

**A Dog Eaten Script: Reading the History of Pre-Colonial Ao
Naga Society through Symbols, Motifs and Designs.**

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HISTORY

BY

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Declaration

I **Sensonaro Longchar** bearing the **Reg. No 17SHHL05** hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation titled, “**A Dog Eaten Script: Reading the History of Pre-Colonial Ao Nagas through Symbols, Motifs and Designs.**” has been carried out by me under the supervision of **Prof. Dr. Bhangya Bhukya** at Department of History , University of Hyderabad is an original and Independent research work. I also declare that this dissertation or a part of it has not been submitted for a degree in any other University or Institute.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**A Dog Eaten Script: Reading the History of Pre-Colonial Ao Nagas through Symbols, Motifs and Designs**”, submitted by Sensonaro Longchar bearing the Reg. No. 17SHHL05 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in Economics is bonafide work carried out by her, under my supervision and guidance and is plagiarism-free dissertation.

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

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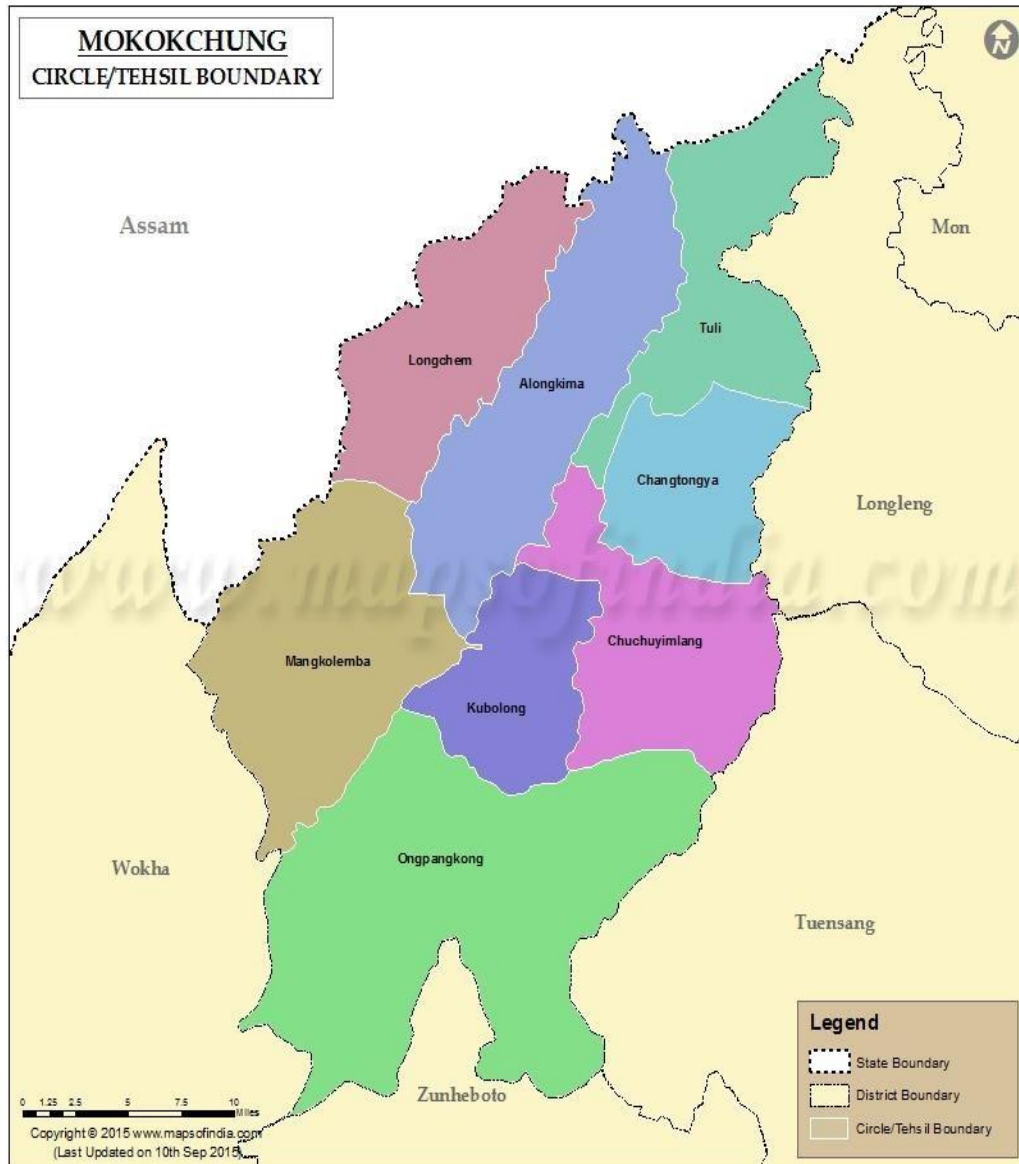
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MOKOKCHUNG
CIRCLE/TEHSIL BOUNDARY



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Introduction

1.1 At a glance

‘Nagas do not have a proper history, prior to the coming of the Colonial state and the Missionaries’. This kind of remark has been observed in many of the writings of both outsiders and Naga scholars. This was largely because, Naga society was seen as an illiterate society with no written records and everything that they had was some folklores and stories, customs and practices intertwined with superstitious beliefs and their inhumane act of ‘Head taking’

Owing to the kind of weightage given to writing than any other medium of Transmission and preserving history, this kind of observation are somewhat inevitable. However, with the development of oral history as a discipline for reconstructing history, one is able to somehow challenge the notion of not having a history on the basis of not having a properly documented record. Yet, the stress given on written document as the most authenticated source of history over any other source is undeniably true. This brings us to once again retrospect the very nature of writing and its development and how it differs from orality as a medium of transmitting history.

If one reflects the development of writing as an important source of retaining history, one would have to go back to the development of writing in the history of mankind. The development of Writing was an evolutionary process. It established at different point in time at different places. For instances, writing was invented in Sumer (Mesopotamia) around c. 3500- 3000 BCE, and Mesoamerica by 300 BC.¹ In China it developed around c1200 BCE and its writings were found in “Oracle bones”. In Egypt, around C.3150 BCE.² As far as

¹ JOSHUA J. Mark, *Writing-Ancient History encyclopaedia*, [website], <http://www.ancient.eu>writing>, (accessed 28 April 2011),

²Ibid.

India is concern, the earliest form of writing can be traced back to the Indus script, however, faced with the problem of deciphering, one is unable to give a definite status or appropriation to the Indus Script. Apart from Indus script, the earliest form of writing in India can be seen using Brahmi script, the earliest example of which can be found in the edict of Ashoka of 3rd century BCE. Some Scholars opines that Brahmi Script might have developed prior to 3rd century BCE.³

One can observe that, the formation of writing as an; *“Ultimate abstraction of sound and meaning with the representation of phonemes by the letter of the alphabet”*⁴ did not just came of out of a sudden out of nowhere, but, it indeed evolves for a long period of time .The development of the script in all these civilization though differs in many respect, shows one thing in common that is; the very nature in which writing was developed. The development of writing is somehow related with a settled form of living mostly, to do with the presence of a state. In this regard, in the word of Pierre Clastres;

*For, in its severity, the law is at the same time writing. Writing is on the side of the law, the law lives in writing; and knowing that the one means that unfamiliarity with the other is no longer possible... Writing directly bespeaks the power of the law, be it engraved in stone, painted on animal skins or drawn on papyrus.*⁵

Writing is very much associated with state in its early formation; a tool used by the people in power to rule and legitimize their power over the rest. This is so because one of the key element of writing is its permanency. Once written until completely destroyed, would remain unchanged. Writing is advantageous to those section of society that could appropriate it. It must also be noted that, writing was for most part, was for a very small section of people who

³ Early Indian epigraphy, [website], <https://en.m.wikipedia.org.>wiki>, (accessed may 2019)

⁴ Denise Schmandtbesserat, *The evolution of writing*, [website], 2014, <http://sites.utexas.edu>dsb>token>th>, (accessed 25-Jan 2014)

⁵ James C. Scott, *The art of not being governed*, reprinted 2014, Orient Blackswan Private limited, 2010, p220.

are supposed to be called as the elite section of the society; the advantage section of the population. Scott remarked;

*“To say that, demographically speaking, literacy hung by a thread would be no exaggeration. Not only was it confined to a tiny elite, but the social value of literacy, in turn, depended on a state bureaucracy, an organized clergy, and a social pyramid where literacy was a means of advancement and a mark of status. Any event that threatened these institutional structures threatened literacy itself.”*⁶

The invention of printing press in fact had altered this elitist notion of writing in many respect, as, writing became easily accessible unlike the days where writing was for no means for common section of the society. However it is true that writing until very recently was very much a tool of the powerful over the weak. In fact, when one carefully observes the very notion of Nagas described by the colonial administrator and the missionaries as “savage” “uncivilized” and ‘barbarous, it was not only the absence of a proper health care centers, or, because of the activities like head cutting, or the lack of cleanliness but, it was also an issue of not having a written script. They discard the rich oral tradition of the Nagas as a way of transmitting history. ‘A society with no writing is a society with no history and no history; no civilization’. The first attempt therefore for the British and the missionaries was to educate the Nagas and to civilize them. Teaching them how to read and write was in fact the solution to the problem. Having a written history was also an important criteria for distinguishing a society as civilized or uncivilized.

Keeping this in mind, highlighting the nature of oral tradition is indeed an appropriate thing to do. If writing is permanent and if permanency is one thing that privileged writing over orality, oral tradition is challenged for its opposite. Oral transmission seems not a reliable source for constructing history for many because of the probability that it may alter according

⁶ James C. Scott, *the Art of not Being governed*, p 224

to the situation. And the fact that human memory can be distorted. But that doesn't necessarily prove that a community or a particular society who rely on orality has no history. It can simply mean a different kind of history or a different way of retaining their history. On this issue, further putting an argument made by Scott over the issue of stigmatizing stateless peoples as "people with no History" by the neighboring culture⁷ He argued;

*The charges are wrong on two counts. First the stigmatization presupposes that only written history counts as a narrative of identity and a common past. Second, and more important, how much history a people have far from indicating their low stage of evolution, is always an active choice, one that positions them Vis-à-Vis their powerful text- based neighbors.*⁸

1.2: Literature review:

The opening up of once so called isolated hilly tract of Nagas hills (here one should be aware that the Nagas were not totally isolated from the rest of the world as they maintained sort of relationship with the Ahom ruler of Assam even prior of the coming of the colonial state.) opened up a space for ethnographical studies of the Naga hills owing to the fact that Nagas did not had a system of historical transmission through writing. Many of the literary works were produced in the form of monographs and ethnographic work, tours and surveys etc. which was necessary for controlling the 'wild tribes' of the Naga hills.in other word, understanding the culture and tradition was crucial to control the different tribes inhabiting the Naga Hill as such, many of these works were produced by the officials who were posted in this area. There are works produced by the Christian missionaries on their mission activities, which also gives an insight about the culture and tradition of the Nagas. However, one thing that had been observed in all these writings was that, they were not necessarily

⁷ James C .Scott, *The Art of not being governed*, p. 237

⁸ Ibid, p. 237

aiming to construct the History of their past rather, their intention was driven towards attaining their own goals.

M. M. Clark's work's on *A Corner in India (1907)* provides us quite an elaborate description about the missionary activities among the Aos. Considering the fact that their main goal towards the Aos was to convert them into Christianity, we find the use of those derogatory terms such as 'Savage' 'heathen' 'uncivilized' repeatedly in her work; portraying the Nagas as living in darkness further intensified the responsibility of the missionaries to convert the Nagas into Christianity. 'Civilizing the uncivilized' was conveyed through their writings. One would find bias and uncritical observation about the Tradition and Culture of the Aos. These terms used by the missionaries on their works on the Nagas in general has a long lasting Negative connotation, which is a challenge that the present Naga Scholar had to face.

J.P Mill, (*"the Ao Nagas" 1926*) and WC Smith's (*"the Ao- Nagas tribes of Assam"*) were among the first to produce ethnographical works of the Ao Nagas. The knowledge required to administrator this untouched tribe made them to write extensively on the domestic life of the Aos. And in fact their works are an important source of reconstructing the pre-colonial Ao Naga society. A great portion on the meanings represented by different symbols and motifs seen in the cultural attire and crafts of the ao Nagas can also be extracted from their works, especially from j. P Mill's "the Ao Nagas" and has been a great source for this dissertation as well. However, if one is to analyze the whole of their works, one is definitely paused by the attitude of superiority, and civilizational difference are a part in both the monographs. In one of the chapters from Smith's *"the Ao Nagas of Assam"*; He titled the chapter itself as *"Changes through contact with more Advanced People"*.

The myth of the Aos holds that, the Ao Nagas once had a written script though happened to be eaten by a dog even prior to the introduction of the Roman alphabets by the missionaries. James c Scott in his book *"the Art of not being governed"* put forward an argued that for the

Hill people of South East Asia which is also called by the name Zomia, writing is in a way or the other is very much associated with the state. The form of agriculture these hill people practice i.e. shifting as over wet cultivation; the type of crop they choose all directs towards a kind of resistance against the state. Like the Ao Nagas these hill people of South East Asia had legend stories, that directs them of once having a written script though, lost in a way or the other. The book though may sometimes be seen as a bit subjective, it still give us an insight of how ‘not having a history’ in the eyes of an outside observer (in this case the valley people) may not always be the case. These hill people have developed a different kind of history using orality as a medium. At the same time, those that denied the presence do so not because they really do not have a history, but, an active choice to avoid social division on the basis of certain history. In a nutshell it gives us an idea of how certain society that we named as ‘uncivilized’, ‘barbarous’ or ‘savage’ on the basis of their food, agricultural practices, oral tradition etc. may not always be the way one imagine or perceived rather, it can also be an active choice on their part to set themselves free from the clutches of the state making mechanism.

Different society have their own system of transmitting their tradition and culture in an article written by Rebecca Blum Martinez entitled; “*Language and tribal Sovereignty: Whose Language is it anyway?*” The author, argues how multilingual policy which also encourages the preservation of one’s language may not always be a suitable option for maintaining and preserving tribal languages. She uses the example of Pueblo tribes of Mexico by arguing that Pueblo community needs a different system to preserve their language as, their language is tied with their religion; language for the Pueblo community is a ‘sacred’ and a maintainer of their identity. Her argument not only enlighten us to reinvestigate the multilingual program as a modern state policy, but, also gives us an idea of how different communities or society can

have different form of maintaining their social identity. Writing may not be the only source of preserving and maintaining one's history and identity.

Temjenwapang on his PHD thesis; *the making of history: Experiences from Naga Historiography* tried to investigate the problem with Naga Historiography. Though his work is limited to defining the problems and not to offer the readers with an alternative way of studying the History of the Nagas, he put forwarded certain problems in Naga Historiography such as the image of the Nagas as 'Savage' a colonial construct, and how the postcolonial writings had further picked this term and continued without further analyzing the sources He problematized the "*circularity on writing Naga historiography*"

Panger Imchen, who holds a theological background had published his work entitled *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* (1993). His book is an attempt to divert the popular opinion on precolonial Ao Naga Religion and culture as old and irreverent with the coming of Christianity. He in fact suggest a thorough investigation on the culture and tradition of the Aos. Quoting his own statement; "*I discovered that much of the truth has not been told*". *Revisiting the past would show that the Ao Nagas were not "alien to the knowledge of the truth"*. Further suggesting that their tradition and culture itself was malleable for the transformation. In his effort to connect the traditional Ao Naga Religion with Christianity, He has highlighted some important social, political and economic aspects of the Ao Nagas which are found helpful in understanding the precolonial Ao Naga Society. The title of his book *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* though can be put to question as periodization in the stick sense i.e. categorizing the Naga society into 'Ancient', 'Medieval' and 'Modern' in the case of the Nagas seems appropriate.

The Ao Nagas culture and attire has seen symbols and motifs that speaks. In this connection, we have found colonial Monographs specially that of J.P Mill a useful source of information. Panger Imchen has also put out some information on the same. Pursowa in his book "*The Ao-*

Naga Traditional Dress as a medium of communication in the society” further illustrated how traditional Ao Naga dress was used as a medium of communication and how it can play an important function of communication in the churches today. Though written in a religious perspective, it still give a whole lot of information about the meanings and symbols represented by different dress and attires of the Ao Nagas.

There are writers, briefing out on various aspects of the Nagas many of which are politically confined works, dealing with the political development of the Nagas and many of the writings are also concerned with the changes that the British and the missionaries had brought to the Nagas. For instances, Dr, Chandrika Singh *the Naga society*, I.L Aier’s “*contemporary Nagas social formation and Ethnic identity*”; Alemchiba’s work on *A brief account of Nagaland*’, Piketo Sema’s work, *British policy and Administration in Nagaland, 1881-1947(1992)* etc. all deals with changes that has been taking place in the Social, political and Religious aspects of the Nagas.

1.3: Scope, Aims and Objectives of the Dissertation:

This dissertation covers a study of the pre-colonial Ao Nagas and extended till the process of consolidation of the Ao Nagas into colonial administration i.e. roughly till the first two decades of the 20th century. The first account on the Ao Nagas in written form came from the writings of the British administrator and anthropologist like J.P Mill, W.C Smith, and missionaries like M.M Clark and so on. Along with the British consolidation, the missionaries introduced education in the Ao areas and the Nagas in general, which marked a paradigm shift in the history of the Nagas. Along with the conversion from traditional Religion to Christianity, writing system replaced the oral transmission which is believed to be a game changer in the history of the Nagas. Against this background, we have the oral tradition of the Aos that discerns the idea of having a written script prior to the coming of the missionaries and the colonial state.

The Aim of this dissertation however, is to once again critically examine the precolonial Ao Naga Society and to bring forth an argument that, even in the absence of a written record, the history of the Ao Nagas can still be constructed through different mediums and one of its main component being the oral source. This dissertation attempts to suggest how, symbols and motifs present in the attires and crafts of the Ao Nagas authenticated by the oral narratives and cultural practices can be an important source of reconstructing or reading the history of the Ao Naga. And that, no written records doesn't necessarily means an absence of history but a deeper analyses on the same would suggest a deliberate attempt not to have a written record and not necessarily out of ignorance.

