



Hospitality and Ethical Relationality in Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu's *Chela Asanpa and Brara*

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Abstract

Hospitality and ethical relationships are important aspects of A·chik oral narratives. This article examines *Chela Asanpa and Brara*, a folktale recorded by Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu in *The Folktales of the Garos* (1960), to examine how ethical relationality is presented through the relationship between the two men. The study uses a close reading of the folktale, focusing on its narrative development and the actions and responses of the characters. The analysis draws on moral anthropology, gift theory, and Indigenous relational thought, particularly discussions of ethical practice, practical judgment, relationality, and everyday ethics. The discussion considers hospitality and gratitude, companionship and competition, and ethical commitment and recognition in the relationship between Chela Asanpa and Brara. It shows that ethical relationality is constituted through the actions and responses of individuals. Hospitality is presented as a customary practice, gratitude as a response to hospitality, and companionship as continuing beyond physical competition. The article contributes to the broader discussion of Indigenous oral literature by showing how ethical practice and relationality can be examined through the ordinary actions, responses, and relationships presented in a folktale.

Keywords: A·chik Oral Literature, Hospitality, Ethical Relationships, Relationality Gratitude.

1. Introduction

In many Indigenous societies, oral narratives are regarded not merely as forms of entertainment or carriers of cultural knowledge, but also as part of storytelling practices. Through them, knowledge, values, and guidance for living are transmitted. Research on Indigenous

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storytelling shows that it “sustains communities,” “validates experiences and epistemologies,” and “nurtures relationships and the sharing of knowledge” (Iseke, 2013, p. 559). It is also central to knowing, learning, and teaching about the world and reality, as discussed by Iseke (2013) and Ranco and Haverkamp (2022, p. 1). They seek to know storytelling as a practice with relational, epistemological, and ontological aspects by describing it as a “meaning-making and world-making practice” that informs culturally specific ways of “being, surviving, and thriving” (Ranco and Haverkamp, 2022, p. 2). Responsibility in Indigenous storying is another area of recent discussion, as Martinez (2021) states that “the pursuit of knowledge is a responsibility”, and that knowledge “must be shared and serve the collective” (p. 8).

For some thinkers, ethics is an important subject of discussion in anthropology. This is particularly evident in studies of how people understand responsibility, how they make moral judgments, and how they conduct themselves in everyday life. Significant approaches include, such as Mauss’s (2002) formulation of “the three themes of the gift, the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and reciprocate” (p. 50), Laidlaw’s (2002) discussion of the “practice of freedom” (p. 322), Zigon’s (2009) concept of “moral breakdown” (p. 252), Lambek’s (2010) “centrality of ethical practice, judgment, reasoning, responsibility” (p. 1), and Mattingly and Throop’s (2018) discussion of “ordinary ethics,” “moral experience,” and “virtue ethics” (p. 478). Meanwhile, Indigenous scholarship also brings out other aspects. Some of these can be seen in Wilson’s (2008) discussion on “relational accountability” (pp. 97–100), Kimmerer’s (2013) understanding of reciprocity as an “obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate” (p. 25).

In fact, Wangiwang’s (2025) example of *paniyaw* helps us to see how ethical principles are present in folktales or storytelling. As she examines, *paniyaw* shapes “the moral and ethical principles” of the Ikalanga community, it “functions proactively in shaping ethical behavior” (p. 748). In practice, for Wilson (2008), “stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and gain life lessons from a more personal perspective”, and they allow them “to see others’ life experiences through our own eyes” (p. 17). He also states that it is up to the listener to “piece together a lesson from the story” (pp. 27–28). The stories, in this sense, allow listeners to understand and learn something from them from their own perspective, not from “abstractions and rules” (p. 17). Another scholar, like Archibald, Lee-Morgan, and De Santolo (2019), from Indigenous perspectives, also discusses what can be learned from stories. They show that stories carry knowledge and provide ways of knowing. For Martinez (2021), Indigenous traditions “demonstrate how our lives are located through values, beliefs and practices”, and how “our lives are connected and in relationships to our histories and beliefs, through storying and stories as well as tellings and tellers” (p. 1). Indeed, every story is powerful. Smith (2021) explains that “stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further”, while both story and the storyteller “serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (p. 166). Looking at memory, Vansina (1985) observes that “the mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation” (p. xi). He also notes that people in a community share “ideas, values, and images”, and that the communication of oral tradition is part of establishing “collective representations” (p. 124).

