

## Eco-anthropological Approach to Select Lepcha Folklore: A Study

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### Abstract

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Lepcha is a tribe mostly inhabiting the Dzongu Valley in North Sikkim and the Kalimpong district of West Bengal. Lepchas believe their homeland to be *Mayel Lyang* which means the hidden paradise. Therefore, they are called by the name *mutunci rongkup* or *runkup* which means the precious children of Nature and God. With Kangchenjunga revered as their venerated guardian deity, the Lepchas are the custodians of a mosaic of folklore in the form of myths, legends and fables that have been orally transmitted and are known as *lungten sung*. The entire complex of the Lepcha folklore is predicated on the belief system that divine essence resides within Nature, thereby associating corporeality with the mountains and the rivers around which they inhabit. This can also be viewed from the perspective of ecological anthropology which can be read as the study of relationships between a population of humans and their biophysical environment. At the wake of the Lepcha movement that was directed against the development of hydropower projects to be built along the river Teesta and its several tributaries, the Lepchas referred to their mythology to prove the ownership of their land. Religious ecology forms the crux of their protest as the river projects will not only herald an environmental desecration but will also defile their sacred space, in turn, endangering their identity. This paper seeks to undertake an eco-anthropological study of select Lepcha folk narratives to find out how the Lepchas reassert their folkloric tradition to preserve their ecosystem and how, in the process, their core indigenous identity merges with the land.

**Keywords:** Lepcha; Folklore; Ecological anthropology; Kangchenjunga; Teesta.

### Introduction

Ecological anthropology is a subfield of anthropology and is defined as the "study of cultural adaptations to environments" (Kottak 579). The sub-domain is also defined as the study of the symbiotic relationships between a population of

humans and their biophysical environment. The focus of this paper is on the ways cultural beliefs and practices helped human populations adapt to their environments, and how people used elements of their culture to maintain their ecosystems. At its core, ecological anthropology establishes that humans are not disentangled from Nature, rather they are an intrinsic part of it. The field validates the worth of indigenous knowledge systems in comprehending sustainable resource management. Indigenous People propound their identity by pronouncing them to be the ones who inhabited their lands before the colonizers encroached upon the land through imperial doctrines of conquest and colonialism. Thereby they are the custodians of such discourses that are indispensable for the rational management of nature and its resources. Their umbilical relationship with Nature and the various forms of creatures inhabiting it, is one that is primal and profound, existing as on a plane that surpasses the mundane realm. The indigenous worldview represents an iconoclastic shift from the stereotypical Western notion of human versus Nature dichotomy. Their vision is grounded in a unique unity of the self with Nature, one that contains not only the physical but also the emotional, spiritual and psychological dimensions. The ecological space is impregnated with a consciousness that is inevitably linked with the very being of the indigenous people. Their sense of the self does not only circumscribe their physical form but also expands to include their sensorial perceptions that ultimately merge with the land. The indigenous worldview thus upholds a comprehensive approach where humans and Nature exist in a symbiotic relationship that defines the very essence of their existence.

Lepcha is an indigenous tribe mostly inhabiting the Dzongu Valley<sup>1</sup> in North Sikkim and the Kalimpong district of West Bengal. Lepchas believe their homeland to be *Mayel Lyang*<sup>2</sup> which means the hidden paradise. Therefore, they are called by the name *mutunci rongkup* or *rumkup* which means the adored children of Nature and God. In *Mayel Lyang*, the reciprocity between human and non-human dialogue through an uninterrupted cultural belief system largely influences the equilibrium in the ecosystem. The lush landscapes of the Dzongu have been the natural habitat of the nature-loving Lepcha people since ages and is specifically reserved for them. Special permits need to be acquired to pay a visit to this undisturbed, hidden paradise of Sikkim. In Lepcha legends and folklore, Dzongu is seen to be the portal to *Mayel Lyang*, the hidden paradise from where all Lepchas are believed to have originated and are destined to return finally. With cobalt turquoise-hued glacial streams and rivers, cascading waterfalls, thick canopy of trees and remote villages marked by jagged mountains, Dzongu is an unsullied treasure trove that offers a kaleidoscopic view into the world of Lepchas. The spatial notion of Dzongu is thereby invariably and inevitably connected to Lepcha identity just as the landscape of Gaphembah Hill is intrinsically connected with the Australian Aboriginal identity. The valley is also much akin to Shangri-La, a fictional place carved out by James Hilton in his novel, *Lost Horizon* (1933). Hilton too portrays Shangri-La as a transcendental valley snuggled in the western part of the Kunlun Mountains. The land has been