1.4: Research questions

Articulating the pre-colonial Ao Nagas as a social entity; the myth of the Ao Nagas having a written script prior to the coming of the British has been subjected to question in this paper. Also stressing on the same, the pejorative terms such as 'savage', 'uncivilised' 'primitive' as seen in the writings of the missionaries, colonial officials and even in post-colonial writings has been further put to question in connection to the question of the Ao Nagas, not having a scripted text.

If at all the absence of a written script has been observed by the colonial observers which is one reason for the introduction of Roman script mainly directed towards certain goals and objectives; if, writing is considered to be a recorder and a maintainer of the events of the past; did the Ao Nagas had a history without such a medium? Or how do one authenticate the validity of the history of the Ao Naga without the so called written script?

It is also worthwhile to interrogate the factors responsible for the Aos as one among the many tribes of Nagaland, pioneering in using the art of writing as a medium of transmission, against the background of having a systematic system of transmission through Folk medium.

Was this shift from folk medium to written culture a forceful one or an inevitable circumstances as a process of change?

1.5: Research limitation

This dissertation is limited to the Ao Nagas therefore, some of the observations may not be applicable to the rest of the Nagas, making it difficult to generalize the argument. For instance, the myth of the lost script is circulated among the Aos and not necessarily among the other tribes of Nagaland. Despite the fact that the process of change that took place during the 19th and 20th century followed a similar pattern among the other tribes of Naga Hills, once the fire was set. Yet, emphasize has been given more on the Ao Nagas on this paper.

Concerning the myth of the loss Script, the reader's curiosity may not be realize as this paper will be limited on the logic behind the story and not necessarily aiming to proof or either disprove the story as a whole.

1.6. Methodology

This dissertation can be termed as an interpretative research wherein, both primary and secondary sources has been used in making this dissertation a complete whole.

Under primary source, interviews method has been one of the important source used in this dissertation. Manuscript and Ethnographic work done on the Aos mostly by the missionaries and the British officials has been a great source of understanding the pre-colonial Ao Nagas from the perspective of a colonial observer. Along with the interviews and ethnographic sources; census report has been another important source and an indicator that shows elaborate details on many aspects of the Ao Naga society specially the changes that has been seen after the coming of the British.

Pictures of motifs and symbols found in the villages of the Aos is also another source used in this paper to further enhanced the claim on the meanings represented by those symbols and motifs.

Starting from J.P Mill, published as well as unpublished books authored by both the local and non-locals (here local writers are basically referring to the Naga writers and those Non-Naga writers as Non-locals) have been used along with the primary sources.

1.7: Chapterisation:

This dissertation is divided into four main chapters and conclusion, considering the different themes presented in each chapter. The first chapter comprises the Introduction and literature review wherein, a brief introduction on the development of writing as an important source of history and how its development can be associated with the state making mechanism has been discussed. It also focuses on the idea that not having a written record need not necessarily means an absence of history.

It is then followed by the aims and scope of the research and the questions that has been articulated in this dissertation. The method implied in completing this dissertation has been briefed out in the first part of this dissertation. In the second part of the first chapter a brief literature review on some of the reading essential for the period related to this paper will be reviewed.

The second is a background survey of the land and its people, their social, political; religious and linguistic life, meanwhile, making a comparison before and after the arrival of the British and the missionaries. In the process, discussion has been done on how the Aos began to call themselves as ‘Aos’ in the process of migration. Further discussion has been done on how the Ao Naga society can be categorized as a clan based society. After instigating the social fabric of the Ao Nagas, it has been observed that, though the coming of the missionaries and the colonial state has transformed the Ao Naga Society in almost all aspects, still the inherent

nature that separates their identity from the rest of the world has been maintained to a large extend.

The third chapter entitled, 'A dog eaten script: orality, motifs and symbols in constructing Ao Naga History' is in fact the main theme of this dissertation. 'Nagas do not have a written script prior to the coming of the colonial state and the missionaries'. This tag has been more or less repeated all throughout the historical discourse as far as the Naga historical writings are concerned. Against this background, we have the oral tradition of the Aos that discern the theory of having a scripted text; though happened to be eaten by a dog. Neither approving nor discarding the myth of the loss script; this dissertation attempts to deploy how this kind of myth started circulating among the Aos? Emphasis has been given to re-read the history of the pre-colonial Ao Nagas by examining the authenticity of the story of the loss script. In this connection, an attempt has been made to understand how history was transmitted through the very art of living in the pre -colonial Ao Society. Further, an elaborate discussion has been made as of how symbols and motifs in the Ao Naga culture can be an important source of historical construction in the absence of a written record. Symbols and motifs along with various other activities can be a great source of authenticating the history of the Ao Nagas.

Though highly cultured, the coming of British and the Missionaries spooked the whole fabric of the Ao Nagas; writing as an art of transmitting history was introduced along with social, religious, political and economic changes that took place during the 19th and 20th century. The wave of changes that hit the once so called 'isolated tribe' of Naga Hills is an interesting picture not only to study the changes that took place among the Aos but, it also opens a space for observing the minds of the British colonial administration on the one hand and the missionaries on the other. Thus, a critical analysis to this so called modern phenomena in light of which, there was a shift from folk medium to written culture has been articulated in the fourth chapter.

the British colonizer in their pursued to homogenizing and the missionaries in Christianizing the once isolated tract of Naga Hill; destroyed their long established system of historical and cultural transmission; an attempt will be made to understand as to whether the metamorphosis brought forth with the colonial intervention could fully create a new cultural formation among the Ao Nagas.

CHAPTER- 2

An Epitome of the Ao Nagas.

2.1: Topography of Mokokchung District:

In order to understand a particular society at any given context, it is crucial to have at least a general idea of the people one is dealing with. Environment plays a crucial role in determining the cultural and historical setting of a particular group of people. Geographical factor in determining the identity of people living in a given geographical space cannot be undermined. Going by a determinist view on geography; Geography which holds the view that “*Strong forces of environment control the course of human action.*”⁹ Suggesting that, the mind-set of an individual is influenced by the environment, which in turn determines the whole social and cultural aspects of the society those individual forms.¹⁰ In this regard we shall look at some of the physical features of area that constitute Mokokchung District as a geographical space.

The Aos belong to one of the prominent tribes inhabiting the place called Nagaland in the North-eastern part of India. Mokokchung district which covers an area of 1,615 km² (624 sq. miles) in the North-eastern part of Nagaland is considered to be the home of the Ao Nagas.¹¹ Mokokchung has a total population of 194,622 out of which, 13, 8997 are from rural areas and 55, 725 from urban.¹² The population of male is higher than the female with total number of male 101,092 against, 93, 530 females according to 2011 census.¹³ Majority of the Ao population can be found concentrated in Mokokchung district, however, the coming of the Colonial administration and the missionaries to their land had resulted in the opening up of

⁹ *Determinism and Possibilism in Geography, General Knowledge today*, [website], 2016, <http://www.gktoday.in/determinism.an...> (accessed. 3 April 2016)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Census of India 2011, *district census Handbook Mokokchung, Nagaland: Village and town Wise Primary Census Abstract (PCA)*, Series-14, part XII-B, p 11

¹² Ibid, p 27

¹³ Census of India 2011, *district census Handbook Mokokchung, Nagaland*, p-27

their isolated society to the outsiders; Today, one would find a good number of Ao population in other districts and towns of Nagaland as well as all over the cities and towns of India and beyond the borders of India.

The district shares its boundary with Assam in the North, Wokha (land of the Lothas) to its west, Zunheboto (land of the Sumis) to its south and Tuensang (comprising of the four districts of Eastern Nagaland) to its East. ¹⁴It is situated at an altitude of around 1398 meters above sea level, and has a population density of 121 per sq. km².¹⁵

The district is further divided into six ranges based on the physiography of the region that roughly runs parallel to each other. These Ranges namely, Ongpangkong Range, Changkikong range, Langpangkong range, Japukong Range Asetkong Range and Tsurangkong range.¹⁶

Mokokchung like any other parts of Nagaland has a favourable climate. Compared to winter, the summer experience much more rainfall with an average rainfall of 1765.64 mm.¹⁷ the district has an average temperature of 18.6°C. Out of 1615 square kilometres, the district has a total of 28966.79 hectares of land under forest, ¹⁸despite the fact that, much of the forest cover have been lost due to the growing population and various human activities like deforestation, building of roads for transportation, excessive hunting etc. in the recent years, still we find a good amount of area under forest cover. The topography of Mokokchung district is such that it is made up of Mountains and Hills, Foothills Plains and valleys as such, variety of plants and animal species are found in this area.

Owing to its favorable climate with high rainfall and moderate temperature, it opens up space for a wide varieties of plants and animals to exist.

¹⁴ *Mokokchung District map*, [website], 2012, <http://www.mapsofindia.com>districts>, (accessed 25 Jan 2012)

¹⁵ Census of India 2011, *district census Handbook Mokokchung Nagaland*, p.14

¹⁶ *Mokokchung District Map*, <http://WWW.mapsofindia.com>district>

¹⁷ *Study of spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall in Nagaland (India)*, international Journal of Geomatics and Geosciences Volume 2 Issue3, 2012.

¹⁸ Government of India Ministry of MSME, *Brief industrial profile of Mokokchung District Nagaland state*.

2.2: Origin of the word Ao and their migration theory:

There are varying opinion on the origination of the term “Naga”. It is difficult to trace back to a definite origin of the term ‘Naga’ as; different scholars and writers have differing opinions to the origin of the word Naga. While some suggesting it to be derived from the Assamese word ‘Noga’ meaning Naked¹⁹. The Assamese also called the Naga as ‘Nangalong’ which also means ‘naked people’. The Naga tribe in Burma is called Na-ka meaning people with pierced earlobes.²⁰ Ptolemy in his work ‘Geographia’ written in 150 AD mention of the present territory occupied by the Nagas as ‘Naga log’ which means the realm of the naked people.²¹ For Verrier Elwin, the term Naga must have been derived from the word ‘Nok’ which is a Tibeto- Burman word for ‘people’.²² There are many others with varying opinions on the origin of the term Naga, but, one thing is for certain that, the term is not an internal origination rather an external one. Bringing up the issue concerning the very word ‘Naga’; it is not our intention to suggest the definition of certain scholar as more suitable or more appropriate, but, to suggest how unlike the origin of the word ‘Naga’, which may be originated on the basis of any of the varied definition given by different scholars based on their own observation; the oral tradition of the Aos strongly holds and preserve that the term ‘Ao’ is a mispronunciation of Aor, (Ao which means ‘Gone’, and Aor meaning ‘going’) which is their own word for themselves, meaning “*those who came*” crossing the river Dikhu differing from Merir “*those who did not come*” or those that stayed back, a term used for the other tribes such as Konyak, Sangtem, chang and phom by the Aos.²³

The Ao tradition strongly holds that, their ancestor emanated from ‘Longterok’ which literally means six stone (Long meaning stone in Ao and terok meaning six) at Chungliyimti

¹⁹ Hokishe Sema, *Emergence of Nagaland: socio-Economic and political transformation and future*, New Delhi, Vikas publishing House PVT LTD, 1986, p.3-4

²⁰ *ibid*, p 3-4

²¹ Ptolemy Claudius, *Geographia*, viii, p. 18-22

²² Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Shillong, Sree Saraswaty press ltd 1961,

²³ J. P Mill, *the Ao Nagas*, 1926, 3rd edition, 2003, p-1

presently a Sangtem village at Tuensang district of Nagaland.²⁴ The myth of the Aos suggested that six people, three men and three women came out of the stone (Longterok) at Chungliyimti, “Tongpok” (male) and “Lungkupokla” (female) who are believed to be the progenitors of the clan Pongener, Longpok (male) and “Yongmenyala” (female) of Longkumer clan and, “Lonjakrep” (male) “Elangsh”i (female) of Jamir clan. Tongpok the male of pongener clan married Elangshi the female of Jamir clan, “Lonjakrep” of Jamir clan married the female “Yongmenyala” of “Lungkumer” clan and “Longpok” the male of “Lungkumer” clan married to Lungkupokla the female of Pongener clan.²⁵ With the passage of time more sub-clans have sprang up out of these three clans. This myth of origin of the Aos from Longterok is not agreed upon by the Mongsen Aos, basing on another myth which suggested that the Mongsen Aos were compelled to come to Chungliyimti after they were attacked and defeated by the Chungli Aos at Kubok under the able leadership of Shiluti and, were forced to form a khel side by side along with the Chungli Aos. *This marked the beginning of their co-partnership.*²⁶ The story goes on to say that the population at Chungliyimti grew so big after a long period of settlement that some of them had to leave the place in search of new settlement to meet the demand of the growing population. In the process, they built a cane bridge to cross the river Dikhu. Many of course crossed the river Dikhu through the bridge but after a sufficient number had crossed the bridge, they cut the cane bridge to prevent further people from migration. Those who crossed the River Dikhu came to be known as “Ao” or “Aor” which means ‘going’ or ‘gone’ in Ao delict. The people who were left behind were called “Merier” or people who stayed back or “people who did not come”.²⁷ From Chungliyimti the Aos arrived at “Aongyinden” and on their arrival, it is said that ten sons were born “*hence the place was called “Soyim”.* While at Soyim one of the

²⁴ J. P Mill, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 6

²⁵ Anungla Aier and Tiatoshi Jamir, *Re-interpreting the myth of Longterok*, *Indian folklore Research journal*, vol 5, no 8 p.5-6

²⁶ J. P Mill, *the Ao Nagas*, p 6-8

²⁷ JP Mill, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 2

Ung was killed by a tiger and so Soyim became Ungma, meaning, *Ung/Chief is lost*".²⁸

From "Ungma", the Aos gradually spread to different Ranges and formed different villages over the period. The Aos using different folk mediums like folk songs, folk stories transmitted this information from one generation to the other.

If we critically examine the nature of how the theory of migration of the Aos has been transmitted; one can observe that it shows a careful construction of the oral narratives of a community with collective consensus. At the same time, it throws us a possibility of purposive selection of certain facts, and interpreting it collectively meanwhile, erasing some, which may be deemed unnecessary or may possibly have a negative implication for that particular society if carried on. This is an advantage of having orality over writing as a medium of transmission of history.

The Aos and Nagas in general are sensitive to the issue of any changes that would affect their aged old tradition and culture. The best instances can be that of the 'Genome Projects in the early 2000s, which was an endeavor to "map the 'tribal's"²⁹ by examining the blood samples scientifically of each tribe was a failure as, it created a fear of "ism" among the different tribes.³⁰ Provoked by the same issue; the Naga Students Federation (NSF) issued a warning against any outsider to carry out research on the Nagas without the permission of the apex body.³¹ This may sound absurd and can also be seen as a hindrance for a profound research and academic development. However, let us look at the other possibility of the issue. The Nagas have a strong established system of history, which is crucial in their identity formation. Like the Aos whose migration theory has been passed down from generation to generation with very little alteration as it forms the fundamental basis of their identity

²⁸ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, Har-Anand Publications, 1993, p 21

²⁹ Temjenwapang, *The making of History: Experience from Nagas Historiography*, PhD thesis, University of Hyderabad, 2012, p. 3

³⁰ Temjenwapang, *The making of History: Experience from Nagas Historiography*, p. 3

³¹ Braj Bihari Kumar, *Naga Identity*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2005, p.1

formation as an 'Ao' differing from the so called 'others'. Project of such types (Genome Project) have the possibility of strengthening the oral history at the same time, it has the potential to open up a whole new dimension which may null the existing theory. If the latter is the case, the uniqueness of their identity grounded in oral tradition may just become groundless or baseless. Like any other highlanders of South East Asia, this is their way of maintaining history; it is their identity. Therefore creation commotion over such issues which seems baseless makes sense, if we critically try and understand the whole social fabric of the Ao Nagas or Nagas in general, as it becomes an 'identity' issue, which is the very essence of all those carefully and meticulously constructed aged old culture and traditions of the Nagas. It further takes us back to the very idea of formation of those oral narratives which is in fact the very base for their identity formation on collective consensus. Though there can be slide variation in the manner of narration; one can see a unanimity among all the Aos in various narratives showing a kind of collective consensus regarding certain aspects of identity formation. At the same time their narration seems limited. Once again introspecting the oral narration on the history of migration of the Aos; there seems to be no effort in trying to recollect or remember history beyond 'Chungliyiimti'. Identity formation starts from Chungliyiimti and not beyond Chungliyiimti. To substantiate more, as mentioned earlier, the Aos had a well- structured form of historical transmission using folk medium. Many a times, one would find even the simplest details of the past in their folklores. To put forward, formation of a group or community is not a simple task; though it may seem a deviation from their traditional belief on formation of Ao tribe; many would agree that the progenitor of the Ao clans emanating from 'Longterok' cannot be taken in its literal sense. Why would the oral tradition of the Aos not go beyond 'Longterok'? There are various possibilities to the question. One could be that, they wanted to form a whole new identity that would give no room for others to claim or control over them. Or, they might have been in a situation where,

they were been subjected to certain social constrain which may have compelled them to migrate to the present land. Whatever may be the cause to construct such a narration that refrain one's mind from going beyond 'Longterok', it confirms us one thing; an active selection or a deliberate choice to forget and not transmit certain historical events which is more likely to have a negative implication on their society if carried on.

Having such an advantage, where there can be a space for eradicating certain events is what makes a society using orality as a historical transmission privileged over a written records.

No doubt Oral history has its lope holes and one cannot deny the many interpretations that might have taken place in the process of passing down the history using orality as a medium, however, one also cannot totally ignore oral history as null and void and one need to understand that every rumor, every story is created in a context; meaning to say it is contextual and therefore has something or the other to say about the society of a particular period in time. The task of a historian or a scholar should therefore, be that of an unbiased observer who in pursuit of finding out the truth should be able to analyze and understand those that may sometime sound ahistorical or irreverent.

Over the past few decades, Subaltern studies which was an initiative to "*write the history of the subordinated people of South Asia*"³² with its inauguration in the 1980s had not only encouraged the study of history of the subjugated people, but has also in a way been instrumental in the further developing of orality as an important source of history. With their initiative to study "History from below", listening to the voice of the people hitherto unheard off or ignored. Subaltern studies have opened up a platform for different section of the society with their variant and unique history to incorporate into the mainstream history.

