

ORAL NARRATIVES OF AO-NAGAS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

A Thesis Submitted During 2011

To the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of a Ph.D Degree in
Centre for Folk Culture Studies

By

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DECLARATION

I **Resenmenla Longchar** hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Oral Narratives of Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. P.S. Kanaka Durga** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Oral Narratives of Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity**” submitted by Resenmenla Longchar, bearing Reg.No: 06SNPF01 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Centre for Folk Culture Studies is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Glossary

- Ajungli: Clay used to make mud balls to kill birds
- Aluro: Harvesting
- Ang or ayan: Thread
- Anghs: Konyak Nagas referred to as kings.
- Ar Atsutepba : Tug-of-war
- Arichu: Boys dormitory
- Arijusanger: Dormitory members
- Asümong: Death rite
- Atap: Hearth
- Atsütep: Peaceful agreement
- Chapili: Currency
- Chuzen: Senior most group in the Ariju
- Daos: Big knives
- Genna/ Anempong: Prohibition
- Jatanyongtang: Settlement
- Jutep kiyim: Elopement (jupet, stealthy mating; kiyim, marriage)
- Kedong mapang: Clan leaders
- Kelamet: Pay a heavy adultery
- Keyir Benjong: Marriage feasts
- Kibong: Family
- Kidong: Clan
- Kikha süchi: Feast of merit
- Kini tsüngrem: House deity
- Kiyimba: Marriage
- Langpang/yipchen: Bed
- Langtem: Apron
- Lemlangvi/Kapok: The Naga women dress their hair in the form of a bun,
- Lijaba: Ao-Naga god, creator of earth
- Lijak: Catapult
- Longterok: Six stones
- Lumelen/lumepu: Rent paid in terms of cash or kind

Mashisa: Pregnant
Mejemtsü: Rice beer
Mepu/khel: The Ao villages are divided into upper and lower clan
Mesujet, mesutet: Adopting male successor
Mithun: Mithun (*Bos frontalis*), the domesticated free-range bovine species. Mithun is also used as a ceremonial animal and plays important role in economic, social and cultural life.
Mongkotepsü: Ao-Naga warrior shawl
Mopungki: Little store-room
Nokpangmentang: Villages who had war-disputes in the past.
Nosem: Placenta
Nusomong: Child birth rite
Osak: *Strobilanthes flacoidifolius* plant
Patir: Clan priest
Putu Menden/ Samen Menchen: Village Council
Semki/acham: Rice pounding table cut from one piece of wood.
Sentsü: Debt
Süngkong: Log drum
Süngpur: Wood carrier
Süpiti/teperemsü: Ao-Naga woman Skirt
Tatar: Council
Tekalilemtsü: Handloom
Tenapang: Blooming period
Tenem ozü: Hornbill bird
Tenü/onü: Father's sister
Tepela tezü: Umbilical cord
Teptsü atep: Tattooing
Tsuba: Water pond
Tsükibutsüla: Matron, guardianship of an old woman
Tsükong: Ranges
Tsungram: Gods
Tsushi: Bamboos water containers
Tzuki: Girl's dormitory
Yimchi semer: Thirty basketfuls of grains

Yongmen: Brass ear ornament

Zafu: Priest

Züngaren: Age group

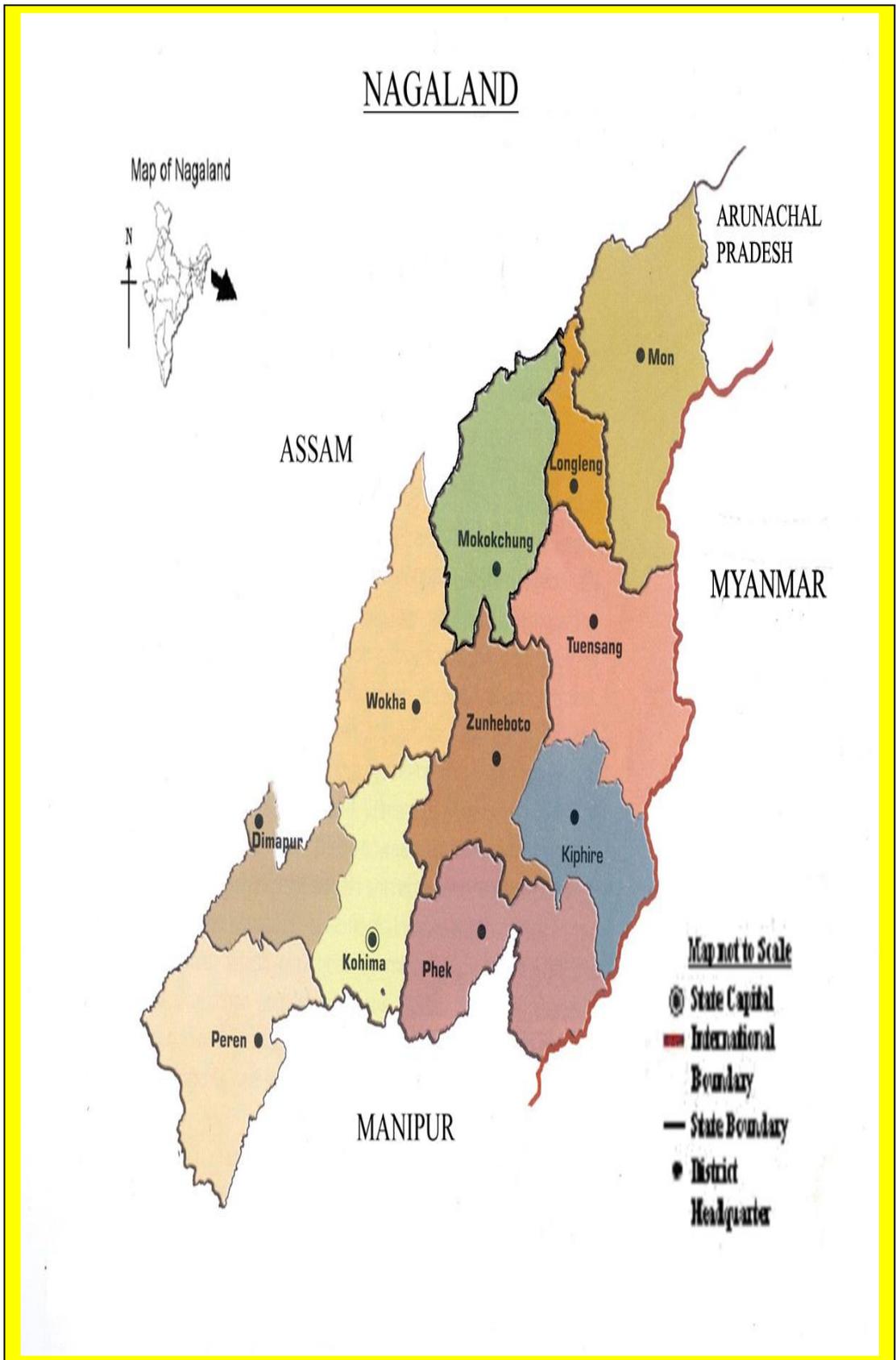
Züngaren: Age group system

Anintsüngba/Longtitsungba: Lord of Heaven

Meyutsung: Lord of death

Tiar/Tiaba: Pre-destiner

Map of Nagaland



Map of Mokokchung District



Chapter: I
INTRODUCTION

Nagas are one among many of the ethnic groups of the North-eastern India that geographically share the borders of four countries- China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan of Asia. They are historically and culturally different from the rest of Indians though they had strong connections established over centuries between the state of Assam and the mainland including Tripura. The physical connection is very narrow and only four percent of the region is contiguous with India where as the remaining ninety six percent of the northeast borders the other countries. They remained isolated on the hill tops and villages often engaged in warfare raids upon the territories of one another till the British besieged them in AD 1882 in the battle of Kohima.

Like any other tribals in India, the Nagas have their own rich cultural heritage preserved in the form of oral traditions and artefacts. The Nagas claim that they had recorded their history on an animal skin which unfortunately was eaten by a dog. Since then, they say that their history and traditions are being preserved in their memories and disseminated orally in the form of songs, myths, tales and other forms of expressive behaviour, their material culture. The Nagas are distinct from the rest of the Indian tribes not only in their origin, languages and appearance but also in their life style patterns. The Nagas are heterogeneous tribes and belong to Mongoloid and Indo Burmese stocks. There are as many as seventeen social groups among the Nagas which were further subdivided into several major clans. These cultural groups from the level of clan to that of a major tribe sustains their distinctiveness in different walks of their tribal lives- traditions, customs, food, religion, social organization, rituals, political and economic organization, functioning of customary law and order-and thus protect their respective identities even amidst the changing world's scenario.

Nagaland, wherein these tribal groups inhabit is geographically situated in the hilly tracts of North-eastern India emerged as a State on December 1, 1963. Dr. Sarvepalli Radha Krishnan, the then President of India, formally inaugurated it as the

16th State of the Indian Union. Different geographical regions which were previously called after the names of the tribes were brought in the name Nagaland. It is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in North, Assam in West, Manipur in South and Burma (Myanmar) in the East. The state has now eleven districts viz. Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Phek, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto, Peren, Longleng and Keperhi. The Nagas are highly territorial in their identity formations. The seventeen Naga tribes are distributed in different geographical regions. Dimapur District is multi-ethnic settlement wherein different Naga and other tribal groups live. Thus the tribes of Nagas viz: *Rongmei* (Dimapur), the *Angamis*, *Moa (Memai)* and *Rengma Nagas* (Kohima), the *Aos* (Mokokchung), the *Konyak* (Mon), the *Chakhesang* and the *Pochury* (Phek), the *Sangtam*, the *Yimchunger*, the *Khiemungam* and the *Chang* (Tuensang) and the *Lothas* alias *Kyong* (Wokha), the *Semas (Sumi)* (Zunheboto), the *Ziliang*, the *Liangmai* and the *Kuki* (Peren), the *Phom* (Longleng and Keperhi) are identified with different territorial regions.¹ The region is covered by deep valleys, gorges, winding streams, hills that form the habitat for a rich variety of flora and fauna.

The Ao-Naga is one of the major tribes in Nagaland who had four distinctive dialectic groups viz: *Mongsen*, *Chungli*, *Changki* and *Sangpur*.² However the major dialects of the Ao-Naga are *Mongsen* and *Chungli*. Though *Mongsen* was the main and poetic mode of expression in the past the dialect *Chungli* had been in use for communication and conversation. It so happened because when American Missionaries came in contact with the AOs, they first stayed in *Molungyimsen* village where the AOs of that region spoke in *Chungli* dialect. Then these people picked up the *Chungli* dialect for communication. Thus advent of missionaries around AD 1872 shifted the spoken dialect from *Mongsen* to *Chungli*. Thus *Chungli* dialect is continued to use for the mode of communication. Again The Ao-Naga tribe itself is not homogenous and is constituted by six major clans which were categorically organised basing on the spoken dialect. The *Chungli* group incorporated the *Pongen*, *Longkumer* and *Jamir* clans and the *Mongsen* group included *Imchen*, *Walling* and *Longchar* clans. Nomenclature in the Naga Hills history presents great difficulties as it is with the other places of North-eastern frontiers. Both the place names and names of the tribes and clans are exceedingly confusing throughout the older writings. The

name Naga is an Assamese appellation to the people living to their east which means, the *naked*. Most of the tribe held the names given by the ‘other’ groups of people.

Significance of the study

Prior to the emergence of Nagaland as a state in Indian Union the Nagas had undergone a phase of politico-cultural turmoil during which they struggled hard to survive and sustain their identities among the other turbulent tribes of North-eastern region. Under the British hegemony the political and social life of the Nagas was much disturbed. It is because the Britishers frequently reshuffled the geographical boundaries of the Naga tribes in the name of political reorganisation of colonial administrative domains.³ They deployed literacy and spread of Christianity as paradigms politico-social integration of the tribes into their colonial regime. At the same time, they condemned Naga religion, culture, and practices, and attributed such acts to the wrath of God. Naga religious rites were forbidden since their animistic socio-religious practices and song traditions appear to be devilish to the Christianity. The Nagas felt that the expansion of Christianity erased their cultural trademarks, political, religious and social institutions and thereby affected the original form and structure of their tribal life.⁴

These developments evoked consciousness among the Naga people who felt that their political and cultural identities are getting lost. Such apprehensions led them to come into conflict with the Britishers during the Colonial period and later with the Indian Government even after the emergence of Independent India in AD 1947. They assert that they had a long cherished history. Nagas claim that their forefathers got migrated from Mongolia in BC 2617 and after migrating across Turkistan, Tibet and Mongolia, they finally arrived in Eastern Yunan Province of China in BC 1385 From China they entered Southeast Asia and thence to their present habitat in BC 1225 Their continuity as a people inhabiting their present lands is an established historical fact. In historical records, the first mention of the Nagas as a people inhabiting their present lands was made by Claudius Ptolemy, the Greek historian and geographer in AD 150. In his records Ptolemy mentions the Nagas as *Nagaloï*.⁵ They were again mentioned by Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller who spent 15 years in India during the years AD 629-645. Hiuen Tsang visited Kamrup the capital of the Varman King, Bhaskar Varman in AD 643. From Kamrup in Assam, in his accounts “*Si-Yu-Ki*” he

writes about the Nagas saying: The east of this country is bounded by a line of hills so that there is no great city to the kingdom. The frontiers are contiguous to the barbarians of Southwest China. These tribes are in fact akin to those of the Man people in their customs.⁶ Besides these records, the Nagas are also mentioned in the Royal chronicles of the Manipur kingdom in records like Chietharol Kumbabu and Ningthourol Kumbabu (AD 663-763 and AD 906-996). They are also mentioned in the chronicles of the Ahom kings who came from upper Burma and the western Unan provinces of China and settled and ruled in Assam for 600 years beginning from the 13th century. Naga resistance against intrusions and raids from these two neighbouring kingdoms and also other kingdoms like the Burmese, Tripuris, Dimashas and the Cachar kingdoms from the 13th century to the 18th centuries are all there in recorded history. As for their encounter with the British in the 19th century and their resistance against British rule for one hundred fifteen years (1832-1947), numerous accounts are found in the British colonial records. It is said that the battles the British fought with the Naga tribes in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries far outnumber all the frontier battles fought with the Indians in the great Indian sub-continent. Even in spite of all these battles, the British were able to subjugate only thirty per cent of actual Naga territory. (The actual Naga ancestral domain would be around 120,000 sq. km). In British colonial accounts, the unconquered 70% territories of the Nagas were recorded as unadministered territories or excluded area. Even in the thirty per cent lands that the British administered, they never laid any claims to the lands they were administering. C.V.Aitchinson in *Treaties, Engagements and Sanads* clearly mentions that there was no written treaty or agreements have been made with any of the Naga tribes.⁷ Also following the submission of the Naga memorandum to the Simon Commission in AD 1929, where the Nagas had refused to be included in the reformed scheme of India, the British Government in recognition of their demands put the Naga Hills under excluded area in the Government of India Act of AD 1935.

These political conditions lead to the evocation of Naga identity as a social construct for incorporating all the tribes only in the early 20th century after the formation of the Naga Club in AD 1918. Even after the grant of Nagaland state by the Government of India, Naga identity still stands amorphous since their long cherished customs and traditions have been thoroughly invaded by modern political system. Historically the Nagas have always been proud of their independence and pristine

lifestyle. Under Article 371-A (1) in the Constitution, special constitutional safeguards are provided to protect Naga identity and Naga way of life. The Indian Parliament cannot make any law in respect to religious and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to the Naga customary law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources. From time immemorial, the Nagas have their own democratic polity which consist of the Naga village Council, the Range (Area) council and the Tribal council designed to serve the democratic Naga way of life.⁸ These are certain characteristics clearly perceivable from the society's folklores and narratives distinct of the Nagas which form the bases of their claim for a distinct identity. Their desire to retain those characteristics is apparent in their struggle to indigenise the modern administrative mechanism based on their respective customs and traditions.

Globalisation is another factor that awakened identity consciousness. It is a socio-economic phenomenon that transformed the entire world into a global village and merged the spatio-temporal boundaries of the universe. It stirs up awareness with regard to homogeneity versus heterogeneity. In the wake of globalisation, the Nagas felt the need to revive their tradition for the identity of their own and keep up their conventional heterogeneity amidst the homogeneity under Christian identity. The impact of globalization is most felt in the area of indigenous cultural products. The Nagas are apprehending that the artisans may modify or redesign the artefacts to keep pace with the global markets which may sometime distort or invert the traditional ideology embedded within the cultural product. In otherwords, the identities embodied in cultural products will thus be eliminated for greater marketability.⁹ Such de-identification of local cultures for global recognition would inevitably lead to a hybridization of identities in cultural artefacts. Hybridization implies the consumption of original features that results in a new product. This inverse process of de-identification begins from the extrinsic domain of visible ethnic identifiers. But this cannot be dismissed as an isolated phenomenon because the extrinsic markers are an extension of the intrinsic identities. The loss of the visible distinctions in cultural products will eventually deplete much of the lore and history of the people so that a time will come when the product will account for writing a "de-humanized" history for the people. As already the cultures of North East India are facing tremendous

challenges from education and modernization, people are scared that the globalization would eventually reduce their cultural 'identity' to 'anonymity'.¹⁰

The Ao-Nagas, being the major sub-tribe of the Nagas of North Eastern Hill tribes share the same ideology with regard to their identity formations. The Ao are also known as Hatigurians. Hatiguri is a place located between the Mariani and Titapar, situated about 30 Km from Tzurang river towards Assam. Most of the Ao villages have alternate names given by the Assamese people. When the Britishers entered the Ao country from the plains, Merangkong was known as Naogaon and Mopongchuket as Molodubia, and so on, Naogaon and Molodubia being the Assamese names for these villages. Once established in the Ao country, the British officers began to ask the names of villages yet further in the interior and were naturally told the Ao names. Thus the Tuesang, a big village of the Changs for years was known by its Ao name of Mojungjami "the village of wicked men". It is because the Changs were the hereditary enemies of the Aos. Most of the names of the Naga tribes were given by the others.¹¹ Such apprehension in every sphere of life currently empowers them to reassert their identity in all spheres of life.

Nature and scope of study

In the light of above discussion the present thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* broadly proposes to study the oral traditions, especially the oral narratives (personal and folk) told by men and women in different cultural contexts on different issues of their society to show how the community constructed their identity, their 'self' in their renditions through the ages. Like any other oral society, the Ao-Nagas prevail upon their lore, the verbal and non verbal expressive behaviour deposited in the mnemonics of the people which is learnt and transmitted orally through the generations. The lore embodies the knowledge, beliefs and the institutions that guided the people and communities to retain their identities, their 'selves' from erosion and invasion despite changes in time and space. Their folk (oral) lore is a rich source for reconstructing their histories and encompasses a wide variety of genres- folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, performing arts like music, dances, drama, painting, arts and an extensive material culture- which establish the distinctiveness and identity among the other tribal communities in Nagaland. Further the study brings forth the change and continuity of Ao-Naga culture as constructed in

their folklore. The thesis examines the notion of identity as conceived by the Nagas in general and the Ao-Nagas in particular. The study shows whether the Ao-Nagas 'what they think of identity' is really lost or still stands as 'core' of their life-style patterns in the contemporary changing dimensions of their worldview. The issues of related to these aspects are proposed to discuss in the light of latest theoretical discourses on identity and methodological implications of narrative inquiry.

The thesis brings forth the socio-religious nuisances of Ao-Naga folk life as reflected in their ritual processes and practices in pre and post Christian times to understand changes and continuity in their new identity formations.

The study proposes to develop Indigenous models of ritual process in tribal societies to demonstrate how the rites performed on different ritual contexts and the material culture associated with them would mark the identity of these communities in the changed contexts. This research also sheds light on social organisation and politico-economic life of the community in the pre and post Christian contexts to show structural continuities and variations in identity formations.

Geographical area of study

The geographical distribution of the Ao region is bounded by the *Tzula* River; *Sangtam*, *Chang* and *Phom* tribes on the East; the *Lotha* tribes, the Assam plains on the west; *Konyak* tribe in the north and the *Sema* tribe in the south. The entire Ao territory is divided into six ranges (*Tsükong*), each having a name comprising of several villages. The ranges run parallel to one another and are called: *the Ongpangkong*, *the Langpangkong*, *the Asetkong*, *the Changkikong*, *the Japukong*, *the Tsurangkong*.¹² The scope of the field work is limited to the regions *Longkhum* village, *Ungma* village, *Mopongchuket* village, *Changtongya* village and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts. All these settlements are populated by Ao-Nagas wherein the other Naga tribes also share the environment.

Survey of Literature

The survey of literature is done in three broad areas. They are: (i) Folk Narrative Research and identity (ii) Status of knowledge on Ao-Naga community (iii) Field methodology and data processing.

(i) Research works on Folk Narrative Research and identity:

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's book, *kinder und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household tales)¹³ is a collection of folktales meant for socialization of the children in the society. It is methodological research on folk narratives. This work is a part of their project in *Germanistik* (German studies) encompassing the fields of philology, law, mythology and literature. By the middle of nineteenth century, Grimm brothers shifted their concern from collection of folktales to (i) search into the origins and dissemination and (ii) study the changes that occurred through the ages in the process of transmission. Grim brothers along with Friedrich Max Muller, an Indologist, upheld the 'Indo-European theory of mythic origins'. On the basis of comparative phylogeny and comparative mythology, they attempted to reconstruct the myths and the mythic-religious beliefs that caused the emergence of these narratives.

Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), in his first volume, *The Origins of Culture*,¹⁴ dealt with various aspects of ethnography including social evolution, linguistics, and mythology. His theory on social evolution contains three stages, savagery, barbarian and civilization. Tylor holds that savagery represents an early stage of cultural development, and barbarians as representatives of a middle stage. Civilizations, such as those of Europe, represent the third stage. He, being the founder of the British school of anthropology upholds that the 'myth' in modern folk society contains the survivals of 'savage myth' and substantiated it basing on his theory of social evolution. He emphasized the need to go deeper into the ethnological roots of the folktales to study origins.

Theodor Benfy (1840-1881) translated the Sanskrit work, *Panchatantra*¹⁵ into English. Basing on the study of the animal tales of this book, he traced the Indic origin to European folktale. He advocated that the dissemination of tales from India to Europe occurred through three stages: First through oral tradition before the 10th century, later through the vehicle of Persian and Arabic translations of Indian literary texts, and finally through contact between Muslim and European populations. Present day scholars consider India as one of several important sources for the European folk narrative tradition. They upheld the theory of monogenesis (single origin) for the similarity of narrative traditions throughout the world.¹⁶

Vladimir Propp's, *The Morphology of the Folktale*,¹⁷ is a famous and highly influential work on structuralism. He extended the Russian Formalist approach to the study of narrative structure. He made a number of distinctions and general schemas about fairytales. Propp examined the kind of relation which comprise each tale, comparing the formulae derived from each and developed a methodology by which one could study the tales according to the functions of the *dramatis personae*. Thus function became the basic classificatory and analytical unit in Propp's structuralism. Propp observed one hundred Russian fairy tales and derived 31 functions (kinds of actions) that construct the narrative structures. It does not mean that all 31 functions occur in a single narrative.

Lévi-Strauss' in his book, *The Structural Study of Myth*,¹⁸ analyzed the structure of the myths in comparative religion. He observed that the patterning of cause and effect relationship in the events and sequential ordering of events in a myth emerges out from the logical structure of the human mind, which configured by the respective societies. He compared the structure of the Oedipus myth with Zuni origin myths and concluded that the logic of mythological thought and the structure of narrative were based on the mediation of binary opposites, such as nature and culture or man and woman. Lévi-Strauss did not deal with the plot-structure of a narrative. He studied the plot-elements by breaking down the myth into the shortest possible sentences, and rearranged these elements into paradigms in order to derive "mythemes" or the meaningful units of the myth. Lévi-Strauss methodology is concerned about the structured meaning in myths, which according to him, is a single reality and observable as such. He does not believe in studying myths in isolation, rather takes into account the cultural-ethnographic context in which they exist and probes into the deep structure of myths and rearranges the elements into meaningful paradigms.

Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) processed the dream narratives of his patients through his theory of psychoanalysis in his essay on '*The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales*'. He interpreted that his patient's dreams contained motifs from '*Little Red Riding Hood*' and '*The Wolf and the Seven Kids*.'¹⁹ His concept of 'sexual symbolism' found expression in his famous book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*²⁰. It is a source to understand human thought. The book presents Freud's

early theories in regard to the nature of the unconscious dream psychology, the significance of childhood experiences, the psychic process of “censorship,” the “hieroglyphic” language of dreams, and the method he called “psychoanalysis.”

Carl Jung’s (1875-1961), *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*²¹ is a collection of Jung’s articles dealing with the archetypes of the collective unconscious. An archetype is a psychic format in which instinctual and conditioned behavior plays out in human activity. He took examples from fairytales and religious imagery to substantiate his concept of archetypes that influence the personal and collective consciousness of the people. The book further throws light on the process of individuation, a process of psychological "wholeness (which) consists in the union of the conscious and unconscious personality.

Alan Dundes’s book, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*²² emphasized the serious nature of myth as a “sacred narrative” through compiling an anthology of twenty-two texts on the theory of myth. His book *Analytical Essays in Folklore*²³ is an anthology of his articles published in various journals. The book throws light on various aspects of folklore-theory, method, structural analysis, and psychoanalysis- with suitable examples from American folklore. Another book, *Folklore Matters*²⁴ contents essays that covers huge field of folklore. It focuses on establishing identity through folklore, how fake lore is produced, comparative methods and analysis of folk toy, proverbs, ballads, pranks and so forth. His essay, *Defining Identity through folklore*,²⁵ emphasises the importance of identity by studying folklore. He states that folklore is not simply a way of obtaining available data about identity but one of the principal way by which an individual and a group discovers or establishes his or its identity. The study of this essay gives deeper understanding in connection with identity and folklore.

Richard Bauman’s work, *Verbal Art as Performance*,²⁶ puts forth an outline for understanding performance theory as it relates to speaking events. He considered verbal art as performance than simply as repository of lore. He considers folklore as a performance framed in a given framework, context, and appreciated (or not) by an audience/auditor.

Dan Ben-Amos in his article, *Toward Definition of Folklore in Context*,²⁷ holds that the domain of folklore revolves round three aspects: a body of knowledge,

a mode of thought, or a kind of art although they are not exclusive of each other. He opines that three types of relations that exist between the social context and folklore: possession, representation, and creation or re-creation forms base of folklore study. Folk narratives, especially folktales constitutes all these three forms of relationships depicting the cultural identity of the tellers who are part and parcel of such narrative tradition. Hence folklore is artistic communication in small groups.

A. K. Ramanujan's essay, *Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?*²⁸, explains cultural ideologies and behavioral manifestations thereof in terms of an Indian psychology which he calls as “context-sensitive” thinking. In his works on folklore studies he highlights the intertextuality of the Indian oral and written literary tradition. His essays, *Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections* (1989),²⁹ and *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991)³⁰ are good examples of his work on Indian folklore studies. Context-sensitivity is a theme that appears not only in Ramanujan's cultural essays, but also appears in his writings about Indian folklore and classic poetry. In *Where Mirrors are Windows*, for example, he discusses the “inter-textual” nature of Indian literature, written and oral. By this, he means that Indian stories refer to one another and sometimes to other versions of the very story being told. It is important for Ramanujan to note that these inter-textual influences do not occur in a unidirectional pattern. He emphasizes that the oral and written traditions, the Sanskritic and local traditions are in dialogue with and mutually influence one another. **Stuart Blackburn** and **A. K. Ramanujan's** book, *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*³¹ is a collection of essays that represent, as the editors suggest, a “fifth stage” of research into Indian folklore, wherein new materials are studied from new perspectives.³² His essay, *Two realms of Kannada folklore* explores two realms of Kannada folklore: on the one hand, there are domestic tales in which women tell stories about nameless figures to a family audience in a manner much like the *akam* form of classical Tamil verse; on the other hand, *puram* tales are for a public telling. He suggests some other distinctions, such as those among myths, ritual tales, and folktales. Ramanujan's another article, *Toward a Counter-System: Women's Tales*³³ distinguish between women-centered tales, in which women are the main protagonists and that exhibit a cultural counter system (an alternative set of values

and attitudes, theories of action other than the official ones)³⁴ and the generically broader set of stories told by women.

Jawaharlal Handoo in his article, *The world of Teyyam: myth and the message*,³⁵ made structural study of *Teyyam* performance, a ritual theatre still prevalent in northern Kerala state of South India. He emphasized the need to interpret oral narratives on performances since they stand metaphors of cultural identity.

Lalita Handoo in her book, *Structural analysis of Kashmiri folktales*,³⁶ addresses two folkloristically important questions: cross-cultural application of Prop's morphological-structural approach and testing the validity of the method across different types of folktales.

P.S. Kanaka Durga's works on different genres of folklore, especially on folk narratives of Andhra Pradesh throw a flood of light on recent trends in folk narrative research. In her article "*From Incorporation to Liminality: Child Marriage in Rites of Passage*"³⁷ analyzed the structure of the ritual process of marriage, especially the child marriage in which certain ritual events are different. She critically evaluated the ritual models advocated by van Gennep and Victor Turner and established how Indian models are different from that of the Western. She accounted cultural variations for the difference in structures. Her articles "*Interchangeability of Gender Roles: Identity in Personal Narratives: A Case of Convergence*"³⁸ and "*Transformability of Gender Roles: Converging Identities in Personal and Poetic Narratives*"³⁹ provide a vivid picture of gender formation and its transformability in Indian womanhood. These articles substantiate how the narrators converge with their personal experiences and their expressive behaviour, exclusively in rendering folk narratives. In the paper "*Politics of Textualisation: Socio Economic Dimensions*"⁴⁰, She explained the socio-economic dimensions of textualisation process of folk narrative tradition. In her paper "*Gender Construction and Domestic Violence: Towards a Folkloric Perspective*", she probed into the issues of domestic violence from the perspective of the process of gender construction in Indian society basing on folktales and legends collected from Andhra Pradesh⁴¹. In the paper "*Women in Hydro mythology: A Discourse on the Representation of Tradition and Counter Tradition in South Indian Folklore*",⁴² she analyzed a folk narrative in the light of contemporary discourse on structuralism and post structuralism and interpreted how

the tradition (normative) and counter tradition (anti-normative) permeate the social life. It further shows the changing dimensions of human and social values in mundane lives. The paper “*Social Construction of Gender: Reflections in Women’s Folktales*”⁴³ substantiate the process of constructing gender as reflected in the folktales often told of the women, by the women and for the women. In the article “*Gender and Identity in Women’s Folktales: Narrative Inquiry*”⁴⁴ she establishes how the narrators establish ‘narrative identity’ in their oral narratives. The narrative inquiry method is adopted in the analysis and interpretation. Her paper “*Women folktales: An Art of Subversion*”⁴⁵ interprets that the women render folktales as a strategy to negotiate with the multifarious task they are supposed to do in their lives. Thus they learn an art of subverting or inverting the realities and pump them into their renditions as folktales.

Hubert Hermans’s article on *The Dialogical Self: toward a Theory of Personal and Cultural Positioning*⁴⁶ gives psychological perspective of identity constructions in the societies. His theory of dialogical self is a psychological concept that describes the mind’s ability to imagine the different positions of individuals in an internal dialogue between ‘I’ (the core self) and ‘me’ (extended self). He established the dialogical nature of self as ‘I’ as ‘knower’ and ‘me’ as ‘known’ constructing personal and social identities of the people. Composite concept “dialogical self” goes beyond the self-other and merges the separation between the inside of the self and the outside world and make them as central to the society at large.

Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears, and Bertjan Doosje essay on *Self and social identity*⁴⁷ examine the self and identity by taking into account the different conditions under which these are affected by the groups to which people belong. They focused on social identity in different group contexts and have analyzed how both the individual and the collective self are concerned in a variety of different group situations. They developed taxonomy of situations to reflect different concerns and motives that come into play as a result of threats to personal and group identity and degree of commitment to the group.

Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book, *The ethics of identity*⁴⁸ observes that people are not simply members of groups or products of culture. He argues that individuality and autonomy are basic to personhood in all social and cultural contexts.

Appiah rejects the romantic notion of identity formation as a search for a pre-existing authentic self waiting to be found or discovered.

Anthony Elliott in his book, *Concept of the self*,⁴⁹ aims to examine critically the ideas, concepts and theories of the self that are used in social analysis while also discussing key areas in which such approaches have produced elucidation of the experience of self-identity, selfhood and personal identity. Elliott has tried to develop a concise introduction to some of the major concepts and theories of the self in contemporary social theory and social science.

Soumen Sen's essay, *Identity Expression in Ritual and myth*⁵⁰ focuses on how identity is expressed through the study of myth and ritual. He studied on the Khasi and Jaintai tribe of North-east India. Though these tribes have lost its significance in regard to the practice of indigenous religion but according to him the recent social and political movements draw much of its symbol and expressions from the myths.

Arnold Van Gennep's book, *The rites of passage*⁵¹ is famous for his study on the rites of passage rituals that mark significant transitions in human lives like birth, puberty, marriage and death. The idea of significance passage rituals was first introduced by Gennep, who saw rebirth as the law of life and described rites of passage as a threefold process: *rites of separation: rites of transition (liminality from the Latin, limen, meaning threshold): and rites of incorporation*. The individual would first be ritually removed from the society as a whole, then he would be isolated for a period, and finally he would be incorporated back into the tribe in his new status. His method was constructed to describe patterns of life in those traditional societies often described as primitive or tribal societies.

Victor Turner (1920-1983), in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*⁵² begins by defining society as he sees it, within the context he has used the term. According to Turner, both structure and *communitas* are vital to humanity. His concrete data regarding ritual comes from his fieldwork with the Ndembu. Turner's theoretical approach is reliant on the work of Arnold van Gennep, who developed the idea of liminality in his own work. Turner used ideas, like *communitas* and liminality to organize his thoughts and to assist in understanding the ritual behavior of the tribe he studied. Turner⁵³ coined the term *liminoid* to refer to experiences that have characteristics of liminal experiences but are optional and don't involve a resolution of

a personal crisis. According to him, the liminal/ *liminoid* entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.⁵⁴ Turner's work is also influenced by structuralists, such as Levi-Strauss, and by sociologists of religion, such as Emile Durkheim. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*⁵⁵, is another work of Turner. It is a collection of ten essays on ritual. He analyzed rituals and demonstrated the symbolic meanings that derived from social contexts. What mattered to Turner were not the symbols themselves, but the roles of the symbols in specific social situations. His analysis on the rituals of the *Ndembu*, an African tribe in Zambia used several kinds of trees for young women's ritual and they attributed various symbolic meanings to these trees.

Mary Douglas' book, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*,⁵⁶ analyzed the ideas of pollution and taboo, considering different cultures from a structural point of view and with some influence from Gestalt psychology. Her purpose was to avoid a limited explanation, regarding the phenomena in relation to the whole social structure. The theory of purity and danger was put forward by Mary Douglas who was perhaps noted for her writings on pollution and taboo. She saw liminality as the intervening elements between contrasting structural positions associated with what she called "matter out of place". This book presents a deep study of pollution concepts and a wide approach of how social rules are reinforced. Another book by Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*,⁵⁷ offers a theory on how rituals and symbols reflect the structure of society. The book is divided into two main sections. The first half of the book lays out methodological concerns, and the second half offers examples and test cases of how the methodology can be used. Douglas builds on the socio-linguistic work of Basil Bernstein and shows how it can be used to examine and make sense of societies. Douglas examines the body in relation to society and studies two neighbouring Nilotic tribes, the Nuer and Dinka to illustrate that the differences in religious practices can be explained by an understanding of their views of the world. Douglas looks at another quadrant of the grid and group framework and states that evil is not a problem for all groups.

Clifford Geertz's, *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology*,⁵⁸ is a collection of academical essays. He deals with human nature, presumably everywhere one and the same, comes only in its local varieties, as a bewildering diversity of languages, cultures, cultural practices, beliefs, mentalities, behaviors, prescriptions, proscriptions, taboos etc, as varieties of local knowledge that appear mutually and reciprocally repellent or incurably allergic to one another in their inconsistency as illuminations of the truth of experience or reality.

(ii) Status of knowledge on Ao-Nagas:

In this section, the works so far produced on the Ao-Naga community are analyzed briefly in two phases⁵⁹: (a) Colonial phase (produced by the British administrators and anthropologists) (b) Post Colonial (the works that speak about culture, identity, globalization etc.)

(a) Colonial writings:

J.P. Mills's monograph on *The Ao-Naga*,⁶⁰ gives an account of Ao-Naga tribal life in six chapters. He described the domestic life of the Ao people, their law and customs, religion and brief introduction to language and folktales. He held that these folktales gives rare glimpses of the early history of the north eastern hills which helps in tracing the origins and migrations of the Nagas. Mills gave an ethnographic account of the routine life, food, economy, religion, belief system, rituals (social and religious), dress, songs, narratives, values, norms and customary law, political organization etc. Mills compare the Aos with the other Naga tribes like Manipur, Myanmar (Burma), Assam in the matters of food, dress, religion and other patterns of life style. Mills was afraid that as the generations pass, there may be a possibility of losing these traditions due two reasons (i) since they are oral cultures that survive on memories of the past handed down from one generation to the other, there are many chances to forget them in due course and (ii) the nature of modern education and conversions into Christianity allow the glorious past to pass into oblivion.⁶¹ He feels that those who tell the stories are the one who were part of the feast of merits and the one who brought heads during head-hunting rituals. His article on *Certain aspects of Naga culture*,⁶² finds variations in the customs of different Naga tribes with regard to (i) methods of government- how Nagas run their village administration,(ii)

disposal of dead and (iii) treatment of enemies' heads. The article highlights the heterogeneity of the Naga tribes.

W.C. Smith's book, *The Ao-Naga tribes of Assam*,⁶³ appears to be a travelogue. He is interested in Ao-Naga language. He considers AOs as primitive tribe who had been isolated in the hills of north-eastern India for generations. He holds that the onset of globalization brought with it the advancement in communication system and technology which cut the boundaries of time and space and evolved the world into a global village. In his view, Ao-Nagas are also subjected to the changes occurring in the third world countries due globalization and losing their hoary past.⁶⁴ However, Smith could not completely record mechanism of the social changes happening in Ao-Naga dominions.

Haimendorf's book, *The Naked Nagas*⁶⁵ is an anthropological work produced during his visit to Nagaland in the 20th century. He lived in the Naga Hills with the people in small groups of villages for several months. He learnt their language and participated in the activities of their tribal life - hunting, fishing, planting, weeding, dancing and feasting - with the people. His reports were in the form of diaries.⁶⁶ His book is a first person narrative.

M.M.Clark's book, *A Corner in India*,⁶⁷ gives an account of the purpose of her stay in Nagaland, for spreading of Christianity and for imparting English Education through American Baptist Missionary Society. Her book contains information on the dress, food, customs, rituals etc. of the native tribes.

(b) Post-colonial writings

M. Alemchiba Ao book, *The Arts and crafts of Nagaland*,⁶⁸ gives a vivid description about many important aspects of traditional Naga society like head hunting, spinning and weaving, arts and crafts. He stresses the need for the translation of the oral ethno-poetry of the Nagas into written form to disseminate their hoard of culture to the outside world.

Verrier Elwin's book, *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*,⁶⁹ is an anthology of excerpts collected from the writings of Britishers on the Nagas from 1827 to 1896. In about one third of the book (eight sections), Elwin gives a general information of different Naga tribes. The remaining chapters describe the geography, anthropology,

exploration, history, religion, custom and tradition, warfare and development (i.e. agriculture, trade, industry, health and education of Naga land and people. The book gives a cursory picture of nineteenth century reports on the Nagas, revealing the breadth and depth of observations made by the British.

M.Alemchiba Ao in his book, *The folktales from Nagaland*,⁷⁰ contains twenty three folktales collected from Nagas. The intension of the writer is to preserve the fast dying oral literature for future generations.⁷¹

Milanda Ganguli's book, *A Pilgrimage to the Nagas*,⁷² presents an account of her experiences amidst the Naga tribes⁷³. The author discusses various issues related to the history and culture of Nagaland and its people. She focused on the issues of origin, spread, social and religious customs, festivals, and Morung (dormitory) system. The influence of Christianity on the Ao religion is also mentioned in the book.

Panger Imchen's book, *Ancient Ao Naga religion and culture*,⁷⁴ focuses on the Ao-Naga belief system and socio-cultural practices. He emphasized in his book that preservation of Naga heritage is essential to construct stronger baser for Christianity in Nagaland. He suggests that the socio-religious and cultural backup of the community has to be given due importance to develop an indigenous church for Nagas.⁷⁵

Temsula Ao's⁷⁶ book, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*,⁷⁷ throws light on the oral traditions of the community. She used these traditions as source material for studying Ao-Nagas. she presented twenty six tales in the book but were neither explained nor interpreted. Though she mentioned myths and tales of Ao-Nagas, she did not interpret the difference between these two genres. She explained the need to study the context of the tale to have a clear understanding of those strands of culture that nourished the Ao-Nagas through the ages. She encourages the younger generation to learn their own traditions which otherwise may get diffused and finally get lost forever. **Temsula Ao's** article, *Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective*⁷⁸ examines the origin myth of the Ao-Naga to see how the social structure and clans divisions were established and also the establishment of the traditional religious practices and system of ethical conduct. Again another article on, *Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective*,⁷⁹ discusses the identity of the Nagas in the wake of globalization by using the examples from

origin myth, shawl, land boundaries, ethnic and linguistic difference, houses, village gates, textiles, tattoos handicrafts, dance etc. she is concern that if the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people.⁸⁰

Lucy Zehol's edited the book, *Women in Naga society*,⁸¹ focuses on the status of various tribes of Naga women in the society in domestic and public realms.

A.Asola Jamir in her article, *The image of women in selected Naga Folklore and its impact on Naga Women today*,⁸² studied selected folktales, folksongs, superstitions and sayings to situate the multiplicity of roles played by women in changing of their Naga society. She expects that the community should change their traditional views towards the Naga women who play versatile and vital role in domestic and public spaces of the society.

V.K.Nuh's book, *The Origin of Naga*,⁸³ traces the origin and spread of all Naga tribes from *Khezhakenoma* village based on oral traditions.

(iii) Field methodology and data processing:

Kenneth S. Goldstein's book, *A guide for field workers in folklore*,⁸⁴ emphasises how experience in the field improves the quality of research in folklore. For him methodology is only one of the requirements for successful data collection. He holds that unless the fieldworker has the inclination, temperament, or personality for data collection, he will never be successful in his pursuits since the mere use of methods and techniques do not serve the purpose. The chapters on problem formulation, pre-field preparations, establishment of rapport with informants, observation collecting methods, interview, collecting methods, and the techniques of motivating informants explain the nature of professionalism in field work that a researcher is supposed to develop. The book explains about data collection techniques used for different genres, ethnographic method, the concepts in qualitative and quantitative research like positivism, naturalism, subjectivity, objectivity, reflexivity etc.

Samuel P. Bayard's article, *The Materials of Folklore*,⁸⁵ tells about what constitute folklore material and how it should be collected. He distinguished folklore from cultural anthropology. He advocated that the folklore lies not in the traditions and, aesthetics and arts of the people but lies within the realm of thought and some aspects of the content and activities of peoples' minds."⁸⁶

Donald A. MacDonald's article, *Fieldwork: Collecting oral literature*⁸⁷ explains the planning of the researcher for field work and prescribes several rules and regulations to be observed in the field. He tells about the field roles⁸⁸ to be played by the researchers, methods and techniques to be adopted in the field basing on the context of collection of data etc.⁸⁹

Dennis Tedlock's, *Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*⁹⁰ presents startling new methods for transcribing, translating, and interpreting oral performance that carry wide implications for all areas of the spoken arts. Moreover, he reveals that how the categories and concepts of poetics and hermeneutics based in Western literary traditions cannot be carried over in their entirety to the spoken arts of other cultures. He stresses the need for the extensive textual and contextual analysis to interpret them from the perspective of the people on whom the research is being carried.

Richard M. Dorson's, *Introduction: Concepts of Folklore and folklife studies*,⁹¹ prescribes the need for a folklorist has to master the skills that are essential to study and interpret folklore a distinct discipline of study. He grouped folklore into four categories: He further describes the field of folklore and folk life under four groupings: (i)verbal/ oral expression that include spoken, sung and voice behaviour, (ii) material culture (iii) social folk custom which comes between verbal expression and material culture and (iv) the performing folk arts.

Jacques Derrida's, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*⁹² are a manifesto against structuralism. Derrida's essay proposed some theoretical limitations to structuralism. The element of "play" in the title of Derrida's essay is often erroneously taken to be "play" in a linguistic sense, based on a general tendency towards puns and humor. His post structuralist theory aims at textual analysis and upholds the concept of "self" not as a singular and coherent entity but a fictional construct. Instead, an individual comprises conflicting tensions and knowledge claims

(e.g., gender, class, profession, etc.). The meaning the author intended is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives. It is important to analyze how the meanings of a text shift in relation to certain variables, usually involving the identity of the reader. In his post-structuralist approach to textual analysis, the reader replaces the author as the primary subject of inquiry. He called displacement is often referred to as the “destabilizing” or “decentering” of the author, though it has its greatest effect on the text itself. Without a central fixation on the author, post-structuralist examines other sources for meaning (e.g., readers, cultural norms, other literature, etc.). The essay explains about the deconstruction of meanings in the binary oppositions of the structure and established the relationships between the signifier, signified and the sign.

Marcus and Cushman’s article, *Ethnographies as Texts*,⁹³ explains how the ethnographic accounts can constructed as cultural texts. He explains about the ethnographic realism, a style of ethnographic writing that narrates the author’s experiences and observations as if the reader was witnessing or experiencing events first hand. The authors identify nine characteristics of ethnographic realism: a totalizing description of another culture; an omniscient, unintrusive narrator; substitution of composite creations for individuals; references to fieldwork only to the extent necessary to establish the actual presence of the ethnographer; focus on everyday life situations; dogmatic claim that the native point of view is being represented; generalizations are favoured over detailing of particular facts; use of jargon; conceptual abstractions which bypass attention to the context of native language.⁹⁴

Stephen A. Tyler’s, *Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document*,⁹⁵ proposes an entirely different definition of ethnography which causes the problem of representation to disappear altogether. His definition of post modern ethnography⁹⁶ emphasizes the dialogical nature of ethnography, but here the discourse is between reader and writer rather than between the writer and the culture he studies. He claims that all ethnographies are post-modern in effect and also states that the post-modern ethnography has not yet been written and may not even be possible.⁹⁷ Tyler's essay is important for it emphasizes on discourse analysis, the ethical character of ethnography, and the relationship between writer, text and reader.

Michael Genzuk's, *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research*,⁹⁸ focuses ethnography as a social science research method where typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. He explains three methodological principles- naturalism, understanding and discovery for ethnographic method.⁹⁹

Jerome Bruner in his article, *The Narrative Construction of Reality*¹⁰⁰ argued that the mind structures its sense of reality using mediation through cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems. He gives an account of ten ways of how a narrative constructs reality. Narrative diachronicity, particularity, intentional state entailment, hermeneutic comparability, canonicity and breach, referentiality, genericness, normativeness, context sensitivity and negotiability, Narrative accrual (how they are cumulative).

Richard Giovannoli's, *The Narrative method of inquiry*,¹⁰¹ points out that, the purpose of narrative research is to study personal experiences and the process of meaning-making in a systematic manner. He held that the narratives are essentially more than the telling stories; it is the way one creates and recreates the realities of one's own self.¹⁰²

William M. Clements', *Personal Narrative, the Interview Context, and the Question of Tradition*,¹⁰³ explains why personal narrative as a genre possesses several advantages over the investigation of more exotic materials. He suggested that while collecting personal narratives, the collector should familiarize with the informant prior to the interview, familiarity with the cultural milieu from which the informant comes, trying to get information on whether the informant has narrated his/her personal narrative, the collector of personal narratives can evaluate traditionality by considering the depth of artistry in the material he/she collect. He further state that, in the interview context, an informant may create narratives in response to specific questions from the interviewer.¹⁰⁴

Paul Ricoeur in his three volumes of books *Time and Narrative*¹⁰⁵ explains the relationships between the narratives, time and identity of the narratives. For him in the narrative construction the historical time transcends into human time to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence. He explains the process of

attaining narrative identity by the narrators in the narratives. For Ricoeur the constitutive features of any narrative form are personal identity, constituted by an *idem*-identity and an *ipse*-identity, which always involves a narrative identity. For him the narrative identity could be obtained in three steps: (i) narratives draw together disparate and somehow discordant elements into the concordant unity of a plot that has a temporal span,(ii) the elements and episodes that a narrative unites involve contingencies. All of them could have been different or even nonexistent. Nonetheless, as emplotted, these elements take on the guise of necessity or at least of likelihood because they are followable. Taken by itself, an element of a story is of interest only if it is surprising. But when it is integrated into a plot it appears as a quasi-necessity and (iii) narratives are made up not only of actions and events but also of characters or personages. Finally, a narrative's characters only rise to the status of persons-fictional or real-who can initiate action when one evaluates their doings and sufferings and imputes them to the actors and victims as praiseworthy or otherwise

Catherine Kohler Riessman's, *Analysis of Personal Narratives*,¹⁰⁶ gives a vivid description of the collection, analysis and interpretation of personal narratives, which is being emerged as a genre of study. The author gives the reasons for its influential use in social science research. The method is based on: the detailed transcripts of interview excerpts; structural features of discourse; analysis of the co-production of narratives through the dialogic exchange between interviewer and participant; comparative approach to interpret the similarities and differences among life stories of the participants.

Ram Ahuja's book, *Research Methods*,¹⁰⁷ explains the method of converting raw data into meaningful statements includes data processing, data analysis, and data interpretation and presentation. Data processing mainly involves various manipulations necessary for preparing the data for analysis which could be manual or electronic. It involves editing, categorizing the open-ended questions, coding, computerization and preparation of tables and diagrams. The data collected from the field is evaluated, analyze and interpret. The analysis is the ordering of data into constituent parts in order to obtain answers to research questions. Merely analysis does not provide answers to research questions so interpretation of data is necessary. Thus,

to interpret is to explain, to find meaning. One must first analyze the data and then interpret the results of the analysis.

Janet Bean, in her *Field Guide: Instructor's Manual*¹⁰⁸ emphasizes the need to have cooperation between the researcher and the cultural groups in the fieldwork situation. She expects the fieldworkers to gain understanding of various subcultures while to improve their research, record keeping, speaking, and writing skills.

Lacunae in previous researches:

So far the researches conducted on the Nagas in general and Ao-Naga in particular, accepted that their rich cultural heritage and identity are preserved in their oral traditions (folklore). But different genres of their folklore are not methodically collected, analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the people who had produced them. Most of the researches depended on the Administrative records, field reports of the anthropologists and other such sources which did not reveal the soul of the community- how it struggled through the ages to carve its own niche i.e., the cultural identity ever since the historical formations. Though some works focused on rituals, folk narratives and songs they are highly descriptive and interpreted more from the researcher's viewpoint. The content of the lore is given importance rather than the cultural context of their renditions. Some works are compilation of folklore genres meant for archival purpose. The rituals are though graphically described, they are not analysed in the light of latest discourses on cultural semiotics and ritual theories. Almost all works express the fear that the literacy, Christianity and globalization are threats to their personal and community identities; and one must save their culture from erosion. They warn the younger generation that they should protect their rich heritage by preserving in audio-visual forms and print media. The research works are not suggesting measures to save the heterogeneity of community from homogeneity caused by the above three factors. The methodology used by the colonial writers was primarily based on exploration and fieldwork and secondly the methods that they used were survey methods, observation and participant observation methods with the objective of trying to show how it really was. Therefore this literature has only description. Their writings became the sources for post-colonial writers on the Nagas. However their writings were more or less a descriptive affair or information on the Naga culture, traditions and the life of the people. So folklore of the Nagas was not

explored and is not taken into consideration for the study about the Nagas. Writings were not perceived from oral tradition or from the folk perspective.

Now the survey of literature emerges the following questions: The Nagas, especially the Ao-Nagas really lost their identity. Whether literacy erased their oracy? Whether Christianity could completely wipe off the animistic thinking, ritual practices, social organization, and gender construction of Ao-Nagas? Whether Indian administration could replace native village organization, customary law and traditional economy? Could the globalization erode Ao-identities?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that:

- Nagas had a long cherished history and culture hoarded in their oral traditions. Their frequent involvement in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and displacement of their political/geographical domains by Britishers and Indian Government could not disturb the functioning of their traditional village councils. The customary law still prevails. The agricultural practices are still tribal but follow some technological advancement.
- The introduction of literacy and advent of Christianity though condemned some democratic ways with regard to spousal selections (Morung system-dormitory), the rest of the patriarchal social organisation related to the institutions of marriage, kinship, law, customs etc, are being continued with some changes coming up in the passage of time.
- Though most of the Ao-Nagas took to the Christianity, their animistic belief system still gets reflected in their symbolic ritual practices observed during several socio-religious celebration in the contemporary times.
- At the outset it appears that Ao-Nagas are losing identity because of globalisation. If the deep structures of different aspects of their folk life as reflected in their oral narratives are analysed and interpreted from the perspectives of the community, they reveal change and continuity of Ao-naga identities through the ages.

Aims and objectives

Basing on the hypotheses made above, the thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* advocates the following aims and objectives.

- To collect different genres of Ao-Naga folklore- folk narratives (mythology, folktales) proverbs, riddles folksongs, beliefs, and religion, ritual practices and personal narratives / life stories of the narrators in the field.
- To analyse the folknarratives from structuralist and poststructuralist perspective for establishing how the folknarrative typology and structures

could reflect the social hierarchies in at different realms of folklife. The Proppian, Levistraussian and Derridian philosophies are being evaluated in this context.

- To show how the people in oral societies construct and sustain their identities through the generations in their folk narrative tradition and other genres of folklore.
- To analyse the ritual life of the Ao-Naga community of the past and present and evolve indigenous models which are quite different from the models put forward by Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.
- To study different walks of the lives like social organizations, religion and rituals, agriculture, economy, administration etc. and their ethnic cultural practices that mark their identity as reflected in their oral narratives. And also to establish the changes and continuities of Ao-Naga identities in pre and post Christian era in the wake of globalisation.
- To suggest the measures for retaining the cultural identities of the Ao-Nagas in the changing scenario.

Methodology

Methods can be defined as the procedures and techniques characteristic of a particular discipline or field of knowledge or a way of doing something, especially a systematic way; implies an orderly logical arrangement. Methodology refers to more than a simple set of methods; rather it refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie a particular study.¹⁰⁹ The first step in methodology is collection of data. Data is organized information. It can be numbers, words, measurements, observations or even just descriptions of things. The data is collected from **primary** and **secondary** sources, but the information gathered from both these sources gets merged in the research process.

Primary sources

The prime source of the study is the data gathered from the field work. The Ao culture is rooted in their folklore traditions transmitted orally through out the generations since they have no written source. The study focuses on the oral narratives as the major source of study. Oral narratives are highly dynamic genres embodying the essence of culture; how it is being experienced, represented and transmitted to the other generations. Narratives are stories that have been shared in everywhere in human culture as a mode of communication, education, preservation of culture and to instil knowledge and values. Hence the people adapt narratives to

contour and conceptualize their experiences to render in the form of stories which are nothing than their experiential expressions. The oral narratives broadly include folk narratives (myths, folktales etc) metanarratives (narratives on narratives), personal narratives, life experience narratives and auto ethnographies of the informants in the field. Men, women and children from different socio-economic statuses and age groups were primary resource persons in the field study. Oral narratives on the traditional rituals and practices are collected from the older people who witnessed three generations. The data on the life cycle (childbirth, puberty, marriage and death) rituals and politico-cultural/religious rites is collected in the form of oral narratives. The contemporary rituals are collected in the context of celebrations.

The material culture associated in the folklife of the Ao-Nagas is also collected from the dwellings of the people. The other folklore genres of the community are also collected. The field work is done in around the villages *Longkhum, Ungma Mopongchuket* and *Changtongya* and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts.

Secondary Sources

The published or unpublished written data related to the topic of research constitutes the secondary source material. Besides the research works that were already analysed above in the survey of literature, administrative records of the British and Indian government and village reports form the source material.

Methods

Research methods are classified into quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative research¹¹⁰ is defined as that which explains a “*phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods, particularly statistics.*”¹¹¹ It contains the data gathered from structured research methods such as survey, questionnaires, checklists and experimentation.

(i) **Quantitative methods** are generally works towards documenting subject attributes expressed in quantity, extent, or strength, as well as guaranteeing- among other things- objectivity, accuracy, validity and reliability. Their purpose is to measure variables and to produce figures which will allow judgements as to the status of the variables in question, which in turn will allow further processing, and

comparisons and permit replicability.¹¹² Survey method is a quantitative method. Before entering into the field, the survey method was applied. I acquainted fully with the literature on the area and its people to supply information, study the geography, weather conditions, and locations before entering into the field and attempted to reach the local people who may assist with the research. Survey method is a non-experimental, descriptive research method or a fact-finding study.¹¹³ Survey method helps to organize data into meaningful components that can assist in understanding the human condition on many levels. In a sense it is a shorthand method of gaining information from a subset of the entire group studied. Survey method is always conducted in a natural setting; it is a field study.

In order to get informations from the field using the above methods, different techniques like focus group discussions, interviews, informal discourses on different issues of the research topic with the communities are appropriated. Focus group discussions are conducted with the members of the councils and elders of the folk groups on different issues on religion, rituals, social norms, customary law etc. In the directive and non-directive interviews, the questions used are open ended which gave scope to the researcher to understand the perspective of the community. After field work, transliteration of data and transfer of data from audio through script is done which is called transcription. A researcher can employ multiple methods.

(ii) Qualitative methods: van Mannen considers qualitative research as a best umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. The qualitative researchers are concerned with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the precise meaning to persons of phenomena occurring in the normal social contexts and are typically preoccupied with complexity, authenticity, contextualisation, shared subjectivity of researcher and researched and minimization of illusion¹¹⁴. The qualitative methods include observation, ethnography, postmodern-ethnography (dialogical method) and narrative inquiry.

a. Observation method is used in obtaining data by direct observation, looking from the outside in and describing the site as the researcher sees it. There are Participant Observer and Non-participant Observer. Participant Observer has the

advantage to participate and observe what is going around and feel the experience the actual role which the researchers assume. Non-Participant Observer may be able to view the situation with an objectivity of which participant would have robbed him/her and as he/she is not in the centre of the action but may be able to take notes, view the entire kaleidoscope of activities and perhaps even be able to use a tape recorder to obtain a full report of the audio aspects of the event.

b. Ethnography is an experience labeled as the fieldwork method and then writes accounts of the culture, emphasizing descriptive detail. It is to be closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture.¹¹⁵ Ethnographic method in short is the graphic study of culture of the races. Ethnography (Greek *ethnos* = people and *graphein* = writing)¹¹⁶ is a genre of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies. Ethnography presents the results of a holistic research method founded on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each other.¹¹⁷ It is the process of describing a culture or way of life from a folk people's point of view. Another name for it is field research. The ethnographer usually cultivates close relationships with "informants" who can provide specific information on aspects of cultural life. While detailed written notes are the mainstay of fieldwork. Even tape recorders and cameras are also used. So the ethnographic method involves observation and note taking.

c. Post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality.¹¹⁸ Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' has influenced academic disciplines. Postmodern ethnographers are interested in understanding how this form perpetuates certain relations of power and domination. Postmodern ethnographers are examples of narrative forms and new ways of telling. Postmodern ethnography springs from methodological reflection within the cultural theory of postmodernism that transposed its principles into ethnographic practice. According to postmodern ethnographers, objectivity and impartiality are not features of the ethnographer's interpretative work, but fictions promoted through rhetorical strategies of textual type known as the 'poetics and politics of writing'.¹¹⁹ These ethnographers believe that instead of

understanding the other more fully, what fieldworkers should do is gain a fuller understanding of themselves, by uncovering their prejudices, ideology and tacit knowledge.¹²⁰

d. Narrative inquiry an ‘inquiry in to the narrative’ is another method used to analyse and interpret the oral narratives in the thesis. Narratives are stories which are told in ordered sequence of events that is combined with verbal communication to make sense of what one experience, and also with different characters that communicate a message artistically. It focuses particularly on people’s lives and lived experiences and the process of gathering information/data for the purpose of research through storytelling where the researcher writes/records a narrative of the experience. The person who narrates the story is the primary sources for the narrative enquiry. The lives of the people are consists of stories. Narrative in essence is the stories of lives and the stories of the lives of others and it is open to interpretation. This interpretation develops through relationship of researcher and the respondent or story teller and listener. Narratives are basically consisting of a narrator who shared what happened or tells a story to others by means of conversation or communication through utterances. Production of narratives is a dialogical process between self of the narrator and the researcher. Hence the narratives and other data collected in the field is a product of employing the Dialogical method, which is reflexive, self emanating and emergent. It produces ‘a corpus of thick data’¹²¹ produced ‘dialogically’ by the ethnographer and the informant thereby merging the boundaries between the subject/object and researcher/informant. Self-reflective knowledge comes from the discussion from both sides. Dialogical method helps the researcher to know the reality of the human beings. Both fieldworker and informant begin with little or nothing in terms of shared experience but when they engage in dialogue with each other they starts to experience the activities going on around them. Narratives research directs a study and gathers information to help bring out the appropriate objective research tools, and can be used as the single evaluation of a real-life problem.¹²² Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience.

The study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methods and data collected had been cross checked with the other source materials. Such process is known as method of “triangulation” which is essential while interpreting them from

the perspective of the community. Triangulation refers to the use of several methods in answering the research question¹²³. Deniz describes four forms of triangulation:

- (I) Data triangulation which consists collection of data through multiple source sampling strategies involving different people, time and locations.
- (II) Investigator triangulation that refers to the use of more than one in gathering data
- (III) Theoretical triangulation in which the research relies on more than one theoretical position in interpreting data.
- (IV) Methodological triangulation that refers to the use of more than one method of gathering data. Deniz calls attention to the ‘with-in method’ (using varieties of the same method) and ‘between method’ (using contrasting methods) triangulation¹²⁴.

Chapterisation

This thesis is divided into Eight chapters.

The first chapter is Introduction which gives a brief preamble to the study of Naga, especially Ao-naga culture and identity. The chapter deals with significance of the research topic, its nature and scope and survey of previous literature, hypothesis aims and objectives. The chapter also gives an account of the methodology followed in the research process.

The second chapter, An Overview of Ao-Naga Cultural Life describes in brief the Ao-Naga Folklife to situate the community’s identities in their expressive behaviour. The chapter describes geography, environment and people of Nagaland in general and Mokokchung district, the land of Aos in detail. The cultural life of the Ao-Nagas that encompass social structure, economic activities, political life customary law, religion, rituals, dress ,musical instruments, material culture and ethno medical practices etc., are discussed in brief.

The third chapter Origin and Dispersal of Nagas: A Folkloric Perspective defines the nature and scope of Ao-Nagas’ Folklife and interprets it from the perspectives of identity formations, both in their personal and community domains. The chapter analyses and interprets the mythical tradition of the Nagas and the AO-nagas to throw new light on their origins and migratory patterns through the ages.

The fourth chapter, On Ao-Naga Narrative typology and structure: Metaphors of Identity focuses on (i) how the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas (both in personal and folk) endure their core strands of identity in their tale motifs, and (ii) how the structure of the oral narratives mirror the social stratification and cultural values of the Ao-Nagas. The folk narratives in this chapter are analysed on the paradigms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic structural models and processed through the Derridian post structural hermeneutical discourse and theory of narrative inquiry.

The fifth Social organisation : Reflections in Folklore analyses the folktales, personal narratives and proverbs told by men and women of different age groups to interpret how Ao-Nagas organised their patriarchal society revolving round the institutions of marriage and kinships. The chapter further focuses on how the masculinity and femininity are constructed upon men and women in Ao-Naga society and explains the gender roles and relations in family system. The role of customary law in regulation of social life is also explained.

The sixth chapter, Life Cycle Ceremonies as Cultural Metaphor discusses in general how the rituals celebrated by the Ao-Naga people in different socio-cultural contexts stand as the metaphors of their cultural identities at personal level, as the members of their respective family/clan groups level (collective), among other clans of the Naga society. The definition and theoretical dimension of the rituals in general and life cycle ceremonies in particular are discussed. The ritual process of the 'life cycle ceremonies'- birth, puberty, marriage and death' of the Ao-Naga are analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the community. The ritual events celebrated in each life cycle ceremony are studied to show how they metaphorically represent the cultural components of their respective families and clan groups. Further the chapter develops indigenous models of life cycle ceremonies of the AO-Nagas which are quite distinct from the models developed in the west and other tribal society of the world. The life cycle ceremonies are explained not only as the metaphors of their personal identity, but as the loci changing identities from one threshold to the other in one's life course.

The seventh chapter, Communal Rites as Markers of identity focuses on the rituals that demand the communal participation of the AO-Nagas .The communal

rites are depicted as the paradigms of socialisation and markers of Aos' identity. The intricacies socio-political and religious intricacies of Ao culture are explained how the communal rituals involve social groups as a whole to process their changing identities. The ritual process of social, economic religious and political rituals of the Aos is analysed. Indigenous ritual models of different communal rites which mark different dimensions of Aos identity are developed.

The eighth chapter, Conclusion is a brief summary of all the chapters along with findings. It is observed that the Ao-Naga community is a distinct folklore community which draws its strength by wilful play of verbal and non-verbal genres of folklore in every day life through which it constructs its identity despite the onslaught of modernity and globalisation.

Endnotes:

¹ Naga people: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_people. Accessed: 23/07/2010

² The people of Mokokchung: <http://mokokchung.nic.in/files/people.html>. Accessed: 26/07/2010

³ Nagaland in the 20th century was severed through a treacherous betrayal by the British Government. Burma was gifted with half, and the other half fell under Indian dominion. Those areas that fell under Indian Territory were further subdivided into four fragments, namely - Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Thus, within the Indian Territory, large chunks of Naga lands and Naga people were put into three other states against the wishes of the Nagas. This was done to reduce the Naga political issue to the smallest possible geographical area. The present Indian State of Nagaland is comprised of only 16,557 sq. kms with a population of hardly over two million people. *Kaka Iralu .D.* "The Fifty Four-Year Indo-Naga Conflict: A Question of Internal Indian Ethnic Conflict or a Conflict between Two Nations" Paper presented in National Seminar on Resolving Ethnic Conflicts in North East India. Guwahati, Assam, November 11-12, 2002.

⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=17767085652>. Accessed: 25/07/2010

⁵ Claudis Ptolemy, *Geographia*, V11, Patis, E, Champion, 1925, (ii) p.18.

⁶ Thomas Watters, On Yuan Chwang's travel in India, Vol.III, Part II, Varanasi, 1903, p.11) Quoted in Visier Sanyü, *A History of Nagas and Nagaland*, New Delhi, Commonwealth Publications, 1995, p.7

⁷ Vol.XII, 1931, p.91, cf. *Kaka Iralu, supra*.

⁸ Naga customary law under article 371A (1) by R.C. Chiten Jamir.

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¹⁰ *Ibid*

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Chapter: II

AN OVERVIEW OF AO-NAGA CULTURAL LIFE

The cultural life is not a fragmented- existential, locational and artefactual- entity of society. It is a holistic and well articulated orb that encompasses different aspects of the folkgroups that make them distinct from one another in social world. A brief picture of different realms of cultural life- the geography, environment, the historical milieu, a brief account of Ao-Naga society, religion, rituals, polity, economy, customary law, folklore genres, ethnomedicene, material culture etc,- is given to situate different paradigms of Ao-Naga identity in all these aspects.

People, land and Environment of Nagaland

The Nagas have high sense of territorial integrity of their boundaries and identity with their lands. Their entire struggle in the past to save their lands from frequent expeditions from the neighbouring tribes as well as the Britishers bears testimony to it. Geographically the Nagaland State is almost triangular in shape, having an area of 16,579 sq. Km. It is one of the North-Eastern most state on its maximum part of the south-east. The state lies between 26 '6' N and 27 '4' Latitudes and between 95 '20'E and 95 '15' E Longitudes. The following table provides general information about the topography of Nagaland.