This study is about the A·chik (Garo), an Indigenous community primarily living in the uplands of the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Northeast India (Sangma, 1995, pp.25–30, 43; Aier, 1978, pp. 1–7; Playfair, 1909, pp. 1–12; Carey, 2017, pp. 1–3; Burling, 2004, pp. 9–10; Sangma, 1993, pp. 1–25). As already discussed, oral tradition is a medium by which ethical knowledge is transmitted. Such knowledge is also found in A·chik folktales, which are important to the community’s oral tradition and to carry cultural knowledge. Playfair (1909)

observes that the A·chik “possesses a large number of verses and stories... these tales and songs have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth” (p. 138). Many of these narratives were later documented by Harendra W. Marak (2002), Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu (1960, 2023), Mihir N. Sangma (1982), Dhoronsing K. Sangma (1988, 1984a, 1984b), Simison R. Sangma (1984), Julius L. R. Marak (2004), Caroline R. Marak (2013), and others. Their work has preserved a substantial body of A·chik oral narratives and provided an important foundation for their study. In the introduction to *Noksik Nokbakniko Chimonggipa Katta Wal·tim*, Kroshnil D. Sangma (2008) raises the view that these tales are not merely the thoughts and beliefs of the older generation. Instead, he argues that they preserve cultural knowledge, social values, and beliefs, which continue to shape A·chik life. But how is this cultural knowledge preserved and carried across generations? It is cultural memory. Assmann describes it as “the handing down of meaning” and explains it as a process by which cultural meaning is “both handed down and brought to present life” (2011, p. 6).

This study focuses on *Chela Asanpa and Brara*, an A·chik folktale recorded by Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu, an A·chik scholar and collector of oral narratives, in *The Folktales of the Garos* (1960, pp. 19–31). The version of the folktale examined in this study is taken from this work. The narrative shows the relationship between Chela Asanpa and Brara through hospitality, gratitude, companionship, and competition. Their relationship develops through these interactions and ultimately leads to a tragic encounter. The study is based on a close reading of the folktale, focusing on its narrative development, their relationship and actions. The analysis draws on scholarship in moral anthropology, gift theory, and Indigenous relational ethics. It examines ethical practice and relationality in the actions and responses of the two men.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Moral Anthropology and Ethical Practice

In recent moral anthropology, morality is no longer understood only in terms of formal systems and abstract rules. More concern is now given to how ethical concerns become part of ordinary social relations. As Fassin (2012, p. 4) argues, “moral questions are embedded in the substance of the social”, and “it is not sufficient to analyze moral codes or ethical dilemmas as if they could be isolated from political, religious, economic, or social issues.” Therefore, the social contexts of moral life need to be considered without a priori assumptions, particularly about how people experience and respond to morality. Das (2007), for instance, describes recovery from violence through a “descent into the ordinary” (p. 7). This view of the ordinary considers how people live with, respond to, and discuss ethical concerns in everyday life. Das (2010) examines ethical life through relationships with others. In her discussion of love and everyday life, she shows how a community based on love can emerge and, in some lives, “break the rigid boundaries of ‘oppositional identities’” (p. 397). Das develops this relationship between ethical life and ordinary experience in her (2012) formulation of ordinary ethics. She argues for understanding ethics not as judgments separate from ordinary practices, but as “the ethical as a dimension of everyday life,” in which people “descend into it as a way of becoming moral subjects” (p. 134). She further explains that ethical work involves “the cultivation of sensibilities within the everyday” and the labor of bringing about “an eventual everyday from within the actual everyday” (p. 134). For her, ethics and morality are “threads woven into the weave of life,” rather than practices that necessarily appear through dramatic moral struggles (p. 134). Lambek (2010, as cited in Fassin, 2015, p. 207) emphasizes the “centrality of ethical practice, judgment, reasoning, responsibility, cultivation, and questioning in social life.” If ethical life is part of social life, then how do people understand what is right or good? This also depends on the culture they live in and the values they share.

Another way of approaching ethics is to consider the possibilities of human freedom. It also looks at how people reflect on and shape their conduct. James Laidlaw (2002) argues that an anthropology of ethics is possible only if anthropology takes seriously “as something requiring ethnographic description, the possibilities of human freedom” (p. 315). This freedom also means that ethics cannot be limited to “general questions of social regularity and social control” (p. 315). It brings attention to how people exercise freedom in their conduct. By bringing in Foucault, Laidlaw (2002) develops his argument on “ethical practices” (p. 322) and the exercise of freedom in different historical and cultural contexts. It is not simply what people do, but how they shape their conduct. He concludes that “Wherever and in so far as people’s conduct is shaped by attempts to make themselves a certain kind of person... to that extent their conduct becomes the subject matter for an anthropology of ethics” (p. 327). He later reiterates this position by emphasizing that “the ethical dimension of social life—the fact that everyday conduct is constitutively pervaded by reflective evaluation—is irreducible” (Laidlaw, 2014, pp. 44–45).