³² Bhangya Bhukya, *Subjugated Nomads: the Lambadas under the rule of the Nizam*, Orient BlackSwan, 2010

2.3: Clan and social organization:

Indian society is characterized by caste division, or for instance American society as a class divided society, if one questions the nature to which the Ao Naga society falls under, one would identify that, the Ao society is classified on the basis of Clan. The role played by the clan members as a social group in public and private sphere of an Ao Naga would suggest a great deal of how it determines the whole social fabric of the Ao Nagas society.

Once again examining the theory of migration as transmitted by their oral tradition, which holds Chungliyimti as the place where civilization started for the Aos, we find the mention of the six individuals who are supposedly the progenitor of the three clan's; pongener, Longkumer and Jamir.³³ The Nagas are still bounded by the exogamous marriage that have been mentioned in earlier part of the dissertation. Today there are various sub-clans within these three clans; however, one still follows the traditional division of possible marriage. Marriage between the same clan is considered a taboo. An individual cannot marry his or her partner from the same sib, or, even if they are from different sib, say for instances, In Chungtia one of the Ao village of Mokokchung district, of Ongpangkong range, with a total population of 4,661 and 724 household according to 2011 census report.³⁴ A village whose pride is in; not allowing a single enemy to attack the village during the time of Head taking 'kodanga arier mejemokba yim' also called themselves as 'Nokenketer yim' meaning 'a village with Magic in their Daos'. A person from longchar sib cannot marry a person of Ajem sib in this village. They are considered to be brothers from the same phratry tracing "Longpok" as the Progenitor of both the sib. Or sometimes it also depends on the kind of relationship they maintain during the time of settlement. For example in the same village, though Longchar and Pongener are from two different clans, tradition holds that Ningsang

³³ Anungla Aier and Tiatoshi Jamir, *Re-interpreting the myth of longterok*, *Indian folklore Research Journal* vol 5, No-8, p. 5-6

³⁴ Census of India 2011 Nagaland, *District census Handbook Mokokchung: village and town wise Primary Census Abstract (PCA)*, Directorate of census operation Nagaland, part XII-B, Series 14, p78

clan who supposedly is believed to have promised the pongener clan that, they would consider the Pongener clan as their brother at the same time, will have marriage relationship with Pongener so as, to hold back the Pongener from further migration when, they thought of migrating further. Thus even though Longchar and pongener are of the different phratry, they cannot be considered suitable for marriage. Ningsang and pongener, on the other hand, calls each other as brothers at the same time they are considered suitable for marriage.³⁵ Such instances are rare however its existence cannot be overlooked at the same time. The selection of a partner for marriage is clan based and any person going against this tradition which they protected by the so-called ‘Customary law’ (‘Subaliba’) is punishable and are exiled from their village.³⁶ Even with the change of their religious beliefs from their traditional beliefs to Christianity, this custom still remain strong in Ao society. In fact, even in the churches, marriage between the same phratry hardly had a chance as such marriage can never be accepted. Society excludes not only the victims, but, their children as well. They are denied from any social privileges. That is one area of how clan becomes important even in determining the family life of an individual, which is considered to be the basic unit of every society. This may be seen as taking away individual Rights however let us look at the other side of the explanation. Scientist has proven that having exogamous relationship “*reduces risk of children having genetic defects caused by inbreeding as a result of inheriting two copies of recessive genes*”³⁷ this so called ‘Savage’ as remarked by the missionaries and colonial officers were aware of the scientific explanations even before anybody would explain them about the science of inbreeding and outbreeding. This opens up a space to deepen our understanding on ‘Local Knowledge and its scientificity’. However leaving the space open for us to think, we then move again to understanding the importance of clan in Ao society.

³⁵ Yangerlila Kichu, *interviewed*, Chungtia village, Mokokchung Nagaland, 2018

³⁶ Interview with Yangerlila Kichu.

³⁷ *Exogamy*, [website], [http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exog...](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exogamy)

Next to the family (which is also determined by the clan system) is the clan that holds most control over the life of an individual of an Ao. Changes has been seen over the years with the coming of the colonial administration and the introduction of Christianity and education by the missionaries, yet, the important functions played by the clan still remain strong.

By investigating a thorough study on the system of the selection of the village council members, known by the name “Putu Menden” in Ao, (the governing institution of every Ao villages) we find that the members of the Putu Menden consist of representatives from all the clans of a village, each representing equal members. The members of the village Putu Menden holds all the judicial, executive and legislative power of the village.³⁸ The members of the Putu Menden comprised those warriors from each clans, when head taking was in vogue. Only those who had brought the head of their enemies which the Aos called as “Mangko” were entitled to represent their clan as “Samen” in the “Putu Menden”.³⁹ Our intention here for mentioning the governing institution of an Ao village, is not to look at the functions they play in the village, or, to summarize the structure of the Putu Menden, but, to show how even the governing body of a village in an Ao society is determined and formulated on the basis of clan, further substantiating that the Ao Naga society as a clan-based society.

Another important function of the clan in an Ao Village is their enormous influence on land holdings of the community. Having a glance on the relation of the Ao Nagas with their Land, one can see that majority of the Land belongs to the clans in an Ao village. Among the Aos, the Land is divided into- “*Cultivable land, Forest land and inhabited land*”.⁴⁰ The ownership

³⁸ Temjensosang, *Governing Institution of the Ao Nagas: A sociological understanding*, international journal of Economic and Business Review, vol 5, [www.epra wisdom](http://www.epra-wisdom.com).

³⁹ Temjensashi Longchar, Interviewed, Chungtia village, Mokokchung Nagaland, 2019

⁴⁰ Rongsenzulu Jamir, “*Local Knowledge and Natural Resource Management: A case study of the Ao Naga of Longmisa Village, Mokokchung, Nagaland*”, unpublished PHD thesis, 2019, p. 87

of the land can be found in the form of – village land (Yim li), Clan land (Kidongli) and private land (Nija Li).⁴¹

Village land or “Yim Li” is managed by the village council at power, ⁴²this land belongs to the whole village. This land are those land that has been occupied by the whole member of the village in the time of village formation. Those land previously belonging to another neighboring village but had been occupied by defeating the village can come under village land.⁴³

Clan Land are those land owned and maintained by the Clan. Each clans have their own specific plot of land which they have occupied during the time of village formation. In order to grasp a better understanding of land holdings among the Aos, one should be aware that, in an Ao society, an individual belongs to one or the other clan. Therefore, an individual can represent a clan; in saying so, one need to understand that a particular village may have been formed by few individuals representing certain clans. With the passage of time population increases and therefore those lands which earlier belonged to few individuals of a clan becomes the possession of a larger extended group who belongs to the same clan and are likely to share blood relation among its members.⁴⁴ Traditionally, the eldest member of the clan is considered the Custodian of the Land.⁴⁵ Within the clan, the Aos maintains their own family or kin or lineage group (‘tenik’ in Mongsen). Clan Land is further divided among different ‘Tenik Li’ or Lineage land. But it all comes under the purview of Clan land. The eldest member of the kin group takes the decision on the matter related to lineage land. The clan land comprised of almost 50 percent of the land.⁴⁶

⁴¹Rongsenzulu Jamir, *“Local Knowledge and Natural Resource Management: A case study of the Ao Naga of Longmisa*, 2019, p 87

⁴² Lanusashi Longkumer and Toshimenla Jamir, *status of Adivasis/ indigenous people Land Series-6 Nagaland, Land Alternation: Colonialism, security and development*, New Delhi, Aakar book, 2012, p. 25

⁴³ Temjensashi longchar, Chungtia Village, Mokokchung Nagaland

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lanusashi Longkumer and Toshimenla Jamir, pp. 25

⁴⁶ Rongsenzulu Jamir, 2019, university of Hyderabad.

Private Land or 'Nija li' are those land owned and managed by the individuals. The Aos being a patriarchal society, the son inherits the property of his father but in the absence of a son, "the land is revert back to the nearest kin group or the clan".⁴⁷ This system is starting to be more flexible and there are instances where even a girl can inherit his father's possession. However in many of the Ao villages, they still follows their traditional system of inheritance. Now if we consider it carefully, the function of Clan is further elevated by their involvement over the land holdings of their community. For an Ao, and in that matter the Nagas in general, land plays a crucial role and in fact it forms "a part of their identity and life."⁴⁸

We have discussed about the community land holdings or village land (Yim li) in an Ao Naga society, the question is who therefore consist of the governing authority in an Ao Naga society? Of course, it is the clan and its representative that comprised the whole governing authority, talking about lineage land holding, they are a sub- group of a clan and therefore are members of a clan. Even an individual in case of the absence of a Son as mentioned earlier, the land is reverted back to the kin group or clan.⁴⁹ This does not mean that an individual does not enjoy rights over the land that he owns. An individual enjoys maximum Rights over his land as long as he is alive or as long as he had a Son to inherit his property. It should also be noted that, an individual has the right to sell off his land if he wishes to.

Our argument is that, Land which is crucial in the life of an Ao Naga in determining his identity is also owned and control by the clans in many respect thus further intensifying the role of clans in determining the social, economic and political fabric of an Ao Naga village.

⁴⁷ Lanusashi Longkumer and Toshimenla Jamir, p.25

⁴⁸ Lanusashi Longkumer and Toshimenla Jamir, *status of Adivasis/ indigenous people Land Series-6 Nagaland, Land Alternation: Colonialism, security and development*, New Delhi, Aakar book, 2012,

⁴⁹ Lanusashi Longkumer and Toshimenla Jamir, *status of Adivasis/ indigenous people Land Series-6 Nagaland, Land Alternation: Colonialism, security and development* p, 125

2.4: Religion

*“Whether it is the Aristotle’s “first mover” or “prime Mover” which is the first cause of the Universe, or whether it is a mere psychosomatic nature of man’s incapability against the process or history, both case, as general rule, relate man closely with a supernatural being above him”.*⁵⁰

Bringing forth the Notion of religion among the Ao Nagas, the kind of possible interrogation of whether the Ao Nagas even had a religion before the introduction of Christianity by the missionaries. Defining the very term religion in the simplest way, Edward Burnett Tylor defined Religion in 1871 as *“the belief in spiritual things”*. If believing in a spiritual being is the essence of religion, the pre- colonial Nagas no doubt had a religion. The pre-colonial - Aos believed in one supreme God which the Aos called “Tsungrem” and is given various names under different circumstances. They believed in the omnipresence of God. Imchen remarked;

*For Aos, **Tsungrem**, is a common name given at different times according to his revelation and manifestations. Thus He is Called Lichaba, the Lord of the Earth, when the Creatorship is attributed to him. He is called MeyutsÜngba, when thought of as the lord of death. At times, God is called, AningsÜngba or LongtitsÜngba when He is understood as the God of heaven; when God is talked of as the pre-destiner, he is called Tiar or Tiaba, who determines man’s fortune at his coming into the world.*”⁵¹

According to this definition, the attribution of the pre-colonial religion as Animism is challenged. The attribution of Tsungrem in multiple names was misunderstood as believing in various gods and, in many of the descriptions, one would find the attribution of Naga religion as Animism. Taking the example of Smith, when he writes; *“the Aos have number of*

⁵⁰ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga religion and culture*, p,6

⁵¹ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p 10

gods”⁵² and goes on to explain the above mentioned names given to Tsungrem as separate. However one also finds that the Aos apart from the believe in an all knowing God, believed in the presence of a number of deities such as ‘Kini tsungrem’ in Mongsen or ‘Kimong Tsungrem in Chungli (House site deity), Tekong Tsungrem’ (Mountain deity), ‘Ki Tsungrem’, ‘Along tsungrem’(m) or Long Tsungrem in(C) stone deity and many more⁵³ Their belief in the presence of spirits and deities cannot be overlooked however, the belief in one Supreme God above all gods who sees and controls every activities of man was in the philosophy of Precolonial Ao Naga Religion.

Having said earlier that different names have been attributed to God in different times according to his manifestation, let us look at the function of Tsungrem at different times.

2.4.1: Lichaba Tsungrem:

The Aos believed Lichaba (Earth walker)⁵⁴ to be the ‘creator of the Earth’ who created everything on earth. He controls over the natural calamities of the earth; the rain, the Storms etc. and, He is also the one in control of the vegetation. He also commands over sickness at the same time blessings and prosperity according to the attitude of men towards him⁵⁵ He is therefore in closes connection to men. Many of the rituals and ceremonies are therefore observed in His name.⁵⁶ To him is also attributed the creation of uneven and rough terrain of the Ao ranges as compared to that of the plains of Assam as, He is believed to be the creator of the Earth. The Aos have a myth which says that, Lichaba after molding the Plains of Assam, when he was just about to mold the Naga Hills, was tricked by a sea beetle who came and shouted “*Enemies, enemies! Hurry! Hurry! Enemies are approaching to destroy the Earth*” and the beetle disappeared. Lichaba in order to defend the earth therefore molded the Naga Hills hastily living it unfinished. The Naga Hill are therefore mountainous unlike its

⁵² W C Smith, *the Ao-Nagas tribes of Assam*, Gian publication, reprinted 1980, p 77

⁵³ Ibid, p 77

⁵⁴ W. C Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, p 78

⁵⁵ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Religion and culture*, p 33

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 33

neighboring plains of Assam.⁵⁷ This legend also suggest the belief of the Aos in the existence of both ‘good’ and ‘evil’ from the time of creation⁵⁸ thus, it makes sense when analyze the relationship they maintained also with the maleficent spirits, which will be discussed in greater details in the following pages. If we carefully analyze the myth of creation, one can also find a sense of identity formation on the basis of geographical space. The people living in the plains as ‘others’ and those living in the ‘Hills’ as their own.

2.4.2: Longtisungba Tsungrem:

Longtisungba Tsungrem is also called by different names, “Aningtsungba” (God of heaven); “Lata-Zuni Tsungrem” (God of Moon and sun, Lata which means Moon and Zungi refers to the Sun). In other word Longtisungba is the God of heaven or God of the sky. He controls *“the sun, moon, rain, storms, seasons, lightning, thunder, air and all natural force connected with the solar system”*.⁵⁹ He is sited high up in the sky, the highest of all gods. However as compared to other gods He receives lesser offerings and sacrifice as he do not directly deal with men.⁶⁰

2.4.3: Tiar or Tiaba Tsungrem:

“Tiaba” (pre-destiner) is the god that predestine the fortune of man. The Aos believed in the existence of different kind of spirit in man. Some are believed to be Tiger spirited, fox spirited, boar spirited, man spirited so and forth. It is believed that some are not given any spirit and those man “remain dumb and dull”. “Tiaba” destines the spirit of a man at the time of his conception. He is also the one that casts the fortune as well as misfortunes of a man. Tiaba determines the destiny of a man on the earth. He is the giver as well as the destroyer of

⁵⁷ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and culture*, p.33

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.33

⁵⁹ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p. 34

⁶⁰ W C Smith, *the Ao Nagas of Assam*, p. 78.

life. Therefore sacrifice of cocks, pigs, eggs were done in times of misfortunes and sickness to gain the favor of “Tiaba”.⁶¹

2.4.4: Meyutsungba:

“Meyutsungba” is the “lord over the death”⁶² He is just and uncompromising. He judge man according to his deeds on the earth. No person can pass the gate of “Meyutsung” without his judgement. The Aos believed that each person is judged according to his deeds on this earth therefore, fearing the Day of Judgment after death. Leaving out a life of honesty, integrity and humility was very much a part of the lifestyle of the Precolonial Ao Nagas. “Meyutsung” does not know forgiveness and a person will be put to shame and punish according to the sin a person inflicted while on the earth. The Aos did not made any particular offerings or sacrifice for “Meyutsung” because He is believed to be uncompromising and therefore, trying to please Him would matter less.⁶³

Apart from the above mentioned ‘Tsungrem’ the Ao Nagas believed in the presence of number of spirits and deities but all subordinate to Lichaba Tsungrem.⁶⁴ The precolonial Aos at all times tried to maintain a mutual relation with the lesser spirits as this spirit if not pleased can bring misfortune and harm to man. For instances, before constructing a house, a ‘Patir’ (priest) would perform a ceremony by sacrificing a cock and then followed by a feast for the whole family. Similarly, another sacrifice is done after the completion of the house. This ceremonies and sacrifices are done to please the ‘Kini Tsungrem’ or the house deity. Often from time to time, the family offer sacrifice to the house deity for protection from evil spirit and for a healthy and prosperous family.⁶⁵ The Aos also believed in the presence of spirit in certain stones and trees. Sacrifices were offered to those spirits residing in those trees and Rocks. It should be noted that, it is not the stone that the Aos believe have spirit but, the

⁶¹ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.35

⁶² Ibid. p 35

⁶³ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*. p.35

⁶⁴ ibid

⁶⁵ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.36

spirit resides on those stones and trees. The researcher herself have seen one of such stones called ‘Tevlong Tsungrem’ in her own village Chungtia, where, the villagers believed it to be the residence of certain spirit, revered as their ‘Village Tsungrem’ Till today, the people of that village consider it to be sacred and stories of various incidents related to that particular Spirit has been circulated among the villagers. Among those incidents, one most recent incident related to that particular stone was an incident, which happened to one of the researcher’s acquaintance, who supposedly visited that stone for the first time. To keep it as a remembrance, she happened to take away a stone from that particular place, the night she got a dream wherein she was asked to give back the stone from where she had taken away. Immediately, the next morning she took back the stone to the place and kept it from where she has collected. Also the Village is known for being heroes of war and had defeated many enemy villages during the time of Head cutting. It was said that before marching for attacking any enemy village, they would first offer sacrifice to ‘Tevlong Tsungrem’; asking protection and victory from Him. The Aos believed in the presence of Malicious lesser deities who are “*responsible for causing illness and mischievous activities to man*”⁶⁶. they are the deities of Lake, (Tsutsung Tsungrem) deities of deserted sites (Kineo Tsungrem), Meta Tsungrem or deity of uncommon Jungle, etc.⁶⁷ they believed that, if a person’s spirit is captured by those deities, the person will undergo pain, and suffering and often dies.⁶⁸ Sacrifices were often done to these deities with the help of soothsayer (Arasentsur)⁶⁹.