Table No. 2.1: Nagaland at a Glance

Total Area	16,579 sq.km
State Capital	Kohima (1,444.12 m. above sea level)
State Boundaries	East – Myanmar, West – Assam North – Assam & South – Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh
Population	19,88,636 (2001 census)
Rural Population	16,35,815 (82.26%) (2001 census)
Urban Population	3,52,821 (17.74%) (2001 census)
Density of Population	120 per sq.km. (2001 census)
Sex Ratio	909:1000 Female : Male (2001 census)
Literacy Rate Persons:	67.11%
Male :	71.77%
Female :	61.92%
Districts with HQs	(1) Kohima, (2) Mokokchung (3) Tuensang

	(4) Mon (5) Wokha (6) Zunheboto(7) Phek (8) Dimapur
Newly created districts	(1) Longleng (2) Kiphire (3) Peren
Number of Villages	1286 (2001 census)
Number of Census towns	9 (2001 census)
Biggest Village	Kohima village (3965 households; 13,705 persons)
Official Language	English
Average Rainfall	2500 mm
Highest Peak Mount	Saramati, 3840 metres (Tuensang district)
Other Important Peaks	Mount Japfu, 3015 metres (Kohima district) Mount Zanubou, 2750 metres (Phek District) Mount Kupamedzu, 2650 metres (Phek district)
Forest Cover	13,345 sq. km (80.49% of State's Geographical Area)
Medicinal Plants	Conitum ferox, ginseng, lemon grass, aconitum heterophyllum, aquilaria gallocha, artemisia annua, dioscorea floribunda, gloriosa superba, hedychium spicatum, lycopodium clavatum, ardostachys jatamansi, panaxpseudoginseng, picrorhiza kurrone, piper longum, piper nigrum, podophyllum hexandrum, pogostemon cablin, smilax china, tagetes minuta, taxus bacata and valeriana wallichii.
Main Rivers	Dhansiri, Doyang, Dikhu, Tizu, Melak
Soil types	Inceptisols (66 per cent), ultisols (23.8 per cent), entisols (7.3 per cent) and alfisols (2.9 per cent).
Major crops	Paddy, maize, sugarcane, potato and tea.
Agro-climatic conditions favour	Agriculture, horticulture and forestry
Natural resources	Limestone and marble (1,000 million tonnes), petroleum and natural gas (600 million tonnes), coal (50 million tonnes) and substantial reserves of slate sandstones, basalt, chert, dunite, gabbro, granodiorite, serpentine spilitepyroxenite and quartzite.
Railway Head	Dimapur
Airport	Dimapur
Commercial Centre	Dimapur

Sources: *Nagaland State Human Development Report* published by Department of Planning & Coordination Government of Nagaland, October 2004; *Nagaland*, Indian Brand Equality Foundation (IBEF), November, 2010.

Nagaland is a hilly state with interspersed ridges and valleys. The altitude varies 110 to 3840 metres above sea level.¹ Generally the climate of Nagaland is cool in winter and warm in summer especially in the interior places and higher hills. There

is no regular river system in Nagaland that flow directly into the sea. The rivers of Nagaland flow either into Brahmaputra in the west in Assam or into the Chindwin in the east in Myanmar (Burma). The Catchment Rivers in Nagaland that drain into Brahmaputra and the catchment area of rivers that drains into Chindwin are approximately equal, but the interesting thing is that in the case of Brahmaputra catchment a group of rivers drain the area and they join the Brahmaputra in Assam separately whereas in the case of Chindwin catchment all the tributaries join together and finally run into the Chindwin.

The weather in Nagaland has four distinct seasons: winter (cold season), pre-monsoon (hot season), monsoon (rainy season) and retreating monsoon (cool season). The winter season begins in December and continues till the end of February, March and April are the hot season as this period is hot. The rainy season included the months from May to September. The period of October and November is treated as cool season as this period is neither too hot nor too cold.

The mountains of Nagaland are high, others are low, some have steep sides, and others have gentle sloping sides. To the North of Kohima the main ranges gradually decline in its height. In their general appearance, the hills are covered with dense evergreen forest. The mountain system in Nagaland is an offshoot of the Himalayan mountain system which runs roughly east to west. The mountain of Nagaland by and large runs north to south.

The State of Nagaland is rich in flora and fauna. About one-sixth of Nagaland is under the cover of tropical and sub-tropical evergreen forests. Its vegetation types range from alpine to moist tropical types. The flora of a place is the result of the interplay of a combination of factors- edaphic, climatic and topographic. Nagaland is one of the thickest top-soil layers anywhere in India. There are bamboo species not bigger than the thumb which entwines themselves up hundreds of feet to the tops of tall trees. Some bamboo *Dendrocalamus Gigantium*² are so big that several strong men are required to left finger but hundreds of times stronger than its own size of wood and tougher and more elastic than fibre glass. Bamboos were collected during the months of July to October when there were little free from the normal economic pursuits. Bamboo of about a year old is generally selected for the purpose, but bamboos beyond 3 years old being brittle are not at all used. Traditional musical

instruments of the Nagas like mouth-organ, bamboo flute, and trumpet were made of bamboo.

In Nagaland, there are plant species that grow continuously through out the year till they become big and bear fruits. There are abundance of edible wild plants and fruits. Wild vegetables from the forest constitute a very significant part of the food of the people. Wild fruits are also quite plentiful. Wild grapes, wild apples, wild lemon, wild bananas, wild walnut, wild mangoes, wild mulberry, wild cherry and a host of other indigenous fruits are to be found. There are also list of wild medicinal plants³ run into several hundreds.

The State is comparatively rich in animal resources and the source of all animal life is plants. The Carnivores like tiger, lions and so on live only on the meat of other animals. But these other animals again depend on plants for their sustenance. Therefore, the animal life of any place is dependent on the type and quality of the vegetation. There are different food and cash crops by the people of Nagaland.

As has been discussed before, the Nagas are heterogeneous tribal entity having multicultural clans, each of which has its own ritual festivities that makes it distinct from the other. The following table represents the festivals of different Naga tribes celebrated in various seasons in their geographical domains.

Table No. 2.2: Tribes, Seasons and Festivals of different Naga land

S.no	Tribe	Subdivision / District	Main Festival	Ritual calendar
1	Angami	Kohima	<i>Sekrenyi</i>	February
2	Ao	Mokokchung	<i>Moatsu, Tsungremong</i>	May, August
3	Chakhesang	Phek	<i>Tsukhenyie, Sukrenyi</i>	April/May, January
4	Chang	Tuensang	<i>Kundanglem, Nuknyu Lem</i>	April, July
5	Kachari	Dimapur	<i>Bushu Jiba, Baisagn</i>	January, April
6	Khiamniungam	Noklak in Tuensang	<i>Miu Festival, Tsokum</i>	May, October
7	Konyak	Mon	<i>Aoleang Monyu</i>	April
8	Kuki	Dimapur; Peren	<i>Mimkut</i>	January
9	Lotha	Wokha	<i>Tokhu Emong</i>	November
10	Phom	Longleng	<i>Monyu, Moha, Bongvum</i>	April, May, October
11	Pochury	Meluri in Phek	<i>Yemshe</i>	October
12	Rengma	Tseminyu in Kohima	<i>Ngadah</i>	September

13	Sangtam	Kiphire; Tuensang	<i>Amongmong</i>	September
14	Sumi	Zunheboto	<i>Ahuna, Tuluni</i>	November, July
15	Yimchungru	Shamator in Tuensang and Kiphire	<i>Metumniu, Tsungkamniu</i>	August, January
16	Zeliang Hega,	Peren	<i>Langsimyi/Changa Gadi, and Mileinyi</i>	February, October, March

Source: *Nagaland State Human Development Report* published by Department of Planning & Coordination Government of Nagaland, October 2004.

The above table throws flood of light on the heterogeneity and cultural diversity of tribes in Nagaland.

Geography and environment of Mokokchung District, the land of Aos

The land wherein Aos live is a place with long ranges of hills with gentle slopes leading to water resources like streams. The Mokokchung District is the home of the Ao people. It has an area of 1615 sq.km. According to the 2001 census there are 1, 20,193 Mokokchung is thickly populated by Aos. It is situated at a height of about 1325.08 meters above sea level. The land of the Aos lays in the North-east border of India between 26.12 and 26.45 degree North Latitude, 94.18, and 94.50 degree East Longitudes⁴. It occupies the country, which is drained by the Jhanzi, the Desoi and by the stream, which flows in the Dikhu on its left bank. They occupy forty-six villages, excluding Longsa which is the only village situated on the right bank of the Dikhu. Out of these, twenty-one are Chungli entirely, nineteen are Mongsen entirely and both the groups inhabit the other six villages.⁵ The climate is generally cool, and the higher hills are relatively healthy. The attitudes of the Ao land are between 1000 to 2000 meters above sea level. According to R.R.Bhattacharya and Parvin Singh, "Starting from the breathtaking panoramic views of its capital Kohima, the roads wind through thick tropical jungle, deep gorges and unexplored terrain. They lead to far-flung villages where each tribe has, for generations, formed its own beliefs, practiced its own rites and sung its own history in the splendid isolation of these hills."⁶ The people of Nagaland belong to the Mongoloid stock. Each tribe has its own ethnic and cultural identity and practices. The population of Nagaland, according to the 2001 Census is 19, 88,636. Out of this 82.26% of the population is rural. The average

density of population is 120 per sq.km.⁷ The following table represents the topography of Mokokchung district.

Table No.2.3: Mokokchung District at a glance

S.no	Items	Statistics
1	Geographical Area (sq.km)	1,615
2	Headquarters	Mokokchung
3	Population (as on 2001 Census)	2,27,230
4	Literacy (%)	84.27; Male- 86.14, Female- 82.20
5	Climate a. Average Annual Rainfall (mm) b. Minimum Temp (0C) c. Maximum Temp (0C)	2,500 2 32
6	GEOMORPHOLOGY i)Major Physiographic Units ii) Major Drainages	Denudational Hills, Structural Hills, Intermontane valleys, Plateau Melak, Dikhu, Tsurang
7	LAND USE (sq.km) a. Forest Area b. Gross Cropped area c. Agriculture land d. Net area irrigated e. Gross area irrigated	289.67 382.50 180.39 59.00 72.70
8	Major soil types	Alluvial Soil, Non Laterite Red Soil, Forest Soil
9	Major Crops	Rice, Tuber, Maize, Naga Dal, Soya Beans, Pea, Mustarad

Source: *Ground Water Information Booklet Mokokchung District*, Nagaland, Technical Report Series: D, 2008.

The Ao land bears a monsoon type of climate, with cool winters and mild summers. The winter night temperature goes down to seven degrees Celsius and the summer heat does not rise above 32 degree Celsius. There is an average rainfall of 25” millimetre during the nine months of the year, with the heaviest rainfall in July and August. In W.C. Smith’s view in the rainy season the valleys and lower ranges are quite malarious. The temperature never goes very high, because of being tempered by the heavy rains.⁸

The Ao territory is made up of ranges (*tsükong*), running in a north-easterly direction with an island plateau in the heart of it. According to the ranges, the Ao

divided their villages and all the ranges have different practices, customary laws, different folklore like myths, legends, ranges folktales etc. All Aos are not equal in many ways. There are slight differences in all custom, traditions and practices. The ranges are more or less parallel to each other and run south-east direction. The entire District is comprised of six hill ranges described below:

1. Ongpangkong Range: The Ongpangkong (cold range) is the southernmost range forming irregular boundary with the settlements of the Sema and the Lotha on the south and the Sangtam tribe on the east. The name was given because it is the coldest range. Mokokchung town, the district administrative headquarters is situated in this range.
2. Langpangkong Range: The Langpangkong (bed range) is the eastern most range skirting along the course of the *Tzula* (Dikhu) river which forms the natural boundary line of Mokokchung with that of Tuensang and Mon districts. It was named because of its resemblance to a bed.⁹
3. Asetkong Range: The Asetkong (Island range) is a central range running from south to east, but compared to others it is the shortest range consisting of five villages, one mission centre called Impur and also two components namely Anjilung and Longjang. The administrative centre is called Kobulong. A road links it with Mokokchung town on one side and the Amguri P.W.D. road on the other end. The Ao meaning of the *Aset* is island; the altitude of this range is lower than that of Langpangkong.
4. Changkikong Range: This range starts from Changki village direction and so is known as Changkikong range. It stretches in the north-west direction. The administrative centre is at Alongkima. Changkikong range runs parallel but lower in altitude than the Langpangkong range and is lying to the south west of Asetkong.
5. Japukong Range: The Japukong range is the outermost regular range stretching from the north-east to south-west, lying at the interior south of the Tzurangkong and bordering the Assam. Japu is the village from which the whole range starts and is so named the Japukong range. It is also said that the range is thus named because of its resemblance to old man drying rice.¹⁰

The **Flora and Fauna** of the Ao land consists of both deciduous and evergreen forests. They draw materials for adornment and the same was represented in folklore and oral tradition. In the low altitudes, the trees are evergreen and in the high altitudes, deciduous trees are found. Since water does not stay due to porosity of the earth so the retention power is less. Many trees cannot withstand the cold, thus it shed leaves. The land looks dry during the month of February and by March it becomes green again. Rhododendrons, begonias, tree fern, mosses, creepers, vines, elder gentian, hollyhock, morning glory, lady slipper, lilies and other flowers are

found in abundance. Variety of wild fruits like bananas, mangoes, wild apples, figs, oranges, raspberries, strawberries, cherries are found. The land had dense forest with plenty of birds, animals and reptiles in the earlier times, however, many of the birds and animal were killed due to indiscriminate hunting. Birds like hornbill, woodpecker, ory, drongo, minivet, white crested bird, thrushes, magpies, colourful pheasants (tragopan), and wild guinea fowl are still found in Ao land. Among the wild animals, boar, barking deer, Himalayan black bear, jungle cat, porcupine, royal Bengal tiger, bear, wolf, monkeys, ibex wild bear, python and land tortoise (*Chelome imbricata*), river crocodile are still seen.

Political life:

Naga traditional life revolved around the village. The family, clan, *khel* and village represented the extent of a Nagas concern, and there was very little inter-village, and even less inter-tribe, interaction. The village was the highest political unit and the sameness of culture and shared concerns for security gave a broad common framework of meaning and loosely held the members of the tribe together. A person's identity was inseparable with that of his family, clan, *khel* and village. Inter-village feuds were very common because the village would avenge any wrong committed against a member by a person from a different village, and any member of the culprit village was a target in seeking vengeance. Within the village, a culture of caring among fellow villagers was assiduously nurtured and the bonds of kinship were usually very strong in the village. Duties and responsibilities to family, clan, *khel* and village were stressed almost to the exclusion of individual rights, indicating group solidarity. Individual hunting feats were mostly for social acclaim and to please the gods. For instance, a successful hunter did not partake of his own kill. It would be distributed to kinsmen and relatives, especially the womenfolk and the old, while the hunter would be prepared some other food.

(i) *Putu Menden*, the village Councils

In traditional Naga society, like in the Ao tribe, the Village Council played a major role. The council was the highest authority in the community and life revolved round the decisions taken by the council. The Nagaland Village Council Act gives due recognition to other traditional village institutions such as the "Putu Menden" in Ao

Areas- to function according to their custom and usage- as a village council. The council decides important issues of law and order, influenced social institutions, and had an almost overwhelming role in the way the community functioned. At the village level, the structure of polity of local self-government is essentially democratic and effective. The *Putu Menden* (Village Council) is a system unique only to the Ao Naga tribe. The word *Putu Menden* (*Putu* means generations and *Menden* means seat) can be literally translated as the seat or reign of a generation. The peers of a generation—equally representing all clans in the village- rule over the village state republic for 30 years, until the next generation takes over. The *Putu Menden* is the traditional village council of elders which is empowered for internal administration, external diplomatic relationships, security and general welfare of all community members. The village council constitutes the representatives chosen by the dominant clans of the settlements. The members of this council are known as “*Tatar.*” Tajen holds that Aos as a whole have no political organization but their respective village organizations are formed on similar patterns.¹¹ The *Mongsen* group called the Council as *Samen Menchen* and for the *Chungli* group it is called *Tatar Menden*.

Tribes or Villages with Chiefs or *Anghs* (Kings) systems are mostly prevalent among the *Sema Naga* and *Konyak Naga* tribes and is an autocratic system wherein the rulers enjoy autocratic governance on hereditary basis. In Federal democratic system the Village Councils are made up of democratically elected members representing the different clans of the village. Thus the elected Village Council is the supreme institution in the community for all important matters from agriculture, resource management, law and justice to security.

(ii) Structure and functioning of *Putu Menden*

The size of a *Putu Menden* depending on the size, population and number of clans in the village ranges from as less as 12 members to as many as 200 members. Eligibility to be in the *Putu Menden* is automatic and according to the *ziinga* that one belongs to.

The structure and ways of functioning *Putu Mendens* vary from village to village but with similar conventions and norms, and structural frameworks. Generally each clan nominates elders from the given *Putu* as representatives and this assembly of elders forms the *Putu Menden*. As mentioned earlier, there can be no one single description

of how a Putu Menden functions but following is a rough illustration of the three tiers of the Putu Menden:

(a) *Onger Menden* (Seat of the Priest) – The Onger is the head of the *Putu Menden*. He can advise but cannot object to any decision of the house;

(b) *Tazüing Menden* (Seat of the Elders). They consist of the senior members (*Tazüingpur*) of each clan and are akin to being the cabinet in modern parliamentary systems. The senior most member is called Tazüingtiba and he presides over all meetings like the Speaker. This is the body which formulates policies, executive and act as judiciary and prepares the annual plans, as well as, fixes taxes (*Yimkong Saru*) and collects revenues;

(c) *Tekong Menden* consists of a number of subsidiary groups with well-defined roles and distinct functions. They perform tasks assigned by the *Tazüingpurs* and are responsible for collection of taxes (*saru*), fines and other revenues. They enforce the executive and administrative orders passed by the *Tazüingpurs* and also assist in the negotiation and settlement of inter-village disputes and other public issues. It is their duty to forge diplomatic relationships with other villages; decree penalties and punishments for wrong doers; preside over the war council; select the area for annual cultivation and all related activities; finalize dates for marriages; organize and manage ceremonies; settle disputes; organize community hunting or fishing; proclaim community work; and facilitate public debates. The *Putu Menden* also nominates Village Council Chairman, as well as, proposes the names of village *Gaonburas* to be appointed by the government. Governance for the Putu Menden was not maintaining law and order or enhancing development, but rather extended to ensuring access to and the collective management of resources, maintaining social security and developing knowledge and learning systems.

(iii) Courts and justice Tribal Courts: Intervention of Britishers

Traditionally, Nagas did not have regular courts. Later, with the advent of the British, tribal courts were set up and judges were appointed from among reputed persons within the tribal community to decide cases. Thus, the first regular courts were started. The British also created the posts of ‘Gaonburas’ (village elders) and ‘Dobashis’ (interpreters) to assist them in the administration.

Gaonburas 'village elders' in the Assamese language of Assam, are village elders nominated by the Village Councils and authorized by the Government to act as assistants to the Deputy Commissioners in village administration. The *gaonburas* are generally charged with responsibility of good behaviour (read as ensuring law and order) in their villages/clan/locality, as well as, being the spokesmen of their community. The number of *gaonburas* in a village depends on the total population and number of localities or *khels*. *Gaonburas* are now an integral part of the governance and administrative system of the villages. They are usually selected by the clan or khel and the Village Councils forwards the names to the government for approval and therefore are considered as agents of the government. This is because *gaonburas* are appointed by law of the state government and not by the traditional institutions themselves. The *Gaonburas* nominated by the Village Council and formally appointed by the government together with the other elders of the village assist the Village Councils in the delivery of justice. The Village Councils therefore act as village courts to settle cases within the villages and the issues may range from laws of inheritance, adoption, marriage, divorce, rape, theft, defamation, murder etc. The British also created the posts of '*Gaonburas*' (village elders) and '*Dobashis*' (interpreters) to assist them in the administration. While the *Gaonburas* were charged with responsibility of good behaviour by their villages and soon also became the spokesmen of the village community, the *Dobashis*, in the course of interpreting for British administrators, were liaisons between the British Government and their local people. Having been accredited with the authority of the Government, the *Dobashis* enjoyed the respect of the native people. Being knowledgeable about customary laws, the *Dobashis* advised the British officers in the settlement of cases. Subsequently, the *Dobashis* courts evolved to decide cases according to Naga customary laws. However, the British administrator remained the sessions Judge, thus combining the executive and judiciary responsibilities in one person. Because of its practical usefulness, the institution of *Dobashis* is being continued till today. In due course it emerged as the deliverer of justice, or judgments in many disputes. The AOs hold that the *dubhashi* mode of settlement of disputes is better in many ways, as compared to the system adopted in formal law courts. In formal law courts, decisions are taken on the basis of better evidences and arguments, whereas, such system, in the *Dobashi* mode matters are settled by objectively looking at the issue and decisions or judgments arrived at

through consensus like in Village Courts or based on traditional precedence. Overtime, the Dobashis by virtue of the establishment of *Dobashi* Court become adjudicators in their own right. *Dobashi* Courts are attached to the office of the Deputy Commissioners at all administrative strata of and disputes between villages and also between individuals are tried as per traditional norms as well as by existing laws and practices of the land. The *Dobashi* courts therefore are the transition courts between the codified and the 'uncodified' legal systems in the state. As is usual, further appeals can be made to the courts of magistrates or higher courts of law¹².

Economic Life

The economy of any region can be studied based on the land holding system, sustenance patterns - hunting and gathering, domestication of animals, shifting agriculture, augmentation of water resources and exchange patterns (trade and commerce through barter system). The interference of the governance to regulate the economic activities formally by taxation and informally by participation in rituals related to the socio-economic activities of the communities is very significant in the Ao-Naga society.

(i) Land: Categories of Owner ship

Naga community in general holds collective ownership over their land. In the past, land was the only economy for the Ao-Nagas. There are lands belonging to the village, individual and clan. In recent time, the state government also owned land for the construction of government institutions and for developmental and conservation purposes. The traditional system of ownership of land varies from one group to the other. The distribution of land (forest) for cultivation among the Ao-Nagas is an elaborate and complex and is regulated by *Putu Menden*, Village Council. The land pattern in the village can be divided into cultivable land, forestland and inhabited land.

Village lands

Naga village is inhabited by more than one or two clans, depending upon its size. Each clan has its share in the village land. Thus the Ao-Nagas also possess some share in village lands. The dealings with regard to the ownership of land vary across the villages and clans of the tribes. The local landholders manage the issues related to

their respective lands in the villages. In village common lands are demarcated separately for cultivation, forest, and housing and for others like cemeteries, religious institutions, schools, parks, community halls, guesthouses etc. These lands are managed by the *samen/tazungpur* (councils) of the village. With the permission of the village council only, the villagers should do hunting, fishing and collect forest products and materials from the land. Those who violate the norms of the administration are liable for punishment by the council prescribed by the customary law. Moreover, the village land should neither be sold nor leased out to non-locals or even non-Nagas. Thus land people are tied by the customary law to (i) prevent the entry of non-local/ non-ethnic tribe of the region for minimizing cultural and political conflicts and (ii) to retain people's identity with the land. Though individual ownership over the land is being emerged, selling them to non-Nagas is strictly restricted.

Individual land

In Ao-Naga society no family is left without landed property either for dwelling or for cultivation. Those who first settled or founded the village occupied huge lands. The people who do not have lands may take permission from those who had huge landed property for cultivation. Once the harvest is over, rent in terms of cash or kind is paid which is called *lumelen/lumepu*. Usually they give two to three baskets of grains to the owner. There is no fixed rate of rent. Some families and clans had lands inherited from their ancestors since times immemorial. No member of the family has the right to dispose the property of the joint family against the interest of other members. In the word of W.C. Smith¹³, "the average Ao Naga is very independent especially if a man has a tract of land under cultivation and he can be reasonably certain of getting his necessary food."

Clan lands

The clan lands are maintained by the clan leaders, *kedong mapang*. The members of the clan enjoy these lands as their hereditary property. No body can either sell or mortgage the clan lands. Among the Ao-Nagas, clans collectively hold ownership over their land. Clan members can cultivate on these lands without rent. If there is surplus land, the others in the village can cultivate on rent payment basis.

(ii) Sustenance patterns

The sustenance patterns of the tribals always follow the rhythm of the nature and environment. Food gathering and hunting always follow the track of the seasons and thus people shift their survival strategies. Throughout the year the people should work hard to earn their livelihood. There was no space for laziness and dodging in Ao-Naga worldview. It is well established in their folk narrative tradition. The following narrative emphasizes the need to work hard for self-sustenance in Ao-Naga economy.

Narrative 2.1: Sarilongli and his wife

Once upon a time, *Sarilongli* and his wife were living in a village. Both of them got bored in their routine life working in the field, cooking, fetching waters and firewood. They wanted to search for a place wherein they can survive without doing any work. They traveled for many days. At last, they reached a place called *Alikodaktsür*. They were sitting on a bench. Beneath the bench, they found people who were very short and tiny. They were relentlessly combing up and down of the short plants, *Likok dong* to collect the seeds from them. The seeds taste soar. The couple realized their mistake and went back to their village. They assembled the villagers and declared, “Hi people, people could never find a place on earth wherein they survive without hard work. Everybody should work to live and sustain”. The villagers also felt happy for the couple learnt a lesson. Since then they lived happily by complementing each other and never expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to any work in their life.¹⁴

From the above narrative it is clear that tribal economy requires the participation of every member of the society to maintain their families. All the modes of sustenance gathering of food, hunting, fishing and agriculture-are adopted basing on their availability in different seasons without disturbing the tempo of the natural environment. The need for the frequent shifts in sustenance patterns is well established in their oral narrations.

The narratives further tell about their food procuring techniques and symbolically suggest the reasons for their shifts in their sustenance patterns. The following narrative depict how the Ao-Nagas picked (gathered) their food, even their animal food very causally in the same way as they plucked fruits from the trees.

Narrative 2.2: Tsüposang

Once upon a time there was *Tsüposang*. He was very friendly with all living beings in the forest and also in the waters. Since he knew the language of the animals, he could locate them wherever they are. Whenever he wanted his food – a bird, or a fish or any other animal meat -he used to take the best among them very casually to his home for his dinner. One day, his *anuk* (son-in-law) asked him, “*Oku* (Uncle), let me also come to the jungle with you”. *Tsüposang* frankly denied. He convinced him, “If watch the animal behaviour it looks funny and also ununderstandable to you. If a new person like you makes any noise they get disturbed or may get frightened. They no longer remain as my friends and may run far away from me. Better not to

come.” However as the son-in-law was pestering, he accepted to take him to forest on the condition that he would not open his mouth. Finally they reached the forest. *Tsüposang* began to converse with the animals by making some sounds to call animals. He began to call and talk to the animals by name like, “*Shitsü* (monkey) *kang kang*, *mesü* (deer) *kang kang*.” Then all the animals and birds responded to him and gathered around him. The son-in-law who was hiding behind the trees he saw an animal, *Chipcho* (Porcupine)¹⁵ trying to climb up a tree. The attempts being made by such short animal to climb up a tree were found funny to the son-in-law. Hence he laughed loudly at it. All the birds and animal ran away after listening to his new voice and sounds and they were no more available to *Tsüposang* to pick them informally to home for food. He grew angry with his *anuk* for his entry in to the forest and spoiled his friendship with the living beings in forest world. Then out of regret he requested the animals and birds, “Please, keep at least a leg or a hand of the Porcupine on the pathway for me.” A jackal passing by that way overhears to his request and conveyed to the animals, “Grandfather has told us to keep at least your feces (*sü*) on the pathway for him.” From that time onward, the Ao-Nagas find the feces of the animals in every path way but not the body remains of Porcupine.¹⁶

The above folknarrative reveals how the Nagas viewed their shifts in their socio-economic organization and sustenance patterns. When the animals and human beings are together with mutual understanding in the forests amidst the natural resources, the former casually picked up even the animals in the same way as they collected other foods like nuts, fruits etc. As the family structure expanded and new members entered, the social bonds and relations become obligatory. The relations between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law attained mutual customary and obligatory. One should oblige the other. Even though the father-in-law did not like his son-in-law to accompany him, he was forced to take him. The latter had no acquaintance with food gathering techniques. Hence his entry into the forests disturbed the hitherto existing relationships and drove the animals deep into the forests. Thus it required technique to hunt them for their food. The jackal in the narrative who miscarry the message of the father-in-law symbolically represents the trickery of human beings involved in technologically advanced societies. In a way the story depicts Ao-Nagas transition from food gathering to hunting mode of life leading to agriculture.

The Ao-Nagas sustain on hunting the birds like pigeons, wild hens, ducks, parrot, and bulbul; and animals like deer, wild boar, porcupine, rabbit, monkey, wild rat, squirrel etc; and gathering forest produces like nuts, fruits and honey. Fishing is food sustenance to the Ao-Nagas. As already cited, jhum- shifting cultivation is another mode of sustenance. The hunting is mostly consist of small group and sometimes individual. The hunts are shared among the family, relatives, neighbors and close friends depends on the hunt collected.

Technology of hunting

The Nagas, who by profession being hunters avail themselves to the usage of locally made tools and techniques to hunt birds. The Ao-Nagas use *lijak*, catapult (A plaything consisting of a Y-shaped stick with elastic between the arms) to kill birds. For hitting the birds or baits the shooter use small balls made of clay (*ajungli*). In the contemporary times marble stone pellets and guns are also being used for hunting the birds. The other technique they comply is 'trapping'. The traps are made of bamboo sticks woven together like a bushel. The mouth of the bushel being turned down and is supported by a stick so that it stands half-open from the ground. A bait is being used to attract the birds and as soon as the birds goes inside the half open bushel where the bait is being kept, the hunter then pulls the rope which is tied to the stick which supports the bushel to stand. Baits like earthworms and grasshoppers were used. Sometimes the hunters also use a sticky liquid like glue to trap the birds. They apply the glue like liquid on the surface of a wood or a tree branch scantily covered with leaves on which they place the bait.

The traditional style of hunting is heroic. The hunters attacked the animals with spears and *daos* to kill or wound them. The hunting techniques depend greatly on the type and nature of the animal to be hunted. The hunters stay over consecutive nights in the forests to identify, locate, track and finally attack it successfully. Otherwise the hunter would become the bait for the animal. The hunter should have conscience to follow the blood marks or foot prints of various animals in the forests. However, the community fix seasons for hunting so that it would not disturb the nature and also the other livelihoods like agriculture. Indiscriminate is hunting and bird catching is not throughout the year. Hunting is allowed only for two months in the winter that too after the harvest season is over. Those who found violate the law are to be fined either in cash or kind.¹⁷

Fishing

The Ao-Nagas consider fishing for livelihood and amusement. The community holds ownership over the natural resources including water. The villagers have the natural rights for fishing and hunting in stream and land of their village. Customary law sanctions fishing and land rights to complement each other. The technique used for the fishing is mainly blocking the flow of the river by top soils/earth and stone.

Once the flow of the water is stopped the fishes begin to draw together. As a result it becomes easier for the people to catch the fish using baskets made of bamboo. Sometimes the Nagas poison the streams and catch the fishes after they die in poisonous waters. However, the village authority condemns the practice of poisoning for fishing as it affects not only the natural resources and but also the other living beings in the waters.

The Ao-Nagas also sustain on domesticated animals such as pigs, cows, buffalo, mithun, dogs and fowl. This occupied important places in the economy of the Nagas because it served as food items and also used as a means of exchange. Animal husbandry was one of the important means of livelihood when it comes to secondary occupation. Animals were reared and preserved for sacrificial and ceremonial feastings, barter economy and so on. Because of such reasons, animals were valued. The variety and the number of animals that a family maintains determine its economic status. Various vegetables were grown in all Ao villages. The Ao people cultivate all sorts of crops like millets, maize, potatoes, sugarcane and yam etc but cotton was the most important one. It was grown in most of the Ao region.

(iii) Agriculture:

Agriculture is one of the significant sustenance for the Ao-nagas. They follow shifting, *Jhum* and terrace, *panikhets* method of cultivation in their hilly and plain on the mountain slopes of Nagaland. Aos sustain on shifting cultivation as their hilly and sloppy terrains are suitable for such mode of agriculture only. These forms of cultivation are devised and appropriated throughout the generations in the state. The *jhum* cultivation completely depends upon the rainfalls; it suffers from the vagaries of climate and monsoonal fluctuations. The following narrative substantiates the problems faced by the villagers in *jhum* cultivation done in the *khels* situated in different geographical locations upper and lower levels of the villages.

Narrative 2.3: Story of Punasosang

Once upon a time a young man by name *Punasosang* in *Soyim* fell in love with a girl from *Impang* (upper khel) and used to visit her dormitory (*Tsuki*) to spent time with her. One his way to the dormitory one day he saw a bird which died because of the whirls of wind. He was sad with this incident. As days passed by it was time for all the villagers to celebrate *Moatsu* festivals. The upper khel *Arju* (boy's dormitory) members along with *Punasosang* went down to the lower *khel* and booked a pig (*ak*) for the *Moatsu* festival from a widow at the rate of fifty *yimchi* (tin) of grains. On the day of the festival, the *Arju* members went down to the house of the widow and killed the pig for celebration. Then the villagers had a great feast on that day. After the festival

was over, it was time for the villagers to harvest the field. The field site of the upper khel villagers could harvest the field very early without much problem. Whereas, the field site of the lower *khel* villager were in a hilly place so they could not be harvest the field on time. After the harvest when *Punasosang* was walking through the lower khel, he saw that the widow could not finish her work. He could manage the help from the members of *Arju* from upper *khel* and finished the work. The old widow blesses all the boys for helping her.

The above tale substantiates how within a village the people conduct the *jhum* cultivation in different times due to non-availability of labour and other resources like waters.

The area under *Jhum* cultivation is about 87.339 hectares and under terraced cultivation is about 62,091 hectares.¹⁸ *Putu Menden* decides the site or plot for cultivation every year. The villagers are only allowed to cultivate on the selected site or land even if the individual has their own individual land. The decision of the *Putu Menden* is final and anyone failing to abide by the Council's decision entails serious fines and penalty. Such measures are taken in order to protect the forest for future use and also for the fertility of the soil in a rotational practice of cultivation. The chosen site is cultivated for two consecutive years after which the entire process of selection a new area or site begins all over again. In the past the cyclic process of cultivation was 11 years but in the contemporary years the cycle has increased to 12 years. One of the advantages of the *Jhum* system is that it provides every citizen of a village with an access to land and the right-to-till. In the past, land was the only economy for the Aos. They cultivate the land for livelihood and survive economically by developing the land that belonged to them. The cultivators cut the treetops to allow sunlight to reach the land. They burn all the trees and grasses for clean and fresh soil. It is believed that this helps to fertilize the land. During burning of the field if an individual burn the other person's field by carelessness or by accident then a fine is imposed by the village authority. In *Longkhum* village, a widow was fined Rs. 500 by the village authority for burning a field that is on the other side by accident.¹⁹ During burning of the field one has to be careful not to create such accident.

In the case of the Sumi Naga, the *Akukao* (village chief) owns and controls almost the entire land, though there are other individual lands also.

The State Government is trying to convince the villagers to change over from *jhuming* to terracing. The Government is in fact, making all out efforts to improve the agriculture. It has under taken a number of irrigation projects, supplied pumping set to

farmers, started community Development projects, set up seed farms and established an agricultural research centre.

As mentioned earlier every village has its own cultivable land, sufficient to support its own population; livestock for meat and also for ceremonies and festivals, wide range of forest for collecting building material, fire-wood, wild animals and food gathering. The Ao-Nagas were more or less self-sufficient as they produced everything they needed. In the Ao society, from the beginning there has existed economic classification, which plays important role in the social order. The wealth of an Ao consisted of the quality of rice available in the store of each family and the land, cattle, ornaments, cloths etc.²⁰ In the past, rice was the stable food and their source of wealth and richness. A rich man who has lots of food grains lends with interest to people who had no food, and he also gives his surplus lands for cultivation on payment of rent that are landless. In the Ao society, from early days there existed economic classification, which plays important role in the social order. The wealth of an Ao consisted of the quality of rice available in the store of each family and the land, cattle, ornaments, cloths etc.²¹ previously rice was the stable food and the source of wealth and richness of the community. A rich man who has lots of food grains lends on interest to people who had no food. He also gives his surplus lands for cultivation on payment of rent to the landless people. Thus the Ao-Nagas began to take pride by cultivating paddy and grains giving alternate status to fishing and other sustenance. The following narrative of the Ao-Nagas substantiates how agricultural productions are more beneficial than fishing. However most of the folklife of the Ao-Nagas revolves round the agricultural activities, mostly the paddy cultivation.

Narrative 2.4: Aluyimer (farmer)

Long time ago, there was a widower named *Sangmonger* in *Nujongkong* village. He lives with his grandson *Talisangba*. One year, the villagers were affected by scarcity of water. All rivers and streams were dried up. Fortunately, the widower and his grandson's field were near the flowing river. The villagers used to catch fishes from that river and sell them. The grandson asked his grandfather, "Shall we also go for fishing like them?" but his grandfather just kept quite and told him to get water from the river and irrigate the field while he spread the soil. Whole year, they worked hard in the field without bothering to go for fishing like the villagers. The paddy in their field turned out to be healthy, whereas the fields of the villagers were destroyed completely. One fine day, they also went fishing with the villagers as they had worked hard enough to make their field healthy. As they were coming back from the fishing, some of the villagers pushed the grandson near the corner of the pathway. Seeing his grandson pushed that way the grandfather sing a song, "*Tayipti tentsu mopong asu jang mopong ako, apodaka nemtsung o talisangba ita nugoktsudima*" (What kind of wind is blowing towards us this morning. What kind of force is this, that even *Talisangba* is pushed like that). Next day, again his grandson

wanted to go for fishing so he told him, “I will catch a big fish for you one day, so just work hard in the field.” The grandson listens and obeys to what his grandfather said.

As the harvest time draws near, the villagers did not produce anything from the field whereas the grandfather and the grandson had a good harvest. After the harvest, his grandfather met some villagers who were going for fishing and told them to bring the biggest fish alive for him. In the evening, the villagers brought the biggest fish alive to his house. He exchanged the fish with the rice grains. He kept the fish in a wooden plate and covered the fish with grains and gave it to his grandson. When the grandson was playing happily with the breathing fish, he told him, “Whoever work hard in the field would never live an unhappy life because with grains we can buy anything so lets us always work hard.” That is how the grandfather exhorted him and taught him a lesson through practical work. There is a saying that, whoever goes only for fishing often becomes poor.²²

The above narrative indicates that the Ao-Nagas realized the advantage of cultivation over other sustenance patterns like hunting and fishing. The narrative reveals two important shifts in conception of exchange pattern of the Ao-Nagas: the emergence of rice or grains as chief mode of exchange and production not only for consumption but also for exchange and hoarding for future needs.

Terrace Rice Cultivation²³ has been the pride of the people of the *Angami* and *Chakhesang* tribes of Nagaland and this technology distinguishes them from the other tribes. This system of growing paddy has been there since the establishment of the village. The first settlers had brought the technology with them. Most of the terraces that anyone comes across in these regions could be as old as the village and that would mean not less than 300 years old.²⁴ Terrace Rice Cultivation is a system of irrigated agriculture for growing rice. The terraces vary in breadth and length depending on the slope of the land and the expertise of the people developing the terrace. The limit to terrace construction is not the slope but availability of irrigation water. The *Chakhesang* are able to develop broader and longer terraces for the same slope than the *Angami* tribe.

(iv) Water Resources

Water is the source of life and its abundance determine the economy and polity of any land. Most of the cultivation relies on rainfall. Nagaland receives very high rainfall and enjoy sub-tropical monsoon climate where the average annual rainfall is around 250 cm to 300 cm. It receives rainfall for seven long months-Aprils to October. The pre-monsoon shower starts from the month of April through convectional activities. The south west-monsoon rain reaches the State from first week of June and it continues till the end of September. Finally, the retreating

monsoon rain start from last week of September which continues till the last week of October. Besides, certain meager amount of rainfalls are also brings by the western disturbances during the winter. However, Nagaland is one among the most water scarce state in India because of inefficient water management, lack of adequate preservation and effort to harvest the “free gift of nature”.

The boundaries of a village or owners of the land are formed by rivers, stream, rock, trees, mound and other natural spot. In such formation, water becomes important resources for the community. Community water pond or reservoir is called *tsuba*. Such reservoir helps the villagers to come to meet their daily needs for water. In some villages there are more than two to three reservoirs. During winter season if the reservoir dries up then at such times the villagers have to trek miles into the jungles to bring home needed water. In current times water supply department provides water to the villagers and the rainwater harvesting helps the people during dry season which is a recent methods. Big tank/reservoir is constructed to store/conserves rain water. Water is collected from the roof top, through semi-circular gutters fitted along the edge of the sloping roof and channelized through down flow pipes to storage tanks kept at the ground/underground. The gutters are fitted in such a way that the slope is maintained towards the storage tank. In *Aliba* village (200 households), there are eleven rain trap tanks almost one in each cluster. Rain water is collected via rooftops and through a network of underground pipes, they all channel into the nearest Tank in the colony. Rain trap tanks were constructed around 1987-88 by a respected citizen Er.Lanutoshi of *Aliba* village.²⁵

A prominent common feature about setting aside primary forests for community reserves was to conserve the water source. This feature confirms that there exists a vast traditional knowledge on the natural resource management among the village communities and they are aware that primary forests serve as water reservoirs. There is a strong resolution passed by the Village Council to conserve and preserve the water sources of the village.

(v). Exchange and Trade

Aos maintained inter and intra tribal trade relations by barter system of exchange. Trade flourished between the Aos and the people of Assam due to the reciprocal demand of these commodities, which were, obtain from each other in

exchange, on barter basis²⁶. Ao economy was a self-sufficient economy except for salt as there was scarcity. J.P.Mills²⁷ remarks, “Salt, without which he cannot live; the Ao can only obtain in plains.” Cotton, chilies, ginger, gourds, mats etc were taken down to the plains in order to get in exchanged of salt and also dried fish, cattle, agricultural implements, beads for ornaments etc. In the past, barter system was practiced mainly because there was no good circulation of money. Though many of the writers have termed this trade as barter, it would be prudent to call the same as ‘exchange’. These exchanges were not economically very significant but nevertheless had some impact with the societal organization.

There also existed inter-village trade as long as there was peace. They sell each other’s products like crafts, woven goods and so on. Salt was sold for twice or three times its weight of unclean cotton, according to the amount of cotton available between the Aos.²⁸ Trade also flourished among the neighbouring tribes. For instance, *Konyaks* and *Phoms* used to buy clothes from the Ao villages and exchanged with spears and *daos* (big knives).

People used two type of currency for trade. One is a round brass disc, about 12 inches (30 cm) in diameter with a slightly convex surface which known as ‘*laya*’. These discs were used for trade with other tribes like *Konyak*, *Chang* and *Phom* but not among the Aos themselves. The other type of currency was known as ‘*chapili*’. It was in the form of strips of iron about six or seven inches long. With the coming of British, there was free access to the market places. The Europeans introduced of the metallic currency of India as the medium of exchange. It caused the displacement of unhulled rice that was considered as the standard of value before.²⁹ It marked the introduction of currency into the Naga economy.

(vi) Crafts

Art and craft have always been a part of life among the tribes of Nagaland. There was very little of craft diversification but not totally absent. Craft production was evident in the form of weaving cloth (mostly by women), production of agricultural and other implements and bamboo crafts which led to small incipient trade. Pot making, basket making, weaving of mats, wood carving, blacksmithy, carpentry, dyeing and cloth weaving for their personal and household requirements were the works done by the people. The families were independent economically

because each household produced their own needs. There was no specialization in the industrial line. People build their own house and make furniture because there were no professional builders or carpenters. Only few blacksmiths were found, because of the contact with the plains (Assam). They made *daos*, spearheads and the simple agricultural implements from an iron, which was brought from the plains. Among the Aos the villages of *Changki*, *Japhu* and *Nanchem* made earthen pots that were sold to all the villages and some even sold out to the plains. But this was never developed and was never an income for living as there was no proper industry. Hands alone were used to make earthen pots. The manufacture of pots was exclusively a female task. Pots were produced by a few villages of Naga tribe.

The main craft of women has been to weave traditional attire such as shawls, and loincloth for men, and skirts and shawls for women. Traditionally these were woven using natural dyed hand spun cotton, by the women. These were woven on the loom. Some villages specialized in spinning and dyeing cotton yarn. This was either sold as dyed cotton yarn or as the ready shawl, as per requirement. Each household raises enough cotton for its own use.³⁰ Before the machines were known the Nagas as well as the Aos used few simple tools for the whole process of spinning which was rather primitive. The cotton was seeded by rolling around stick on a flat stone. The contemporary weavers use acrylic material, they still try to keep the traditional designs and colours. But as the yarn available is thicker and too bright, the result is not as intricate as in earlier traditional fabrics. Traditionally, each design had a norms attached, to who could wear which designs and products. For example, *Sutsongrong*, the end piece made of dyed goat's hair and cane, could be attached to the shawls of only head hunter, or a person who has done *mithun* sacrifice, or the leader of the Panchayat. Each design also has a name. For example, the shawl having blue ground and black checks is named as *keyisü* meaning tiger shawl. It implies that the man who wears it is like a tiger. This is an Ao-Naga shawl, worn by both men and women. Traditionally, this shawl was woven using cotton yarn, dyed blue using *Osak* (*Strobilanthes flacoidifolius*) plant. Apart from these, *Mongkotep sü*, the shawl having a white band of pictorial motifs of cock, *mithun*, spears, elephants, tigers, stars, moon, human head, etc. woven in the centre of red and black striped shawl is a warrior shawl. The headhunters and rich men who have sacrificed *mithun* were only entitled to wear it. Mills writes, "This laborious task usually falls to the lot of old women

who, being no longer able to go down to the fields, eke out an existence in this way”.³¹

(vii) Technology of weaving

The Ao people who were in contacts with the plains in the Assam valley, were introduced to little seeding machine consisting of two wooden rollers geared to revolve in opposite directions and turned by a crank with the right hand. This machine was probably imported from the plains and village like *Asangma* of Ao-Naga used to make them. The cotton having been seeded is carded by being flicked with a little bow. Then the cotton is gently rolled by hand with the help of a round stick over a flat stone or plank into sausages after which it is to be spun into thread. They used a bamboo stick like a pin about 22 cms long tapering to a fine point at the top and about the thickness by a pencil at the thickest part near the bottom. Just above the thickest point is fixed a wheel made of black stone. The stone is turned flat and round by rubbing on the other stone. To make the hole in the middle a man holds it between his toes and twiddles a spear on it between his hands till the iron belt by the spear goes through.³² The narrow end of the pin shaped bamboo piece passes through the bore and is fettled at about 5 cm from the thick end.

After all the works were done, the women start to spin. To spin, she sits with her skirt pulled up till her thigh and tucked in between her legs. She places the cover end of the spindle in a broken piece of pot, or a little basket covered with a bit of rag, and spins it with a drawing motion against her right thigh, feeding it meanwhile from a sausage of wool, held in her left hand. The thread (*ang* or *ayang*) collects above the stone until the spindle is full. To make the thing of the women who is doing the spinning slipping and to make the rotation of the spindle easy, a sort of white powder obtained from a kind of water melon is applied on the thing at the beginning and at intervals.

For starching the yarn, the skeins are damped with cold water, and vigorously pounded on a board with a rice powder, or a bamboo with the root portion cut level and afterward it is soaked in hot rice water for about ten to twenty minutes. Then it is dried in sun, being jerked at intervals to get rid of excessive flour. After it is dried completely the woman winds the thread into balls (*anglung* or *yanglung*) ready for weaving. To do this, she sits down and holds the skein she is working around her

extended knees and the end of the yarn is rolled on a care made of a stone piece.³³ After the yarn is transferred into skeins the process of dyeing takes place.

As the Nagas as well as the Aos are found of colours so the clothes are very colourful which attracts the eyes especially during festivals. The Nagas are found of using variety of coloured clothes and dress. The Nagas used dark, blue, red and rarely yellow dye. The whole process of dye were carried out by women, there is also a taboo among some tribes to handle any dye during pregnancy less the foetus be effected by the colour. Among the Aos, J.P.Mills³⁴ writes, blue and red are the only two colours which the Aos known how to dye. The blue colour varies from light blue to about black according to the strength of the dye used. The dye was obtained from the leaves of a plant called '*Osak*' (*Strobilanctres Flaccidifolius*). This was cultivated for this purpose in the shady and heavy jungles. This leaves were used by all the Nagas for dyeing.

The method of preparing the dye was long and laborious. The leaves grown in the shade produce a colour approaching black while those grown in the sun produce a lighter blue colour and both are used in different stages of the dyeing process. The indigenous blue dyeing was used in autumn and early winter seasons when the leaves were fully grown and the women folk at this time were little free from their busy agricultural works. The methods of preparation and use of blue dye differs slightly among the different tribes.

For the Aos, the leaves that grown in the shade were pounded up and spread out on palm leaves or bamboo tray to dry. They were used after it was kept in the house for one or two months. The required quantity was then put into cold water and well stored and left to soak for three days. On the third day wood ash was added and the mixture stirred well. The dyed cloth or yarn was then washed in cold water, dried and again kept in the dye for one more day and finally dried. It was again soaked for another night if the colour was not dark enough. It was then boiled in water with unpounded leaves of *osak* grown in the sun for about an hour to finish it off. This process may be repeated more than once. The best dark blue cloths are made of thread which has been subjected to both cold soaking and boiling before weaving.³⁵

At the time of boiling the cloth, it was worked over and over with a bamboo stick many times to facilitating uniform colouring. In the process of dyeing during the

olden days no stranger were allowed to watch for it was believed that the colour will not take off. When the husband thinks his white cloth is dirty, he will ask his wife to dye it dark blue. The indigenous red dye was used less than the dark blue. The red colour denoting of blood, it was believed that young women using this colour in dye operation would die a violent death or lose her head in a raid. Therefore, only old women dye yarn in the red colour. Even in the dyeing of red colour, all the tribes have slightly different method. For the Aos, the dye was obtained from the root of a creeper locally called 'Aozü or Aowali'. The root after drying thoroughly pounded and mixed with dried and pounded leaves of a tree called 'tangshi' in local dialect. This was again mixed with dried and pounded husks of an acid berry called 'tangmo or tangba'. The thread which was to be dyed was boiled to the mixture for about half an hour. The boiled thread was taken out and dried in the sun and brushed clean. Mills explains one process which was unknown to the *Mongsen* group, where the thread was boiled with the seed of the oil-seed plant (*azü*) and for two or three days it was left soaking in the cold brew so it looks pale brown when it is taken out and dried. Then it was boiled in an infusion of the pounded leaves of the *kotsam* tree and bark of the roots of the *changlong* tree which turns red. When sufficient colour had been imparted, it was taken out, rinsed in cold water, and dried. It is said that using of dye of any colour was restricted before harvest because it might affect the crops. *Akhoya* Village of the Ao tribe did and produced the best dye. So the Ao people go to this village to dye their cloths. Today this village weaves the best cloth and they weave a large variety.

After dyeing was done, the women started to weave. The weave the Ao women based the indigenous handloom called 'Tekalilemtsü'. Mills writes, the Ao loom was a tension loom of the simple Indonesian type which was even found among the *Semas* and *Lothas*. The Ao women keeps the necessary strain by sitting with a belt which is often made of low skin 'aphi' in the back attached to a bar 'anen' from which the warp 'kutong' runs to the beam 'mungmung' is firmly attached to the wall of the house. The heddle is called 'Angetlong' and the shuttle is called 'Süksen' which is shot through by the hand, and the woof 'lenten' beaten up with the sword 'alem' which is rubbed either with max or with a very fine white powder, where Mills thought it to be like French chalk found on the underside by the leaves of a species of wild plantation. The patterns in clothes are obtained by the necessary combinations of

different colored threads in the warp and woof. Weaving of clothes with decorations design takes double as even more time depending upon the nature of the design. The designs were mostly done by using different colours of warp at different stages or by the extra weft weaving method. For extra weft weaving, the warp yarns are lifted by a bamboo stick like the knitting stick or by porcupine quill with the finger of the left hand while by the right hand the thread is passed through the shed so formed as per the design. To sew the strips of cloth together for body-cloths or to darn holes, the Aos used a needle. (*achem* or *yimpen*) which was simply a thin splinter of cane or bamboo with a split end on to which the thread was twisted or struck with a little wax.

Making goat's hair accessories, such as daos, spears, jewelry like ear ornaments and pendants for the warriors and shawl end known as *Sutsongrong*, were other traditional crafts practiced by Ao Naga men, apart from making cane and bamboo baskets. For this purpose goat's hair was traditionally dyed orange red using natural dye. For yellow, stem of dried orchid known as *akong* was used along with red dyed cane to make these products. Till date the craftsman of *Longsa* village follow this traditional technique.

(viii) Taxation

The socio-economic development process in Nagaland certainly began with India winning its freedom. The erstwhile British administration had evolved a special kind of administration for Naga Hills District. The Nagas were exempted from most of the taxation prevailing in British India (this practice has remained undisturbed till date). The Nagas had to pay only one form of taxation namely the "house tax" collected from each household. The traditional village councils governed the affairs of each village according to the traditional customary procedure. The district administrative head, however, exercised his authority with due firmness all over the district in those areas of administration, which fell within his jurisdiction. The British policy was of least interference in the traditional way of life of the Nagas. The house taxes are collected according to the needs of the village which varies from place.

Economic changes

The introduction of Christianity followed by the British rule brought tremendous economic changes in Ao society. The economic condition has changed

due to education, modernization and urbanization. By 1960's almost all the Aos were involved in small-scale industries, many have entered into government service, business, supply work which was the major source of income. Comparing to the cultivators they live a better life. The people who were living in the villages went searching for a place in urban places like towns and cities for better living standard. And the parents instead of sending their children to the field sent their children to schools. Due to the increase in education, expansion of employment opportunities, better living condition etc., people were interested to migrate to urban areas.

For the Ao people, Mokokchung town is the trade centre of the district. To get supplies to the villages of the Aos, firstly it reached Mokokchung where commodities and goods were brought from Assam area. The people were more or less self sufficient but due to more demands and needs of the people the volume of trade also increased and the needs and requirements of the people were made available in the markets. In the local markets, vegetables and fruits were sold which were brought from different villages, shops were opened where traditional arts, craft, cloths, dresses, ornaments were sold, all sorts of articles required for modern living were imported by the people. People started to involve in small cottage industries and from their incomes were extracted. There are both rich and poor people but there were no beggars. It is well known that the people were living in a very thick forest and isolated life for centuries. Since there was no contact with the rest of the country, there was no development. It was only in the 19th century that they had a close contact with the outside world by various agencies and incidents. Only through the coming British in 1832 and the Christian missionaries in 1876 in the Ao area, slowly and gradually started to progress. W.C.Smith feels that, improved methods of travel and communication and the developments of commerce have annihilated distances and the world has grown smaller and with the result these tribes have come into contact with groups and higher cultural levels, and this has brought many breaks in their practices which had grown hoary with age.³⁶

Social Life

The structure of the Ao-Naga society is basically rural in character. For Nagas family is the basic unit of society, constructed on the basis of the institutions of marriage and kinship. Ao-Naga family rests on patriarchy wherein the father or the

husband is the head of the family. For the Aos, the family is the most important social institution like in any other culture. The traditional norms and values determine the gender roles and relations in the family and the customary law regulate them in such a way that there occurs any anarchy in their gender performances. The Ao family is a nuclear unit which must exist independently of any direct parental authority. Since the society is patriarchal in nature inheritance follows the male line. The daughters are regarded as subordinate members, do not become co-owners with sons and do not inherit property of the family. All the tribes maintained *Morung* called Dormitory (like present institution: schools, colleges, universities) during the olden times. The Ao men stayed in *Arichu* and women stayed in *Tzuki*. Both boys and girls stay in their respective dormitory till they get married. Ao men and women are easily identified from the other Nagas through their names. The system of marriage is exogamous upon which the framework of Ao society was built. The Aos still strictly follow the rules of exogamy and endogamy to preserve their racial purity and social integrity. The men are monogamous. Widow re-marriages are also visible and accepted in the society. In the Ao-Naga family every individual is a member of a clan. Clan is a group of people that trace their descent from a common ancestry. Since the Aos belong to a patriarchal family, descent is traced through the male line, and children belong to the same clan as their father. In succession, sons, brothers, nephews, cousins etc are the order of preference for inheritance. Customary law imposes the responsibility of debt clearance on debtor. As mentioned, if the father fails to pay back the loan, his successor, be it his wife or uterine son or distant heir should clear it off. Both men and women have different gender roles in the family and in the community.

(i) Customary law:

The entire Folklife of the Ao-Naga gets regulated by the customary law of the community. The two major linguistic groups Mongsen and Chungli which further subdivided into six major clans- Pongen, Longkumer, Jamir, Imchen, Longchar and Walling and many sub-clans had their own customary law that make conform their socio- economic and politico-cultural spheres of their respective lives which in turn would construct the identities of their own. In the constitution of India, in the Article 371A (1), “*Customary Laws*”, provision was made for safeguarding social and religious practices, customary justice and landed property of the Nagas. J.P.Mills

observed that the council would rarely fail to counsel the parties since their trials follow strictly their customary law. They do not like to breach customary law as they believe that breaking of one norm would lead to the breach of another law and order. Hence any attempt to breach law is condemned in the community.

(ii) Religion:

The Ao-Nagas are the followers of animism in their religious behaviour. Animism can be defined as a folk religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.³⁷ The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. Animists perceive that life is controlled by spiritual powers and live in fear of spiritual powers whose activities must be divined and frequently manipulated. They seek to live in harmony with their world believing that the forces and powers of the world are interconnected. They deify the elements of nature and worship them to realize their wishes. There are various names and descriptions of the gods in the realm of Ao-Naga religion where they have different personalities, mode of worship and with their own distinctive authority. They are: *Lijaba*, Creator of the earth; *Longtitsungba* Lord of Heaven; *Tiar/Tiaba*, pre-destiner; *Meyutsung*, Lord of death. In their world view these powers exist behind high mountains, in flooded rivers, big trees, stones and in epidemics that threat the populace. The Aos adore their gods (*tsungrem*) and seek blessings, protection, security and well-being from them through worship. The Aos are also scared of gods. They believe that the spirits may create troubles and sufferings to their family due to the disgrace. So Aos observe rituals and offer sacrifices to appease deities and spirits from causing evil to them. They are god fearing and believe that *Meyutsungba* would judge the people after death to allocate hell or heaven depend upon their deeds. Such spiritual threats existing in the religious thought of the Aos' made them to embrace a new religion Christianity which also distributed similar religious message that would bind the god and people together. Inability to bear the cost of expiations in ritual centred Ao-animistic religion, they could easily adapt to Christianity. Even after their conversion to Christianity, the core of their animistic region still pervades their spiritual ideology.

(iii) Rituals:

The Ao-Naga Folklife revolves round several ritual celebrations performed indifferent socio-religious and political contexts. The life cycle rituals-child-birth, puberty, marriage and death- and the rituals that demand communal participation like house warming ceremonies, agricultural rituals (*Tsungrem Mong*), and political rituals like, *Putu Menden*, headhunting. The triumphant warrior cuts and brings the head of the enemy to their village to show his community as a token of victory over them. The head hunter gets praises and honour for heroism. It is a prestige to not only the head-hunter but also to the community to which he belongs. It proves the strength and ferocity of the tribes in internecine warfares. Every ceremony necessitates the observance of a period of purity and pollution known as *Genna (anempong)*. It is an act of prohibition followed by strict restriction and sanctification which is observed just before and after every ceremony. During this time the entire normal activities should be ceased because it is a period of purification. The ritual process, the narratives associated with the rituals, the material culture connected with the rites reflects the way how the people/groups embedded their identities in their socio-religious behaviour.

The Ao-Nagas' have a rich folklore with a variety of genres both verbal and non verbal. Their affluent narrative tradition contains myths, folktales and legends. The Aos are experts in transcribing their experiences in the form of narratives. The hoard of Ao-Naga lore contains myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, word games, jokes, beliefs, rituals and other related practices. The performance tradition is significant for their folk songs, and folk dances performed and musical instruments are played as pastime activities or on the context of ritual festivals. They are always associated with traditional folk dances, songs and games. Some of them are *nuknurar ken* (responsive love song), *nokin ken* (warrior song), *tongpang ken* (victorious song) etc. The games like *Mezung/sungbang*³⁸ (*top*), *Shiangtsükshir/ külingtsükep* and *Sütsüing* (played with the seeds of the sword-bean creeper) are played. Tug-of-war (*Ar Atsutepba*) is a famous game among the Aos, in the past the ropes for this game were thick jungle creepers of great length. Even in the present day context, the Ao play this game on every important ritual occasion but they used ropes that find in the market.

(iv) Dress:

The designs and colours on the dress identify the respective ethnic groups of the Nagas. During forefather's time, attire plays a very important role for one's identity. The dress differs on the paradigms of clan, group, socio-economic status, valour and designs of tattooing. The dress of the family members of the head hunters and sponsorers of generous feast in the villages are distinct from that of the other marking their significance and identity in the community. The wife and daughter of the man wear a different pattern on their skirt which was heavily ornamented. The whole family wear hornbill feathers as a sign of status. There were variety of clothes but in the present time, Aos are identified by other tribes when worn a shawl by men called *tsungkoteptsu* and women, *waru supeti* (wrap around) and *Etsungtsu* (shawl). Nagas are rich in their arts and crafts. Their traditional costumes include the multi-colour spear, ceremonial daos, colourful armlets, bracelets and varied dresses. Hornbill feathers are important part of the Ao as well the Naga's attire. The Hornbill feather were used universally by the Nagas as a symbol of prowess and wealth in the past and *drongo* bird feather is also part of the Ao attire and is used as an adornment on the ears.

(v) Musical instruments:

Bamboo mouth-organ is one of the oldest traditional musical instruments used by the Nagas. Its whole length is about 6 inches long and half an inch in width. *Ani*, a kind of thin bamboo is used to make this organ. In both the ends at least 1 inch should be kept in such a way that it can be held putting the thumb and the pointing fingers. The other end is made like a nail head in which a string about 8 inches long is tied for one and to pull it out separately. Through the length, a small portion of the centre is taken out vertically with the help of a sharp and pointed knife. The end where the fingers are holding is cut off so to move the fingers easily. The other remains uncut to block the air. This is called tongue. This tongue is taken out by means of a small pointed knife and thin out as round as a needle.³⁹ Likewise there cup violin made of a good quality of hard and thin bamboo or sometimes a shell of bitter gourd is used. There is also bamboo flute, the trumpet which is normally made of brass with bright ringing tone.

(vi) Material culture

The material culture is exhaustive. All these artefacts are metaphors of the Ao-naga lifestyles. It includes (i) different types of artefacts used by the Aos in every sphere of life from birth to death and (ii) the technology involved in their manufacture. House construction, pottery, food technology, utensils, spoon (earthen, wood and bamboo), hearths, firewood, wooden cots (*langpang/yipchen*), couches for sitting (*mekum, menden*), textile technology, designing, colouring, basket making, manufacture of spears, daos, nets and cages for hunting etc constitute Ao-Naga material culture. Further the texture and designs drawn on their textiles are very traditional. Traditionality is still being maintained in the matters of designs though texture is replaced by contemporary synthetic or silk material. The traditional patterns and styles are still being practised at least on their respective ritual or festive occasions even after their conversion into Christianity. Even during the celebration of Christian rituals, they prefer to be traditional Aos. However, every aspect of their material culture identifies with its consumers, the Aos.

The forests of Nagaland are rich in bamboo and cane. In general, it has been rightly said that Nagas start life “in a cradle of bamboo and ends in a coffin of bamboo”.⁴⁰ Baskets meant for permanent use all over Nagaland are usually woven in a checker-twilled pattern or open-work pattern in various sizes, resembling the cane seat of a chair. The Ao basket (*akhi* and *akha*)⁴¹ is conical in shape, while the Angami basket is cylindrical with the mouth slightly wider than the base. In addition to the conical carrying baskets, every household use several big flat-bottomed baskets in twill pattern and are used for sieving the liquids like rice beer. The knitting of the baskets are water-tight. Split bamboo is the usual material used for both mats and baskets.

The Ao-Nagas house consists of a small front room (*chin*) on the ground level, a large main room (*kilung*) on piles and at the back a sitting-out platform (*songlang*) also on piles. An average house measures 25 feet long by 14 feet broad with a platform at the back measuring 11 feet long by 14 feet broad. The back and front are square and the roof of thatching grass or palm leaves. The ridge of the roof runs out along the projecting roof-tree and forms a little flying gable in front. The walls of the houses were made of strong bamboo mats. In the outer room the rice pounding table

(*semki/acham*) cut from one piece of wood and bamboos water containers (*tsushi*) were kept. The hunting implements like spears and different baskets for routine use were supposed to be kept in the front hall. Two or three steps often only notches cut in a sloping log-lead up to the main living-room. The floor of this room is of closely knitted split bamboos supported on poles. In the middle is a hearth (*atap*) made of beaten earth, furnished with three stones for supporting cooking-pots. The ceiling is made bamboo matting. From the main ceiling-beam immediately above the fire is suspended one above the other three bamboo trays. The bamboo shelves are arranged on the walls. One corner of the main room is often partitioned off and used as a little store-room (*mopungki*). The beds (*langpang/yipchen*) are often hewn out of one piece of wood. A ridge of wood serves as a pillow and the head-end has often slightly longer legs than the feet end. The husband's bed is by the fire and another bed for children by the wall. From the main living-room a door leads directly on to the back platform, which is used as a general sitting-out place by the family⁴². They keep their head towards the east.

(vii) Ethno medicine:

The forest provides medicinal herbs for treatment of different diseases and ailments. In the past the traditional knowledge of medicinal herbs were confined to the medicine men which has been passed on orally from generation to generation. The importance of ethno medicine is reflected through the folktales.⁴³ The following narrative shows how plants cured different the diseases and sickness of the boy.

Narrative 2.5. : Boy with sores on his body

Once upon a time when the Aos were living in Chungliyimti, there were two settlements, the *khels* (*mepu*)⁴⁴: upper and lower *khels*. The *Chungli* group lived on the upper khel whereas the *Mongsen* group lived on the lower khel. In *Mongsen* group of the khel, there a boy by name *Chungrongjung* (best among the others). He developed sores on all over his body due to a snake bite. As he was young, he used to visit dormitory. No body accepted him. All the girls, boys and even the villagers chased him away from the village. He went deep into the forests and sat on a stone feeling unhappy for he was driven by every body in the village. One, when he was sorrowful with these thoughts, he saw a snake with bruises on its entire body. The snake was bruised by the people with stones and *dao*. The snake went near a pond. It chewed some leaves and applied its paste to its body where there were wounds. The boy observed the snake when it came on the second day for leaves. He saw the bruises getting cured. Even on the third day also the snake came and repeated chewing and applying it to its body. All bruises were healed and the body became smooth. The boy observed the way how the wounds on the snake were cured and thought that it might be a medicinal plant. Then he plucked some leaves. He chewed and applied to the wounds on his body. Slowly all his wounds got cured and became handsome within no time. Then when he visited dormitory the girls invited and offered him seat in honour. They did not recognise him as one who had sores on his body. He told the girls that he did not have gold or silver to give and he wants to sit near the firewood where he formerly sat when he had sores on

his body. Then the girls realised that he was the one who had sores on all over his body. They wanted him to marry, but he denied and left the place. In due course he became rich and could purchase and maintain and breed the animal mithun,⁴⁵ the privilege of rich. So according to the forefathers, nobody in the world could breed such big mithun like *Chungrongjung* did.⁴⁶

The above narrative reveals how tribals closely follow their fellow beings, the animals in their routine life. He was bitten by a snake which caused sores all over his body. When he observed the snake which got cured its wounds by applying some chewed medicinal leaves to them, he understood that the same may be the cure for his wounds also. That's how he could heal his ailment. Sharing of the same environment both by humans and animals is the norm of the tribals. Such custom articulate the land and people together on one hand and on the other the context sensitivity of the tribals with regard to the ethno medical practices. The narrative has several cultural implications with regard to *Morung* system of bridal/bridegroom selection, qualities admired by both for marriage and parameters for considering the richness of a person (maintenance of *Mithun*).