Ethical concerns are present in everyday social life. Discussions in anthropology have moved beyond formal moral systems to consider how ethics is experienced in ordinary life. This raises an important question: where is the ethical found in everyday life? Mattingly and Throop (2018), in their review of the anthropology of ethics, argue that the recent “ethical turn” has sparked new debates over “where the ethical is to be found,” particularly concerning “the status of the ordinary in informing ethical life” (pp. 478–479). They identify ordinary ethics, virtue ethics, and moral experience as three major directions, by which contemporary anthropology approaches ethical life (pp. 478–483). Earlier, in this matter, Zigon (2009) distinguishes between morality and ethics, giving particular emphasis to the moments when people question their ordinary moral dispositions. He argues that morality consists of “three different, but certainly interrelated, aspects”: “the institutional,” “that of public discourse,” and “embodied dispositions” (p. 258). The third aspect, embodied dispositions, is “what Mauss called a kind of habitus, or unreflective and unreflexive dispositions of everyday social life,” which is “not thought out beforehand, nor is it noticed when it is performed. It is simply done” (p. 260). When these unreflective dispositions of everyday social life are questioned, then, people can see ethics. Ethics, by contrast, is “what is done in those occasional moments when one calls into question any of the three aspects of morality” (p. 261). Acknowledging that this view is “clearly influenced by Foucault’s notion of working on the self,” Zigon describes ethics as “a kind of stepping-away to question and work on any of the three aspects of morality” and “a conscious acting on oneself” to become “a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person” (p. 261). For him, questioning these unreflective dispositions also affects how people act. The ethical moment is “brought about by a moral breakdown,” through which persons “create... new moral personhoods and enact new moral worlds” (p. 262). So, every social context allows for a range of possible moralities, and this range of possibilities defines the recognizable options for what counts as either morality or ethics (Zigon, 2009, p. 263).

Robbins (2012) sees morality as rooted in cultural values, arguing that values “shape culture and define what counts as moral action” (p. 124). He distinguishes cultural values from individual preference, and he argues that they can be identified through “the common patterns of social life” and “the logic of its enduring conceptions” (p. 124). Cultural values, therefore, provide “the conditions of possibility for individual moral experience” (p. 124). This cultural approach to morality is developed in his (2013) call for an “anthropology of the good,” which describes the different ways people understand and pursue the good, including “the ways they foster the good in their real social relations” (p. 458). Later, Robbins et al. (2023) develop this idea, arguing that anthropology of the good should be grounded in “cross-culturally variable visions of the good” and should investigate differences in how people understand “the best kind of lives human beings can live” (p. 47).

2.2. Gift Theory, and the Question of Return

Obligation and reciprocity are important parts of ethical life, especially in social relationships. An important foundation for this study is Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (2002), which examines gift exchange as a system of reciprocal obligations. Mauss identifies "the three obligations: to give, to receive, to reciprocate" (p. 50). These obligations are connected to the social relationships created and sustained through giving and receiving. He also conceptualizes these exchanges as "total" social phenomena, in which "religious, juridical, and moral, which relate to both politics and the family," and economic institutions are expressed simultaneously (p. 3). Another idea of reciprocity comes from a relational perspective, particularly in Kimmerer's (2013) work. Reciprocity is a relationship involving mutual obligation, where "gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate" (p. 25). Reciprocity is also illustrated as mutual participation in a relationship: "there is reciprocity between you" (p. ix). These formulations provide a dimension of understanding in terms of giving, receiving, obligation, and the question of return within social relationships.

2.3. Indigenous Relational Ethics

Indigenous scholarship on relationality understands being, knowledge, and social life as shaped by relationships with others. Indigenous ontology and epistemology can be understood through relationships, as "reality is not an object but a process of relationships, and an Indigenous ontology is actually the equivalent of Indigenous epistemology" (Wilson, 2008, p. 73). In fact, things are not understood separately, but through the relationships they have with one another. An Indigenous epistemology can be described as "where the relationship with something (a person, object or idea) is more important than the thing itself" (Wilson, 2008, p. 73). This view of relationships also shapes how the self is understood: "Rather than viewing ourselves as being in relationship with other people or things, we are the relationships that we hold and are part of" (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). From this understanding of the self as relational, relational accountability becomes important. Hence, fulfilling one's role and obligations within a research relationship means being "accountable to your relations" (Wilson, 2008, p. 77). Relationality, in this sense, involves not only a way of understanding being and knowledge, but also responsibilities that arise from being part of relationships. A similar understanding is found in Kovach (2009), who argues that Indigenous epistemologies are relational and "live within a relational web and all aspects must be understood from that vantage point" (p. 57).