portrayed as a veritable utopia, a paradise on earth cut off from the outside world. The Lepchas are the custodians of a trajectory of folklore in the form of myths, legends and fables that have been orally transmitted and are known as *lungten sung*. The entire complex of the Lepcha folklore is predicated on the belief system that divine essence resides within Nature, thereby associating corporeality with the mountains and the rivers around which they inhabit.

### **The Lepcha Creation Myth**

The Lepcha myth of creation locates the genesis of the Lepcha tribe in the mighty *Kongchen Kongchlo*<sup>3</sup> or Khangchendzonga. *Kongchen Kongchlo* which means “the Big Stone” (Wangchuk and Zulca 30) relates to the mountain that had witnessed the birth of the first Lepcha man and woman, Fudongthing and Nazong Nyu, made by the Lepcha God Rom or Itbu-Deboo<sup>4</sup>. They are said to be composed from the pure snows of Mt. Kangchenjunga. Another version of the creation myth opines that it was the Mother Creator, Itbu-moo<sup>5</sup> who created “everything upon earth and in the heavens including *Kongchen-Konghlo*” (Foning 88). The first Lepcha man and woman were called “Children of the Snowy Peaks” (Doma 1). The origin of the Lepchas therefore becomes inherently linked with the mighty Kangchenjunga which had been in existence since time immemorial. This myth therefore operates as a validation of the indigenous status of the Lepchas who call themselves *mutunci rongkup* or *rumkup* meaning the precious children of Nature and God. The myth of creation for the Lepchas functions as an attempt on their part to establish a sense of genesis and a sense of rootedness and indigeneity to the land of their birth. Lepcha folk narratives can therefore be perceived as sites where identities are moulded and consolidated and spaces which become pivotal to the process of identity formation. The Lepcha myth of creation manifests a spectral notion of space by weaving a spiritual association between the sacred *Kongchen Kongchlo* and the Lepcha community thereby making it a veritable cultural site for identity formation. Kangchenjunga forms the evidence of the spiritual and religious life of the Lepcha community just as Bora rings<sup>6</sup> serve as the unique cultural sites for the Australian Aboriginals. Bora rings lie as a symbolic testament to the primal fabric of the Australian indigenous identity. Marked by a ceremonial circular ground, Bora rings can be seen as an ethereal threshold where the Australian Aboriginal consciousness merges with the spectral idea of the space. Lepchas too have worshipped Kangchenjunga since the 13th century, in ceremonies conducted by a hereditary priest called the *bongthing*, which culminate in special rituals during the month of *kursong* (February-March). The veneration of Kangchenjunga as a guardian deity concurs with the same line of thinking where the Lepchas consider themselves to be the disciples of Kangchenjunga which protected them and cared for them like a mother and the proof of it existed everywhere around them. The Lepcha community had repeatedly talked about their consciousness being merged with that of the mountain, owing to their belief that the Lepcha community not

only originated from the mountain but their identity has also evolved with the course of time.

In 2001, Sikkim Government passed a directive that Kangchenjunga and a few other peaks could not be scaled under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991. However, the Union Home Ministry's (MHA) decision in the year 2019 to lift an 18-year-old ban on Kangchenjunga by including it in the "open area" along with 136 other mountains of India has been vehemently opposed by the Lepcha community inhabiting the districts of Kalimpong and Darjeeling in West Bengal. Thereby, in the same year, the Centre revoked its decision to open the Kangchenjunga Mountain peaks in Sikkim for mountaineering expeditions. According to the new order, the holy Kangchenjunga and Kangchenjunga South would be beyond the purview of permission for the foreigners for any kind of expedition. This reminds us of the statutory law in Amitav Ghosh's latest novel, *The Living Mountain* (2022) where the people could never, on any condition, set foot on the slopes of the Mahaparat<sup>7</sup>. This spirituality associated with Kangchenjunga also draws on the geographical realities as many of the other Himalayan peaks like Mount Kailash are deemed sacred by the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions. Prayer-flags adorn the snow-capped Mount Kailash and setting foot on it is prohibited on account of it being the holiest peak in the world. The reverential outlook of the Lepchas towards the Kangchenjunga reverberates the Bhutanese law of mountaineering which, despite having some of the highest peaks of the world, has prohibited mountaineering above 6000 meters in 1994 and eventually all kinds of mountaineering in 2003.