Nagas in Modern History:

The Nagas experienced western military violence beginning in 1832 when British troops entered Nagaland⁴⁷. Between 1832 and 1851 the British undertook 10 military 'expeditions' into Naga territories, inflicting considerable damage and suffering on the people.⁴⁸ The Naga Hills District was a former district of the Assam province⁴⁹ of British India. The Aos first came into contact with the British when, in January 1844, Colonel Brodie, the Deputy commissioner of the Sibsagar District made a tour between the Dikhu river and the Doyang river. He entered the hills via Namsang, Kamsing, and Noagaon. After Brodie, Edward Winter Clerk, an American Baptist Missionary visited them. The Ao country was occupied without much opposition as they themselves wanted to come under the British administration⁵⁰. Adjoining Sivasagar settlement the Longsa village containing 600 AO houses was annexed to British territories in Nagaland. Afterwards the villages Yehim and Chesami and Chichung River were included⁵¹. Later Mangrung (including Satemi), Nangtang, and Phinsing villages were brought under their control as they are much peaceful Ao lands. Porteous said that if they had the requisite force available, he could have built an outpost in the Ao country, which would certainly give a sense of security along the Nankam- Ungma road, which is the main line of communication

with Kohima. The Ao country was the immediate neighbour of the plains of Sibsagar. They had carried trade with the Assam Raj, and even prior to the British occupation of the country, men like Mr. Clark's native Assamese preachers considered travelling perfectly safe. Porteous wanted to administer the newly possessed domains by a European officer for systematic collection of revenues⁵². Mr. Davis planned to collect tax of about 2 rupees per family from Aos. Porteous, preferred a place near Ungma (Mokokchung) for the new sub-divisional headquarters at the point where the Khenza ridge joins on to the Nankam-Mongsemdi range on Ao-Naga territory. Here two roads are of primary importance i.e., one under Nankam across the Doyang to connect with the Kohima-Wokha-Golaghat road, and the second to connect the new sub-division with the plains of Sibsagar. In order to establish law in the newly organized regime they planned to bring the Frontier Tracts Regulation into force and to extend the rules for the administration of justice and police. The regulation was extended to Mokokchung under section 5 of the Scheduled Districts Acts. The Chief Commissioner was made to consider any further step necessary to legalize the revenue administration. This additional tract in the existing district and for its formation into a new Sub-division with head quarters at Mokokchung was issued. This notification has been approved by the Government of India and was published in the Assam Gazette⁵³.

The Naga Hills district was created in 1866 by the Government of British India. Its headquarters were located at Samaguting. In 1875, the Lotha Naga region was conquered and annexed to the district. In July 1884, Mr. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, with a force of 50 sepoy of Naga Military Police and 40 sepoy of the 44th Assam Light Infantry under Lieutenant Tiernan, took an expedition against the Mangmetong village under Ao district, for killing a man of Lakhuti village. The village was strongly fortified but the inhabitants fled away on the approach of the troops with firearms. Mangmetong was burned down without much opposition. Lieutenant Tiernan and a few sepoy were injured by panjis, while passing through the defence.⁵⁴ The Hatigorias of Nungtung murdered a man of Koio, a Lotha village which was under the British protection. Mr. McCabe marched against the village; the offenders were not given up, whereupon the village was burnt to the ground.

An administrative center was established at Wokha (habitat of Lotha Naga) which was shifted to Kohima (capital of Nagaland) in 1879. In 1889, the Ao region was fully annexed to the Naga Hills District as a subdivision. The boundaries of the District were further extended to include most of the Sema Naga territories (1904) and the Konyak Naga region (1910). In 1912, the Naga Hills District was made part of the Assam province. The Government of India Act 1919 declared the Naga Hills District as a "Backward Tract". The area was to be treated as an entity separate from the British Indian Empire. In the early 1930s, some of the tribals in the region rebelled against the British rule under the leadership of Haipou Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. As per the Government of India Act 1935, the area was made an "Excluded Area", administered by the Governor of Assam. The Deputy Commissioner of the district, CR Pawsney, established the Naga Hills District Tribal Council in 1945, which later evolved into the Naga National Council in the 1945. Under the leadership of Phizo, the Naga National Council unsuccessfully led a secessionist movement. When the Constitution of India was first released in 1950, the Naga Hills District was placed in "Part A" category of tribal districts as per the Sixth Schedule. The Part A areas were supposed to be governed by the Government of Assam in collaboration with the Autonomous District Councils. However, the Naga leaders refused this scheme. Subsequently, the Naga Hills District, along with the Tuensang Division (then a "Part B" area in the North-East Frontier Agency) was made a new administrative unit under the Ministry of External Affairs in 1957. After negotiation with the secessionists, this administrative unit was later made a full-fledged state called Nagaland. The early history of Nagaland is largely undocumented. The chronicles of the neighbouring kingdom of Ahom in Assam notes the customs, economic activities of the Naga tribes. The British invaded and subsequently occupied the Naga Hills for more than a century, causing a profoundly traumatic impact on the Nagas.

To summarise from the above, the cultural life of Nagas is incongruity with the cultural landscape. The geographical landscape is a fragmented one with hilly terrains intercepted by valleys and rivulets. This natural configuration resulted in the formation of isolated villages having pockets of habitations at intervals with clan settlements as individual agglomerations. As a result, the politico-economy and socio-religious life of the Nagas remained to clan consciousness and there by generated

intra and inter tribal conflicts for the sake of dispersed identities. The same is reflected in their mythologies and narrative traditions as observed in the next chapter.

Endnotes

¹ A.K, Paul, *Nagaland GK*, Guwahati, General Publications, 2007, p.4

² The tallest of bamboos with close culms and slender branches. Culms 24-30 m tall, 20-30 cm diameter, usually 2-2.5 cm thick-walled, dull green, covered with white waxy crust when young; internodes 35-40 cm long, lower nodes with root scars. <http://www.inbar.int/publication/txt/tr17/Dendrocalamus/giganteus.htm>. 1.12.2011

³ *Adhatoda vasica* Nees. (Acanthaceae); sangtam tu; malabar nut. Leaves (8–10) are warmed on fire and applied locally in the treatment of joint pain, lumber pain and sprains. Bl.(Araceae); shitsu nupang; giant yam. Fresh stalks are boiled and taken as anthelmintic. *Canna indica* L. (Cannaceae); amjitera; Indian shot. Fresh raw rhizomes are commonly chewed to get relief from gastric troubles. *Capsicum* spp. (Solanaceae); mersu; chilli. Crushed fruits are applied as antipruritic and counter irritant. *Carica papaya* L. (Caricaceae); mamazu; papaw. The latex is applied topically in the treatment of ringworm. *Caryota urens* L. (Palmae); asang renra; fish tail palm. The cotton like tissues (fibres) are directly applied over the wound to stop bleeding and to join the cut edges. *Costus speciosus* (Koen.) Sm. (Zingiberaceae); moori. The fresh rhizome is crushed and then it is massaged locally during muscle cramp and muscle pain. *Ficus carica* L.(Moraceae);mongozono;Ripe fruits are eaten in the treatment of intestinal ulcer. *Musa paradisiaca* L. (Musaceae); somomo; plantain. The juice (20–25 drops) collected from the plant with little water is taken orally with a gap of 30 min for the treatment of severe diarrhoea/cholera. *Sapindus mukorossi* Gaertn. (Sapindaceae); *ering jang*; *soap-nut*. Fruits are crushed and used as antipruritic during foot and toe infection. It is also used as shampoo and as detergent.<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0367326X99000635>. 30th Nov, 2011.

⁴ W.C. Smith, *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, (1925)2002 (Rpt.), p.1

⁵ Mar Atsongchanger, *The Historical Memoranda of the Nagas and their Neighbours*, Guwahati (Assam) Naga people Movement for Human Rights, November 30, 1995, p.19.

⁶ R.R.Bhattacharya, “Discover India”, Hongkong, *Media Transasia Limited*, November 2004, p. 31

⁷ *Statistical Hand Book of Nagaland* published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Nagaland, Kohima, 2004, p.2

⁸ W.C Smith, *supra*.

⁹ In Ao language bed is called Langpang.

¹⁰ A.Bendangyabang.Ao, *History of Christianity in Nagaland: Social change 1872-1972*, Mokokchung, Shalom ministry Publication, 2004.

¹¹ Tajen Ao, 1980, *Ao Naga Customary Laws*, Jorhat, Aowati Imchen, p.114

¹² Amba Jamir, “Understanding Local Self Governance in Nagaland-An essence of the Institutions and their activities”; <http://www.scribd.com/doc/51638389/Local-Self-Governance-in-Nagaland-India>:Accessed 13/12/2011

¹³ W.C Smith, 2002 (Reprinted), *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, p.7

¹⁴ Information collected from Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007

¹⁵ This animal lives in the deep forest and difficult to hunt down. For the Ao-Nagas the quill/spike of the Porcupine served many purposes- as earrings, as a means to make hair bun strong, used in weaving, to part the hairs on the head and the meat of the animal is used as medicines.

¹⁶ Information collected from Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007

¹⁷ Information provided by Sakunungla Longkumer (F), Longkhum Village, interviewed on June, 2010

¹⁸ <http://www.dorabjitatrust.org/northeast/pdf/6%20Nagaland.pdf>. Down loaded on 27.10.2011

¹⁹ Information collected from Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.06.2008

²⁰ Tajen Ao, *Ao Naga Customary Laws*, Jorhat, Aowati Imchen, 1980, p. 179

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 179

²² Information collected from L.Teka Longchar (M), 66 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 13.06.2008.

- ²³ The complete hillsides are cut to form terraces suitable for cultivation. The width of the terrace depends upon the slope of hill. If the slope is less, there is much possibility for making big terrace. The fields are irrigated by a network of water channels. Normally the terraces are so accommodated that water flows down conveniently from one terrace to the other below it, and so on. Bamboo pipes are used to regulate the flow of water. The digging up of the terraces requires a immense effort in cutting them into shape, but these terraced fields, once prepared, are much easier to maintain than the *jhum* plots. They have also the advantage of being closer to the village site. The other ethnic groups living in the North and East besides depending on forest products still continue shifting cultivation (*jhuming*).
- ²⁴ <http://nagaland.nic.in/Report/TRADITIONAL%20AGRICULTURE%20-%20A%20Thematic%20Report.pdf>. 25.10.2011
- ²⁵ Bendang Pongener (M), 30 years, Debuia village, interviewed on November, 2011.
- ²⁶ B.B.Ghosh, 1979, *Nagaland District Gazetteers: Mokokchung District*, Dimapur, Sethi Printers, p.113
- ²⁷ J.P.Mills, 1926, *The Ao Nagas*, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, p.103
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, p.104.
- ²⁹ Smith, W.C, *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2002 , (Rpt.)
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 37
- ³¹ J.P.Mills, supra, pp.90-91
- ³² *Ibid*
- ³³ Alemchiba Ao, , *The Arts and Crafts of Nagaland*, Calcutta, Naga Institute of culture Government of Nagaland, Kohima, 1986, p. 7
- ³⁴ J.P.Mills, 1926, p.92
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3
- ³⁶ W.C.Smith, (1925) 2002, p.179
- ³⁷ <http://www.evidenceandanswers.org/articles/worldofanimism.pdf> 28th Nov, 2011
- ³⁸ They may not be used while the rice is growing, except at the *Tsungremmong*, for from seed time to harvest “the earth is pregnant and to spin tops at such a time would cause illness and misfortune. J.P.Mills, 1926, *The Ao Nagas*, op.cit., p.155.
- ³⁹ Lanu A Ao (ed.), *Naga cultural attires and musical instruments*, New Delhi, Concept, 1999, p.112
- ⁴⁰ <http://ignca.nic.in/craft156.htm>. 28th Nov, 2011
- ⁴¹ L.Teka Longchar (M), Longkhum village, interviewed on November, 2011
- ⁴² Otsufuba Longkumer (M), Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.12.2007
- ⁴³ Sapu Changkija, “An Ethnobotanical Folktale of the Ao Naga in India”, *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1994, pp. 255-258
- ⁴⁴ Localities, sectors or wards in the village.
- ⁴⁵ Mithun (*Bos frontalis*), the domesticated free-range bovine species, is an important component of the livestock production system of North-Eastern hilly region of India. This unique bovine species is believed to be domesticated more than 8000 years ago. Mithun is primarily reared as meat animal. Mithun is also used as a ceremonial animal and plays important role in economical, social and cultural life. Besides, it is now established that superior quality milk and hide can be obtained from mithun. <http://www.nrcmithun.res.in/>: Accessed 13/12/2011
- ⁴⁶ Information gathered from Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, on 24/04. 2008.
- ⁴⁷ Johnstone J, *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*, London, Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1896.
- ⁴⁸ Yonuo A, *The Rising Nagas*. Delhi, Vivek, 1974.
- ⁴⁹ Sir Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas bordering on Assam*, 1883-1941, and Reprinted by (Eastern Publishing House Delhi 1983).
- ⁵⁰ Tajenyuba Ao, *A History of Anglo-Naga Affairs 1832 to 1913*, Published by Tribune press, Guwahati, 9.8.1958), 78-79.
- ⁵¹ S.K. Barpujari, *The Nagas, The Evolution of their history and administration (1832-1939)*, Guwahati: Delhi, Spectrum Publication, 2003, p. 119.
- ⁵² S.K. Barpujari, *The Nagas: Evolution of their History and Administration, 1832-1939*, Guwahati: Delhi, Spectrum Publications, 2003, p. 118.
- ⁵³ G R Irwin to the Chief Commissioner of Assam; Fort William, the 28th January, 1890; Published by Kohima Archives 1991; FPP (External A), Feb 1890; Sl. No. 166.; J.P. Mills; *The Ao Nagas*, 404-405.
- ⁵⁴ Sir Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas bordering on Assam, 1883-1941*, Delhi, Reprinted by Eastern Publishing House, 1983, p. 125

Chapter - III

ORIGIN AND DISPERSAL OF NAGAS : A FOLKLORIC PERSPECTIVE

Folk life is an extension of the boundaries of folklore. It is the traditional expressive culture of the people shared within the various groups of society- familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, drama, ritual, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft.¹ Folklife is the totality of the tradition- based creations learnt and disseminated orally through the ages. The realm of Folklife is pervasive and encompasses the changes and continuities of these traditions that occur in every sphere of the lives and mark the identity of folk groups. Continuity is an important constituent of identity. Richard Jenkins² holds that the identity doesn't just exist, but it must always be established by the people and community. Different genres of Folklife construct and continue the identities of people as 'a members of a particular group' and 'as a group' throughout the generations despite changes in different spheres of their lives. Though the thesis studies oral narratives as the major source of research, the present chapter describes in brief the Ao-Naga Folklife to situate the community's identities in their expressive behaviour. The chapter discusses the concept of identity in terms of Ao-Naga Folklife and overviews the historicity, origin, migration, environment and lore of the community that sustained their distinctiveness among other local tribes of Nagaland.

The Oxford reference Dictionary, defines identity as the fact of being who or what a person or thing is, or a close similarity or feeling of understanding. Again in the Oxford English Dictionary it is said that Identity is from Latin root (*identitas*, from *idem*, 'the same') and two basic meanings. The first is a concept of absolute sameness identical to and the second is a concept of distinctiveness or difference which presumes consistency or continuity over time. Identity is a term used to describe a person's conception and

expression of their individuality or group affiliations. Peter Robb³ considers that identities are always multiple, contingent and continuously constructed, so that traditions, also continually reinvented, are shared and reiterated practices and beliefs which reflects the collective memories of previous constructions. Thus multiple identities operate at personal (individual), family level (relations), gender (social roles), sex (men and women) class and clan, community (group of people), social (collective), global (worldwide), national, local etc. In the light of above discussion, the identity can broadly be categorized as personal and social.

Personal identity is the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual; these self-meanings operate across various roles. Both the personal and role identities are articulated through a common system of meanings.⁴ Social identity is the ways in which individuals and groups are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and groups. It is the systematic establishment and signification, between individuals, between groups, and between individuals and groups, of relationships of similarity and difference.

Alan Dundes⁵ interprets that the folklore marks the identity of its respective folkgroups. He emphasizes that the identity is absolutely essential to understand that it is impossible to speak of sameness without reference to difference, for, if all the members of a given set were identical and the set was equal to the universe, then sameness would be virtually meaningless. For him, there can be no identity individual, regional or national without being distinct from the other persons or groups. Thus, the folk groups develop esoteric and exoteric expressive behaviour to represent their own 'self' as well as the self of the 'other' and thus construct their identities as a members of the folk group (personal identity) on one hand and on the other as a folk group (group identity) that can be distinct from remaining social groups of a given geographical space. Thus the totality of Folklife as reflected in their lore and lifestyle patterns speak about the way the folk groups are persistent and continuous in withholding their identities at least symbolically in the changing times.

Temsula Ao⁶ considers identity as a word loaded with meanings, evocative of multiple interpretations and in today's context, implicated in a vociferous cry for

assertion. She holds that identity changes its significance spatio-temporally; it may accrue or shed meaning. For a Naga, especially an Ao-Naga identity is a many-layered concept. For her Ao-Naga identity lies in three realms: the existential, locational and artefactual. Existential identity of the Nagas is immersed in mythical lore how they originated, the location of their origin and why they come to live at different places or inhabit the geographical area called Nagaland and outside the state in some places in the adjoining states. Locational identity lies in the village of birth and residence of the Naga. It is because this identity is marked within a specified ethnic and linguistic space. She holds that the art and its various forms never existed in the Naga context for its own sake. Whatever art forms identified with or assigned to the “Naga” today has evolved from utility items. For her the artefactual identity is given by the others but not constructed by them. She is scared that globalization is merging the Ao-Naga identities due to production of hybridized cultural products for exchange in business world. The author undermined two issues: (i) culture is not static and changes according to changing needs of the people in time and space and (ii) the hybrid cultural products do not dehumanize and de-identify the traditional forms, but construct ‘new identities’ and create ‘new contexts’ for their sustenance and continuity thus renewing the Folklife of the society.

Migration and origin of the Nagas

Till today it is an unsolved mystery how the people of Naga⁷ come and settled in the present habitat because of the unwritten records. Many writers have different opinion on the migration of the Naga tribe. But most of them are of the opinion that the Nagas might have come from different places of Southeast Asian countries. The Nagas are generally believed to be a people of Mongolian descent who migrated to the hilly regions. The Philologists have grouped Naga languages as belonging to the Tibeto-Burma family. All the different tribes of Naga come to their present place from different directions and in different waves, not all at a time. Their date of migration is not known due to lack of written records. Many anthropologists had studied the tribe of Nagas since ancient time. The British were the pioneers who encountered the Naga people and studied about them. The Nagas have not its own written history about their origin. But the folksong, folk-tale and legends of different tribes of Nagas are the sorts of Naga history that can trace the origin of the Nagas. The uniqueness of this tribe brought the curiosity to the British

ethnologists to study and wrote about them. Most of the pioneer ethnographers on Nagas were soldiers. The authorities of Nagas were non-professional Anthropologist. Some of the important notes and documents on the Nagas were also lost and damaged in 1879 insurrections (Battle of Khonoma). Damant who was the political agent at Kohima had Manipur Dictionary and a paper on the Angami Nagas, but this was destroyed in the Kohima stockade, during the fighting.⁸ The pioneer ethnologists tried their best to accumulate the information on Nagas but they have inadequate knowledge and information about Nagas, perhaps due to communication gap (interpreter) and no written history. There are different perspectives on the Nagas by outside and inside writers, but the works of pioneer authorities on the Nagas have been acknowledge and appreciated, regardless of their incomplete knowledge.⁹

Shakespeare wrote that Nagas are resembled to those tribes of Dyaks and they loved the marine-shells, which is not found in Naga village. Thus he wrote, “They recognize a slight resemblance in matters of counting name domestic implements, in way village architecture and their Head-hunting propensities to those of the Dyaks, while their love marine-shells (which they part with but rarely) may seem to point to a bygone home near the Sea, though they are far inland-residing community.”¹⁰

According to Mary Maid Clark¹¹ the Nagas in stature are medium and in colour not as dark as the natives of Bengal or Africa. Ethnologically, they may be dominated indo-Chinese or Tibeto-Burman and their language shares considerable mental capacity.

W.C Smith compares the Nagas with the Austro-Asiatic stock. He suspect that the use of the buffalo in the Naga Hills, both as a domestic animal and as an emblem in carving, is to be associated with this Austro-Asiatic stock, also the practice terracing the hillsides and perhaps in making permanent settlements in villages with shifting, but not migratory, cultivation.¹² He tries to enumerate some thirteen characteristics of the Nagas, which are common with Indonesians (the people of Malaya and the island of Indonesia). Some of them are head hunting, common sleeping room for unmarried men, disposal of dead etc. This goes to prove that one time or other; the Nagas were closely connected with the tribes of South-East Asia, particularly with the Dyaks of Borneo, The Battacks of Sumatra, Igords and others of Philippians and other tribes of Formosa.

M. Horam, holds that the present group of Nagas came from the Philippines. His argument is based on the fact that there is a village 'Naga' in Philippines¹³. However the above belief is just an assumption because the Naga village (present Naga city) in Philippines was named by the Spanish troops only in 1573, when they discovered a flourishing Bikol village with abundance of *narra*¹⁴ trees in that place. The Naga being left undisturbed for such a long time, have retained the culture of the most ancient times till today. Their fondness of Cowries shells for beautifying the dress, and use of Conch shells as ornaments (precious ornaments for them) and the facts that the Nagas have many customs and way of life very similar to that of those living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia etc. indicates that their ancient abode was near the sea, if not in some islands."¹⁵

The Nagas use conch-shells and cowries as part of their ornamental dress. In 1874, Butler as the head of an exploration expedition party was told by the people at *Tesopheneyee (Rengma)* that they had ruled "The Coast for Ages".¹⁶ This shows that the forefathers might have crossed some seashore. The long drums hewn from huge logs also features the canoes, is so common with islanders. Even Panger Imchen compares the Nagas with the Vietnamese way of killing *Mithun*. The technology of *dao*, and process of drinking beer during the festive occasions are alike in both the cases.¹⁷

Origin myths with regard to Naga migration

The oral tradition, especially the myths speak about the Naga migrations. The myths are the sacred narratives that tell how the world came into existence. The myths explain how the Supreme Being reveals his mysteries through creation, the place of human and animal kingdom in this universe and their relationship so on. Marca Eliade holds that myth is a true and sacred history which relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the beginnings. Myths tell how through deeds of Supreme Beings a reality came into existence, be it, the whole reality, the cosmos or only fragment of realities. Myth is always an account of creation. It relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only what had really happened and which manifested it completely¹⁸.

Oral traditions reveal that the Nagas hailed from mainland of China who migrated to Myanmar along the rivers and corridors. They migrated to the Southern Seas of Myanmar along the rivers and lived near the Seas coast of Moulmein (Myanmar) for generations before they retreated to Irrawaddy and Chindwin valleys. They lived for generations in Irrawaddy valley but most probably they were driven out to the hills by more advanced races in warfare. The Nagas migrated from Irrawaddy valley through Indo-Myanmar corridor and then to Manipur and finally reached the *Makhel* (the place from which the Nagas dispersed), a historical site in Senapati, Manipur District. It is believed that many Nagas took to diversion from *Makhel* and migrated to the present Naga inhabited areas. The following myth shows how the village *Makhel* is associated with the origination and migration of the Maos, another Naga tribe.¹⁹

Narrative 3.1: Origin Myth of Nagas (i): Tiger, Spirit and man²⁰

Once upon a time there lived the first women by name *Dziilimosiuro* which means the 'purest water' or 'crystal clear water'. One day, she was resting under a tree with her legs wide apart, at a place called *Makhriifii* or *Makhel*. Suddenly a cluster of clouds came over her and some drops of liquid came down over her private part and she became pregnant. Subsequently she gave birth to a Tiger, Spirit and Man or human being. By the time the three children became adults; their mother was quite old and sick. So the three brothers took turns to look after their ailing mother. When the Tiger looked after her, the mother used to become sicker with anxiety and her worry got intensified. The reason for this was that the Tiger used to touch the mother's body to identify the fleshy, good muscles which he could eat after her death. During the turn of the Spirit, the mother used to become more feverish and develop acute headaches. The mother felt at ease and relaxed only when the Man looked after her because he treated his mother with utmost care and concern. As the death of the mother was nearing, the sons began to fight for succeeding her land. When the tussle for inheritance reached blood shed, the mother decided to settle the dispute. So she scheme a contest to be executed among her sons. For this purpose, she created a ball made of grass at a long distance and told them that those who touch it first, he would inherit the land. She understood the mentalities of her children. She wants to inherit her property to the wise and sober son. The Man being the youngest and a good fellow, she wants to help him. She knows that the man cannot compete with the others, the tiger and spirit as both have extra-human powers. Hence, she suggested him to shoot it with a bow and arrow. He followed his mother's advice. He shoots the ball and inherits the property. The tiger got disgusted with the defeat and went deep into forests. The spirits disappeared to the south (Kashiipii).

The myth suggests that Nagas lived in a mythical world wherein the terrestrial (human beings and animals) and celestial beings (sky, clouds, and spirits) lived together sharing the same environment for their sustenance and continuity. In due course the humans learnt to survive on other living beings by using bow and arrow (hunting). As the people began to acquire land for practising shifting cultivation, their fellow-beings began to part from them. Thus the animals went into the forests and sprits disappeared into air

leaving the lands to human beings. The myth reveals the unusual union between the woman (earth) and clouds (symbolises solidified waters, symbolising semen) that yielded three atypical uterine siblings- man, tiger and sprit – who shared same environment. Till date the Nagas believe that some people have tiger soul. If a person with such soul dies, it is believed that a tiger in forest dies. If the tiger gets injured, the person with tiger soul also gets injured. In the same way the people believe that spirit which harms or threatens by its miracles would stay inside the big trees, unused water ponds in the forests, deserted places etc. Similar myth is with some variations is found in other Naga tribal groups.²¹

The Nagas, like any other animist trace their origins to animate and inanimate things of the world like trees and stones. The above explained origin myth got actualised symbolically in the form of a Banyan tree (Marabu),²² stones of man, tiger and god at Makhel in Manipur district. They still stand as cultural idols of Naga identity for the people memorize the myth whenever they see them. The Nagas still memorize the myth by idolizing the following panel of photographs shows the sites to which origin myths are associated.

Photo, No.3.1: Panel of photographs.

The Sacred tree in *Makhel*(1) , the stones of (2), man(3), God and tiger(4).²³



One of the Naga myth tells about the migration of the Nagas from their origin place Mikhel, Manipur region (as revealed in the tiger, spirit and man myth, Narrative,1),to *Khezakenoma* in Chakhesang region and thence to different parts of north east region. The myth further tells how different Naga tribes the Angamis, the Semas, the Lothas and the Rengmas emerged. This origin myth is an Angami-Naga version. When the myth is analysed interesting information emerges regarding their origin at migration. The myth runs as follows:

The history of how the Naga tribes came precisely to occupy their present position had, of course, passed into the dim obscurity of vague tradition (Hutton, 1921). The tradition mentions that the Angami-Nagas sprung from two ancestors who emerged from the bowels of the earth, not in Angami country, but in some where in the South probably Manipur region.

Narrative 3.2: Origin Myth of Nagas (ii) Myth of flat stone and three brothers ²⁴

Once upon a time a person by name Koza named came from the east and after reaching Mekhroma (Maikhel, Manipur region) he rested for sometime and contemplated that in which direction he should go. Then he prayed the god for guidance. Suddenly a bird flew by and alighted on the horn of his *mithun* and then flew off again in the direction of Khezakonoma. In order to ensure the direction shown by the bird, he allowed his hand stick to fall down on the earth. The stick also pointed the direction into which the bird flew. Koza considered it as the guidance given by the spirits and continued his journey towards Khezakonoma. After he reached, he was resting on a stone slab. Again he saw the same bird. Later on, Koza observed a frog putting a grain of rice on the stone slab. Surprisingly, the grain got multiplied and became two. Then Koza brought a basket of rice and poured upon the stone slab. The grain doubled in its volume. Koza then decided to settle down in Khezakonoma region along with his cattle wealth. Koza was blessed with three sons in course of time.

Every day they used to spread their paddy on the flat stone slab. Single load of grain was doubled. It is because a spirit lived in that stone slab. The three sons took turns to spread their paddy because loading and unloading of grains consumed lot of their energy and time. One day their quarrel to do this duty was so terrible that their parents scared that they may shed blood. To ward off the spirit in it, they broke eggs, covered the stone with bush-wood and set it to fire. The stone burst with a crack like a thunder, the spirit went up to heaven in a cloud of smoke. The stone lost its miracles. The three sons then departed and became the ancestors of the Angami, Lotha, and Sema Naga tribes. The parents remained there and became the ancestors of the *Kheja* clan of *Chakhesang* Naga tribe in Kezami villages. The Angamis still point out the great cracked stone, a flat slab opposite the house of the Kemevo, who was supposed to have occupied. As a general rule the site believed to have occupied by the original founder of the village.

In Khezakonoma village the ‘supposed origin stone’ is being still preserved. ²⁵

The above Angami myth suggests the journey and branching of the Nagas into several clans. The above folk narrative motif is widely prevalent in Nagaland wherein other sects also tell the similar episode with regard to their origination and migration. The Longchar²⁶ clan of Ao-Nagas claim that they are also originated from the same stone slab on which the grain was spread for thrashing situated in the village of Khezakonoma. Still this origin myth and its association with the stone slab holds adoration and reverence in their worldview of Nagas. The following photograph shows the mythical stone slab at *Khezakonoma*:

Photo, No.3.2: This stone or monolith is kept in memory as **Naga dispersal Site, Khezakonoma.**²⁷



Mythical lore on Ao-Naga origin and migration:

The Aos are one of the seventeen major tribes (as mentioned in the first chapter) among the Nagas who hold their origin myths distinct from the other sister-tribes. They are still very strong with regard to their identity in terms of origin and symbolism attached to them. They customarily impose fine in cash or kind to those who offend their culture by distortions.²⁸ . During an interview, Chubameren Longchar²⁹, a culture specialist from community, is scared to talk about origin myths of the other clans that live with them in his village though he knows them. He wants to save himself from unwanted conflicts that push him into danger. Thus the identity and origin of the Ao-Naga tribe is carefully constructed and legally protected in their origin myths. The Ao tribe consists of many villages and many sub-clans so they all have their own norms and laws.

In the same way as Naga is a given name to the tribe, it is held that the 'Ao' is also a name given by Sangtams, Changs, Phoms and Konyak Nagas to a set of their people who branched off from the main stock. Literally, the word 'Ao' means 'went or went away'. But for the 'Aos' it means those 'who came' across the Dikhu River (Mon district). The following oral tradition prevails among the Nagas which substantiates the branching of Ao-Nagas from the others.

According to tradition, the people after a long period of life at *Chungliyimti* (presently in Tuensang district) felt to acquire more lands as their population grew enormously. So groups of people had set off to a western region. In order to reach their

destination, they have to cross Dikhu River. Then they constructed a cane bridge. Among the others, Aos were the first to reach the other side of the river. Soon after they landed on the bank, they cut off the bridge with the intension that nobody should come onto their side. Hence, those who crossed the Dikhu River³⁰ were known as “Aor” or “Ao” meaning went or went away and those who were left behind came to be known as “Merir” meaning “left out” or “left behind”³¹. Till today the Ao people call the other tribes like Sangtem, Chang, Phom and Konyak as *Merir*. This is how the word “Ao” and “Merir” originated. The Sema tribes of Nagaland refer to the Aos as *Cholimi* which means the people of Chungliyimti or gone ahead; while *Lothas* referred as *Chuwomi* which means “who proceeded”; Angamis are called *Tsungumi* which means “left behind”; this shows that the Aos went ahead from the rest of the tribes. But Panger Imchen contradicts the above presumption with regard to the derivation of Ao and advocates that the Aos called themselves as Ahors, with a stress given to *Ho*, which in several dialects means Mountain or mountain dwellers.³² According to B.B. Ghosh, every term or name originates with a meaning either through an accident or through a story linked to it.³³ The Aos address the Sema Naga as *Moyar* which literally means, ‘not hungry. Ao’s tell the following account with regard to the naming of the *Moyars* as Sema Nagas³⁴.

Once upon a time the Aos and the Semas were working together. The Aos enquired the Semas whether they were hungry. The Semas replied that they were ‘not hungry’. Since then the Ao’s call Semas as *moya* ‘not hungry group’.

Ao-Nagas’ Worldview on their origin

The Ao-Naga worldview contains abundant lore with regard to their origin and nomenclature of their clans. Their mythical lore reflects the emergence of the Ao-Naga Folklife with animate and inanimate creations universe. The origin myths provide information on (i) how the god created the geography and environment of their Ao-Naga land (ii) the origination of Ao-Naga clans from inanimate matters, the stones (*Longterok*-six stones); (iii) origin of clans from celestial beings, birds, animals and their remains like feathers and celestial bodies like sky, clouds, wind waters.

(i) The geography and environment of AO-land as reflected in myth of Lijaba, the creator

Like any other tribals of Nagaland the Ao-Nagas revere the earth and nature as life-giving entities that cannot be alienated from the any part of their sustenance and endurance. They establish identities and continuities with every living and non-living creations of the god with great emphasis on land and environment. They perceive land not as mere space to be optimised for survival, a substratum for the social groups that enable them to construct their communal as well as personal identities of their members. They believe that the humans, nature, animals and insects have the same ancestral roots and therefore, they have a personal and social relationship. Animals also participate in decision-making and they too possess a strong sense of discernment and a sense of gratitude. Humans are integral part of creation and not above creation. The following narrative explains that the Supreme Being (*tsungrem*) got personified as Lijaba, the creator and scaped the hilly terrains, rivers, streams, ponds, forests lands and so on for the Ao-Nagas. There are two myths of Lijaba that are widely prevalent in the community with regard to creation landscapes and sustenance of the Aos. They identify *Tsungrem* (Supreme Being) as the creator as well as the sustainer of the human beings on the earth. He creates the universe, protects from evils and blesses with fortunes. In the myth (narrative No.3) mythical reasons for hilly nature of Nagaland explained.

Narrative 3.3: Lijaba, the creator of Aos' terrains

Lijaba, the creator of the Ao-Naga lands is believed to be the incarnation of the Supreme Being (tsungrem). One day Lijaba was busily moulding Naga hills for the Ao-Nagas to live in it. When he was deeply immersed in his work, a water cockroach (tsü leplo) appeared and alarmed him, "Enemies are coming, and enemies are coming to destroy the earth with dao and spear." Then the water cockroach disappeared. Lijaba thought that the enemies were really coming. In a hurry to fight with the enemies, he created the rest of the Ao landscape roughly.

Thus the myth establishes geographical contrast between the plains of Assam and the Nagaland, the former has plains and the latter is unevenly spread by hills, forests, deep valleys etc. It further suggests the threat of the outsiders probably be the Assamese to the Ao-Nagas³⁵. Here it is needed to give historical reasons for conflict between the Assamese and the Aos. By the time Ahoms reached the South Eastern Burmese region under King Sukhapa in A.D. 1228, the Nagas were already settled there³⁶. The Nagas' contact with the Ahoms began as early as the 13th century A.D. There were frequent

disputes between the Nagas and the Ahoms. The Nagas always apprehended that their territories may get occupied by these new groups. Hence they used to launch raids upon the Ahoms to plunder their possessions. There were frequent ferocious wars between both the parties. The Ahoms crossed Ao territory during the course of their invasion over Kachari³⁷ capital, in Dimapur. On another occasions, during 1765-67, when the Ahom army tried to help Manipur Raja, they were unable to cross the forests of the Naga land. There were many possibilities for Ahoms to raise wars with the Nagas to carry on their political and commercial activities. Hence they opened special trade markets, Nagakhats in which Naga participation was accepted. It served the purpose of trade and protection from the raids of Naga tribes. The Ahoms even paid money to Nagas which was a kind of protection money to guarantee that no raids would be carried out against those who made payment. The initial contacts were marred by strong feelings of hostility on both sides. For quite some time the hostilities continued, but these battles never resulted in the subjugation of either one by the other. Geographical proximity and economic exigencies has made them inevitably dependent on each other.

These historical relations interpret that the turbulent Naga tribe was at unrest for quite a longer period and remained on toes to save its domains from incursions of its neighbours. The fear gets reflected in the incomplete and disorderly creation of Ao domains in Nagaland by Lijaba, the Supreme Creator. Because he is a protector and sustainer of people, his prime duty is to save his people from threat of enemies. Hence he left the place to snub the enemies. The myth explains geographical formations of Ao-land interms of the political issues that were predominant during the earlier context.

In the worldview of Aos, water cockroach is a benefactor. For curing the dreadful ailments like tuberculosis and asthma the Ao's eat raw cockroaches as a medicine. The zoological name is *blatta orientata*. It is locally called in different names: *leplu* (Ao), *Balno* (Angami), *Plau* (Sema), *Mejingping* (Khamungang), *Luplyue* (Lotha), *phelew* (Rengma), *Akaliu* (Pochury), *Takapui* (Zeliang) and *Echy* (Chakhesang)³⁸.

In the same way as the cockroaches cure the ailments of the humans, it even saves the entire human kind of the Nagas from the attack and destruction by the enemies. The cockroach hastened Lijaba to complete his work as the enemies are approaching. He

hazardously finishes and goes to fight with the enemies. The Ao-landscape remains unapproachable to attacks of enemies and unreachable for alien people due to its geographical inconveniences. Thus Lijaba and cockroach could save the people and environment from atrocities of foreign invasions. Thus the Ao-Nagas mythified their landscapes and environment by associating its creation to their supreme god Lijaba and thus legitimized the possession of their territories from God. In other words, the narrative gives mythical explanation to the existing structure of Ao-land and environment.

For Aos' Creation reveals the mysteries of the supreme Being who signifies the entire universe like winds, the sun, the trees, the rivers etc.³⁹. *Lijaba* enters the earth with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. *Lijaba* is one who protects; upholds, sustains and gives life to all; one who created and continues to create the earth. Thus, the whole world and the entire creation is the Supreme Being's domain. The tribals experience the time and space to the activities related to the earth and seasons of the environment. For them time is cyclical and hence centre their activities round the land. People expect the years to come and go in an endless rhythm, like that of day and night, and like the waning and waxing of the moon. They always wish that the events like rainy season, planting, sowing, harvesting, dry seasons should continue to occur for ever. The axis of the concept of time is the celebration of nature's life-cycle. If nature is disturbed the Folklife gets disturbed. The tribal concept of history and time is inter-linked to and rooted in creation⁴⁰. Hence the folk mythify and mystify their bondage with the land and environment for their identity and continuity.

(ii) Origin of the Ao people from stones: myth of Longterok (six stones)

The popular belief of the Ao-Nagas with regard to their origin is that their ancestors got emanated from six stones *Longterok*. Thus a sacred narrative was developed on their origin in the name of the myth of *Longterok*. The traditional Aos tell that the word *Longterok* is made of two words, *Long* for stone and *terok* for six. Thus the literal meaning of *Longterok* is 'six stones'⁴¹. The settlement around these six stones was named after them as *Longterok* situated in Chungliyimti, Tuensang District. The origin is mythified and the myth is articulated with geographical spaces and remains. Thus the Aos constructed cultural memories in their collective consciousness. The myths

and memory stones that symbolise the originators both perpetuate the tradition of Ao - Naga origin the Naga society. The following photograph shows the stones at *Chungliyimti*, Tuensang District:

Photo, No.3.3: Remains of *Longterok*



The above myth of Longterok is told as simple half-narrative. The names mentioned in the myth are nowhere found except in other oral traditions of Ao-Nagas. However, the people accept those six persons—three men and three women—came out of the stone who were progenitors of the three clans. Each clan has one male and one female. The following table shows the males and females belonging to three clans:

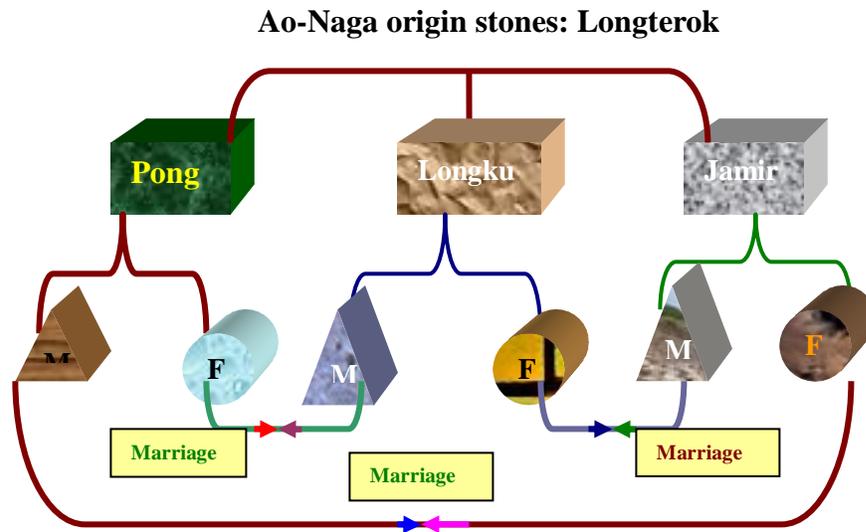
Table No. 3.1 : Clan wise distribution of humans emerged from the stones

Male and Female	Clan
Tongpok (M), Lungkupokla (F)	Pongener
Longpok (M), Yongmenyala(F)	Longkumer
Longjakrep (M),Elangshi(F)	Jamir

Tongpok the male of the Pongener clan, married to the female, *Elangshi* of the Jamir clan; *Longjakrep* the male of the Jamir clan, married to the female *Yongmenyala*, of

the Longkumer clan and *Longpok* the male of the Longkumer clan, married to *Lungkupokla*, the female of the Pongen clan. These three were the main clans among the Aos. As the time passed from these, three many more came into being as sub-clans.⁴² The following diagram describes origination of the Ao tribes.

Diagram No.3.1: Origination of Ao-clans



The *Mongsen* and *Chungli* groups of Aos disagree on the question of their origin and migration basing on the above myth. The above origin myth of the *Longterok* is not accepted by the *Mongsen* group of the Aos. They claim that *Chungliyimti* village is their first settlement. The *Chungli* Aos of *Ongpangkong* range consider *Mongsen* Aos as their descendents. But the *Imchen*, *Longchar* and *Walling* clans of the *Mongsen* Aos' group hold that they were originated neither from stones nor from the *Chungli* group. J.P.Mills is of the opinion that, "The *Mongsen* came out of the earth first and settled at *Kubok*, a vacant site on a spur running down from *Mokongtsu* towards the *Dikhu* River".⁴³ However there exists some inter-tribal warfare between these two clans which is attested by the folk narrative tradition. The widely prevalent episode in this regard is that the *Mongsen* Aos used to kill *Chungli* Aos in such a way that the latter could not understand that who are the culprits. It was only *Shiluti* a great *Chungli* hero who could attack the *Mongsen* Aos and solved the problem. Later on the *Mongsen* Aos were forced to come

to *Chungliyimti* village and form a *khel* side by side with the *Chungli*. The entire account is embedded in the following narrative:

Narrative 3.4: The attack of *Kubok* village

Once upon a time there lived a married young man, *Shiluti*. One day when he went out for hunting he found a narrow path. He was curious to find course of the path, its beginning and its end. As he walked for long time he found the path blocked by fully grown cane trees. There he saw some sharp sticks which people use for clearing bushes in the forests. He slowly removed the canes that blocked the path and returned home. Next day *Shiluti* carefully walked and reached the end of the path from where he could see the village of *Kubok* on the slopes of the valley. He understood that it was the place where ‘men of search party’⁴⁴ of their village found the headless bodies of those who missed their path in the forests. He returned home quietly and told this episode only to his wife. But unfortunately some villagers overheard the information while they both were talking. They informed it to the village elders. Immediately the elders of the village called for a meeting and decided to invite *Shiluti*. Though initially he refused to meet the elders, he ought to go for it is mandatory for any member of the village to attend if ordered by the council. They the council asked him to come with a *dao*, and narrate the findings. In the meeting they decided to attack the *Kubok* villages. *Shiluti* was given the charge of training and testing the calibre of the village warriors who are supposed to attack their enemies. Ceremoniously, he killed a healthy pig and cut it into 30 pieces. Then he threw them into the burning fire. After that he took one burning piece of meat and kept it into his mouth. The other twenty nine trainees followed the example of *Shiluti*. Thus they all were qualified to attack their enemies. They attacked *Kubok* settlement and defeated the *Mongsen Aos*. Thus the *Chungli Aos* forced the *Mongsen Aos* to come to *Chungliyimti* and form a *khel* in their neighbourhood. Since then they both were together.⁴⁵

From the above narrative it is evident that though *Mongsen Aos* do not trace their descent from the *Longterok* (six stones) for they believe that they are earlier to other group of *Nagas*, the *Chungli Nagas*. That’s why the *Mongsen Aos* tried to curb the advance of the *Chungli Aos* into their domains. It is attested by the head-hunting of their enemies for head bodies of trespassed hunters of the *Chungli Aos* were found by their hero, *Shiluti* in the above narrative. When the *Chungli Aos* proved their ability to defeat their enemies *Mongsen Aos*, the latter were forced to accept for the terms and conditions of the former. The norm ‘the might is right’ holds in tribal societies. Hence the mighty *Chungli Aos* established their right of control over the *Mongsen Aos*. Once the peace attained amidst the two groups of *Ao Nagas*, their society got hierarchically organised through the institutions of marriage and kinship. The village administration and polity, and economic organisation were regulated by customary law and order. The moral and ethical aspects of were streamlined⁴⁶.

As mentioned earlier, from *Chungliyimti* the whole *Ao* community moved westwards and after they crossed the *Dikhu River*, went their own ways and founded

their own villages. The Aos came to Aonglenden (Mokokchung district) and on their arrival, ten sons were born. So the place was called *Soyim*, but one of the *Unger* (Chief) was killed by a tiger at Soyim. So Soyim become *Ungma* meaning *Ung* (Chief) and *ma* (lost). Therefore, they left the Soyim and came to Koridang, a new site and from Koridang to the various parts of the present Ao country. One group founded the Longkhum village, while according to Mills the majority settled at koridang range. One group wandered further south and founded Ungma⁴⁷ while another group founded Sütsü and Kabza. The above said villages are all from the Ongpangkong range, the largest range among the six ranges of the Aos, and from this, they slowly and gradually founded more and more villages. It is said that the event of the settlement of Aos in the present territories indicates that they displaced some clans of early Konyak tribe inhabitants viz: *Isangyonger, Nokranger and Molunger*.⁴⁸ This is so because there are a number of sites still bearing testimony of this people and some of the people have been absorbed in the Ao community.

There is no historical record to trace the route of Ao migration and moreover Ao traditional stories also do not go beyond *Longterok*.⁴⁹ In present day, there are many writers and research scholars who are of the opinion that Ao Naga origin goes beyond *Longterok* (six stones). For many centuries it was believed that the Aos originated out of six stones in *Chungliyimti*, but with the coming of Christianity and education, historians and scholars concluded that humans cannot be emerged out from stones. In order to have a clear idea of the Ao origin, the *Mongsen* group formed a group to study and research especially on the *Mongsens* in 1985.⁵⁰ They went and visited all the neighboring tribes of the Nagaland. Panger Imchen writes that the *Mongsen* Aos came to Nagaland through the lower parts of Irrawaddy valley where as the *Chungli* Aos came through the upper part of the Chinwin River at about 300B.C. and their first settlement at *Chungliyimti* was in between A.D. 100 to A.D. 125.⁵¹ W. C. Smith is of the opinion that *Mongsen* and *Chungli* had their separate identity before they lived together in *Chungliyimti*. Even J. P. Mills' writes that the *Mongsen* came out first and later the *Chunglis*. Opinions and views on this are diverse.

The places now occupied by the Sema and the Lotha Nagas have names, which was said to have been once inhabited by the Aos. There is a story that tells of a group of Aos who moved southward towards the present Sema and Lotha area from Koridang in search of better land. They settled in those areas for sometimes but finding no suitable land they retreated towards the north and joined the mainstream of the Aos. The Semas called the Aos by the name *Julimi* because they tried to follow them but could not reach them. The Semas saw that some Aos once passed through their areas, and the places like *Aochakilimi*, *Lumami* and *Lotisami* are said to be areas where Aos once lived and went away. In a report, the Mongsen group gathered information from the grand old men of the visited tribes in regard to the origin. The Yimchunger tribe says that the Ao people once lived together with them but after sometime they moved out. They all came across Burma searching for a hilly area. From *Khezakenoma*, one group went to Eastern Sangtam, from where the name *Chungliyimti* was apparently coined. They do not agree with the Aos origin from a stone. According to the Sangtams, Aos and Sangtams lived together in *Chungliyimti* once upon a time. They are of the opinion that the Aos came from Burma, and some went through Japhu and stayed in Jakhama village and the other group without moving out continues to live in Chakhesang area. Later on the Aos went ahead leaving the *Sangtams*. When the Aos wanted to establish a village to settle down, the first thing they did was examine the land. First, they dug a hole in the ground and filled it up with the same earth. If the dugout earth could not completely fill the hole it was considered infertile and if it filled the hole it was considered fertile. In this way the Aos settled down and moved on with cultivation.⁵²

Till today, oral traditions passed down by word of mouth through generation seems to happen only in the village *Chungliyimti* (Tuensang District). But the above discussion state that all the Aos came from the eastern side. Many researchers are of the opinion that the Aos came to Mokokchung District (inhabitant of the Aos) through Myanmar (Burma). It is assumed that the materials like bones, precious stones etc. were picked up while crossing rivers and streams to make ornaments like armlets, necklaces, conch-shells and cowries etc. unfortunately many of them were lost because the villages and granaries were burned. Even the long drums hewn from huge logs also feature the canoes which are so common with islanders during their migration. The Ao society was

fully organised only after they reached Chungliyimti village and it was a time of social and political reformation of the Aos. It is believed that after everything was constructed, six Morungs (dormitories) representing altogether the six units of the village administration was constructed.

(iii) Origin of the clans: birds, animals and their remains like feathers and celestial bodies like sky, clouds, wind waters.

As discussed above, from the Longterok tradition it is evident that the Aos are of two (i) Chungli and (ii) *Mongsen* groups. The *Pongen*, the *Longkumer* and the *Jamir* clans descended from the Chungli Aos and the *Imchen*, the *Longchar* and the *Walling* clans emerged from Mongsen Aos. From these two groups they spread and founded many clans. Today there are number of clans in the Ao areas. There are some myths that trace the evolution of different clans of the Aos from these major groups of Aos. The following narrative shows how clans were originated from celestial bodies like sun and moon which reflect the animistic perception of the tribes predominant in their origin stories.

Narrative 3.5: Child of sun and moon

Once upon a time, there lived a wife and husband. When the wife was drying grains in the *sunlang* (balcony) she was covered with darkness and fainted. There had been no sexual intercourse between them as yet. So she asked her husband whether he came to the balcony but her husband denied that he did not come. Then the wife said, “Now this darkness has done some bad work upon me. I will await and see after I gave birth to the child.” After sometime she gave birth to an amazing child who was intelligent and different from others. From that child new clan emerged.⁵³

The narrator commented that since the child belonged to the Sun and the Moon, it obtained their blessings. Hence the successors of the child are still prosperous and well established in high positions though several generations passed after the birth of the glorious child. It is believed that this story was a true story that took place in the range. The narrator refused to tell the name of the clan that descended from the child of sun and moon. It is against the customary law of the Ao-Nagas to reveal or unfold the information of other clans that would offend their sentiments. That’s why the narrator did not reveal the identity of the clan.

The Ao worldview had several myths with regard to the origination of their sub-clans. Following is one such myth of the *Ozukumer* Ao-clan (sub-clan of *Longkumer* of *Longterok*) that traced its origins to inanimate materials like feather and the stone.

Narrative 3.6: The story of *Longkongla*

Once upon a time, there once lived a righteous woman called *Longkongla* in *Chungliyimti* village. She belonged to the *Longkumer* clan. She was a just and upright woman, hospitable, loved children very much and everyone on earth. One day as she was weaving her cloth in her courtyard, a male hornbill (*tenem ozü*) passed her way. That moment she wished, “I wish the hornbill dropped one of its feathers so that I can wear to the *Moatsü* festival.” Then the hornbill dropped one of its feathers. Seeing the feather she was overjoyed. She kept the feather in her *kettsu* (cane mat box). Next day she found out that the feather had turned into a sharpening stone. She kept the stone in the fore room at the entrance to her house. Soon that stone got transformed into a broken bamboo basin. She threw it out. Later, in that night, she noticed the broken bamboo basin turned into a baby boy. He was crying. She cared for him as a foster mother and named *Pongtang* which literally means ‘everyone try to carry’.

In due course, he grew into a strong and handsome boy who was admired by all women, young and old. Some of the villagers were jealous of the boy. One day he was taken to fishing and was killed. After knowing about the mishap, *Longkongla* decided to take revenge by killing all the villagers. First she wanted to kill the children and later the villagers who would come to her house for retribution. One day, when all the villagers were out in the field, she killed a big pig and cooked it. She invited all the children for the pig feast. When they were enjoying the food, she closed the doors and set fire to it. All the children were burnt to death except for one boy who escaped and informed the news in the village. When the tragic news spread the chief (*ungr*) of the village; the council called upon all his villagers to stay at home to kill *Longkongla*. Having learned of their plan, she spread grains- rice, millet, soybeans and maize-around herself and waited for the villagers to come while she weaved her cloth. Later all the men gathered with their *dao* (knives). As each one approached her with the *dao*, they slipped on the rice grains and beans and fell down. Thus *Longkongla* casually killed everybody with her sword i.e., weaver’s baton (*Alem*). When evening came, she found herself alone. She could not live alone. She asked the *Anintsüingba*, God of Heaven to lift her up to heaven as she no longer wished to remain on earth. The god told her that he would lift her to the heaven only if she forgot all her attachments, possessions and belongings on the earth. Moreover she could not look down even if her kith and kin called for her. God further told her that if she did not follow these conditions she would be dropped from heaven. She promised him that she would not to look down. The god stretched the rope from heaven to lift her up. But halfway to heaven she heard all the cries of her cows, dogs, pigs, chickens and goats. As their voices grew louder she looked down because she missed them. The moment she looked down she was dropped to the earth and turned into a rock.⁵⁴ Her son who was born from hornbill feather became the originator of the *Ozukumer* clan of the Aos.

The above tale is claimed by the *Ozukumer* clan (literally meaning one who was transformed from a bird. *Ozu* in the Ao language means a bird). This clan is one of the Aos clans who trace their origin not to *Longterok* but to *Pongtang*, who was transformed into man from a bird’s feather and raised by *Longkongla* in the above story. This clan is accepted as a sub-clan of the *Longkumer* clan. The tale is widely known to the Ao-Nagas.

From the above discussion it is evident⁵⁵ biggest mystery is the origin of various tribes of the Nagas because different tribes have their own version of their origin”. However, there is a consensus that has been agreed upon by all scholars that the Nagas are Mongoloid by race. They have broad head and are light complexioned with black hair and yellowish eyes. They have different tribes and sub-tribes with various customs and

traditions broadly scattered between the great rivers of Brahmaputra in India and Salween River in Myanmar. It is believed that the earliest home of the Mongoloid people was on the upper reaches of Hwang-Ho River in China. They further moved down to South-East Asia then to these mountains. The Nagas claim their origin from village *Makhel* (as mentioned in the myth of Tiger, spirit and man, Narrative No.1) a historical site in Senapati, Manipur District and also from *Khezakonoma* (as mentioned in the Myth of flat stone and Three brothers, Narrative No.2) in Chakhesang region. The Angami Nagas connected their descent directly from the man mentioned in the tiger, spirit and man myth from where one of the sons diverted his way to *Khezakonoma* (origin of flat slab). From this place the remaining tribes like the Lotha, Sema, Rengma emerged. The parents who stayed back in *Khezakonoma* were the descendent *Kezami* village (Chekhesang Naga).

Till date the origin myth of *Longterok* is a generally accepted myth of the Ao-Nagas. After much research it came to a conclusion that the stones (origin stones) were kept as a foundation in remembrance of their settlement in *Chungliyimti* (presently in Tuensang District) and for identity marker. Even though ancient stories do not go further beyond *Longterok* but still some of the grand aged people have in their mind, faded memories about their land and brethren in the East. Even the Aos believed that they have close similarity with the tribes of South-East Asian countries and many researchers and writers are of the opinion that the Aos came to Ao region through Myanmar (Burma). Ever since the inception of the Ao Naga society, the *Chungli* Aos and *Mongsen* Aos, never had any common administration unit even if they lived together in a common village and the same practice is retained till today.

To conclude, the frequent inter-tribal conflict and migrations within the Nagas could not develop a sense of brotherhood and fraternity among the tribes. Instead each migrated group needed an identity for continuing their line of succession. Thus the seventeen Naga groups constructed separate myths of their origin to distinguish themselves from the others. Being the animist in their belief, the Nagas created their mythologies and traced their origins to animate and inanimate beings of terrestrial and celestial realms of the world. When the origins are in obscure, it is natural to the social groups to develop their genesis to mythical beings or directly to god. Thus the Naga creation myths fall under the categories of parthenogenesis and autogenesis. The birth of

the clans by parthenogenesis (origination due to the union between human beings and spirits) and autogenesis (self transformation into several forms before reaching a final shape or form) find expression in their narrative structures. The following chapter studies the structural feature of Ao-Naga folk narratives to see the linkages between the narrative structures and the identity formations.

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/introduction.html>, 28th Nov.2011

² Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.4

³ Peter Robb, "The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May), 1997, pp. 245-283.

⁴ Jan E. Stets, "Role Identities and Person Identities: Gender Identity, Mastery Identity, and Controlling One's partner" *Sociological Perspectives* 38, 1995, pp. 129-50

⁵ Alan Dundes, *Folklore matters*, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1989, p.4

⁶ Temsula Ao, "Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective", in *Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India*, A quarterly newsletter Folklife from National Folklore Support Centre, Serial No.22, July, 2006, pp. 6-7

⁷ Various scholars have given their opinion on the term 'Naga'. According to Holcombe and Peal, the term "Naga" has its origin in the word "Nok" which means "folk" and as the Naga people use to live in groups, they come to be known as "Naga" later on (Ashikho-Daili-Mao, *Nagas: Problems and Politics*, New Delhi, Ashish Publishing house, 1992 :p.10). Even Verier Elwin feels that the word Naga is mostly derived from the word Nok or "people". Some groups of scholar's feels that the term "Naga" must have originated from a Sanskrit word "Nagna" which means "naked". Another two views are "Nagna" meaning "Naked" from a Hindustani word and "Nangta" again "Naked" from Bengali word. Whatever derivation might be, Hokishe Sema ,a Naga writer in his book, *Emergence of Nagaland* has clearly written down two largely accepted viewpoints about the term "Naga" from Burmese and Assamese language the Burmese called the Naga "Na-Ka" which means people, folk with pierced ear-lobes. In Assamese Nagas are called "Noga" meanings "Naked", writes that "Moreover, it was the Burmese that the British first came to know about the Nagas soon after their earliest wars with Burma during 1795-1826" (3). In the historical records of Assam, called Buranjis, the word Naga is used for the primitive man living in his natural surroundings in an uncorrupted form. The Nagas had contact with the people of plain in Assam during earlier times. Even Dally Namo in his book, *Prisoners from Nagaland* has expressed the same term "NA-KA" from the Burmese language for Nagas Hokeshi, Sema, *Emergence of Nagaland: socio-economic and political transformation and the future*, New Delhi, Vikas Pub., House, 1986.

⁸ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2478/5/05_chapter%201.pdf. 30th Nov, 2011.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Shakespeare L.W, *History of upper Assam, Upper Burma and North East Frontier*, 1914, p-197

¹¹ M.M Clark, *A Corner in India*, Guwahati, Christian Literature Centre, (Reprinted and Published), 1978, p.43

¹² W.C Smith, *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications. (Reprinted), 2002, p.xii

¹³ M. Horam, *Naga Polity*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Co. 1975, p.25

¹⁴ Narra (*Pterocarpus indicus*) is a briefly deciduous, majestic tree typically growing to 25–35 m (82–115 ft) in height. It is the narration tree of the Philippines, as well as the provincial tree of *chonburi* and *phuket* in Thailand.

- ¹⁵ R.R. Shimray, *Origin and Culture of Nagas*, New Delhi, Samsok Publications, 1985, p.13
- ¹⁶ H. Bareh, *Nagaland District Gazetteers Kohima*, Sree Saraswati Press Limited, 1970, p. 19
- ¹⁷ Panger Imchen, *Ao Mongsen Lipok*, Mongsen Mongdang, Mokokchung, 1990.
- ¹⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Realty*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London, 1963, p.1
- ¹⁹ For further readings refer: Lorho Mary Maheo, *The Mao Naga tribe of Manipur: a demographic anthropological study*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2004, pp. 21-22
- ²⁰ X.P. Mao, "The origin of Tiger, Spirit and Humankind: A Mao Naga Myth", NEHU, Shillong-22 Indian Folklife, Serial No.33, July 2009
- ²¹ Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24.04. 2008; Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12. 2007.
- ²² William Nepuni, *Socio-cultural history of Shüpfomei Naga tribe: a historical study of Ememei, Lepaona, Chüluve and Paomata generally known as Mao-Poumai Naga tribe*, Mittal Publications, 2010, p. 38
- ²³ <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.233868789978619.66506.227200567312108&type=1>. 30th Nov, 2011.
- ²⁴ Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24.04. 2008
- ²⁵ B.B.Ghosh, *Nagaland District Gazetteers; Mokokchung District; Kohima*, Published by Government of Nagaland, 1979, p. 39
- ²⁶ Purtongzuk Longchar, *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland*, Dimapur, Print home, 2002. In his book he narrated the myth as; there was a magic stone, flat and wide used for basking patty at the *Khezakenoma*. It goes on that the Longchar bask the grains on the flat stone doubled at the time of collecting in the afternoon. Due to increasing power of the stone the Longchar group of people became rich whereas their neighbours remained poor. So this difference led to a feud and affected where they were compelled to vacate the place.
- ²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=233932013305630&set=a.233931303305701.66513.227200567312108&type=3&theater>. 30th Nov, 2011.
- ²⁸ J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, 1926, p.5
- ²⁹ Chubameren Longchar, 76 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.03.2005
- ³⁰ I.Bendangangshi and I.T Apok Aier (Naga scholars of the 20th century), feels that the mentioned Dikhu River cannot be the exact river. But for them, "It may be one of the big tributaries of the Irrawadi like the Chinwin River in Myanmar (Burma)", I.Bendangangshi, Aier, I.T Apok Aier, *The Religion of the Ao Nagas*, Guwahati, 1990: X).
- ³¹ Information provided by Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12. 2007
- ³² Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publication, 1993, P.20
- ³³ B.B. Ghosh, *supra*. 1979, p. 2
- ³⁴ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, This narration is also mentioned by J.P.Mills in his book, *The Ao Nagas*, 1926. In his version instead of water cockroach it is water-beetle. P.220.
- ³⁶ Charles Chasie, *Nagaland*. Pp.257-258
- ³⁷ Non-Aryans
- ³⁸ N S Jamir, P Lal, "Ethnozoological practices among Naga Tribes", Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge, Vol.4 (1), Jan. 2005, pp. 100-104
- ³⁹ A. Wati Langchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology: Tribal Theology, Issue, Method and Perspective*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 2000, pp.82-88.
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- ⁴¹ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years, Longkhum village, on 18.12.2007
- ⁴² Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years, Longkhum village, on 18.12.2007
- ⁴³ J.P.Mills, *supra*,. 1926, p.7
- ⁴⁴ The smart, strong and depended warriors were selected by the village elders in the search party.
- ⁴⁵ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, on 18.12. 2007
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*
- ⁴⁷ Bendangangshi, *supra*, , he mentions that Ungma is the biggest village among the Aos and the biggest village in south-east Asia 1990: 2

⁴⁸ J.P.Mills, op.cit., 1926, p. 9

⁴⁹ B.B. Ghosh, supra. 1979, op.cit., p.30

⁵⁰ Mongsen Mongdang, Report “*Mongsen Lipok Terajem Bushiba Osang*”, 1985

⁵¹ Panger Imchen, op.cit., 1993, p.36

⁵² Information provided by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, on 18.12. 2007

⁵³ Information collected from Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, on 24 04. 2008.

⁵⁴ Information provided by Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, on 18th June, 08.

⁵⁵ P.D. Stracey, *Nagaland Nightmare*, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1968.

Chapter: IV

AO-NAGA NARRATIVE TYPOLOGY AND STRUCTURE:

METAPHORS OF IDENTITY

Story telling is an innate impulse and an accepted expressive behaviour among the people. Especially in oral societies, like the Ao-Nagas where the communication and transmission of knowledge is based on orality and mnemonics, narratives are the only channels through which one can articulate with the other throughout the generations. By rendering tales narrators find meaning to their own lives and also to their respective culture and environment in which they are born and raised. In general, unless the experiences and events of human lives are storied they do not have a narrative structure. When the narrators organize and render their experiences in cognizance with their own selves, the emergent narratives accomplish an evocative framework of interpretations. In the process of interpretation, the narrators develop 'narrative identity' and through which they could establish 'personal' and 'social' identities with their narratives. Since the narratives are deemed to be the overt or subverted experiential expressions of the narrators, they mirror structure and cultural values of the society in which they are told and subsumed.¹ Thus narrative structure remains identical with the pattering of the mind of the narrators which in turn are tuned along the respective societal norms. The social functions served by the narratives also remain online with the accepted cultural values and rules of their social stratification. Hence the structure, function and interpretation of the folk narratives converge to construct the identity of the tellers both from their personal and community perspectives. The Ao-Nagas are good narrators. Every oral expression with regard to their culture comes out of their experiences in their community life. It is because the narrators are structured and their social roles are regulated by the norms, values, beliefs and customary law of their respective groups. The same patterns get reflected in their renditions (folklore) of the narrators. Hence the Ao-Naga oral narratives, especially the folktales when analysed reveal identical life style patterns in reality as well as in their expression.

The present chapter focuses on (i) how the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas (both in personal and folk) endure their core strands of identity in their narrative motifs, the themes, and (ii) how the structure of the oral narratives mirror the social stratification and cultural values of the Ao-Nagas. The folk narratives in this chapter are analysed on the paradigms of Proppian and Levistrausstian structural models and processed through Derridian post structural hermeneutical discourse and narrative inquiry.

(i) Typology of folktales and motifs

Typology is a scientific classification and study of types or categories that are prevalent not only among people but also in any system, structure, function, culture or society. Categorical study of any cultural product gives a greater understanding of the worldview and expressive behavior of its producers. Folktales are cultural expressions of people and societies. The typological classification and study of folktales reveal how the people and the communities sustained their distinctiveness and built their identities amongst the others through out several generations. Further, it reveals the esoteric and exoteric nature of human groups in identity formations. The Ao-Naga folktales are typologically classified basing on the motifs that are largely prevalent in their society.

From the repertoire of the folktales collected in the field by the researcher, only 33 were appropriated in the thesis. Interestingly in Ao-Naga society every body is not a storyteller; a few are blessed with the gift of narration. Even among them, the male tellers outnumber the females. It is because, in Ao-Naga society men have more opportunities for exposure in various aspects of social life (politico-economic and socio-religious and legal) than that of the women. Conventionally, men who take part in village councils, *Putu Menden* are supposed to know the cultural and traditional norms, customary law and order of their society. Even if the women tellers are asked to explain the issues related to their community byelaws and tradition, they prefer their men to reveal them to the others. The women are cautious that if anything goes wrong in their renditions they believe that it tantamounts to the violation of their norms. They think that it is the domain of the men.² Hence the men act as the ‘active bearers’³ of the Naga tradition whereas the women remain as ‘complementary’ to them.

The Aarne–Thompson classification of folktales is being followed in the chapter. Antti Aarne published in 1910; it was then translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson. His six-volume *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1932–37) is a repertoire of knowledge and an international key to categorize the traditional material. It is known as *AarneThompson Tale Type Index*. Thompson used motifs, the themes/content rather than structures in the process of in categorization of the tales.

Thompson defines motif as, “the smallest element in a tale, having a power to persist in tradition.”⁴ Motif indexing is the process of breaking down a story into its smallest unit (motifs) and arranging these units into an organized structure. The resulting index enables scholars to compare folktales across cultures by similar motifs, and serves as a story-finding aid and selective bibliography of folktales in single editions and collections. The motif index proper is often accompanied by several other indices that help access to it, such as a subject index or a tale title index. The book is a collection of indices that provide access to the primary components, the motifs and is well known as “motif index.”

Motifs in Ao-Naga Folktales

The motifs of folk narratives collected from the community are categorized in the light of the classification of Arne Thompson. In the following table No.1, the narrative-motifs prevalent in Ao-Naga society are given.