For Zigon (2014), moral and ethical experience begins with a being already entangled in relationships that matter to its existence. Morality and ethics need not necessarily be conceived in terms of "judging, evaluating, and enacting the good or right," but instead can concern "the making, remaking, and maintenance of relationships" (p. 21). When these relationships break down, ethical practices may involve repairing, rebuilding, or constructing new relations. The maintenance and repair of relationships, however, also take place within particular social and relational settings.

2.4. Oral Tradition as Ethical Knowledge

When we talk about oral tradition, it is important to consider how it works and what it does in shaping knowledge. Wilson (2008) draws our attention to the distinctive knowledge-making capacity of Indigenous storytelling. He observes that, instead of presenting knowledge through "abstractions and rules," stories allow listeners to see "others' life experiences through our own eyes" (p. 17). Knowledge, in this way, is encountered through the experiences of others, but it is the listener who sees and understands those experiences through his or her own perspective,

rather than receiving knowledge in the form of rules or fixed formulations. Wilson further observes that it is up to the listener to “piece together a lesson from the story” (p. 28) and apply it to their current problem or situation. These observations suggest that through storytelling, knowledge is conveyed through experience and interpretation.

The relationship between story and knowledge can be seen in Kovach’s (2009) discussion, where stories are “active agents within a relational world” (p. 94). She says, “Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships” (p. 94). Oral stories are recounted relationally and provide continuity between generations. Stories also carry teachings. They are “vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices”, and “teach of consequences, good and bad, of living life in a certain way” (p. 95). From a Nêhiyaw point of view, “knowledge and story are inseparable,” that “interpretative knowing is highly valued,” and that “story is purposeful” (p. 98). Her discussion brings story, knowledge, teaching, and interpretation together as narratives which carry understandings of how to live, while listeners interpret them in their own ways.

Archibald’s (2008) development of storywork makes the ethical dimension of storytelling clearer. In her earlier formulation, Indigenous stories may contain “powerful ‘teachings’” (p. 83). Her later work develops Indigenous Storywork as a framework of seven principles, including respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity, while emphasising “ethical responsibilities” for stories, storytellers, and story listeners-learners (Archibald, 2021). In fact, story or storytelling is not only a means of preserving knowledge. It provides a way of learning values, reflecting on conduct, and considering how one ought to act within relationships. Wangiwang (2025), recently, shows the connection between storytelling and ethical learning by describing *paniyaw* as a “practical ethical system” through which storytelling functions as “indigenous moral instruction,” embedding “ethical consciousness within everyday life” (p. 763).

3. Hospitality and Ethical Relationality

The folktale *Chela Asanpa and Brara*, recorded by Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu in *The Folktales of the Garos* (1960, pp. 19–31), tells of the meetings between Chela Asanpa, a man renowned for his extraordinary strength, and Brara, whose strength leads Chela Asanpa to seek him out. Their relationship is shown in a series of meetings that include physical contests, hospitality, and shared companionship.

The narrative introduces Chela Asanpa, who lived in A·chik A·song, in a village on the lower stages of the Damring River. He was described as a person of “gigantic physical proportions” (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 19), standing nine cubits in height, with extraordinary physical strength. Yet, despite his formidable strength, he was known for his unusual fear of a hen with her brood, and he was, therefore, also called Chela Asanpa Bika Do·bima, or “Chela Asanpa, the Chicken-hearted.” He was also a colossal eater, capable of consuming quantities of food far beyond what an ordinary person could manage (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 19). Chela Asanpa was particularly fond of wrestling and contests. He wandered the country in search of individuals who could match him and fight with him. He found no greater joy than the opportunity to “come to grips with some gigantic man and floor him in a physical contest,” fighting for the “pure joy of fighting”, rather than for reward or praise (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 19). During his travels, he encountered several powerful men and dangerous animals, including a strong wrestler near the Simsang River, a tiger that had terrorised a village, and a wild elephant near the Ranggira Hill. In these encounters, his extraordinary strength was demonstrated, at the same time he developed relationships of hospitality with those he encountered (Rongmuthu, 1960, pp. 20–25). After proceeding home by way of Bajengdoba,

Chela Asanpa set out to find a strong individual with whom he could “match his enormous strength.” This time, he came to Nongchram Village, where he caught his first glimpse of Brara, a very strong man, while clearing his jungle for *jhum* cultivation and uprooting stiff clumps of *wa-ma* bamboo with his bare hands (Rongmuthu, 1960, pp. 25–26).