They believed in the existence of spirit everywhere and, its influence over the life of an individual and community. In order to have a prosperous and a healthy life, pleasing gods, Deities and spirit was considered a necessity. They also believed in the presence of both benevolent and malevolent spirit. The Aos observed various ceremonies and sacrifices on

⁶⁶ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p 38

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p 38

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 38

⁶⁹ W C Smith, *the Ao Nagas of Assam*, p.91

different occasions most of which were directed to please those deities and spirits that can bring harm if not appeased. Lichaba being considered the supreme ruler of the earth, ceremonies and sacrifices are done so as to please Lichaba that he may bestow abundant blessings and for protection. “MoatsÜ mong”, and “Tsongrem mong” are two festivals, directed toward Lichaba Tsongrem. It was believed that, if ceremonies and sacrifices are not properly done, Lichaba propelled destruction, landslides, storms, hailstones etc. that could cause heavy loss for man. Therefore For instances after “Tsongrem Mong” ceremony, which is the last ceremony and the most important ceremony of the year, which is observed to please the creator of the Earth ‘Lichaba’ for bountiful harvest. This ceremony is observed for three days with all its strictness and is also therefore called as “Asemni Amho” (three days sabbath) ⁷⁰ three weeks after Tsongrem mong festival, the village priest observes another ceremony called as “Lichaba Za” to make sure that their God Lichaba is pleased with their offerings and sacrifice failing which, there will be consequences. No matter how properly Tsongrem Mong has been observed; the village priest observed this Lichaba Za ceremony to reimburse if they had failed to appease Lichaba in any way.⁷¹ Again many of the ceremonies and sacrifices are done to make sure that the deities and spirits are pleased. For instances ‘AtsÜ/ TsÜba Kelem (Water/ well worship or ceremony) a ceremony to appease the Water deity so as to stop him from devouring man, also to avert destruction of village by fire, which was believed to be the work of “Kitsuk Long”; the villagers would observe a day of genna (Among) where the village high priest, on behalf of the villagers offer sacrifice to “Kitsuk Long”⁷²

All the ceremonies and sacrifices if carefully observed, would suggest that, the Aos were very particular about the malevolent spirit that could bring disaster and harm to the individuals and community as a whole. Therefore the ceremonies and sacrifices performed were conducted to

⁷⁰ Panger Imchen, p 55

⁷¹ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.56- 57

⁷² Ibid, p 58

maintain a relationship with the other realm. The coming of Christianity had changed this concept of appeasing the different spirits through ceremonies and sacrifice to, believing in one supreme God; controller and maintainer of all the universe, having all authority and power, to mollify or placate every problems and thus seek only his protection and help in all circumstances. Certain traditional ceremonies still continues but in a different form. For instances, one would no longer find elaborate ceremonies and rituals like that of “Moatsu Mong” and “Tsongrem Mong” however, prayers are observed in the church asking God for bountiful harvest. Similarly before cutting down forest for cultivation in traditional Ao Naga religious practices, ceremonies and sacrifices were done to appease the deity of that forest. Today, instead prayer are offered to God to protect them from those malicious spirits. One can still find a very close connection between the practices of the traditional Ao Naga religion to that of Christianity.

In a nutshell, one would find that the traditional Ao Naga Religion was practical. It was practical not only because it involves an intricate and elaborate ceremonies and rituals but, also because, it was a relationship maintained between man and the unseen forces which he finds difficult to comprehend; an act to attain an end for which, appease the unseen forces which they believed are both benevolent and malevolent was important. Religion for the Aos was a way of life and therefore their social and religious life was intertwined and inseparable. Their culture was their religion and; religion was their culture. The Ao Naga Religion can be understood as a way of dealing with the mysterious world, a way of life that would maintain a harmonious relation with the nature that surrounds them.

2.5: Language:

The crux of this dissertation in on language as such, more inputs will be added and addressed in the succeeding chapters, yet, as a prelude to the issues of language which will be discussed later, it is our intention to bring forth a brief account on the background of the linguistic

division of the Ao Nagas society. One would be mesmerized to know the kind of linguistic diversities that forms an integral part of the Ao Naga society. The Ao languages are among the central Naga language and it comprised of a small family of Sino- Tibetan languages.⁷³ At the upper layer the Ao Naga language can be divided into three different languages, “Chungli Ao”, “Mongsen Ao” and “Changki Ao”. when we look at what J P Mill has to say about the linguistic division of the Aos in his book ‘the Ao Nagas’ one would find an addition of one more dialect known as “Sangpur dialect” a dialect spoken in the Sangpur Khel of Longsa village but today we hardly find any speaker of this dialect and therefore, is disregarded. Majority of the Ao villages are speakers of Chungli and Mongsen Ao and changki Ao is spoken only in three villages.⁷⁴

One interesting feature about Ao Naga language is that, their idiom differs from one village to the other village, even when they are from the same Ao speaking group. For instances both Aliba and Chungtia are Mongsen speaking Ao villages, and are in proximity to each other. In fact if one look from a distance, one would be mistaken that it consist of one village and not two. The distance between the two are of only few yards however, one would notice that the tone in which the two speakers speak differs. Distinguishing the place to which one belongs is never a difficult task. This is applicable to all the villages of the Ao in fact, the speech itself forms an integral part of their identity as, defining one’s identity by the village to which an individual belongs is a common phenomenon in an Ao society. There are also villages that has both Chungli and Mongsen speakers. Villages like Sungratsu and mopungchuket can give us the best example of such villages. Mill further describes how the village of Sungratsu is divided into two khels, (wards) one consisting of Chungli speaking clan and the other of Mongsen speaking clan and how, the two speakers knows each other’s language but speaks its own. He also illustrated with an example of how Mongsen women married to a man of

⁷³ Ao Language, <http://en.m.wikipedia.org>> Ao_la...

⁷⁴ J P mill, *the Ao Nagas*, p. 1. 2

Chongli Khel would speak in Mongsen with her husband but at the same time would speak to her baby in Chongli owing to the patriarchal system prevalent in their society.⁷⁵

W C Smith in his monograph describes, how the contact with the advance peoples (by which he is referring to the Colonial administration and the Christian missionaries) and the introduction of writing has yielded unity among the different Ao villages. He observes that, Chongli Ao has become a dominant one, as all the literature has been written in Chongli. He illustrated further by saying, how the religious service in a Mongsen village, “*while the sermon will be in Mongsen, the scripture is read and the song are sung in Chongli*”⁷⁶ today, one would find even the sermon being given in Chongli in all the Mongsen speaking churches. This in fact as opined by Smith has broken down the isolation between different villages and Smith is partly right in saying that “*there is no envy on the part of the Mongsen group, as they seem to be entirely satisfied with the situation of having all the literature in Chongli dialect*”.⁷⁷ But one need to critically examine the kind of peril it carries. Accepting Chongli as a common language for the Aos may be a uniting factor, however, one should also be aware of the fact that, one of the major reason for the loss of rich and diverse culture today, is the intermixing of different cultures. Speaking in a psychological way, an individual speaking other than Chongli would find their dialect as less important. Taking English the official language and Nagamese as the common language of the State as an example, would further simplify my argument. Today if we look at the linguistic dimension of the Nagas, since the introduction of English education and making it compulsory for all children to learn English largely because of its market value, (by market value I mean the importance attached to English as a language be in government sector or any kind of profession, which has to do with one’s earning or livelihood) the importance of one’s mother tongue has been largely reduced. We would even find quite a good number of Nagas, who are

⁷⁵ J P mill, *the Ao Nagas*, London, Micmillan and Co, Limited, 1926, p 1-2

⁷⁶ Wc smith, *The Ao-Naga tribes of Assam*, Delhi, Gian publication, reprinted 1980, p.199

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p 199.

unable to speak their own mother tongue most of their parents of course, are either from different tribes as such, their communication being usually done either in Nagamese or English. According to a case study conducted on Language loss in Nagaland, it has been observed that, during the last three decades, there has been migration of different professional groups, skilled and unskilled workers, traders to towns like Kohima and Dimapur. The language situation of those migrated children finding themselves in a transition. In many of the families, it had been observed that their village Dialogue has been completely lost and, their mother Tongue subsequently differing from those of the first generation speakers.⁷⁸

In the case of those mixed background family, many of the parents would find no importance in teaching their children their mother tongue unlike their forefathers, who would value and preserve their language as it was a way of defining one's identity, one's culture and a sense of we feeling among the members of a community. In saying so, the researcher herself have come across children of mixed background, who do not even understand either of their parents language instead, Nagamese and English becomes their spoken language.

The sense of belongingness to one's culture, one's identity seems to be losing with the passage of time. There is in fact the so called inferiority feelings in terms of language at all levels. If this continues, a time would come where the once celebrated culture and the uniqueness attached to it would be nowhere to find. Therefore, emphasise should be given so that, in the process of assimilation and while trying to open up the society to other cultures, one's cultural identity need not be wiped off.

With the advent of Colonial administration and the Christian missionaries, one would no longer find the kind of society that has been described by earlier writers on Ao Naga History. We no longer find 'Morung' (Arju in Chungli Ao and Arijū in Mongsen Ao) as an institution of learning, neither would one find any Ao worshipping a stone, which they once believed to

⁷⁸ R. Vashum, Aleube Iheilung, Nehemiah panmei, Lanu Longkumer (ed) *Nagas at work*, NSUD Publication, New Delhi, 1996, p 42.

be the residence of certain spirit and, therefore, need to be revered. One also would rarely find women with their tattooed body. We see speedy transformation in the cultural life of the Ao Nagas in fact, changes in every sphere has been noticed however, one also cannot deny the fact that, the Ao Nagas still adheres to certain traditions, preserving it in the form of Customary laws which affirms their identity as different from others. Changes has been seen yet the inherent nature of maintaining a separate identity still find its way in the Ao Naga society. The question is, how far will it sustain without having a proper intervention?

The purpose of this chapter was to give a brief background of the Ao Nagas; a comparative study of Ao Nagas before and after the colonial intervention. Keeping in mind that it would serve as a base for the proceeding chapters.

CHAPTER- 3

A dog eaten Script: Orality, Symbols, Motifs and Design in Reading Ao Naga History.

3.1: Defining motifs and symbols:

A motif is “a pattern or design” it is “also an idea that appears repeatedly in the works of an artist or in a piece of writing or music”⁷⁹

Symbols can be “a sign, shape, or object that is used to represent a quality or idea”⁸⁰

In the context of the Ao Nagas, motifs would mean the repeated design of a particular image or object that is seen in the crafts and attires of the Aos and symbols would mean the meaning attach with those images and objects.

In trying to reconstruct the history of any particular society using symbols and motifs as a tool, one would certainly be skeptical of the very nature of symbols and motifs as, It is in fact undeniable that, a particular sign, image or word may have different implication and may not necessarily represent the same meaning at all time and space therefore, it becomes necessary for any observer to know the context, cultural settings, before trying to explain what a particular object or thing may symbolize. In other word, all these signs and symbols are social construct and may vary from society to society. The symbolic meanings conveyed by different

Motifs, signs etc. can alter even within a particular society in course of time. This is where, understanding the nature of Culture itself becomes necessary and will be analyzing it in the following paragraphs.

In a society where there are no written historical records like that of the Nagas, it becomes inevitable to overcome such challenges (by challenges I mean the nature of symbols and

⁷⁹ *Cambridge English dictionary*, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>> motif

⁸⁰ *Cambridge English dictionary*, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>> symbol

motifs which can be alter in the course of times.) using oral sources . Therefore, when one talk about symbols and motifs as a tool for reconstructing Naga history, it does not necessarily divert or distinguish itself from the larger frame of constructing history through oral means.

In the previous paragraph, we have seen how understanding the nature of culture in a particular political, social, economic and religious settings becomes important. So what is culture?

3.2: Culture:

Studying the history, people, Religion, politics , language, economy and behavior of any particular society from the simplest to the most complex, one cannot skip the term ‘culture’ as all these institutions and behavior are culture in itself or in other word, they are the elements of culture that identify a particular society. The definition of culture is no doubt just as complex as the complexity of the different cultures of the world itself and, confirming or confining to a certain definition would be somewhat impractical and inappropriate. One of the earliest definition of culture can be seen in the word of E.B Tylor, who defined culture as *“That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of Society.”*⁸¹

From his definition one can notice that culture is acquired and not biological which is why; culture though seems static is also dynamic in nature.

Dictionary defines culture as;

*“The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group”*⁸²

The oxford dictionary in defining culture clearly suggest two things that; it is a way of living and it differs according to time and space. In our own word, Culture is ‘An institutionalized

⁸¹ E.B Tylor, *primitive culture*, volume 1, 1874, p.1

⁸² *Oxford learner’s dictionary*, <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionary.com>>.....

way of living conditioned by experiment and experiences of different individuals with the environment they live in, which an individual is expected to possess or act upon certain norms and behaviors by the members of his or her community in dealing with the mystery of the nature and to live harmoniously with the environment and the people around.'

The paradoxical nature of culture is that, "*culture is stable, yet is also dynamic, and manifests continuous and constant change*".⁸³

Culture is both stable and dynamic. Members of a particular culture cannot totally wipe out or destroy their own culture at a given point of time and established a totally alien culture. In a way or the other, society retain certain elements of culture, showing it's consistency in the midst of all developments and changes, at the same time culture does not remain as a static entity. It changes in the course of time. In its strict sense, culture is dynamic. In course of time, culture tends to change which may be visible or sometimes even without any realisation by its members.

In today's world, where every parts of the globe is interconnected, cultural shift is an inevitable phenomena which it is openly visible. Postcolonial literary critique and an anarchist like Bhabha would argue that culture is dynamic and not static using the theory of 'Hybridization' or 'Hybrid Culture'. It intensify the fact that culture is not a static entity; it is something dynamic and in motion.⁸⁴ Putting forward his argument, where Bhabha argued, and in his word; it is no more the "*self and the other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures.*" But "*a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different- a mutation, a hybrid*"

The coming of the missionaries and the Colonial state did saw a drastic change in the culture of the Ao Nagas and Nagas in general. However, the coming of the new wave did not totally

⁸³ Melville F. Heskovits, ,preface by Joseph h. Greenberg, *Cultural dynamics*, Alfred A. Knopf, INC, 1964, P 4

⁸⁴ Homi. K Bhabha, *The location of culture* , Routledge,1994, p 158-159

wiped out its prior tradition and culture, but moulded into a 'Hybrid culture' a combination of the external and the internal cultural forces.

Culture as dynamic in nature is subjected to change, yet, it is worthwhile to have a proper articulation of the kind of hybrid culture it produces especially in the cases like that of the study of colonial intervention among the Hill tribes or, any other space that had experienced such intervention where, the vicissitude seems revolutionary.

Side-lining the dynamicity of culture at once, and focusing on the other side of the culture i.e. its ability to maintain consistency despite certain changes. In this chapter, we shall look at some of the unique features of the pre-colonial Ao Naga society, which they have retained through various folk mediums; a cultural enterprise, as against the background of not having a proper history prior to the coming of the British and the missionaries due to the absence of a written record.

3.3: The Myth of the loss script and its historicity:

Reminded of a story, once told to me by my Grandfather, the story was about how a group of people whose script, written on the skin of an animal has been eaten by a dog because of one man's carelessness.

According to the oral folklore, as my grandfather would say; the Ao Nagas, once upon a time are said to have written script, which they received written on an animal skin. They started their Journey to the present land with the script that they received. It so happened that, before reaching their destination, tired and weary after a long and tiresome journey, wanting to feel themselves afresh; they stopped in a shed to relax and have some food and drinks. They had the scripted text written on an animal skin with them, taking care of it, with utmost care. The person who was supposed to be taking care of the script, decided to keep the script outside under a tree despite, opposition from some of his mates. Hoping that nothing would happen, he ignored their advices and kept it outside under a tree. Unfortunately, the script being

scripted on an animal skin, and as my grandfather would humorously say, “Happened to be eaten up by a dog never to be seen again”. They had no option but to give up.

Those were the days I would think of nothing but laugh out aloud making it one of the funniest story since I was too small to understand the core meaning behind the story. As a child the only lesson that I could draw out at my best was how, a simple act of disobedience of an individual could result into an undesired situation, which may even hamper the community as a whole. But today, if I am to give an expression on it, I would be remorse by the fact that, our own script had been lost just because of a dog, if it did exist on the first place.

One can also be certain of the fact that, my grandfather like many others, must have interpreted the story according to the context to draw out certain objectives from it, and, not necessarily aiming to transmit the idea that the Ao Nagas were no different from the rest of the civilization.

The fact that, the story being orally transmitted would certainly bring up the question of authenticity and reliability of the story itself which, of course is irrefutable. Even the story that I got to learn must had undergone a whole lot of changes. The same story may have a different interpretation from a different individual, however, the notion of the Aos, once having a script even prior to the coming of the Christian missionaries was well circulated. Whether one accept it without scrutinizing its historicity or reject it, is a matter of personal choice. Having a panoramic view, and by critically analysing the issue concerning its authenticity, we might be able to comprehend the idea behind the story. Being a product of the present and trying to interpret things of a different space and time, our way of looking at things might alter even while trying to remain impartial. The question is, how do one construct historical relevance out of the myth, which seems trifling or frivolous?

“James C. Scott” in his book “the Art of not being governed” argued that, “for the hill people, the world of writing and text is also associated with state”.⁸⁵ . In his writings, Scott gives an elaborate description of how the people living in the hills of South East Asia, which is also called by the name “Zomia” (a geographical space coined by Willem Van Schendel) whose culture and tradition has been transmitting through oral tradition, have got similar justification of how they had lost the art of writing. In many cases their lost was attributed to their own recklessness, and, sometimes because they were being cheated or by the act of treachery. Scott argued that the absence of writing in these areas by what he called “Shatter Zone” or “Zone of refuge”⁸⁶ is a strategy positioning themselves from the intrusion of the State. These are people who evade from the state making policies. According to Scott “*the absence of writing and text provides freedom of maneuver in history, genealogy, and legibility that frustrates the state routines*”.⁸⁷ Citing the argument made by Scott, it is our intention to bring forth the idea and the possibility that, the same can be applied in the case of the Ao Nagas, like any other highlanders of the South East Asian Massif. Tracing back the origin of the Ao Nagas, through oral tradition and owing to its linguistic and cultural similarities, many suggested the possibility that the Ao Nagas and Nagas as a whole migrated from place like China, Thailand, and Burma and so on. Ignoring for ones the controversies and debates that concentrated around defining one’s identity using race as a medium, the Nagas in general can be racially categorized as Mongoloid.