Believing that it is the right moment to confer juristic status to Mother Nature, Justice S. Srimathy of the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court suggested that Mother Nature should be considered a "living being" with the status of a legal body. *The Hindu* on 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2022 reports that Justice S. Srimathy declared that the court is conferring Mother Nature the status of a "living being" having the rights of a person with all rights, duties and liabilities. The court observed that Mother Nature should be accorded the rights akin to fundamental rights, legal rights, and constitutional rights for her survival, safety and sustenance. The geographical imagination of the Lepcha community also confers upon Kangchenjunga the status of a living entity which has a throbbing heart and a consciousness of its own. It was the sole witness of their genesis and the protector of the realm and the community. It is a space where identity merges with land in an inseparable pattern of existence. Therefore, the age-old tradition of worshipping the Kangchenjunga is an attempt to preserve the ecosystem as religiously as to safeguard their core indigenous identities that exist in an unflinching bond with it.

### The Death of Lasso Mung Puno

Mungs<sup>8</sup> are considered to be the deserted children of Fudongthing and Nazong Nyu, the first Lepcha couple who abandoned the children because of their illicit relationship. The children had grown up to become devils-

Rumdu mung, the devil of small pox; Dom Mung, the devil of leprosy; Arot Mung, the devil of accidents and misfortunes; Ginu Mung, the devil of envy and jealousy; Asor Mung, the devil causing death of unborn children and mothers during childbirth. Others developed into snakes and insects. They all wanted to take revenge on their cruel parents...The eldest among the demons was Lasso Mung. He was also referred to as Lasso Mung Puno or the demon king. (Doma 11)

After abandoning the first seven children, the goddess of procreation is said to have fed milk to the next child and raised it as the first human. Noticing this partiality, the deserted children fumed with jealousy and turned into evil spirits. Indeed, in the Lepcha folk narratives, the image of the demon is depicted as someone who ate flesh, drank blood, and caused droughts. They are projected as uncontrollable and Lepchas exist in mortal fear of the Mungs. Lepchas try varied ways to appease them. For example, every cardamom field houses the *Mung Li* or the devil's house for *Thyok Dum*, a devil who is believed to destroy cardamom plants. The farmers generally put up a *Mung Li* at the corner of the field with the hope that the devil will not damage the field. However, it is not just the humans who fell victim to the Mungs. Mungs are also said to tear off the wings of the birds while rats lost their paws and nothing under the devils' eyes is ever left undesecrated.

It was mentioned before that among the many Mungs, the most dreaded and devilish is *Lasso Mung Puno*. In Lepcha, *lasso* transliterates to change, *mung* means devil and *puno* means king so taken together, he is the king of the devils. Lepcha folk people believe him to be the first born of Fudongthing and Nazong Nyu who eventually metamorphosed to become the "arch-enemy of mankind" (Foning 124). He is difficult to appease and comes across as a troublemaker because of the brewing jealousy towards his younger siblings who were loved by his parents. So, he united the forsaken children, made a league out of them and started harassing and devouring human beings. The image of *Lasso Mung Puno* seems similar to the demon king of the Sundarbans, Dokkhin Rai<sup>9</sup> who reigns over the beasts and devils. Amitav Ghosh's description of Dokkhin Rai sits quite appropriately in the context, "...the powerful demon king, who held sway over everything that lived in the forest- every animal as well as every ghoul, ghost and malevolent spirit..." (102). The Lepchas, being fed up of his antics, were desperate to kill the troublemaker. But it took an arduous struggle to control *Lasso Mung* as he was believed to have confused his killers by shape-shifting at twelve different times. When he was challenged in fight, he took the guise of twelve varied animals: *kalak* (rat), *suthong* (tiger), *heek* (rooster), *kuzyu* (dog),