Table No. 4.1: Motifs in the Ao-Naga Folk Narratives

Narrative	Motif	Motif Index
1. A boy who choose his wife (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 5) (a boy test two girls to chose as his wife)	Character	H1569. Tests of character- miscellaneous
2. The embarrassing boy (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 6) (a boy gets embarrassed because he failed all the test given by the girl’s family)		
3. Improper marriage (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 7) (two lovers could not marry because the girl was married to the lover’s elder brother)	-Grief -fate	F1041.21. Reactions to excessive grief. M302.2. Man’s fate written on his skull
4. Origin of tattooing (in Ch.6,	Tattooing	A1465.1. Origin of tabooing

Narrative no. 1) (this is a tale how tattoo was originated among the Ao-Nagas)		A1595. Origin of tattooing.
5. Designs of tattoos (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 2) (the Mongsen and Chungli girls were identified through their tattoo)	Tattoo	H55.3. Recognition by tattoo.
6. Two girls and the hair (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 3) (How the maintenance of the hair neglect the work)	Equals	P310.8. Friendship possible only between Equals
7. A tree spirit who love a girl (in Ch. 6, Narrative no. 4) (The lover of the girl transform into tree when morning comes)	Transformation	D215. Transformation: Man to tree
8. The son who went to death land (in Ch.6, Narrative no. 8) (The son realizes that the land of death and mortal is very different)	-Help -Land	F403.2.Spirits help mortal E481. Land of the dead
9. Distribution of property (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 3) (Father distributed the property of the mother to the daughters accordingly)	Property	A1585. Origin of Laws: division of property in a family
10. <i>Menangsangla</i> and <i>Nokshiloba</i> (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 4) (Both the man and woman were judged by lord of judgment, <i>Meyutsungba</i>)	Punishments	E606.1. Reincarnation as punishment for sin. Q220. Impiety punished
11. Revenged for a father's death (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 5) (Two sons took the revenge upon the death of the father)	Son	H1228.2. Son goes out to avenge father's death.
12. Devil and the old man (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 6) (The old man killed a devil with his own hand)	-Devil -killed	M219.4. familiar devours whoever does not keep pact with devil. G303.20.ways in which the devil kills people.
13. The rich girl who became spinster (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 7) (The rich could not marry because he was in love with a poor boy)	-Poor -Pride	T91.5. Rich and poor in love T91.5.1. Rich girl in love with poor boy. Pride brought low
14. Two lovers of same clan (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 8) (One boy and girl of the same clan were in love but due to the strong customary law they gave up their love.)	Exogamy	T131.5. Exogamy. Marriage only outside the group
15. Man who married to his cousin (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 9) (a man who married his paternal cousin realizes that his marriage with his own cousin sister was unnatural for him and divorced her)	Marrying	A1552.1. Why brothers and sisters do not marry
16. Wife who played competition with	Heaven	F966. Voices from heaven (or

her husband (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 11) (wife was taught by the voice of spirit not to play completion with her husband after divorce)		from air)
17. Step-mother (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 12) (Step-mother who treated differently when serving food)	Food	Q65.1. Supplying food to ungrateful stepmother rewarded.
18. <i>Sungrochetla</i> who became cuckoo bird (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 13) (<i>Sungrochetla</i> is a supernatural being married to a mortal man)	Supernatural	T111.marriage of mortal and supernatural being
19. Aier chanu agi ozu akumba (in Ch. 5, Narrative no. 15) (A girl who turns into a bird)	Transformation	D156. Transformation; Man to cuckoo
20. Two brothers and a tiger (in Ch.5, Narrative no. 16) (Two brothers killed a tiger)	Tiger	J1706.1. Tiger as stupid beast.
21. The cursed mango tree (the daughters of a rich man celebrated his father's plentiful harvest)	Work	J21.50.Idleness begets woe; work brings happiness
22. <i>Tsiposang</i> and the animals (in Ch. 2, Narrative No. 2) (He understand the language of the animals)	-Men -Animal	A2433.2.4. Animals that live with men B217. Animal language learned
23. <i>Aluyimer</i> (farmer) (in Ch. 2, Narrative no.4) (The farmer worked hard on the field to survive because he know that fishing will not help them in times of famine)	Fisherman	J345.2. Man leaves farming for fishing when water dries up he goes hungry.
24. Lijaba, the creator of Ao terrains (in Ch.3, Narrative no. 3) (Lijaba, the creator of earth created the Naga land)	Mythological motifs	A801. Earth born of chaos. Greek: Grote I 4ff. A605. Primeval chaos.
25. <i>Lijaba's</i> spirit (in Ch. 7, Narrative no. 3) (Lijaba's spirit was send to the earth so that people will worship him)	Visit	K1811. Gods (saints) in disguise visit mortals F32. God visits earth
26. The story of <i>Longkongla</i> (in Ch. 3, Narrative no. 5) (This story is about a woman who took revenge by killing all the children and villagers in the village)	-Feathers -Feather	T536. Conception from feathers falling on woman. D437.3. Transformation: feather to person
27. Distribution of colours	Animal	B0--B99.
28. Owl (<i>pokpo</i>) and Hummingbird (<i>yimpangmejep</i>)	Animal	B0--B99.

Source: Basing on the information collected from the field work in Naga land

Among the 38 used tales, only 28 tales fall under the Aarne-Thompson motif-Index tale type. In general the Ao-Naga tales are very simple having a single motif. The major motifs as cited in the above table are: transformation, exogamy, marrying, work, mythological, supernatural, devil, killed, character, fisherman, tiger, punishment, help, land, food, son, property, poor, pride, visit, equals, tattoo/tattooing, heaven, feathers, transformation, grief, fate, men, animal. Almost all these tale types or motifs of the tales are really synonyms of the mundane and spiritual lives of the tellers as well as the community. The motif of 'transformation' is predominant in the motifs. The non-living (like stones, rocks etc) got transformed to into living (human beings, trees, flowers etc) and *vice versa* (humans into stones, tress, animals). The community's identity with the nature and environment and belief in the occurrence of some 'spirit' within the selves of animate and inanimate beings of the world often found in the motifs of the oral narratives construe the animistic spiritual ideology of the Ao-Nagas.

Some tales have more than one motif. For example, the Ao-Naga narrative No.14: *Devil and the Old man*, contains two motifs namely *devil* and *killed*. Thus the Narratives, Nos. 8, 15, 33, 3 and 27 in the above table have two motifs. Occurrence of more than one motif in the folk narratives indicates the growing complexity in social phenomena and politico-economic formations and nature *vs* culture relationships due to the interventions like inter-tribal warfare or exchange relationships among the other ethnic tribes of the region.

The redundancy of motifs of exogamy-endogamy, marriage and conjugal fidelity and tattooing depicted in Ao-Naga folk narratives reiterate the norms and values that are to be endured to retain the 'racial purity' of the respective clans of their society and thereby the community's identity. There are interesting motifs peculiar to Ao-Nagas that emphasize the presence of a metaphysical world that judges the good or bad deeds of the human beings on the earth after they die. Some motifs show how Ao-Nagas categorize the cosmos into two different realms: the worlds of dead and living. The motifs on stepmother (Narrative no. 17) are prevalent in the tradition which indicates re-marriage of men, a dominant feature of patriarchy in tribal societies. 'Revenge' motifs are significant in their oral narratives. The tribal societies survive and endure on internecine warfare among clans or groups. In order to keep-up the fervour of militancy, a requisite to win the

battles, 'revenge' has to be developed as instinct among the men and women to save their 'community selves' from the threat of others' incursions. The 'revenge motifs' of Ao-Naga folktales reflect the tribal law and order, the 'eye to eye'. The folktale has the motif of sibling rivalries is mostly between sisters. The tribal economy based on hunting and gathering or shifting cultivation, especially *jhum* cultivation among the Aos necessitated sometimes keeping the younger children at home with their elder children. In the absence of their parents the elder sisters used exploit the labour and services of their younger sisters. Interestingly Ao-Naga narrative tradition is conspicuous by the absence of motifs on (i) in-laws conflict, (ii) domestic violence, (iii) incest. The reasons are explained as follows:

(i) In Ao-Naga tradition the newly wedded couple from the day of their marriage should lead independent life managing their mundane activities on their own. The interference of the in-laws from both the sides appears to be negligible. Hence there is not much scope for regular interaction that would lead to conflicts.

(ii) Though wife beating is not uncommon in the society, the issues in general are considered as internal to their respective families. But when the problem exceeds the 'patience limit' of the partner, it gets settled by the family elders and community council. Fear of society and law keep the conflicts among the family members in low profile. Hence the motifs on domestic violence are scanty.

(iii) The motif on incest is not found in the Ao-Naga folk narratives since kinship relations like in any other society strongly condemn the practice as unethical and unscrupulous. Since the child rearing of Ao-Naga community gives less scope for sibling conflicts the problems related to incest are not visible. Though here and there such episodes are in the society, the issue did not raise to the level of constructing lore upon it.

Thus, the tale types /motifs those are prevalent in the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas stand as the icons of their identity. In the same way, the sequential pattering of the different events and the cause and effect relationship among different reflect the structure of Ao-Naga society.

(II) Structure of Ao-Naga Oral Narratives : Identities

Structure can be defined as a system consisting of units having definite relationships among themselves and at the same time to the whole; therefore units and their functions are predictable. Function is the contribution which a partial activity makes to the total activities of which it is a part. The structure and functions are inseparably interwoven to give meaning not only to the teller but also to the target audience. Propp used the term ‘function’ to refer to the ‘act’ of the character which causes the progression of the tale. The functions of each of the characters are constant elements independent of how or by whom they are fulfilled, thus becoming the fundamental components of a tale. The functions of each tale are limited and always sequentially identical, even if some of the functions are absent. He formed rules for the plots of fairy tales, which can be summarized as follows: “there are a set number of events (or functions, of which there are 31) and character-roles (*Dramatis Personae*) that appear in tales, and, while not all appear in each tale, those that do appear must come in a certain order. These rules do not hold literally true in all tales (in many tales, functions occur out of order); however, they are a good structure through which to analyze most stories of any type.”⁵

Lévi-Strauss structuralism claims that although the manifestations may be very different, the human mental processes are the same in all cultures. He holds that the mind unconsciously follows the social world. The use of the Structuralist models of myth allows for the reduction of material studied to manageable levels. The dominant manner to accomplish this goal is based on the use of the following concepts: a) surface and deep structure, b) binary oppositions Culture/Nature, and c) mediation.

a) Surface and Deep Structure: The surface structure provides us with the narrative, the deep structure with an explication of the myth. This is accomplished by discovering the major binary opposition(s) in the deep structure.

b) Binary oppositions: Lévi-Strauss holds that the primitive mind always perceives their world in binaries—rich/poor, male/female, high/low etc. These occur in nature and naturally in the human mind. Nature and culture often functions as a binary opposition in tales. However, depending on the tale or myth, the binary opposition change.

c) **Mediation:** A binary opposition can be mediated by finding a solution to the opposition created by the binary. The mediation to the culture/nature binary opposition is that culture transcends nature. The aim of the structural analysis is to mark how the content is organized and how the function is expressed, not to negate the existence of the function or the content.

Though structuralism achieved objectivity its readings ignore the specificity of actual texts and treat them as if they were produced by some impersonal force or power, not the result of human effort. Further, the individuality of the text disappears in favour of looking at patterns, systems, and structures. Structuralists like Russian formalists also propose that all narratives can be charted as variations on certain basic universal narrative patterns. The chief tenets of Structuralism are:

- The structure of language itself produces ‘reality’. i.e., one can think only through language, and therefore all perceptions of reality are all framed by and determined by the structure of language.
- Language is mode of expression and the source of meaning is not an individual's experience or being, but learn from the system which governs what any individual can do within it.
- Rather than seeing the individual as the centre of meaning, structuralism places ‘structure’ at the centre. It is the structure that originates or produces meaning, not the individual self. Language in particular is the centre of self and meaning.

The structuralism was critiqued by the Deconstructionist, Derrida because; it overlooked the ‘self’ of the people who had produced the structures. Jacques Derrida holds two key points to the idea of deconstruction⁶: (i) all systems or structures have a ‘center’, the point of origin, the thing that created the system in the first place and (ii) all systems or structures are created of binary pairs or oppositions, of two terms placed in some sort of relationship to each other. One part of that binary pair is always more important than the other, that one term is ‘marked’ as positive and the other as negative. Hence in the binary pair good/evil, good is valued. Evil is subordinated to good. Derrida argues that in all binary pairs work the first term is always valued over the second. Derrida associates an opposition -speech/writing with the binary pair of opposition, the metaphysical presence and absence. He holds that *speech* prevails over the *writing* as it gets associated with *presence*, and both are favoured over *writing* and *absence*. Derrida

called such privilege of speech and presence as logocentrism. He advocated that the pair of binaries cannot exist without reference to the other. For example, light (as *presence*) is defined as the *absence* of darkness, goodness the *absence* of evil. Deconstruction never sought the reversal of the hierarchies implied in binary pairs-to make evil favored over good, unconscious over consciousness, and feminine over masculine. But it wants to erase the boundaries (the slash) between oppositions, hence to show that the values and order implied by the opposition are also not rigid. His method of deconstruction is as follows: "Find a binary opposition. Show how each term, rather than being polar opposite of its paired term, is actually part of it. Then the structure or opposition which kept them apart collapses, as in the binaries of nature and culture. Deconstruction is a combination of construction/destruction- the idea is that one need not simply construct new system of binaries, with the previously subordinated term on top, nor destroy the old system-rather, may deconstruct the old system by showing how its basic units of structuration (binary pairs and the rules for their combination) contradict their own logic.

In the light of above discussion the Ao-Naga oral narratives when subjected only to Proppian and Levistraussian structural analyses, the narrative structure reveals a syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of the identity formations. The dimension of deconstruction has to be added in order to give a holistic picture of how narrative structures echo identity of the narrators and their communities. The perspective of the narrator's self (personal and community) in analysis and interpretation of the oral narratives negotiate the pairs in the binaries from the respective cultural perspective and erase the boundaries between the narrator and narrative to establish a narrative identity.

Keeping in view the postmodern and poststructuralist discourse that contributed for the emergence of perspectival studies, D. Clandinin and F. Connelly⁷ developed narrative method of inquiry in which narrative is used as a method as well as an object study in the interpretation of cultures. Narrative as a method describes across time and space the various ways in which actors rely on narrative form in interpreting and making sense of their worlds. The narrative is also studied as an object to study social life. Here the narrative is used as a fundamental social concept to denote process by which people communicate their understanding of the world. Further narrative inquiry emphasizes syntagmatic, paradigmatic and cross sectional dimensions of narrative and deconstructs

and reconstructs meanings of the metaphors from the viewpoint of the narrators and their community. In the present context, narrative inquiry is employed to analyze oral narratives to give a holistic picture of how structures reveal the identities.

Narrative inquiry refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials.⁸ It is a dynamic and dialogical process approach that construes life experiences, both personal and social in relevant and meaningful ways. The act of creating and telling a story is a heuristic as well as hermeneutic inquiry. It is heuristic because in creation of a story portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences.⁹ It is hermeneutic because it is a meaning making and interpretative process operating at two levels. (1) creation of general understanding through the use of symbolic systems wherein every act of comprehension is by nature hermeneutic (2) involves the systematic use of hermeneutic interpretation as a strategy to approach participants' meaning in a given social interaction. In the light of above theoretical discussion, an Ao-Naga folk narrative is analyzed to show how their structures reveal the dynamics social construction of the narrator's identities.

In the light of above discussion, the narratives can be analyzed from three dimensions¹⁰: (1) The action as it happened in its actual chronological sequence (the story); (2) the story's causal structure (plot); and (3) the sequence of events as ordered in the narrative by the narrator (discourse). In this section structural analysis of a oral narratives (i) *Revengeful sons (mangyangba jabaso)* is done as an example to show how identities get reflected in the narrative structures. The tale told by a village councilor *Tsükdinungba Longkumer (75)* hailing from *Mokokchung* District, the abode of the Ao-Nagas

Analysis of the Narrative.1. The story of Revenging sons (*mangyangba jabaso*)

The folktale 'Revengeful sons' (*mangyangba jabaso*) are collected from *Tsükdinungba Longkumer (75)*. He hails from *Changtongya* village situated in *Mokokchung* District. He is the most honored old man, *Oala* because he headed the village council *Putu Menden* as Chairmen (*menden*) for 30 years. As an elder in the village he had several experiences in his life as member of his clan as well as the head of the Council. He is witness for changing dimensions of Ao-Naga folklife for three

generations. As an administrator he is well versed with customary law that regulates the social- cultural life of the communities in the village. He is a hoard of local knowledge with regard to not only Aos, but also the other Naga tribes. It is because he has to travel many villages to settle a variety of disputes. He is a good narrator and active bearer of tradition. He said that he had been a typical Ao-Naga who had belief in animistic religious life and hence he could not marry up to 23 years. Only after he accepted Christianity he could get marry and get children. He even meets the *arasentsür* (witch doctor/sorcerer) many times when he was sick to call out his spirit. Most of his narratives emphasize on regularization of gender roles or punishments for crimes. The following is one of the narratives told by him during the fieldwork:

The first step in the narrative analysis is the action as it happened in its actual chronological sequence (the story):

Narrative 4.1: The Story of Revengeful sons (*mangyangba jabaso*)

Once upon a time, in *koridang* village there lived a family. They had two sons. When the sons were small, the *Sangtem* tribe¹¹ killed their father and took them away. When the sons were growing up they felt the absence of their father so they questioned their mother, "Where is our father, where is our father." The mother only told them to get matured. Soon after the boys reached the age of twelve and thirteen years, one day the mother cut a *sutsüing zü* (cane) and dried it on the fire. She told his sons to sharpen their *daos*. After sharpening their *dao* (a large heavy knife used as a weapon) they went inside the house to meet her mother. She took out the dried cane rope and told them, "If you can cut this rope in one go then I will tell the name of the person who killed your father, otherwise I will continue to stay unspoken." But the sons could cut the rope into two pieces in one slash, so the mother narrated the entire story about a man who killed the father. She told them, "Go to his place and tell him that you will stay with him and work for him. And when he is satisfied and trusts both of you then take him for fishing to the river and killed him there." They paid attention to their mother's advice and stayed with the old man for many years. After the harvest was over, the boys requested the old man to go for fishing. He decided to go. When they reached the forest, they at last killed him. In this way the sons took revenge. Their lifelong enemy was killed because of their wise mother.¹²

III. Plot structure

Plot is a literary term defined as the events that make up a story, particularly as they relate to one another in a pattern, in a sequence, through cause and effect, or by coincidence. The narrators skillfully present in such a way that the patterning of events in the plot of their renditions would accomplish some artistic and emotional effect and thereby reflect their personal and community selves. Aristotle stated in his book *The Poetics* that plot structure had "a beginning, middle and an end". But it is much more than

simply the telling of events one after another. A plot needs a motivating purpose to drive the story to its resolution, and a connection between these events.

The story begins with a 'complete family' having husband, wife and children. A villain from *Sangtem* tribe creates havoc in the family by killing the father belonging to Ao tribe. The responsibility falls upon the mother to take the role of father.

The middle part of story revolves round the mother. She brings up the children with care. She put her sons to a test that they should cut the log in one shot by a word. When they succeed in that test, the mother revealed the secret of death of father and scheme a plan to kill the enemy. When the sons leaves the home to the place of villain the middle portion ends.

The end of the story begins with the strategic behaviour of the son with the enemy and finally concludes with the killing of the villain on the way of forest to the fishing pond.

Thus the Aristotelian's plot structural analysis gives a picture of how an action/event lead to several events in the story line, but do not unfold interpretation of deeper meanings attached to the characters in the narrative.

Analysis of the tale with Syntagmatic approach

In this approach the 'Proppian Functions' depicted in the tale are first analyzed and latter causal relationship between the events in the folktale are studied by sequentially arranging different events that lead the story in 'Moves'

The story or folktale is interwoven among four characters, the **victim**, the father who was killed, the **villain**, the old man who murdered the father, mother who enact as a **The dispatcher and the donor**. She empowers her children with revenge and also ability to take revenge upon her husband's death. The fourth is the **hero**, the sons' character who realizes their mother's wish of cutting the head of their father's killer.

The story begins with the **Initial situation** with the family in which husband and wife live happily with two sons. The next function is the **Violation**. It is marked by the entry of **Villain** who killed the father and took the dead. A **lack** in the family is created with the death of father realizing the function of **absentation**. The mother passes

(**Meditation**) the information to her sons about the person who killed their father. The story follows the function of **Donor Sequence** in which the sons are tested to prove their valor that makes them triumphant over the villain. The **first function of donor** is thus served. The sons (**Heroes**) react to the **donor** (mother) and leave the home (**Departure**) to stay with the old man, the **villain**. The boys **Struggle** to stay and work with the old man for many years and killed in direct combat and there is **Victory** by defeating the villain. (**Liquidation**) the sons brought satisfaction to the mother because task was resolved (**Solution**).

The causal relationship between the events in the plot that develop story line in are analyzed and represented in two ‘moves’. The plot or sequence of events of the story is shown in the following table.

Table No. 4.2: Analysis of the plot

S.No	Move I	S.No	Move II
1.	There was a family	1.	The sons stay with the old man.
2.	The father was killed by the <i>Sangtem</i> tribe and took his dead body.	2.	They work for the old man.
3.	The mother took care of their sons.	3.	They took the old man for fishing.
4.	The sons questions about their father.	4.	They took revenge and kill the old man
5.	Mother examines their sons’ strength.	5.	Realized the mother’s wish(taking revenge upon their father’s death)
6.	Mother tells who kills their father.		
7.	Mother sends her sons to stay with the old man.		

The analysis shows that the plot structure has two moves, having character of father, mother, old man/enemy and sons/children. Move I begins with the lack created in the family with the death of the father by an enemy and ends with the ‘departure’ of the sons to the enemy place to take revenge for their father’s death.

The second move begins with the stratagem of the sons to take revenge and ends with killing of the enemy triumphantly. The **lack** created in the family, exclusively to the mother had been **liquidated** by replacing the same ‘father figure’ (the villain) in the other family. **Revenge is the medium of liquidation of lack.**

When coming to the characters, two forming a, ‘dyad’ interacts per scene. Dyads are any two characters interacting with each other at a given time in any particular scene.¹³ The following table shows the interaction of the ‘dyads’ in the tale:

Table No. 4.3: Dyad interaction (of characters)

S.No	Move I	S.No	Move II
1.	Father/ mother /children	1.	Sons/old man (enemy)
2.	Father/villain		
3	Mother/sons		

In the Move I all four characters appear interacting to construct the story line. The story begins with ‘triad’, the interaction among the characters of the father, mother and children in the happy family. It is followed by father and villain dyad, in which the latter vanquished and killed the former. This action fills the mind of mother full revenge and leads the story to the next event giving of training by the mother to her sons. It develops as a dialogue with the dyad mother/sons. In the Move II, only one dyad, the sons and the enemy interact with one another. In the combat between two characters the latter dies in the hands of the former. In the Move I only one female character and all other three characters are male. In the Move II a single dyad containing two male characters lead the story. On the whole the story contains male and female characters in 3:1 ratio. The story appears to be male centred.

Paradigmatic Structural analysis of a Ao Naga Myth

Claude Levi-Strauss view myths as stemming from a human need to make sense of the world and to resolve cultural dilemmas. These dilemmas are embodied in the structure of myths, which is made up of binaries or opposites, such as good-bad, night-day. For Levi-Strauss, myths are a kind of universal language. While the events of myths vary, the basic structures, like grammar, are similar in myths worldwide - because people are similar.

Narrative 4.2: Longkong chungliyimti

Once upon a time, there once lived a righteous woman called *Longkongla* in *Chungliyimti* village. She belonged to the *Longkumer* clan. She was a just and upright woman, hospitable, loved children very much and everyone on earth. One day as she was weaving her cloth in her courtyard, a male hornbill (*tenem ozü*) passed her way. That moment she wished, “I wish the hornbill dropped one of its feathers so that I can wear to the *Moatsü* festival.” Then the hornbill dropped one of its feathers. Seeing the feather she was overjoyed. She kept the feather in her *kettsu* (cane mat box). Next day she found out that the feature had turned into a sharpening stone. She kept the stone in the fore room at the entrance to her house. Soon that stone got transformed into a broken bamboo basin. She threw it out. Later, in that night, she noticed the broken bamboo basin turned into a baby boy. He was crying.

She cared for him as a foster mother and named *Pongtang* which literally means ‘everyone try to carry’.

In due course, he grew into a strong and handsome boy who was admired by all women, young and old. Some of the villagers were jealous of the boy. One day he was taken to fishing and was killed. After knowing about the mishap, *Longkongla* decided to take revenge by killing all the villagers. First she wanted to kill the children and later the villagers who would come to her house for retribution. One day, when all the villagers were out in the field, she killed a big pig and cooked it. She invited all the children for the pig feast. When they were enjoying the food, she closed the doors and set fire to it. All the children were burnt to death except for one boy who escaped and informed the news in the village. When the tragic news spread the chief (*ungr*) of the village; the council called upon all his villagers to stay at home to kill *Longkongla*. Having learned of their plan, she spread grains- rice, millet, soybeans and maize-around herself and waited for the villagers to come while she weaved her cloth. Later all the men gathered with their *dao* (knives). As each one approached her with the *dao*, they slipped on the rice grains and beans and fell down. Thus *Longkongla* casually killed everybody with her sword i.e., weaver’s baton (*Alem*). When evening came, she found herself alone. She could not live alone. She asked the *Anintsungba*, God of Heaven to lift her up to heaven as she no longer wished to remain on earth. The god told her that he would lift her to the heaven only if she forgot all her attachments, possessions and belongings on the earth. Moreover she could not look down even if her kith and kin called for her. God further told her that if she did not follow these conditions she would be dropped from heaven. She promised him that she would not to look down. The god stretched the rope from heaven to lift her up. But halfway to heaven she heard all the cries of her cows, dogs, pigs, chickens and goats. As their voices grew louder she looked down because she missed them. The moment she looked down she was dropped to the earth and turned into a rock.¹⁴ Her son who was born from hornbill feather became the originator of the *Ozukumer* clan of the Aos.

The above myth can be divided into mythemes and organized both in terms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic style as shown in the below table. If one reads syntagmatic way story can be understood meaningfully. If one reads paradigmatically, one can notice the binaries based on similarities and differences.

Table No.4.4: Levistraussian way of organising mythemes

1	2	3	4	5
Hornbill feather turns to stone. Stone turns to broken bamboo basin. Bamboo turns to baby boy.				
	Boy is reared and loved by the woman (mother)	Boy is killed by the villagers		
		Woman kills the children of the village		
		Woman kills the villagers		
	Woman loved her reared animals like cows, pigs, chicken etc.		Woman turns to stone	
				Emergence of clan claimed from the boy.

1= Autogenesis origin of community through boy (representing life)

2= Woman's immense love for boy and animals (overrating of blood relations)

3= Boy killed by children/villagers and woman in turn killing them (underrating of blood relations)

4= Autogenesis origin of stone (representing lifelessness)

5= emergence and continuity of clan (denial of Autogenesis origin of community)

Binaries in the above myth can be seen as 1:4 :: 2:3

Autogenesis life x Autogenesis lifelessness

::

Overrating of blood relations x Underrating of blood relations

In the above binaries column 1 represents life as the boy is born and column 4 represents death as the woman turns to stone which is a state of lifelessness. Therefore 1 and 4 are binaries as representation of life and lifelessness.

The column 2 represents immense love of woman for boy and animals and therefore it is ‘overrating of blood relations’ because the woman loves the boy so much that she wants to take revenge on those who killed him and her immense love for animals and property could not let her in heaven despite she wishes to be in heaven and fallen back to earth as stone. The column 3 shows killing as a distinct feature wherein the boy is killed by the other children of the village and wherefore the woman takes revenge by killing the children first by setting fire to the hut and later killing all the villagers by sword and therefore it represent ‘underrating of blood relations’.

The column number 5 is a denial of Autogenesis origin of community because of the myth is silent about the marriage of the boy or about the progeny of the boy. Therefore it is a basic denial of the autogenesis origin of the community and also establishing the patriarchy form of social system by showing the death of woman who brought up the boy and by simply attributing the lineage to the boy. Therefore the myth addressed the issue of life and death and resolved that the existing phenomenon of the community’s non-autogenesis origin and patriarchy is to be socially validated.

Discourse

The above perspectives of structural analyses when interpreted from the perspective of narrative inquiry in the light of Derridian epistemology a holistic picture on narrative discourse emerges. The narrative discourse throws flood of light on who narrated the story, from whose perspective it is narrated, the socio-cultural context of its narration and how does the narrative represent the identities of the people and communities who produced the narrative tradition.

The narrator as mentioned above *Tsükdinungba Longkumer (75)* comes from *Changtongya* village of *Mokokchung* District wherein most of the Ao-Naga populace occurs. He is head of a village council for more than three decades. During his life course he had several experiences with regard to his personal as well as his professional pursuits. He had seen many conflicts- inter and intra tribal and village. As per his renderings he had resolved many issues pertaining to the personal/familial lives of the people. For him his personal life is not much separated from his official affairs. As a head of the village council his prime duty is to regulate social roles of the people and reiterate the norms and

values of the community. Life in the tribal societies is not much secured and frequently loss occurs to the families due to the death of males (sons or fathers) in the constant warfare. In such situation it is the duty of the village councils to enlighten the women (widows) about their change gender roles. In general, the Ao-Naga women are courageous and hard working. They are well versed with the norms and values of their community. They never lose their heart and responsibilities in grave situations and strive hard to keep up their clan/tribal identities. When the male members die in such wars, the female take up the duty of upbringing the children in such a way that they can take back revenge upon those who had offended them. Thus revenge constitutes the core of the gender construction in tribal society. It gets reflected in the practice of headhunting among Ao-Nagas. Headhunting is a heroic and avenging ritual practice in which head of the enemy was cut and brought back to the village as a token of revenge upon the one who offended them. Head-hunting gives honour to the person who had performed it and raises the prestige of his respective over the other fellow groups. Women in the families develop community consciousness among the children by reciting them the tales of valour and heroism. The narrator's identity with the narrative gets reflected in many ways. As a person taking the role of a councilor, he passes the message to the people about the duty of a woman in conflict situation at family as well as at community levels. For the tribal groups the personal and community identities merge in their social lives; killing the enemy of a family tantamount to the elimination of their opponent clan/group. The narrator converge his professional and personal experiences in the narrative and thus established the narrative identity.

With regard to the nature of the tale though it appears to be a male centred narrative, all the male characters revolved round the woman, the site gender construction a home. The story shows how a naga women/son is supposed to be in keeping up family/community norms.

The discussions with the narrator enabled the researcher to interpret the story from the perspective of the Ao-Naga among whom such tales are wide spread.

The tale symbolizes the shifting patterns of economic practices in different seasons— hunting/gathering, agriculture and fishing. In the story, the sons work with the

villain in agricultural fields. They accompanied him to fishing after the harvest season is over. The optimization of resources available in different seasons can be understood in this context. Further the sons were sent as slaves in the farm of the villain. The emergence of slavery can be corroborated with the beginnings of settled agricultural practices like terrace cultivation (*panikhets*). The mother designed a 'scheme' to kill the enemy instead of directly prompting the sons to cut villains' head. She poured revenge into the mind and heart of the children along with physical virility to kill the enemy. She narrated the episode of the father's death only she confirmed that her sons could kill the enemy. The test she put to her sons to analyze their strength is symbolic. They should cut the cane rope in single shot with knife. In head hunting, enemy's head should be cut in one hit. The killing of the enemy is not direct as in 'head hunting' but differently, the way an animal is hunted in the forest by trapping.

The following observations are made in the chapter. The study of tale types/motifs of the Ao-Naga oral narratives reveals their identity through their belief system, norms and values and cultural practices in the society. In general the tales are very simple having a single motif but there are also tales that contains more than one motif. The transformation motif is found dominant. The non-living gets transformed into living and *vice versa*. This shows their animistic features that were prevalent among the Aos. The tale types/motifs prevalent in the Ao-Naga oral narratives such as exogamy-endogamy, marriage, patriarchy, headhunting, life after death and agricultural practices like *Jhum* cultivation stand as the icons of their identity. Through the study of the tale types/motifs it is also observed that there are certain areas which are not prevalent: in-laws conflict, domestic violence and incest which shows that all cultures are not the same.

The structural analyses of Proppian and Lévi-Straussian reveal a syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of the identity formations in the narrative structure. Their analyses give only the structure, the sequential pattering of the different events and the cause and effect relationship but do not carry meanings to the narratives. The structural analyses in the light of Derridian deconstruction give a holistic picture when interpreted from the perspective of narrative inquiry. The story/folktale appears to be a simple one but by interpreting the structure of the story though narrative enquiry, it gives deeper

meanings. By collaborating- structural analyses of Proppian and Lévi-Straussian and Derridian deconstruction, it gives a holistic meaning to the narrative that constructs identity.

Endnotes

¹ P.S.Kanaka Durga, “Women and Social Identity in Folktales: Narrative Inquiry”, *Kakatiya Journal of women’s Studies* (BI ANNUAL), Vol. I. 2007, P. 1

² Information provided by Longrichila Longchar (F), 78 years, Longkhum village on 20.12.2007

³ The information was gathered in the field during group discussions with the people of Ao community .

⁴ Cited from Alan Dundes, “The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique”, *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sep. - Dec., 1997), pp. 195-202

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp

⁶ Derrida and Deconstruction: <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deconstruction.htm>. For further readings: Peggy Kamuf, (ed.), Derrida: A Reader Hemel Hempstead: Harvester; A collection of essays (including one by Derrida himself) about Derrida may be found in Wood, David, (ed). *Derrida: A Critical Reader*. London: Blackwell, 1992.

⁷ D. Jean Clandinin, F. Michael Connelly, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story “ in *Qualitative Research* , San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000, p.3

⁸ CF., P.S.Kanaka Durga, , “Women and Social Identity in Folktales: Narrative Inquiry”, *Kakatiya Journal of women’s Studies* (BI ANNUAL), Vol. I. September, No.2, 2007

⁹ C. Moustakas, *Heuristic research: Design, methodology and applications* , California, Sage Publications. 1990, p.13

¹⁰ P.S.Kanaka Durga, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.102

¹¹ Naga tribe living in the Tuensang district of Nagaland.

¹² Information provided by Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, 24th June, 2008.

¹³ P.S.Kanaka Durga, 2007 *op.cit.*, p. 106

¹⁴ Information provided by Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, on 18th June, 08.

Chapter V

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION : REFLECTIONS IN FOLKLORE

Social organization depicts the pattern of articulation relationships among the people belonging to different hierarchically organised segments of a given society. The sustenance and endurance of any society rests upon the nature of functioning of its various institutions like family, kinship, marriage and gender relationships. They, in turn, play vital role in politico-economic formations of the respective societies. The Ao-Naga narrative tradition reveals how these institutions function to regulate their personal as well as their community lives and continue their identities in changing times. Till date in Naga society, people tell narratives, proverbs and riddles to regulate the behavior of their children and sustain the norms and values in their family. In the current chapter *Social Organization*, the folklore genres such as folktales, personal narratives and proverbs told by men and women from different age groups are analyzed and interpreted to show how Ao-Nagas organised their society through the institutions of patriarchy, marriage and kinship. The chapter further focuses on the process of construction of masculinity and femininity of men and women in Ao-Naga society and explains functioning of the gender roles in different relationships in the family system. The family in Ao-naga society is depicted as citadel of human relationships.

1. Ao-Naga Family (Aoer Kibong)

Family is a basic unit of social organization for it is a miniature society. Family emerges as a group united by marriage, blood, or adoption, residing together, communicating with each other in their respective roles and maintaining a common culture.¹ A family constitutes husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister who interact and communicate with one another in performing their social roles. Such roles are defined by the expectations of the society and also the family. Like any other social group, the family (*kibong*) functions as a centrifugal and centripetal force for Ao-Nagas. They construct family by conducting legitimate

marriage between bride and bridegroom coming from two different clans of the same community. Marriage is considered more as an important affair between the clans and families. Men are supposed to be strictly monogamous. The Ao family is a nuclear unit which must exist independently of any direct parental authority. Care for the welfare of the parents is a norm of the society². After marriage, the couple begins a new family and maintains a separate and independent household. Ao-Nagas have patriarchal society wherein father heads the family and all the children carry their respective father's clan name. For example, if the father belonged to a *Jamir* clan then all the children will be known as *Jamirs*. Once a couple marries and establishes a separate family, it becomes a full-fledged institution bound by all rules and regulations of the village in which it is a part. The community expects the couples in the families should adjust with one another keeping in view the children.

The following narrative explains how husband and wife smoothly operate their relations and sustain their families despite some petty quarrels.

Narrative 5.1: Wife who returned home

Once there was a couple. They had two sons. One day, without any reason the wife took her two sons and went to her father's house. The husband was not happy with his wife's attitude so he said to himself, "I did not ask her to go but she left home without telling me any reason; let her come back on her own. I won't ask her to come". He spent his days working and going to the field, taking care of the pigs and cooking for himself. On the other side, the wife was missing him and wanted to go back to the house but she could not do so as she was the one who left the house. She could no longer bear the loneliness One day, she decided see her husband. She held the eldest son in her arms, carried the younger son on her back, and told them, "Let's go and see what your father is doing at home." After reaching the house, they peeped through the door. They saw him cooking food for the pigs. The elder son shouted, "Father! We are standing here." Hearing that, the father quickly replied, "Oh! Why are you standing there, come inside the house." That's how the wife returned home.³

This narrative reflects the typical routine life of families wherein conflicts and negotiations are universal. The expectation of the husband towards the wife that she should return home on her own but not on somebody's request is the genuine way of bringing realization on the part of wrong doers. It made his wife to become conscious of her unnecessary wrath on her husband and joined him with her family. The husband also behaved politely to incorporate his wife and children without taunting them. The narrator told that the wife picked a petty issue and left her husband. Hence she has no voice to re-enter. She deployed her children who successfully patched up

the conflict. The husband too accepted for he gains respect when he had a family with wife and children.

a. Division of labour in the family

The health of a family depends upon the consensus between men and women functioning in different relationships and on how they divide family labour among themselves. The family functions as a unit when it could operate on division of labour in the domestic realm. In Ao-Naga society such harmonious relations exist in domestic life. In traditional society, the prestige of a family depended upon the virility of men who were supposed to perform head hunting (the ritual of head hunting is described in the following chapter). The spears required for the hunting, *daos* (big knife) and the shields were manufactured by men. The implements used for weaving and spinning were made by both the men and women. Despite the domestic chore, women played major role in agricultural operations⁴. The folktales show how women and men participate in *jhum* cultivation. The tales further show the problems with regard to child rearing at home during the times of agricultural operations. Men controlled the community resource and the social systems and women took care of the family as well as the domestic economy and the production.⁵ Women are exclusive custodians of weaving and spinning and this job is forbidden for men. It is based on the belief that if men touch the implements then bad luck follows and the clothes that weave will go wrong. According to J.P.Mills, “A poor chance of getting a good husband would be an Ao girl who did not know how to spin and weave and make for the family. It is one of her most important duties, which it is absolutely forbidden for a man to share in Ao-Naga society.”⁶ Safeguarding the village from enemies be it humans or animals was considered the most important duty of the male members in the village. The following narrative shows how the entire village community including people, spirits and even the new men that enter a village protect their villages from their enemies.

Narrative 5.2: *Otsü* of Samataba (tale of Samataba)

Once upon a time there was a pond (*awatsun*) in *Mopongchuket* village⁷. People used to adore the pond as there was a powerful devil in it. People offered eggs, chicken and pigs to the devil to appease and extend protection to them and their village when the dangers approach them. The devil was so powerful that it can even lift the cows from one place to the other. It made friendship with villager who could inform any danger in the village. The devil also informed him whenever it left the village. One day, the *Ahoms* from Assam came to attack the villagers. They

took bath in the pond. They killed and cooked a dog for their food. The villagers could not do anything. The devil frightened them and drove them away in the night. When they were running away, the villagers chased and killed the *Ahoms*. They left their *daos* and the villagers kept them *inside* the trunk of a tree near the pond because they were scared to use them. Formerly this pond was called *siingkotenep*. One day when the villagers were going to fields, they saw a big snake on the tree. They planned to kill it with spears, catapults, bows and arrow. But they could not. At this juncture, a young man came. His name was *Samataba* which means that 'who did not get meat' from village, *Chungtia*. He came to *Langpangkong* range from his village because he was denied by the Council of his village to become its member. According to the custom, no new member should enter into or leave the village when such an act of killing is happening. However, he was asked to kill the snake. He requested the snake, "*asa nüka meta, azü nüka meta, kü tenung samataba kü madang ko teplakzukang*" (I did not get meat, I did not get even rice beer, my name is Samataba, come and fall before me) and killed the snake with catapult⁸.

These two narratives establish the division of labour in the society at domestic as well as in the public realms. Accordingly the works are divided for both men and women but he performed house keeping in the absence of his wife (see narrative: 1) but soon the roles were regulated and reached the societal expectations towards organization of a family by its members.

b. Family inheritance (*Kibong Shilem*)

Since the Ao family succession is through the male line, sons, brothers, nephews, cousins are the order of preference for inheritance of properties. Sons born from different wives are brothers and they have legal right to inherit their father's ancestral property. In contrast to the AOs, the *Konyak-Naga* follows a different practice when it comes to inheritance. The *Ang* (Chief) has only one *Angya* (queen) and the rest are categorized as concubines. Only the sons of the *Angya* can inherit the *Ang's* kingdom or only the sons of the *Angya* have the right to heir of the kingdom. *Ang* system is hereditary.⁹ The family possesses both the ancestral properties and self-acquired properties. The father of the family has absolute power over the family property and the sons and grandsons have no right to claim partition of properties against the father. Landed property is regarded as a common fund for maintenance of the family and the sons are the co-owners with their father in the landed property. Therefore, the father has no right to dispose of landed property without the consensus of the grown-up sons. Likewise if the father dies and the eldest son takes the place of the father, he has no right to dispose of immovable properties without reasonable grounds against the interest of the other sons.

In a family, the eldest son is accorded first preference in the property of the father. He is entitled to choose among the shares of the father's property. According to Tajen Ao, the rule of primogeniture is the guiding principle for succession.¹⁰ Even if there are many sons in the family, the eldest son takes the place of the father and acts as guardian of the property. This shows that the eldest son plays an important role in the family when it comes to taking care of the family responsibilities. The younger male siblings may sometimes imitate the elder, or show disrespect by avoiding his duties to the elder brother. This is revealed in the proverb, "Like a star is brighter than moon" (*Ita dangbo petinu tesangwaba ama*).¹¹ This particular proverb is used when elders are not being treated as elders by the younger ones or a lowly person tries to be big or high though he/she has nothing, standing out of his social position.

If there is no son to inherit the father's share in a family, then the brother or uncle or nearest male kinsmen take the preference in succession. Preference for succession between the kinsmen is chosen by counting the degrees of kindred. Among the kinsmen, the choice of heir is preferred to a person who is the descendant of the eldest son of the ancestor. If the above system fails then the clans as a whole do the succession.

c. Status of an Ao woman in the family

In a family, when a daughter is married she goes out of her father's family and comes under the authority of the husband. The children of the daughter are considered as the children of a family of other clan. Therefore the daughter and her children have no place in her father's family. The daughters are regarded as subordinate members and do not become co-owners with sons and do not inherit property of the family. The property belonging to the mother after her death can be distributed among her daughters. Tug for property sometimes occur within the families with the parties playing tricks regarding the property. This situation is clearly shown in the following tale.

Narrative 5.3: Distribution of property

Once upon a time, there was a rich family. Unfortunately, the mother died leaving her two daughters with her father *Tamayangba*. Before she died many clothes, necklaces and ornaments were left with *Tamayangba* for their daughters. Since he was getting old, he decided to share the property of his wife to his daughters. He constantly worried that his daughters may

fight after his death for the property of their mother. So he chalked out a plan. He pretended as if he was dead due to illness while his daughters arranged for his memorial service. They then started to mourn over their father's dead body (When a person dies, people mourn by singing songs of praise about him). The first daughter sings to his father, "oh *Apa Tamayangba yatem dangko kongto kongra den dang chowng nupasii*" (oh Father Tamayangba, why are you leaving us. When you were alive you always wanted to have food with dry meat in the evenings. The father then understood from the song of her first daughter that her mourning reflected more accusation rather than concern for him even in the matters of food. He then listened to the younger daughter's song. She sang, "Father *Tamayangba* when you cross *Meyutsüngba's* (Lord of justice) place, shout and go down saying, '*Yangrenmenla's* (her name) father is coming down.'" After listening to his daughters' song the father comes to the realization that his younger daughter loved him more than the elder daughter. So after they had finished singing, he got up from his coffin much to their astonishment. Later the father distributed the property to them. The younger daughter received all the good clothes and the beautiful ornaments whereas the elder daughter received only the ugly ones because she was rude towards her father¹².

As women enjoy considerable privileges in family and society. They are mentioned as follows¹³:

- A girl can be named after her father's family but she cannot name her children after her father's family.
- In the past, except in certain religious offerings which are restricted only to priests women participated in all social and religious activities and also danced together with the opposite sex.
- A woman cannot inherit property, movable or immovable, though she may be given a gift. She has the right to sell it if she so wishes.
- If a woman receives immovable property or otherwise from her father in the form of gifts during his lifetime, it remains hers till her death, after which it goes back to her father's heir.
- On her marriage, her separate property does not merge with that of her husband.
- She cannot become a member of the *Tatar Putu Menden* (Village Council).
- In the past, she could not become a *Patir/Putir* (Priest) though she may be the oldest person in the village. She is debarred from performing religious rites and sacrifices. However, she can assist her husband in family worship. Earlier, there were medicine women, diviners, tiger women and prophetesses among the womenfolk.
- She cannot participate in public debates or discussions but can counsel and advise her husband at home to a certain degree.
- She cannot inherit landed property. She is not liable for any debt of her ancestors or her heir.

2. Patriarchy in Ao-Nagas

Like any tribals of India, the family of the Nagas in general and the Ao-Naga in particular is patriarchal in character where father or husband is the head of the family. He performs certain political, social and religious duties sanctioned by their respective families and clans. The institution of patriarchy emerged to pattern family as a basic unit of society. In a patriarchal set up, the male in different gender relations operates hegemonic roles in the family and plays a vital role in decision making in every aspect of family life basing on their respective gender norms. Sons succeed not only property and assets of their parents but also the duties and responsibilities of the family and name of the clan. Men have privileged position over women even in family matters like choosing life partners to the children. In the majority of homes of a patriarchal family, the man is the figure who financially supports a family while the woman stays at home and cares for the children.

a. **Construction of masculinity**

The masculinity of Ao-Naga community is construed upon strength and ability to take care of their family on one hand and their kin group on the other. As a patriarchal society, the social status of a man is dependent on his heroic performances like headhunting as a member of a group in a society. 'Might was considered as right' in Ao-Naga patriarchy¹⁴. A man being the head of the family is respected and recognized by the society and peer groups for having knowledge about the knowledge system of the people, the art of social interaction, perseverance and pervasiveness in public and domestic realms. Men who are indecisive are teased with nickname *lapi* (sissy or chicken-hearted) in the community. They are considered as womanish and are not well honoured in public. In every family decisions it is mostly the man's advice, plan, and viewpoint are applied. Every Ao village is a democratic republic in which a citizen irrespective of wealth and rank has the right to participate. But only the male member performs the role of citizens. The Ao village council of elders is known as "*Putu Menden*"¹⁵ and the members of this council are known as "*Tatars*". Only the male members can take part in the village council (*Tatar Putu Menden*). Women are not allowed to become a member of the *Putu Menden* and they were not recognized as a member of the council and could not participate in policy-making

matters and have no privileges. Even in hearing of the petitions, women's 'say' is not being privileged and sometimes ignored. There are evidences in the folktales wherein the helpless women resorted to metaphysical worlds like hell and heaven and their lords for proper judgments even after their death. The extent of a woman's learning or privilege was less emphasized in this regard. In the following narrative, the narrator metaphorically identifies Naga women with the heroine in his narration.

Narrative 5.4: Menangsangla and Nokshiloba

Once upon a time there was a woman named *Menangsangla*. She was a well-known woman because of her ability to practice magic. She was married to *Temjensoba*, but not so long after their marriage he passed away so she became a widow. In the village where she lived, there was a man named *Nokshiloba* who waited so long for *Menangsangla* because he wanted to marry her but unfortunately she refused to live with him. This really hurt him. One day, *Nokshiloba* did not go to the field. That day, he rolled a mat made of bamboo and hid the mat under the floor of *Menangsangla's* house. After that, he informed and raised an alarm to the villagers that he has lost his mat. The villagers who were in the village started to look for the mat. Later the mat was found in *Menangsangla's* house. Next day, she was called by the village elders. She was blamed by the elders as thief for stealing the mat of *Nokshiloba*. She begged the elders not to call her a thief as she did not steal his mat, but the village elders did not listen to her plea since the mat was found at her house. After the case was over, in front of the village elders, *Menangsangla* told *Nokshiloba*, "When you die, I will also die on the same day and both of us will be judged in *Meyutsungba's* place (god of judgment) to know whether I'm right or wrong." Then she left the place. One day *Menangsangla* heard that *Nokshiloba* had died. Suddenly she also died on the same day exactly as foretold by her. Even her granddaughter also died that day

Her granddaughter rose up from death within a short time and narrated one story like this, "I died along with my grand-mother and *Nokshiloba* so we all went together to *Meyutsungba's* place and reached at the same time. After that *Meyutsungba* started to judge between grandmother and *Nokshiloba* by asking them to each throw a spear on a tree. *Nokshiloba* aimed and threw but was not able to touch the tree and broke his spear, whereas grandmother brought her *anem* (weaving tool), aimed at the tree and threw the *anem* with all her strength. It went straight and nailed itself on the tree. After the test was over, the god told them, 'on the earth when you two were alive, you *Nokshiloba* called *Menangsangla* a thief but it is not true. Today through the test it is proved that *Nokshiloba* is wrong." This was the story told to the villagers by *Menangsangla's* grand-daughter. After hearing the story they come to realize that *Menangsangla* was actually telling the truth.¹⁶

In the above folktale, the case was not trialed from *Menangsangla's* perspective and was falsely accused as thief by the elders even as she once rejected the marriage proposal from the accuser. He felt that his ego and masculinity were offended by her refusal to marry. So he subverted his anger in such accusations which would stigmatize her life in patriarchal society.

Though in traditional societies, men acted as family priest, women were not ignored and their presence was mandatory for the sacred as well as secular rituals. At the same time there is no dearth for women in Ao society who could negotiate and successfully manage mundane life even in the absence of their husbands. Undaunted

by misfortunes, the women could boldly and patiently handle the complex situations and mould their children to suit the needs of their families. Though women in Ao-Naga worldview are secondary to men, they have innate will and perseverance to wait till their day comes to settle the issues in their respective families. The following narrative narrates the story of how one woman could strategically take revenge through her sons upon the culprit who killed her husband.

Narrative 5.5: Taking revenge for a father's death

Once upon a time, in *koridang* village there lived a family. They had two sons. When the sons were young toddlers, the *Sangtem* tribe¹⁷ killed their father and took his body away. When the sons were growing up they felt the absence of their father so they questioned their mother, "Where is our father, where is our father." The mother only told them to get matured. Soon after the boys reached the age of twelve and thirteen years, one day the mother cut a *sutsüing zü* (cane) and dried it on the fire. She told his sons to sharpen their *daos*. After sharpening their *dao* (a large heavy knife used as a weapon) they went inside the house to meet their mother. She took out the dried cane rope and told them, "If you can cut this rope in one go then I will tell the name of the person who killed your father, otherwise I will continue to stay unspoken." But the sons could cut the rope into two pieces in one slash, so the mother narrated the entire story about the man who killed the father. She told them, "Go to his place and tell him that you will stay with him and work for him. And when he is satisfied and trusts both of you then take him for fishing to the river and killed him there." They paid attention to their mother's advice and stayed with the old man for many years. After the harvest was over, the boys requested the old man to go for fishing. He decided to go. When they reached the jungle, they killed him. In this way the sons took revenge. Their life-long enemy was killed because of their wise mother.¹⁸

Naga men are obliged to protect their community and fight for the common cause of their people. In the process they may even neglect their family and children. The following folk narratives substantiates how the community's self of the Nagas predominate their personal selves.

Narrative 5.6: Devil and the Old man.

The story is believed to have happened when there was no distinction between gods and human beings. This story occurred before the separation of the village *Changtongya yimsen* (which was called *Mangdangtakong* before) from *Changtongya*. There was an old man called *Punazüingba*. One day he went to the jungle to set up *sang* (traps) to catch birds. After sometime he went to check the traps. To his surprise a devil named *Oanglemla*¹⁹ was found caught in the trap instead of the birds. When the devil saw the old man, she pleaded with him, "Old man, please do not kill me. I will bless you with good food till you die." But he refused and said, "Oh devil why should I spare you. I will kill you at this very moment." When the old man did not listen to her she once again said, "Since you are going to kill me I will also break your plate²⁰." But the old man killed the devil and went back home. Upon reaching home, he found that his daughter died at home. When the devil said I will break your plate, she had actually meant that his daughter would die. He met his villagers and told them that he had killed *Oanglemla*. But they did not believe him because according to their belief nobody could kill a devil. He wanted to prove them wrong so he took them to the site where the devil was killed. When they reached the

place, they only found the dried body of the devil. That is why the place was called *Mangdangtakong* which means dried body.²¹

The narrative shows how Ao-Naga men cannot be bargained even by gods or devils to meet their personal welfare and wealth and they always are for the community. In the above tale, as the old man knows that the devil is detrimental to community's safety, he could not be persuaded by the devil for his self. He sacrificed his daughter for the village.

3. Kinship

Kinship is one of the oldest and most imperative determinants of social organization in tribal societies. It represents socio-culturally recognized relationships constructed on the basis of marriage, procreation or adoption. Generally, kinship gets expressed by terminology and attitude. The former denotes the kin terms or words that technically name the relationships that exist among the members of the family. The latter refers to the description and interpretation of those relationships prescribed and determined by the norms and values, worldview of their respective communities/groups. In a nutshell, kinship of any community delineates the articulation of meaning of kin terms with the behavioural norms and code of ethics the persons involved in kin-relations. The basic kin-terms like father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, children cross cousins etc had their predetermined roles to play in domestic as well as in public spheres of life. In social interaction, while the people are performing their respective gender roles reveal their 'selves' through their expressive behaviour mostly in allegorical verbal genres like proverbs, riddles, songs, folk narratives, rituals or amusements. All these expressions are the manifestation of the people's relationships in both personal and communal levels. Hence kinship is a broad term that encompasses several aspects of social life -institution of marriage based on clan (*kidong*) system, family, inheritance, adoption etc.

a. Ao-Naga kin relationship in social life

In the Ao-Naga family every individual is a member of a clan. Clan is a group of people that trace their descent from a common ancestry. Since the Aos belong to a patriarchal family, descent is traced through the male line, and children belong to the same clan as their father. These clans are also exogamous where individuals cannot

marry another member of the same clan. In one Ao village, there were two lovers from the same clan. They wanted to marry and start a family but because of the fear of being ex-communicated from the village they didn't get married. But the village council according to the custom fined them a pig because three daughters on different year were born. Later the man married a woman from different clan. The customary law is sternly imposed on intra-clan marriages²². The couple of such marriage will be excommunicated and even their offspring is not allowed to partake in the family inheritance. In *Longkhum* village²³, in the late 1980's one couple who were married to the same clan were ex-communicated from the village. Even cross-cousin marriages are not allowed for three generations. Monogamy is strictly emphasized to prevent adultery.²⁴ Conjugal infidelity is considered as adultery. To substantiate such an adultery act taking place, an account happened in one Ao village is narrated. There was a family who had seven children. During a trip to Assam with his sister-in-law for marketing (who was also a married woman) the man impregnates his relation. So the customary law fined both in cash and in kind. Those who are caught in adulterous relationship are fined in cash/kind. Normally three to six pigs are to be paid by the culprit. The fine varies from village to village.

The rules of marriage and family succession are dealt with in the following pages

b. Family succession

In succession, sons, brothers, nephews, cousins etc are the order of preference for inheritance. The sons born by a man and his wife are full brothers among themselves. The sons born by a man but with more than one wife are also full brothers; they are all joined in respect of father or ancestral property. The sons inherit the property of their father jointly and the grandsons are joined with their fathers in the property of their grandfather.²⁵ In a family, if there is no son then the father's brother or uncle or nearest kinsman take the preference in succession. Preference for succession between the kinsmen is chosen by counting the degrees of kindred. Among the kinsmen, the choice of heir is preferred to a person who is the descendant of the eldest son of the ancestor. If this procedure failed then the clan as a whole will succeed.

Again in a family, if there is no son and many daughters then (in the present times) the father distributes the lands or house which has been bought by him to his daughters before he dies. For this, witnesses are needed. Witness can be someone who is the eldest from the kins or from the clan.²⁶ The kinship is so important that, during any important feast if a pig or cow is killed, the owner gets the head and the remaining shares are disturbed according to seniority within the clan. An Ao woman inherits the belongings of her mother, sister and maternal aunt. If her husband dies leaving to her the minor children, she become the owner of the family property till they become matured. There is no question of division of property between the mother and the son. The son will claim the property of the father.

If the last man in the clan/family has no male successor, he can adopt (*mesujet, mesutet*) only a minor orphan boy as an heir for inheritance. The custom ordains that the father has no right to pass on his ancestral nor clan's landed property to his foster /adopted son. He can give his house or other possessions. If the man does not adopt, then after bequeathing his property to his daughter or sisters the remaining property will be inherited by his clan relatives. Again if there is no son then the husband has the right to give 1% of his property to his wife and the remaining goes to the relatives. However for every succession/inheritance transaction, witness of the elder members in their respective clan or kin group is mandatory for reducing litigations in this regard. The inheritance implies not only to assets but also to debts.

Debt (*Sentsü*)

Customary law imposes the responsibility of debt clearance on debtor. As mentioned, if the father fails to pay back the loan, his successor, be it his wife or uterine son or distant heir should clear it off. According to Ao custom, direct heir is liable to pay the debt with full interest but the distant heir is to pay the debt of the deceased with half of the interest only.²⁷ Direct heir includes son, grandson and great grandson and also brother of the deceased; distant heir includes cousin, nephew, uncle and other paternal blood relations. According to the custom, debt will continue to last generation to generation against the heir until it is paid up. Interestingly till date in Ao-Naga society there are several families being crushed in the cycle of debts made

by their predecessors. Even the personal possessions like vehicles, lands secured by purchase etc, are sold to meet the purpose.

The following personal narrative explains how the Ao-Nagas abide their custom of debt-repayment as per their norms and nourish their identity.²⁸

Narrative 5.7: Custom of debt-repayment

In a village of *Longkhum*, there was a family. He had two sons and one daughter. But the father divorces his wife and left his family without leaving any property. Later he re-married a widow and moved in to the house of new wife. Unfortunately when he died the debts made by him were forced to be repaid by his first wife and his children by her. Ironically, the new wife and her first husband children were exempted from repaying the debts made by her second husband.

c. Clan (kidong) system

Clan is also an important kin group which is a unilateral descent group. It includes a set of kins whose members consider themselves to be the descendants of a common ancestors and blood relatives of each other that stand, work and help each other in many ways. Hence, the members of a clan do not marry each other. In other words, the clan is an exogamous kinship group. The members have common traditions that maintain their social set. In the social set-up of the village, the clan has the role of authority and law. If a dispute arises between individual members of the clan it is then settled at the clan level. They have common property like land, money or grain. The land is enjoyed by the members on the basis of seniority in age. No one has the right to sell or dispose the clan property otherwise the person is fine in cash or in kind.

The clan as a unit of village polity has its own organization with chosen leaders where the senior male persons take the major responsibilities. Clan functionaries are arranged on the basis of seniority in age among the kindred. The study of kinship helps to understand clearly the marriage system and the gender and power relationships of the Ao-Naga.

4. Ao marriage system (Ao Kipa Lembu)

Like in any other tribal communities, the basic unit of social organization of Ao-Naga is family. The identities of Ao-Naga lie in the establishment of a legitimate

family (*kibong*) only by the custom of marriage (*Kiyimba*). By emphasizing on strict rules of exogamy and endogamy, Ao-Naga society prevents the possibility of asymmetrical marriage and emerged as a strong institution (*Kipa lembu*). Exogamy can be defined as a social rule that prohibits a person from marrying within a defined social group of which he/she is a member. According to the rule of exogamy a man or woman can marry only outside a certain group. In the word of Folsom, “Endogamy is the rule that one must marry within one’s own caste or group. However, it is seldom permits marriage of close kin.”²⁹ Asymmetrical marriages in Ao-Naga communities occur due to match making between (i) parallel cousins is strictly prohibited and (ii) paradigms of rich and poor are considered seriously, especially in the past. Since it is patriarchal society wealth and valour of bridegroom and genealogy of the families are considered as main determinates of marriage. The following personal narrative substantiates how rich and poor paradigms still govern the match making even in these contemporary times.

Narrative 5.8: The rich girl who became spinster

Once upon a time in a village, there lived a rich family. They had a daughter. She was very beautiful. Since they belonged to a rich family they lived a luxurious and delighted. The rich daughter fell in love with a poor boy, but he was very handsome. However, when the girl’s parent heard about their love affair, they insulted the boy saying, “How can a poor boy marry my daughter. He has nothing.” Whenever the boy visited the girl’s house her parents used to insult him very badly. So one day, the boy told his lover, “Even though I love you very much your parents are against this affair so we will never be able to get married.” But the girl told him, “Whatever comes in our ways, I will marry you.” But the girl’s parents went to his home and ridiculed him. The boy was offended by their insult so he decided to make a plan. In the night when all the villagers were about to sleep, he went to his lover’s house and called, “Uncle, uncle, why are you closing your door? I came to your house to say a word, but since you don’t want to open the door, let me just say this and go. I came to say that I won’t be able to marry your daughter, let her get married to some other boy.” After saying this he left. All the villagers heard what the boy had said. Next day they talk to one another saying, “Even if they are rich they don’t have the right to insult the boy like that even though he belonged to a poor family.” After that, no boys from the village came forward to marry her. Even though all her friends got married, nobody came forward to marry her. At last her parents decided to let her marry a boy who was from a rich family. The boy was ugly and short so she did not like him. She told her friends, “He is so ugly, I don’t like him, but since my parents are forcing me to get married to him I have no other choice but accept his proposal.” This was heard by the boy and he got very angry. He went to her parents and said, “Uncle (*okü*), I’m not fit to marry your daughter since I’m ugly and short. I’m sorry I can’t marry her.” After saying this he went away. Even though she was from rich family and beautiful, no boys in the village came forward to marry her. Therefore, she remained as spinster till she died.³⁰

The above narrative is an experience of somebody told by a narrator. The narrative shows how a woman gets victimized in the domestic politics with regard to

marriage. The girl is dejected by her paramour as well as the groom and remained as loner in the family system.

Ao-Naga constructs antiquity to the systematization of their marriage norms and rules through their customary law. They believe that the marriage law (*Kipa lembu ozung*) was framed and passed by the ancestors at *Chungliyimti* (presently in *Tuensang*). Among the Ao-Naga there are six major clans (*kidong*) both from *Mongsen* and *Chungli* group (*Ken*). The six clans are: *Pongen*, *Longkumer* and *Jamir of Chungli* group; and *Imchen*, *Longchar* and *Walling of Mongsen* group. The ancestors of the Aos having lived for three *aso* (generations), all religious, social, political, ethical and civic rules and traditions were formulated in the *Ar salong* (cane platform) at *Chungliyimti*. According to Panger Imchen, “One of the ancient Ao cultural practices that has not been distorted or changed either by modern education or Christianity is the strong network system of marriage laws and procedures and its impact on individual and communal ethical standards upon which the frame work of the Ao social structure was built.”³¹ The folktales give a vivid picture of marriage system that makes them distinct from other group of Nagas.

a. Institution of Marriage

The system of Ao marriage is based on *exogamy*, where one clan cannot marry to the same clan otherwise excommunicated from the village. They can return to the clan only if they are separated by their own will or by death. Their children are called *Adianuza* (child of brother-sister). They lose their identities; inheritance and status of any kind in the society and their names are erased from their original father’s family name. Even the child is affected in the society. The following narration clearly shows how Ao society is strictly against the practice of exogamy. The following tale explains how two lovers of the same clan decided to discontinue their relationship because of the strong law against the practice of exogamy.

Narrative 5.9: Two lovers of same clan

Once upon a time, there was a boy and a girl. They were in deep love. They wanted to marry and live together. But they knew that their wishes will never be true as they belonged to the same clan. Their love is compared to the *Rüsüayong* (name of a river). In this river, how long the legs and hands are placed it just fades away. It means to say that the deeper and stronger their love become, the laws and regulations of the village also become equally strong until it was

impossible for them to get married. So feeling deep regret, they sang this song together, “*Kidongzüla lira ipa mezamirarma, kajo mira mira meli küsa teri tongtanger, esabo kodanga melembor*” (we belong to the same clan so we can never get married).³²

This is a frequently told tale in the society with regard to the unfulfilled wishes of the people. In Ao society, one of the social ties in the community is rooted in inter-clan marriage that directly or indirectly supports mutual understanding and kinship. The young men of one clan marry the young women of another clan through the inter-clan marriage system; relationship and understanding among the clan are promoted

As mentioned, those who break the law of marriage were punished by the village council and were excommunicated from the village. In some cases, their children were forbidden from taking part in any of the social activities and were insulted in public by the villagers. Even today, the family married to the same clan is not regarded by the society even if they are from well-to-do families. That is, illegitimate children have no place in the Ao society, either religious or secular.

As discussed elsewhere, the Aos strongly condemned the practice of endogamy. Marriage between close cousins is also not allowed even though they belonged to different clans. For example, if the girl’s father and the boy’s mother are brother and sister then marriage is prohibited because the blood relationship becomes too close. It shows that their parents are from the same father based on scientific experience, cousins from the maternal side are not married, only from fourth generation they can marry.³³ Though cross cousin marriages are sanctioned by customary law, each match making requires a gap of third generations. The reason for such prohibition is to protect the upcoming generations from physical disorders that surface due to close kin relations. The people strongly convicted that if endogamy is practiced the couple’s children too is affected in the future in negative ways. People especially become careful to marry their children. The people know that there will be no support from the society. Whatever good things they try to do it will never happen in the right way, like the yam plant where its upshot crept anti-clockwise to the support pole. The mentioned tale explains why practice of endogamy is against by the people.

Narrative 5.10: Man who married to his cousin

Once upon a time, there was a man called *Mangmesoba* who married his paternal cousin sister against the advice of parents and other senior relatives in the village. After the marriage, he planted a yam in his field but its upshot crept anti-clockwise to the support pole. Seeing it he realized that his marriage with his own cousin sister was unnatural for him and divorced her. The yam was called *Mangmeso*.³⁴

As mentioned, marriage within the same clan is not permitted as it amounts to incest. Incest constitutes a cultural taboo in the Ao-Naga society. They are ostracized from the villages. If the people comes to know about the relationship then it become picky for choosing a life partner from that family. During my field work one narrator³⁵ told me that, a certain village is not allowed to have marriage relationship with a certain village because in the past, one brother and sister (siblings) had a long affair which brought bad news to the village. The fear of ostracize and shame is keeping the people away from such relationship. Otherwise in contemporary society, people practice such affair secretly. The same narrator informed that, he has seen with his own eyes where two siblings were staying together in one separate house helping together in the field etc but having secret relationship.

Marriage is considered as very important in the family. The society expects all young men and women to marry. It is the duty of the parents to let the children get married and raise their own family as the Ao-Naga is a nuclear family. The following tale shows the duty of a mother in encouraging her daughter to get married. She also teaches metaphorically the pleasure one derives from conjugal life.

Narrative 5.11: Daughter who refused to marry

Once there was mother who wished for her daughter to get married at the earliest, but the daughter never listened to her mother. The daughter would always say, “I will not get married, I will not get married.” In the past, getting married was considered very wonderful and important for both boys and girls since there was no education like the present time. Marriage was the only way to set up a family. The person who does not get married was looked down by the society. Thus the mother tried to convince her daughter. She was very disappointed with her daughter’s behaviour. One day, the daughter was lying on the lap of her mother. The mother took a feather, turns round, and round inside her daughter’s ear. The daughter felt the sensation so pleasant and told her mother, “Wow! Mother it’s so good; it’s so good, do it again.” Then the mother replied back, “That’s why I’m telling you to get married if you really want to feel good like this.” Only then the daughter realized her mistake and decided to get married.³⁶

The narrative symbolically explains the pleasure a woman seeks from the married life. The narrative explains the very conception of marriage in their life style.