Judging from what has been observed about the theory of migration among different scholars, in regards to the migration of the Nagas to their present land, it is very likely that, Scott’s argument might somehow come in line with the Ao Nagas, and their story of the lost script, as an intentional act of defiance to avoid state hegemony; an act to set free of themselves

⁸⁵ James C Scott, *The Art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland South East Asia*, Orient Blackswan Private limited, 2010, p.228

⁸⁶ James. C. Scott, *The Art of not being governed*, p x

⁸⁷ Ibid, p 220

from the clutches of the State Making policy. It might also have been created as a defense mechanism, a way of justifying themselves in response to the adjacent neighboring plains of Assam whose culture and civilization has developed the Art of writing way back in 9th – 10th century. Another possibility that can be deduce from the story is that, the Nagas might have once been a part of the state, without having a chance to learn the art of writing due to their status in the society, as writing was in most cases, for the elite in the earlier centuries unlike today, where in many cases the Constitution itself guarantees “Right to educational” to all its citizen. There is also a possibility of having a common consensus to completely ignore the use of writing which may be associated with state or any other reasons. In the previous chapter we tried to question the very concept of Aos being emanated from ‘longterok’ and not having any history beyond Chungliyimti. And there is these six individuals forming three different families representing three different clans who are regarded as the progenitor of all Ao Nagas; “Tongpok”, “Longpok” and “Lonjakrep” representing “Pongen”, “Longkumer” and “Jami” clan. A critical view on this would also suggest an inclination towards the theory of as the history of conqueror. These three individuals may have been the leader under whom the Aos might have migrated in search of a new place for any possible reasons. Once they reached Chungliyimti, in order for a fresh start; they must have wanted to create a whole new social structure intending to forget all that of their earlier experiences or history as such, a clan based society with an elaborate system of transmitting history using folk medium may have been the result of their effort over time. there is also a possibility that, the six stone that the Aos revered upon as, the stones from where they are believed to be originated, may have been erected as a symbol of the three individuals who are supposed to be their leaders and not necessarily emerging out of the stone. In the process, either with a common consensus or as a result of the initiative of the three individuals, the Aos might have given up their Script. However this is based on mere speculation and therefore can be subjected to further analysis.

The Less likely to accept, but, the story could also have happened in reality, which of course, might makes no sense to many of the scholars today. Whatever the reason might have been, for constructing such a myth; if one is to assume that, this story of the lost script is just a myth constructed out of necessity, so as to deviate a community or a group from the state making mechanism or, any other reasons which one may or may not be able to define or comprehend in particular, still the fact that the Ao Nagas, considered their script to have been eaten by a dog cannot be dismissed. One is therefore, made aware of the fact that, ‘the Ao Nagas too had the knowledge of writing even before the advent of the missionaries and the Colonial administration’. Our argument is that, Writing was not an alien introduction to the Ao Nagas when the missionaries first introduced the art of writing. It therefore suggest an intentional or purposeful selection not to have a writing as a source of historical transmission. If at all they feel the need of writing, it was never an impossible task. It seems to us a more of disinterest than failing to achieve or have a form of writing.

Therefore, described as “Barbarous”, “uncivilized” or “savage”, or having no History can be subjects to question. Their every act was calculative and determined to achieve certain objectives. European standard of a civilized or an uncivilized community need not be the determining factor of a society, which is so different in every aspect be it political, economic, religious or cultural dimension.

The question then arise, how, therefore, did the Ao Nagas without a written script retained their history? Or how accountable is the history of the Ao Nagas without a written script? Before giving an answer to this question, one should be vigilant not to force oneself in determining a society as more advance or civilized on the basis of the historicity of a society. In other word, Historicity should not be the criteria or the determinant for social division among different societies of the world. Different societies have got its own way of dealing with the world inside and outside the environment they live, and, it might not always be

comprehensible for us or may not always favor our way of defining a well-structured society. One must not be too obstinate in defining a society according to one's approximation of an ideal society, in order that one do not fall in the trap of categorizing a society wholly on the basis of development of technology, transportation; modern politics, the art of writing, (here it must be noted that writing is not a modern development, however, writing as a determinant of how advance a society is, was developed specially with the invention of printing press a factor that facilitated the growth of modernity) well so and so forth, which I would put as 'modern mode' (all that has to do with modern developments) rather, one must try to apprehend a particular society as a unique entity encapsulating various norms, beliefs, laws, politics etc. in the form of 'Culture' of a particular society. Having said that, the Ao Naga society may serve as a precedent of how, a particular community or a society adjust and adapt with the environment that surrounds them, and, how they could preserved their rich tradition and history through an entirely different mode using orality as a medium corroborated by motifs embodied with symbolic meanings and mythical symbols⁸⁸ which was passed down from one generation to the other in the form of story-telling and songs which I would term it, as 'Folk-medium'

3.4: Transmitting history through the art of living:

In the article written by Rebecca Blum Martinez about Pueblo an Indian American community in New Mexico, the author described how the bilingual teachers in the 1990s, who genuinely aimed at promoting multilingualism, and worked for advocating a primary language program for the Pueblo students, so as to bring equitable education for all students, were unable to understand when the Pueblo community reacted pessimistically regarding the use of their language in the schools without the consent of the council. The author argued that

⁸⁸ Using the word Mythical symbols here would mean the symbols and meanings one get to extract form different myth prevalent in the Ao Naga Society.

pueblo languages required a different way or a different educational solution, owing to the political and religious importance attached with their language. For the Pueblo community, language act as a savior; a protector of their identity and a maintainer of autonomy over their land and culture from the clutches of the outsiders. Their traditional system of government being based on theocracy, religion plays a vital rule in the governance of this tribal community. Their religion involves an intricate ceremonial cycle which involves face to face contact to learn all of the information required for the event orally. In the process, the participant are made aware of the importance of their language. Language for the pueblo is sacred since, it is tied with their religion and can only be practiced by its members. It must be noted that the pueblo community had suffered religious persecution from the Spaniards as well as the Americans, culminating into a situation, where their religious practiced got internalized and therefore writing down their language and disclosing it to others becomes sacrilegious.⁸⁹ Writing down their language and exposing it to the outside world, is never a solution for transmitting their language. It indeed need a different educational solution to their problem. Taking Pueblo community and their perception about their language as an example, I mint to allude the idea that the Ao Nagas like the pueblo community did had their own way of transmitting their culture, religion and politics which need not necessarily be centered around their language like that of the Pueblos' still by having a closer view on the way society was structured, the Ao Naga society was indeed undeniably a society where history played a vital role in determining the way society was leaning toward. This can be validated by the way they maintain their culture, their tradition transmitting it through different agencies so as to preserve their past legacies and social customs.

The Ao Nagas were very much aware of the significance of history and therefore there social life was much centered on creating an impactful history for the generations to come. This can

⁸⁹ Rebecca Blum Martinez, *Language and tribal sovereignty: whose language is it anyway*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1477340>,(accessed 18 April 2018)

be seen at every level which revolves around their day to day existence. One best example of such is the agency called the institution of Morung known by the Name 'Arju' or Ariju in Ao.⁹⁰ Morung was a dormitory for the bachelors'. Every male member of a village would leave their parents, enter the institution of Morung after attaining puberty where he would be trained in various aspects. Morung act as an educational institution for the Ao Nagas and Nagas as a whole. It was where the boys would be taught the art of warfare since the Ao Nagas were once upon a time always under the threat of enemy villages. *"Much of Naga culture, its customs and tradition have been transmitted from generation to generation through folk tales and oral traditions, carving of figures on stones and wood, and design on clothes. It was also used as a guard- house during the times of war"*.⁹¹ In short Morung was an institution where its members learnt their culture, traditions and values of life. 'Boys who do not attain the institution of Morung were being disgraced by the villagers'⁹².

Talking about the female members of the society, 'girls like boys would leave their parents after attaining puberty and would sleep in the house of the widows which the Aos called as Tsuki where like boys, girls learnt the art of painting, weaving, dyeing, pottery and various activities which they would passed down from generation to generation'⁹³.

One can observe that, Their way of living was structured in such a way that living a life known not only in the present but creating an impactful history for the future generations to come was always in the mind of the people. They made sure their culture and tradition along with different activities, values involved in living a fruitful life was transmitted. While, having a glance at the role played by Morung as agency through which history was transmitted, it would be wrong for us to dismiss the role played by family as an institution in transmitting their tradition and culture and in preserving their history. *"Before one enters the*

⁹⁰ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p 98.

⁹¹ Mhonthung Yanthan, *Relevance of Naga Morung culture*, The Morung express.com>relevance-naga-m.(accessed 18 July, 2016)

⁹² Aoloin Kichu, interviewed, 2018, Chungtia village, Mokokchung Nagaland.

⁹³ Resenmenla Longchar, *"Attire of the Ao Naga women; representation, memory and history"*, p 62

*Ariju, one learnt the primary education from parents and mostly from grandparents. This learning included basic art, handicrafts, stories of the past, legends, mythology, folktales and songs and traditional customs”.*⁹⁴ A careful and critical study on various, Folklores, folksongs, folkdances of the Ao Nagas would suggest that these folk mediums were their unique way of maintaining and transmitting their history and a system well-structured to maintain their identity in the absence of a written record. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Ao Naga society can be categorized as a Clan based society. By having a closer look one would be fascinated to know how even this clan as a social entity act as an agency and a maintainer of the history of the Ao Nagas. Clan as a social group not only help in tracing the genealogy of that particular clan, but, different clans have their own set of stories, myth, songs, and have a different set of dress and ornaments which all speaks in itself.

The way they structure their society, the way they act upon a given situation, and the way they live out their life was in fact maintained and executed in such a way that their culture, their tradition would to be preserved even without a written script.

When one carefully studies the traditional Ao society, one would find a good number of what today’s generation may call superstitious beliefs having a religious sanction which was being observed by all members of the society. Even those what we may called superstitious beliefs had played an important role in transmitting their history and culture. For instance, having physical relationship with their partner before attacking an enemy was strictly prohibited among the Ao Nagas. It was considered a taboo and would bring disaster if any of the members violate it.⁹⁵ No man would therefore dare to violate this constructed notion which may or may have anything to do with the victory in the warfare. Abstaining from any physical relationship before attacking an enemy village was religiously sanctioned which became a law of the land to be transmitted and followed by the generations to come. If we are

⁹⁴ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, Har-Anand Publications, 1993 p 98

⁹⁵ Tiakaba Longchar, *interviewed*, 2019 Chungtia village, Mokokchung Nagaland.

to critically examine the idea behind maintaining such strict taboos; there is a logic behind it. It is scientifically proven that, sex can put a person to sleep due to the “*tremendous shift in blood flow throughout the brain*”. “*With less blood flow, you can’t activate as many neurons and this can make you feel sleepy*”.⁹⁶ In order that all man remain alert and active, they must have insisted such a taboo wherein, no man could dare to break the law and that, they could only achieve by having a religious sanction over it. One could see that there is scientific elements even in those insisted Taboos which may be seen as some superstitious beliefs if not properly analyzed.

Combining all the above discussion in a nutshell, one can say that there was a deliberate attempt among the Ao Nagas to preserve their history in the form of tradition and culture, which many a times became the law of the land or so called as customary law. Their very art of living or in other words, their lifestyle was executed in such a way that their existence would to be known to the unknown.

3.5: Understanding Motifs, Symbols and designs in Ao Naga cultural attires and craft:

Panger Imchen commented, “*Aos have a tradition of pictographic expression of history, philosophy and social events*”.⁹⁷

The process of conversion for the Ao Nagas from traditional religion to Christianity, started from the late 19th century which is considered to have paved the way for modernization among the Ao Nagas. The fact that the Christian missionaries in the process of proselytization would consider many of the things related to their old tradition and culture as ‘evil’, the early believers therefore, had this notion that, many of the things related to tradition must be forgotten so as to become a faithful believer. This in a way helped in maintaining a consistency in the meaning represented by different symbols and motifs for the

⁹⁶ 6 strange side effects of sex, <http://www.menshealth.com>sex-women>

⁹⁷ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* p 127

Ao Nagas. In other words the meaning remains unchanged despite the changing situation and circumstances. “The meaning represented by different symbols and motifs contained in different attires and craft of the Ao Naga remain unchanged though, there is a shift in the designs and fashion of the Ao Naga clothing”⁹⁸ for instance, today one can find a simple neck tie containing various motifs of sun, moon, animals, etc. which on the first place(neck tie in itself) was never a part of the Ao Naga cultural attire, or one can see waist coat (see figure 3.5.a) containing all such patterns and designs ,yet, the meaning represented by the sun, moon, cock, elephant so and so on would remain as it is, even with the change in the patterns and fashion of the cloth . It should be noted that, meanings to a particular figure or motif may find some slide variation from village to village or from clan to clan, yet, it all have its commonality despite slide variations. Emphasis will be given on the commonality of the meanings represented rather than differentiation on the same.

Today one can no longer can differentiate a person of his or her status by the look of what He or she wears, yet, it was not the case for the pre-colonial Ao Nagas. By having a closer look at some of the symbols and motifs that one find in the traditional Ao Naga attires and crafts one would get a closer picture of how society functioned in the pre-colonial Ao Naga society. The economic, political, social and religious standing of a person was differentiated by the kind of attire a person wore. For instance, “TsÜngkotepsÜ also known as MangkoyepsÜ” (see fig 3.5.b) warrior Shawl, has got certain symbols and motifs that represent different meanings to it. The origination of this Shawl would trace us back to the time when the Aos were living together at Chungliyimti. It so happened that once the Ao women in Chungliyimti seeing the decreasing number of population of the Aos as a result of continuous loss of head to the neighboring enemies from other tribes during the time of head cutting (it should be noted that head taking was not regarded as an ‘evil’ practice for the Pre-colonial Nagas) decided and

⁹⁸ Pursowa, interviewed, 2018, Akhoya village,

promised to make a special Shawl for those men who could bring enemies head as a war trophy, as a sign of encouragement and respect to those man of honor.⁹⁹ This is how the very traditional shawl of the ao Nagas came into being. If we look at the Ao Naga warrior shawl, interestingly we will find the symbol of star, Moon, sun, and figures of some animals like tiger, elephant, cock, hornbill feathers and many more. These are not just mere designs but they all signifies and represents meanings. According to Panger Imchen, “*Each phratry and clan has their own dress and ornaments each of which trace back to their origin and historical events*”.¹⁰⁰

”Ingvild Saelid Gilhus”, talks about how we have contradictory feelings and thoughts for animal due to the nature in which we see and treat the animals. Our feeling towards animal is a mixture of sympathy and a desire to eat them. They are similar, at the same time different from us, making it appropriate for us to imagine and conceptualize the animals as humans using them as symbols.¹⁰¹ When one looks at the Ao Nagas traditional attires and crafts, one can find very often the use of animals and birds embroidered or crafted as designs, each of which conveys different meanings and symbols. As stated above, animals are good not only to eat but to feel which is one reason we find the use of animal and bird figures being used as symbols in different parts of the world even till date and the Ao Nagas are no exception to it. Take in the Ao Naga shawl “TsÜngkotepsÜ” (warrior shawl). It might look like a simple shawl, yet every design and colors imprinted on it has a deep meaning and significance. The white strip in the middle symbolizes courage and bravery, for a man who have not taken the head of an enemy were forbidden to wear such shawl with the white strip in the middle. (see fig 3.5.c)¹⁰² The ordinary man would simply wear just the red and black combination of the shawl. The picture of the sun, the moon and the stars would be imprinted on the shawl of the

⁹⁹ Meuvwati, *interviewed*, 2018, Chungtia village.

¹⁰⁰ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p 140

¹⁰¹ Ingvild Saeid Gilhus, *animals God and Humans: changing attitudes to animals in Greek, Roman and early Christian ideas*, Taylor and Francis e-library, 2006

¹⁰² Lanutola Kichu, *interviewed*, 2018, Chungtia village, Mokokchung Nagaland..

ruler or a leader only the rulers also known as Tatar had the privilege to wear shawls with such pictures.¹⁰³ It must be noted that only those warriors from each clans who had successfully taken the head of the enemy were entitled to become the representative of the village council. For a man who has successfully given the feast of merit, while mentioning about the feast of merit, it is undeniable that giving the feast of merit even once in a life time was not an easy execution. It required a person to be generous enough to serve the whole village population with food and drinks on that particular day, when they determine to do so, it was therefore natural that a man who could offer such festival were economically rich and were much respected in the society. For those man, the picture of the Mithun head was imprinted on their shawl, signifying the wealth of the one who wears it. The image of Mithun (a buffalo like animal) indicates the wealth of the wearer because only the rich people could rear this animal. The symbol of cock in the shawl of a man would mean the wearer as a priest as, only a priest could wear the symbol of cock on his shawl. If we see the ritual and sacrifices in the traditional Ao Naga Religious practices, Cock was often used for all rituals and ceremonies. And most of the sacrifices were done by the priest. Thus, only a priest could put the symbol of cock on his shawl. Motifs of head of a man was also imprinted on the shawl of those warriors who could successfully cut the head of an enemy. Along with the figures of animal, a man of wealth would often imprint the figure of Jabelli (see figure 3.5.d) (Jabelli was used as a currency for exchange in the Traditional Ao Naga Society) signifying a person's wealth.¹⁰⁴ The animal figures such as tiger, and elephant in the shawl depicts the physical power, bravery and courage of man,¹⁰⁵ thus, those figures of animals printed on the shawl of a person redirected to one's success in getting the head of an enemy courageously. Other figures such as spears and daos also represents success in head hunting.

¹⁰³ Pursowa, *The Ao Naga traditional dress as a medium of communication in the society*, Barkati& company pvt limited, 2011, p27

¹⁰⁴ Pursowa, *The Ao Naga traditional dress as a medium of communication in the society*, p 27

¹⁰⁵ En.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>tsung..

One of the interviewee remarked, “My husband insisted me not to cover him with ”TsÜngkotepeÜ” (warrior shawl) on his death body because he thought it would be undeserving for him to cover himself with the shawl of honor even on his death body”.¹⁰⁶ This kind of remarks made by those individuals who had tasted both life before and after conversion to Christianity throws to light the kind of reverence that was given to the meaning and significance of the shawl, and, the person who wears it prior to the coming of the colonial administration.

Apart from “TsÜngkotepeÜ”, one also finds an interesting differentiation of attires on the basis of one’s status in the society. For example, “TapensasÜ” (fig.3.5.e) also known as “WarusÜ” is a shawl representing the wealth of a person. In order for a person to put on this shawl, one should successfully complete at least five times of Mithun sacrifice in his life time or, he should be a men whose father and grandfather must also have successfully done giving the feast of merit.¹⁰⁷ Being able to possess such shawl was a pride and an honor for the man who possess it. It was a symbol of wealth for a men whoever owns it.