*punthyong* (eagle), *long* (ox), *sader* (thunder), *oon* (horse), *luk* (sheep), *bu* (snake), *sahu* (monkey), and *mun* (pig) thus symbolizing the twelve-year cycle of the Lepcha calendar. It is said that the “men were dumbfounded, and some of them grew apprehensive, for it seemed to them that *Lasso Mung Puno* had mysterious powers and would never die” (Doma 12). Despite the Mung’s metamorphosis into animals, it is believed that Mung in human form is the most dangerous. This last insight infers how man has assumed a primary position in the anthropocene epoch and therefore the human disguise of the demon seems to be the worst because they are unrecognizable. The very term “anthropo” which signifies “human” along with “-cene” suggests the present geological epoch, which has been indomitably influenced by humans. So deep is this influence that it has changed atmospheric, biospheric, geologic and other earth system processes. Warm winters, warmer summers, landslides, avalanches, glacier lake outburst, floods are some of the many vagaries of global warming that the Kangchenjunga region is experiencing. Heatwaves sweep across the hill districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Kurseong, a hill station, has almost turned into an oven with locals contemplating on acquiring fans this year. Gangtok witnesses an unprecedented temperature rise. The North Sikkim flash floods of June 2023 amid torrential rainfall have affected Lachung and Lachen massively. All these drastic changes can also be seen as a brutal rendition of the prognosis of the climate catastrophe. Additionally, permafrost thaw, which is one of the transformations to the mountain cryosphere, is also instigated by global warming. Thus, the several disguises of the Mungs of Lepcha folklore sometimes take the face of the Man of the Anthropocene who mindlessly desecrates the environment heralding a series of climate catastrophes. It is eventually becoming clear that we are driving headlong towards an eco-apocalypse and our chosen doom suggests an epoch where we are slowly entering into a permanent climate colonialism. Unlike the religious concept of apocalypse, the eco-apocalypse offers us with no moment of redemption as Bruckner writes,

The Christian Apocalypse presented itself as a revelation, a passage into another temporal order, whereas this apocalypse reveals nothing, it issues the final judgement: pure apocalypse. No promise of redemption, just an ideal for survivors, an “epidemic for remorse. (8)

### **The Race between Teesta and Rangeet**

Yishey Doma, in the book *Legends of the Lepchas* (2010), records a surreal story about the race between Teesta and Rangeet, the two rivers that originate in Sikkim Himalayas and meet at a confluence in the plains of West Bengal. Rangeet and Rongnyu (as Teesta was previously known) were the river spirits venerated as Itbu-moo’s creations all across *Mayel Lyang*. According to this myth, the two river spirits used to have their rendezvous in a place high in the snow-capped lap of the Himalayas. Doma records, “But when their love was known to all, they offered salutations to Kongchen Kongchlo and decided to go away, very far, unseen by their friends. However, as if to conceal their sacred

love, the river spirits decided to take different routes, promising to meet at Pozok” (51). In a playful banter, they decided to race each other. Since they were journeying outside their acquainted region, both decided to engage respective guides to help them in their race towards the plains. Rangeet, the male river spirit, chose *tutfo*, the mountain bird, while Rongnyu, the mild-mannered female river spirit, chose *parilbu*, the snake, as her guide. Under normal circumstances, the bird should have been the swifter guide. However, it was distracted by the sights and sounds in the journey, thereby procrastinating the purpose of Rangeet. On the other hand, Rongnyu, guided by the committed *parilbu*, darted across as an arrow towards the plains. Naturally, Rongnyu reached the plains earlier but her happiness gave way to concern as she had to engage in a taxing wait for her lover. When Rangeet found Rongnyu already there, he cried out “Thi- see-tha? (When did you arrive?)” (Doma 52). Coming second in the race, his pride was impaired, and in fury he started retreating towards the mountains paying no heed to the repeated entreaties of Rongnyu. The desecration that was caused by the rising waters of the two rivers flooded the land so immensely that everything began to disappear under the wrath of the deluge. According to the legend, it was the Mother Creator who initiated the calamity to remind the people of their negligence towards her. Tundong Lho, a mountain in Damthang, South Sikkim, was the only haven for the Lepchas to save themselves. The people climbed the top of the mountain, the only place that was not submerged by the flood. The Lepchas offered sacrifices and oblations to appease the Mother Creator. However, their prayers were in vain.