3.1. Hospitality and the Question of Return

When Chela Asanpa arrived at Nongchram in search of Brara, Brara immediately seized his *milam* and *spi*, believing that an enemy had come for his head. Standing at a distance, Chela Asanpa introduced himself, and he asked for lodging for the night. Brara, then took him to his house, entertained him with rice-beer, killed a six-year-old castrated pig, and told his wife and servants to prepare a meal. The two men ate and drank together until late at night. Chela Asanpa revealed the purpose of his visit, and he explained that he had come to challenge him to a wrestling bout. Brara accepted the challenge. Before the agreed duel took place, Chela Asanpa invited Brara to his village. Brara, however, declined the invitation, explaining (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 26):

I agree to your proposed wrestling bout. I agree to your duel, should I defeat you by wrestling tomorrow. But to come over to your house for a mere feast? That I cannot agree to. It is tantamount to seeking food and drink in return for what I give you. Don't you know that according to our age-long A·chik custom we entertain guests and strangers with food and drink and whatever we can afford without the least expectation of anything in return? Don't you remember the old saying: If you do not feed or give drink to any guest or stranger who enters your house, having in your heart no idea of recompense; or if you send him or her away empty-stomached from your home, Susime (Goddess of Fortune) looks down upon you with disgust? Therefore, we should take our food and drink and fight wherever it is convenient for us. (Rongmuthu, 1960, pp. 26–27).

The question of return arises when Chela Asanpa invites Brara to his village after receiving his hospitality. In relation to this, Mauss (2002) identifies three connected obligations in gift exchange: “the obligation to reciprocate presents received,” “the obligation ... to give presents,” and “to receive them” (p. 17). Kimmerer (2013) similarly describes reciprocity through an “obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate” (p. 25). Though these formulations are good for understanding giving, receiving, and obligation in social relationships, Brara does not accept return as a condition of his hospitality. He explains that according to A·chik custom, guests and strangers are given food and drink “without the least expectation of anything in return” (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 27). Brara further refers to Susime (Playfair, 1909, p. 90; Sangma, 1984, pp. 12–13), the Goddess of Fortune, **because the goddess is displeased when a guest is not fed. Hence, this act of giving is based on the customary practice**, and it is not on an expectation of what may be received in return.

After their long fight, Chela Asanpa was defeated by Brara. The narrative shows that the two men accepted each other with mutual respect, then bathed together before returning home to eat, drink rice-beer, and converse late into the night (Rongmuthu, 1960, pp. 28–29). The following day, before departing, Chela Asanpa expressed his gratitude:

Misi Susime must envy your extraordinary bounty and unwavering generosity. I have eaten and drunk more in your house than I have ever done in any other house throughout all my adventurous ramblings. You have my best regards. I heartily thank you for your unstinted hospitality. (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 29).

Brara replies:

You are not far from flattery when you speak of my generosity. I have but given you what is due to an honored guest as enjoined by our custom. I am not at all satisfied with what I have done for you. Please do not mention it anymore. (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 29).

Brara does not accept Chela Asanpa's praise of his generosity. He explains that he has only given what is due to an honored guest according to their custom. In this giving and receiving, Mauss (2002) sees a "bond of alliance and commonality" between those involved (p. 17). Chela Asanpa acknowledges the hospitality, but Brara does not see his hospitality as deserving praise. His request, "Please do not mention it anymore," shows that he does not seek recognition for it. Yet their fellowship continues. As Wilson (2008) observes, "we are the relationships that we hold and are part of" (p. 80).

3.2. Ethical Conduct and Practical Judgment

Another dimension of their relationship is revealed in the wrestling match between Chela Asanpa and Brara. The folktale demonstrates both their extraordinary strength in the competition and their conduct. After they struggle for a long time, Brara defeats Chela Asanpa (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 28). The folktale then describes how they respond:

Brara held out his hands which Chela Asanpa grasped most heartily with boyish candour. Chela Asanpa was not embittered by the unexpected defeat; nor was Brara unduly flushed with victory. Both took the outcome in a sportsmanlike manner, praising each other's great strength and fair play. (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 28).

