

TABOOS AND SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS IN THE ORAL TRADITION OF THE AO NAGAS

(Dissertation submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirement
for the award of the degree of Masters of Philosophy in English)

By

RONGSENNUNGLA PONGEN

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Under the Supervision of:

PROF. JANO S. LIEGISE

Professor, Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus.



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**School of Humanities and Education
Nagaland University, Kohima Campus,
Meriema Kohima, Nagaland- 797004**

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Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, Kohima – 797004 Nagaland, India

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I, **Rongsennungla Pongen**, do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Taboos and Supernatural Beliefs in the Oral Tradition of the Ao Nagas**, is a bonafide record of research work done by me, under the Supervision of **Dr. Jano S. Liegise**, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema, during the period of my research (2018-2019), and the dissertation has not been submitted, either in full or part, to any other university or institution for the award of any degree, diploma or title. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of **Master of Philosophy in English**.

Place: Kohima

(Rongsennungla pongen)

Date:

Regn.No NU/M.phil/Eng/37/2019

Countersigned

Head
Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema.

Prof. Jano S Liegise
Supervisor
Professor, Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema.



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(A central University established by the Act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, Kohima – 797004 Nagaland, India

NU/Eng/2019

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation entitled **Taboos and Supernatural Beliefs in the Oral Tradition of the Ao Nagas** is a bonafide record of research work done by **Ms Rongsennungla Pongen**, Regd. No NU/M.PHIL/Eng./37/2019, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2018-2019. Submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English, this Dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or other title and the dissertation represents an independent and authentic work on the part of the candidate under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations May 2016 (amended) and the candidate has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for the submission of the dissertation.

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Jano S. Liegise
Professor, Department of English
Nagaland University
Kohima Campus, Meriema
Kohima- 797004, Nagaland
Contact: 9856775073
Email: janosekho@gmail.com

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Dated:

(RONGSENNUNGLA PONGEN)

M.Phil Scholar

Department of English

Nagaland University

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

The Ao Nagas are an ethnic group of people that inhabits the North Eastern Part of Nagaland that finds its home mostly in the Central Mokokchung District.

The Ao Naga tribe has distinct characteristics which define themselves in their own way through their beliefs, traditions and way of life, which they call “Sobaliba”, “Soba” means “Birth” and “Liba” means “Live”. The Aos have their own legend of origin which is different from the other Naga Tribes and it constructs the beginning of everything in their folklore. They hold the belief that they emerged from Stones, which they call “Lungterok”, which is a combination of two words, “lung” which means “Stones” and “Terok” which means “six”.

The Ao Nagas, like the rest of the other tribes of Nagaland have no written record. Thus they depend on the folklores which have been passed down from one generation to the next generation. The verbal and the non-verbal expressive behavior which has been passed down illustrate not only the old traditional ways that governed them but it embodied wisdom, knowledge, belief and way of life that defined their own unique identity. The Ao Naga oral tradition is a source of social and cultural knowledge that has governed the people since time immemorial, and it is not just people’s constitution of literature but has contributed to the progression and survival of the people. The oral tradition became the repository for all the knowledge related to the origin, socio cultural aspects of the Ao Naga society. The belief in the myth of the origin of the Ao Nagas and the lifestyle which they follow is closely woven in

such an elaborate and intricate way. Each belief influences the nature of their communal lifestyle.

It is held that the name “Ao” were given by the Chang, Sangtam and Phoms, which literally translates to those that “went” or “go away” but for the Ao people, it holds the meaning of those “who came” meaning, those that came crossing the Dikhu River.

1.1 Origin of the Ao Nagas

According to the legend of origin of the Ao Naga, it is believed that three males and three females came out of the stones, representing three different clans. It is difficult for one to believe that the human beings physically emerged out of stones, but it is what the oral tradition of the Ao Naga mythology has about their origin, and it has been passed down from their ancestors, from generation to generation. The myth of origin may not be realistic, but it has its own allegorical meanings. The pattern of uniform social structure which was followed from the early civilization emphasizes a special concordant which they made for themselves. A table representing the progenitors of Lungterok can be illustrated as:

CLAN	Male	Female
PONGEN	TONGPOK	LENDINA
LONGKUMER	LONGPOK	YONGMENALA
JAMIR	LONGJAKREP	ELONGSHI

The progenitors married one another, not from the same clan, but different clans. Tongpok of Pongen Clan married Elongshi of the Jamir Clan, Longpok from Longkumer Clan married Lendina of the Pongen Clan, and Longjakrep of Jamir Clan married Yongmenala of

Longkumer. The passage of time and descendants from these progenitors created more sub clans based on clan exogamy.