There were also shawl such as “SÜpusÜ”, (fig. 3.5.f) mostly worn by the slaves and common men, “Takar lipase”, shawl for rich man,

One can also find certain restriction in wearing certain dress and ornaments on the basis of phratry and clan or in that sense, some phratry has the advantage of wearing certain shawl over the other even without being a warrior or a wealthy person. For instances, “Takar Lipa su” is a kind of shawl entitled to be worn by men who has done Mithun sacrifice, yet “Pongen” and “Imsong” clan, are entitled to wear even without having done the Mithun sacrifice.¹⁰⁸ Why would one phratry have the advantage over the other in possessing or having the privilege to wear certain cloth and ornament which other phratry have to earn it or, even to the extent of prohibition of wearing certain attire can be a matter of concern? To give

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Lanutola Kichu

¹⁰⁷ Pursowa, *The Ao-Naga traditional dress as a medium of communication in the Society,,* p, 29

¹⁰⁸ Pursowa, *The Ao- Naga Traditional Dress as a medium of Communication in the Society,* p 29

an answer to that, the Ao Nagas had well preserved their oral narratives that trace us back to their history.

According to Chungli phratry, Pongen clan as a senior phratry had more rights over the other than comes the “Longkum” and “Jamir”. The story goes on to say how the Aos, once they settled at “Koridang” had a fierce rivalry between the Pongen and ”Longkum” clan. On the issue of rights over ornaments. The story describes how “Rosangba” the protagonist of the “Pongen” clan was as ugly as a monkey while, “Mangyangba” the protagonist of the Longkumer clan was not only a handsome man but a great traveler with the knowledge of the outside and had friends everywhere. “Mangyangba” in order to deprive the right of wearing certain ornaments from “Rosangba” took the issue to the Raja of Assam, whom the Ao called as “Chuba” (king). He persuaded “Rosangba” to come down to the plain in order to come to a decision over the matter. The Raja of Assam put a serious of test where they were made to choose between the top and the bottom of a log of “Nahor” wood, a fine cock and an egg, and two cups one of which was a beautiful red clay cup and the other a dull metal made cup. In all the test “Mangyangba” would be the first to choose. He chooses the top of the tree over the root, a bag of salt over the earth; cock over the egg and, the beautiful clay cup over the dull metal cup. But to his disadvantage, his perception about his choices would left him with no rights over the ornaments that he desired to deprived. “Rosangba” on the other hand choses the root over the top from which all trees grows, egg over the cock from which fowls are hatched, bag of earth from which all things grow and the metal cup which would not break. The Raja therefore pronounced that, “Rosangba” made the better choice in all the test therefore, “Rosangba” and his descendants were made greater than “Mangyangba” and his descendants for all generation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ J P Mill, *the Ao Nagas*, p 43

Accordingly the Raja divided their ornaments both for men and women mostly to the advantage of Pongen clan. This is how justification over the right of wearing certain ornaments was given.

The idea in exposing such oral narration is not to bring out the division or categorization over the right to wear certain ornaments by certain clans, but, to explain the kind of adherence the pre- colonial Ao Nagas had over their customs and traditions though, the authenticity of the story may seem questionable to us. This kind of oral narratives were turned into customs of the land which was strictly followed and observed by all members of the society. Similar kind of oral narratives circulates among the Mongsen Ao. The story also suggest us the right of inheritance based on the seniority. Often one would find that the eldest Son inheriting the maximum share of his father's property.

There are various other shawls with different patterns and designs, representing different meanings which act as an important determining factor for social, political, economic and religious standing of a person in the society.

The Ao traditional attire is incomplete without the ornaments. Cambridge dictionary defines ornament as a 'decoration that is added to increase the beauty of something'.¹¹⁰ In the case of the Ao Nagas, ornaments are not just merely an object of beautification, but, carries intensive meanings many of which are symbols of honour and wealth for the wearer.

Hornbill feather known as OzÜmi (see figure 3.5.g) in Ao is one such attire that is used as an ornament by the Aos. While looking at the meanings represented by different motifs and symbols of the Ao Naga traditional attire, one cannot overlook the use of Hornbill feather among the Aos. One can find the use of Hornbill feather irrespective of gender unlike other ornaments, the usage of which are differentiated on gender base. Hornbill feather represents the fame and wealth of the wearer. It was also a symbol of pride for the woman who wears it,

¹¹⁰ Dictionary.Cambridge.org>...

for it could be only be worn by women whose father or husband has taken the head of an enemy or had successfully given feast to the whole village. The number of hornbill feather a person wears represents the number of feast or the number of head a person had taken Owing not only to its beauty but, also because of the difficulty one undergoes while hunting the Hornbill bird, the Ao Nagas considered one feather of hornbill an equivalent of one Mithun head¹¹¹ ornaments such as “Lakepmolung” the Boar tusk Necklace, (see fig 3.5.h) “Yimyu pen” the Drongo, “Tamkhu” which is the Coronet, “Kumpang” (see fig 3.5.i) Armlet, the Sash which is also called as “Sükuzi” in Ao, (figure 3.5.j) “Sügi sÜko heko Pong” or The Casket, (fig 3.5.k) the Gauntlet “Ka-ap” (fig. 3.5.l) in Ao etc. are different forms of ornament used by the Aos, the use of these ornaments were not just to enhanced the beauty of the attire, but carried with it different symbols and meanings which the Aos certainly looked in, before one finally put on their ornaments. For instances, Lakepmolung, is a necklace made out of the task of Boar and can be worn only by a successful warrior. “Kümpang”, the armlet is another kind of ornament made out of the elephant tusk for arms. For the Chungli Ao group, Pongen, Imsong and Longkumer clan has the privilege of wearing the armlet in both the arms unlike the Jami clan, whose right to wear “Kümpang” was restricted to one arm, exception being made to those who were empowered to do sacrificial rites in the village. Meaning to say, only a priest could wear on both side of the arm for Jami clan.¹¹² In the same way, the Casket called by the Name “Sügi SÜko” or “Henko Pong” was a well decorated casket using goat hair, and hairs of women which they acquire from the enemy village during headhunting. It had the appearance of a Mithun horn and was used for carrying bamboo spikes, which they kept alongside the path of the enemy. It was one of the main weapon of defense during the process of headhunting. This casket was meant only for the real hero or the leader even among the warriors. Ordinary men were not entitled to wear this casket. Like that of the

¹¹¹ Pursowa, *the Ao Naga Traditional dress as a medium of Communication in the society*, p 12-13

¹¹² Pursowa, *the Ao Naga Traditional dress as a medium of Communication in the society*, p 15-16

armlet, (Lakepmolung) only Pongen, Imsong and Longkumer clan could wear it. Jamir's were prohibited from carrying this warrior casket.¹¹³

As pointed out earlier, the right to wear certain ornaments being divided according to the judgment of the Raja of Assam, one can find an interesting picture of how the Aos though it may seem unfair, would dare to challenge the accountability of the legend story over the distribution of ornaments. Introspecting into the matter once again, may throw us to light the very nature of all Ao Naga customary practice and traditions, being based on value system of honesty and dignity. Customs and tradition of the Ao Nagas encompasses moral ethic, the root of all social relationship for the Aos.

Digging deeper into the matter concerning the use of different ornaments would certainly widen our knowledge of the social, economic, religious and political history of the Ao Nagas.

*"Each clan has her own mark of dress hand woven or embroidered upon the cloth".*¹¹⁴

"Resenmenla longchar", in her MPhil dissertation described the Ao women and their attire and how it differs according to class differences. *"The Ao women in the pre-British period were identified by the attire they wore and there was a statement of their class whether she belonged to rich or poor"*¹¹⁵. Like that of men, the identity and status of a women was also easily recognized by the kind of cloth and ornament she wears. For example an outsider could easily observe whether an Ao women belongs to Mongsen or Chungli phratry just by a glance at the kind of hairband she uses called as "Küpok" (figure 3.5.m) in Ao. A Mongsen women would band her hair using a white "Küpok" while, Chungli women use a black color hairband. Also, the wife or daughter of a man who had done Mithun sacrifice were entitled to put OzÜmi or hornbill feather on their hairband.

¹¹³ Pursowa, *the Ao Naga Traditional dress as a medium of Communication in the society*, p 17

¹¹⁴ Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p 141

¹¹⁵ Resenmenla Longchar, *"Attire of the Ao Naga women; Representation memory and history"*, University of Hyderabad, 2006, p 78.

Necklace “AzÜk” (figure. 3.5. n)) and earring were also differentiated and distributed according to the status of a women. For instance, “Lakep wangkom” and “Mejunghangshi” can be worn by any women provided they can afford to buy them; “Yiptong Wangkom” necklace however, was entitled only for women whose father or husband had done Mithun sacrifice.¹¹⁶ Women also wears “kümpang” armlet, of two types “MerangkÜmbang” and the other known as “KorakÜmpang”. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the AOs considers “Tongpok”, “Longpok” and “Longjakrep” to be the progenitor of all clans and sub-clans. For the AO women, the privilege of wearing “KÜmpang” (armlet) is distributed according to these three group. The descendants of “Tongpok” are entitled to wear both the armlet, “Longpok” descendent were enabled to wear only the “KorakÜmpang” whereas those descended from Longjakrep were prohibited from wearing any of the two.¹¹⁷

“Mekhala” (‘SÜpeti’ (fig.3.5.o) also called as “Teperem su”: “teperem” meaning waist and Su meaning cloth in AO) also served as an important marker of identity for an AO women during the pre-British period. One could easily identify to which clan or group she belongs just by looking at the “Mekhala” or skirt she wears. It not only serves as an identity marker, but also displayed the status of a women in her community. The daughter or wife of a men who had done Mithun sacrifice wears a different kind of skirt which was more profound and sumptuous in comparison to the simple designed skirt a poor women. In this regard one can observe that, the tag of once being a rich man’s daughter cannot be taken away even if a woman from a rich family is married off to a poor man and therefore, she has the right to wear those dress and ornaments which she gained from her father’s wealth.¹¹⁸ Like that of men, women too wears ornaments not just for enhancing her beauty, but, served in maintaining her social, economic, religious and political identity.

¹¹⁶ J.P mill, *The AO Nagas*, p 58

¹¹⁷ Pursowa, *The AO Naga Traditional dress as a medium of communication in the society*, p11

¹¹⁸ J.P mill, *The AO Nagas*, p 39

During the pre-British period, no Ao women could wear dress or attires which she was not entitled. The social and economic standing of a women was easily recognized by the kind of dress and ornament she wears. One thing that differentiate men and women in this respect is that, for men in order to get the entitlement to wear certain dress and ornaments, he was expected to achieve certain requirements as a member of the community. Women on the other hand, were free of such requirements in order to mark a position in the society. For a women, the availability of clothes and ornaments generally depended on the status of his Father and her Husband. This does not necessarily mean women were inferior or were socially lower in status than that of men. The amount of sacrifice a woman had to provide for the success of her husband cannot be undermine. It indeed was a matter of equal distribution of works among men and women in the society. Further examining the above mentioned observation would in fact throw us to light the respect and privilege an Ao women enjoyed during the pre- colonial period.

After considering all the above discussion, one might question and challenge the notion of pre-colonial Ao Nagas society as an ‘egalitarian’ society as labelled by many scholars and writers. Interestingly with all these differentiation even in terms of dress and ornaments, when carefully observe one would find it applicable to consider the pre- colonial Ao Naga society as an egalitarian society. It must be noted that most of the dress and ornaments were worn during festival or on certain occasions and not on any other days; say for instance, a man is entitled to wear his shawl of merit on the day when he offers the feast of merit.¹¹⁹ Likewise the observation of feast of merit itself was an act of wealth distribution among the members of the community. For an Ao wealth was not merely an achievement of a person for his hard work, but bestowed upon him by god. *“His social status is automatically as a result of God’s blessing. Not to host such a feast could result in loss, destruction and even an*

¹¹⁹ Panger Imchen, Ancient Ao Naga Tradition and Culture , p 137

unnatural death".¹²⁰ Being religiously sanctioned, it became a responsibility for the rich to share their wealth to the poor. This way the disadvantage section of the society were not downcast. Indeed their belief system was framed in such a way that the whole idea of a man becoming rich was not for himself but for the community as a whole. The sumptuously designed warrior shawl was also worn only during the festivals. Those who wear the warrior shawl were greatly honored and looked upon. It was the desire of every man in the community to become one like them. The objective of displaying such shawl during the time of festival was to encourage the people to work hard and also to honor those men who were responsible for protecting the village from the enemies and also contributed their wealth for the welfare of the community. The status of a person chiefly depended on the amount sacrifice a person offers to the community.

Like that of the dress and attires which is marked with eloquent designs, containing meanings to it, the main pillar on the house of a rich man was decorated with symbols of Mithun, and other animals crafted out from logs which was an overtly a sign of the status and economic condition of that household.

It may seem as though these symbols and motifs were just a mere representation of one's status and position in the society. However if we critically examine the symbols and motifs which seems to be just an indicator of one's identity and position; one would find a great deal of historical account lying deep within those symbols and motifs. For instances; the symbol of head in the shawl of a man would not only mean that individual had taken the head of the enemy but, would immediately take us to the practice of head taking, which was an integral part of the Ao Naga society. Similarly the symbol of a Jabelli would not only indicate the wealth of the one who wears but, it suggest a presence of trade relation with their neighboring

¹²⁰Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Tradition and Culture*, p 136

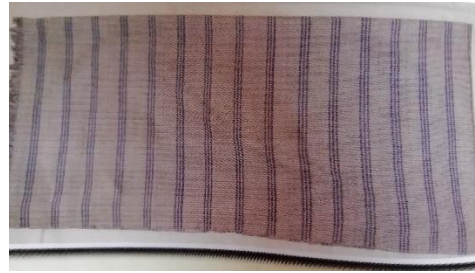
plains of Assam. The different ornaments on the basis of clans indicates a clan based social structure.

Coming to a conclusion on the above discussion intending to prove that the history of the Aos was cautiously preserved using different 'folk mediums', despite not having a written script. Attires are one means of reading the history of the Ao Nagas. An intense study on the symbols, motifs and design in the attires and crafts had arrived us to a conclusion that 'it all speaks'. But this is not the only way through which history can be read. There are various other ways and means of looking at the history of the Ao Nagas which will be sidestepped in this paper. One can conclude that the Ao Nagas reflected upon what had been done by their predecessors and lived out in accordance with their customs and tradition and made sure that in the midst of all, their history was carried down from generation to generation

Table 1: Images of Traditional attires and Ornaments of the Ao Nagas



3.5.a: Traditional waistcoat,



3.5.f: SÜPU SÜ (common men's Shawl)



3.5.b: TsÜngkoteptsÜ (warrior Shawl)



3.5.g: OzÜmi (hornbill feather)



3.5.c: TsÜn sÜpang sÜ (Shawl for common man)



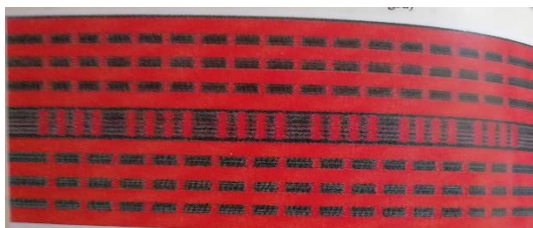
3.5.h: Lakepmolung (Boar tusk Necklace)



3.5.d: Jabelli (Traditional Ao Naga currency)



3.5.i: KÜmpang (Men's Armlet)



3.5.e: Men's shawl (Tapensa sÜ)



3.5.j: SÜkuzi (The Sash)



3.5.k: SÜgi SÜko Henko pong (the casket)



3.5.0: Teperem sÜ (Women's skirt)



3.5. l: Kaap (The Gauntlet)



Tekalar Ni (Mekhala for rich women of Chungtia

Village)



3.5.m: KÜpok (the Hair Band)



Kichular Ni (Mekhala of Kichu clan)



3.5. n: AzÜk (Necklace)

CHAPTER- 4

Symbolism to writing: A New approach

4.1: Christianity and Writing:

The coming of the missionaries and the Colonial administration ushered a new era in the history of the Nagas. It would however, be misleading to look at the colonial state and the missionaries as one entity. They represent two different group of people with different intents. If there was one thing that allied the two together, it was the introducing of education which seems to be a necessity for both in the case of the Ao Nagas, although with different goals and objectives. As such, we see an effort on both the sides in spreading education among the Ao Nagas.

If one would have to understand the nature in which writing was introduced among the Aos; one cannot ignore the process of conversion that took place among this people. The spread of Christianity cannot be separated from the introduction of Writing in the context of the Aos. Therefore, if we are to understand the nature in which writing as an art of transmitting history was introduced, we have to first understand the nature in which Christianity grasp its hold among the Ao Nagas. In other word; the conversion of the Ao Nagas from their Traditional Religion to Christianity was also the reason for shifting their attention from folk medium to writing in preserving and maintaining the history among the Ao Nagas. No wonder, the Aos like all other Naga tribes did not like intrusion from the outsiders. In the word of Hokishe Sema;

*“The rigid physical isolation and seclusion in which the different Naga tribes lived was not only a result of the peculiar circumstances in which these tribes found themselves, but was also self-induced and deliberately chosen”.*¹²¹

¹²¹ Hokishe Sema, *Emergence of Nagaland; socio-economic and political transformation and the future*, 1986, Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, p 8

In fact, this was also the reason why, there was inimical relationship even among the villages of the same tribe. The establishment of the British rule over the land of the Nagas was an eyes breaker which brought about a transformation in almost all aspects of the Nagas, which, they had never perceived prior to the coming of the British. Whether the change was for good or worse, depends on how one looks at it however, the coming of the British and the missionaries did opened up a new era among the Nagas, and writing was for the first time introduced among the Aos and the rest of the Nagas.

4.2: Missionaries and British intrusion and structural change among the Nagas:

Little has been done as of how, writing as a medium of transmitting history has gained its importance in the Naga society which in fact, was the base for establishment of a new order in the Naga society. Writing as an art was introduced only with the coming of the missionaries and colonial state. The Ao Nagas, despite having a well-established system of transmitting its culture and history as discussed earlier, were compelled to shift their attention to writing, over the years following the coming of the British and the missionaries to their land. One is made to question; how then, did this sudden change in the course of their history gained its popular mandate among the Ao Nagas? Was it out of compulsion? Or can we attribute it as a social process over the course of time?