Brara extends his hand to his defeated opponent, while Chela Asanpa accepts without resentment. The two men, despite the outcome of the contest, praise each other's strength and fair play. Neither victory nor defeat changes the respect they have for one another. Here, the competition is not only about physical strength, but also about fairness, restraint, and mutual regard. Precisely, the narrative presents scenes of shared companionship. Instead of parting as rivals, the two men drink rice-beer together, bathe in the stream, return to Brara's house, share another meal, and spend the evening joking and discussing matters of common interest (Rongmuthu, 1960, pp. 28–29). These ordinary activities show that the wrestling match has not weakened the relationship between them. Before returning home, Chela Asanpa expressed, reflecting on their relationship:

What greater pleasure can we derive from our association with each other than to live like two congenial friends at one time and two generous foes at another as circumstances demand. (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 29).

Chela Asanpa's reflection shows that the two men remain friends even when they fight each other. But what does their conduct after the contest tell us? Of course, Brara has won, while Chela Asanpa has lost. The outcome could have changed their relationship. Victory could lead to pride or boastfulness, and defeat could bring resentment or hostility. But neither happens. Both men accept the outcome; they do not allow the contest to affect their mutual regard. Here, Lambek (2010) considers the ethical within the "full range of human action and practice" (p. 11) and relates it to the "exercise of practical judgment" (p. 11). In this competition, that ethical quality lies in how they respond to the outcome. Both men exercise practical judgment, as seen in their fairness, restraint, and respect for each other.

3.3. Ethical Commitment and Recognition

Before setting out for the agreed duel, Brara performed a divination. It gave an unfavorable sign. He, even so, decided to proceed:

What is the meaning of this? The divination does not betoken fair auspices. Well, should that be the case, let it be. Death, which comes but once, is nothing more than a ceasing of breath. Come what will, I must go forth without bother. (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 30).

Brara knew that the divination did not promise a favorable outcome, yet he did not withdraw from the competition. He even accepted the possibility of death by going forward with the agreed duel. Under such uncertain circumstances, his decision can be understood through Lambek's (2010) "exercise of practical judgment" (pp. 11–12) and "practice is continuous" (p. 27). Brara continued with the commitment he had already made, even though the circumstances had changed. Lambek (2010) identifies "following through on what one has committed to" as a salient feature of ethics (p. 27). Brara did not abandon his commitment despite the uncertainty, which shows his continued adherence to what he had already committed to.

Chela Asanpa, meanwhile, had received a favorable divination. He was "in high spirits" and waited for Brara behind a simul tree (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 30). Brara suspected that Chela Asanpa was hiding there and struck the tree with his *milam*. The sword became stuck in the trunk. Chela Asanpa then came out of hiding, and he struck Brara at the neck (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 30). The duel ended with Brara's death. Yet Brara continues to have a place within the social world of Nongchram. He is remembered as a man who had "more influence than any other man at Nongchram" and was "admired, beloved and trusted by all" (Rongmuthu, 1960, p. 31).

4. Conclusion

By examining the A·chik folktale *Chela Asanpa and Brara*, this study considers how ethical relationality is constituted through the actions and responses of individuals. As Wilson (2008) observes, "we are the relationships that we hold and are part of" (p. 80). Thus, their conduct can be understood through their relationship. Ethical practice is found in ordinary social conduct. Customary hospitality, gratitude, companionship, and conduct in competition are part of everyday relations, which Das (2012) describes as "a dimension of everyday life" (p. 134).

Practical judgment is involved when a person has to decide how to act in a particular situation. Lambek (2010) describes this as the "exercise of practical judgment" (pp. 11–12), and he also discusses "following through on what one has committed to" (p. 27). Ethical commitment, then, is related to continuing with what has already been decided, even when circumstances become uncertain.

Recognition is not limited to the immediate relationship between two persons. What happens when the direct relationship has ended? Brara's remembrance in Nongchram shows that a person can continue to be recognized within a wider social world. Thus, within Indigenous ethical thought, A·chik oral literature provides an understanding of ethics connected with relationships, conduct, and ways of living. The ethical meanings of the folktale are presented not only through direct moral statements. They are also found in the situations, relationships, actions, and consequences in the narrative. *Chela Asanpa and Brara* contributes to the broader discussion of Indigenous ethical thought by showing ethical practice and relationality through the conduct and relationships of persons.

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