a sit.

In olden days the might and glory of the village is known from the numbers of well-built wrestlers and the number of times wrestlers brings laurels to the village. Thus, the pride of the society depends on men.

Switch grass striking game – The game called '*luda*' and

played by the men folk of four southern Angami villages, Kezoma, Kidima, Viswema and Jakhama belonging to one ancestral root. The significance of the game is to examine one's strength as compared to the preceding years. It is played with a plant called 'panicum virgatum' commonly known as switch grass. Menfolk take numbers of switch, held in their hand and assemble, dividing themselves into two group. The switch is strike to the ground and points are given according to the distance covered. To play the game, judges of any number are appointed to give verdict. However, these judges should always be men no matter the number. The game is also found in some Chakhesang villages played only by men.

Sojo – Men of the village are considered the guardian and protector for the Angamis. The significance of the game is that men in group can act together whenever fire erupts in the village or if there is enemy invasion. Menfolk in their youth are encouraged to stay back and guard the village since wildfire are prone to destroying village as every house is made of thatch and there are frequent enemy attacks. The game makes use of a half-sliced log, kept in an erect position which acts as the target and every player takes a stone to shoot at it.

Death men's stone – The activity was practice by the Chakhesang community. In local term it is called *sarütsü pü'* which means carrying of death men's stone. It is a form of honor to the death by the men of the society. The activity involves men in their prime competing who among them will be able to carry the heaviest as well the biggest stone picked from the river to the house of the deceased. The game involves showcasing one's masculinity in strength and might

Feet stomping – It is called *odo rhi* by the Angamis *kazie* by the Chakhesang tribe. An action to showcase might and strength played by the men of the society. The player demonstrates by displaying a loud stomping with his feet after jumping and utters the line "*whi, I am my father's bull*". The bull signifies majestic, strength and bravery. Thus, the status of the male offspring is elevated by this very line.

Paddy harvest competition – A competition among the society where every household compete to get the most bountiful harvest. The household with the most bountiful harvest gives feast to the whole village. The father of the house who is the male head of the family is entitled to wear *therükadiara* which symbolizes prosperity and generosity after hosting the first phase of the feast. With the completion of the second phase, he is entitled to wear the shawl called *lichira*. After the completion of each feast, stone pulling takes place and a stone is erected in the name of the male parent in places where people often navigate. This was practice by the Chakhesang.

Rüinguhi – The Chakhesang called it *rüinguhi* meaning spear war. Warfare is also taken as an activity of sportsmanship and considered the first considered popular men's game through indigenous knowledge keepers. The activity requires masculinity features and characters. One must be brave, courageous, good target. During ancestral time, there was hardly any friendship, peace even between two neighboring villages. So, a form of warfare is conducted with the use of spear from where the name itself is derived from. It is an open challenge that involve village versus village and includes the participation of the village men. The activity is held in an open field. Both parties will assemble at the said location on the said day which is decided by the elders of both the village. The party that gets more heads is declared the winner and the man with the most head is given the title with the elders saying “...*pü püzho vete, püka püroma rote, pü phülo therizho pü vete...*” meaning he is entitled to wear all the costumes and ornaments of a warrior. The excellent warriors are described as *therimave* meaning warriors of war. Only *therimave* are entitled to wear head ornament made of hornbill feather which is forbidden for any ordinary men. During stone pulling for monolith or pulling of log/stone for village gate, only those entitled the hornbill feather as ornament in the head stands upon the stone/log while the ordinary men pull the rope tied to it. Women are not entitled to stand upon the stone when it is pulled. The hornbill head ornament usually consist of one feather (as it is hard to find).

No ordinary men are allowed to sleep in the bed of the warrior. If any common men wear hornbill feather or sleep in the bed of the warrior without being entitled it is a belief that evil force takes the course upon him as he is unworthy of the feather. The person with maximum head is said to have earned *yokvükra* which is highly respected. Warfare between Kikruma and Phesachodu the two neighboring village was always held in Kerüra a river between the two said villages. It is a game to showcase the might of one's village through its warriors. Thus, the might of the village depends on the male warriors.

War cry – it is called *meki* by the Angami and *mütshrü* by the Chakhesang. War cry is a form of yodeling done only by men. War cries are given in honor of victory after war, death of man of high status and festivals. It also indicates open challenge to the enemy group. War cry signifies bravery, strength and respect. It gives security to its women and children, the assurances that their men are there to protect and is ready to face adversaries come what may.

Games inclined towards femineity

Women in the traditional society are expected to be engaged with household chores and field work. It is their duty to serve the male members of the family. Women in the society is given less opportunity to explore and have less say. The activities available for women does not require masculinity features like strength, bravery, weighted physic, courage etc. According to the sayings of elders, forefathers forbade women from playing as physical gaming activities does not suit girls who will play the role of future wife and mother. Also, too much exposure to outdoor activities, girls are believed to lost femineity in them. A justification to why there is very less game for women.