It is observed that the Ao-Naga marriage system is very rigid where their focus is mainly on the bloodline and considers that marrying within the same clan is marrying their own brother or sister. According to the customary law no husband or wife can marry another's wife or husband while they are still husband and wife. The law deals with every divorce, so marriage was regarded very significant. According to Tajen Ao, Ao marriage is a social contract.³⁷ Temsula Ao, says that if a term is to be coined for the form of marriage among the Aos, it may very well be called a contract by consent.³⁸ By studying the term contract it can be understood that contract is an agreement or deal which last for a while and then got expired. Here the term contract used by the two writers can be argued because by studying the marriage system of the Ao-Naga, it is not just an agreement between the girl and the boy, but also within both the families where rituals and ceremonies are followed till the end. The marriage is an institution which is rigid and strict. With the coming of Christianity, the Aos started considering marriage as a more sacred union. Marriage is the most important matter in their entire system of social recognition, political participation and religious sanctity. Therefore the Aos give much thought to marriage laws and system.

b. Divorce (*Balaluyuba*) and re-marriage

In Ao society, theoretically divorce and remarriage are accepted norms but governed by community's values and customs. There is no ceremony connected with divorce and the couple simply separates after dividing the household properties. The fact that there is no such rule that binds a woman to marry her dead sister's husband or husband or husband's brother speaks volume about the degree of independence of women in the society. Though re-marriage after divorce or after the death of one's spouse is considered normal and natural, practice of plurality of wives or co-wives does not exist.

Divorce can be sanctioned on several pretexts like wanting of issue, poverty, family interference, adultery, conversion, unsoundness of mind, incurable disease, ill-treatment, desertion, conjugal infidelity, childlessness, inability of men and women to perform the roles prescribed to them by the family and society etc. Remarriage had also been an age-long practice which occur only with the either death or divorce (legally accepted by the customary law) of the consort. Once divorce is done they go

their separate ways and if anyone tries to act in an unusual manner then they are dealt accordingly.

However, divorce and living apart is condemned in the AO-Naga worldview. The society expects complementary relationships but not contradictory life styles. The following narrative substantiates how 'living together' in a family is required than being as loners.

Narrative 5.12: Wife who played competition with her husband

A long time ago, a couple who were married happily got divorced because of some misunderstanding. After the divorce, both stayed in separate houses. The husband used to go to the field along with the villagers in the morning and returned only in the evening. The husband led a normal life. But the wife wanted to play competition with her husband so she used to go alone to the field early in the morning holding a lighted bamboo torch returning from the field very late after everyone is back home from the field. She did so for many days after the divorce. One morning, on the way to the field a voice told her, "*Alu ponga temsenla pesüno nü tali metepa, nabo nuzingabopo matoksatsüji.*" (Going early and coming late from the field only allows more mosquitoes to bite you but you will never be able to compete with your husband). She was shocked to hear that voice because it was none other than god who was warning her. This made her realize her foolishness. After that, she lost all her interest in competing with her husband. From the next day onward she went to the field along with the other villagers.³⁹

The above is an interesting story which conveys the message that men and women are two distinct genders that play complementary roles but could not exchange their role behaviour for they have to satisfy their role expectations by the family as well as the society. The story establishes gender asymmetry in Ao-Naga society. The tradition warns her that going early and coming late allows her to have more mosquito bites. The 'mosquito bite' metaphorically refers to the ridicules of society or fixing the eyes of other men upon her. The narrative thus discourages the divorce of the couples in the society⁴⁰.

The customary law regulate divorce cases. Divorce owing to adultery of either party or without reasonable grounds is dealt with fines in cash or in kind. Several Ao Naga folktales speak about stepfathers and step mothers who had strained relations with their stepchildren. But the stories related to the stepmothers are highlighted in the folk tradition as irksome members of the family. They are frequently represented as cruel, mischievous and unjust; always strategize to exercise power and control over the members of the family including husband and stepchildren. References for the stepfathers who offended their stepchildren are rare. Such projection of women is a typical patriarchal stratagem for their subjugation.

However women are shown punished if the mischief was noticed. The flowing story clearly shows the differential treatment given by a stepmother towards her stepchildren by giving priority to her son whom she begot during her first marital relationship. However, her mistake was blown to the society and the husband abandons her.

Narrative 5.13: Stepmother

Once upon a time, in a family, a wife died leaving her husband and son. The husband got re-married. The new wife then gave birth to a son. She nourished her own son with warm and good food and gave him good cloths and beautiful shawl woven by best yarn. She fed her stepson with cold and spoiled food and gave thick and roughly woven cotton shawl to wear. The villagers could sense the differential treatment given by the stepmother to her stepson. One day, the wife asked some villagers, "Have you seen two boys one wearing shawl made with soft yarn and the other with a rough yarn." They replied, "We don't see any distinction in their shawls." The mother did not understand why the villagers could not differentiate their shawls. One day, when the father and his son were working in the field, they heard the sound of the *Osü* bird. The boy sings to the bird, "Even if you shout loud, your meat is sour to taste and your intestine is bitter." The father was shocked to hear that and told him, "My son, why are you singing like that." He replied, "But father, what can I say it tastes like that only." Then the father understood that something wrong was going on at home when he was not there. So he told his son, "Son, tonight also I will take home one *Osü* bird with me. I will taste some meat from your plate". The son said, "It's my pleasure father." Then they went back to their home after work. During the dinner, whatever food was served by the wife to her stepson it was tasted by the husband. He found out that she served him some leaves that taste sour and the seeds that are bitter. She did not serve the meat. The father grew angry with his wife for ill-treating her stepson and expelled his wife and her son out of the home on that night only. Thence, the father and the son lived alone.⁴¹

Though remarriage of women after the death or desertion caused by their former husbands was accepted in society, it is obvious that there was domestic unrest in the relationships among the stepparents and children. In such situations, women as usual were visibly displayed and banished. Folk narratives are silent to men's mistreatment of stepchildren. Since child rearing continued to be the domain of the women/mother, the issues related to it were an area of concern of the women. As she trespasses her role as a wife and mother by becoming partisan in her attitude, she was punished. The Ao-Naga society strictly regulated roles and relations among men and women in their patriarchal system through their established customs and practices to endure their kinship and inheritance.

c. Types of marriages

Apart from the normal marriages, given below are some types of marriages which are mainly taken up by the customary law if the marriage is not according to the law.

(i) Voidable marriage

Elopement (*Jutep kiyim* means: *jupet*, stealthy mating; *kiyim*, marriage). This occurs when both parents on both sides or of either side do not favour the marriage on any grounds. When a girl or a boy after a formal engagement is done run away with another girl/ boy *nechen* has to be paid to the girl's parents. The person who marries the girl is liable to pay fines (*kelamet*) or the boy who leaves his lover is liable to pay the same fine.

When a man commits adultery with another's wife and they subsequently become man and wife, they are declared adulterers and liable to pay a heavy *kelamet*. In other words, if a man, with or without wife lives with another man's wife and commits adultery, and if the husband decides to leave his wife and if she lives with the other man, it is called *kelamet kiyim*. On payment of *kelamet*, fines, the marriage is declared regularized. The man and the woman will be fined with six pigs by the clan. For the *Lotha* tribe, if wife commits adultery, her husband's relatives may warn her and if she continues to partake in the adultery act, she can be divorced by paying a fine of Rs. 10. For this tribe, divorce cases are mostly decided by the village council.

If a girl is impregnated by another man, or the same man, before marriage and has not disclosed this, such a marriage can be deemed void provided, in either case, the victim pays *kelamet* of seven pigs and is not divorced.

(ii) Void marriage

Marriages which are prohibited by custom are void. They are dealt with severe penalty for immorality. Marriage within the same clan of family is endogamy. The husband and wife of endogamous marriage are heavily punished with pig fines and they are expelled from village. This marriage can never be healed. There is no case of bigamy marriage among the Aos but when the tendency of this is suspected it is then nipped at the bud by the village authority. According to Tajen Ao (1980), the functions of village authority are highly commendable as it is due to their vigilance that immorality is timely suppressed. He further adds by saying that there are cases of endogamous marriage but so far there is no case of bigamous marriages among the Aos.⁴² If a man is found living with another woman while he has his wife then he is given orders by village authority to give up the other woman. If he divorces his wife

and continues to live with the other he is not liable. If however, he does not obey the order he is ousted from the village.

A man living with another woman as his wife by deserting his own wife without affecting divorce or without giving reason, such marriage is also void. Reasons for desertion, if not assigned will enable the marriage always void. Void marriages such as endogamous bigamy and marriages by desertion are seen as most seriously immoral and unethical among the Aos since ancient times and are dealt with severe penalty. The victims have only two choices, either expulsion from village with no acceptance anywhere, and become wanderer or to abide by customary law under the vigilant village authority.

d. Identity through the distinction of marriage system between the Ao and the others

With the coming of Christianity, education and modernization the marriage ceremonies are being diverted and are influenced by the western style. But one thing to keep in mind is that the traditional system of marriage is still practice and there is continuity in that. Instances like, the practice of exogamy, girls not losing their title even though they are married, no bride price, customary laws to deal with if there are divorces or problems arises between the wife and the husband and so on.

Among the Aos there is no marriage price. For the *Konyak* Naga, marriages were arranged by parents. The girl's parents demanded huge properties as price for their daughter. She did not have any option to choose her life partner. She was only to consent to the choice of her parents. If she refused her parents' choice, she was discarded from her family. With the passage of time this is no longer the same. Again one interesting fact is that a son would always marry a girl from his mother's clan. However, in present time, this is also no longer adhered to.⁴³

Even among the *Zeliangrong* tribe, the bridegroom pays the bride's price to the bride's family. It is customary that the bride's price must be paid before the actual marriage ceremony takes place. The bride's price is usually distributed among the girl's parents and their relatives: in case, the girl does not have any relative, near or distant, it is shared with their close friends. Those who hare bride's price are responsible to sort out the girl's matrimonial problems if and when they arise.⁴⁴ The

Sema's guard their girl with the greatest care, the reason being that a girl fetches a handsome price at marriage and this price would be substantially reduced if she got involved in a scandal.

The AOs did not practice polygamy. But for the *Lotha* tribe, Polygamy was more popular before the coming of Christianity. But it was confined only to the village chiefs, great warriors and to the wealthy section of the people. If the wife proves to be barren, the husband had every right to marry again without divorcing his first wife. Even today among those who live by traditional customs and practices, polygamy is still prevalent.⁴⁵ To add further according to J.H.Hutton,⁴⁶ the *Lotha* is ordinarily polygynous to the extent of having two wives and sometimes three are married.

Among the AOs, a marriage to the same clan is against the law. But for some other tribes like *Sema*, after a gap of some generation they can marry members of the same clan. The *Konyak Ang* (Chief) can have many wives and he marries from the same clan from other village for maintaining the purity of royal blood.

The AO women do not lose their title after they are married unlike other tribes. For example, if she is from a *Longchar* even though she married to a *Longkumer* clan, she will always remain a *Longchar* till she dies. But for other tribe the day she gets married, the girl loses her title and takes up her husband's title.

5. Gender and power relationship in Ao-Naga family system

Gender is emerging as an important paradigm to interpret the dynamic roles and relations of men and women in their respective family systems. Family which is the citadel of social organization functions as a centrifugal and centripetal force in determining and construing gender. Gender is the knowledge about the differential positioning of men and women in the society. The society fixes meanings to the role ideology and role behaviour of men and women keeping in view their biological and cultural differences that are genetically and epigenetically transferred along generations. In other words masculinity and femininity are conferred upon the men and women resting on their gender performances prescribed by their respective societies. Gender is created in response to power relations. Power relations are constituted within the role a person plays. A gender role is a set of expectations about

what behaviours are appropriate for people of one gender. As the role changes, the power relations also change and *vice versa*. Hence, these relationships are highly dynamic. The frequent shifts in these relationships find expression in their speech genre like tales, proverbs, and slurs. They manifest the process of gender construction and the patterning of roles and relationships of men and women in their respective societies. It is because, the relationships especially between the two sexes are generally believed to have been manipulated and preserved by social customs and traditions. The structuring of different events and interaction among various social dyads in folktales reflects a network of gender relations and the process of gender construction that the people undergo in a given society.⁴⁷

Folktales of Ao-Nagas told by men and women of different ages bear sound testimony to the biases that exist between the two sexes regarding their gender performances and roles. The gender norms and relations between men and women observed in different roles – husband vs. wife, siblings, parents vs. children etc, - can well be explained through the folk narratives.

a. Husband Vs. wife

Generally the husband has power to regulate and manipulate his family relations as he is supposed to be the bread-earner. Being the head he should be able to protect his family prestige and should be sober with his wife and children.⁴⁸ His contribution towards the society should not be neglected. When the husband comes back from work or public meetings (*yimden mapa*) or public participations, the wife is expected to speak politely/ humbly and make arrangements for warm bath, clean clothes and delicious food. The wife is supposed to negotiate both the domestic and public realms within the family and in the society. The family schedule is determined by the woman. Normally, wife/mother is expected to learn in quietness and full submission. Being a woman she should be dissent, not expected to teach or have authority over her husband, must be silent and not be malicious but temperate and trustworthy in everything. She must be worthy of respect and must manage her children and the household well.⁴⁹ Wife should work hard; take care of her family members including their parents and in-laws. She should maintain healthy relationships with the neighbours and exchange honours with them by gifting or

offering delicacies etc.⁵⁰ Thus, the role expectations of wife are multifaceted. Any deviation of women from their respective societal expectation was treated with contempt.

The narrative (1: Wife who returned home), delineates how a husband abides the norms of the family and endures his relations with his wife and children even though she violated them. Any disagreement that arises between the husband and wife is supposed to be settled by them only. The return of the wife to her husband in the narrative further suggests that for a woman her man is the only ultimate resort to live in peace and glory.

The extent of intimacy between the husband and wife finds expression during the pregnancy and delivery time of the Ao-Naga woman. The husband's participation on the eve of childbirth is amazing event that shares the experience of pleasure and pain between the couple. This is well explained in the life cycle ceremonies.

In a family, good relationship between husband and wife is maintained when they are faithful to one another despite their differences and weaknesses. When dissatisfaction between them takes place they should be able to solve it by themselves.

The following narrative (no. 13) explains how the husband loses his temper when he found out his wife's one weak point. Without showing any sympathy to her, he made his father take her away and never let her step inside his house again, knowing that they have a son. But before he realizes his mistake it was too late because his wife had gone away and never to return home. It is a typical patriarchal story which depicts the right of husband to desert the wife if he can trace any asymmetry occurs in her thought or practices in their conjugal relationships. The narrative further tells that asymmetrical marriages cannot sustain for longer times.

Narrative 5.14: Sungrochetla who became cuckoo bird

In the past, humans, animals and gods lived together. During this time, *Sungrochetla*, daughter of god married to a human being. She was very fair and beautiful because her parents fed her with human flesh. One day, *Sungrochetla* told her husband, "These days I'm feeling extremely weak and seem to be losing my weight so, can you please go to my parents and bring the usual food I use to have at home." He agreed and went to the jungle to meet her parents. He was asked to stay the night with them. Next morning, *Sungrochetla's* parents cut one human hand and wrapped the hand several times with a leaf called *Am*, and tied it with bamboo string and gave it to their son-in-law. On his way home, he wanted to see what was inside the leaf so he slowly opens one of the layers. Every time he tries to open the leaf, a bird (which was sent by her parents to guide the food) always shouts at him, "*Ni nü nangla sayiko*" (I will tell them).

When he reached home, he saw that he had opened all the layer of the food, except one. He gave the food to his wife who was making rice-beer. She got so excited to receive the food. After that, she told him, "I'm going to make rice-beer so go and fetch water or collect firewood from the jungle." She did this because she didn't want to let her husband know about the food. But he did not trust his wife so he peeped through the bamboo-matting wall. He was shocked when he saw her taking out a human hand. She then roasted the hand on the fire and slowly enjoying the hand with rice-beer. Then slowly, her face began to glow and became beautiful as before.

He told the entire story to his father and asked him for an answer. His father told him, "You take her into the deep jungle and leave her there." But the son replied, "I have a son to take care so please let me not do that business." So his father took *Sungrochetla* to the jungle told her, "Let's go and collect *yarang* (young banana) from the jungle." She happily agreed and went together to the jungle. On their way, the father-in-law collected some clouds and put it on a container. He asked her, "Do you know this jungle." She replied, "Yes, this is place where we frequently come". The father-in-law thought to himself, "If I leave her here I'm sure she will able to come home so let me take her to another place". They went deeper and deeper into the forest. At last, they reached a place near a river from where she could not return. Then the father-in-law opened the container containing clouds and poured them over her. Then the entire surroundings were thickly covered by clouds. Both cannot see each other. Then the father told her to wait there for sometime till he comes back with some leaves. Thus he deserts her into the forests.

Sungrochetla's son cried whole night searching for his mother's milk, so in the morning her husband told his father, "please go and bring her back because the baby cried the whole night searching for her." The father-in-law agreed and went to the forest in search of her. He took food along with him. He called out, "*Sungrochetla, Sungrochetla* where are you? I came to take you home." But she told him that she got transformed into half human and half bird and hence she could not come out. She shouted at him, "*Akongtongdong, akunur ashi kulaker.*" (Father-in-law is cunning). So he left half of his food to her and returned home. He told his son, "She will never come back, she has gone to her parent's side, and so you take care of you son."⁵¹

From the above narratives it is observed how a man uses his patriarchal authority to over-rule his family as well his wife.

During the fieldwork the researcher could not collect folktales on wife beating. But there are many contemporary narratives that show how husband beats his wife due to drinking and loss of temper which finally end up in divorces or family problems. It is interesting why there are no folktales regarding wife beating despite the fact that the Ao tradition and culture shows the plentiful usage of rice beer. Though Christianity condemned drinking, the people cannot alienate themselves from it. Older generation tell that the wife beating and mutual negotiation are common in the society and they are not the problems to be publicized out. That exists in the family realm and the issues are internal to their private life. That's how the issue of wife beating is internalized by the traditional people and this may be reason for the absence of the motif of wife beating in their oral narratives.

b. Parents Vs. children

The strength and wealth of a family depends upon the nature of relationships that exist between the parents and children. The parents should set examples to their offsprings. In AO-Naga society, though the gender roles and duties of father and mother or are hierarchized, in the absence of one, the other takes the responsibility of the one who was lost and patches up the situation. Especially the Ao-women have the caliber to take the role of the father in up bringing of the children. Because of the internecine and inter-tribal warfares, there was no security to men's lives. Hence the women are equipped with the qualities that are essential to arouse the community and family consciousness among their children for revenging upon their enemies. Thus the role of portents in character building of children is very crucial in Ao-Naga society. The parents expect their children to learn about their genealogy and history of their respective families. The children are expected to know not only about their properties but also their debts, friends and foes. The debts of not only money but also relationships like realizing the promises of their parents or revenging upon their clan enemies are expected to be cleared by the offsprings⁵². In chapter 4, **Narrative No.1. *The Story of Revenging sons (mangyangba jabaso)*** of the thesis explains how a mother brings up her male children in such a way that they take revenge upon the enemy who killed their father⁵³. In the past, the fathers sent their son to the boy's dormitory (*Arju*) which was the primary step to socialize him to the rules and regulations of the family at the base and the community at the apex. Children who just listen to advices but never do things in their practical life are referred to such proverb, "Like water not staying in *Yum* leaf" (*Manüto nung tsü mamong ama*)⁵⁴ The meaning of this proverb is that water never stays on the *yum* leaf. It always falls down the moment water touches the leaf because it is very slippery and even if one tries to let the water stays on the leaf it just rolls down and falls on the ground. The following narrative explains how a father disciplined his son.

Narrative 5.15: The spoiled son

Long time ago, there was a family. They had only one son. He grew up according to his own wishes and his parents provided him with all the good food like fish and meat. To test and see the son's reactions, one evening, his parents give him only a simple dish without any meat or fish. The son told his father, "*Opa nibo ayimnur.*" (Father I want to shout). Actually he means to say

he wanted to have some meat or fish. His father quickly replied back, “*Tongshi nungji wor ayimang.*” (Go and shout near the wooden post). The father just replies what his son said. Only then the son realized what his father means to say and never demanded anything extra. He stopped crossing the limit and tried to be a good son.⁵⁵

The father and son relationship develops through the participation in activities of the Village Council (*Putu Menden*). Traditionally the role of the mother was to manage the home, to look after the children, weave clothes for the family, and train her daughters to weave, cook food, feed the children and animals, and fetch water and firewood, brew rice-beer, pound paddy works in the field throughout the seasons. The mother was considered as an example of hard work for her children. Even today, the daughter is expected to be like the mother. Mother is expected to mould the behaviour of the daughter. Mother vs daughter conflicts are not shown in the narratives. Cordial relationship is manifested even in other folk expressions of the AO-nagas.

Sibling relationships

The sibling relationships in the case of sisters were noticed in the folk narratives. The conflicts among the male siblings were shown in the origin myths of Nagas (see chapter II, Narrative 2: origin myth of Nagas (ii) Myth of flat stone and Three brothers in this thesis). Expected behavior for siblings may depend on where the child is in the sibling hierarchy (oldest, middle, or youngest child) and whether the child is male or female. Children with siblings learn how to share and resolve conflicts quite easily. And with the right kind of guidance from parents, siblings also get a lot of practice in learning how to be cooperative, supportive, and nurturing to others. Siblings serve many functions for one another. There are many folk narratives based on siblings' relationship. When the older sibling tries to exert too much control over the younger one then there arise conflicts among them. They are expected to be responsible, help one another and not to exploit their sibling control. This is explained in the following narrative.

Narrative 5.16: Aier chanu agi ozu akumba (A girl who turns into a bird)

Once upon a time, in a family there were two girls. One day as their parents were away to the field, they spent their day going to collect firewood. Since they went to collect firewood for several times they felt very tired and hungry. The youngest sister asked her elder sister, “Sister, shall we have food?”. Her sister replied, “if you want to have food then you go first to collect water.” After coming back from the pond, when the younger sister again asked to have food, her sister told her, “There are some few grains so you pound the grains.” At last she fainted and could not do any work because of the hunger. She told her sister, “I will not do any work because

I am feeling very hungry” and then she rested. But again her sister demanded, “You cook rice first” so she started to cook. She took out some rice with a spoon and tasted to know whether it was cooked or not as she was feeling very hungry. But unfortunately this act was seen by her elder sister. Her sister snatched away the spoon and beat her terribly. Because of the beating, the younger sister got very angry and she cried hysterically as if she was going to faint. As she was very angry, she tore her cloth and put the cloth on her arms and backbone to look like bird wings and feathers. Fixing it so, she went to *sünglang* (balcony) singing this song, “*Ati mangla süngpeni wangte, Tzüteri mangla, ongpang mentitila nung onglak onglak*” (Sister you told me to collect firewood and to fetch water, what kind of sister are you).

When their parents returned from the field, they could not find the youngest daughter. When the sun was about to set, they found her in the corner of the *sünglang*, transformed into a bird. She was there jumping joyously singing the same song which she sang to her elder sister. When they saw her and heard the song, they called her many times thinking that her elder sister might have scolded and made her very angry. They requested her, “Child, please come to us. We will scold your sister”. But she never returned to her. The parents scolded the eldest sister and so she too became very angry and at the same time, she also did not come back to them. She went down to the balcony. Even she turned into a bird and went away making sound, “*Tenü-a tenü-a*” (sister-o sister). During *metsü mapang* (sowing season), the sound of this bird is heard.

The narrative illustrates the problems the parents face with children when they leave their home for earning livelihood. In any relationship the ‘strong’ exploits the ‘weak’ and the ‘elder’ snubs the ‘younger’ and sometimes the *vice versa*. In the end the ‘defeated’ or ‘exploited’ will escape into a blissful world. Here the younger daughter who was frequently exploited by her sister got transformed into a bird and flies into skies.

Maintaining good sibling relationships can be found when problems, sufferings and danger occur between them. The Ao-Naga depends for food not only in cultivation but hunting as well. So the male siblings help one another for the sustenance of the family. During hunting in the jungle, they face dangers in many forms, so their relationship is recognized at this time. The following narrative explains the relationship of two brothers where they helped one another to save themselves from the danger, on their way from hunting birds.

Narrative 5.17: Two brothers and a tiger

Once upon a time, there were two brothers. They went to hunt birds (*anung asai*). They caught many birds, so the younger brother said his brother, “*Odi* (brother) lets go home, and we’ve caught enough birds.” But his brother said to him, “Let’s wait and catch more birds and let’s also catch a big bird for our mother because there will be lots of birds coming when evening comes.” As they were engrossed in their hunting, it became dark. As they were going back homeward, they saw an old man holding a bamboo torch and walking through the woods making an, “*mmmh mmmh*” sound. Since it was dark and they had no torch with them, they shouted, “*ohhoi!* We don’t know who you are, but wait for me and my brother. ” So, the old man waited for them. Actually it was an old tiger. The tiger said to them, “Burn all the birds one by one and put into my mouth otherwise I will kill both of you.” They told him, “We will burn and give it to you one by one, all the birds.” Meanwhile, the younger brother said to his brother, “Brother, do

not give the biggest bird to the tiger which we caught for our mother”; he kept repeatedly saying this for several times. While doing so he made a long stick out of tin, put it on the fire and told the tiger, “Grandfather close your eyes and open your mouth big, I will give you the biggest bird.” When he did so, the younger brother put the hot, burning stick into his mouth. His tongue burned and he ran away in search of water. So they shouted, “I and my brother enemy went in search of water. Please let there be no water in the river.” As the tiger reached the river all the water dried-up, and he had a difficult time with his burned tongue. This tale means to say that, people come across danger when they live in a poor condition.⁵⁶

c. Relationship with in-laws

In-laws can be a great source of support and closeness. They can also be a major problem in the marital relationship. As mentioned earlier, roles change according to the position. When a man is married to a girl, he becomes a member of the girl’s family. The son-in-law is expected to be present in the in-laws family occasions rendering his help. The son-in-law’s help, presence and concern should be made known to the father-in-law through respect. Since son-in-law has married his daughter so it is his obligation to attend whenever need arises. For example, if his brother-in-law is to get married, he should be the first one near them by even, sacrificing his sleep. In the past, the husband used to go to the wife father’s field to help and for all practical purposes to accept as a member of her family. This is clearly explained in the marriage ritual. The father-in-law’s role is to make sure that his daughter lived securely and happily with his son-in-law. He is also expected by the society not to be too involved in the son-in-law family affairs because being a nuclear family, he has his own family and once the daughter is married to him, the son-in-law assumes the responsibility and right towards his daughter. If he tries to involve and control his son-in-law’s family then it will only bring disturbances between the two families and it will also affect the relationship of the kinship. Till today it is a practice and custom that during an occasion if a pig is killed then the son-in-law give a thigh of the pig to the father-in-law’s family. In this way the relationship is maintained.

Unlike the joint family of the Indian society, generally in the Ao-Naga family everyday close interaction is not found between the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law because of its nuclear set-up. This doesn’t mean that the relationship between them is distant but they maintained their relationship by sharing information, instructions and advices even during pregnancy and delivery. They share their love

and care through gifts and also respect their roles and power. Conflict arises like divorce, bad relationship when they interfere in the family affairs.

According to Anungla Aier, “Our social structure has a clear division of gender roles, while the menfolk were historically engaged in protecting our villages and clans, women were confined to the family and kitchen. I think it will take some more time for the society to change its mindset”.⁵⁷ Gender plays an important role in determining the role of male and female in any society. The Ao-Naga society being a patriarchal society gave men more rights in decision-making. Men not only worked to look after their own families, but as members of the village council they also took importance decisions for their respective village or clan. The women too in the Ao-Naga society had an important role to play. Though they confined themselves to the four walls of the house, it was their duty to take care of the family and look after all the household chores. They were responsible in molding the daughters to become good wives and mothers. The fathers played a huge role in shaping the lives of the sons. Despite the norms set by the society in certain cases where the women had no say, she did not have the right to property and she could not become a member of the village council. Thus the patriarchal society decided the norms for both male and female and power too is determined by the relation between male and female.

It can be concluded from the above discussion that the organization of Ao-Naga society rests on functioning of its various institutions like family, kinship, marriage and gender relationships. The narrative tradition of the Aos reveals how these institutions standardize their personal as well as the community lives and ensure the continuity of their identities in changing times. Family (*kibong*) is the basic social institution established through the custom of legitimate marriage (*Kiyimba*) and function on the norms of patriarchy. Marriage rests on the stringent rules of exogamy and endogamy. The norms of kinship are strictly followed in terms of marriage and related behaviour. The trespassers are punished by the customary law. Polygamy and adultery in conjugal life are prohibited for Aos where as Lotha-Nagas observe it. Aos have no bride price where as the *Konyak* and *Zeliangrong* Nagas hold this practice. Remarriage of men and women are permitted. The stepmother problem is highlighted in some narratives. The wicked stepmothers are expelled from the families in the narrative tradition. The stepfather episodes are not

found. Though divorces are in vogue, the Ao custom emphasizes on the need for a healthy and unbroken family for men and women. The narrative tradition suggests the women (wives) not to compete with men (husbands) in family life as both are complementary in their role behaviour. The society warns the women that they receive more bites from men than privilege. The women has vital role to play in bringing up the children as per the norms of the Ao society if the father dies in tribal warfare, hunting or in protecting their community or away from home. The society expects that the men should always be ready with his *dao* to die for the cause of his community. Every woman wishes that her husband or son should emerge as a headhunter and prove his virility and prowess as a member of Ao-Naga society. Though the nature of the family is nuclear, parental care is mandatory as per their custom. The children are eligible for inheriting property as well as debts of their parents. The family functions on division of labour. The gender roles and functions are determined by custom. The obligatory and customary relationships between parents, parents vs. children, in-laws, between siblings (brothers vs. brothers, brothers vs. sisters and sisters vs. sisters) bounded by tradition. The children are socialized by dormitory system. Thus the social organization of Aos speaks about their identity as a distinct group among the other Nagas.

In order to regulate and reiterate the values and norms of the society the Aos observe several customary and obligatory rituals both in personal (familial) as well as at community (social) realms and thereby protect their core identities in changing times. The next chapter explains the process of constructing the personal and group identities of the Aos by observing the rituals, viz: the personal rites, i.e., the rituals of life cycle -childbirth, puberty, marriage and death and community's socio-religious and political rites.

Endnotes

¹ E. W. Burgess, H. J. Locke, M. M. Thomas, *The family*, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971, p. 1

² A man (anybody) is expected to be obedient and give respect to the elders and parents. Quarrelling is a serious issue and reconciliation is demanded. The elders in the village come and patch up the differences. J.P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, 1926, (reprint 2003), P.175.

³ Information gathered from Longrichila Longchar, 78 years, Longkhum village, interview on 20th Dec, 2007

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- ⁴ Information gathered from Rongsenkaba, 77 years old, Yimjenkimong village, interviewed on 10.06.2008
- ⁵ Lucy Zehol, , *Women in Naga society*, (ed) New Delhi, Regency publications, 1998,p. 94
- ⁶ J.P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, ,*supra.*, p.90
- ⁷ This village is in Asetkong range.
- ⁸ Information collected from R.Nungshimeren Ozukum (M), 64 years, Mopongchuket village, Interviewed on 26. 06. 2008
- ⁹ Information gathered from Purtongzuk Longchar (M), 70 years, Molung village, interviewed on 8.06.2008
- ¹⁰ Tajen Ao, *Ao Naga Customary Laws*, Jorhat, Aowati Imchen, 1980, p.73
- ¹¹ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, Interviewed on 18.12. 2007
- ¹² Information gathered from Rev.L.Pona Jamir (M), 77 years, Mopongchuket village, Interviewed on 24.05. 2008
- ¹³ Lucy Zehol, (ed), *Women in Naga society*, New Delhi, Regency publications, 1998.
- ¹⁴ Information gathered from K. Jamir (M), 71 years, Chuchuyimpang village, Interviewed on 7.06.2008
- ¹⁵ Putu means generations and menden means seat.
- ¹⁶Information fathored from Rev.L.Pona Jamir (M), 77 years, Mopongchuket village, Interviewed on 24.05. 2008
- ¹⁷ Naga tribe living in the Tuensang district of Nagaland
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*
- ¹⁹ It is believed by the people that this is a devilish creature that lives in the jungle near a river or lake.
- ²⁰ The plate is metaphorically representing the daughter who takes care and prepares food for the father.
- ²¹ Information gathered from Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24th June, 2008.
- ²² Since the customary law is too strong that people who love each from the same clan also cannot get married because they don't want to leave the village and miss all the opportunities like inheritance of property, voices in the society and church, being part of the family etc.
- ²³ Information gathered from Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.06.2008
- ²⁴ Tajen Ao, *op.cit.*, 1980, p.32
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p.73
- ²⁶ Information gathered from Imtilepzuk Jamir, Interviewed on 24.06.2009, 68 years, Changtongya village.
- ²⁷ Tajen Ao, *op.cit.*, 1980, p.185
- ²⁸ Narrator did not tell her name.
- ²⁹ <http://www.preservearticles.com/here-is-your-short-essay-on-endogamy.html>. Accessed 29/10/2011
- ³⁰ Information gathered from Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.06.2008
- ³¹ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publication, 1993, p.108
- ³² Information gathered from Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007
- ³³ Panger Imchen, *op.cit.*,1993, p.109
- ³⁴ Information gathered from Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 20.12.2007
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Information collected from Longrichila Longchar (F), 78 years, Longkhum village, 20.12.2007
- ³⁷ *Ibid*,
- ³⁸ Temsula Ao, ,*The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Baroda, Bhasha Publications, 1999p.44
- ³⁹ Information gathered in the field from Longrichila Longchar, 78 years, Longkhum village, interview on 20th Dec, 2007
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

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- ⁴¹ Information collected from Imolembe Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007, Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.12. 2007
- ⁴² Tajen Ao, *op.cit.*, 1980, p.43
- ⁴³ Kevekha Zehol, Lucy Zehol, "Konyak Naga", (ed.) Lucy Zehol, *Women in Naga society*, New Delhi, Regency publications, 1998, p. 79
- ⁴⁴ Hunibou Newmai, "The Status of Women in Zeliangrong Society", (ed.) Lucy Zehol, *Women in Naga society*, New Delhi, Regency publications, 1998, p. 79, pp. 43-44
- ⁴⁵ Mhathung Tungoe, "Status of Women in Lotha Society", (ed.) Lucy Zehol, *Women in Naga society*, New Delhi, Regency publications, 1998, p. 79, p. 32
- ⁴⁶ J.H. Hutton, *The Lotha Nagas*, London, direction of the Assam Administration Macmillan and co., limited, 1922
- ⁴⁷ P.S.Kanaka durga "Social Construction of Gender: Reflections in Women's Folktales", *Journal of Institute of South Asian Studies*, 2000, Chennai, pp.89-120.
- ⁴⁸ Information gathered from L.Teka Longchar, 65 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 13.06.2008
- ⁴⁹ Information gathered from Longrichila Longchar, 78 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.12. 2007
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*
- ⁵¹ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M)
- ⁵² Jamir, N.Talitemjen; A.Lanunungsang, *Naga Society and Culture- A case study of the Ao Naga Society and cultures*, Nagaland, Nagaland University Tribal Research Centre, Department of Sociology, 2005, p. 236
- ⁵³ See in the thesis, Chapter 4, Narrative 1.
- ⁵⁴ The explanation for the proverb is gathered during informal chat with the community people in the village Longkhum.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*
- ⁵⁶ Information gathered from Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24.04. 2008
- ⁵⁷ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/politics-remains-outofbounds-for-naga-women/278891/>

Chapter VI

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS AS CULTURAL METAPHOR

The well-knitted social organization of the AOs sustains on the performance of the ritual observances that require individual as well as the communal participation not only to socialize its members, but also to bind them with the community to which they belong. A ritual is a formalized, predetermined set of symbolic actions generally performed in a particular environment, be it sacred or secular. However, the line of demarcation between these two realms often fades in mundane lives. Any custom usually involves a physical action (giving the food), a shared belief (the premonitory dream), and a material object (the penny loaf). Customs that have acquired considerable magical and sacred potency are known as rituals¹. Ritual is a social quest that every community expedites to express its norms, values and belief system in a symbolic way through several magico-religious and cultural performances. The rituals mark the belongingness of the members to their respective communities. The ritual ideology, behaviour; the material culture and the course of the ritual process always remain in conformity with the community and the people that celebrate them. Hence the rituals are metaphor of identity formations. Thus the rituals reinforce and confirm the collective as well as the personal identities, respectively of the community and its members when juxtaposed amidst different cultural groups in the society. The identities are not static but changes in spatio-temporal dimensions. Every change has to be celebrated as a ritual to (i) enlighten the ritual passenger about his /her positioning in the changed spaces, (ii) instruct the dos' and don'ts in newly acquired statuses, and (iii) legitimate the newly acquired (changed identity) position in the society. Thus the rituals mark the shift of identities both in personal as well as in communal domains. The Ao-Naga rituals can be classified into two categories: the life cycle ceremonies that one undergoes in the course one's own life and communal rites that one observes as a member of their society.

The life cycle ceremonies are the rituals that are celebrated at the time when the individuals attain a new status during their life course. In other words, these rituals demarcate one's transition from one stage of the life to that of the other. The

rituals are the markers of identity of the individual's entry into the next stage of their lives. In almost all many communities, birth, puberty, marriage and death are considered to be the major events that demarcate major stages during the lifetime. Hence these occasions are celebrated in pomp and glory accompanied by rituals. The ritual process and the ritual behaviour embedded in the rites fades the former identities and construct the new identities to 'passenger' the one undergoing these celebrations. The life cycle ceremonies are meant for constructing personal identity as a member of the family at the base and as a member of the society at the apex. In other words, they affirm personal as well as the group identities.

The community rituals are meant to construct the identity of people as members of particular group at higher level contributing for their group identity. However, both the identities are inter-related. Personal identity is the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity or the totality of the person's self-attributes at a given moment in time, whereas community identity is the ways in which individuals and groups are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and groups. There are other rituals such as territorial rituals like house warming, and community rituals such as harvesting (*aluro*), pulling of log drum (*Süngkong*), construction of *Arju* (*Morung*), replacing of new village council (*Putu Menden*) and feast of merit (*Kikha süichi*).

In the rituals of the Aos, both the sacred and secular elements complement each other. According to van Gennep², sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it brought into play by the nature of particular situations. Sacred realities are defined as those that are set apart and revered. It is because they are believed to be extraordinarily powerful and ultimately real. Many seemingly secular rites may exhibit religious aspects precisely because they serve as means of re-enacting the relation between persons and some public purposes or personal identities which are held to be sacred.³ The rite of passage rituals embodies both the sacred and secular aspects of life. Hence, they constitute part and parcel of lives and construct the respective identities.

In the light of above discussion, the present chapter analyses the ritual processes of the major life cycle ceremonies like child birth, puberty, marriage and death and interprets how different rites observed in each ceremony (ritual) situate the Ao-naga identity. The changes and continuity in ritual ideology and practices with

regard to the celebration life cycle ceremonies in the wake of Christianity and globalization are also discussed in this context.

Ritual theories

Keeping in view the significance of ritual as metaphorical representation of the respective communities that celebrate them, scholars across the world focused their studies on the ritual process, ritual symbolism and several aspects of rituals observed in public and private realms of the people in different cultural contexts. Given below are the works studied on the rituals by the Anthropologists like Van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas.

Van Gennep (1873-1957) was the first anthropologist to note the regularity and significance of the rituals attached to the transitional stages in man's life, and his phrase for these, "the rites of passage", has become a part of the language of anthropology and sociology. He holds that the rite of passage rituals mark significant transitions in human lives, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. By *rite of passage* he means any ceremony that accompanies the passage from one state to another and from one world, whether cosmic or social, to another. The idea of significance passage rituals was first introduced by Gennep, who saw rebirth as the law of life and described rites of passage as a threefold process: *rites of separation*: *rites of transition (liminality* from the Latin, *limen*, meaning threshold): and *rites of incorporation*. The individual would first be ritually removed from the society as a whole, then he would be isolated for a period, and finally he would be incorporated back into the tribe in his new status. Although the most commonly observed rites relate to crises in the life cycle, Van Gennep saw the importance of the ceremonies as being social or cultural, celebrating important events that are primarily socio-cultural or human-made rather than biological. His method was constructed to describe patterns of life in those traditional societies often described as primitive or tribal societies.

Victor Turner (1920-1983) is one of the symbolic anthropologists. He examined how the people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols. Turner mainly studied rituals in non-western societies and looked at the roles of the symbols in specific social situations. He analyzed rituals and demonstrated roles of symbols in various social contexts. One of Turner's famous studies is his analysis on the rituals of the *Ndembu*, an African tribe

in Zambia. The *Ndembu* used several kinds of trees for young women's ritual and they attributed various symbolic meanings to these trees. Turner explored *liminality* as a period in which human beings found great strength in the joint support of others in the same situation. Turner⁴ coined the term *liminoid* to refer to experiences that have characteristics of liminal experiences but are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis. According to him, the liminal/ *liminoid* entities are neither here nor there; they are 'betwixt and between' the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial rite.⁵ To him, liminal entities, such as 'neophytes', in initiation may be represented as possessing nothing. Turner used ideas, like *communitas* and liminality to organize his thoughts and to help in understanding the ritual behaviour of the tribe he studied. He coined the word *communitas* to explain the feeling of shared unity among those who, for example, were initiated together. To him, both structure and *communitas* are very important to humanity. Turner believes that those individuals who are deprived of either structure or *communitas* will seek to fill their needs through rituals that provide them with either structure, in the case of those that are structurally inferior, or *communitas*, in the case of those that are structurally superior. Turner's work incorporates structural ideas of society, *communitas* and liminality into an anthropological study of religious ritual. Turner believes that rituals serve to fill needs not filled within everyday life, by balancing structure and community⁶.

Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*⁷ and *Natural Symbols*⁸ established her as a major theorist of ritual and theology. Both works are justified with suggestive examples taken from the Lele and other African societies, the Old Testament, contemporary social movements, and even from her housekeeping routines in Highgate. She tried to develop universal models of the relationship between group structures and ideas about the world. According to Douglas, there are rituals and symbols embodied in meals, dress codes, pageantry or political demonstrations, above all in the human body, a perennial focus of symbols and taboos. The theory of purity and danger of Mary Douglas holds that a person goes through different stages of life it gets polluted by some way or the other or in other words, defilement is a part of a cultural system. A ritual takes place in order to get purified to step into the other stage. Douglas has argued that all social transition is perceived as dangerous because their status is temporarily undefined, persons experiencing transition has no place in

society. She pursued liminality as the intervening elements between contrasting structural positions associated with what she called “matter out of place”.

However all these theories emphasize the significance of rituals as the metaphors of the cultures of the communities that perform them and thus establish continuities between culture and community through rituals on one hand and on the other hand specificity of rituals to communities. To view rituals as the manifestations of Ao-Naga identity at personal and group levels, the life-cycle ceremonies are analyzed and interpreted in the light of the belief system and practices of Ao-Naga society.

One very interesting features about the Ao-Naga is that every ceremony is accompanied by *genna/prohibition*⁹ called *anempong* (refers to sanctification and strict restriction). *Anempong* is observed just before and after every ceremony. During this time the entire normal activities should be ceased because it is a period of purification. For married couples, sexual intercourse during this period is highly restricted. The *anempong* may vary from one to six days or even more in case of severity of the nature. Failure to observe or misconduct of such *anempong* leads to tragedy or misfortune. That is why no ceremony is performed without strict observance of *anempong* to avoid misfortune.¹⁰

Life -Cycle Ceremonies

Life cycle ceremony is defined as a ritual event celebrated on the occasion of one's attainment to a particular state, be it a birth or puberty or marriage or death to demarcate a person's transition from one stage to the other. Transitions always symbolise the changes in social statuses. To accomplish these new statuses ritual purification of the ‘ritual subject/ passenger’, the person undergoing changes is essential. It is done by observing the culturally prescribed rites of the respective community/tribe to which the person belongs. For the Ao-Nagas the life cycle ceremonies are very important occasions to celebrate as events of significance. For them each event is a change of season in life that brings new change in their lives and gives new identity. The sense of identity always gets reflected in every ritual act of their lives. Ao-Naga society consider (A) *Nusomong*, Child birth rite (B) Puberty rite (C) *Kiyimba*, Marriage rite (D) *Asümong*, Death rite -are the major events of celebration accompanied by elaborate rites and rituals.

I. Nusomong, the Child Birth Rite

In Ao-Naga society pregnancy and childbirth are perceived as revered events in the family life of men and women. Especially for woman these statuses are contexts of celebration to construct their new identities as a 'pregnant' and a 'new mother' in the family. Further, the newborn child opens his identity card as a member of the family on one hand and society on the other. Thus, the childbirth ritual is very important as it initiates the process of identity construction for both woman and for child. Different rites performed on the occasion are specific to Ao-Naga community and stands as an icon of identity to the 'ritual passenger'/'neophyte' the person who is undergoing the ritual.¹¹ The ritual passenger when enters a new role is called by Victor Turner as 'neophyte'. The rites observed during the course of the ritual event are very typical that construe and construct an Ao-Naga child. The process of observing the ritual *Nusomong* is schematically given below:

The ritual process

The ritual process of the *Nusomong* (*Nu* is child, *so* is birth and *mong* is rite/ceremony) child birth rite can conveniently be studied in three stages: (i) pre-birth represent the period that begins with the moment the woman knows that she is pregnant and ends with the birth of the child; (ii) delivery stage starts when the pregnant woman gets delivery pains and gives birth to child and (iii) post birth stage covers the period between the child birth and the incorporation of mother and child into the family with changed statuses. Each stage has certain norms and practices to follow by the 'ritual passenger' and people associated with him/her.

(i) Pre-birth:

At the moment a woman knows that she is a pregnant (*mashisa*), she herself takes care of her physical and mental health. Even the family members treat her distinctly in the matters of food, bed, rest and other comforts. She is abstained from eating food items like tiger meat, slippery fish (*angopongo*), monkey, fox, tortoise, frogs etc. that is forbidden to her. If she finds a tasty beetle in the fields she may not bring it up for supper, tucked into her skirt at the waist, or her child will be born with a birthmark; she must bring it tied in a corner of her cloth so that it does not touch her.¹² When she is pregnant, her husband (even she) is not allowed to kill any animals like snake, tiger, even pig or chicken. It is believed that the 'yet to be born

child' would resemble to the animal the father had killed. Till date, such belief governs the worldview of the newly wedded Ao-Naga couples who did not bear children. The pregnant woman should be alert while working and should not to get traumatized by animals or by any other acts or events to protect the unborn child from shocks that may cause premature delivery or stillbirths or timid children.

(ii) Birth (Delivery)

When a pregnant woman knows that it is time for her delivery (*nusotsü*), she informs her husband and he then passes the information to his other family members. In Ao-Naga society no other member of the family than her husband is allowed to be with his woman in the labour room at the time of delivery. In traditional Ao-Naga society, it was a convention among that the wife can deliver the child safely only when the husband who is responsible for it would passionately stay with her. In case if the husband happens to be away, his shawl was tied to her stomach to symbolize his 'presence' to his wife. The mother gives birth by standing or in a squatting position supported by her husband. Till the child is born, only the wife and the husband are alone in the room.

After the child has been delivered, the mother holds the umbilical cord (*tepela tezü*) by keeping it beneath her toe and the father carefully separates it from the child by using a knife made of bamboo. Otherwise, the naval would swell and become puffy which causes discomfort and ugly look to the baby. Before the birth the father keeps six such knives ready. One knife will be thrown away if a daughter is born. If a son is born, all six knives including the one used for cutting umbilical cord will be bundled and tied to the thatched roof just over the bed of the new mother. Ao-Nagas believe that they tie the knives to ward off evil spirits. Now the father's paternal aunt or the child's paternal aunt, father's sister (*tenü/onü*) washes and wraps him in new cotton cloth. Then the father touches the child with his left and later with his right hand keeps a little munched rice into his mouth. Then utters "*Ni tsüngrem tenung nung tanur dak tangshir, tsüngrem shinga ya kodanga maoyatsü* (I have laid my hands before the god so no god can snatch this child)." Again the father touches the lips of the child with cooked chicken's *temesen* (liver) and says, "From today onward you will have such kind of food." Then again cooked rice is munched softly and is put on the child's mouth and the father says, "Starting from today you will have such rice to survive." The mother is also given a cup full of high-quality *mejemtsü* (rice beer) to

gain her strength. Later she is allowed to have food with chicken but without chilly because that will hurt her stomach. The best medicine to regain her strength is to give good food especially chicken with rice beer.

Then the father washes the *Nosem* (placenta). He packs it in a clean cloth and buries it in a *moapu* (valley) or under the floor of the house to protect it from dogs, pigs or other animals from getting contaminated by them. The community believe that if the father plants like a post or tree making big noises the child will not be able to breathe. It is also believed that the placenta should not be buried where waste is thrown away, or near trees, or muddy water otherwise the child will always remain sick and will not grow up to be a brave and independent child. The placenta is buried properly to protect the child from all sickness, harms and danger.

(iii) Post-Birth

After the child is born, the new mother and father had to be secluded for five to six days from their normal social life like get-togethers, religious gatherings and routine works like agricultural practices and hunting activities. The father hangs green leaves from the trees of *Asangdong/ Changpet*, to the door, If a boy is born six leaves and five leaves if a girl is born, as a sign to show that the family is observing *genna*, a preparatory ritual for any rite. Even the duration of *genna* is also six and five days for boy and girl respectively. The number of the leaves symbolizes the sex and duration of the *genna* of the child. To keep the child in warmth, fire is burnt in kitchen. During the *genna* period neither guest from other villages nor friends relatives are allowed to see the child and new mother as the community believes that evil spirits or bad winds (*mopung tamajung*) that enter the house may affect the breath and thus the survival of the child. Even sexual intercourse between the wife and the husband in this period is strictly forbidden. The new mother along with her child stays in the house and she is not allowed for five days to take part in domestic or public activities. During *genna*, foods which are restricted to her were not allowed to the new mother. It is believed that by taking such restricted foods, sores may appear on her lips.

On the second day after the child is born, the *narong* (earlobes) of the child are to be pierced. Sharp piece of bamboo and a hammer made of half a sword-bean seed were used. A little bunch of hair from the child is cut with a *dao*, a big knife. The hair and the hammer were kept in the house. The *kinü narongto* (ear-piercing) ritual is

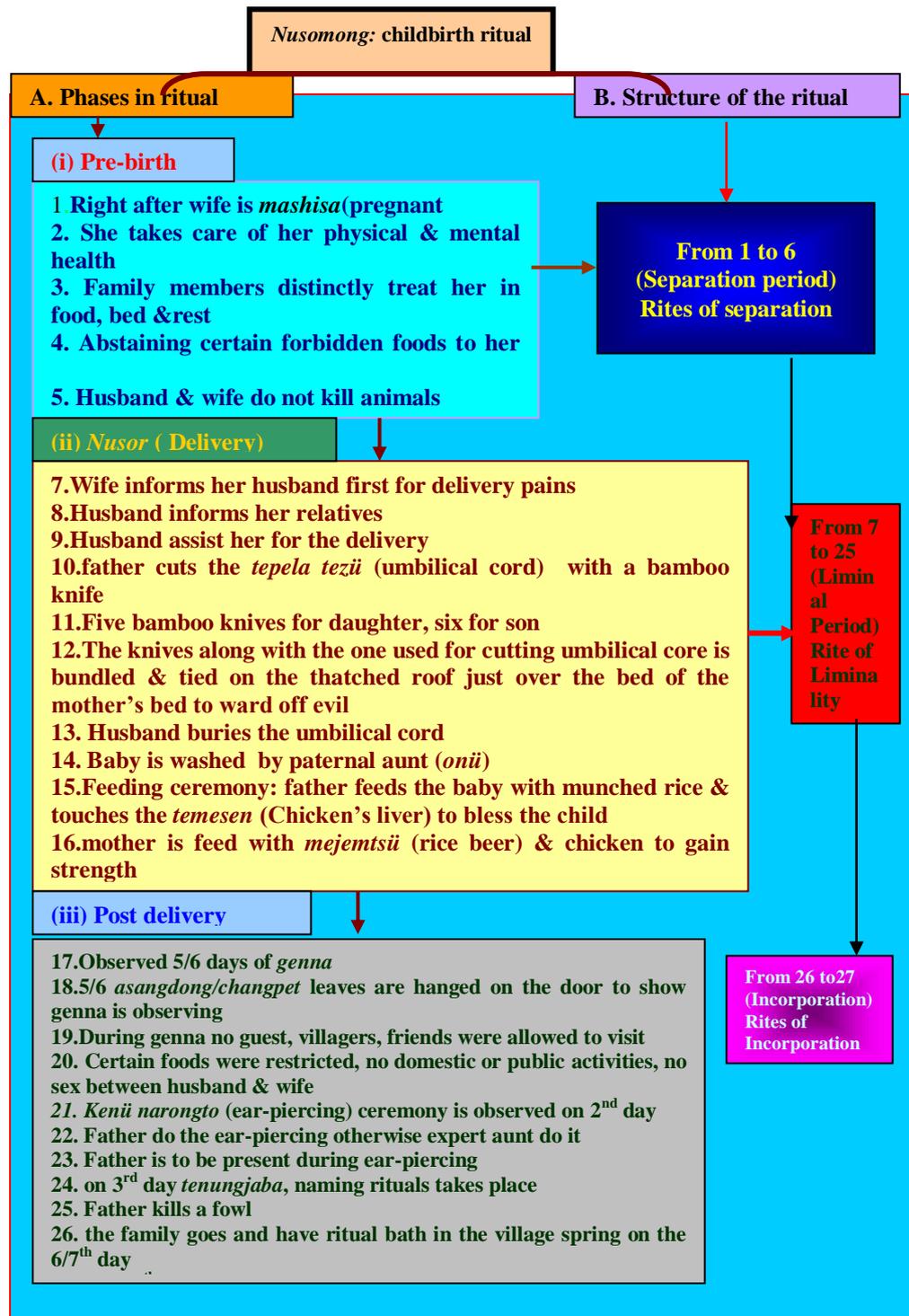
performed by the father of the child. The ritual act of ear piercing mutually reaffirms that they both are father and son. Though in some families *onü* (paternal aunt) would perform the ear-piercing rituals but the father and mother of the child would present there. Fowl has to be killed to celebrate the ear piercing ritual. The baby then wears earrings after the hole of the ear lobe gets healed.

On the third day, the *tenungjaba* (naming) of the child takes place. Being a patriarchal family the Ao-Naga custom does not authorize to name the child from the mother's side. Many names are collected from the father's side and the best name is selected for the child. A fowl is killed and the father looks at the sun to get good luck upon the child. Only then the child's name is uttered. It is believed that if the child gets sound sleep it can be deemed that the baby liked its name. Otherwise if the baby cries continuously for the whole night it can be understood that the name given is not liked by her/him. Then a new name is given. From fourth day till fifth/sixth day the mother and the child remains inside the house but the husband can carry on his routine job.

After the *genna* is over, on the sixth/seventh day the new mother, child and the father go for wash off in the village spring waters. It is a ritual cleansing from 'impurities' the family incurred during the post delivery period. Next day the husband offers a chicken and an egg in front of his field house. In the past, no big celebration was observed for the arrival of the new child because of the many children in the family which become an expensive affair. This concludes the childbirth ceremonies of the Ao-Naga family.

The ritual course of the *Nusomong* rite is represented as following diagram No. 1. In the diagram, (A) represents phases in the ritual course and (B) Structure of the ritual. In ritual course (A), the entire process is divided into three stages, the pre-birth, delivery (birth) and post birth. In each stage a series of rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In the Structure of the ritual (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the childbirth rite are analyzed and interpreted in terms of the Structural models of rites of passage advocated by Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. Such interpretation would establish how cultural differences between the people construct different socio-cultural practices that construe their identities.

Diagram No.6.I: Child birth ritual *Nusomong*



(iv) Analysis

Unlike in many Indian and Western tribal societies, among the Ao-Nagas, the childbirth ritual begins not from the time of delivery of the child, but in the next moment the woman knows that she is pregnant (*mashisa*), i.e. from the pre-birth stage

of the child.

In Ao-Naga society, the period of 'separation' do not depict any particular ritual, but prescribes restrained behavioural code for both the pregnant woman and her husband keeping in view the prosperity of the 'yet to be born child'. Hence the pre-birth stage of the Ao-Naga child corresponds 'period of separation' the first stage of structural model. The separation is not only to the unborn but to the parents. The period of separation in the childbirth rite among Ao-Nagas is longer than in other communities.

The period of liminality in the childbirth rite encompasses all ritual behaviour and rituals performed second stage 'delivery', childbirth stage (7to16) and also a few rituals (17to25) of post birth period in the third stage of ritual course (A). The liminal period in the case of Ao-Nagas, begins when the woman feels her transition from pregnant state to new mother status. After the delivery the fetus become child, woman becomes mother and husband becomes father. The roles and statuses of the family members change with the delivery, but the entire family remains separated from participation in community life. The Victor Turner describes vividly on the nature of liminal period. He considered it as a phase of confusion for the ritual subject/passenger (liminoid) as a being situated in betwixt and between positions claiming their status neither here nor there. Turner noted that the liminal entities such as 'neophytes' in initiation may be represented as possessing nothing, which means with no identity. He notes that "the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'.¹³ That is, the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous.

Liminal individuals have nothing: "no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows".¹⁴ But for the Ao-Nagas, the liminal period is the time to ritually construct the identities of the entire family. The markers of Ao-Naga identities are: rite after the liminal period starts with first feeding of the child is performed by the father, *genna* is observed and the *Asangdong/ Changpet* leaves are hanged on the doors.

The father feeds the child with little munched rice and *temesen* (chicken's liver), *kinü narongto* (ear piercing) and *Tenungjaba* (naming) ceremony. All these are celebrated during the liminal period only. Ear piercing is the first marker of identity of

the child to become an Ao-Naga. The *tenungjaba* (naming) of the child takes place on the third day. The naming process initiates the first step of constructing child's personal identity. The selection of the name of the child and first utterance of that name to address the new born is exclusively done by the father. It not only confirms the identity of the child in the family but also right of the father in patriarchy as a giver of name to the child. Thus the period of liminality for Ao-Nagas is no more a period of confusion but a dais for construction and assertion of their identities and thus differs from the structural model.

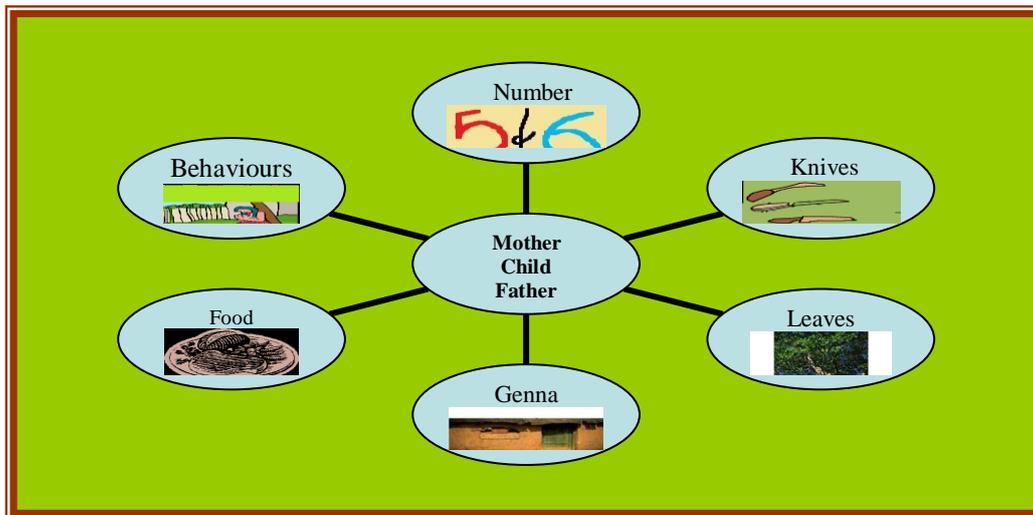
The incorporation period of the structural models covers the last two rites of the post-birth stage (26to27) in the ritual course (A). It is a very short period in the Ao-Naga childbirth ritual because the family had performed all the rituals in the liminal period that construct their new identities. Only on the last rite of the post-birth stage, the family is incorporated through a simple ritual bath and the husband offers a chicken and an egg on the next day in front of his field house.

Mary Douglas¹⁵ speaks of dirt “as matter out of place. This implies only two conditions, a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Blood can therefore be described as either “in place” or “out of place,” pure or defiled. It is also an active substance-it has an effect on the things it touches: it can be either a pollutant or a detergent. Blood is used during rituals because it cleanses, purify and sanctify.¹⁶ It also represents life force at its most basic nature. By observing the Ao-Naga childbirth rituals, blood is shed three times in order to purify the individual who is going through the ritual. Firstly when the baby is delivered one fowl is killed and the meat is cooked to feed the mother in order to recover her strength and to bless the child so that gods will not take away the child away, secondly another fowl is killed during ear-piercing and another fowl is killed and sacrifice in order to incorporate into the normal life.

(v) Symbolism

The rituals symbolically speak about the values the people attach to the self and identities of the community. Following diagram No: 2 shows the importance of symbolism during the childbirth ritual.

Diagram No. 6.2: Ritual Symbolism: Child birth



To begin with, during the child birth ritual, using of certain numerical figure has found out to be very significant and symbolic. The numerical figures namely five and six signifies the sex of the child. After delivery, bamboo knives were used to cut the umbilical cord (*tepela tezü*). Five such knives are used if a girl child is born and six knives are used to if a boy is born. Whereas tribes like *Angami* and *Rengma* do not follow such practices. Certain leaves called *asangdong/ Changpet* are hanged on the door. Five leaves symbolizes that a girl child is born and six leaves for a boy. Even this practice is followed only among the Aos. By looking at the leaves the villagers identifies the sexes and also do not visit the house knowing that the household is observing *genna*. Observance of *genna* differs for male and a female; five days for a female and six days for a male. The above explanation show how Ao-Naga sect is different from the others because other Nagas like *Angami* and *Rengma* do not have such particular days, figure and time that identifies between a male/boy and a female/girl in all the above mentioned events. For the *Angami* Naga, the *genna* that follows was the same whichever the sex of the child.¹⁷

The symbolism of food is also significant. The father touches the lips of the child with the cooked chicken's liver (*temesen*) and joins him in their family meal. Till date it is being practiced as an important ritual. The ritual touching of liver of chicken to the child symbolically represents the practice of offering the delicious and nutritious food to the young who require more care. In Ao-Naga family still youngest of the family are fed with liver of the animals they cook to eat. The women from the

community tell that the body parts of the cooked animals are shared basing on their roles and age. Certain foods are prohibited to the mother during pregnancy and after delivery to protect the child from resembling like the animals and according to Ao custom certain foods were restricted to the women folk. Only fowl was used for offering because it is the only domesticated item that every family could afford for every ritual otherwise other animals were expensive. It also symbolizes humbleness. Egg was used for offering which symbolizes rebirth.

Through the Ao-Naga childbirth ritual, the identity of the Ao is also constructed through food habits, customs, manners and practices. Unlike the *Rengma* and the *Angami* community, the Ao does not allow others to be present when the wife is giving birth, whereas one dissimilar found among the Aos is that only the father is present with his wife during delivery. For the *Rengma* tribe, only mother or mother-in-law helps with the delivery and no male were allowed inside while giving birth. They wait in the outer room.¹⁸ But for the Aos, the husband has to be present near her otherwise the delivery will be a difficult one. The husband is present because being the head of the family and husband to his wife; he has to be there to support and comfort her and to go through the pain together. The mother gives birth by standing or in a squatting position supported by her husband signifies that the father has to understand the pain and bear the burden along with his wife. It was a belief and practice that the standing or squatting position enables the mother to deliver easily.

In the contemporary times, since most of the women go to hospitals for deliveries no formal *genna* is being observed. Despite the influence of Christianity on the religious life of the Nagas, the belief and practices related to the birth like *tenungjaba* (naming), burying of *nosem* (placenta) still holds the identity of the Ao-Naga child. The patriarchal concept deeply rooted in the minds of the society makes the *tenungjaba* (naming) very significant. Till date, beliefs (superstitious) like husband killing snake or animals are not permitted when his wife is (*mashisa*) pregnant. So both wife and husband remain watchful and cautious till delivery.

(II) Puberty ritual

Like in any other human society, in traditional Ao-Naga life, puberty is an important phase to be celebrated it as a rite. Attainment of the age of puberty is the state wherein the girl/boy shifts their status and roles from childhood to youth. Ao-

Nagas visualize puberty as an indicator to get married and ability to beget children through legitimate marriage. For boys attainment of puberty indicate a state at which they can launch for the activities meant for men like war tactics, construction of house, art and craft and so forth. In this section puberty rites of girl and boy are given separately.

In Ao-Naga society, the rites of puberty among girls do not onset with the first appearance of menstrual blood but begins from the time once the girl develops her secondary sexual characters. Interestingly unlike in the other tribal societies of India¹⁹, Ao-Nagas give less or no ritual importance to the first menstrual blood as a marker of identity for puberty and often hide the matter from publicity. The celebration puberty rites of the girls differ from person to person depending upon their respective physical appearances. The puberty rites of the boys are not as elaborately as that of for girls. In Ao-Naga terminology there is no as such a specific word to denote 'puberty', but when the girl or boy attains the age of puberty the community says *jangati/lazati or asangur/aier*. It means that the boy/girl is grown up or reached an age of maturity (stage of fertility). The ritual practices with regard to puberty are not time bound as in other communities. The entire process continues till the girl or boy biologically, psychologically and culturally becomes fit to get married and beget children and establish a healthy family.

Interestingly, among the Ao-Nagas, rites of puberty are communally celebrated. The girls of the village who are more or less of same age group who appear to be reaching puberty stage are grouped and begin the communal celebration of the ritual. The Ao-Naga society validates maturity more as a cultural construct than exclusively as a biological indicator. The process in Ao-Naga puberty rite includes several aspects to delineate the transit of the girl/boy from childhood to youth. Each aspect is unique and determines the identities of the individuals in their new thresholds as well as a member of the community.

Puberty rites of girls

Among the determinants of puberty of the girls/boys (i) *Teptsü atep*, tattooing on the girl (ii) *Ku ayur*, the phase of hair growth on the head (iii) *Sobusolemtsu*, Ritual clothing (iv) *Narongto*, Piercing of earlobes (v) *Tsüki/Ariju*, girls/boys dormitory are noteworthy. These four steps complete the process of puberty ritual

(i) *Teptsü atep*, Tattooing

Tattooing is the major determinant of identity for the Ao girls for it symbolizes the beginning of the process of puberty, the stage at which they can claim for membership in their community. Tattooing rite is a long process. Basing on the tattooing ritual the rest of the puberty rites, as cited above are followed and performed accordingly. As cited above, the puberty rite of the girls doesn't begin with the starting of the menstruation. But onset of puberty is indicated through ritual act, *teptsü atep* (tattooing)²⁰ done on different parts of the body in regular intervals over a period five years, every year during the months of December and January which roughly correspond to the post-harvest²¹ period. In these times the villagers enjoy leisure to relax by engaging themselves in pro-ritual activities like tattooing the young girls and preparing them to the next phase of life. Further, the Ao-Nagas feel that since the environment during the season is so pleasant that it would heal up the wounds on the skin due to tattooing. The community thus maintains harmony with the nature to construct their cultural identities.

Each act of tattooing is followed by a period of rest i.e., freeing from other domestic activities. The entire process of tattooing has five times tattooing and five times rest. Tattooing is an important practice in the community since these marks on body of the girls denotes not only their membership in the community but distinguishes them from the 'slaves' who according to the customary law are banished from undergoing the process. The people are scared that the evil spirits and animals like tiger would kill the girls who are not protected by tattooing. The community believes that those who are not tattooed would have less chances of getting good matches. For the girls to remain unmarried brings disgrace to them in the society. Such beliefs with regard to tattooing are very much deep-rooted in their worldview. The following narrative which is widely prevalent in the community establishes how the tradition of the tattooing among the Ao-Nagas got emerged and absorbed into the mindset of the people.