At last, kahomfo, the partridge, reached the peak of Tumdong Lho and made an offering of mongbree, which it had brought wrapped in a huge leaf. Facing Kongchen Kongchlo, it tossed the grains upwards in the sky, praying and pleading for mercy. The bird’s sincere appeal on behalf of the creatures of earth was heard. Itbu-moo relented. The Partridge carries white dots on its plumage from the scattered mongbree that fell upon him during his oblation. Itbu-moo’s sudden change of mood caused a huge tremor, forcing the floods to recede. (Doma 53)

As the deluge receded, the lovers were reconciled and united at last. They decided to flow down the plains of Bengal at a confluence, never to be separated. Rongnyu later came to be known as Teesta. The confluence of the rivers Rangeet and Rongnyu is believed to be a sacred place by the Lepchas. The Lepchas follow a ritual in which they take the newlywed couples to the confluence of the river gods in order to seek benisons from the river spirits for a happy, prosperous and blissful married life. Every year, during the month of December or January, the Lepchas celebrate a special feast of the river gods eulogizing and commemorating the sacred place. It is therefore natural that the attempts at damming Teesta and establishments of hydro-electric power projects along the course of Teesta would face impassioned resistance from the indigenous Lepcha community. Kerry Little in her thesis, *Stories of the Lepcha Narratives from a*

*Contested Land* (2013), makes ethnographic research on the resistance movements of the Lepcha youths against power projects on the rivers. They believe that such projects will not only cause environmental desecration but will also defile their sacred spaces in turn, endangering their identity. Little makes a legitimate point on these interpersonal dynamics of the sacred spaces with the agency of activism when she projects these places as a marker of protest. Little comments from the perspective of eco-activism, “The sacred space from the elders’ time became protest narratives when the activists referred to their mythology to prove their ownership of the land” (15).

Religious ecology forms the crux of their protest because almost in all indigenous cultures, mountains, rivers and lakes are revered as sacred. Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie define the sacred space as,

...that portion of the earth’s surface which is recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem. Space is sharply discriminated from the non-sacred or profane world around it. Sacred space does not exist naturally, but is assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterizes it through his culture, experience and goals. (94)

The domain of religious ecology puts forward a holistic worldview in which the human agency is not outside Nature, rather it is intrinsically inscribed within it. The practice of anthropomorphizing rivers as goddesses has been an ancient tradition in India. Since time immemorial, rivers are known to be preservers as well as destroyers that have cradled civilizations but at the same time wreaked havoc causing unimaginable death and destruction. The fact that river flows gives it a corporeality making it as real as the Real. The legends that originate from the living presence of these rivers are often transmitted orally specially among the indigenous tribes that base their religiosity on animistic principles. These myths, legends and lore around the rivers are an integral part of their identity and an encroachment upon the rivers is looked down as a molestation of their identity. The Narmada dam projects that heralded the watershed Narmada Bachao Andolan (1985) still stand as the epitome of environmental desecration with its massive ecological consequences. The displacement of large sections of populations, especially the Adivasis and other marginalized groups, reveals the ugly face of development and modernization that weave dreams on the graves of its own indigenous population. The NHPC’s proposal of damming the pristine Teesta has met with similar opposition as the Lepcha community fears a pollution of their sacred land and an encroachment upon the Himalayan ecology. For the government, the river is a lucrative capital that can be exploited for its potential. However, for the Lepcha community, the river is their identity- a viaduct to salvation. It is something that they would try to protect with the last drop of their blood. The Lepchas cite their myths and legends at the face of this spatial colonialism to reassert their identity and their indigenous right on the land just as Oodgeroo Noonuccal in the poem “We are Going” expresses similar concerns,



We are as strangers here now, but the white tribes are the strangers.  
We belong here, we are of the old ways.  
We are the corroboree and the bora ground  
We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders,  
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.  
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp  
fires.  
We are the lightning bolt over Gaphembah Hill  
Quick and terrible  
And the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow. (224)

Oodgeroo's reference to corroboree<sup>10</sup>, Bora ground, Dream Time<sup>11</sup> and Gaphembah Hill highlights the reiteration of the Australian Aboriginal identity and their unique cultural ways in a land that once belonged to their ancestors and in which now they have been made strangers by the white colonialists. The allusion to the sacred ceremonies and the animistic spirituality of the space is no different from the Lepcha community's plea to preserve their identity and ecosystem at the face of expansionist developmental power projects.