Keeping in mind the above posited questions, To have a wider picture on the process of introduction of writing as a medium among the Ao Nagas, one would certainly have to examine the colonial policies towards the Nagas, since its earliest contact for which, a quick view on the war that took place between the British and the Burmese from 1824 to 1826 and, its consequent impact seems necessary.

The British at first, though not interested on the issue of Nagas given the fact that, interfering the war like ‘Barbarous’ tribes would bring them no profit. Keeping in mind, in all of their

policies the British not to forget were driven by profit behind their every moves, as such, areas where they find unprofitable like that of Naga Hills would hardly trigger their interest. Yet, things turned a different turn and, keeping the Nagas under their control became somewhat inevitable.

Different factors necessitated the British to establish their power over the Naga Hills of which, the imperialistic and expansionist policy of the Burmese that diverted the attention of the British towards the North Eastern region on the first place was one major reason for triggering their interest. The Burmese by the 19th century, reconquered Manipur in 1813 and occupied Assam in 1821.¹²² Manipuri Raja, Marjit Singh, along with his two brother fled from Manipur to Cachar, which caused instability in Cachar compelling the Raja of Cachar to entreaty the British for help. Hearing no response from the British, the Raja of Cachar had to turn towards the Burmese: Sensing the danger of Burmese imperialistic policy as a threat to the British controlled area; the British did not hesitate and immediately declared Cachar as a Protected- state under British which in fact was a clear sign of deviation from its earlier policy of mutual relationship with the Burmese. In addition, to this, Assam which was under the rule of the Ahom ruler, Raja Chandrakant at the time of Burmese occupation of Assam, was dethroned and later reinstalled to the throne when he beseech the Burmese for help. But later on, he was compelled to seek political protection from the British when, he saw the inhumane act incurred upon his people by the Burmese. On the request of the Ahom ruler of Assam for protection, coupled with the fear of Burmese expansion on the British occupied territories of India, and not forgetting the Russian interest over Asia after the fall of Napoleon. All these accelerated the British to declare war against the Burmese earlier with whom, they were trying to maintaining obeisance in order to establish commercial relationship without war.¹²³ Thus a war between the two became inevitable.

¹²² Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas; A historical and political study*, 1974, Manas Publication, p 64.65

¹²³ Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas: a historical and political study*, Manas Publication, 1974 p 63- 67

The first “Anglo- Burmese” war started on 13th of March 1824 and, after a fierce battle at all front, finally ended in 1926 after two years of constant war with a peace treaty also known as “treaty of Yandabo”.¹²⁴ Between the British and the King of Ava of Burma. The Burmese were brought into submission and areas like Assam and Manipur which never were under the dominion of any other rulers or dynasties all came under the influence of the British.

Notwithstanding the relationship maintained between the Ahom’s and different Naga tribes prior to the Anglo- Burmese war, which was a concoction of mutual relation and aggression at the same time, the Nagas were not left unaffected by the War. However, it was also true that, the British had little interest over the ‘war like Barbarous tribes of Naga hills’, prior to the occupation of Assam. The world of the Nagas and many other tribes like, “Garos”, “Khasis”, “Lushais” etc. Living in the mountains and hills adjacent to the Assam and Manipur valley and plains were now exposed to the outside world through the first Anglo-Burmese war. In the word of Piketo Sema;

*“The treaty had an immense impact on the tribes of North east India with no evidence of any Knowledge of these tribes, the British became the de facto guardian of the whole region by the terms of peace treaty’.*¹²⁵

Setting aside the other tribes living in the hills surrounding the plains, the Nagas whose abode were covered with thick and difficult to access forest areas, accelerated by heavy rainfall and malarias region of course was not a bed of roses for the British or any other rulers for that matter, in giving efforts to control them. However, it became a necessity for the British to put a check on these tribes especially the Nagas who continuously raided the British occupied area of Assam and Manipur. “Asoso Yonuo” remarked,

¹²⁴Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas: a historical and political study*, pp 63-70

¹²⁵ Piketo Sema, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, 1881-1947*, second edition 1992, Scholar Publishing House, p 1

*“Whatever might it be like a thunderbolt from the sky, the British had sooner or later to get themselves involved with the hill tribes particularly the Nagas in order to keep their interest going in Assam, Manipur and Burma”*¹²⁶

Interfering in the affairs of the Nagas became inevitable as the interest of the British over their newly occupied territory grew deeper thus specially, with the discovery of Tea in the plains of Assam augmented by the fear of Burmese and French whom though defeated in war, still possessed a threat to the British most important occupied colonial states of India.¹²⁷ Thus providing it another reason to take control over the Nagas. It should also be noted that the British wanted to take control over the Naga Hills for strategic reasons. In this concern, Piketo Sema wrote;

“Evidently, the British had been drawn into territory not for any other purpose or attraction, but because of their strategic interest”.¹²⁸

The British at first left the matter in the hands of Manipur and Cachar rulers to usurp the war like Nagas, however, they soon realized that they were unable to curb the belligerent Nagas under their control.

The first encounter between the British and the Nagas took place in 1832, on their search for a road connection between Manipur and Assam. This encounter was in fact not a pleasant encounter when the Angami Nagas attacked Captain Jenkin and Pemberton led troops and coolies. Owing to their superior military might, the British indeed curbed the Angami Nagas.¹²⁹ However, that incident did not put a stop to the Naga raiding over the British controlled plains of Assam.

Unable to befriend with the Nagas, the British Starting from 1832 took numerous expeditions which was reciprocated with massive retaliations from the Nagas. Properties and lives were

¹²⁶ Asoso yonuo, *the Rising Nagas*, p71

¹²⁷ *ibid* p 70-71

¹²⁸ Piketo Sema, *British policy and Administration in Nagaland 1881-1947*, second edition 1992, Scholar Publishing House, p 4

¹²⁹ Alemchiba Ao, *A brief historical account of Nagaland*, 1970, p 41- 42

lost for both the parties until in 1851, the British inferred the policy of non-intervention in the Naga Hills during the time of Governor General, Lord Dalhousie. Dalhousie in his minute wrote in 1851;

*“Hereafter, we should confine ourselves to our own ground: protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us; and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got, or to buy what they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome”*¹³⁰

However the policy of non- intervention proved to be a failure since the Nagas continued to carry out raids all the more; it almost took 232 British subjects who were either killed or wounded or carried off.¹³¹ Unable to deal with the Nagas, the British finally decided to completely control and administer the Nagas starting from 1866. Curbing the Nagas and keeping them under their control therefore became a better option for the Colonial masters in keeping themselves safe from the Naga raids.

Thus different Naga villages were occupied and annexed one after the other under the British rule. It is important to note that, every Naga village irrespective of their tribe, was an independent unit, prior to the coming of the British and therefore, in order to conquer the Nagas and to take control of their land, it was impractical to conquer the whole of Naga Hill at one go, rather they were required to conquer every village as an independent sovereign entity.

The consolidation process continued till 1947. One after the other the different Naga tribes came under the control of the British either through warfare or submission without a fight. Starting from the Angami area, the different Naga villages submitted themselves to the British gradually and, in the process of their consolidation; the Aos were also compelled to

¹³⁰ For. Dept. Pol-a January 1885, no 128

¹³¹ Hokishe Sema, *emergence of Nagaland*, p-23

express their allegiance to the British rule. Finally, the Ao area was fully annexed to the Naga Hill district of Assam in 1889 and Mokokchung became the head quarter of the Aos.¹³²

The British consolidation and the process of proselytization went side by side in the Naga Hills. In the eyes of the British; the precolonial Nagas were savages without law and order therefore, maintaining law and order among these lawless tribes became one of the most important objective of the British: Converting the Naga into Christianity directly or indirectly became a tool for the British administration- This does not necessarily means that, the work of the Christian missionaries were just directed to maintaining law and order among the Naga tribes; There were ample of reasons and objectives to which the missionaries directed their interest on the hill tribes nevertheless, for Both the British administration and the missionaries' one thing was evident that, maintaining order and stability among the Nagas was a pre-requisite for any other developments to proceed. Writing as discussed in the earlier chapters is very much a state making mechanism; maintaining law and order for any kind of appropriation requires writing for a State. Moreover, the British needed Nagas who could act as an interpreter between the Nagas and the British for which educating the Nagas became somewhat inevitable.

The spread of Christianity and introduction of writing are two separate entity yet, inseparable in the history of the Nagas. Introduction of education among the Nagas was used as a means of proselytization by the Christian missionaries. In the light of this, one can also see a connection between the British consolidation process and the working of the missionaries as two separate entity with different objectives however, making a coalition to reach a desired end; the former for administrative control and the latter, for the spreading of the Gospel. Whatever the objectives might have been, the arrival of British and the missionaries to the

¹³²Hokishe Sema, *emergence of Nagaland*, p 14

land not only exposed the unexposed hilly tract to the outside world but, it brought about changes that would affect the very base on which the Naga society was structured.

In the second chapter, little have been mentioned about the religion of the Ao Nagas prior to the coming of the British and the missionaries. We also tried to understand the core idea of the traditional Ao Naga religion which somehow challenged the description of the pre-colonial Ao Naga religion as 'Animism'.

Animism can best be described as a belief in the existence of soul and spirit in all natural things like rock, forest, trees, which can have influence over the activities of humans.¹³³ The Ancient Naga Religion cannot be called Animism because they did not believed in the existence of soul and spirit in every natural things rather they believed that some of this natural things like stones and trees etc. can be an abode for certain spirits. The Ancient Ao Religion cannot be categorized as Animism however, only a proper interrogation would help us understand the difference between the Ancient Ao religion and Animism.

For most Scholar, Animism is what defines the Ancient Naga religion. In the word of Chandrika Singh;

"The ancient Naga people have strong faith in natural forces were, animist by faith. They carried various religious myths, which served as their religious scripture and creeds in absence of any prescribed religion. These religious faiths helped them not only to understand the environment and universe but also to shape their social and cultural life".¹³⁴

It is true that the Ao Nagas or Nagas in general depended on nature, however, ascribing their religion as Animism is somewhat misleading especially in the case of the Ao Nagas. For the Ao Nagas they believed that there is a God that has control over all Natural activities. However it is also true that, whatever their belief system was, it did helped the Aos not only in understanding the environment he lives in but also, shaped his social and cultural life. In

¹³³ Animism, [website], <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>>animism

¹³⁴ Chandrika Singh, *Naga politics: A critical account*, Mittal Publication, 2004, p 8

other word; their religious beliefs played an important function in the formation of their overall aspects. One can observed that their religious belief was the root of all social, political, economic and cultural development; their ideas on geography and environment. Against this background, the British administration and the missionaries during the 19th and 20th century brought forth a complete new social order and involved themselves in constructing a new social order in the Naga Hill district of Assam.

The fact that the missionaries tried to convert the Nagas into Christianity would mean a change in the overall structure of the Pre-colonial Ao Nagas owing to intertwined relationship between Religion and social life of the Aos. Religion and social life were somehow inseparable in the context of the Pre-colonial Ao Nagas. This by its very nature, accelerated the structural changes in the Nagas society, once a person converts himself into Christianity, he would have to deny his ancestral religion which, as pointed out earlier was not only a religious belief but the root to all other social, political and cultural aspects of the pre-colonial Naga Society; changing a person's religion from traditional religion to Christianity therefore was not just identified as having a new identity in Christ but, a convert Christian was compelled to leave his old religion which has all his life activities knotted: tea in placed of rice beer, prayers and singing gospel songs instead of festivals and rituals; mutual love and respect in placed of head taking, seclusion to inclusion of every individuals under the banner of Christ irrespective of tribe, greed or color.

Converting from Traditional Religion to Christianity would require them to know the word of God. And Christianity being based on written culture and 'Bible' the holy book of the Christian being in written form; learning the art of writing now became crucial for those new converts.

In a nutshell the Nagas saw an abrupt transformation in every aspects of their life once they converted themselves into Christianity. However, it is also true that the introduction of

Christianity did not utterly wipe out the entire social and political fabric of the Nagas. The Nagas still endorse great reverence to some of their old customs and tradition which is still practiced till date. For example, the governing institution of the villages of the Nagas are still strongly based on the traditional system of governance. The Ao Naga society is still largely structured on the basis of clan. The opening up of the Naga Hill ushered a new era among the Nagas of the North east.

4.3: Traditional Religion and belief system to Christianity:

As far as the introduction of writing among the Ao Nagas are concerned, despite the myth of having a scripted text; there has been no proof of its validity till date. To dig deeper into the matter would give us a wider picture of the whole prospect which would need an extensive and elaborate research. Washing our hands off the topic and diverting our attention to a correlated yet a different outlook i.e. the process of the conversion among the Ao Nagas from their Traditional beliefs to Christianity under the banner of Christ; the adaptation of writing as a medium of transmission on the other.

The British and the missionaries found and concluded that, the Ao Nagas and the Nagas as a whole are tribal's of mongoloid race with no history, terming them as 'savages' 'barbarous' and 'uncivilised'. As mentioned earlier, the British were compelled to tame the untamed wild tribes while, mainly because of the unrest caused by the Naga raids on the plains of Assam especially on the tea holdings of the British in the plains. On the other side of the edge were the missionaries, with their main objective to proselytize and convert the Nagas into Christianity.

The colonial masters though not interested in spreading the gospel to these wild tribes yet, at one point in time agreed upon the request of the missionaries and supported the mission work which possibly was one way to bring law and order among the Nagas. Things did really work out as, Christianity began to grow gradually among the Nagas. If the intention of the

missionaries was to spread the gospel; the British officials by establishing schools further supplemented to the cause of the former. It is worthwhile to know that, the Nagas obviously dislike the British whom they would regard as ‘Temesung Nisung’ (White man) in Ao and were always suspicious of them; so did they dislike the missionaries at first. For instance, in the year 1871 when Godhula visited Dekhu Haimong (Mulong Kimong) for the first time, his intention was challenged and impugned by the villagers. “What do we want of man’s new religion?” “Get him out of the way”, “A spy, doubtless of the company.”¹³⁵ He was assigned a small hut which was well guarded and the villagers would not go near for two or three days.¹³⁶

Though Godhula himself was an Assamese and not a ‘white man’, being a subject of the Company alone was enough for the Aos to be suspicious of him. If this was the scenario, how could the missionaries succeeded in converting the Ao Nagas into Christianity?

Conversion was an amalgamation of various factor and one cannot be specific about a particular even or an experience to be the reason behind this transformation however it is important to examine as to how the process of conversion begin.

4.3.1: The ground was susceptible to change:

Though not an easy adventure, the missionaries could sow the seed of the Gospel among the Aos. One reason behind this could be the fact that the ground itself was susceptible for changes. No doubt the Ao Nagas like the rest of the Nagas always wanted to live independently. As mentioned earlier, head taking itself was a means to maintain sovereignty over their little villages. In the case of a weaker village, they sought protection from a stronger village. For instance Mulong Kimong was under the protection of Chungtia when

¹³⁵ M M. Clark, *A corner in India*, 1907, Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, p 11

¹³⁶ Ibid,

the American missionary reverend Dr Clark first visited Mulong Kimong. In fact, Chungtia the foster- parent played a significant role in giving assurance to the newly converts when they formed a New village known as Mulong yimsen.¹³⁷ In such a case, submitting to a more powerful village does not necessarily mean, the right to rule over the weaker village; it was more of making an alliance so as to protect themselves from other enemy villages. It was a customary practice for the Aos to protect the allied weaker village from enemies attack once the stronger village agree upon the request of the weaker village. In return, the weaker village was required to pay tributes to their protector. Seeking protection from a stronger village itself was a way to maintain their autonomy so do with the practice of head taking. Head taking, was an act of protecting one's village from the enemies attack. Relating this as a factor that contributed to the conversion process may somewhat seems disconnected however, one need a more critical approach towards this. Christianity talks about peace, and love for one's enemy. Many a times while studying about the pre-colonial Nagas, one is prone to be erroneous about the practice of head taking as a symbol of pride and honour, especially, in cases like that of the Ao Nagas, where one would find various motifs with symbolic meanings carved on the main pillar of the house or in their culture attire. Yes those were symbols of pride and honour, yet, the bigger picture is shallowed; the intention of protecting one's village from the hands of the enemies is overshadowed by the consequences of becoming a hero.

When the Christian missionaries started propagating the idea of peaceful existence, love for enemies like that of his own brother; it was obvious that it would appeal the attention of those people living in constant fear specially the weaker villages as, Christianity seemed to be a light in the darkness. Moreover head taking as discussed was not a child's play for the sake of pride and honour; it was indeed for protection. If Christian missionaries could come with a

¹³⁷ M M. Clark, *A corner in India*, p 21

better solution to remain unharmed even without taking the head of the enemies; the Ao Nagas were obviously open to the new changes that was flogging in their society. In addition, their old religion demanded them a whole lot of sacrifices: the life of an Ao Naga was full of rituals and ceremonies mostly to appease the malicious spirit and sometimes to ask blessings from the benevolent Supreme Being. From the day of birth of a child, an Ao Naga undergoes various ceremonies and rituals till his dead. To make things more visible, here I will elaborate with an instance cited by M M Clark, wherein she describes the attitude of the Aos towards Sin.

*“The Aos define sin as “unclean”, “foul”, “a stain”, “a spot”, and greatly abhor anything they denominate sin ”.*¹³⁸

If a women dies during her childbirth, all her belongings must be destroyed; if a person dies of an unnatural death, his whole family has to abandon their house, and live in the outskirts of the village until the next new moon during which, no person can visit or talk with the bereft family for six days. Since not a thing of their possession can be taken, they had to survive with the clothing and food provided to them by their relatives which must be done without communication. Everything related to the old is forsaken, their field, their clothes, cattle's, including their house, and therefore, the unfortunate family had to bear the consequences of their sin by giving up all their possession.¹³⁹ Such taboos were economically demanding as such, when the Christian missionaries preached about Jesus of Nazareth who paid for all the sins of man, unlike their religion that demanded them lot of sacrifices, resisting such an offer would be a tough one. In the word of M M Clark;

¹³⁸ MM. Clark, *A corner in India*, p 59

¹³⁹ M M. Clark, *A corner in India*, p 59

*“Religiously, these hill people South of Assam, not being grounded in the old systematized religions of the East, and having no caste, are far more ready to accept the simple story of Jesus of Nazareth”.*¹⁴⁰

The pre-colonial Ao Nagas, did believed in the existence of a Supreme Being however, their religion was tied up in trying to understand the nature of the world and their relation with it for a peaceful coexistence; rituals and sacrifices were all a part of their activities in order to maintain a balance between the things they knows and the future that was unseen. In simple term, they were in a quest for more understanding about the universe and its existence unlike, the Hindus or Muslims on the other parts of India who had already been following an established philosophy about the very existence of the universe and all that in it. It was therefore, comparatively easier to convince the Nagas than the others, who were already having their own set of philosophy.