Thüvlo – Played with the dices of monkey ladder beans locally called *thüvlo* or *tholi* or *tholiki* by the Angamis. The only game most popularly and commonly played by the womenfolk of the society. The significance of the game is to celebrate sisterhood and for recreational purpose. The game is played either with the

dices lined up or the dices kept in an erected posture and the players takes turn to shoot at it. Men also participate whenever they wish to.

Tsünelü – The game is more feminine as it requires less physical activity. Played by Chakhesang women with small pebbles fetched from the river. It is played in an open space after harvest. Players are divided into groups basing in *khels* or peer groups or friend circle. In this game stones are erected according to the number of players. Each player takes one pebble each to shoot one erected stone, and the groups take turns to shoot. The aim of all the players is to shoot at the erected stones accordingly involving head to toe.

Cüva – It is played by Chakhesang women folk. Small slit bamboo that could possibly land on the back of the palm is taken for the game. In the game, the player will try putting the given slit bamboo to the back of the palm and try catching single piece of the slit bamboo. If the player catches more than one piece, then she is considered out of the game. And other players continue the game if all the slit bamboo is caught by the players. The player that catches maximum slit bamboo is considered winner of the game.

Kerie rüthu – Played by Angami women but mostly unmarried women. A game to skip with rope. Two players will hold both ends and bounce the rope. While other players will stand in the middle of the rope and try jumping from slow motion to hot pepper jumps where the speed of the jumps increases. If any player trip on the rope, she is considered out of the game. The game is usually played in the month of January and February. However, it stopped in the late 1960's.

Discussions

Societal stigma - Three to four days ahead of wrestling, group of boys numbering four to five in their youths will give message to every household. In the message given by the boys, any pregnancy outside wedlock in the house are asked to come forward and clarify the name of the father, since it is considered a bad omen to the wrestlers of the society if the name of the father

is not cleared. So, every family makes sure that no unmarried daughters or sisters of theirs is pregnant or if so, name of the father is said and if at all the father of the unborn is not known, any male member of the family or relatives takes up the responsibility to be the father of the child. In case, no men own up to be the father, the unmarried pregnant women are banished from the society for the wrestling period. Also, any child or person without father is asked to go out of the society on the wrestling day and is asked not to return until wrestling gets over.

Social taboos - It is taboo to keep unfinished weaving textiles weaved by the womenfolk in the house on the wrestling day. So, women are asked to either keep the unfinished weaves outside the village gate or to dismantle it. In Porba, a Chakhesang village, wives or mothers of wrestlers are not allowed to carry neighbors or relatives' babies or children as it is believed that it weakens the spirit of the wrestlers as babies and children are not as strong like adults as compared. Women can be spectators but are not allowed to enter the area where the wrestlers are sitting nor enter the wrestling arena. In the preparation of the switchgrass for the game, it is taboo for women to touch or walk over the switch in the process of preparation, as it is a belief that, it will bring bad omen to the players and the groups. They will either lose the game or their switch will keep breaking in the game. Even the spectators are always male be it young or old. Women are not allowed to even go near the players. It is taboo for southern Angami women to yodel as it is a belief that if a woman yodels it brings bad omen to her brothers. The belief that brothers of women who yodel become less masculine and lack characteristics needed to be called 'a man' losing any challenge with their peer groups and unfit to be a warrior.

Status of women - Indigenous society was patrilineal in character. Men possess greater authority than women. When the male head in the community or family authorizes any movement or activity, it is obeyed willingly with reverence as it becomes authoritative in nature. Indigenous Games practiced in the distant past indicate there is partial gender acknowledgement. For

instance, carrying of 'death man's stone', shawls of recognition for men *therükadiara* and *lichera* and stone erection in the name of a man who holds a high status portray that men have a higher status than women. Traditional society patronizes the male head of the family rather than both the male and female heads who plays equal roles. In any household achievement, where the mother also plays an important role, credit and entitlement is always given to the male head of the family. Also, the father is given more glory and honour in the case of his sons' achievements rather than the mother. A female member of the house is a silent participant.

Conclusion

Through indigenous games, the customs and traditions, cultural beliefs and rituals of the society are preserved, and people practice the taboos set with reverence. There is always more implication to society than the activity. And the implications are centered on social expectations of being a man and a woman with a defined role. Women in the distant past were more subject to the gender role of household chores. They are encouraged for indoor duty that involves less physical work and are inclined towards femininity, while men are engaged with outdoor physical work that involves strength, courage and bravery and are inclined towards masculinity. Men enjoy more leisure and recreational time than women, and men are taken as the pride of society. However, with social transformation taking place, the societal platform of indigenous activities for women is in the process of reformation, and the gender roles active in the distant past are less practiced in the present day.

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