Narrative 6.1: Origin of tattooing

Once there was an Ao woman, Yarla from *koridang* an Ao-Naga settlement. One day when all the villagers went to the fields Yarla tied up her younger sister and tattooed her on the leg. It took some time to heal the wound caused by the tattooing. But the tattoos were much admired by the people after the wounds were healed completely. As such, the process of tattooing became widespread and admired since those days.²²

The general age to begin the ritual of tattooing is between years of 10 to 14 depending on the physique. Every year all the girls of the same age in the village are tattooed in the same season. The girls are separated from the society and are excluded from attending any community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works during the occasion of tattooing because it is a cautious and sanctified period for those who are undergoing the rite of tattooing. Till the sores were healed she is allowed to have only rice, bamboo pickle and water. During tattooing all food prohibited to her like any animal meat were avoided. Till her wounds are healed she remains in the process period. Once a girl undergoes her first year's tattoo she is regarded as a full-fledged member of the community.

Art of tattooing

Tattooing is a specialized craft and art designed and executed by specialists from community. In Ao-Naga society, only old women who have expertise chose the profession of tattooing. It is a hereditary profession following in the female line. The expert mother trains their daughters, who in turn train their successors. In the past, it was more or less mandatory for a daughter of a tattooist to follow her mother's profession. It is because they believed that if the profession is not practiced by the successors, the art would soon disappear and make them poor and disgraceful.

Tattooing is executed in a jungle adjacent to the village. Before initiating tattooing upon a girl, a fowl has to be sacrificed to appease any evil spirit that might cause pain during the process of tattooing. Since the tattooing rite is gender specific activity for woman, the entry of men is strictly prohibited. Nagas believe that presence of men on the spot would not only increase the pain but also affects the design of the tattooing. People apprehend that the breathe (*amu*) of the men will affect the health of the girl. Even though the girls know that tattooing causes much pain and suffering, and sometimes even death. However, it was compulsory for all the girls to get tattooed on their bodies.²³

Tattooing instruments: colour

In the traditional Ao-Naga society, the colours used for tattooing were made from the juice of the bark of a tree, *Ngupti* or '*Naptti*'. The technology was primitive. The bark of the tree is rubbed back and forth against a flat stone slab with rough surface. Then the juice of the bark is collected by hand into a pot boiled on firewood.

Rice beer was added to the juice after it was half-boiled. Sharp cane thorns fixed to a wooden holder was used to apply the colour to the design on the skin. The pattern to be tattooed was marked by an old woman on the girl's skin with a piece of wood dipped in the colouring liquid. The piercing was done by gentle hammering on the implement into the skin. Root of *kamri* tree was used as a needle to pierce. After the first round of piercing is done, the colour (*Nap*) is then applied once more after the blood has been washed off.

Designs of the tattoo

Different designs of tattooing were placed on different parts of the body of the girls. The following narrative held that according to the tradition different designs to differentiate the groups in the village were created by a *Chungli* mother.

Narrative 6.2: Designs of tattoos

In past, the young girls would sleep in the *Tsiki*, dormitory at night. Girls from both rich and poor families would meet each other and they spent time singing and narrating stories. Amongst the group there were two girls. One belongs to a rich family from *Chungli* clan and the other girl from a poor family of *Mongsen* clan who was intelligent, beautiful and popular with many of the other girls. The rich girl cultivates jealousy with the poor girl and she started to dislike her. The rich girl started to make fun of the poor girl in front of the other girls. Since *Mongsen* girl is very beautiful so out of jealousy the mother of the rich girl put a criss-cross tattoo on the *Mongsen* girl and a parallel tattoo on her daughter. But after the wound on the leg of the *Mongsen* girl is healed it is much admired. From that day on the villagers started tattooing and different patterns of tattoos were applied for the two groups. The patterns of their tattoos give identity and even the boys found it helpful in distinguishing the girls they admired.²⁴

In the first year, the legs up to the calves are tattooed. It is because, the girls are not generally allowed to tattoo on their bodies before they attain puberty. In the second year, chest, chin, shoulder are tattooed. In the third year, the patterns of the calves are finished and on the fourth year, knees are tattooed. Lastly in the fifth year, the tattooing completes with wrists and stomach. The pattern varied slightly from *Mongsen* and *Chungli* group of the Ao-Naga. But generally, there are four vertical lines on the chin, a chin of lozenges from the throat to the bottom of the breast bone, inverted letter 'V' shape on the front of the shoulders and stomach, lozenges and sides squares on the wrists, lozenges on the lower part of the leg, and a sign of arrow pattern on the knee.²⁵ After the wounds of tattooing are healed and dry skin got peeled off, the grace of the designs appear. The tattoo of a *Mongsen* woman is given in the following photograph.

Photo No.6.1: Tattoo of a *Mongsen* woman



(ii) *Ku ayur*, the phase of hair growth on the head

The girls in pre-puberty stage in traditional societies do not maintain big hairs on the head. The head was frequently shaven indicating their childhood. The girls were allowed to grow hair permanently on the head till they can tuft it in a form. This process accompanies tattooing. The Naga women dress their hair in the form of a bun, *Lemlangvi/Kapok*. The girls from *Mongsen* and *Chungli* sects of Ao-Naga had different hair dressing styles. The *Mongsen* wears white in colour while the *Chungli* wears black in colour which was made of fallen hair that had been collected. The community believes that the *Mongsen* first invented the use of yarn so they use the hair bun round with string made of white thread.

The traditional Ao-Naga society emphasizes much care on hair care of girls. It is held that Ao-Naga boys adore the long shiny hair of the girls. Because the society believes that the girls with such hair would have graceful married life. The following narrative tells how the maintenance of hair by the girls determines the prosperity of their married life irrespective of their background.

Narrative 6.3: Two girls and the hair

Once upon a time in a village, there were two young girls. The first girl was from a poor family. She was very beautiful with fine personality. She was also known for her beautiful and long shiny hair in the village. The second girl belongs to a rich family. Her hair was short, not beautiful and brownish in colour. They were very good friends. But the rich girl started to hate her poor friend because she have many admires. Since their parents were cultivators they go to the field together and returned together. But as the time moves on, the rich girl used to reach the field on time while playing with her hair. She tries every style to make her hair looks beautiful but it never happen as her hair was short. When all the villagers had gone to the field, the poor girl waits for her rich friend. One day she lost her patience and sang a song to her, “I’m getting late to go to the field while playing with your hair. Those hair that suits with bun style go to the field, those doesn’t suit with bun don’t go to the field.” After singing this song she went to the field leaving her rich friend. According to the tale, the poor girl married later and led a wonderful life because of her hard work. The forefathers say that, one cannot change what is given to us even if we want to.²⁶

(iii) *Sobusolemtsu*, ritual clothing

Once the girl underwent first tattooing the next mark of her entry into youth is tying of a cloth, often dark blue or white in colour. The cloth is tied on the waist of the body covering breasts and lower pelvis. The cloth used to tie is called *tokojentsü*. Then *süpiti/teperemsü*, skirt which is wrapped around the waist is started to wear once she enters into *Tsüki*, girls' dormitory. All the clan is visibly distinguished by their varied clothes and ornaments. The dress of married and unmarried girls differs. The young girls wore bodice which is just a piece of shawl to cover her breast. Until she becomes a mother, her breasts were not exposed. As women's clothing is concern; wife and daughter were depended on the husband/father richness. Whose father/husband had done *Mithun*²⁷ sacrifice wears a different pattern on her skirt and besides clothing; they wear crystals earrings, brass rings, hornbill feathers, brass bracelets which clearly indicate that they belong to the rich and wealthy family. Poor and ordinary women were not entitled to wear such ceremonial clothes even during festivals.

(iv) *Narongto*, Piercing of upper earlobes

Piercing of holes in the upper earlobes, *narongto* and insertion of ear ornaments *Yongmen* in them is another sign that symbolizes the process of puberty rite. *Yongmen* is a brass ear ornament. It is like a thrice coiled of ring of about nearly four inches diameter and half inch thickness. The piercing is done by an old woman with a sharp pointed bamboo stick or a red-heated iron. Once the wound is healed, one end of the coiled rod is pressed in both the upper hole of the earlobe and it is turned slowly and slowly till the whole ring is put in the ear holes. These two big brass rings are tied together across the head by a bunch of black threads to keep the hair intact. It is done during the first year of tattooing. During this process, the parents strictly make the girls to observe the rules of purity and pollution like eating animal's meat, avoiding any community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works till the wounds of the ears are completely healed. Among the Ao-Nagas some clans' like *Pongen*, *Jamir* are not entitled to wear this ear ornament *Yongmen*. Hence they need not pierce the upper earlobes. It shows that the girl has attained marriageable age and is capable of bearing children. The *Yongmen* is shown in the following photograph.

Photo No: 6.2. *Yongmen* ear rings



(v) *Tsüki*, girls' dormitory

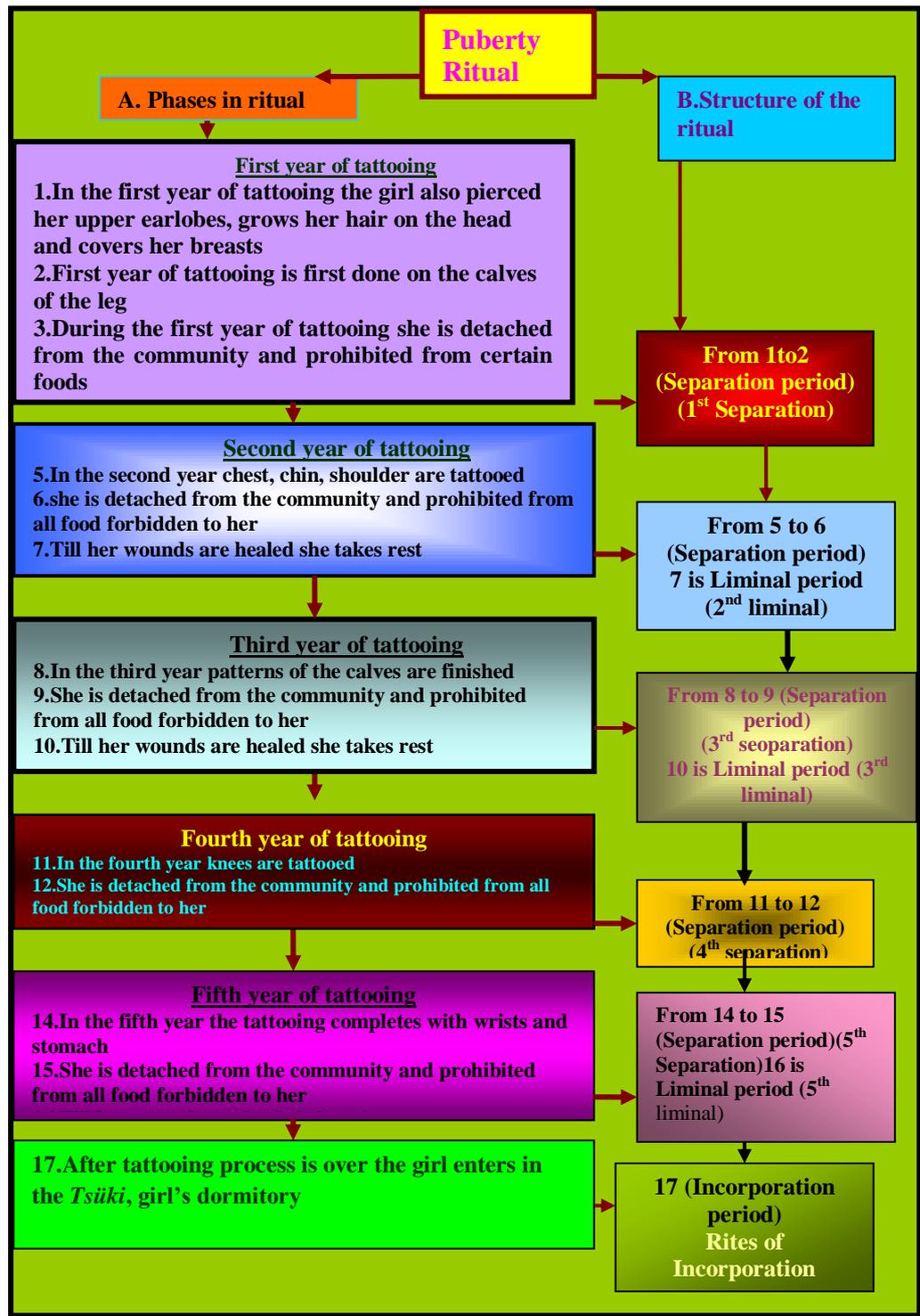
Tsüki can be defined as girls' dormitory wherein the young unmarried girls are kept under the guardianship of an old woman called *Tsükibutsüla/matron*. Usually the home of the oldest women of the clan (*Tsükibutsüla/matron*) is chosen as a residence for the five to seven young girls in the village. There were several dormitory in every location (*mepu/khel*) because every clan has their own respective *Tsüki* as the Ao practice clan exogamy.

The young girl is allowed to sleep in the corner of the house. As a neophyte, new entrant she must do minor domestic works that furnishes her the knowledge of housekeeping and management. The girl should reach the dormitory earlier than her senior members and should take care of the domestic needs like collecting of firewood, igniting up of fire, fetching of water, pounding of paddy, cooking, sweeping, feeding of pigs and chicks and finally arranging the beds. She should even visit her parent's home to attend to the needs of her younger siblings and household chores. The dormitory training furnishes the requirements that a typical Naga maiden should possess in her real life. The girls are enlightened with the norms and values of the society and the duties of the people towards the family and society, customary law etc. There are several folktales wherein the girls in the dormitory were imparted with such a knowledge system. Since the *Ariju*, boys' dormitory was organized separately on these lines there was a scope for the girls to choose their life partners in this context. The boys visit the girls' dormitory but the girls cannot visit the boys' dormitory. In the same way the young boys searching for partners respect the

Tsükibutsüla and help her in manual works because she acts as the consultant or advisor. Till the girl gets married, she remains with her inmates in the dormitory under the supervision of *Tsükibutsüla*.

Only the eligible girls are entitled to become a member of this institution, once the girl goes through all the rites that are fixed by the community. After attaining puberty, the mother request and take permission from the *Tsükibutsüla* to allow her daughter to sleep in her house. After she attains her puberty if the parents continue to let the daughter sleep at their home it was a shameful part on them so the custom made it compulsory for all the girls to sleep in the dormitory. After the request was granted, the girl's father prepares a bed (*yipten*) and sends it to the house of the *Tsükibutsüla*. The girl remains in the dormitory till she gets married. The ritual course of the Puberty rite is diagrammatically represented.

Diagram No. 6.3: Puberty ritual of the girls



Puberty rites of the boys

In Ao-Naga society the puberty rites for the boys are not as elaborate as that of the girls. For them, tattooing is not a marker of identity. Tattooing of men was closely associated with the practices of headhunting. It is a politico-religious rituals act that

proves the prowess and masculinity of males. But every headhunter was not tattooed. A headhunter who brings the head of the enemy to home was tattooed.

In due course tattooing of men on this occasion was stopped. It is because the ritual process involved in tattooing done after head hunt required stringent practices, especially with regard to food to be observed by the ritual passenger. Sometime those observances became fatal for their lives. Hence keeping in view the need of men to the society as sustainer these practices was discontinued.²⁸ The puberty rites of the boys are divided into two stages, firstly ear piercing rite and secondly rite of entering into *Ariju*. Under the *Ariju* system the boys complete the stages with three age group which the boys has to stay in each group for three years till they are promoted to the new age group.

(I) *Narangto*, piercing of upper earlobes

Just like the girls, the boys also pierced their upper earlobes (*narangto*). The ear piercing was done just before the boy enters into the *Ariju*, boy's dormitory/*Morung*. It is performed by a male, either his relative or a friend. The ear is pierced using red-hot iron. When the iron is pushed through the earlobe, the *dao* blade is kept behind the ear to avoid injury to the head. This shows that he is ready to enter into adulthood.

(ii) *Ariju*, boys' dormitory

The boy enters into the *Ariju*, which is popularly known as boys' or bachelors' dormitory. This institution was not just a simple place to sleep or for social gatherings but it was a centre for socialization and an ideal learning institution. The *Ariju* serves the needs of society such as social security, promotion of culture and training centre of master artisanship. The man called *tir* who is also a religious head takes care of the male members. The entire life of *Ariju* was based on the age group system, *züngaren*. After joining the *Ariju* the boys becomes a member and responsible citizen to perform all sorts of community work enlisted to him or as group. Each age group has to remain in the same status for three years. The membership is extended to all the male members irrespective of their status as they are entitled into its system. The puberty phase of boys begins when they attain the age of 12 to 14 years and continue up to they get married. The phase completed with three stages. The *züngaren*, age group is composed of three stages namely- (a) *Süingpur/tzüür* age group

(b) *Tenapang* age group (c) *Chuzen* age group.

(a) *Süngpur/tzüür*, first age group

Süngpur/tzüür is the first and the junior most age group in the *Ariju*. The boys enter into *Ariju* at the age of 12 to 14. He is separated from his parents partially and enter into *Ariju* to become *Süngpur/tzüür*. *Süngpur* means wood carrier and *tzüür* means water. Though the boys eat with their parents in their respective houses but they sleep, learn and work in the *Ariju*. Every boy is accompanied by his father who brings an egg and keeps it on the ground to offer it as sacrifice. On entering the dormitory he put down the egg on the ground and prays to make his son to be strong, wise and flourish in all things as he stays in the dormitory. Some families sacrifice hen, rich families a pig or even a buffalo which is then used for the feasting of the *Arijusanger* (dormitory members). The parents invite relatives and friends and treat them with food and rice beer to mark the memorable occasions. Once the boy is inducted into the *Ariju* he is regarded as a full-fledged member of the village. They serve their seniors by doing menial works like collecting firewood, fetching water, sharpening of *daos*, massaging etc. The boys do all sorts of duties assigned to them by the seniors at anytime because they are under service training for three years. Failing to do their duties and test leads to severe punishment. Three years period is a time of vigorous training in order to discipline him and to prove that he is a worthy citizen to the society. The age of entry into *Ariju* earns their social status of man. The boy wears a shawl for one whole year and on the next year he wears *langtem* (apron) to show that he is eligible for marriage. A young Ao boy was given a *dao* holder and belt to wear at the age of five or six, before he gets hold of an actual *dao*, or other clothing. When the boy reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, cover his phallus with a small-netted carrier suspended from a string round the waist. Then he is permitted to carry the *dao* in his holder. This illustrates that the *dao* was the most basic masculine symbol within Ao society, as was also the case with most other Naga groups. The following narrative shows how the dormitory helps a boy and a girl to find the right partner for their marriage.

Narrative 6.4: A tree spirit who love a girl

Once upon a time, there was a boy who was in love with a girl of *Jamir* clan. Every night the boy used to visit her in the girl's dormitory. The boy visits her only in the night. He was very handsome and even blessed with a beautiful voice to sing. Every night they spend their time singing and even slept together in the dormitory. When the morning comes he gets up early in the

morning and goes back to his place. This happens every day. The girl became inquisitive to know about his family and the place he stays. But she never gets the chance as he always goes off early in the morning when everyone is still sleeping and comes back to visit her only in the night. One day the boy requested her to make a *dao* holder cord to carry his *dao* so to attend the *Moatsii* festival (a harvest festival celebrated in the month of May). As requested she made a beautiful *dao* holder for him. Next day when the girl was on her way to fetch water, she saw the *dao* holder cord which was made by her tied to a tree. She unfastens it and took it to her dormitory. That night when the boy came to visit the girl, he asked her, "Why did you take away the cord from me, I was celebrating the festival." But the girl did not believe him so she told him, "Don't lie to me! I took it away because I saw it tied to a tree near the pond." They stopped their conversation there itself and spent their time singing. When the boy got up early in the morning, the girl secretly decided to follow him. She saw his image till the end of the village but right after crossing the village, she saw him turning into a tree (*Amtong*). She saw the tree walking down and stopped near the pond where she fetched water the previous day. When she went closer to look at the tree she found out that, it was the same tree she had encountered yesterday. Only then she came to realize that she was in love with a tree spirit. She made herself a bed from that tree. When she slept on the bed she died, because the spirit of the tree took her away because it was her lover. In the past and even in the contemporary time, *Jamir* women are not allowed to sleep or sit on anything which is made out of this tree because it is believed that they will die very soon and their life will be in danger.²⁹

(b) *Tenapang*, second age group

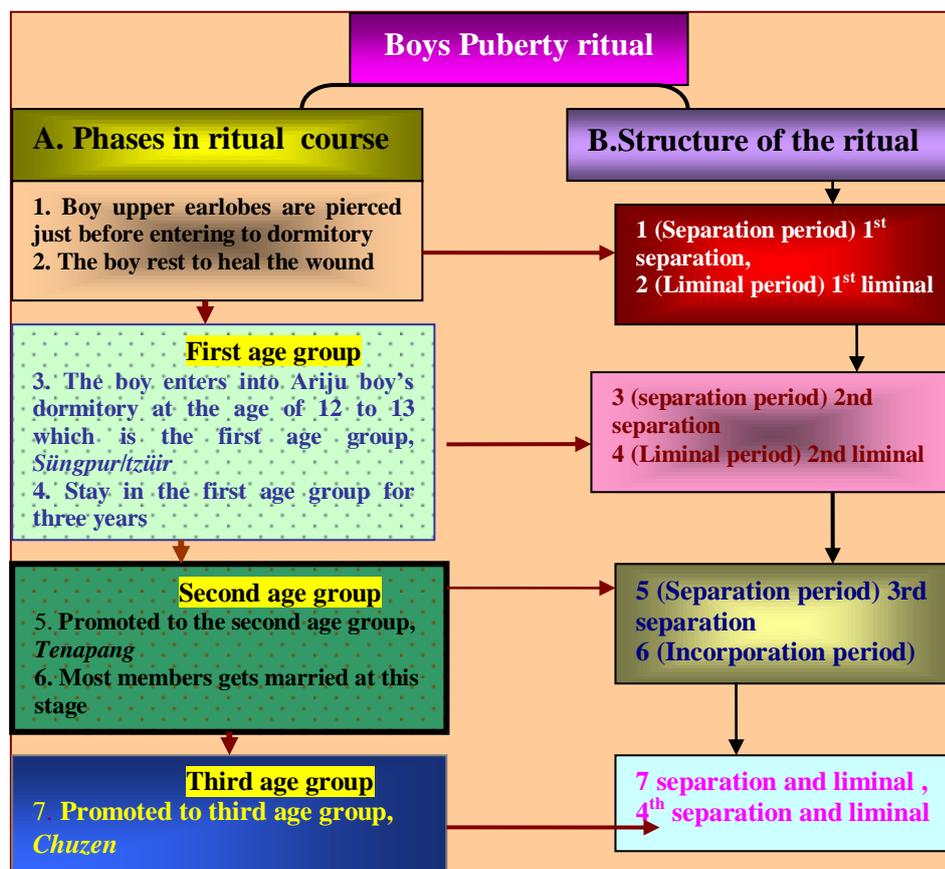
After three years of service and training as *Süngpur/tzüür*, the boys are promoted to the next age group called *Tenapang* which means blooming period. This is a period where most of the boys are ready to get married because they are entitled to marry. Most of the members marry and settle down at this period. Those who do not marry remain as *Chuzen* (the last age group) in the *Ariju*. *Tenapang* age group members do not so much menial duties like the younger age group but they abide by the rules and regulations of the *Ariju*. They continue to perform other works and duties under the supervision of *Chuzen* for upkeep and welfare of the *Ariju*. The *Tenapang* members' main duty is to teach the boys of the *Süngpur/tzüür*.

(c) *Chuzen*, third age group

The third age group is called *Chuzen*. This is the senior most group in the *Ariju*. They are considered as commanders of the *Ariju* and the most matured age group. They are the overall incharge of the activities of *Ariju*. The main duties of this group are building and repairing the *Ariju*, maintenance of the *Ariju* system and its organization, making decisions in the affairs of the *Ariju* administration and assigned duties to the respective *Zünga* (age group). They are the real bachelors of the village, almost free from all rules and disciplines but command respect and honour. The *Ariju* life retires at this age. Most of the men get married and settle independently. Any other member of outgoing *Chuzen* group who wish to remain as a member of *Ariju* remains as a member who is called *sangremer*, confirmed bachelor. But he cannot

exercise his power as his group (*Chuzen*) is already succeeded by the younger group. The members who left *Ariju* after marriage and whose sons have not yet entered *Ariju* are called *Arijusanger/arijununger*. They always contribute their service and labour for common welfare of their *Ariju*. They no longer consider themselves as *Arijusanger/arijununger* after their sons enter the *Ariju* and ceased from all contribution to the *Ariju*. From this organization they are inducted into *Putu Menden*, village government.

Diagram No. 6.4: Boys Puberty ritual



(iii) Analysis:

The puberty ritual of the Ao-Nagas is represented in the (A) Phases in ritual course and (B) Structure of the ritual. The above diagram shows different steps of transition period of the girl and the boy from child to adulthood. The boy's dormitory played an important role in bringing up great warrior among the Ao men. All the war tactics and special training and testing were given to the boys in the *Ariju*. The young men were energized by the pressure of rivalry among peers and hence they had to

prove their worth by taking heads in succession. Regarded as a prelude to marriage, each Ao young man usually hoped to take one head at least. A man who had taken a head has more advantages. For marriage, it enhances his status and adorn with war medals, a means to enhance his personality, and to avoid the scorn of others. Ao young men were supposed to be competent in the game of feuding and raiding but the 'quick one' with the ability to lead his warriors and track down enemies was celebrated in ritual, story, songs and oratory. He was the '*sushir*' or commander of the contingent. The *sushir* was selected for one battle but a good *sushir* was appointed again if he proved his worth and if he was willing to retain the title. Selection was done by the village rulers on behalf of the whole village community. The *sushir* gets sandwiched between two pressures, to lead his contingent towards success and to retain his position as commander.

The puberty stage is a very significant period where the boy and girl performs their fixed rites to construct their own self and also as a member of the community. Puberty rites of the Ao-Naga boys and girls are different. The girls' puberty rites are more elaborate than the boys. The tattooing rite of the girl is the symbol for constructing identity because it is the major rite performed for a longer period during puberty ritual. The girl pierced her upper earlobes (*narangto*), starts to grow her hair on the head, and covers her chest once the tattooing starts. The onset of the menstrual blood of the girl is not celebrated among the Ao-Naga because it is not inbuilt in the culture rather it becomes an individual thing or personal matter. In the contemporary time, the traditional practices of puberty rites are no longer observed because of the influence of Christianity. The only way to keep the identity of the puberty rite is through the narratives of the community, photographs and through the attires.

Unlike the other tribes of India³⁰, the separation and the liminality are continuous and they merged together. In puberty rites of the girls, separation and liminality occurs five times (B) Structure of the ritual. In the first year of tattooing (1to4), the girl is separated from the societal activities like community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works and abstains from all food prohibited to her. Till her wounds of the tattooing are healed she is in liminal period. Again in the second, third, fourth and fifth year of tattooing (5to 16) again separation and liminality continued. Separation alongside is followed by liminality because she is in process of entering into another stage called adulthood from childhood. The

tattooing procedure is same all these years but the girls are tattooed in different part of the body every year. Unlike the theoretical model of liminality put forward by Victor Turner, in the Ao-Naga puberty ritual the boy and the girl is not in the state of betwixt or between and neither here nor there because the boy and the girl gets his/her status/identity during the liminal period itself. Before she even enters into the puberty (adulthood) stage, the rites of *teptsü atep* (tattooing) on the first year itself made her a full-fledged member of the community and shows that she has reached the marriageable age. Even the boy obtains his identity through the piercing of earlobes before entering into the dormitory (B) Structural of the ritual , rites of separation (1). He also becomes a full-fledged member of the village once he enters into the dormitory.

Tattooing was very significant because tattooing gives one's identity in the Ao society regarding to which clan and group she belong. Tattooing was fairly common among the Naga tribes. Tattooing was the preparatory rites to enter into the puberty stage. Once the tattooing starts, the remaining puberty ritual follows one after the other. Irrespective of the fact that tattoos were used to differentiate status or for purposes of identity, it was compulsory for all Ao women and the fact that there was universal admiration among the Ao for such a practice shows that it was a rite of passage.³¹ The role of tattoos was not only part of the identity but more importantly it contributed to the self-image of the Ao-Naga women. The *Chungli* and *Mongsen* women have their own distinctive tattoo pattern which was significant for identification. It differentiates their group by their tattoo. Most importantly it helps the boys to identify the girls to which group she belong especially when the time comes to look for a partner. The *Chungli* women bear's three parallel black lines vertically on the chin, crisscross lines on the chest, on the leg below the knee but three lines horizontally at the calves. But the *Mongsen* women differ by a crisscross line at the backside of the leg. The traditional practices of tattooing are now taboo due to the influence of Christianity.

Once the girl undergoes or completes all the puberty rites she then incorporated into the *Tsüki*, girls' dormitory. She is legitimized by incorporating into the dormitory (B) Structural model (17). This signifies that she is capable for marriage. Unlike the girls, the boys enter into the *Ariju*/dormitory very early because they have the age group system (rites of incorporation (3to5)). It is a very strict affair.

The *Tsükibutsüla/matron* did not just simply permit a girl to enter the dormitory.

Among the puberty rites of the boys separation and liminality (1 to 5, 7) takes place for four times. When the ritual passenger enters into the dormitory for the first time he is in separation period. He is separated from his house, bed and parents to another. For three years he is liminal period because the passenger is in the process of entering into a new status. After three years is over he is separated again from his old status to another one i.e., from his old age group to another new age group. During this period many boys marry and leave physically the dormitory. The one who gets married is incorporated into the society (6). After that he is again separated from the dormitory but promoted to the last age group. Those remains unmarried is again separated and remains in liminal period when he is in the last age group.

(III) Marriage rite

Marriage is the third major significant rite in life cycle of the Ao-Nagas that is celebrated in pomp and glory. Marriage is a vital event that ceremonially unites the lives of male and female as husband and wife to establish a legitimate family and to produce children to continue the line of inheritance. In other words, institution of marriage is the right path to establish legal families. Marriage shifts the statuses/roles of the people involved in the rite. The girl and boy become wife and husband respectively. Their parents become in laws- father-in-law and mother-in-law. Brothers and sisters become brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. As their roles change, their relationships as well as their domains of power changes. All these kin-relational shifts demand changes and adjustments in their newly acquired role behaviours. The community considers marriage neither as an event of one day nor as an affair between bride and bridegroom. Ao-Nagas treats marriage as a sacred ceremony and a matter between the families involved in the relationship. Hence marriage rites in any society are designed in such a way that the ritual observances and the ritual behaviour prescribed to the persons involved in the process communicates the ideology of the ceremony. The ritual process-cultural practices, the dress, ornaments, make-up, material culture etc,-of the ceremony itself marks the identity of the couple in family/ clan in domestic and community at public spheres of their lives.

As discussed elsewhere in the previous chapter, the marriage should follow the endogamous (within the same sect) and exogamous (outside the clan) norms of the

clan/community. The rite of marriage in Ao-Naga society is a long drawn process. The marriage preparations construct a sense of sanctity and accountability among the parties of marriage-bride and bridegroom and their respective families -with regard to the rite. It takes minimum one-year time between engagement and marriage to complete all the rituals and initiate a new family. Meanwhile the couple and their parents get mutually familiarized with each other which give much scope for adjustment after marriage. In the contemporary times, the Ao-Naga follows certain norms after the engagement is completed. The Church before giving recommendations to the couple they make sure that the couple is baptized. Only through Baptism he/she can become a full-fledged member of the Church. The couple has to wait for 90 days to fix the wedding date which is a standing rule followed by all the Ao Churches as per the directive of Ao Baptist Christian Association.³²

In this section the marriage rites in the traditional as well as the contemporary Ao-Naga family system are studied to understand how Nagas retained their identity despite their shift from animistic to Christian religiosity through their ritual practices that form core of their identity.

(A) Traditional Ao-Naga Marriage ceremony

The traditional Ao-Naga marriage takes place in four phases. They are: (1) *Kiyimla*, *Kiyimsang*, selection of bride and groom (2) *kibongmakem mong*, engagement. These two rituals are pre-marriage rituals. (3) *Keyir Benjong*, Marriage rite and (4) *Keyir Benjong sulen*, Post-Marriage.

Phase I: *Kiyimla kiyimsang*, selection of bride and groom

The proposal and acceptance are communicated through agents such as mother, sister, relatives or friends. The communication for marriage through the agents is found in both regular and irregular but not in the prohibited marriages. Generally, for the Ao parents there are certain other factors which may have some influence in the choice of mates, like family histories of would-be brides and grooms. Families with a history of mental illness, hereditary diseases or even criminal records are often avoided. The besides the rules of exogamy and endogamy, the Ao-Nagas strictly observe spatial integrity while selecting grooms/brides. The villages which are to be articulated by matrimony should have compatibility (*melembo*) mostly political. That is, marriage should not take place between the bride and groom whose villages

are war-ridden or war-prone. Further the villages whose war-disputes (*Nokpangmentang*) were not finalized are prohibited for marriage. The villages must first have a peaceful agreement (*Jatsütep*) and *Jatangyongtang*, settlement. Marriages are not allowed between villages that once fought, and not yet under peace treaty is considered under *Nokra* (accursed of *dao*) under warfare. Any village that is attacked by *dao* (big knife) is considered as cursed. If marriage takes place between such villages it is believed that the couple would not have cordial relationships and their lives will not be prosperous. Their children may have congenital disorders and parents may become childless.

Tribal societies are nomadic in nature and it is normally a war-prone areas. In order to have a peaceful settlement of the people it is the utmost duty of the menfolk to safeguard the villages/boundaries. The men show their strength and superiority to the neighbouring villages. By showing such abilities, the attempt to attacks from the enemies ends. This peaceful settlement makes the life and marriage system more easy. Those villages which are prone to wars were usually not accepted for marriage alliances because it becomes a cursed community where disputes are not yet settled. It is believe that the relationship of the families will be destroyed and brings unhappiness.

Till date, such belief holds in the Ao-Nagas with regard to marriages in an oral narrative told by Tialemla³³ (75) from Longkhum village, it was mentioned that a boy despite the objection from the family, married to a girl whose village had *Nokpangmentang*, dispute not yet settled. Initially they had many normal children but as the time passed by she did not survive long and their children and husband started to show symptoms of lunacy. This affected in the marriage alliances from others.

Though mutual acceptance of bride and bridegroom are important, parental and community approval is also needed for a happy marriage in Ao-Naga family system. However, forced marriages among the Aos are truly rare. In any society, the acceptance of the families for marriages rests upon two aspects: rules of exogamy and endogamy and commensality, i.e, bed and food habits. These two are sources of contamination i.e., the pollution. To maintain purity of clan and families, these two aspects are taken care of even in the Ao-Naga society.

In tribal societies, sharing and distribution of food is a norm to be observed in

the families. A boy/girl is expected to take care in the family with regard to food and bed, the source of sustenance and continuity. The couple should exhaustively aware of the norms and behaviour of their respective clans to flourish successfully in a family system. The parents help the children with regard to these aspects in the selection process of life partner. The following two narratives (5 and 6) show the selection of bride and bridegroom in the Ao-Naga family. In Narrative 5, a girl was rejected by the boy. She did not accomplish the required qualities that a husband expects from his wife like housekeeping, food manners and family management. Narrative 6 shows the disapproval and rejection of a boy by the girls family in terms of table manner and inability to do the task given to him.

Narrative 6.5: A boy who choose his wife

Once upon a time, there was a young boy. He wanted to get married but found no perfect match for himself. As time pass by in search for a wife, he picked up two girls from his village. To choose the best one among the two he decided to take the girls for fishing as outing. His intention is to observe and study their character, personality, manners, whether they are lazy, hard working or cunning. He picked up a fine day and took the two girls for fishing. They caught lots of fish and cooked for themselves. During lunchtime, the first girl tells the boy, "Today I'm very excited because we caught lots of fish. We are so lucky. I'm really enjoying this fish." But the second girl with a smile tells him, "I'm not feeling hungry so let me not have food, even the fish as well." Hearing this boy says to her, "Why don't you just have the fish?" So she just touched the cooked fish lightly with her finger and put the touched finger on her tongue and told them, "Yes, it very tasty, really tasty." Actually she was trying to show that she is a light eater. Looking at her behaviour the boy assumed that something is wrong with her. After they finished with their lunch they came back to the village. The boy instead of going home straight goes to the second girl's house and peep her through the wall. To his surprise, he saw the girl having cooked yum (*manü*). Since she did not have anything the whole day, out of hungry she told her mother, "*Avi achet rok, avi achet rok*" (Mother peel out the cover, mother peel out the cover). Out of hungry she gets her mother's help to peel the cover of the yum as quick as possible. Every time the girl eats the yum, the boy puts a small stone on his shawl and collected many stones. Then the boy went back to his house.

That night, the boy took the collected stones with him and visited the girl's dormitory (*Tsüki*). He took out the stones and asked the girls in the dormitory, "Supposed this stones are cooked yum then is it possible for a human being to finish this much?" The first girl happily replied, "For me it is possible. I can even finish double the size of the collected stones. I had food again, even after we came back from fishing." But the second girl replied, "How can a person eat that much, it is not at all possible." Without waiting any longer, the boy straight away told the second girl, "Is it not you who had eaten this much yum in the evening? I was outside your house counting when you were breathlessly eating those yum." The girl felt very embarrassed. In the end the boy chose the first girl as his perfect wife.³⁴ (In another version the boy's mother tested the girls by asking them to come and collect flowers from her house. In the past, girls were very much found of flowers. The girls used different kinds of flowers to decorate themselves. The boy's mother collected some flowers knowing the fact that the girls will love to have it. She placed the flowers on the *sapang* (backside kind of balcony). Before they come she scattered the dishes and plates all over the house and also near the doors. The mother called the girls to the house and told them, "I have collected and kept some flowers on the *sapang* so if you want to decorate your ears with those flowers then go and get it from the *sapang*." Having said the word flower, the *Mongsen* girl went straight to get the flowers without noticing the dishes and the plates on the floors, but the *Chungli* girl cautiously picked up the things lying on the floor, placed them properly as she go to get the flowers. After she placed the things properly only then she went to get the flowers. Looking at the different manner and behaviour of the girls, the mother came to

know that her son's choice was perfect)³⁵

Narrative 6.6: The embarrassing boy

Once upon a time, there was a boy. He belonged to *Mongsen* clan. He was in love with a *Chungli* girl and wanted to marry her. In order to win her heart he began to visit the girl's dormitory. The society expects a boy to be hard-working and knows all types of work before he looks he get married. Keeping all these in mind the boy used to work hard to win the girl's heart. The boy used to visit the girl's house and help them in their works. One day as the boy was having food with the girl's family; the boy sits next to the girl's father. When the boy was trying to tear off the meat with his teeth, the meat slipped and went into the father's plate. The father seeing the meat on his plate asked him, "You don't want to have this meat?" because the meat went into the plate by mistake. Since he does not want to feel embarrass so, he quickly answered, "Yes, yes uncle". After they finished with their food, he went to fetch water for them. After he collected the water on the bamboo, he tied the bamboo with a rope but he didn't know that he had tied the bamboo along with the roots on the ground. He tried to pull the basket but he could not do it. At last, when he tried to pull the basket filled with water on the bamboos, the forced broke the rope attached to the root and water was dropped on the ground. Unfortunately when the bamboos drop to the ground, he too fell down, sits on the chicks, and killed some chicks which belonged to the girl's family. Considering the behaviour of the boy, the girl's father thought to himself that something is wrong with the boy. He decided not to let his daughter marry to the boy. When the boy came to her house, the father told him, "From today onward stop visiting our house and go to some other house." The father meant to say that, he is being rejected to be his son-in-law.³⁶

The above narratives show how difficult it was to seek a bride or bridegroom according to the convictions of the Ao-Naga society. As mentioned above, parental approval for selection of bride/groom is very important. Though forced marriages were rare in Ao-Naga society, the parents used to enforce the children in the name of customs. In the following narrative the parents deny the love of the couple on the pretext that the elder brother of the boy was not married. It is a custom in the traditional society that the eldest son/daughter should be given the first privilege to get married. The narrative reveals how the forced marriages not only ruin the marital life of the couple but also the families involved in such relationships.

Narrative 6.7: Improper marriage

Once upon a time there were two villages, *Changtongya* and *Akhoya*. It so happened that a boy by name *Imsükumba* from *Akhoya* village fell in love with a girl, *Songopo Longkumer* from *Changtongya* and wanted to marry her. The news of their love spread in both the villages. The boy approached his parents for consent.

But his parents told him, "Your elder brother is yet to get married, so let him get married first with your lover *Songopo*."

After hearing this from his parent's mouth he could not utter any words. He kept quite because he could not avoid his parent plea and moreover it was his eldest brother. So he and his lover sacrificed their love for the sake of his parents and his brother. *Songopo* also married to her lover's brother even though she did not love him. After marriage, the girl tried to adjust and lead normal family life with her husband but could do so. In the same way her husband could not share his life. With her broken heart the girl soon died. The family ruined. Nobody was happy.³⁷

Thus the first phase consummates into fixing of marriage basing on

acceptance of the bride and bridegroom, their parents and elders in conformity with the norms and values of the community. It leads to second phase *Kibong makem mong* which ritually fixes marriage. The concept of arranging a match is unknown to the Aos and therefore the question of a third party like marriage-broker does not arise.

Phase II: *Kibong makem mong*, engagement

It is a very important phase in marriage as it ritually binds bride and bridegroom to become husband and wife in the next phase. Once the choice of bride/groom is decided, a formal process of negotiation begins between the two parties. The male member from the boy's extended family-his maternal uncle or brother-in-law goes to the girl's house and formally asks for bride to his boy. If the girl and her party accept the boy's offer, a fish (*ango*)³⁸ caught personally by him to the bride. This ritual acceptance is known as *Nesem/lichen*. (*Ne* literally means wife and *sem* means betroth). Fish-gifting and its acceptance initiates the remaining process of marriage like fixing date, celebration etc. Marriage date was fixed during the season of *Moatsu* (April-May) spring season when the villagers have finished with seed sowing.

Next morning after the engagement is over; the boy's parent presents some quantity of grains for the marriage. The grains are brought to the house by the boy's best friends *Temba* and *Ase*. This ritual is called *Semen*. If the boy's family is rich, they give thirty basketfuls of grains (*yimchi semer*) and for poor family three to six basketfuls of grains were provided. When the boys bring the grains to the girl's house, they are served with food. Then a nice shawl (*Sii*) weaved by the girl herself was presented to the boy later on. There is no marriage price among the Aos.

After the formal engagement of the couple is over completely, for some months the boy usually helps the girl's parents in their fields and paddies, and he is accepted as a member of her family for all practical purposes. So is the case with the girl vis-à-vis her would be in-laws. Getting married and setting up a new household involve certain obligations which must be fulfilled before the marriage actually takes place.

The boy has so many responsibilities because he will be the head of the new unit. Custom demands that he must construct a new house before marriage. The site on which the new house is constructed would be a clan-site and the materials for the

new house are usually gathered with the help of his close family and other clansmen. All the posts, wall and roofing are prepared in one day, so they select a good day. This is because if the house is not constructed in one day and if some people die in the village it is believed to be bad sign. On the construction day, the boy's family provides the meals but the labour is free, as only relatives and clansmen are involved in the construction. When a new house is about to construct, a ceremony is performed by the clan priest (*patir*) for blessings and protection from all harms and dangers, sickness etc. A cock is sacrificed and the whole family will have a feast. Then when the house is being built, another sacrifice is offered by the clan priest. Only then the family move into the new house. The family gives offerings and sacrifices to the *Kini tsüngrem* (house deity). The new house for the young couple symbolizes the concept of total responsibility and independence of this new family unit in society. Henceforth, there will be one more unit in the village government from which it can incurred taxes and labour for its management. Construction of house leads to actual rite of marriage, *Keyir Benjong*.

Phase III : *Keyir Benjong*, Marriage rite

The marriage ceremony was simple in the traditional society. It was much lighter in poor family. Beer prepared from rice was shared among the invitees and relatives at the cost of the bridegroom. Marriage feasts (*Keyir Benjong*) were prepared by the bridegroom's family. The marriage ceremony was celebrated only in the evening.

Once the marriage invitation was conveyed verbally to the relatives and friends, preparation for the marriage ceremony begins. A cock was kept in the new house built by the bridegroom before the marriage rite takes place. Then one of the older female members of the bride's clan sets fire in the hearth of the new house. On the marriage date before the bridal march takes place, the bridegroom accompanied by his best friends goes to the bride's house. They wait outside the house of the bride. Then the bride serves them with rice beer and food. After they are done with eating, the bridegroom and his friends wait for the bride to get ready for the nuptial procession (*jeptsü*)³⁹. There was no specific dress for the marriage ceremony. The identity of the clan of the bride and the groom is recognized by the dress they wear. Wearing of such dress shows that the marriage between the two clans is legal and acknowledged. The attire shows the status of the rich and the poor families. The rich

attires are elaborate but the poor dresses were simple with few ornaments.⁴⁰

The formal departure of the bride begins. This procession was lead by the oldest woman of her clan (*Elangtsür*) and is followed by the groom and accompanied by few of their friends, parents, siblings, relatives and escorted to their new house. They accompany the bride by singing and dancing. Nobody was allowed to go ahead of the march. The bride friends carry a complete set of weaving tools for the bride to the new house. The procession takes place between the routes from the bride's house to the new house. After reaching the new house, the bride places her right foot first under the new house as she enters. Only then all the persons joining the march enter the house. The marriage rites were performed by a priest (*Zafu*) of the bridegroom's clan. The priest blesses the newly wedded couple and also their house. He kills the cock (*An tepong*) which was kept before the ceremony. He examines its intestines to predict the future for the new couple. After marriage ceremony was over a feast was provided to the guest present in the wedding.

After marriage ceremony was over the newly married couple's best friends organized a feast (*Sungko-Mayong*). The couple friends from the dormitory stay back. All the girls and boys were served with rice beer, meat and sticky rice and sing nuptial songs in the company of the newly married couple. In the mid night the boys and the groom leave the bride and the girls in the house. They sleep in the *Ariju*.

Phase IV: *Kiyer benjong sulen*, post-marriage

After *Kiyer benjong* is over, next morning the bride goes to her parent's house, brings food for the girls, and serves to the girls in the new house. The same morning, two elderly woman of the bride's clan are entertained with food in the bride's parent house. They then proceed to the house of the newly married couple. In front of the house they call out the evil spirit to get away from the house. After the marriage, the couple though sleeps in their new house but eat only in their respective parents' house until the harvest. Only after the harvest is over they started to cook the rice collected from the harvest and eat together. When they start cooking and eating in their house the relatives presents them earthen pots, baskets, utensils and materials for everyday use.⁴¹ This is how they start their family and have children.

Marriage ceremonies differ from one tribe to another and from village to village. Unlike the Ao-Nagas, tribe like *Angami* and *Chakhesang* performed the

marriage ceremony at the groom's father house. They construct their new house only after marriage rites are over and start their new family. The *Angami* Nagas marriage rites are performed quietly, eat, and drink in dead silence. (H.Barah; 1970: 79-81) Unlike the Ao-Naga they do not have special celebration in the night with the friends of bride and groom from the dormitory.

Contemporary Ao-Naga marriage ceremony

With the coming of Christianity the system of Ao-Naga marriage has changed extremely. The marriage has become very expensive. The marriage system follows the norms of Christian marriage principles, customary practices and part of western culture. The socially accepted marriage rite is the Christian marriage in the church. Like any tribal communities of the world, the Ao-Naga is also naturally a society-seeking race. They cannot live in isolation. So in order to get married, one cannot ignore the church and so abide by church ethic and customarily law. After the coming of Christianity, the church and the village council work together for the marriage system because only if the council gave no objection order only then, the marriage ceremony was further proceed. Sakunungla Longkumer⁴² (55 years) from *Longkhum* village gave her personal narrative about her marriage ceremony in the contemporary times.

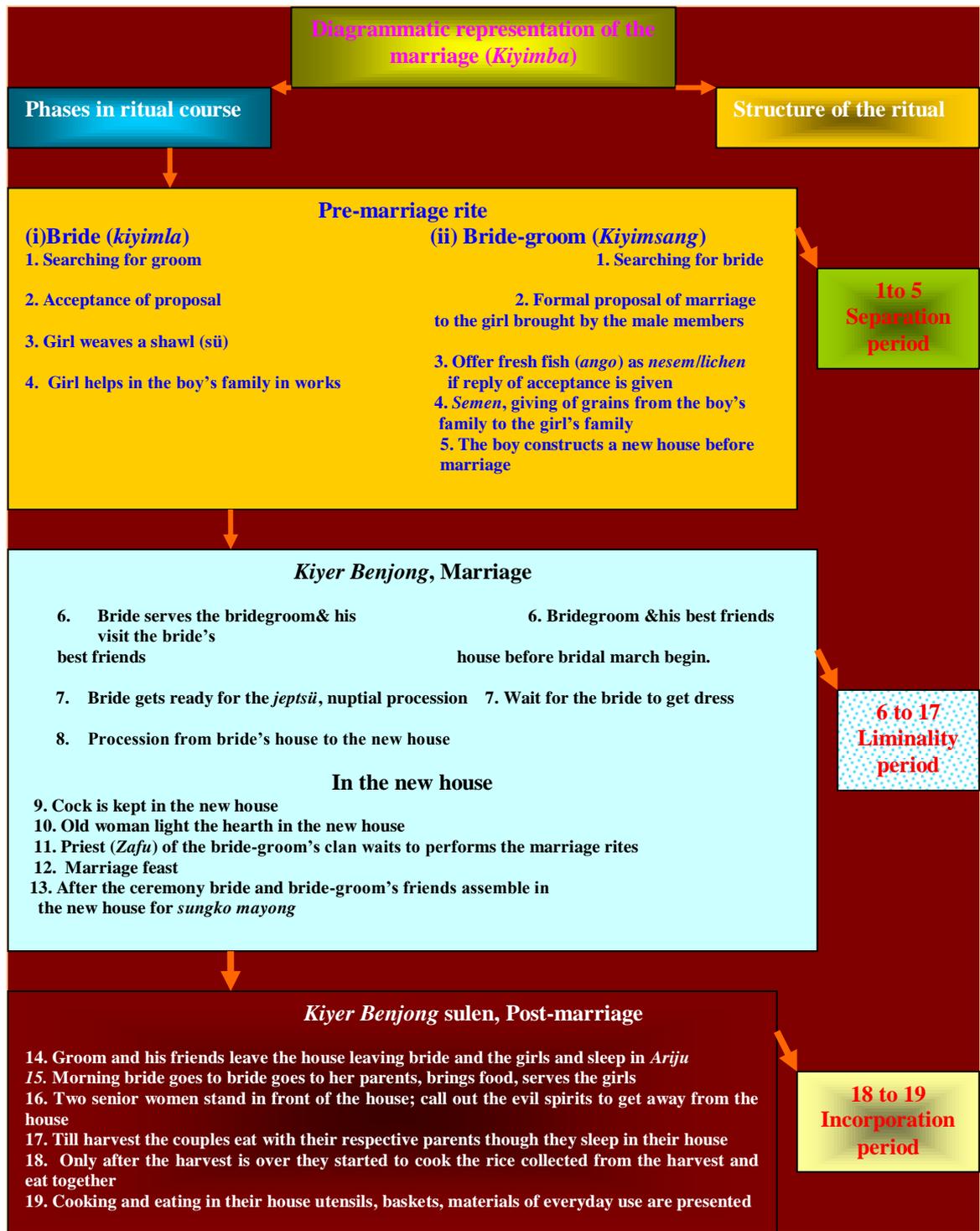
Before her marriage proposal came formally, the groom met the village elders and discussed whether the two clans were appropriate for marriage according to the norms. After the village elders gave recommendations for the marriage, the families approached the church and formal procedures like engagement and marriage ceremony were fixed. Engagement rite was done at the narrator's place i.e., girl's place. They invited the Pastor and Deacons of the church for a prayer along with the relatives from both side. Then their marriage date was fixed. The marriage feast was prepared by the Bridegrooms' side. After the marriage ceremony was done at the church, they took a procession from the church till the bridegroom's parent's house. Then wedding cake was cut and then there were wedding feast prepared for all the villagers. In the contemporary time, after the engagement is done, the church allows the marriage to be done only after 90 days. It is a strict rule to be followed by all the members of the church.

She further explained about her parent's marriage after the coming of Christianity. This marriage ceremony was a mixture of traditional as well as contemporary. When her father's marriage proposal was accepted by her mother, he gave her a packet of salt to her as a sign of acceptance. Salt was given because it was very expensive and rare to get in the hills. They go all the way to Assam to buy the salt. They travel many days to reach Assam.

She heard the story of her parent's marriage from them when they were alive. Her father and mother marriage ceremony was done only in the night. Generally, the people go to the field to work so it was impossible for a marriage to be done on the day time. Usually marriages date was fixed either on Saturday or Sunday evening. By the time her parents got married they were already Christians. The marriage ceremony was done only in the night because, whole day her father and his clans men, relatives and friends constructed the new house for the marriage nuptial to be done on that new house. After the house was constructed, then they set up the hearth. When all the works were done in the evening and all the villagers were out from the field, they called the Pastor and the Deacons of the church and prayed for the new couple. That was the end of the ceremony. There were no elaborate rituals. After the marriage ceremony was over, all their friends gathered together in the new house and celebrate the whole night.

The ritual course of the *Kiyimba* rite is represented as following diagram No: 5. In the diagram represents (A) phases in ritual course (B) Structure of the ritual. In (A), the entire process followed by the bride and the groom is divided into three stages, the pre-marriage, marriage and post marriage. In each stage a series of rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In the (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the marriage rite are analyzed and interpreted in terms of the models of rites of passage.

Diagram No. 6.5: Marriage ritual



Analysis

The ritual of the Ao-Naga marriage is a long process. The boy and the girl could get married only after they fulfill the norms prescribed to them by the family and the community. Only after the completion of such phase, the families along with

the boy and girl prepare for the ceremony. They are accepted as an independent family only after they start cooking and eating in their new house.

In the Ao-Naga marriage rite, the separation period (1to5) is very long. The separation starts on the day engagement rites starts for the bride and the groom on the pre-marriage phase. This phase is done in personal level between the two families. The boy and the girl are separated from their normal life and they no longer remain in the puberty stage. They hold more responsible and careful towards their in laws. They are careful not to spoil their character when they are in the process of changing their identity. Their service in helping in agricultural and domestic works in their in laws families shows that they are worth to be part of them.

The period of liminality in the marriage rite includes all ritual behaviour and rituals performed on the marriage stage (6to13) and also a few rituals (14to17) of post-marriage in ritual course (A). The liminal period starts on the day of the marriage and goes on till they are incorporated as a new family in the society. The girl's last rite of feeding the bridegroom and the friends at her father's house shows that she will no longer live with them but procreate with her new husband after marriage. She enters into liminal phase when she starts from her house for the bridal march. The community recognizes the bride that she is entering into a new family when the bridal march rite is observed. She is no longer under the authority of the father's house. She belonged to somebody else *i.e.*, her husband. The girl and the boy change their statuses to bride and bridegroom to newly wedded wife and husband during liminal period. Till they remain in liminal status they cannot apply their roles identities are not yet legitimated ritually. The markers of Ao-Naga identities are: last feeding of the bridegroom and his friends at her father's house, bridal march from the father's house to the new house, entering of the bride into the new house and special feast (*sungko-mayong*) for their friends from dormitory. After the marriage ceremony is over the couple eat that is cooked from the parent's house. They are legitimately declared as husband and wife but they are in still in liminal phase.

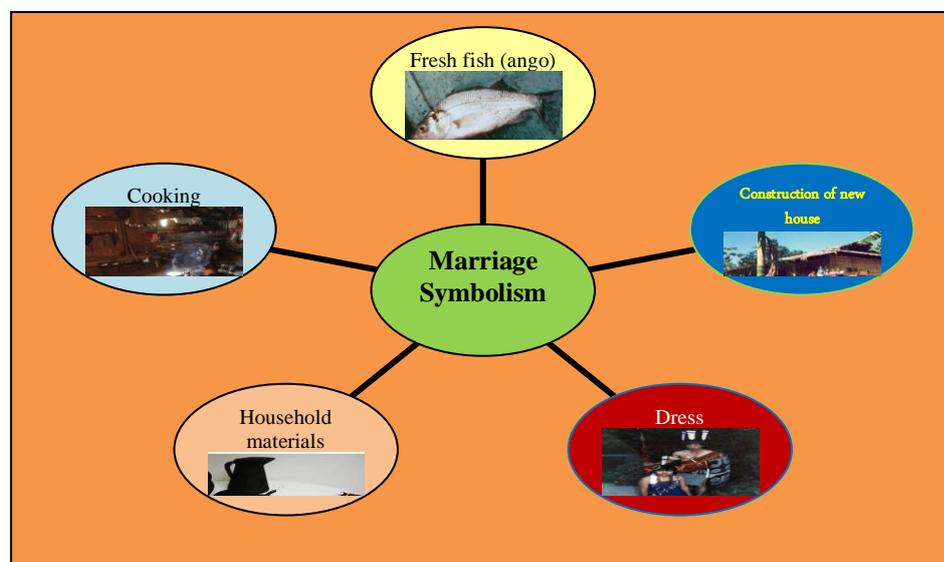
The incorporation period of the structural models covers the rite of cooking of the post-marriage stage (18to19) in the ritual course (A). It is a very short period because the family had performed all the rituals in the liminal period that construct their new identities. The first cooking in the new house shows that they are

legitimately declared as new independent family in the society. The new family is incorporated by their first cooking.

Symbolism

In the marriage ritual the use of fish, construction of new house before the marriage, wearing of ritual dress, using of different household materials and cooking are major markers of Ao-Naga identity. The following symbolisms are shown in the following diagram No: 6

Diagram No. 6.6: Marriage symbolism



In the Ao-Naga society when the boy give a fresh fish to the girl's father it symbolizes that he wants to marry his daughter. The acceptance of the fish is a sign of discussion to fix the marriage. Fish means a good new family. This fish gift is called *Nesem*, *Nesem*- the word *Ne*- is equivalent to *Ane* which means wife and the word *Sem* is participle of the verb *Semtsu* which means betroth. After the engagement is done between the two families, the boy constructs a new house before the marriage ceremony. The construction of the new house symbolizes the independent family and the marital status. It also symbolizes that the girl and the boy is ready to start a new family and procreate children. The territorial rites like house warming ceremony were integral to marriage ritual. This is because only after the house was constructed the couples were allowed to get married. There was no need for a separate celebration for house warming as ritual. In the contemporary times, the ritual process of the marriage

has changed. The practices are not observed in the way the forefathers used to do by giving offerings and sacrifice cock or pig. With the coming of Christianity, the Pastor of the church will say a prayer before constructing a house and after the house is completed, again for dedication the pastor of the church pray for the family for blessings and protections. Then as a thanksgiving they will have feast. Due to changes socio-economic conditions the people are now moving to different places for jobs and different purposes. The building of a house does not become a necessity before marriage. In fact, those who are financial sound buy ready-made house, flats and even rich parents built houses for their children. But the practice of separate family is still retains in the Ao-Naga family.

Dress plays a very important role in the Ao-Naga marriage system. During the marriage day the bride and the groom wear their own clothing. This enables the community that the show their identity. Like the other Naga tribes, in Ao Naga society there are various kinds of traditional attire, which is unique and distinct to each clan. Every man and woman of the Ao Nagas has different kinds of dresses. Since traditional times Ao Nagas have their clan identity through the attire one wears. An Ao woman gets their dress according to the richness of her grandfather, her father and husband. Their clothing shows the position of the family in the society. Attire in Ao Naga was regulated by social status, gender, age and occasion. Acculturation has made people modern in dress more than in anything else so dress is the most rapid and quick changing culture in the community. In the present time, generally the bride and the groom wear modern dress for the wedding.

The first cooking and the household materials symbolized the importance of new legitimate family. They are no longer depended on their parents. They can cook from their own pot and depend on no one. It shows that they are ready to manage and run their family by their own.

(IV) Asümong, Death rite

Like in any other culture, AOs consider the death *Asümong*, as an irreversible cessation of organismic functioning resulting into the permanent loss of personhood. It is an event that concludes earthly life of individuals and is the last occasion to be celebrated in the life cycle. Interestingly the rites that are performed on the eve of death are highly elaborate and most of its rituals are performed in public spaces like

burial grounds. Death, like birth or marriage, is universally regarded as a socially significant event, set off by ritual and supported by institutions. It is the final rite. A corpse must be looked after; the deceased must be placed in a new status; his vacated roles must be filled and his property disposed off; the solidarity of his group must be reaffirmed and his bereaved family must be comforted (Blauner 1966). Death is mostly a public event. It is also celebrated to let the death person get away from all the earthly sufferings and to rest his/her soul in peace. The family also celebrates by offering a feast with prayers on the last day of *lokomong* (mourning) to share the happiness to the relatives and friends for showing their love and concern. Death event is an expensive affair for the Ao-Nagas. It takes lots of time, energy and wealth but it is also a time to acknowledge and experience the love from the people.

Concept of death among Ao-Nagas

The Ao-Naga believes that there is a definite destiny for every body after their death and they will experience a reward or punishment depending upon on their deeds on earth. They further deem that they had an eternal soul which continues to survive even after they perish physically. The tradition holds that there is a place called *Asü Yim/Diphu Yim*, village of the dead (commonly accepted direction by the Aos to which the dead go which is underneath *Wokha* (District Hill, south-east of *Longkhum* village, an Ao village). A person's soul goes to the eternal home of the souls called *Depuli/Kodakli*. On their way to the land of dead, the person has to cross a stream called *Longritzü* (lonely river) only then he/she enters into the land of *Meyutsüing* (Lord of judgment). Before reaching the *Longritzü* River (which is believed to be a big river with transparent water), the soul of the person does not know whether he/she is dead or alive. When the dead washes the face, leg and hands it looks pale and sees holes on their palms. Thus realize that they are dead and has to cross the stream never to return. Then they cry bitterly thinking of their loved ones.

The Aos deem that the world of dead is different from that of the living beings and the spirit of the dead would wander around their near and dear. Sometimes, the souls of the dead may get transformed into insects or creatures like gross hoppers. The following narrative gives interesting information on the worldview of the Ao-nagas on the feelings of dead regarding their kith and kin and nature of the domain of death.

Narrative 6.8: The son who went to the land of dead

Once upon a time, there was a family. They had two sons. Unfortunately the mother and the father died. The sons were left alone and they used to take care of each other. Every day they work very hard in the field and go back to their home. On the next day by the time they reach the field, to their surprise, the work left by them on the previous day got finished. It continued for few days. The elder brother *Imolemba* told his younger brother, "There might be someone who is helping us so let us stay back tonight and check out to see who is helping us." That night as they were sitting quietly in the hut of the field, they saw the spirits of their mother and father working in the field. Without giving any warning, they quickly catch hold of mother and father but the father loosens his hand from his elder son and ran away. The mother felt pity for them so she took the younger son away to the land of death (*Asü yim*). When the younger son reached the land of death he did not see any people but could hear only voices. The son was in the land of death for quite sometimes. One day, his mother told him to go with the people for hunting wild boar. He took a spear along with him. When he was hunting for the wild boar, he could hear voices from top but did not see any people. He went listening and looking for the people but he only found a grasshopper (*Songkok*) so he killed the grasshopper with the spear he was holding. The moment he killed the grasshopper, he heard voices shouting, "*Akumliba-i songkok tsüngoko*." (The one who has life killed the grasshopper). Actually the son could not see any people as he was in the land of death where only spirit moves.

The mother was waiting for her son to come home. When he returned back from the hunting, his mother told him, "Son our world and your world is different so please go back to your brother. Even though I love you and don't want to let you go but we have to depart." Then she packed rice and meat for his son. She warned him, "Do not open this package till you cross *Longridong* River. Just go straight to your brother." Nevertheless he was very inquisitive to know what was inside so he opens the package before crossing the river. To his shock he found only ashes and pig's dropping. He continues with his journey. He decided to open the package one more time after crossing the River. This time he found the package filled with rice and meat. After he met his brother they shared the food together. After departing from his mother he continues to live with his brother on the earth as a normal human being.

The Ao-Naga believed in the god of death and justice (*Meyutsungba*) who judges and punishes righteous and unrighteous acts of human beings. They deem that heaven is above the sky and not underneath the earth. In their worldview, the heaven has no space to the souls that has attachment with the worldly attachments. The people are expected to leave their all belongings and renunciate their bondages if once they die. Otherwise they would be thrown from it. The following folk narrative, *Longkongla otsü* substantiates the Ao-Naga perception of life and death and also individual's contribution in determining one's own destiny, whether hell or heaven.⁴³

Beliefs associated with Death

The Ao-Nagas has numerous beliefs associated with death since time immemorial. Till date even with the coming of Christianity, the people believed that if certain unusual thing happens then there could be possibility of death in the family or with that person who comes across such strange thing or figures etc. weather, animals and birds, trees etc., symbolizes death. Given below are some of the beliefs or

superstitions associated with death which are still transmitted orally by the people, in some way believe, and practice by the people.

- The Ao-Nagas generally believe that on a bright sunny day if heavy rains pour down suddenly then people speak that an influential person will die which used to happen.
- If sun is surrounded by rainbow or big thunders and heavy wind (*mekurang*) visit the place then it is believed to be a bad sign which will bring death among the community or influential person will die.
- If a branch from a tree suddenly breaks down in front of a person when he/she is walking then it is believed that death will come to that person because the spirit of the tree is frightening him/her. According to a narrator⁴⁴, when her brother was walking down the *longlangpa* (a place in *Longkhum* village) a branch from a tree suddenly broke. He shared this with his family members as a bad sign. He died next year after this incident happened.
- Howling of owl near the house in the night also indicates danger or a sign of death not only in the family but among the relatives as well.
- If a person kills a dog or pig in the dream it is believed that terrible thing will happen that will cause death.
- If sound of *pentsü* (ashy wren warbler bird) is heard on untimely, then it is a sure sign of death happening.

Pantheon associated with death

Unlike the other tribes of India, *Meyutsüngba* (lord of the land of death or god of justice) is the pantheon associated with the death among the Ao-Nagas. He is believed to have a wife called *Ongangla* who assists him in judging man (Panger Imchen: 1993; 35). Between life and dead, *Meyutsüng* gives the ultimate judgment. He judges everyone according to his/her deeds on the earth, so no ceremonies were observed and offerings were given to him because he is the god of righteousness. He expects to live a righteous life with purity, honest, humble, and so on. The dead person after crossing *Longritzü* River (lonely river), the dead reached the house of *Meyutsüngba* and *Ongangla* his wife. *Meyutsüngba* says, "I'm in the gate between life and death, there is no other gate to the land of the dead except through my house"⁴⁵. At the entrance of the gate, there is a big tree called *Sungtidong/Asangdong* (a fern tree) standing which is called tree of righteousness. As the person enters the gate, each person carries a spear (woman carry weaver's baton) and walk down the streets of the *Meyutsüngba's* gate carrying the load of whatever they did when they were alive on earth. According to the deeds, the righteous man will find their burden

or load light while the unrighteous finds their load heavy. As the unrighteous man cross *Meyutsüngba* gate, for example, eggs will fall down if he has stolen. Likewise everything was revealed in the presence of the righteous who have gone before which was a dishonorable day for him. On the tree of righteousness every individual soul are asked to throw his spear if he is a male and if she is a female, she has to throw her weaving baton/*alem*. The righteous and the honest being undisturbed by his load able to throws his spear at the tree and hit it in the middle. After that he/she is declared righteous and the *Meyutsüngba* calls him to go through his house to the land of the dead. Whereas the thief or the crooked man would miss it due to the heavy load so he/she is declared unrighteous and *Meyutsüngba* calls him to the land of dead via the back of his house. That is how each man departs his destination according to his own deeds. This test enables *Meyutsüngba* to easily differentiate the good from the bad. The ancestors tried to live a righteous and honest life for the fear of the final judgment. In this way, children were also taught in the past to live a truthful and righteous life. According to narrator *Tsükdinungba Longkumer* the righteous and unrighteous person go to different places where righteous person will enjoy the same good life as he did on earth but the unrighteous work hard, toil to survive and come across suffering and shame in that land.

Traditional Ao-Naga death ceremony

When the death is imminent, family members are notified. When a person dies in the family, one of the family members closes the eyes of the dead and washes the face of the dead. Then clothes entitled to him/her was put over the body. Then the relatives who are related through blood relations are invited to pay farewell to the dead. This practice is called *mangma menoker*. During this time they utter words of goodbye. The *pachalar*, women members of the deceased clan get together and sing songs of honour and heroism of the dead if he was a rich man and warrior which were composed and sung during the feast of merits or on some other ceremonies organized by the deceased when he was alive. Then his ornaments and dresses are displayed before the corpse to acknowledge for his achievements. When a rich or famous man die then a dog is killed. It is believed that the dog takes the message ahead to the land of dead and informs *Meyutsüngba* as well as his relatives of his coming. The Aos believed dogs to be the nearest in creation to man's soul (Panger Imchen: 1993; 46). The dog also accompany the soul of the dead on his way to the land of dead to

frighten the spirits of animals and enemies that were killed by the deceased during his life who waits for his soul to catch and take revenge.