A corporeal presentation of the rivers also brings to the fore the colonial discourse of victim and victimizer. In fact, the body is the primary conduit in terms of communicating one's existence. When the physical survival of a body ceases, nothing remains. Thus, the discourse of the politicization of a female body surfaces. The progress-hungry, development-minded modern man often renders Nature as a silent female body that can be vanquished at their whim. But Helen Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa* (2010) opines that the same female body can be forged as a weapon of resistance. Lepcha community whose identity merges with the land they inhabit, through their folk narratives, articulate a memory where their own bodies become the central medium to exhibit the inherited cultural memories.

### **Conclusion**

Ram Dayal Munda opines that separating the tribal community from his land is similar to choking them. An Adivasis's extinction can be seen in the separation from his land. The Adivasis are often displaced from their lands because of big power projects in the name of national development and they often end up in slums as a crowd of landless, migrant labourers and domestic servants. For him, the conservation of the tribal ways of life is extremely essential to resist the cultural genocide of the indigenous worldview. The Lepcha community too have chosen their folk narratives to gain participative attention of the world as the folk narratives are capable of developing a counter hegemonic discourse. The only alternative to the Lepcha community for protecting their land vis-à-vis their identity was to build a separate ideology in contrast with the colonialist ideology and the folk narratives have thereby successfully woven a non-conformist value

so much so that the phrase, "silence of the subaltern" cannot be attributed to them.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Dzongu Valley is located in North Sikkim and is inhabited by the Lepcha tribe.

<sup>2</sup>Mayel Lyang is a Lepcha term which means "the land of the hidden paradise." It is a legendary place that lies on the lap of Mount Kangchenjunga. Lepchas believe their homeland to be Mayel Lyang from where they have originated and to where they will return.

<sup>3</sup>Kongchen Kongchlo or Mount Khangchendzonga, the third highest mountain in the world, is regarded by Lepchas as the "original big stone" and their guardian deity. They believe that they have originated from this mountain, which is why a dead body always faces this mountain. The source is Yishey Doma's *Legends of the Lepchas*, Ebury Press, 2010, pp. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Lepcha God Rom.

<sup>5</sup>It means Mother-Creator in Lepcha. The Lepchas believe that the Mother-Creator shaped Kangchenjunga when there was nothing but vast emptiness on earth and in the sky. The source is Yishey Doma's *Legends of the Lepchas*, Ebury Press, 2010, pp. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Bora is an initiation ceremony unique to the Aboriginals of Eastern Australia. Typically, bora grounds are the sites of the ceremony comprising a larger circle with a diameter of about 20-30 meters or a smaller ring around 10-15 meters in diameter.

<sup>7</sup>In Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*, the narrator visualizes herself as a little girl growing up in a valley inhabited by a cluster of warring villages in the Himalaya although united by a common sense of reverence for the Mahaparat or the mountain at whose lap the valley is located. The reference is found in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*, Fourth Estate India, 2022, pp. 7.

<sup>8</sup>Mungs are considered to be the deserted children of Fudongthing and Nazong Nyu, the first Lepcha couple who abandoned the children because of their illicit relationship. The children had grown up to become devils. The reference is found in Yishey Doma's *Legends of the Lepchas*, Ebury Press, 2010, pp. 10.

<sup>9</sup>Dokkhin Rai is the demon king of Sundarbans, India who reigns over the beasts and devils. According to the folk narratives, Dokkhin Rai often takes the guise of the tiger.

<sup>10</sup>Corroboree is a sacred or a festive ceremony celebrated by the Australian Aboriginals.

<sup>11</sup>Dream Time refers to the cultural worldview of the Australian Aboriginal belief system. It can also be understood as the Aboriginal understanding of the world, its myriads of creations and the stories associated with it. It denotes the beginning period of the knowledge system of the Australian Aboriginals.

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