The root of their religion and society itself was opened to changes, making its way for the missionaries to penetrate into their religious structure.

4.3.2: Democratic nature of their Social structure:

The social-political structure of the pre-colonial AOs was very much democratic. In the word of Major Butler in describing about the Ao village governing body elaborates;

*“Every man follows the dictates of his own will, a form of the purest democracy which it is very difficult indeed to conceive as existing for even a day; and yet that it does exist here is an undeniable fact”*¹⁴¹

It was this democratic nature of the AOs that further widened the space for the penetration of Christianity in the land. Taking the example of the first Ao Christian village Mulong Yimsen; it was at high risk, they decided to form a new village some miles away from the old village

¹⁴⁰ M M Clark, *A corner in India*, p 57

¹⁴¹ Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*, oxford University Press, 1961, p 525

Mulong Kimong. Apart from facing contempt and criticism from the members of the old village, they were never forced to stop in forming a new village. If contempt and mockery was to be heard, it was out of their concern for the newly converts: living in a time where there was constant threat from the enemy villages, they never expected the newly formed village to sustain by itself even for a week.

If it was not for democracy, where every person's voice was heard; it would have been nowhere possible to do so, such as forming a new village.

Individual decision was respected which is why, the first converted Christians could coexist with the 'unbelievers' whom the converted Aos called as 'Yimcha Memanger'. This does not necessarily mean that the situation between the two was always armistice. At certain point in time, when the new converts were forbidden by their new faith to participate in festivals and rituals where in, it was a necessity for all members of the village to participate; misunderstanding between the two parties was something inevitable. It must also be taken into consideration that, though there was individual liberty, the Ao Nagas after an elaborate discussion once come to a decision is final and must be followed by all members of the village. Nevertheless, being able to enjoy individual rights, the individuals were still in a safer zone and were less questioned for accepting the new faith. Thus, the very nature of the governing institution of the Ao Nagas itself proved to be suitable for the spread of Christianity.

4.3.3: Songs and Christianity:

When the Assamese evangelist Gudhola first visited Dekha Haimong in 1871, He was put to question by the villagers, being a subject of the Colonial administration. He was put in a rude hut and kept watch over him and his activities closely to insure their own safety since all that was related to 'white man' or the colonial administration were a threat to these Hill people. Mrs Clark elaborated how the evangelist was left all by himself and no villagers could go

near him on the first two three days. It was his singing that slowly catcher the attention of the villagers. ¹⁴²Mrs Clark remarked;

*“But when with his deep-toned, melodies voice he poured out his soul in the sweet gospel hymns in Assamese the people flocked around him and listened as he told them, in his own eloquent way, the sweet old, old story”.*¹⁴³

Nagas are known for communicating through songs. Songs played a vital rule in the life of the Ao Nagas. Singing accompanied every festivals, lovers would communicate through songs. Songs were a medium of communicating and transmitting their history and tradition. It was indeed when Gudhola sang the gospel hymn in Assamese, which got the attention of the first Converts of Dekha Haimong.

Singing is an important aspect and an integral part of Christianity. Singing accompanies every worship in a Christian religious settings therefore, as part of a Christian worship, when the missionaries along with the message of the gospel used songs a medium of conveying their message; it was easier for these hill people to connect with the new religion given the fact that, song always played a crucial rule in the social life of the Ao Nagas. Though unfamiliar with the meanings, the first Ao converts were eager to learn the hymns and songs mostly in English and in Assamese taught by the missionaries. Till date a typical Naga worship service begins with a hymn and ends with a song followed by prayer. In short song played a significant role in proselytising the gospel among the Ao Nagas as, it could connect the new with the old.

There are various other factor which exerted great influence in the spread of Christianity such as the introduction of modern medicine and economic support. Recalling a story widely circulated among the members of one Ao a community, which they label as a fun fact. There was this incident of a man, who happened to have a severe stomach pain; having so much

¹⁴² MM Clark, *A corner in India*, p11

¹⁴³ Ibid

faith in the work of medicine, he took a quinine which automatically cured him. Most people would laugh at the story but, it did give us a picture of how the Aos had faith in the working of modern medicine.

Dr. Chandrika Singh opines that, one of the factor responsible for the growth of Christianity among the Nagas was by and large; the economic assistance given to them by the Mission centers.¹⁴⁴ Assistance in the form of financial help in times of distress, medicine so and so forth. All these stood behind the scene in spreading the gospel among the ao Nagas.

As the saying goes “little drops of water make a mighty ocean”, the unceasing determination and persistent efforts executed by the missionaries could alter the course of the history of the Ao Nagas. However, it should be noted that it was not only the missionaries who single handed manage to walk the path that was so challenging. In fact, the British officials were very much instrumental in attaining the same cause that the missionaries longed for, though their intentions would not always favor with each other. If the missionaries were injecting the seed of love and prepared the minds of the Nagas; the British, with their heavy hand would compel the Nagas to stop the activities such as head taking in the form of law, establishing schools, and protecting the missionaries under their care.¹⁴⁵ The ground was prepared by the officials for the missionaries to spread the gospel among the Ao Nagas.

The little light that started to ignite from one of the weakest village slowly and steadily transferred its light to all the other villages. Once the flame was ignited, in no time the converted Nagas themselves took up the flame and spread the gospel not only among the Aos but even to the other tribes of the Naga Hills.

¹⁴⁴ Chandrika Singh, *the Naga society*, 2008, Manas Publication, 2008, p 107.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 107.

4.3.4: Symbols to written:

Much have been discussed about the use of symbols and motifs as an important constituent of transmitting history and tradition of the pre Colonial Ao Nagas and how, one can read the meaning and significance of a particular dress or ornament; the worth and social status of a person by the possession of his attire and ornaments and the meanings it represent.

Opposed to the rest of Indian reflection on the Nagas as, backward and primitive, Horam observed the Nagas as having a “*highly developed culture*” even prior to the coming of the British and the missionaries.¹⁴⁶ Learning how to read and Write might not have been one of the criteria in their education system of the Ao Nagas nevertheless, Arju as an institution always served as an important educational institution in the pre-colonial Ao society. If education is a lifelong process involving teaching and learning for shaping and molding the behavior of a person; the Ao Nagas no doubt were always educating their children in every sense. If something seems a new introduction in the system of education that the British and the missionaries brought forth, it was the introduction of the art of writing. By Writing we mean “*the content of a linguistic utterance is encoded so that another reader can reconstruct, with a fair degree of accuracy*”.¹⁴⁷ M.M Clark stated;

*“They did not have a written history, neither did they bother about their literature. Till the time of the British capturing Naga Hills, there was no school s in conventional sense and no Script”.*¹⁴⁸

Language is one of the most important element in transmitting one’s culture and ideas to the other. When the missionaries first entered the Ao Naga Hill, they grasped that the Aos do not have a written script. In order to spread their mission, something needed to be done as it was crucial to introduce the art of writing for intensifying their mission. With much effort, the

¹⁴⁶ M. Horam, *Nagas old way and new trends*, Cosmo Publication, 1988p 77- 78

¹⁴⁷ History of Writing, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_writing.

¹⁴⁸ MM. Clark, *A corner in India*, p 78

missionaries spent their time picking the local language at the best they could, even paying them for the same. Finally they compressed the spoken words to writing using Roman character.¹⁴⁹ The missionaries in order to spread the gospel among the non-converts, needed trained local preachers who would be more effective in conveying the message of the good news having the advantage of language over the Assamese and western missionaries. The British needed educated locals to assist them in governance. Though With diverse objectives, yet for the benefit of both at the same time; the colonial officers joined hands with the missionaries in establishing primary schools along with the mission schools.¹⁵⁰ However most part of the British rule, schools were mostly run by the missionaries who were not in favor of secularizing the schools as their main objective was nothing more than spreading the message of Christ. The colonial masters on the other hand wanted to secularize the education so as to produce educated Nagas who would be useful for their service.

When the missionaries were trying to completely eradicate the tradition and costumes of the Ao Nagas; the British officials on the other hand would try to preserve the tradition and customs of the Nagas. This sharp differences in the opinion of the missionaries and the British can be seen in many of their remarks. For instances G.B steward in his letter to missionaries at Impur;

*“To the mission secretary, Impur, those boys who promised to wear only their traditional dress will be granted scholarship”*¹⁵¹

On the contrary here we have missionaries like “Perrine”, who would say;

*“What we want to do is simply prepare the Christians for the performance of the duty that must fall on them”*¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 84

¹⁵⁰ Chandrika Singh, *The Naga Society*, p. 123

¹⁵¹ G.B. Steward S.D.O, May30,1932

¹⁵² Chandrika Singh, *The Naga Society*, p. 126

The credit for Introduction of education among the Ao Nagas can be attributed to the missionaries by and large despite the help from the government.

The art of writing, a new way of transmitting history came into existence with the introduction of education. The question still lingers; what was the reaction of the local people towards this transformation? Was it a choice or was it out of compulsion? Schools as a place of spreading the gospel for the missionaries and at the same time, a place to educate the local people with basic knowledge for the service in the case of British would never have existed on the first place without the mandate of the people, who were subjected to all these changes. No doubt, it was the missionaries and the Colonial state who took the initiative in spreading the art of writing. However, without the consent of the locals it would have been impossible for the any such changes to have taken place. Understanding the mind and reaction of the locals towards the new shift becomes important.

For those converted Christians, Bible being the source of all their knowledge about Christ, they would willingly involve themselves to explore more in search of truth. In an interview with an elder women, a converted Christian, she remarked:

*“I have never stepped my foot inside a school, compelled to stay back watching over my younger siblings and helping my parents at work being the eldest in the family. one of my friend requested me to attain an evening class where we were taught how to read the holy Bible and Hymnals; I attained twice and discontinued from then on because of the matters that I was supposed to take care at home. That two days have helped me able to read my Holy Bible and the Hymns”.*¹⁵³ One thing that the researcher finds amusing and also ironical during the interview was that; apart from bible and hymn book, she is unable to read even a single secular books. This kind of facts shows that, for many, it was not development, neither economy or politics that influenced the people to learn the art of reading and writing but, a

¹⁵³ Tekarepla Longchar, *interviewed*, 2018, Chungtia Village, Mokokchung Nagaland

total focus on their new religion. Further strengthening our argument, many of those who have attained evening school, like the former would relate themselves attaining the evening school, solely for the purpose of learning how to read Bible and Hymn book.

On the other hand, certain section of the people were compelled to enter into schooling not out of their own choice but out of compulsion. In this regard, Aoloin commented;

“Being the eldest member of the family and the fact that I am a man, compelled me to go to school because, my parents would never afford to pay a fine of five rupees” ¹⁵⁴

Against the background of a typical newly converted Christian, we see the role played by the government in spreading education. The government made it compulsory for the eldest male member of the family to attend the schools, failing which they were fined rupees five which was a big amount considering the time factor.

In trying to achieve their respective goals, the missionaries and the British both played an integral part in spreading the art of writing among the Ao Nagas. It is difficult to identify whether, the growing spirit of Nationalism among the Nagas accelerated the spread of education or the education that made the Nagas aware of their political situation. Nevertheless it seems to me a two way rather than one. Leaving the matter aside, and rapping the matters up in short, Christianity and the spread of written culture in the Ao Naga society are like “two sides of the same coin” if not Christianity, education would not have existed in the first place and if not education, Christianity would have died off half burnt. In the same way, the Christian missionaries and the British administration though with different aims and objectives were able to add upon each other in achieving their goals.

¹⁵⁴ Aoloin.Kichu, *interviewed*, 2018, Chungtia Village, Mokokchung Nagaland.

Conclusion:

In the introductory chapter, a brief account on how writing developed of writing in different space in time been discussed. “Writing as a systematic mark representing the units of a specific language,”¹⁵⁵ has been developed over the period of time and it developed at different time according to the geographical differences. It has been argued that writing and its early development was much associated with state and the State formation. We also tried to locate how oral transmission differs from writing mainly on the basis of their characteristic. Permanency, which is one of the main characteristic of writing is what differentiate writing from orality. The permanence of writing is one reason that makes writing an integral part of a State society.

In the second chapter, a background survey of the land, and its people, social religious and linguistic background of the Ao Nagas had been articulated wherein, a critical examination on the theory of migration of the Aos according to their oral tradition, would suggest a common consensus over certain aspects and also a deliberate attempt to forget or construct certain narratives with common pact depending on the situation. The Aos not having any attempt to recollect beyond ‘ Chungliyimti’ certainly suggest a deliberate attempt to forget certain experience and memories that may have a negative impact if not forgotten.

It has been observed that the Ao Naga society unlike the Indian society at large which is categorized as caste society or, European society, which is a as class based society, the Ao society can be classified as clan based society by looking at the function of Clan in family, social, political; economic and religious sphere of the Ao Nagas. Clan as an organization determines the structure of the family of the Aos. Marriage between a man and a women from same clan is against the law of the Land and that anybody going against the Law is excommunicated from the society. The village council representative is selected on the basis

¹⁵⁵ Denise Schmandt Besserat, *The evolution of Writing*.

of Clan. Land which is one of the most integral part of the Ao Naga social and identity formation is also divided mainly on the basis of clan. Thus the influence of clan over all aspects of the Ao Naga society is something one cannot overlooked while constructing or studying the History of the Aos.

A critical view on the Religion of the traditional Ao Nagas had been done wherein, we argued that Ao Naga Religion cannot be attributed to Animism. By having a deeper understanding on their world view would suggest that, the Traditional Ao Naga religion was a way of dealing with the mystery of the nature that surrounds them making it practical with intricate ceremonies and sacrifices involved so as to please the spirits of the other realm in order to maintain a peaceful co-existence.

Language as an important determiner of one's identity in the context of the ao Nagas has been discussed. The coming of the Colonial state and the missionaries and their effort in producing literature in Chungli, has made the Chungli Ao as a common language for the Aos which seems to bring unity among the Aos but further analyses would suggest that, this can have a negative impact in their society in the near future.

In the third chapter, attempt has been made to articulate the myth of the loss script as presented by the oral Tradition of the Aos. The Ao Nagas are believed to have had a written script even prior to the coming of the missionaries and the colonial state, which is unfortunately said to be eaten by a dog. Based on the myth we tried to argue how not having a written script was not out of ignorance but that, the Aos were in fact aware of the art of writing even before the introduction of writing among the Aos by the missionaries. It has been further argued that it was a deliberate choice not to have a written script and not necessarily that they were unaware of it. In this connection, we tried to argue how this myth of the lost script has been constructed. The possibility that the Ao Nagas could have been migrated from a state society, or that they may have constructed this myth as a response to

the adjacent neighboring plains of Assam or that the story could have happened in reality. By further analyzing the origination of the Aos from “Longterok” according to their oral tradition, in connection to Myth of the loss Script, we tried to argue how the origination of the Aos from “Longterok” shows a kind of history constructed on the basis of might. In this regard, assuming the three Progenitor; “Tongpok”, “Longpok” and “Lonjakrep” as the leader and under their leadership, suggesting a kind of alteration in the whole social structure of the Aos which was to be followed by all generations.

It has also been argued that, in the absence of writing as a source of Historical transmission, the Ao Nagas through their lifestyle, and by using various folk mediums transmitted their history from one generation to the other. Orality substantiated by symbols, Motifs and Designs in the attires and crafts of the Ao Nagas can be an important source in reading the history of the Ao Nagas. It has also been argued that Ao Nagas were historically conscious and that history played a vital role in identity formation of the Aos. They live their life based on history and live out their life for history. It has also been suggested that, possessing certain attires on the basis of merit would not only suggest the position and status of the person but, a careful examination would help us understand a whole lot about the Pre-colonial Ao Naga society.

Despite having a well-organized system of historical transmission, the opening up of the Naga Hills to the colonial state after the ‘Treaty of yandaboo’ and with the coming of the Christian missionaries in the late 19th century saw a drastic change in all aspects of the Ao Nagas. The Christian missionaries and the Colonial State, though with different objectives, the former for Christianization and the latter for consolidation and administration both felt the need to educate the Nagas. In the process writing was introduced among the Ao Nagas. It has been observed that, Christianity and Education in the case of the Nagas are inseparable. Changes in the religion of the Aos from their traditional Religion to Christianity necessitated

a change in the whole social fabric of the Ao Nagas due to the intertwined nature of Religion and Culture in the context of the Pre-Colonial Ao Naga society. If at all we see acceptance from the locals to learn the art of writing, it was more of their eagerness to learn how to read Bible and Hymnals and less of other factors like Economic, political etc. at the same time for certain reasons, we see the involvement of the British in educating the Nagas by imposing penalties if not obeyed.

In a nutshell it has been observed in the process of our study that, the pre-colonial Ao Naga society was a unique social entity encapsulating various social, religious, political and economic norms and behaviors which got internalized in due course of time, transmitting it through a well-articulated system which can be called as ‘folk medium’. The fact that they had the knowledge of writing even prior to the coming of the British would in a way challenge the notion of ‘savage’ or ‘uncivilized’ which has been observed in many of the colonial and Post-colonial writings. At the same time, it substantiated the fact that, writing is not the only way to authenticate the history of any society at a given point in time.

The Ao Nagas were not unaware of writing rather it’s as though they didn’t felt the need of a written script.

Understanding the nature of the construction of oral narratives of the AOs would give a better understanding to the whole idea of not making an attempt to develop or search their root so as to introduce the art of writing prior to the coming of the British and the Missionaries.

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A Dog Eaten Script: Reading the History of Pre-Colonial Ao Nagas through Symbols, Motifs and Designs

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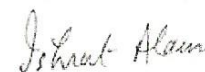
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