A bamboo was cut and one of the deceased's sons, brothers or nearest blood-relation carries it in front of the house and throws away the bamboo from his shoulder and utters, *sudang suang* (May you have a complete dead). Then an earthen pot was thrown down on the bamboo and breaks into pieces which symbolizes that life of human being is just like an earthen pot that becomes earth when death comes.

The corpse which was wrapped in clothes is then wrapped on a bamboo mat. Four stakes are stuck on the ground to support the *lep* (corpse). Before the corpse is placed on the platform the family members and relatives wave their hands over the corpse and bid farewell. They call out the name of the dead for six times for a male and five times for a female. Then a big fire was light up on a platform in the outer room of the house and the wrapped corpse is thus smoke-dried. While drying the corpse, all fats comes out from the body and foul smell spreads all over the house and the compound but the family members never complains about the smell, thinking the death person will not feel happy. When the family members passed the house or while eating, even though the terrible smell lingers around they just say, "it smell good and the food also taste good", to let the death hear it and to let him /her that they love them. Till the corpse was dried properly, then it was kept in the outer room. Early in the morning, the fats or the dirt were being removed and cleaned so that again a big fire will light up whole day. Even if flies disturb the one who cleans the dirt, the flies were not killed because if it is killed, then it was believed that the death will not feel happy. This corpse was being guarded by a family member, mostly *putir* (priest) called *leptsungsong*. They are paid for guarding the corpse.

Every day, a plate of rice was being kept near the corpse to let him/her to eat. This was done with a belief that until and unless, the corpse remains in the house, he/she was still alive so dead body was properly taken-care by the family members. This practice is called *leptsungsong*. After death, it is believed that one soul of the death person lingers near the body for six days for the male and five days in case of a female. Foods are offered to the dead. If the food gets bad in a given period of time it is believed that the dead has eaten and is happy. But if the food remains the same then a household sacrifice is held in order to plead pardon from the dead.

During this time, *genna* was observed and not a single hatred or disapproval was shown towards the death, only respect. After the dead body was dried properly, on the last day of the oldest man of the clan comes to the house of the deceased. Some cooked rice wrapped in *am* leaves and rice beer in a gourd was brought near the corpse to show the dead that the food and the drink belongs to him for the day. It was then put in a basket. The family members and relatives call out the name of the deceased for five to six times. Then the mourners were supplied with plenty of rice beer to withstand the awful odour of the corpse. Then the priest loosens the corpse from the platform by saying your site will be shifted which was then help by the male relation attending the funeral and kept in front of the house. The best shawl of the deceased was spread around the coffin and the coffin was also decorated with dresses prepared for this purpose. The male relatives carry the corpse in a procession holding burning bamboo torches with foods in a basket. Water is carried on bamboo cylinders. The women members follow till the village gate and return to the village. Then the corpse is taken to the cemetery which consists of a long line of corpse-platforms by the side of the main path near the village. The corpse is put inside the house on a raised platform four to eight feet high. It was believed that when the bamboo post roots ways, if the head falls first on the ground, the man was declared to have lived a dishonest life. This is called *Leptsü* or 'grave falling', a significant omen. The Aos believed that the falling of the death grave proved whether a person was honest or dishonest after the death.

Those people who had taken care of the corpse washes their hands with the water from the bamboo cylinders and warm their hands on the burning bamboo torches. Then they return to the house. The priest removes the post over which the corpse was kept for smoking and all the materials used during funeral. He sweeps the outer room where the corpse was smoked. The bed of the deceased was also taken out from the room. Then he washes all the things with water and dries them in the sun.

On the next day all the family members and relatives go to a village river, catch fish, prepare food and partake the food together, then wash their clothes, cleansed off their body in the village river which is *chiyolak*. Then on the next day they sweep the entire house, all the utensils and materials were washed and cleaned. Then flies were killed and they throw all the polluted materials where flies were set on.

Contemporary death ceremony

Tongpang Longkumer narrated how death ceremony is observed in the contemporary times. Despite their shift from animism to Christianity some of the traditional practices of the death rites still exist and continued. According to the narrator, if a person knows that he is going to die then his wife, children, son-laws and relatives will take care of him and stay with him for weeks. People whom he loves only feed him and can give things to eat. When he's eyes close then all the family members will say, he is dying, do not call his name or speak to him. After death, all his clothes were removed from his body and new clothes are being put on but buttons are let lose because it is believed that, on the way to the land of death, he is not felt free. Preparations were made for the funeral service. During his funeral, his wife will say the farewell words followed by relatives praising him and tell how he led his life on this earth and tell to the people what advices and encouragement he had given. Those who come to attend the funeral service gave money especially to take care of the expenses spent during the death which is a good gesture.

In the past, mourning-cum-*genna* called *lokomong* was observed for six days for a man and five days for a woman. In the contemporary times it is observed only for three/two days. Again this varies from village to village. On the last day, all the family members will divide the property; discuss whether he has left any debts to give away. The responsible to give away the debts is taken up by the sons. Material things belongs to the men is divided among the male line and with the women as well.

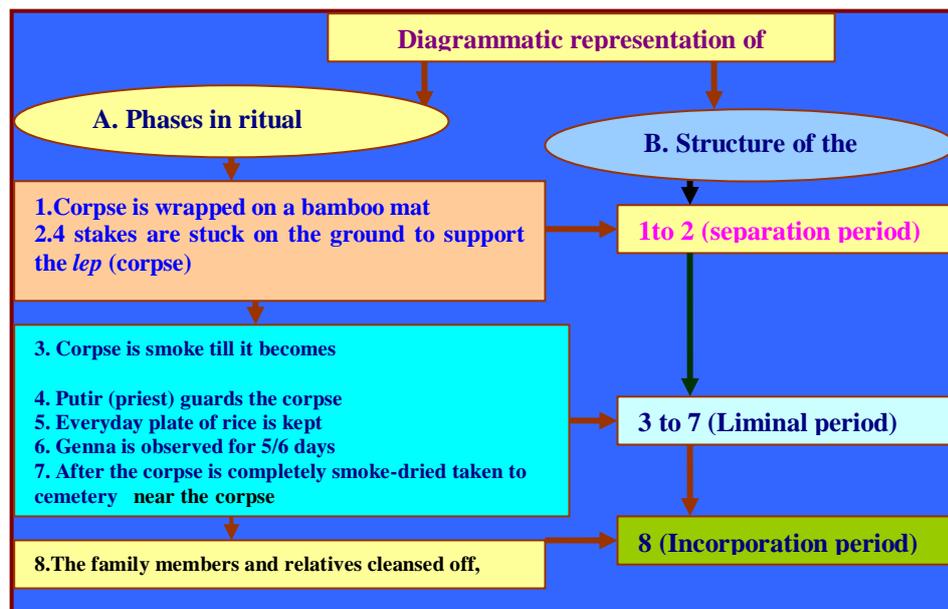
After the *lokomong* is over (*logopener*), next day the remaining family and the relatives in the village go to a river to take bath called *chiyolak*. They take bath because it is believed that, the death misses the family and this lead to short life of the children. In the river, they wash their hands, legs, body which with it took care of the death, the words spoken to the death and everything that had happen will be cleaned off while taking bath. Before they bath in the river, they first pray. After bath, they cook, have food together and come home and then pray and disperse from the house. These days taking bath in the river after mourning is considered very important.

After all these rituals are over, they begin to work in the fields. The family members put rice, curry on his plate, and offer to the dead by asking "you have this food". It is believed that, the food smells if it is accepted and if it remains the same it

means that the food was not taken. When the harvest time comes, the villagers will clean the path to the cemetery. Even if he died on the month of January, only when harvest time comes only then the way to cemetery is cleaned. This practice is called *Lechen*. On this night, *asenchang* (special rice) is cooked. Some take this cooked rice and keep it on his graveyard. It is said that, if his graveyard is not made properly then it is shown in the dream so the family members go and re-made it properly.

The ritual course of the *Asümong* rite is represented as following diagram No. In the diagram, two models; (A) phases of ritual course (B) Structure of the ritual are presented. In Indigenous model, the series of rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In the Structural model (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the death rite are analyzed and interpreted in terms of the Structure of the rites of passage.

Diagram No.6.7: Death ritual



Analysis

The death ritual among the Aos is interesting. There are eight phases in the ritual course (A) of death. As soon as the person dies, he/she is ritually *separated* from the living beings by wrapping the dead body and keeping on four pegs; the phases I and 2 in the ritual course (A) represents it. But his people believe that spirit of the dead lingers there though he is physically dead. Hence he is fed, cared and

protected by his family. It gets continued for 5/6 days the family observes genna. During this time the family members stop all normal activities like agricultural works and societal works. They make sure that they do not make the dead unhappy by showing any disrespect. This is *the liminal* period for the dead as well as the living people. The phases 3 to 7 in ritual course represent liminal period in which neither the dead is disposed nor the surviving continue their duties. Hence it is the period of Liminality. After the dead is disposed permanently and the family takes ritual bath, *chilok* (8 in the ritual course A) the process of *incorporation* gets completed. The dead is relieved from the earth and gets incorporated into the hell/heaven and the family attains normalcy.

Symbolism

In traditional as well as in contemporary death rituals some practices are still continued. Traditional practices like *lokomong* for both male and female (three and two days), bath (*chilok*) in the river after the *lokomong* and keeping of rice in the field for the death and also dividing of property is still observed and continued.

For the Aos, *Leptsü* or 'grave falling' is a significant omen. The Aos believed that after the death, the falling of the grave proved whether a person was honest or dishonest. In the past, the dead body was kept in a bamboo mat on a raised platform four to eight feet high and when the bamboo post roots ways, if the head falls first on the ground, the man was declared to have lived a dishonest life. Narrator Purtongzuk Longchar has explained the life of a person through the grave-falling in here points: i) if the platform was destroyed to pieces by storm or an animal then that person was dishonest or ii) if the corpse was opened by a tiger then it was a sign of wrong doer and, iii) if the corpse was covered by any creepers within a month's time then it was a sign of a rejected person. So it was a common phrase among the Aos, "let's see your grave-falling". Grave falling was taken as a judgment whether the person lived an honest or crooked life.

Unlike the Aos, the Rengma-Naga buried the dead body as soon as possible. The dead body is wrapped in two new shawls, digs a grave and buried in front of the relatives house (Milanda Ganguli; 1984: 95). The Nagas followed both bury and exposing the dead on platform. But most tribes bury the dead. Angami tribe buries the dead outside the village, Lotha tribe buries outside his own house, Southern Sangtem bury under his own bed . The Chang-Naga too bury the dead at home in a corner of

the living room. But the Ao tribe practice only exposure as mentioned above which shows that it is different from the other tribes. The dead is smoke-dried then laid on a platform. The corpse-platforms are invariably along the path outside the village.

Thus, the rituals reinforce and confirm the collective as well as the personal identities, respectively of the community and its members when juxtaposed amidst different cultural groups in the society. These rituals demarcate one's transition from one stage of the life to that of the other. In almost all many communities, birth, puberty, marriage and death are considered to be the major events that demarcate major stages during the lifetime. Van Gennep, Victor, Turner and Mary Douglas worked upon the life cycle ceremonies in the name of rites of passage and advocated models on ritual process of life cycle stages. However, their models can not be applicable as it is for the data on the Ao-Nagas reveal that In general, in their rites of passage, the separation and incorporation rites are simple where as the liminal period is long. Moreover, as per the Turner's theory during liminal period individuals have nothing such as no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. But for the Ao-Nagas, the liminal period is the time to ritually construct the identities of the entire family. The following chapter covers the communal rituals of Ao-Nagas to asses their identity markers.

Endnotes

¹ Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, University of Chicago Press, 1972p.3.

² Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960,p.12

³ Bird, Frederick, "The Contemporary Ritual Milieu," in *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, (ed.) Ray B. Browne, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980; 22

⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1974, 1969, Aldine Transaction 1995, pp53-92

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 95.

⁶ Victor Turner, *The forest Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca, Ny, Cornell University Press, 1967

⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: An Analysis of the concept of pollution and taboo*, London, Ark Paperbacks, 1975.

⁸ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, New York, Routledge, 1996.

⁹ According to A.W.davis, 1891, the word genna is used in two ways: it may mean practically a holiday, i.e., a man will say my village is doing genna today, by which he means that, owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occurrence as an earthquake, eclipse, or burning of a village within sight of his own, his village people are observing a holiday; genna means anything forbidden. P.514 in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the 19th century*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.

¹⁰ According to Milton Katz in the *Genna* complex, three discrete elements are apparent: the *Kenna-Penna*, the social *Genna*, and the erection of memorials. *Kenna* and *Penna* are curious and special

forms of taboo, the former a species of quarantine, the latter an obligatory holiday. Either may be pronounced for village, clan, family, or individual. When *Kenna* is observed no member from a village may depart or strangers allowed entering for trade or conversation. This is being abrogated; the household which is *Kenna* announces its situation by a branch of herbs posted outside the door, and the villagers avoid intercourse with its inmates; the individual who observes *Kenna* may speak with none. *Kenna* maybe rigorous or mild: a household maintains *Kenna* only toward members of another village, or of another clan; sometimes personal *Kennas* are directed merely to outsiders; and mutual *Kennas*, especially between husband and wife, are common. On *Penna* days no work may be done, or (for there are degrees of *Penna* as well as of *Kenna*), certain forms of work are prohibited. The duration of both *Kenna* and *Penna* varies. Village observes *kenna* accompanied by annual, monthly ceremonies which recur frequently though irregularly or occur occasionally. There are also clan *kenna*, Household and personal *Kenna* accompanying ceremonies which mark the crises in life-birth, puberty, marriage, and death, accompanying periodical ceremonies performed by household or individual, accompanying ceremonies which are demanded occasionally of a family or a person. There are also mutual *kenna* between men-women of village, clan, and between man-wife, bride-groom. Like *kenna* the village observes *penna* ceremonies at annual, monthly, at irregular recurrence and at occasional. Household and personal *Penna* is observed at crises in life, at periodical ceremonies and occasional ceremonies. Magical application of *Penna* is also performed. Memorials are employed in wood or stone to recall a village feast, or signalize the performance of a social *Genna*; and among the Angami Nagas, to commemorate a religious *Genna*, celebrated by clan or village, monolithic pillars are erected. Forked (Y-shaped) posts are used by the Sema, Rengma and Sangtem Nagas for tethering sacrificial buffalo, to recall feasts and to proclaim the performance of a social *Genna*. Round-topped, cylindrical posts are erected by the Ao Naga for tethering sacrificial buffalo as memorial of a feast and as memorial of a social *Genna*. Ao Naga (presumably for the existence of social *Genna* among them is suggested by the phrase: "it [the harvest *Genna*] is the time chosen by some rich men for giving their feasts to the village). Neither Y-posts nor round-topped posts ever serve as memorials to the dead. Miniature hut over grave were practice by the Sema and the Ao Nagas. Likewise there are many memorial post were erected. An excellent description of a typical *Genna* complex may be found in the book by J. H. Hutton, *Angami Nagas*, London, Direction of the Assam Administration Macmillan and co., limited, 1921 pp. 189-242.

¹¹ Victor Turner, *op.cit.*, 1969, p.94

¹² J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, 1926, p.263

¹³ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Cornell University Press, 1967, p.95

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.98

¹⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*, London, Ark Paperbacks, 1975, p. 50

¹⁶ To cite an example, in African society life is closely associated with blood. For instance, when blood is shed in making a sacrifice it means that human or animal life is being given back to God who is in fact the ultimate source of life. Indeed, blood is used to cleanse society and individuals and to propitiate or pacify the spiritual powers. It is used to establish links with the spirit world. The circumcision blood is like making a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and his people. Until the individual has gone through the operation, he is an outsider. Once he has shed his blood he joins the stream of his people, he becomes truly one with them. (<http://www.mamiwata.com/women>). 25th October, 2011.

¹⁷ J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, London, Direction of the Assam Administration Macmillan and co., limited, 1921, p. 214

¹⁸ J.P.Mills, *op.cit.*, 1926, p. 200

¹⁹ Gonds and Todas tribal girl undergo rites during her onset of menstrual cycle. See K.S.Singh, B.V.Bhanu, *People of India: Maharashtra Part 1*, Popular Prakashan, 2004, p.687, and Life Cycle rituals: http://ietd.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/814/12/12_chapter%205.pdf. Excerpt 27/03/2011

²⁰ Sangtem Naga girls are tattooed on the arms, calf, forehead and chin but the boy were not tattooed (Milada Ganguli, *A Pilgrimage to the Nagas*, New Delhi, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1984, pic.22) The Phoms tattoo their women only on the legs, but an Ao woman could be tattooed anywhere from face downward to the legs.

²¹ The people were active in art and craft works like basket making, weaving etc for them to use for the next year.

²² Information gathered from Mepolila Imchen, (F), 73 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.12.2007

- ²³ W.C Smith, *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2002(Reprinted), p.22
- ²⁴ Information gathered from Longrichila Longchar (F), 78 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.12. 2007
- ²⁵ J.P.Mills, *op.cit.*, 1926p. 30
- ²⁶ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ²⁷ The Mithun (Bos Frontails) exist both in wild and semi-domesticated form. This animal has religious significance and intimate relation with socio-cultural life of the people.
- ²⁸ Other tribes like *Chang*, *Khiamiungan* and *Konyak* tribes practiced tattooing. See Nagaland revisited-From Tuensang to Peren;
http://www.pbase.com/neuenhofer/nagaland_revisited_peren_tuensang. India: Land of eternal Ink,
http://www.vanishingtattoo.com/india_tattoo_history_4.htmExcerpt 27/03/2011
- ²⁹ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ³⁰ Among the Kolams tribe, the girl/boy who go through the puberty rituals are considered as adults during incorporation period. See K.Mohan Rao, *The Kolams a primitive tribe in Transition*, Hyderabad, Booklinks Corporation. 1990, Pp. 119-128.
- ³¹ Gertrude M.Godden, "Naga and Other Frontier Tribes of North-East India", *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 26 (1897), pp. 161-201.
- ³² N.Talitemjen Jamir, A.Lanunungsang; *Naga Society and Culture- A case study of the Ao Naga Society and cultures*, Nagaland, Nagaland University Tribal Research Centre, Department of Sociology, 2005, p. 210
- ³³ The identity of the narrator is changed because the incident is a personal one.
- ³⁴ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, Interviewed on 18.12. 2007
- ³⁵ Information gathered from Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Information gathered from Marla Longkumer (F), 89 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.12. 2007 narrated that she was given fish and salt from the boy's side. Then the boy's parent gave three basketfuls of grains for the marriage.
- ³⁹ Marla Longkumer narrated her personal experiences that the marriage procession was in the night where the children, women, aunties from her own clan and her friends were decorated with flowers and they were making sounds and beautifully made a long queue. When the procession was over she and her husband sit together. The oldest person from the boy's clan brought a hen and fans them by using the feathers on the cock and says a prayer, "protect them from all evils, bless this house, bless their family, protect from sickness, bless in their field." The cock was taken away by the boys. They cook and used to enjoy the curry. She further says that their marriage ceremony was so wonderful and enjoyable but these days marriage system has no meaning. 89 years old, Longkhum village, Interviewed on 18.12. 2007
- ⁴⁰ For example, the *Pongen* women wear *yongmen* (brass earrings), *tongpang* (crystal earrings), *aziik* (cornelian beads) and they wear a '*teniik supeti*' (skirt) where the design looks like a cucumber seed or eyes shape. The colour of the *teniik supeti* is red and blue.
- ⁴¹ Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, Interviewed on 18.12. 2007
- ⁴² Information gathered from Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.06.2008
- ⁴³ See chapter III, Narrative 6: The story of *Longkongla* in the present thesis.
- ⁴⁴ See above reference number 39
- ⁴⁵ Panger Imchen, *op.cit.*, 1993,p. 47

Chapter VII

COMMUNAL RITES AS MARKERS OF IDENTITY

Every culture sustains on some or the other rituals that require communal participation not only to socialize its members, but also to bind them with their community to which they belong. Whereas the life cycle rituals construct the gender identity of men and women in different social contexts during the course of their personal lives and make them fit to be the successful members of their respective cultural communities in which they were born and brought up; the communal rites through participation in the respective community rituals enable its participants to develop in them the group solidarity and consciousness. The tribal societies demand communal living to sustain their mundane lives on one hand and on the other, their identities both as a person and as a member of their commune. The communal consciousness and identity emerges out of their respective religion and belief system. Religion through its spiritual ideology and ritual performances gives an identity to its followers, be the lay people or the power groups in the society. The ruling powers, the tribal heads/councils empower their political statuses by enacting as 'ritual heads' of the religious performances and also undergoing/celebrating political rituals like anointment as 'tribal head' or 'village council'. These political rituals are always performed in conformity with customs, traditions and belief system of their respective societies. Thus society, religion and state form a matrix in the communal ritual life of the people in Ao-Naga society.

In this chapter the rituals that demand communal participation are categorically studied as (i) socio-religious like *Lijabamong* (creator of earth ceremony), *Tsungrem Mong* (god ceremony) and *Watsü Merok* (cleansing of the village) (ii) Political rituals like *Putu Menden*. The ritual are analysed and interpreted to show how the Ao-Naga society reflects its core traits - animistic beliefs, religious pantheon, and ritual practices, tribal agrarian and political life - in the ritual process, behaviour and material culture of the communal rites.

Society forms the base of political formations and the political structure in turn reiterates and reinforces socio-economic and cultural norms of people. These two aspects of the Ao-Naga social life are not independent isolates but are holistically articulated in every aspect of their mundane activities. Though Colonial rulers gave the robes of Christianity to almost all the Nagas as a religious stratagem to attain political integration, the core traits, that endure the Naga uniqueness and identity still peeps into their worldview. Nagas in general and the Ao-Nagas in particular till date retain their traditional beliefs and practices, atleast symbolically and represent them in the ritual events celebrated in their familial and communal domains. Thus they preserve the symbols of their identity to endure their cultural continuities and thus establish past-present-future continuum of their societal values and norms.

The Ao-Naga community celebrates a hoard of rituals such as harvesting (*aluro*), pulling of log drum (*Süngkong*), construction of *Arju* (*Morung*), coronation of new village council (*Putu Menden*), feast of merit (*Kikha süchi*) and so forth. Over the years several major and minor ceremonies are being observed as per the demand of the people and society. These are public ritual performances conducted to negotiate the spirits of nature for protecting the society from calamities. Certain rituals like *mosü mong*/drought ceremony, *wara lepdang*/prevention of disease and earthquake, *Anü sangwa mong*/ceremony for daylight, *tsüingsang mepong mong*/ceremony for good atmosphere and *sung naro mong*/cleansing of environment necessitates the involvement of whole village where as some rituals like *kitsükirong mong*/fire incident, *menen mong*/sanctification require the participation of individual families. It depends upon the nature of calamity the individuals and the society undergo. The AOs believe that such calamities occur due to disorderliness in ritual performances and irregular observance of ceremonies that prescribed to the people and community. The Ao-Nagas, after they got converted into Christianity though they did not observe 'typical Ao-Naga rituals' the ideology behind performance of ritual observances still endures in their mindset. For example, ethnically Nagas celebrate each event as a ritual accompanied by feast and drink. Though Christianity condemns intoxicant drinks like rice beer, Nagas offer it to the invitees to celebrate the event. Rice beer is not only a staple beverage but also a marker of their community gatherings. Even now Ao-Nagas spread salt around the houses and put water bowl beneath the cots or doors to ward off evil spirits that disturb the minds of the dwellers. The core belief of

the community sustains the people even in the changing socio-cultural and politico religious dimensions.

Though Ao-Nagas celebrate several community rituals, in this section a few of them that focus upon their identity formations are studied.

(i) **Socio-Religious rituals**

Society and religion are two essential aspects of any community that form an intricate network to articulate the people with one another and also with the society and polity on the other. Rituals are the media through which such network operates successfully. Social rituals shape the cultures that can create a sense of group identity and further develop social bonds. The rituals give an opportunity to the people and communities to express, reinforce and to spread the shared values and beliefs in their respective societies. Through out the whole year the Ao-Nagas remain busy in celebrating one or the other ritual to regulate their social roles and behaviour. It is because the Ao-Nagas belief system manifested in their ritual ideology and practices which were rooted in their environment and worldview form the undercurrents of their life style patterns.

Ao-Naga religion and ritual observances

Like any other tribal societies of India, the Nagas who consider themselves as part and parcel of the nature are animistic¹ in their religious behaviour. A brief picture of Ao-Naga religion is given in the Chapter II, *An Overview of Ao-Naga Cultural Life*. The Aos deify the elements of nature and worship them to realize their wishes. They are also polytheistic² and venerate several benevolent and malevolent gods and spirits, in different names for different purposes. They believe that their lives are regulated by earth, heaven and spirits. They opine that the earth takes care of sustenance, the heaven takes care for life and death and the spirits takes the responsibility of controlling every phenomenon in nature. Nagas believe in supernatural powers. In their worldview these powers exist behind high mountains, in flooded rivers, big trees, stones and in epidemics that threat the populace. The traditional Nagas conduct animal sacrifices by offering, cows, pig, chicken, birds, and items like food, drink, clothes, etc, to appease their pantheon. The Nagas strongly believe in the existence of

a Supreme Being, a benevolent god that creates everything for the good and welfare of the humankind in the universe.

Hence religion is inseparably articulated with the socio-cultural life of the Ao-Nagas. According to Panger Imchen, “*An Ao cannot conceive of a world apart from religion. The whole universe is sacred and filled with gods...Religion possesses ideas and values that are the guiding principles of one’s behaviour.*”³ The religious beliefs and practices of the Ao-Nagas are well-established and organized. The Ao respect and fear their gods (*tsungrem*) and seek blessings, protection, security and well-being. They also believe that the causes of troubles and suffering which befall in a person’s life or family and the inhabitation are attributed to the action of the evil spirits. So they perform a system of ceremonies by offering sacrifices to keep these deities and spirits in good humour. Mill describes the Ao-Naga’s religion as “not a moral code...[but]... a system of ceremonies... [to appease]... the deities around him who... are every ready to blight his crops and bring illness upon him and his family”⁴.

The domain of religion is highly pervasive as it represents not only the cultural beliefs and practices including moral codes, rituals and spiritual ideologies but also mythology that speaks about the creation, nature and purpose of the universe and the role of a god, gods or other superhuman agencies therein. Further, the origination of the user communities of the particular religious ideologies is linked with their respective pantheon. In other words, the devotees are being linked with gods through ritual observances and practices prescribed in the belief system. Thus the religion establishes an identity with its followers and vice versa. As mentioned above, the polytheistic dimension of Ao-naga religion gets expression in the functioning of gods and spirits in hierarchical order. The following three tables respectively represent (i) major pantheon (ii) *Tsungrems*, the gods associated with the nature and environments of the Aos (minor pantheon) and (iii) sprits and souls in Ao Nagas belief system. (These tables are prepared basing on the information gathered from folk narratives, personal narratives and exegesis collected in the field work).

Table No. 7.1: The Major Ao-Naga Pantheon

S.no	Name of the god	Descriptions	Mode of worship	Portfolio	Context
1.	<i>Lijaba</i> , Creator of the earth.	He stays beneath the earth. He holds the earth between his two hands. He is aware of all happenings and events on earth.	A major ceremony is observed yearly to offer sacrifices and prayers (see <i>Lijabamong</i> ritual in the following pages)	He is causes natural calamities if the people do not perform the rituals that are prescribed to them. He blesses ⁵ on one hand and Curses/punishes basing on the good and bad deeds of the people.	A special day is observed for him in prayer for protection from natural calamities. People observe ‘thank giving’ ceremony (<i>Tsungrem mong</i>) before the onset of harvest time. The ritual blesses the field after the seeds are sown.
2.	<i>Longtitsungba</i> Lord of Heaven.	He is also called, <i>Aningsungba</i> , <i>Aning</i> – heaven, <i>tsungba</i> - Chief or Lord.	Sacrificial ceremonies are performed almost every day by one or the other in their respective agricultural fields to obtain plenty of rains. (Domesticated animals like cocks, pigs, eggs, etc, are offered)	The god holds power over the heavenly bodies like the sun, moon and other celestial forces like the rains, storms, lightening, thunder, winds.	People observe <i>genna</i> during the times of drought to have a good harvest.
3.	<i>Tiar/Tiaba</i> , pre-destiner.	He predicts man’s earthly fortune. He casts spirits of various kinds; some people are not given any spirit so they remain dumb and dull.	There is no fixed ritual but right from birth people offer prayers and sacrifices.	He is both giver and taker of life and futures of the people. .	People offer cocks, eggs, pigs etc, to ward of sickness or ill fortunes and gain prosperity.
4.	<i>Meyutsung</i> , Lord of death	He is the god of truth and justice. He judges the deeds of the people when they are alive on earth and punish them accordingly after they die. <i>Ongangla</i> his wife assists him to judge people. He remains as silent spectator	No ceremonies and offerings are given to him because he is the god of righteousness. He has no mercy.	At the gate of <i>Meyutsung</i> every sin are revealed and disclosed for shame and punishment. He judge right and wrong so he does not know forgiveness.	He gives judgement when meets people on face to face at his place.

Table No.7.2: *Tsungrem*s, the gods associated with the nature and environments of the Aos.

S.No	Name of the deities, spirits/souls	Descriptions	Mode of worship	Portfolio
1.	<i>Tekong Tsungrem</i> , mountain deity; <i>Tzuba Tsungrem</i> , well/ spring deity; <i>Along Tsungrem</i> , stone deity	It is believed that these deities positively influence their devotees if properly venerate them.	People offer meat or food items. Devotees are supposed to make mistakes which otherwise is considered as a bad omen.	These <i>Tsungrem</i> s spirits breaks havoc upon the people through their powers if they are not invoked for their blessings and benevolence.
2.	<i>Yongpang Tsungrem</i> , spring deity; <i>Tzutsung Tsungrem</i> , Deity of lake; <i>Tzuta Tsungrem</i> , Stagnant and lowland deity; <i>Mosakni Tsungrem</i> , deity of indigo; <i>Thini Tsungrem</i> , deity of the uncommon jungle and certain trees.	They are believed to reside in Bamboo groves. <i>Tsungrem</i> s afflict the physical body with ailments and wounds.	The illness and suffering happens if the people are captured by the devil deities. During the times of illness, the offerings and sacrifices are being conducted.	These are the lesser in the hierarchy of spirits and deities. They are meant to cause illness and mischievous activities to man.
3.	<i>Atsu Tsungrem</i> , water deity	<i>Ahlachetla</i> is the water deity and believe to be the most dreadful deity. This deity lives in the river, lake, stagnant places.	The villagers observed a one day ceremony to offer sacrifices to the deity and as well clean the common village pond.	Patient attacked by this deity does not survive.
4.	<i>Kini Tsungrem</i> , house site deity	There is no specific description of this deity.	This god is propitiated before putting the first spade on the earth while digging foundation for building a new house to seek (i) protection from evil spirits elements and (ii) getting blessings and benevolence from gods.	The clan <i>patir</i> , priest perform the ritual by sacrificing a cock and the whole family have a feast.

Aos also believe that the spirits, ghosts and angels could influence their lives ambivalently showering positive and negative affects upon them. A human being is believed to have personal spirit (*Tiyar*) and a soul (*Tanela/ Temhila*). It is further deemed that a man has three spirits and three souls; whereas a woman has two spirits and three souls. The soul is the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal, regarded as immortal.⁶ Whereas the spirit is the nonphysical part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character (the soul). The animist believe that all living

and non-living beings possess souls. In other words, spirits are souls that have passed out of their human body, but for some reason have not left this “illusion” and completed their journey back to the supernatural reality.⁷ The space given in Ao-Naga worldview to the spirits and the souls of the human life gets expressed still in their death ritual practices like offering food to the dead in the cemetery or near the death bed (after the death). The following table shows the role played by the spirits and souls in a human being.

Table No.7. 3: Sprits and souls in Ao Nagas belief system

S.no	Role of the spirits	Role of the souls
1.	<p>a. <u>For a man</u>, the three <i>tiyar</i> respectively brings him (i) happiness and good health; (ii) children and prosperity; and (iii) protection. The first two remain at home and the third, the protector follows wherever he goes.</p> <p>b. <u>For woman</u>, one <i>tiyar</i> blesses her with a husband and children, while the other protects her from illness and unseen dangers.</p>	<p>It is believed that every person has three souls, <i>Tanela/ Temhila</i>. One soul is in a person’s eyes. When the person dies, this soul gets released from the body and passes to the land of the dead, i.e. the abode of <i>Meyutsungba</i>. The second soul lives in the form of tiger, wild cat, locust or rat which on the death either dies or escapes death or lives elsewhere. The third soul is a hawk. On the death it flies to the land between the dead and the remaining family members.</p>

Traditional Ao-Nagas venerate *Lijaba* (*Li* means land, *jaba* means real) the supreme god (creator of earth). They regard him as the creator and sustainer of the earth/world and with everything ‘embedded in’⁸. The community affirms that the earth is the source of life and hence is sacred. They consider the earth as the provider of space, food and other basic resources that meet the needs of people. Symbolically, like any tribal communities, the Ao-Nagas understand the earth to be the spouse of the Supreme Being. The Nagas view the earth and the Supreme Being is inseparable entities. So their belief system and ritual patterns are constructed to appease them in different cultural contexts.

The following myth associates *Lijaba* with the creation of world in the view of Ao-Nagas

Narrative 7.1: Lijaba and his creation

Lijaba is the creator of the earth and the supreme god. He created the earth very beautiful, smooth and plain. When he was still in the process of creating the earth, out of nowhere a water cockroach (*tsü leplo*) scared him by giving false alarm, “Enemies are coming, enemies are coming to destroy the earth with dao and spear.” Then the water cockroach disappeared. *Lijaba* thought that the enemies are really coming. Out of hurry he roughly created

the rest of the Ao land. For this reason, the Aos believe that the land of the Ao is full of mountains and hills and does not have many beautiful plains, valleys and river like the Assam region. The land of Assam looks plain and the place where Nagas lives looks hilly in nature.⁹

This short myth is still remembered and retold by many people from the community. From the narration, Aos concludes that from the very beginning of the creation there was an evil force whose main intention was to distract and bring confusion.¹⁰ R.C.Tocy Ao¹¹ interprets the myth: “The water cockroach is not a cockroach but an enemy of *Lijaba*. The forefathers named his enemy as cockroach. *Lijaba* was frightened by the cockroach because of the notion that he might rule all the earth. The enemy was there from the beginning before the earth was created. The enemy might be the Assam people because different story tells about the war between Nagas and the Assam people”.

Ritual process of *Lijabamong*

The traditional Aos celebrate the *Lijabamong*, in commemoration of the creator, *Lijaba* and the myth is still being remembered as a metaphor till date. Ao’s consider *Lijaba* as giver of good crops, regulator of the rain and sunlight and responsible for occurrence of natural calamities. The following myth perpetuates *Lijaba* as the provider of sustenance in the worldview of Aos.

Narrative 7.2: *Lijaba* and the two girls

One day *Lijaba*, the creator of earth decided to travel to different parts of the earth. After travelling for many days, one evening he reached a village. *Lijaba* went door to door asking for shelter for the night but all the family in the village refused to welcome him. Everyone has different excuses. Eventually he saw a small house at the end of the village so he decided to go there. He found out that two sisters were staying in the house. When he asked for shelter they welcomed him happily though they were very poor. The girls told him, “*We have nothing at home so we are not cooking anything.*” But *Lijaba* told them, “*Place the pot in the hearth and warm the water.*” The girls obediently did what they were asked to do. Then he started to scratch his knee. From his knee, a grain of rice came out so he put it on the pot. To their surprised the rice filled the pot. Again he told them to boil water. This time when he scratches his forehead, a piece of meat came out so they cooked the meat. The meat fills the pot. They had a hearty meal that evening. After dinner, three of them went and stood outside the house. *Lijaba* asked them, “*Whose field is that?*” “*They belonged to the family who insulted us*” was their reply. Then he started to curse that field, “*Let their field never prosper, let their field harvest only tusk.*” All the fields were cursed by *Lijaba* because all the villagers insulted the two sisters. Finally he asked them, “*Where is your field.*” But the sisters were so ashamed to tell him because it was just a tiny patch of a rice-field. Finally he asked the two sisters, “*Whose field is that, that small field in the corner.*” They were feeling shy to say but replied to *Lijaba*, “*It belongs to us.*” Then *Lijaba* blessed their field by saying, “*Let that field be harvested non-stop.*”¹²

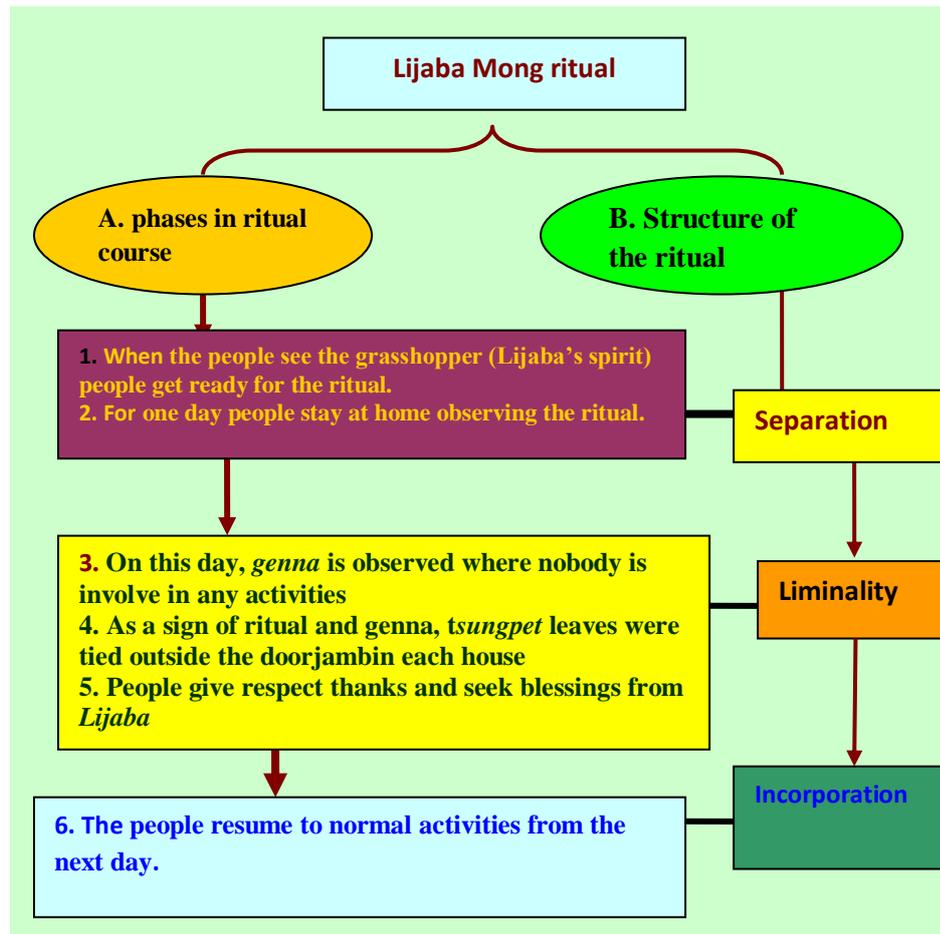
In order to balance the nature from disequilibrium people observe it as a major ceremony (*among*) *Lijabamong*. The ritual rests on the belief that Lijaba sends his spirit, *tanula* in the month of May and June in guise of *sungkok* (grasshopper) to receive thanks giving from the people in return of his blessings poured upon them. On this occasion nobody is allowed to engage in any other activity than this. It is a day of *genna*. It is an auspicious occasion. Hence the leaves of *Tsungpet* are tied outside onto the doorjamb of each house. It is a ‘one day’ thanks-giving ritual to *Lijaba* who showers prosperity upon those who worshiped him. The spirit of Lijaba lives on the earth only for a week and later vanishes. Whoever sees the grasshopper in the field informs to the village chief or the chief priest. The chief priest would perform the ceremony by killing one rooster (*An tepong*) in the village gate (*sungkum*) as a token of thanks giving to Lijaba for sending his spirit to the village which makes the village and villagers affluent. From the next day onwards the village resume its normalcy. The feel of bliss that the villagers get by performing the ritual makes them to rejuvenate their vigour and rigour attend their life core. The following narrative explains the myth behind the celebration of Lijabamong and also mode of worship to be done in this context.

Narrative 7.3: Lijaba’s spirit

In olden days, the people worshipped *Lijaba* as the creator of earth. But nobody saw him. The *arasentsür* (witchdoctor or magician) was the only mediator between the people and Lijaba. One day, *Lijaba* told the *arasentsür*, “I’m not going to live anymore on this earth amidst the people. Instead, I will send my spirit to bless and punish depending upon their good/evil deeds. Whenever I come people will know. So everyone should celebrate a feast to commemorate my name. One should offer a perfect, healthy and complete animal without any handicap or scar upon its body. The meat of the animal should not be shared with anyone. The bone too should not be broken”. So one summer season a grasshopper appeared. Then people thought that it is the spirit of Lijaba and uttered as ‘Lijaba’s *sungkok* (*Lijaba*’s grasshopper) came’. It remained only for two to three weeks and then disappeared. When the people saw the grasshopper they announced to each other that *Lijaba*’s spirit has come onto the earth. The entire villagers worshipped and asked for blessing from him. Ao folk believe that the grosshopper is the spirit of Lijaba and hence venerated it remembrance of the god *Lijaba*.¹³

The ritual course of the Lijabamong rite is represented in the following diagram No.8. In the diagram, (A) depicts phases ritual course (B) represents Structure of the ritual. In Indigenous model, the entire stages of the rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In the Structural model (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the Lijabamong rite are shown in terms of the Structural models of rites of passage.

Diagram.No.7.1 Ritual of Lijaba



Symbolism

In Ao-belief system the grasshopper symbolises the spirit of prosperity. The onset of grasshoppers onto the earth depicts full bloom of the grains, trees, vegetables etc., in the fields. Since it occurs in the month of May and June, it is clear that right after the seed sowing the grasshopper appears. An emergence of the grasshopper shows that the harvest is not far away. The symbolism of the *Tsungpet* leaves shows that the household is in *genna*. No one can visit anybody's house.

Another god, *Longtitsingba* which is also called *Aningsingba* (Aning-heaven; *Tsüingba*- Chief or Lord)/ *Lata-zuni Tsungrem* (moon-sun god) is custodian of the heavenly elements. He sees that all natural forces get articulated with the solar system.¹⁴ The people in general and the individual in particular over the year observe ceremonies and offer sacrifices for plentiful of rain¹⁵ and special ceremony is taken up

by the priests for rain during the time of drought. Chicken, pigs and eggs were given at the field altar. After their conversion into Christianity, the Aos substituted the animal-ritual sacrifice with a special prayer for having bountiful rains.¹⁶ The text and texture of the rituals changed but the spirit of the context remained the same. The people strongly believe that the god would definitely answer to their prayer requests of his subjects. They further advocate that the god can even reorganise the nature of the celestial bodies for the benefit of the devotees. The following narrative substantiates it.

Narrative 7.4: Moon covered with cow dung

Once upon a time, the moon was closer to the earth than the sun. So, the moon was warmer than the sun thus causing much heat to the human beings. The people on the earth could no longer tolerate the hot rays of the moon. They complained the matter to Aningsüngba, the god of heaven who could regulate roles of sun, and moon. After listening to them he threw cow dung on the face of the moon to diminish his heat and brightness during the nights. Then the moon felt ashamed with the act and slowly moved away from the earth and the sun. Till today, this story is being narrated by the older people.¹⁷

There are many other gods (*tsungrems*) who have been associated with the environments of the Aos and there are various minor or lesser deities and spirits/souls. The deities on the earth are regarded as lesser to *Lijaba* and their respective domains on earth are prescribed by him. This lesser deities are explained on table 3: as *Kini tsüngrem* (house site deity), *Tekong tsüngrem* (mountain deity), *Tzüba tsüngrem* (wells and springs deity), *Along tsüngrem* (stone deity).

Social rituals

There are some rituals in Ao-Naga society that require the participation of the community. The priests conduct the rituals. The social solidarity gets reflected through the celebration of community rituals. Hence priesthood, *Poti Menden* is one of the most important institutions. The priest in the Ao-Naga societal rituals is instrumental in conducting ritual performances and organises the entire ritual process including offerings to god ranging from simple vegetarian foods to animal sacrifices. There were also clan priest who act as a leader during certain ceremonies of their respective clan. The ritual (*Among*) and *genna* (*Anempong*) are observed simultaneously. *Among* are the days when ceremonies are held, and *anempong* are the days of purification before and after the *among*. The ritual of *Watsü Merok* is

discussed below. It is a ritual observed by the whole village from cleansing the village from epidemics causing different sickness and death.

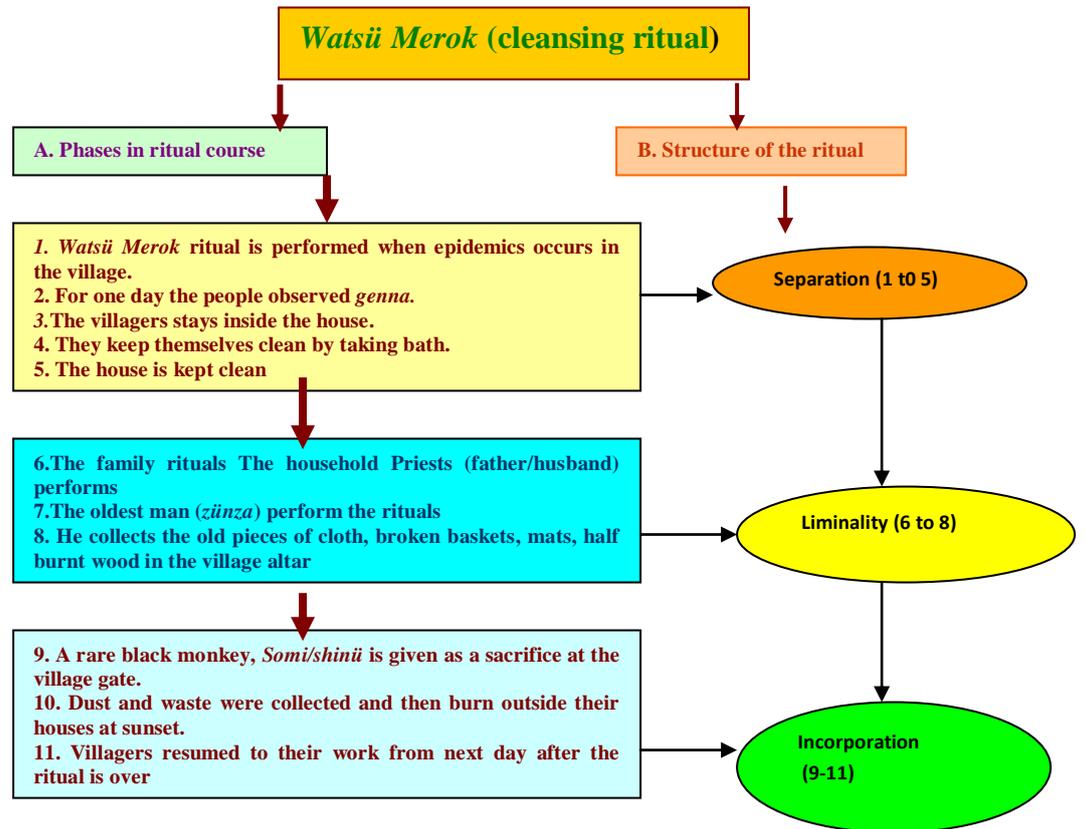
a. *Watsü Merok* (epidemics burn)

Watsü Merok (epidemics burn) is a ritual of cleansing the village from different epidemics which leads to different kinds of sickness and sufferings which sometime claim lives. The ritual was observed to prevent from occurring of illness and infections throughout the year.

Ritual process

When the ritual of *Watsü Merok* is performed, *genna* was observed for the whole village. No one was allowed to move outside the village. The household priest (father/husband) performs the family ritual. The whole family kept themselves clean by taking bath. They also keep the house clean. When everyone is inside the house, the oldest man (*zünza*) of the village walks from one end to the other end of the village gate. He carries a basket with slings on his head and a bamboo stick. He shouts, “Today is epidemics burning day”, and the villagers from inside the house shout back, “let the epidemics, illness, sickness be burn”. They beat the wall, post, roof, ceiling and stamp on the floor while shouting. As he stands outside shouting, each household priest (father/husband) brings old pieces of cloth, broken baskets, mats, half burnt wood. The old man collects them and burns them on the village altar. A *Somi/shinü*¹⁸, a rare black monkey with a white stripe on forehead considered to be medicinal species was given as a sacrifice at the village gate. Then dust and waste were collected and then burn outside their houses at sunset. From the next day, the villagers end their *genna* and continue with their daily activities. The following diagram represents the various phases in the ritual

Diagram No.7.2: Cleansing Ritual



Before the coming of Christianity, it is observed that socio-religious rituals and practices of the forefather were very costly. For every illness and sufferings, diviners were consulted and sacrifices with pigs, fowls, eggs, dogs, cows and drinks were offered to gods according to the diviner’s prescription. This often led to extreme poverty among the people. In the cases of desperate illness, land and property were disposed off to meet the expenditure for such ceremonies. Consequently, less land or no land were left for the heirs.

II: Political rituals

Ao-Nagas celebrate political rituals because it display the supremacy of the generation (*putu*) to the community since it is a public affair, the authority and power helps to determine what is politically significant in a community. It represents the past and the future having relationship within the community and religion. The political

ritual is a community ritual where the people participate and raises the possibility for further collective action. Those who participates in the ritual builds commonality among them, emphasizes their distinctiveness from nonparticipants. The community perform this ritual to lend authority and legitimacy. The community is connected with the rulers through the ritual. It creates identity and sense of belonging.

The reinstating of village council (*Putu menden*) ritual is an important event among the Aos. In the past, the procedure of *Putu Menden* celebration was very complex with long ceremonies but in the present time, though the celebration is big but it has become very simple. The celebration varies from village to village. There is a replacement of the old members with the new one, and then followed by oath taking which is a serious business. In the past, right after the formation of the village, the Ao-Nagas established a village council made of representatives chosen by the dominant clans. According to Tajen Ao, “As a whole, the Aos have no political organisation but their respective village organisations which are formed on similar patterns from one another represent the political organisation.”¹⁹ The village council of elders is known as “*Putu Menden*”²⁰ and the members of this council are known as “*Tatar*.” Among the *Mongsen* group, the Council is called *Samen Menchen* and among the *Chungli* group it is called *Tatar Menden*. The village administration is carried on by the *Tatars* who like the present administrative officers are responsible for policy and the administration as well as dispensation of justice. In the village council only perfect people are selected because he will be the one who will be giving the judgment. Not everyone can be a member of the *Putu Menden*. For example, a person who has a blood line of stealing cannot go into the *Putu Menden*. During this celebration all the men are supposed to wear their traditional attire. It is a customary practice that every new comer has to contribute a pig, one each, which will go for the feast and distribution among themselves, especially for the old timers. After the celebration is over the man has to distribute the meat to others for blessings. Before going into the ritual process of the *Putu Menden*, here are the names and meaning of the *Putu* (generation).

Names of the *Putu* (generation)

The *Chunglis* have five generations, each generation is called *Putu* and each

Putu (generation) consists of thirty years. The names of the *Putus* and why the names were called are explained below:

- a) *Mechensanger*: Members who are united.
- b) *Mepongsanger*: Members who are like wind, who go where the wind blows.
- c) *Kosasanger*: Members who has full of complains and jealousy.
- d) *Rionsanger*: Warring members.
- e) *Medemsanger*: Equal strength members.

The names of the *Putu* start from *Mechensanger* till it reaches in *Medemsanger*. After that again a fresh *Putu* starts from the beginning i.e., from *Mechensanger*. According to the *Chungli Putu Menden* system²¹, *Tatars* live in power for thirty years and at the end a new group of *Tatars* comes to power ousting the members of the outgoing *Putu* from office. In *Changtongya village*, the older generation was replaced by the *Kosasanger* in 2008 after the completion of thirty years ruling by the *Mepongsanger*. The succession to *Putu Menden* is called ‘*Putu Atsüngtep*’. It is not only meant for transfer of power from one *Putu Menden* to another but it is also meant for change of a generation which is replaced by another. In the said village, during my fieldwork, I met a man who was 31 years old who entered into the *Putu Menden*. He will be in the *Putu Menden* for thirty years. For the Mongsen group, there is no standardized system of *Putu*. The government is run by chosen representatives called *Samen* and the councils formed by *Samen* are called *Samen Menchen*.

Photo No. 7.1: In 17th November, 2008 when the *Medemjanger putu* in *Longkhum* village completed thirty years of ruling the *Mejenjanger putu* replaced them. The pigs weight 60kgs and above were contributed for the celebration by every new members of *Mejenjanger putu*.²²



Ritual process

The ritual process of the *Mongsen Putu Menden melentepba* (reinstation of Mongsen village council) has been narrated by Toshimeren Imchen²³. If the *kosasanger* are in ruling then they inform the *Reongsanger*, who will be replacing the former, in two years advance to select the *Aola* and council chairperson wisely for the next *Putu Menden*. They pass the information by saying that they have only two years left to rule the village so get ready and select the members wisely. This is done in advance because the successors have to know and memorize about the culture and tradition, customary laws, story of *Chungliyimti*, how headhunting was done by the ancestors and all the rituals and practices. They have to represent the *Mongsen* group of that village. After the news has been spread, the *Reongsanger* select their *Aola* (chairman) and sit for a meeting to discuss about the celebration of the *Putu Menden*, decide on how many pigs to kill (the legs belongs to *Aola* and the persons who will enter the new generation and the remaining parts for the people). They also check out the members of this generation. When the succession to *Putu Menden (atsungtep)* day comes, it is celebrated in *Imrong* (middle of the village).

Even seating position is well maintained for the two *Putus* (generations)

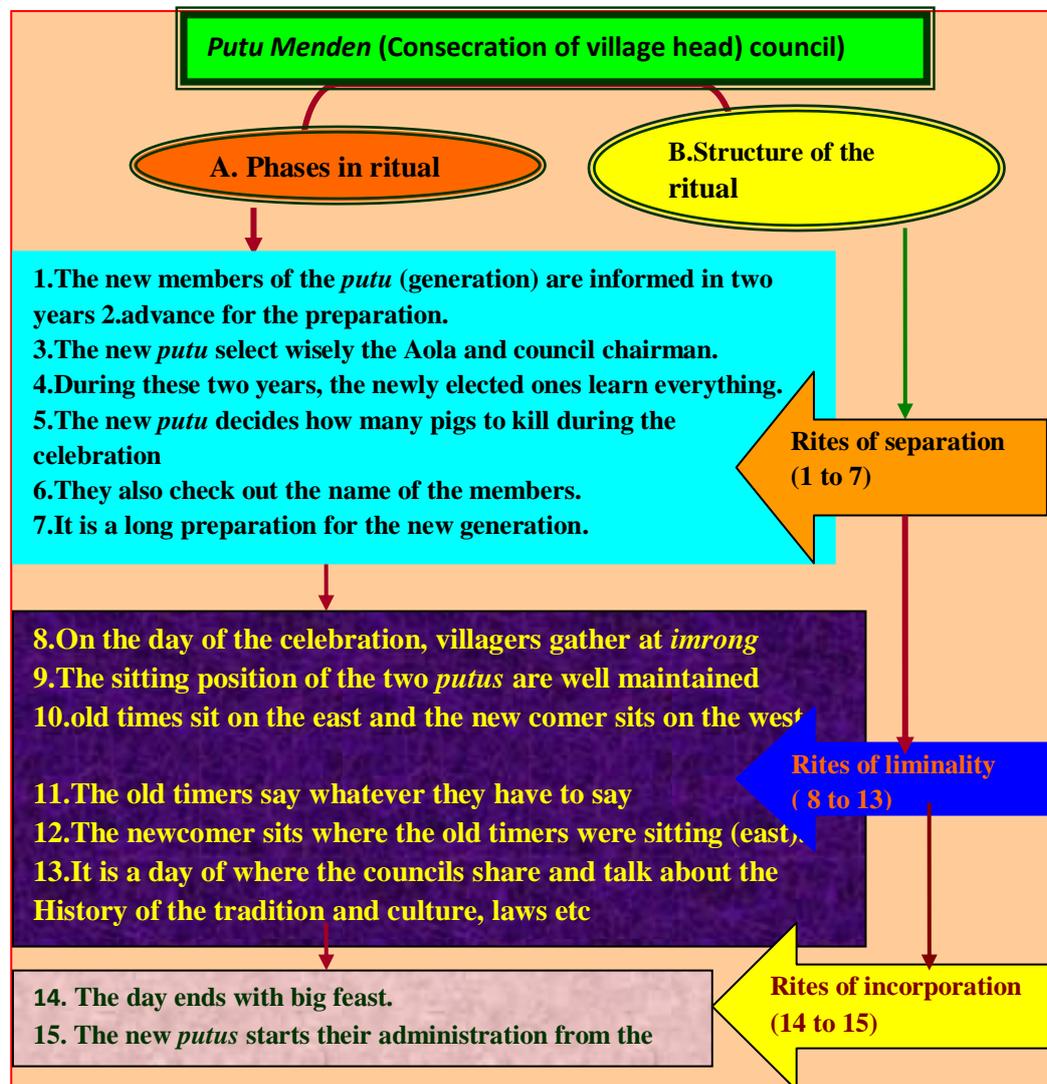
On the East: Mopungsanger will sit (they say everything to Kosasanger).

On the West: Kosasanger (the new Putu Menden) will sit.

After the discussion is over, they shift their seats and sit towards the east. Then spear nail (*nu asonger*) is on the ground by the *Aola* and discuss about the culture and traditions, customary laws, how village was formed etc., of the Aos starting from the *Chungliyimti*. *Aola* will proclaim, “Let this generation be the best and bless with good life till the 30 years is over”. This kind of speech is given by the other *Aola* also. This session goes on the whole day. After the talking is over, they have big feast. After this, the new *putu* starts their administration from the next day. After *Kososanger* term is over, again they will inform the next generation called *Medemsanger*. The ritual course of the *Mongsen Putu Menden melentepba* rite is represented in the following diagram No.10. In the diagram, (A) depicts ritual course and (B) represents Structure of the ritual. In A, the entire stages of the rituals that are being

observed are sequentially numbered. In the Structure (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the rite are shown in terms of the structure of the ritual.

Diagram.No.7.3: Putu Menden ritual



The ritual process of the *putu menden* is not so complicated because, all the preparations are done in two years advance. By analysing the diagram it is found that there is no need for another ritual for the new members to get incorporated into the society. Since the members have already received their identity during the liminal period so they are incorporated directly by starting their administration. The separation is a long period (1 to 6) in (B) Structural model.

The councillors in the *Putu Menden* or *Samen Menchen* settled all the disputes within the villages according to the customary laws but there are people who are not satisfied with the judgment appeal the Magistrate's court. In order to judge over such cases, the British appointed certain hand-picked men to act as interpreters and were required to advise the Magistrate on custom. These men are called '*Dobhashis*' and they have a separate court called the *Dobhashis*' Court. Though these officials were not highly paid, they were held in great esteem by the public. Besides, those who were required to be in the headquarters, in every village, Headmen or *Gaonburas* (small village had just one, but big villages have five to six *Gaonburas*) were appointed to act as go-between the government and the village.²⁴ But the village administration is carried out by the council of elders or the *Putu Menden*. They are guided by a set of well established laws commonly known as Ao Customary law. Though Ao society is egalitarian in character but women were never allowed to be a member in the village council and they even have no voice in the council. J. P. Mills writes, "*It is interesting to note that two of the earliest villages founded were ruled by women. One was Sangtemla... and one was the first foundation of Kabza on a site a short distance from its present one.*"²⁵ But it did not last long because they were not recognized as a member of the Council and could not participate in policy making matters and has no privileges.

The above mentioned rituals help us to understand how the Ao-Naga as individual and community participate and construct their identity. Since the socio-religious and political rituals are inter-related, one can notice how these three are inseparable by studying the *Moatsü* Mong (seed sowing festival) of the Ao community.

***Moatsü* Mong (seed sowing festival)**

Moatsü is celebrated in the spring season when the villagers have finished with seed sowing. They pray for blessings upon new grains in the field and also for protection of crops throughout the season. Every community is aware that right after the seed sowing is over *Moatsü* festival starts. So there is no need for the village heads to inform community. It just automatically falls on the fixed date as the family and the villagers has store and prepare foods in one month advance for the

celebration. The women folk get ready with the dress to wear for the festival. They make sure that everything was ready before the festival starts.

Photo No. 7.2: Celebrating *Moatsü* festival²⁶



Moa, is an open field or street, and *tsü*, to go round; meaning to go round the open streets with singing, drinking and dancing.²⁷ Both men and women including children participate during this festival. Among all the ceremonies, *Moatsü* is the only occasion in which there was not much taboos, *gennas* and ethical restriction.

Ritual process

For the first three days, *anempong* was observed strictly from sex, travel, and no hard works etc. On the first day, *Sungpen* (firewood) was collected for cooking, new fire was made for this purpose, and sites were cleaned. The family and the community start preparing for the festivals. On the second day, *yati* (major day) the people kill a pig, cow or cattle according to the status of the family. Meat is distributed among the relatives, family, friends, *zunga* (stage) from the *Ariju*. Even outsiders were given meat. Then people dressed themselves with their full attire and the inaugural feast began with the beating of the drum. On this festival the rich men and warriors show their status through their attire. The women folk recite poems and sing songs for them. The rich will serve rice beer for those who came to sing song for them. Every *khel Ariju* members have fun time dancing and singing. During this festival, the lovers exchange gift and sing song for their lovers. It was a time of joy and fun. This festival is normally a festival of young boys and girls where they interact with each other through various activities like singing, dancing and playing

games.²⁸ Different games like cock fighting, running, high jump, wrestling etc., were played which continue till third day.

Photo No. 7.3: Serving rice beer²⁹



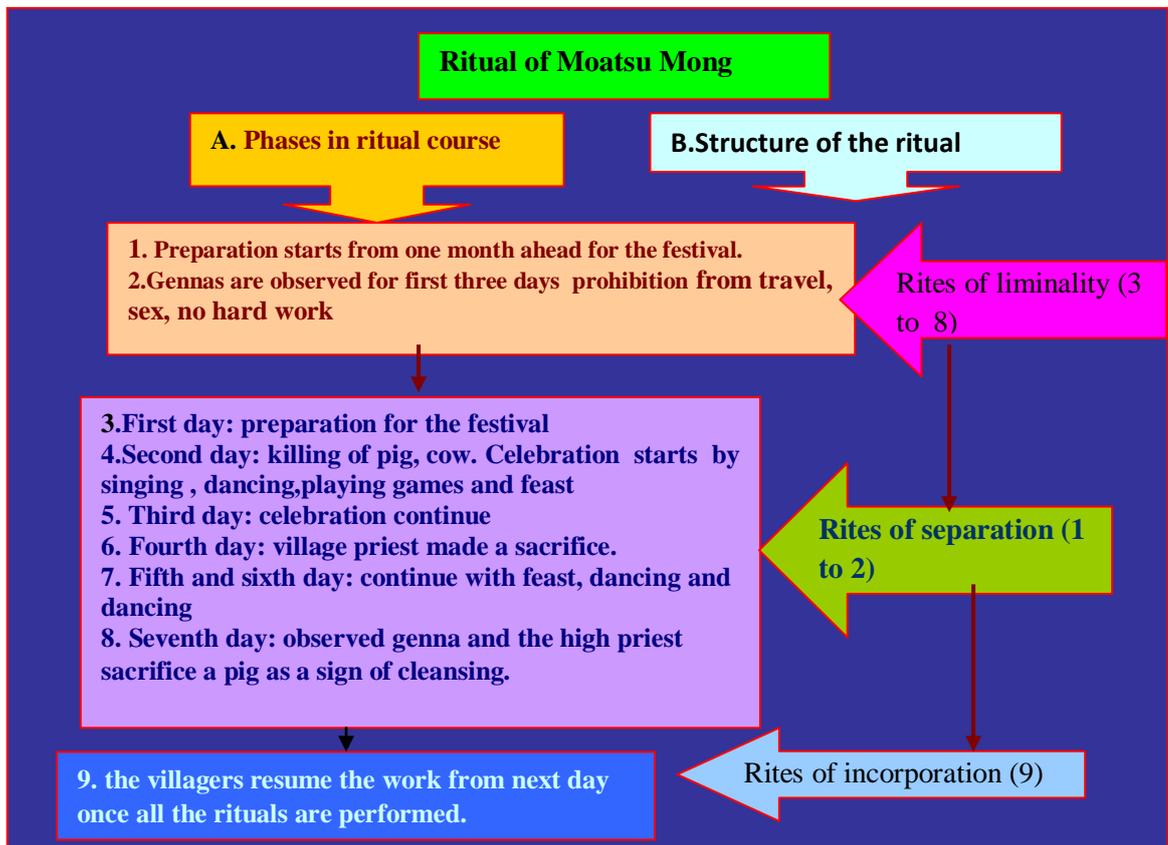
On the fourth day, a sacrifice was made by the village priest for blessing and prosperity and also for possible sins committed during this festival. But still the whole villagers continue to feast and celebrate dancing and singing till on the fifth and sixth day. On the last day, they play tug-of-war between men and women which brings end to the festival.

On the seventh day, the villagers observed *genna*, while the high priest sacrifice a pig at the village altar as a sign of cleansing of the whole village including their fields and public path leading to the field. Then they resume their normal works the following day.

This festival is still celebrated in the present time but with the coming of Christianity, the *genna*, taboos, sacrifices etc., are not observed but singing, dancing and feast is part and parcel of the festival.

The ritual course of the *Moatsü Mong* rite is represented as following diagram No.11. In the diagram, (A) phases in ritual course and (B) Structure of the ritual. In (A) the entire stages of the rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the *Moatsü Mong* rite are shown in terms of the Structural models of rites of passage.

Diagram. No.7.4: Ritual of Moastri Mong



Analysis

Moatsü Mong (seed sowing festival) is one of the biggest ceremonies for the Ao-Nagas. In the past, *Moatsü* was celebrated on different months because the cycle of harvest and sowing depends on the climate and environment as there are different ranges for the Ao-Nagas. With the opening of schools, it became difficult to celebrate on different dates since the students have to attend classes. In order to uniform with them, in 1936³⁰ it was decided to celebrate *Moatsü* from 1st to 3rd May (in the past, *Moatsü*³¹ was celebrated for six days) every year with big celebration and feast. It is a long and big celebration so everything was kept ready for the feast and celebration according to family richness and status. The celebration includes everyone. This festival is a time of celebration so there was not much taboos, *gennas* and ethical restriction.

In the Ao-Naga *Moatsü Mong*, the separation period (1 to 2) is a long process. Separation starts from the time the villagers know that the celebration is about to begin once the seed sowing is over. The entire family household has to do some extra preparations and works from the normal time. Till the day comes for the celebration the villagers are in separation period.

Once the celebration starts, the period of liminality starts (3 to 7) of Indigenous model (A). The *Moatsü Mong* rite includes all ritual behaviour and rituals performed on the festival. The liminal period starts on the day of the festival and goes on till they are incorporated as a new person in the society. The initial three days are considered very important and *anempong*, *genna* was observed strictly from sex, travel, and no hard works because the community has to participate for the events. They should be focused in order to observe the rituals properly because the first three days is like a welcoming rite. They cannot start the festival with any mistakes. Everything has to be ready and cleaned. It is a very important day because, the neighbouring tribes comes to celebrate the festivals with the Ao community. This is a time for the rich to show their richness and status to the villagers as well to the visitors. It is a time where the community as well the individuals show their way of life not only to the villagers but also to the outsiders. During the liminal period the identity of the individual and the community are legitimised. Since the festival is a long one, in the process of celebration, the community might have committed some sins and so on the fourth day, a sacrifice was made by the village priest for blessing and prosperity and for forgiveness during this festival. Playing of tug-of-war between men and women concludes the festival.

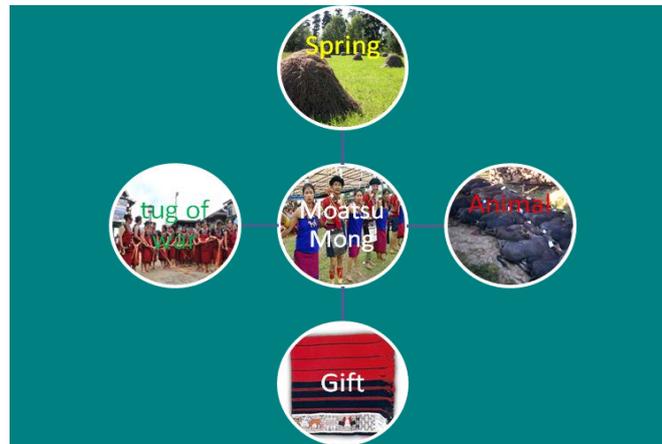
The incorporation period (8) covers the rite of observing *genna* by the whole community while the high priest sacrifice a pig at the village altar as a sign of cleansing of the whole village including their fields and public path leading to the field. The villagers are incorporated and resume to their normal activities once the ritual process of sacrifice and cleansing is over.

Symbolism

The rituals symbolically speak about the values that the people attach to the self and to the identity of the community. **Following diagram No: 6** shows the

importance of symbolism during the *Moatsü Mong* ritual.

Diagram No: 7.5.Ritual Symbolism: *Moatsü Mong*



Spring is very valuable for it is the time for the people to prepare land and planting crops, thereby providing the perfect conditions for germination. In spring time, the days become more joyful and stimulating while plants grow and flourish. It is the perfect time for the individual and the community to have time to celebrate once the seed sowing is over and give time to germinate. The killing of pig, cow and cattle shows the status of the family and during this time they show their colourful attires and possessions to the community. Only rich can effort to kill such animals and give feast to the community. Since *Moatsü* is a festival for everyone so the young boys and girls expressed their love through songs and gifts on this occasion. The women beforehand make shawl or *dao* holder etc., for their lovers as gifts on this special occasion. Tug of war is one of the important games for the Nagas. It is a game played at the end of every festival. Tug of war is a game to test the strength of two teams.

To conclude from the above, the tribal societies demand communal living to sustain their mundane lives on one hand, and on the other, their identities both as a person and as a member of their commune. The communal consciousness and identity emerges out of their respective religion and belief system. It is observed that the Ao-Naga pantheon consists of (i) major gods (ii) minor gods and (iii) sprits and souls. The hierarchy of gods depicts the social hierarchies in the tribal life. They perform the communal rites to express their special and temporal existence. Even in these rituals, they perceive the period of liminality as a site of preparation and training for

proceeding to the next stage. That is why even in the life cycle rituals and communal rituals period of liminality is designed as citadel of primary identity formations at the family as well as at the society. The prolonged liminality only suggests that it is in tune with their worldview and the structural feature of narrative tradition. The narrative structure reveals the conflict and violence which is resolved only through the elimination or subordination of the 'other' as reflected in the practice of headhunting. In other words, identities of the tribes of Nagas are established only by negating the other and preparation for negation is a prolonged process therefore, liminality also remains as a prolonged course.

Endnotes

¹ The genesis of the practice of religion when traced to its roots in primitive tribes and societies is often found to rest in some form or manner of 'animism', Hokishe Sema, *Emergence of Nagaland: Socio-economic and Political transformation and the future*, New Delhi, Vikas Pub., House, 1986 p.34.

² Worshipping or believing in more than one god

³³ Panger Imchen, 1993, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publication, p.3.

⁴ J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, 1926, p.214

⁵ One day Lijaba, the creator of earth decided to travel to different parts of the earth. After travelling for many days, one evening he reached a village. Lijaba went door to door asking for shelter for the night but all the family in the village refused to welcome him. Everyone has different excuses. Eventually he saw a small house at the end of the village so he decided to go there. He found out that two sisters were staying in the house. When he asked for shelter they welcomed him happily though they were very poor. The girls told him, "We have nothing at home so we are not cooking anything." But Lijaba told them, "Place the pot in the hearth and warm the water." The girls obediently did what they were asked to do. Then he started to scratch his knee. From his knee, a grain of rice came out so he put it on the pot. To their surprised the rice filled the pot. Again he told them to boil water. This time when he scratches his forehead, a piece of meat came out so they cooked the meat. The meat fills the pot. They had a hearty meal that evening. After dinner, three of them went and stood outside the house. Lijaba asked them, "Whose field is that?" "They belonged to the family who insulted us" was their reply. Then he started to curse that field, "Let their field never prosper, let their field harvest only tusk." All the fields were cursed by Lijaba because all the villagers insulted the two sisters. Finally he asked them, "Where is your field." But the sisters were so ashamed to tell him because it was just a tiny patch of a rice-field. Finally he asked the two sisters, "Whose field is that, that small field in the corner." They were feeling shy to say but replied to Lijaba, "It belongs to us." Then Lijaba blessed their field by saying, "Let that field be harvested non-stop. (information given by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007).

⁶ Dictionary, www.google.co.in.

⁷ www.spiritualhealingenergys.com/terminology

⁸ The Rengma-Naga believed that Songinyu/Aniza who lives in the sky and is the father of all living things, as earth is their mother but for the Aos there are no such things as mother. The Eastern and the Western Rengmas have different opinion on how the earth was shape. One says it was *aniza* while the other says it was Ndü or Asükhi. J.P.Mills, *op.cit.*, 1926, p. 165.

- ⁹ Information told by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007. This narration is also mentioned by J.P.Mills in his book, 1926, *The Ao Nagas*. In his version instead of water cockroach it is water-beetle. P.220.
- 10 Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publication, 1993, p.3.
- ¹¹ Information given by 53 years old, Yaongyimsen village, interviewed on 26th June, 2009.
- ¹² Information given by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ¹³ *Ibid*
- ¹⁴ Panger Imchen, *op.cit.*, 1993, p. 34
- ¹⁵ The Konde of east-central Africa adored Mbamba, a divinity who dwelt with his family in the heights above the sky. The Konde offer prayer and sacrifice to the god who dwells in the sky, especially at times when rain is called for (The encyclopedia of religion, 1987, vol. 10, Mirca Eliade, New York, Macmillian Publishing company.)
- ¹⁶ Information given by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ¹⁷ *ibid*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 53
- ¹⁹ Tajen Ao, *Ao Naga Customary Laws*, Jorhat, Aowati Imchen 1980, p. 114
- ²⁰ Putu means generations and Menden means seat.
- ²¹ The *Chungli Putu Menden* system is narrated by Imtilepzük Jamir (M), 68 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 23rd June, 2008.
- ²² The informations and the photos are collected from Teka Longchar (who was part of the celebration), interviewed on 18th June, 2011.
- ²³ Information gathered from Toshimeren Imchen (M), 56 years, Longkhum Village, interviewed on 18.06.2008
- ²⁴ J.P.Mills, *op.cit.*, 1926, p. 407
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p.8
- ²⁶ <http://infomaram.wordpress.com/nagas/>
- ²⁷ Panger Imchen, *op.cit.*, 1993, p. 52
- ²⁸ Interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007, 73 years old, from Longkhum village.
- ²⁸ Information given by Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th June, 2008.
- ²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=oa.237476886285017&type=1>
- ³⁰ Information given by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
- ³¹ This festival slightly differs from one village to another. This ceremony is narrated by Imtilepzük Jamir, interviewed on 24.06.2009, 68 years, Changtongya village.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION

A Sum Up

The present thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* broadly proposes to study the oral traditions of the Ao-Naga community, especially the oral narratives (personal and folk) told by men and women in different cultural contexts on different issues of their social world to show how the community constructed their identity, their ‘self’ in their renditions through the ages. Like any other oral society, the Ao-Nagas sustain upon their lore, the verbal and non verbal expressive behaviour accumulated in their mnemonic traditions. The people learnt and transmitted these traditions orally through the generations. The lore encompasses the knowledge, beliefs and the institutions that steered the people and communities to retain their identities, their ‘selves’ from attrition and assault despite changes in time and space. The Naga folk (oral) lore is a very rich source for reconstructing their histories for it contains a wide variety of genres- folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, performing arts like music, dances, drama, painting, arts and an extensive material culture- which establish their identity among the other tribal communities in Nagaland. Further the study brings forth the change and continuity of Ao-Naga cultural life as depicted in their folklore.

The thesis pursues what constitutes identity for the Nagas in general and the Ao-Nagas in particular. Further the research envisages whether the Ao-Nagas ‘what they think of their identity’ is really lost or still continues as ‘core’ of their life-style patterns in the contemporary times. The issues of related to these aspects are proposed to discuss in the light of latest theoretical discourses on identity and methodological implications of narrative inquiry. The study further proposes to substantiate how, syntagmatic and paradigmatic patterns in narrative structures and folktale motifs reflect the patterning of relationships of human beings in different realms of the Ao-Naga society.

The thesis analyses and interprets the socio-religious and politico-economic nuances of Ao-Naga folk life as reflected in their ritual processes and practices in pre and post Christian times to understand changes and continuity in their new identity formations. The study proposes to develop Indigenous models of ritual process in tribal societies to demonstrate how the rites performed on different ritual contexts and the material culture associated with them would mark the identity of these communities in the changed contexts. This research also sheds light on social organisation and politico-economic life of the community in the pre and post Christian contexts to show structural continuities and variations in identity formations.

The geographical distribution of the Ao region is bounded by the *Tzula* River; *Sangtam*, *Chang* and *Phom* tribes on the East; the *Lotha* tribes, the Assam plains on the west; *Konyak* tribe in the north and the *Sema* tribe in the south. The scope of the field work is limited to the regions *Longkhum* village, *Ungma* village, *Mopongchuket* village, *Changtongya* village and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts. All these settlements are populated by Ao-Nagas wherein the other Naga tribes also share the environment.

An exhaustive survey of literature is made in three broad areas. They are: (i) research works on Folk Narrative Research and identity (ii) Status of knowledge on Ao-Naga community (iii) Field methodology and data processing. It enabled the researcher to identify the lacunae in the research works conducted on Nagas and Aonagas with regard to methodology and deployment of oral literature, the folklore in the interpretation of cultures, especially the communities that sustain their continuities on oracy.

Certain gaps are found in the researches conducted on the identity constructions in the oral societies, like the Ao-nagas. Though several scholars are aware that the Nagas have rich cultural heritage preserved in their oral traditions, different genres of their folklore are not methodically collected, analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the people who had produced them. The researches depended on the Administrative records, field reports of the anthropologists and other such sources which did not reveal the soul of the community- how it struggled through the ages to carve its own niche i.e., the cultural identity ever since the historical formations. Though some works focused on rituals,

folk narratives and songs they are highly descriptive and interpreted more from the researcher's viewpoint. The content of the lore is given importance rather than the cultural context of their renditions. Some works are compilation of folklore genres meant for archival purpose. The rituals are though graphically described, they are not analysed in the light of latest discourses on cultural semiotics and ritual theories. Almost all works express the fear that the literacy, Christianity and globalization are threats to the personal and community identities of people and social groups respectively and suggest that one must save their culture from erosion and oblivion. They warn the younger generation that they should protect their rich heritage by preserving in audio-visual forms and print media. The research works are not suggesting measures to save the heterogeneity of community from homogeneity caused by the above three factors.

The methodology used by the colonial writers was primarily based on exploration and fieldwork and secondly the methods that they used were survey methods, observation and participant observation methods with the objective of trying to show how it really was. Therefore this literature has only description. Their writings became the sources for post-colonial writers on the Nagas. However their writings were more or less a descriptive affair or information on the Naga culture, traditions and the life of the people. So folklore of the Nagas was not explored and is not taken into consideration for the study about the Nagas. Writings were not perceived from oral tradition or from the folk perspective.

Now the survey of literature emerges the following questions: what are the historical and cultural reasons for the development of identity crisis among the Nagas? The Nagas, especially the Ao-Nagas really lost their identity during the course of their dispersal? Whether literacy erased their oracy? Whether Christianity could completely wipe off the animistic thinking, ritual practices, social organization, and gender construction of Ao-Nagas? Whether the British and Indian administrations could replace native village organization, customary law and traditional economy? Could the globalization erode Ao-identities or find new context for the continuity of cultures, especially the societies that sustained since generations on orality?

In order to address these issues the main aim and objective is formulated in this thesis as;

- To study different walks of the lives like social organizations, religion and rituals, agriculture, economy, administration etc. and their ethnic cultural practices that mark their identity as reflected in their oral narratives.
- To study the rituals both life cycle ceremonies and communal rites from the community's view point to show how the ritual processes construct their personal and community identity.
- To develop indigenous ritual models which are quite distinct from the ritual theories put forwarded by veteran scholars like Victor Turner and Van Gennep.
- To establish the changes and continuities of Ao-Naga identities in pre and post Christian era in the wake of globalisation and to suggest the measures for retaining the cultural identities of the Ao-Nagas in the changing scenario.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in the thesis. The dialogical method is used in procuring collection of thick corpus of data and narrative method of inquiry is used to analyse and interpret the data in the light of new hermeneutical discourse.

The Ao-Naga culture is a holistic and well articulated entity having its unique identity in different realms of its life. It has neither fragmented nor segmented into existential or locational or artefactual identities. All these merge to situate the core of AOs' identity amongst the other groups of the Nagas. Nagaland is a hilly state with interspersed ridges, slopes and valleys. There is no regular river system in Nagaland that flow directly into the sea. Rain is the natural resource to feed the ditches, ponds and springs in the hills and forests. The State of Nagaland is rich in flora and fauna. About one-sixth of Nagaland is under the cover of tropical and sub-tropical evergreen forests. Its vegetation types range from alpine to moist tropical types. The extensive bamboo production in the forests emerged unique bamboo culture—cane houses, house-hold furniture, implements, and musical instruments-of the AO-Nagas. The forests are rich in medicinal plants. The oral narratives reveal several remedies prevalent in tradition. The rich animal resources not only sustained their food but also enriched their mythical lore. A variety of wild fruits birds and animals that are available in the thick forest endured their hunting and gathering economy.

The hilly tracts, slopes and terraces and vagaries of monsoon, taught them *jhum* (shifting) cultivation and terrace cultivation as alternate source of livelihood.

Rain waters collected in the foothills, ditches, ponds etc, in the undulating lands gave scope for fishing. The climatic changes and environmental moulded their economy. Owing to the nature of the geography, the highest political life of the Aos centres round the village. A person's identity was inseparable with that of his family, clan, *khel* and village. Duties and responsibilities to family, clan, *khel* and village were stressed almost to the exclusion of individual rights, indicating group solidarity. Inter-village feuds were very common as there was always threat of raids from the neighbouring tribes for land encroachment. The bonds of kinship are usually very strong in the village. The sense of justice was highly honoured. Care was taken to see that the self-respect and honour of the guilty person was not injured.

For Nagas family is the basic unit of society, constructed on the basis of the institutions of marriage and kinship. The Aos still strictly follow the rules of exogamy and endogamy to preserve their racial purity and social integrity. Patriarchy governs organisation of the family. The institution of *Morung* called Dormitory constructed the masculinity and femininity of boys and girls before marriage. The entire Folk life of the Ao-Naga gets regulated by the customary law of the community. They are animistic in religious behaviour. They believe that life is controlled by spiritual powers. Their mythology reflects harmony of human beings with the forces and spirits of power. They deify the elements of nature and worship them to realize their wishes. They are highly ritualistic in socio-religious behaviour.

The heterogeneity of the Nagas gets reflected in a variety of culture specific seasonal rituals performed by them as markers of their existence and distinction amongst themselves. The life cycle rituals-child-birth, puberty, marriage and death and the rituals that demand communal participation like house warming ceremonies, agricultural rituals (*Tsungrem Mong*), and political rituals like, *Putu Menden*, headhunting. The triumphant warrior cuts and brings the head of the enemy to their village to show his community as a token of victory over them.

The Ao-Nagas' have a rich folklore with a variety of genres both verbal and non verbal. Their affluent narrative tradition contains myths, folktales and legends, proverbs, word games, jokes, beliefs, rituals and other related practices. The performance tradition is significant for their folk songs, and folk dances performed

and musical instruments are played as pastime activities or on the context of ritual festivals.

Their material culture is exhaustive. Like any other tribal groups, the Naga tribes have high territorial integrity. The Nagas, through out the historical formations struggled hard to retain their lands from the threat of adjacent settlements which were geographical isolated from one another. Nagas claim that their forefathers got migrated from Mongolia in BC 2617 and after migrating across Turkistan, Tibet and Mongolia, they finally arrived in Eastern Yunan Province of China in BC 1385 From China they entered Southeast Asia and thence to their present habitat in BC 1225. Their continuous resistance against the raids from the Burma, China, Tripuri, Dimasha, Cachars from 6th to 18th centuries and finally Britishers from 1843 to 1957 created ambiguity, confusion, conflict and revenge in the minds of the Nagas which created apprehension with regard to their existence in their newly migrated lands. Such anxiety got culminated into identity crisis. In this context, they needed authenticity and legitimacy to hold the territories in their grip. Hence the Nagas developed mythical lore around the origin and thus creation myths were constructed with regard to their origin and dispersal to various domains.

Like any other social group, for Aos, continuity is an important constituent of identity formation. The mythical lore of Nagas is very rich and provides information on their origin and dispersal to different part of Asia. They assert that they had a long cherished history. Nagas claim that their forefathers got migrated from Mongolia in BC 2617, travelled south to North-eastern Frontiers of India through Myanmar region. They claim that they have long cherished tradition which got disturbed throughout their course of dispersal to different geographical regions from ancient to the recent times. The lands occupied by the Nagas were hilly terrains and geographically isolated having threat from the neighbouring groups which lead them into to mutual distrust and conflict. The frequent inter-tribal conflict and migrations could not develop brotherhood and fraternity among different Naga tribes. Instead each migrated group needed an identity for continuing their line of succession. Thus the seventeen Naga groups constructed separate myths of their origin to distinguish themselves from the others. Being the animist in their belief, the Nagas created their mythologies and traced their origins to animate and inanimate beings of terrestrial and

celestial realms of the world. When the origins are in obscure, it is natural to the social groups to develop their genesis to mythical beings or directly to god. Thus the Nagas claimed their origin in *myth of Tiger, Spirit and man* to the human being born of the union between the woman and sky spirits and associated them with the place Mikhel in Manipur region. All most all Nagas claim their origin to this mythical place. The *myth of Myth of flat stone and Three brothers* attributes the migration of Nagas from Mikhel to Khezakonoma. The three brothers who dispersed to different regions became the progenitors of the clans Angami, Lotha, and Sema Naga tribes. They later on developed their new origin myths with different socio- cultural practices. In the same way the Ao-Nagas of Mokkukchung developed their creation myths from Longterok, tracing their origin to six stones. Aos also accept the myth of *Tiger, human,spirit myth* for their origination but have different world view with regard to the creation of their land and people. With regard to their origin they hold that (i) the god Lijaba created the geography and environment of their Ao-Naga land (ii) different AO-naga clans are originated from inanimate matters, the stones (*Longterok*-six stones); and (iii) the clans also originated from celestial beings, birds, animals and their remains like feathers and celestial bodies like sky, clouds, wind waters (he story of *Longkongla Ozukumer* Ao-clan (sub-clan of *Longkumer of Longterok*). Thus the Naga creation myths fall under the categories of parthenogenesis and autogenesis. Parthenogenesis is the creation due to the union between the humans and spirits or divine elements. The *tiger, human, spirit creation* myth of Nagas upholds this theory. Autogenesis involves the ‘emanation’ or ‘creation’ from ‘ownself’. That is the object itself gets transforms into different forms to achieve a final appearance. The creation myth of Longterok traces Ao origin from six stones. Thus the Aos still continue to believe their origin as discussed in the chapter and celebrate the respective rituals of Lijaba, hornbill and other spirits with pomp and glory to establish their identity as Nagas on one hand Aos on the other. The belief in the animism and claiming of parthenogenetic and autogenetic origins could easily transcend them into the Christianity, but the nature of their political institutions and geography made Aos emotionally war-prone and revengeful which get reflected in the folk narratives. It is also observed that the women occupy lead role in origin myths as the sustainers of the line of clan though the social institutions claim patriarchy. It seems that after they consolidated as distinct group, since protection of the clan was prime duty of men, the institution of patriarchy would have been

established but supported by the women in the family. Thus the folklore, especially the text of the narratives of the Aos reveals the process of construction of how they came into existence into the world. The creation myths also reflect the state of confusion of the Nagas in the construction of their identities and linkages among different tribes of Nagas with the main branch. It is interesting to note that even the structure of the narratives, that is the pattern of arrangement of different events in a narrative also reveal the process of construction of Ao Naga identity in changing times.

The Ao-Naga folk narrative tradition mirrors the structure and cultural values of the society in which they are told and experienced. The narrative structure remained identical with the pattering of the mind of the narrators and the social functions served by the narratives also reiterated their accepted cultural values and rules. Hence the structure, function and interpretation of the folk narratives converged in constructing the identity of the tellers, the Aos, both from their personal and community perspectives. It is substantiated in the chapters that the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas (both in personal and folk) endure their core strands of identity in their narrative motifs and the themes. The study reveals that in general the tales are very simple having a single motif but there are also tales that contains more than one motif. The tale types/motifs prevalent in the Ao-Naga oral narratives such as exogamy-endogamy, marriage, patriarchy, headhunting, life after death and agricultural practices like *Jhum* cultivation stand as the icons of their identity. Revenge motif predominate the other types. The tribal societies survive and endure on internecine warfare among clans or groups. In order to keep-up the fervour of militancy, a requisite to win the battles, 'revenge' has to be developed as an instinct among the men and women to save their 'community selves' from the threat of others' incursions. The 'revenge motifs' of Ao-Naga narrative tradition reiterates their tribal law and order in the society. Through the study of the tale types/motifs it is also observed that there are certain areas which are not prevalent: in-laws conflict, domestic violence and incest which shows that all cultures are not the same.

The structural analyses of Proppian and Levistruassian reveal a syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of the identity formations in the narrative structure. The Levistruassian method of analysing the creation myths reveals that the myths are in conformity with motif analysis. The transformation motif is the most prevalent motif

in Ao-Naga mythology. The non-living gets transformed into living and *vice versa*. This shows their animistic features that were prevalent among the Aos. The birth of the clans by parthenogenesis (origination due to the union between human beings and spirits) and autogenesis (self transformation into several forms before reaching a final shape or form) find expression in their narrative structures. The structural analyses in the light of Derridian deconstruction gave a holistic picture when interpreted from the perspective of narrative inquiry. The analysis of the oral narrative motifs and structures reveal the patterning of relationships of genders in different cultural contexts – the structuring of social groups, organisation of social institutions like marriage, kinship, religion, rituals, polity, and economy.

The Ao-Naga society rests on functioning of its various institutions like family, kinship, marriage and gender relationships. The narrative tradition of the Aos reveals how these institutions standardize their personal as well as the community lives and ensure the continuity of their identities in changing times. Family (*kibong*) is the basic social institution established through the custom of legitimate marriage (*Kiyimba*) and function on the norms of patriarchy. Marriage rests on the stringent rules of exogamy and endogamy. The norms of kinship are strictly followed in terms of marriage and related behaviour. The trespassers are punished by the customary law. Polygamy and adultery in conjugal life are prohibited for Aos where as Lotha-Nagas observe it. Aos have no bride price where as the *Konyak* and *Zeliangrong* Nagas hold this practice. Remarriage of men and women are permitted. The stepmother problem is highlighted in some narratives. The wicked stepmothers are expelled from the families in the narrative tradition. The stepfather episodes are not found. Though divorces are in vogue, the Ao custom emphasizes on the need for a healthy and unbroken family for men and women. The narrative tradition suggests the women (wives) not to compete with men (husbands) in family life as both are complementary in their role behaviour. The society warns the women that they receive more bites from men than privilege. The women has vital role to play in bringing up the children as per the norms of the Ao society if the father dies in tribal warfare, hunting or in protecting their community or away from home. The society expects that the men should always be ready with his *dao* to die for the cause of his community. Every woman wishes that her husband or son should emerge as a head-hunter and prove his virility and prowess as a member of Ao-Naga society. Though the nature of the family is nuclear, parental care is mandatory as per their custom. The

children are eligible for inheriting property as well as debts of their parents. The family functions on division of labour. The gender roles and functions are determined by custom. The obligatory and customary relationships between parents, parents vs. children, in-laws, between siblings (brothers vs. brothers, brothers vs. sisters and sisters vs. sisters) bounded by tradition. The children are socialized by dormitory system. Thus the social organization of Aos speaks about their identity as a distinct group among the other Nagas. Though Christianity brought changes in their way of life, norms and values that an Ao-Naga family maintained through the ages still peep into their contemporary personal narrative tradition and construction of gender identities of present day context.

In order to regulate and reiterate the values and norms of the society the Aos observe several customary and obligatory rituals both in personal (familial) as well as at community (social) realms and thereby protect their core identities in changing times.

It is observed that the well-knitted social organization of the Aos sustains on the performance of the ritual observances that require individual as well as the communal participation not only to socialize its members, but also to bind them with the community to which they belong. The life cycle ceremonies are the rituals that are celebrated to demarcate one's transition from one stage to that of the other in the course of life. The rituals performed on these contexts are the markers of identity of the individual's entry into the next stage of their lives. The major rituals of celebration are, birth, puberty, marriage and death. Each ritual has a course during which several rites that depict transition of the 'ritual passenger' have to be performed. Van Gennep, Victor, Turner and Mary Douglas worked upon the life cycle ceremonies in the name of rites of passage and advocated models on ritual process of life cycle stages. They framed the entire ritual course of these rites of passages, for that matter any ritual into three stages separation, liminality and incorporation in which different rites sequentially leads one another.

When the life cycle ceremonies of Aos are analysed in terms of the western and African models, a quite distinct picture emerges in the ritual structure. The ceremonies emphasise more on the observance ritual purity *genna*. In the child birth ritual (*nusomong*), the three stages; pre-birth (from the day one knows that she is pregnant), delivery and post delivery are observed. These three corresponds to period

of separation, liminality and incorporation. The pre-birth ritual behaviour is long and the period of liminality unlike in other cultural groups is significant. It is because all marks of Ao identity are conferred upon the baby like first feeding, ear-lobe piercing and naming. Later on a ritual bath i.e., a simple dip of the entire family in the village spring and a sacrifice of chicken completes the incorporation ritual. It is observed here that the period of liminality as explained by Victor Turner that the 'liminoid' has no identity and he/she is between and betwixt position cannot be applied here. Thus the childbirth ritual put forth a distinct model of its own that speaks out the Ao identity.

The celebration of puberty ritual is unique since the puberty rites do not start from the day of appearance of the first blood but starts when the girl attains primary sexual characters. Interestingly, among the Ao-Nagas, rites of puberty are communally celebrated. The girls of the village who are more or less of same age group who appear to be reaching puberty stage are grouped and begin the communal celebration of the ritual. The Ao-Naga society validates maturity more as a cultural construct than exclusively as a biological indicator. It is not completed in few days but takes atleast four to five years in five sittings; each demarcated by tattooing in different designs one for each. Tattooing is prime marker of female attainment of marriageable age. Each tattooing has one separation, liminality and incorporation wherein simple *genna* is followed and are not ritualistic. The other markers are ritual of hair growing on the head *Ku ayur*, ritual clothing (*Sobusolemtsu*), piercing upper ear lobe, *Norangto* and entering the girl's dormitory, *Tsuiki* for getting trained in gender roles of the community to undergo marriage. It completes incorporation.

Regarding the puberty rites of the boys', separation and liminality takes place for four times. When the ritual passenger enters into the dormitory for the first time he is in separation period. He is separated from his house, bed and parents to another. For three years he is liminal period because the passenger is in the process of entering into a new status. After three years is over he is separated again from his old status to another one i.e., from his old age group to another new age group. During this period many of the boys' members get married and leave the dormitory physically. The one who gets married is incorporated into the society. After that he is again separated from the dormitory but promoted to the last age group. Those remains unmarried is again separated and remains in liminal period when he is in the last age group

The marriage ritual process of the traditional Aos is very significant which

takes place in four stages. They are: (1) *Kiyimla, Kiyimsang*, selection of bride and groom; (2) *kibongmakem mong*, engagement. These two rituals are pre-marriage rituals (separation rites). (3) *Keyir Benjong*, Marriage rite and (4) *Keyir Benjong sulen*, Post-Marriage are liminal rituals. The liminality ends with ritual cooking in the new house. The ritual of marriage is significant because, the couple get furnished with every need before they live together by marriage bond and get training in their dormitories to start their new lives independently with mutual understanding and comfort.

It is observed that the death rituals of Ao-nagas metaphorically reflect their belief in spirits and life after death. They trust in appeasement of spirits of the dead as they construe their births based on their deeds on the earth. The death ritual is elaborate and *genna* being observed for six days for males and five for females. Here the separation and incorporation rites are simple where as the liminal period is long.

Thus the ritual course, behaviour and material culture associated with all these rites mark the identity of the people. The life cycle rituals construct the gender identity of men and women in different social contexts during the course of their personal lives and make them fit to be the successful members of their respective cultural communities in which they were born and brought up.

It is observed that Ao society culture sustains on the rituals that require communal participation not only to socialize its members, but to bind them with their community to which they belong. The communal rites through participation in the respective community rituals enable its participants, to develop in them the group solidarity and consciousness amongst the Aos. In this context society, religion and state form a matrix in the communal ritual life of the Ao-Nagas. It is observed that the Ao-Naga pantheon consists (i) major gods like *Lijaba*, (Creator of the earth), *Longtitsungba* (Lord of Heaven), *Tiar/Tiaba* (Pre-destiner) and *Meyutsung* (Lord of death) (ii) *Tsungrems*, the gods associated with the nature and environment of the Aos (minor pantheon) and (iii) sprits and souls in Ao Nagas belief system. The Aos venerate these gods ritualistically in different seasons. *Lijaba mong* is a religious communal ritual for worshipping the god *Lijaba*, their creator to have blessings and forgiveness from sins. There are many other gods (*tsungrems*) who have been associated with the environments of the Aos and there are various minor or lesser deities and spirits/souls. The deities on the earth are regarded as lesser to *Lijaba* and

their respective domains on earth are prescribed by him. This lesser deities like *Kini tsüngrem* (house site deity), *Tekong tsüngrem* (mountain deity), *Tzüba tsüngrem* (wells and springs deity), *Along tsüngrem* (stone deity). The hierarchy of gods depict the social hierarchies in the tribal life. *Putu menden* is performed as a political consecration ritual which combines social, religious and cultural aspects of the society. It is observed that the line of demarcation among different ritual is fading since all these elements are found in every ritual upto certain extent. But the seasons are different. In almost all rituals, the rites of separation and incorporation are simple and less time consuming where as the rites of liminality are more and elaborate. It may be because, the community finds the liminality as a period of relaxation from routine than the period of confusion as defined by Victor Turner. They perceive the period of liminality as a site of preparation and training for proceeding to the next stage. That is why even in the life cycle rituals and communal rituals period of liminality is designed as citadel of primary identity formations at the family as well as at the society. Even after their conversion into Christianity the core rituals like hornbill ritual, Lijaba and some other local rituals are being performed and people still wear traditional dresses on these occasions.

Findings

- Nagas had a long cherished history and culture hoarded in their oral traditions. Their frequent involvement in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and displacement of their political/geographical domains by Britishers and Indian Government could not disturb the functioning of their traditional village councils. The customary law still prevails. The agricultural practices are still tribal but follow some technological advancement.
- Though most of the Ao-Nagas took to the Christianity, their animistic belief system still gets reflected in their symbolic ritual practices observed during several socio-religious celebration in the contemporary times.
- The creation myths of the Nagas and the Aos both reveal the origination of the primordial being of their clan through parthenogenesis and autogenesis. With such animistic belief system they could easily get transcended into Christianity which believes in parthenogenesis. Instead of love and

compassion, the Nagas are embodied by revenge and mutual offence/defence between the tribes.

- Their worldview carries conflict through out their expressive behaviour. Christianity teaches ideology of love and compassion. Even after the Nagas accepted to Christianity their oral tradition still memorises the histories of the valour, conflict, revenge and episodes of head-hunting during tribal warfare. The core strand of their identity crises still carried out in their oral traditions. The geographical isolation of different tribes and frequent tribal warfare demanded revengeful mentality among the tribes. With this trait they think that they can retain their geographical integrity. The headhunting is a paradigm of such heroism for males.
- The structure of the myths and other oral narratives reveal the patterning of the Ao-Naga society, religion, polity, economy and other aspects of Folk life.
- The syntagmatic structures in narratives and folktale motifs reflect the patterning of relationships of human beings in different realms of the Ao-Naga society.
- Revenge motif predominate the other types. The tribal societies survive and endure on internecine warfare among clans or groups. In order to keep-up the fervour of militancy, a requisite to win the battles, 'revenge' has to be developed as an instinct among the men and women to save their 'community selves' from the threat of others' incursions. The 'revenge motifs' of Ao-Naga narrative tradition reiterates their tribal law and order in the society.
- Through the study of the tale types/motifs it is also observed that there are certain areas which are not prevalent: in-laws conflict, domestic violence and incest which shows that all cultures are not the same.
- The stepmother problem is highlighted in some narratives. The wicked stepmothers are expelled from the families in the narrative tradition. The stepfather episodes are not found.
- Though divorces are in vogue, the Ao custom emphasizes on the need for a healthy and unbroken family for men and women. The narrative tradition

suggests the women (wives) not to compete with men (husbands) in family life as both are complementary in their role behaviour.

- The Naga creation myths fall under the categories of parthenogenesis and autogenesis. Parthenogenesis is the creation due to the union between the humans and spirits or divine elements. The *tiger, human, spirit creation* myth of Nagas upholds this theory. Autogenesis involves the ‘emanation’ or ‘creation’ from ‘ownself’. That is the object itself gets transformed into different forms to achieve a final appearance. The creation myth of Longterok traces Ao origin from six stones.
- The paradigmatic structures of the Naga myths reveal their worldview which is based on binary oppositions wherein they address the issue of life and death and resolve that the existing phenomenon of the community’s non-autogenesis origin and patriarchy is socially validated.
- The social institutions like family, marriage, kinship etc, are systematised by the ritual celebrations, the life cycle and communal rites. They stand as the icons of AO identity at personal and community levels. In the ritual course there is a long phase of liminality where in almost all rites of identity construction gets completed where as in other communities and models developed by the scholars, it is a period of confusion that depicts no identity to the ritual passenger. A simple sacred dip in waters or a sacrifice of small chicken or egg completes the phase or ritual of incorporation. For Nagas the incorporation registers new identity to the persons who had undergone the rituals.
- In general, in the Ao Naga rites of passage, the separation and incorporation rites are simple where as the liminal period is long.
- The prolonged liminality only suggests that it is in tune with their worldview and the structural feature of narrative tradition. The narrative structure reveals the conflict and violence which is resolved only through the elimination or subordination of the ‘other’ as reflected in the practice of headhunting. In other words, identities of the tribes of Nagas are established only by negating the other and preparation for negation is a prolonged process therefore, liminality also remains as a prolonged course.

- The introduction of literacy and advent of Christianity though condemned some democratic ways with regard to spousal selections (*Morung* system-dormitory), the rest of the patriarchal social organisation related to the institutions of marriage, kinship, law, customs etc, are being continued with some changes coming up in the passage of time.
- Globalisation did not erased or eroded the Naga identity for their cultural traits but continued in changed contexts.

To surmise from the above discussion, the Ao-Nagas as a distinct folklore community draw their strength by wilful play of verbal and non-verbal genres of folklore in every day life through which they construct their identity despite the onslaught of modernity and globalisation.

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List of cultural participants consulted in the research process.

Name	Age	Village	Period of data collection
1. Otsufuba Longkumer (M)	73 years	Longkhum	Dec. 2007, June 2008-9
2. Longrichila Longchar (F)	78 years	-do-	June 2007, Dec 2008, June, 2009-10
3. Chubameren Jamir (M)	83 years	-do-	Dec 2008
4. Imkongakum Imsong (M)	80 years	Ungma	Dec 2008
5. Imolemba Jamir (M)	57 years	-do-	Dec 2008
6. Marla Longkumer (F)	98 years	Longkhum	June 2007, Dec 2008
7. Sentinungla Longkumer (F)	101 years	-do-	June 2007, Dec 2008
8. T.Kumzuk Ao (M)	65 years	Mopongchuket	May 2008
9. R.Nungshimeren Ozukum (M)	64 years	-do-	May 2008
10. Rev. Pona Jamir (M)	77years	-do-	May 2008
11. Imtilepzuk Jamir (M)	68 years	Changtongya	June 2009 to 2011
12. Tsukdinungba (M)	75 years	-do-	June 2009
13. Dr. Purtongzuk Longchar (M)	75 years	Molungkimong	Dec 2007, July 2008
14. Sakunungla Longkumer (F)	55 years	Longkhum	June 2007 to 2011
15. L.Teka Longchar (M)	66 years	-do-	June 2007 to 2011
16. k.Jamir (M)	71 years	Chuchuyimpang	June, 2008

There are ten males and three females informants. All the informants are between 55 to 100 years of age.

Note: The names of the informants given in the endnotes of each chapter in the thesis are concealed for protecting identity.

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ORAL NARRATIVES OF AO-NAGAS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

A Synopsis of the Thesis Submitted During 2011
To the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Centre for Folk Culture Studies

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ORAL NARRATIVES OF AO-NAGAS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

A Synopsis of Ph.D Thesis

Nagas are one among many of the ethnic groups of the North-eastern India that geographically share the borders of four countries- China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan of Asia. They are historically and culturally different from the rest of Indians though they had strong connections established over centuries between the state of Assam and the mainland including Tripura. The physical connection is very narrow and only four percent of the region is contiguous with India where as the remaining ninety six percent of the northeast borders the other countries. They remained isolated on the hill tops and villages often engaged in warfare raids upon the territories of one another till the British besieged them in AD 1882 in the battle of Kohima.

Like any other tribals in India, the Nagas have their own rich cultural heritage preserved in the form of oral traditions and artefacts. The Nagas claim that they had recorded their history on an animal skin which unfortunately was eaten by a dog. Since then, they say that their history and traditions are being preserved in their memories and disseminated orally in the form of songs, myths, tales and other forms of expressive behaviour, their material culture. The Nagas are distinct from the rest of the Indian tribes not only in their origin, languages and appearance but also in their life style patterns. The Nagas are heterogeneous tribes and belong to Mongoloid and Indo Burmese stocks. There are as many as seventeen social groups among the Nagas which were further subdivided into several major clans. These cultural groups from the level of clan to that of a major tribe sustains their distinctiveness in different walks of their tribal lives-traditions, customs, food, religion, social organization, rituals, political and economic organization, functioning of customary law and order-and thus protect their respective identities even amidst the changing world's scenario.

Nagaland, wherein these tribal groups inhabit is geographically situated in the hilly tracts of North-eastern India emerged as a State on December 1, 1963. Dr. Sarvepalli Radha Krishnan, the then President of India, formally inaugurated it as the 16th State of the Indian Union. Different geographical regions which were previously called after the names of the tribes were brought in the name Nagaland. It is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in North, Assam in West, Manipur in South and Burma (Myanmar) in the East. The state has now eleven districts viz. Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Phek, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto, Peren, Longleng and Kepheri. The Nagas are highly territorial in their identity formations. The seventeen Naga tribes are distributed in different geographical regions. Dimapur District is multi-ethnic settlement wherein different Naga and other tribal groups live. Thus the tribes of Nagas viz: *Rongmei* (Dimapur), the *Angamis*, *Moa (Memai)* and *Rengma Nagas* (Kohima), the *Aos* (Mokokchung), the *Konyak* (Mon), the *Chakhesang* and the *Pochury* (Phek), the *Sangtam*, the *Yimchunger*, the *Khiemungam* and the *Chang* (Tuensang) and the *Lothas* alias *Kyong* (Wokha), the *Semas (Sumi)* (Zunhebot), the *Ziliang*, the *Liangmai* and the *Kuki* (Peren), the *Phom* (Longleng and Kepheri) are identified with different territorial regions.ⁱ The region is covered by deep valleys, gorges, winding streams, hills that form the habitat for a rich variety of flora and fauna.

The Ao-Naga is one of the major tribes in Nagaland who had four distinctive dialectic groups viz: *Mongsen*, *Chungli*, *Changki* and *Sangpur*.ⁱⁱ However the major dialects of the Ao-Naga are *Mongsen* and *Chungli*. Though *Mongsen* was the main and poetic mode of expression in the past the dialect *Chungli* had been in use for communication and conversation. It so happened because when American Missionaries came in contact with the Aos, they first stayed in *Molungyimsen* village where the Aos of that region spoke in *Chungli* dialect. Then these people picked up the *Chungli* dialect for communication. Thus advent of missionaries around AD 1872 shifted the spoken dialect from *Mongsen* to *Chungli*. Thus *Chungli* dialect is continued to use for the mode of communication. Again The Ao-Naga tribe itself is not homogenous and is constituted by six major clans which were categorically organised basing on the spoken dialect. The *Chungli* group incorporated the *Pongen*, *Longkumer* and *Jamir* clans and the *Mongsen* group included *Imchen*, *Walling* and *Longchar* clans. Nomenclature in the Naga Hills

history presents great difficulties as it is with the other places of North-eastern frontiers. Both the place names and names of the tribes and clans are exceedingly confusing throughout the older writings. The name Naga is an Assamese appellation to the people living to their east which means, the *naked*. Most of the tribe held the names given by the 'other' groups of people.

Significance of the study

Prior to the emergence of Nagaland as a state in Indian Union the Nagas had undergone a phase of politico-cultural turmoil during which they struggled hard to survive and sustain their identities among the other turbulent tribes of North-eastern region. Under the British hegemony the political and social life of the Nagas was much disturbed. It is because the Britishers frequently reshuffled the geographical boundaries of the Naga tribes in the name of political reorganisation of colonial administrative domains.ⁱⁱⁱ They deployed literacy and spread of Christianity as paradigms politico-social integration of the tribes into their colonial regime. At the same time, they condemned Naga religion, culture, and practices, and attributed such acts to the wrath of God. Naga religious rites were forbidden since their animistic socio-religious practices and song traditions appear to be devilish to the Christianity. The Nagas felt that the expansion of Christianity erased their cultural trademarks, political, religious and social institutions and thereby affected the original form and structure of their tribal life.^{iv}

These developments evoked consciousness among the Naga people who felt that their political and cultural identities are getting lost. Such apprehensions led them to come into conflict with the Britishers during the Colonial period and later with the Indian Government even after the emergence of Independent India in AD 1947. They assert that they had a long cherished history. Nagas claim that their forefathers got migrated from Mongolia in BC 2617 and after migrating across Turkistan, Tibet and Mongolia, they finally arrived in Eastern Yunan Province of China in BC 1385 From China they entered Southeast Asia and thence to their present habitat in BC 1225 Their continuity as a people inhabiting their present lands is an established historical fact. In historical records, the first mention of the Nagas as a people inhabiting their present lands was made by Claudius Ptolemy, the Greek historian and geographer in AD 150. In his records Ptolemy

mentions the Nagas as *Nagaloï*.^v They were again mentioned by Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller who spent 15 years in India during the years AD 629-645. Hiuen Tsang visited Kamrup the capital of the Varman King, Bhaskar Varman in AD 643. From Kamrup in Assam, in his accounts “*Si-Yu-Ki*” he writes about the Nagas saying: The east of this country is bounded by a line of hills so that there is no great city to the kingdom. The frontiers are contiguous to the barbarians of Southwest China. These tribes are in fact akin to those of the Man people in their customs.^{vi} Besides these records, the Nagas are also mentioned in the Royal chronicles of the Manipur kingdom in records like Chietharol Kumbabu and Ningthourol Kumbabu (AD 663-763 and AD 906-996). They are also mentioned in the chronicles of the Ahom kings who came from upper Burma and the western Unan provinces of China and settled and ruled in Assam for 600 years beginning from the 13th century. Naga resistance against intrusions and raids from these two neighbouring kingdoms and also other kingdoms like the Burmese, Tripuris, Dimashas and the Cachar kingdoms from the 13th century to the 18th centuries are all there in recorded history. As for their encounter with the British in the 19th century and their resistance against British rule for one hundred fifteen years (1832-1947), numerous accounts are found in the British colonial records. It is said that the battles the British fought with the Naga tribes in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries far outnumber all the frontier battles fought with the Indians in the great Indian sub-continent. Even in spite of all these battles, the British were able to subjugate only thirty per cent of actual Naga territory. (The actual Naga ancestral domain would be around 120,000 sq. km). In British colonial accounts, the unconquered 70% territories of the Nagas were recorded as unadministered territories or excluded area. Even in the thirty per cent lands that the British administered, they never laid any claims to the lands they were administering. C.V.Aitchinson in *Treaties, Engagements and Sanads* clearly mentions that there was no written treaty or agreements have been made with any of the Naga tribes.^{vii} Also following the submission of the Naga memorandum to the Simon Commission in AD 1929, where the Nagas had refused to be included in the reformed scheme of India, the British Government in recognition of their demands put the Naga Hills under excluded area in the Government of India Act of AD 1935.

These political conditions lead to the evocation of Naga identity as a social construct for incorporating all the tribes only in the early 20th century after the formation of the Naga Club in AD 1918. Even after the grant of Nagaland state by the Government of India, Naga identity still stands amorphous since their long cherished customs and traditions have been thoroughly invaded by modern political system. Historically the Nagas have always been proud of their independence and pristine lifestyle. Under Article 371-A (1) in the Constitution, special constitutional safeguards are provided to protect Naga identity and Naga way of life. The Indian Parliament cannot make any law in respect to religious and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to the Naga customary law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources. From time immemorial, the Nagas have their own democratic polity which consist of the Naga village Council, the Range (Area) council and the Tribal council designed to serve the democratic Naga way of life.^{viii} These are certain characteristics clearly perceivable from the society's folklores and narratives distinct of the Nagas which form the bases of their claim for a distinct identity. Their desire to retain those characteristics is apparent in their struggle to indigenise the modern administrative mechanism based on their respective customs and traditions.

Globalisation is another factor that awakened identity consciousness. It is a socio-economic phenomenon that transformed the entire world into a global village and merged the spatio-temporal boundaries of the universe. It stirs up awareness with regard to homogeneity versus heterogeneity. In the wake of globalisation, the Nagas felt the need to revive their tradition for the identity of their own and keep up their conventional heterogeneity amidst the homogeneity under Christian identity. The impact of globalization is most felt in the area of indigenous cultural products. The Nagas are apprehending that the artisans may modify or redesign the artefacts to keep pace with the global markets which may sometime distort or invert the traditional ideology embedded within the cultural product. In otherwords, the identities embodied in cultural products will thus be eliminated for greater marketability.^{ix} Such de-identification of local cultures for global recognition would inevitably lead to a hybridization of identities in cultural artefacts. Hybridization implies the consumption of original features that results in a new

product. This inverse process of de-identification begins from the extrinsic domain of visible ethnic identifiers. But this cannot be dismissed as an isolated phenomenon because the extrinsic markers are an extension of the intrinsic identities. The loss of the visible distinctions in cultural products will eventually deplete much of the lore and history of the people so that a time will come when the product will account for writing a “de-humanized” history for the people. As already the cultures of North East India are facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization, people are scared that the globalization would eventually reduce their cultural ‘identity’ to ‘anonymity’.^x

The Ao-Nagas, being the major sub-tribe of the Nagas of North Eastern Hill tribes share the same ideology with regard to their identity formations. The Ao are also known as Hatigurians. Hatiguri is a place located between the Mariani and Titapar, situated about 30 Km from Tzurang river towards Assam. Most of the Ao villages have alternate names given by the Assamese people. When the Britishers entered the Ao country from the plains, Merangkong was known as Naogaon and Mopongchuket as Molodubia, and so on, Naogaon and Molodubia being the Assamese names for these villages. Once established in the Ao country, the British officers began to ask the names of villages yet further in the interior and were naturally told the Ao names. Thus the Tuesang, a big village of the Changs for years was known by its Ao name of Mojungjami "the village of wicked men". It is because the Changs were the hereditary enemies of the Aos. Most of the names of the Naga tribes were given by the others.^{xi} Such apprehension in every sphere of life currently empowers them to reassert their identity in all spheres of life.

Nature and scope of study

In the light of above discussion the present thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* broadly proposes to study the oral traditions, especially the oral narratives (personal and folk) told by men and women in different cultural contexts on different issues of their society to show how the community constructed their identity, their ‘self’ in their renditions through the ages. Like any other oral society, the Ao-Nagas prevail upon their lore, the verbal and non verbal expressive behaviour deposited in the mnemonics of the people which is learnt and transmitted orally through

the generations. The lore embodies the knowledge, beliefs and the institutions that guided the people and communities to retain their identities, their 'selves' from erosion and invasion despite changes in time and space. Their folk (oral) lore is a rich source for reconstructing their histories and encompasses a wide variety of genres- folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, performing arts like music, dances, drama, painting, arts and an extensive material culture- which establish the distinctiveness and identity among the other tribal communities in Nagaland. Further the study brings forth the change and continuity of Ao-Naga culture as constructed in their folklore. The thesis examines the notion of identity as conceived by the Nagas in general and the Ao-Nagas in particular. The study shows whether the Ao-Nagas 'what they think of identity' is really lost or still stands as 'core' of their life-style patterns in the contemporary changing dimensions of their worldview. The issues of related to these aspects are proposed to discuss in the light of latest theoretical discourses on identity and methodological implications of narrative inquiry.

The thesis brings forth the socio-religious nuisances of Ao-Naga folk life as reflected in their ritual processes and practices in pre and post Christian times to understand changes and continuity in their new identity formations.

The study proposes to develop Indigenous models of ritual process in tribal societies to demonstrate how the rites performed on different ritual contexts and the material culture associated with them would mark the identity of these communities in the changed contexts. This research also sheds light on social organisation and politico-economic life of the community in the pre and post Christian contexts to show structural continuities and variations in identity formations.

Geographical area of study

The geographical distribution of the Ao region is bounded by the *Tzula* River; *Sangtam*, *Chang* and *Phom* tribes on the East; the *Lotha* tribes, the Assam plains on the west; *Konyak* tribe in the north and the *Sema* tribe in the south. The entire Ao territory is divided into six ranges (*Tsükong*), each having a name comprising of several villages. The ranges run parallel to one another and are called: *the Ongpangkong*, *the Langpangkong*, *the Asetkong*, *the Changkikong*, *the Japukong*, *the Tsurangkong*.^{xii} The

scope of the field work is limited to the regions *Longkhum* village, *Ungma* village, *Mopongchuket* village, *Changtongya* village and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts. All these settlements are populated by Ao-Nagas wherein the other Naga tribes also share the environment.

Survey of Literature

The survey of literature is done in three broad areas. They are: (i) Folk Narrative Research and identity (ii) Status of knowledge on Ao-Naga community (iii) Field methodology and data processing.

Lacunae in previous researches:

So far the researches conducted on the Nagas in general and Ao-Naga in particular, accepted that their rich cultural heritage and identity are preserved in their oral traditions (folklore). But different genres of their folklore are not methodically collected, analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the people who had produced them. Most of the researches depended on the Administrative records, field reports of the anthropologists and other such sources which did not reveal the soul of the community-how it struggled through the ages to carve its own niche i.e., the cultural identity ever since the historical formations. Though some works focused on rituals, folk narratives and songs they are highly descriptive and interpreted more from the researcher's viewpoint. The content of the lore is given importance rather than the cultural context of their renditions. Some works are compilation of folklore genres meant for archival purpose. The rituals are though graphically described, they are not analysed in the light of latest discourses on cultural semiotics and ritual theories. Almost all works express the fear that the literacy, Christianity and globalization are threats to their personal and community identities; and one must save their culture from erosion. They warn the younger generation that they should protect their rich heritage by preserving in audio-visual forms and print media. The research works are not suggesting measures to save the heterogeneity of community from homogeneity caused by the above three factors. The methodology used by the colonial writers was primarily based on exploration and fieldwork and secondly the methods that they used were survey methods, observation and participant observation methods with the objective of trying to show how it really was.

Therefore this literature has only description. Their writings became the sources for post-colonial writers on the Nagas. However their writings were more or less a descriptive affair or information on the Naga culture, traditions and the life of the people. So folklore of the Nagas was not explored and is not taken into consideration for the study about the Nagas. Writings were not perceived from oral tradition or from the folk perspective.

Now the survey of literature emerges the following questions: The Nagas, especially the Ao-Nagas really lost their identity. Whether literacy erased their oracy? Whether Christianity could completely wipe off the animistic thinking, ritual practices, social organization, and gender construction of Ao-Nagas? Whether Indian administration could replace native village organization, customary law and traditional economy? Could the globalization erode Ao-identities?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that:

- Nagas had a long cherished history and culture hoarded in their oral traditions. Their frequent involvement in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and displacement of their political/geographical domains by Britishers and Indian Government could not disturb the functioning of their traditional village councils. The customary law still prevails. The agricultural practices are still tribal but follow some technological advancement.
- The introduction of literacy and advent of Christianity though condemned some democratic ways with regard to spousal selections (Morung system-dormitory), the rest of the patriarchal social organisation related to the institutions of marriage, kinship, law, customs etc, are being continued with some changes coming up in the passage of time.
- Though most of the Ao-Nagas took to the Christianity, their animistic belief system still gets reflected in their symbolic ritual practices observed during several socio-religious celebration in the contemporary times.
- At the outset it appears that Ao-Nagas are losing identity because of globalisation. If the deep structures of different aspects of their folk life as reflected in their oral narratives are analysed and interpreted from the perspectives of the community, they reveal change and continuity of Ao-naga identities through the ages.

Aims and objectives

Basing on the hypotheses made above, the thesis entitled *Oral Narratives of the Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity* advocates the following aims and objectives.

- To collect different genres of Ao-Naga folklore- folk narratives (mythology, folktales) proverbs, riddles folksongs, beliefs, and religion, ritual practices and personal narratives / life stories of the narrators in the field.
- To analyse the folknarratives from structuralist and poststructuralist perspective for establishing how the folknarrative typology and structures could reflect the social hierarchies in at different realms of folklife. The Proppian, Levistraussian and Derridian philosophies are being evaluated in this context.
- To show how the people in oral societies construct and sustain their identities through the generations in their folknarrative tradition and other genres of folklore.
- To analyse the ritual life of the Ao-Naga community of the past and present and evolve indigenous models which are quite different from the models put forward by Van Gennep, Victor Turner and Mary Douglas.
- To study different walks of the lives like social organizations, religion and rituals, agriculture, economy, administration etc. and their ethnic cultural practices that mark their identity as reflected in their oral narratives. And also to establish the changes and continuities of Ao-Naga identities in pre and post Christian era in the wake of globalisation.
- To suggest the measures for retaining the cultural identities of the Ao-Nagas in the changing scenario.

Methodology

Methods can be defined as the procedures and techniques characteristic of a particular discipline or field of knowledge or a way of doing something, especially a systematic way; implies an orderly logical arrangement. Methodology refers to more than a simple set of methods; rather it refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie a particular study.^{xiii} The first step in methodology is collection of data. Data is organized information. It can be numbers, words, measurements, observations or even just descriptions of things. The data is collected from **primary** and **secondary** sources, but the information gathered from both these sources gets merged in the research process.

Primary sources

The prime source of the study is the data gathered from the field work. The Ao culture is rooted in their folklore traditions transmitted orally through out the generations since they have no written source. The study focuses on the oral narratives as the major source of study. Oral narratives are highly dynamic genres embodying the essence of

culture; how it is being experienced, represented and transmitted to the other generations. Narratives are stories that have been shared in everywhere in human culture as a mode of communication, education, preservation of culture and to instil knowledge and values. Hence the people adapt narratives to contour and conceptualize their experiences to render in the form of stories which are nothing than their experiential expressions. The oral narratives broadly include folk narratives (myths, folktales etc) metanarratives (narratives on narratives), personal narratives, life experience narratives and auto ethnographies of the informants in the field. Men, women and children from different socio-economic statuses and age groups were primary resource persons in the field study. Oral narratives on the traditional rituals and practices are collected from the older people who witnessed three generations. The data on the life cycle (childbirth, puberty, marriage and death) rituals and politico-cultural/religious rites is collected in the form of oral narratives. The contemporary rituals are collected in the context of celebrations.

The material culture associated in the folklife of the Ao-Nagas is also collected from the dwellings of the people. The other folklore genres of the community are also collected. The field work is done in around the villages *Longkhum*, *Ungma Mopongchuket* and *Changtongya* and in around Mokokchung and Dimapur districts.

Secondary Sources

The published or unpublished written data related to the topic of research constitutes the secondary source material. Besides the research works that were already analysed above in the survey of literature, administrative records of the British and Indian government and village reports form the source material.

Methods

Research methods are classified into quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative research^{xiv} is defined as that which explains a “*phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods, particularly statistics.*”^{xv} It contains the data gathered from structured research methods such as survey, questionnaires, checklists and experimentation.

(i) **Quantitative methods** are generally works towards documenting subject attributes expressed in quantity, extent, or strength, as well as guaranteeing- among other things- objectivity, accuracy, validity and reliability. Their purpose is to measure variables and to produce figures which will allow judgements as to the status of the variables in question, which in turn will allow further processing, and comparisons and permit replicability.^{xvi} Survey method is a quantitative method. Before entering into the field, the survey method was applied. I acquainted fully with the literature on the area and its people to supply information, study the geography, weather conditions, and locations before entering into the field and attempted to reach the local people who may assist with the research. Survey method is a non-experimental, descriptive research method or a fact-finding study.^{xvii} Survey method helps to organize data into meaningful components that can assist in understanding the human condition on many levels. In a sense it is a shorthand method of gaining information from a subset of the entire group studied. Survey method is always conducted in a natural setting; it is a field study.

In order to get informations from the field using the above methods, different techniques like focus group discussions, interviews, informal discourses on different issues of the research topic with the communities are appropriated. Focus group discussions are conducted with the members of the councils and elders of the folk groups on different issues on religion, rituals, social norms, customary law etc. In the directive and non-directive interviews, the questions used are open ended which gave scope to the researcher to understand the perspective of the community. After field work, transliteration of data and transfer of data from audio through script is done which is called transcription. A researcher can employ multiple methods.

(ii) **Qualitative methods:** van Mannen considers qualitative research as a best umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. The qualitative researchers are concerned with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the precise meaning to persons of phenomena occurring in the normal social contexts and are typically preoccupied with complexity, authenticity, contextualisation, shared subjectivity of researcher and researched and minimization of illusion ^{xviii}. The qualitative methods

include observation, ethnography, postmodern-ethnography (dialogical method) and narrative inquiry.

a. Observation method is used in obtaining data by direct observation, looking from the outside in and describing the site as the researcher sees it. There are Participant Observer and Non-participant Observer. Participant Observer has the advantage to participate and observe what is going around and feel the experience the actual role which the researchers assume. Non-Participant Observer may be able to view the situation with an objectivity of which participant would have robbed him/her and as he/she is not in the centre of the action but may be able to take notes, view the entire kaleidoscope of activities and perhaps even be able to use a tape recorder to obtain a full report of the audio aspects of the event.

b. Ethnography is an experience labeled as the fieldwork method and then writes accounts of the culture, emphasizing descriptive detail. It is to be closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture.^{xix} Ethnographic method in short is the graphic study of culture of the races. Ethnography (Greek *ethnos* = people and *graphein* = writing)^{xx} is a genre of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies. Ethnography presents the results of a holistic research method founded on the idea that a system's properties cannot necessarily be accurately understood independently of each other.^{xxi} It is the process of describing a culture or way of life from a folk people's point of view. Another name for it is field research. The ethnographer usually cultivates close relationships with "informants" who can provide specific information on aspects of cultural life. While detailed written notes are the mainstay of fieldwork. Even tape recorders and cameras are also used. So the ethnographic method involves observation and note taking.

c. Post-modern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality.^{xxii} Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' has influenced academic disciplines. Postmodern ethnographers are interested in understanding how this form perpetuates certain relations of power and domination. Postmodern ethnographers are examples of narrative forms and

new ways of telling. Postmodern ethnography springs from methodological reflection within the cultural theory of postmodernism that transposed its principles into ethnographic practice. According to postmodern ethnographers, objectivity and impartiality are not features of the ethnographer's interpretative work, but fictions promoted through rhetorical strategies of textual type known as the 'poetics and politics of writing'.^{xxiii} These ethnographers believe that instead of understanding the other more fully, what fieldworkers should do is gain a fuller understanding of themselves, by uncovering their prejudices, ideology and tacit knowledge.^{xxiv}

d. Narrative inquiry an 'inquiry in to the narrative' is another method used to analyse and interpret the oral narratives in the thesis. Narratives are stories which are told in ordered sequence of events that is combined with verbal communication to make sense of what one experience, and also with different characters that communicate a message artistically. It focuses particularly on people's lives and lived experiences and the process of gathering information/data for the purpose of research through storytelling where the researcher writes/records a narrative of the experience. The person who narrates the story is the primary sources for the narrative enquiry. The lives of the people are consists of stories. Narrative in essence is the stories of lives and the stories of the lives of others and it is open to interpretation. This interpretation develops through relationship of researcher and the respondent or story teller and listener. Narratives are basically consisting of a narrator who shared what happened or tells a story to others by means of conversation or communication through utterances. Production of narratives is a dialogical process between self of the narrator and the researcher. Hence the narratives and other data collected in the field is a product of employing the Dialogical method, which is reflexive, self emanating and emergent. It produces 'a corpus of thick data'^{xxv} produced 'dialogically' by the ethnographer and the informant thereby merging the boundaries between the subject/object and researcher/informant. Self-reflective knowledge comes from the discussion from both sides. Dialogical method helps the researcher to know the reality of the human beings. Both fieldworker and informant begin with little or nothing in terms of shared experience but when they engage in dialogue with each other they starts to experience the activities going on around them. Narratives research directs a study and gathers information to help bring out the appropriate

objective research tools, and can be used as the single evaluation of a real-life problem.^{xxvi} Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience.

The study adopted both the qualitative and quantitative methods and data collected had been cross checked with the other source materials. Such process is known as method of “triangulation” which is essential while interpreting them from the perspective of the community. Triangulation refers to the use of several methods in answering the research question^{xxvii}. Deniz describes four forms of triangulation:

- (I) Data triangulation which consists collection of data through multiple source sampling strategies involving different people, time and locations.
- (II) Investigator triangulation that refers to the use of more than one in gathering data
- (III) Theoretical triangulation in which the research relies on more than one theoretical position in interpreting data.
- (IV) Methodological triangulation that refers to the use of more than one method of gathering data. Deniz calls attention to the ‘with-in method’ (using varieties of the same method) and ‘between method’ (using contrasting methods) triangulation^{xxviii}.

Chapterisation

This thesis is divided into Eight chapters.

The first chapter is Introduction which gives a brief preamble to the study of Naga, especially Ao-naga culture and identity. The chapter deals with significance of the research topic, its nature and scope and survey of previous literature, hypothesis aims and objectives. The chapter also gives an account of the methodology followed in the research process.

The second chapter, An Overview of Ao-Naga Cultural Life describes in brief the Ao-Naga Folklife to situate the community’s identities in their expressive behaviour. The chapter describes geography, environment and people of Nagaland in general and Mokokchung district, the land of Aos in detail. The cultural life of the Ao-Nagas that encompass social structure, economic activities, political life customary law, religion, rituals, dress ,musical instruments, material culture and ethno medical practices etc., are discussed in brief.

The third chapter Origin and Dispersal of Nagas: A Folkloric Perspective defines the nature and scope of Ao-Nagas' Folklife and interprets it from the perspectives of identity formations, both in their personal and community domains. The chapter analyses and interprets the mythical tradition of the Nagas and the AO-nagas to throw new light on their origins and migratory patterns through the ages.

The fourth chapter, On Ao-Naga Narrative typology and structure: Metaphors of Identity focuses on (i) how the oral narratives of the Ao-Nagas (both in personal and folk) endure their core strands of identity in their tale motifs, and (ii) how the structure of the oral narratives mirror the social stratification and cultural values of the Ao-Nagas. The folk narratives in this chapter are analysed on the paradigms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic structural models and processed through the Derridian post structural hermeneutical discourse and theory of narrative inquiry.

The fifth Social organisation : Reflections in Folklore analyses the folktales, personal narratives and proverbs told by men and women of different age groups to interpret how Ao-Nagas organised their patriarchal society revolving round the institutions of marriage and kinships. The chapter further focuses on how the masculinity and femininity are constructed upon men and women in Ao-Naga society and explains the gender roles and relations in family system. The role of customary law in regulation of social life is also explained.

The sixth chapter, Life Cycle Ceremonies as Cultural Metaphor discusses in general how the rituals celebrated by the Ao-Naga people in different socio-cultural contexts stand as the metaphors of their cultural identities at personal level, as the members of their respective family/clan groups level (collective), among other clans of the Naga society. The definition and theoretical dimension of the rituals in general and life cycle ceremonies in particular are discussed. The ritual process of the 'life cycle ceremonies'- birth, puberty, marriage and death' of the Ao-Naga are analysed and interpreted from the perspective of the community. The ritual events celebrated in each life cycle ceremony are studied to show how they metaphorically represent the cultural components of their respective families and clan groups. Further the chapter develops indigenous models of life cycle ceremonies of the AO-Nagas which are quite distinct

from the models developed in the west and other tribal society of the world. The life cycle ceremonies are explained not only as the metaphors of their personal identity, but as the loci changing identities from one threshold to the other in one's life course.

The seventh chapter, Communal Rites as Markers of identity focuses on the rituals that demand the communal participation of the AO-Nagas .The communal rites are depicted as the paradigms of socialisation and markers of Aos' identity. The intricacies socio-political and religious intricacies of Ao culture are explained how the communal rituals involve social groups as a whole to process their changing identities. The ritual process of social, economic religious and political rituals of the Aos is analysed. Indigenous ritual models of different communal rites which mark different dimensions of Aos identity are developed.

The eighth chapter, Conclusion is a brief summery of all the chapters along with findings. It is observed that the Ao-Naga community is a distinct folklore community which draws its strength by willful play of verbal and non-verbal genres of folklore in every day life through which it construct its identity despite the onslaught of modernity and globalisation.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Naga people: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_people. Accessed: 23/07/2010

ⁱⁱ The people of Mokokchung: <http://mokokchung.nic.in/files/people.html>. Accessed: 26/07/2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Nagaland in the 20th century was severed through a treacherous betrayal by the British Government. Burma was gifted with half, and the other half fell under Indian dominion. Those areas that fell under Indian Territory were further subdivided into four fragments, namely - Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Thus, within the Indian Territory, large chunks of Naga lands and Naga people were put into three other states against the wishes of the Nagas. This was done to reduce the Naga political issue to the smallest possible geographical area. The present Indian State of Nagaland is comprised of only 16,557 sq. kms with a population of hardly over two million people. *Kaka Iralu .D.* "The Fifty Four-Year Indo-Naga Conflict: A Question of Internal Indian Ethnic Conflict or a Conflict between Two Nations" Paper presented in National *Seminar on Resolving Ethnic Conflicts in North East India*. Guwahati, Assam, November 11-12, 2002.

^{iv} <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=17767085652>. Accessed: 25/07/2010

^v Claudis Ptolemy, *Geographia*, V11, Patis, E, Champion, 1925, (ii) p.18.

^{vi} Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's travel in India*, Vol.III, Part II, Varanasi, 1903, p.11) Quoted in Visier Sanyü, *A History of Nagas and Nagaland*, New Delhi, Commonwealth Publications, 1995, p.7

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- vii Vol.XII, 1931, p.91, cf. Kaka Iralu, *supra*.
- viii Naga customary law under article 371A (1) by R.C. Chiten Jamir.
<http://www.nagalandpost.com/ShowStory.aspx?npoststoryiden=UzEwMDYxNzA%3D-jwsus6fA5ww%3D>. Accessed: 26/07/2010
- ix “The famous Ao-Naga shawl called “*Mangkotepsu*” is male attire but these days one sees that jackets made out of it have become unisex and are sold at tourist spots with its lore and history totally ignored. Other handicrafts, dance forms are also being manipulated to ‘fit’ into the required mould”. Temsula Ao, “Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective”, in *Globalization and Tribes of Northeast India*, A quarterly newsletter Folklife from National Folklore Support Centre, Serial No.22 July 2006, pp. 6-7
- x *Ibid*
- xi Robert Reid, *History of The Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*, Shillong, The Assam Government Press, 1942, fn. Pp.109-110.
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- xxi *ibid*
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