Chungliymti was the first settlement, after which the people crossed the Dikhu river, came to Aonglenden (Mokokchung District). On their arrival, ten sons were born. They named the place Soyim. It is said that a tiger killed one of the Unger (village chief) at Soyim. Thus, Soyim became “Ungma” , “Ung” meaning “chief” and “ma” meaning “lost”. They left the place in search of new places to settle.

The “Longterok” at Chungliymti is an important symbol of origin as well as the beginning of social construction. “The Ao socio-cultural and customary beliefs and practices will be incomplete if one ignores those legends and historical facts that took place in the process of socio cultural evolution where the Ao renaissance occurred at this historical place.” (Jamir and Ao 26)

Although Chungliymti is no more a village, and the Aos do not reside, the social and the cultural aspects practiced in Chungliymti was followed even after the people moved away from the place. In chungliymti, the Chungli and the mongsen groups settled together yet occupied different sectors. The system of Arju was practiced from those days, where every clan had their own Arjus. It was also where the construction of the Log drum began. The Log drum was the pride of the village. The administration system also began from the first settlement in the Chungliymti, which is also practiced till date in form of customary laws and practices.

The settlement at Chungliymti was a social and cultural revolution. They constructed their way of life to set up a flourishing society. The administration system, customary laws,

beliefs and practices, the marriage system, warfare, weaponry etc developed. They learned to fight as well as make reconciliation. They learned and improved on the arts, such as weaving, pottery, spinning etc. The people established a self governed administration system, along with distinct features of their own customary laws. Their moral code of conduct and their understanding of society, the sense of togetherness, and unity all point towards a closely knitted community with distinct identity that they carved for themselves. Settlement at Chungliyimti can also be seen as the beginning of their civilization. Although Christianity took over, the belief in the myth of origin is still kept alive in the Ao Naga Society.

Accordingly, the clans trace the progenitors in the Chungli group as Pongen, Longkumer and Jamir, and the progenitors of the Mongsen group as Imchen, Longchar and Walling. The descendants of these clans created many sub-clans. And some of the other sub-clans also have their own myth of origin, which traces to inanimate things. Following is the legend of the origin of the Ozukum Clan which has been narrated in different sources with a little variation to the myth, *Folktales from Nagaland* (Directorate of Art and Culture 1), and *Historical development of the Ao Nagas* (Longchar 46)

Narrative

Once there was a woman named Longkongla from the Pongen clan. She was a woman of virtue, loved by all and loved everyone. One day as she was weaving, a male Hornbil (tenem Ozu) flew by. She wished that it would drop a feather so she could wear it to the Moatsu Festival. The bird dropped a quill and she was happy. She placed the feather carefully in her bamboo box. The next day, she saw that the feather had transformed into a sharpening stone. Therefore, she kept it in the entrance of her house.

The next day, the sharpening stone was not there but instead it turned to a broken bamboo basin. She threw it away but later, she found that the broken basin had again turned into a baby boy. She took him in and raised him as his foster parent.

The baby boy grew up into a fine young man, loved by the women in the village, which aroused sense of jealousy amongst his peers. One day, they took him fishing and killed him. His mother, Longkongla came to know about this and vowed revenge on them. So, on a very fine day when all the villagers had gone to the fields, she killed the healthiest hog, and invited all the children for the heavy feast. When they were enjoying, she looked the doors from outside and set fire to the house, thus killing every children, except her grandchildren. For retribution of the massacre, the villagers decided to kill Longkongla, but she was prepared for them. She spread grains, beans and rice around her, and weaved her cloth. When the villagers came one by one towards her, they slipped and fell down; she killed them with her weaving baton. Thus, she ended up killing every one of her villagers. After the incident, she couldn't remain in the village anymore, and was compelled to go up to the skies. She called upon the lord of sky, "Aningtsungba" to take her upto the heavens. He agreed lift her to heaven on the condition that she had to leave all the worldly possessions, and not even look down. She obliged but halfway to the heaven, she heard the cries of her grandchildren and her domestic animals: the cows, dogs, cats, goats, chickens, etc calling out to her. She looked down and thus she was dropped, she fell to the earth. Her blood flowed and entered "Kabusung" (Macaranga Denticulate Tree), so whenever this tree is crushed, the core constitutes red colored juice.

The son who was turned into a human from a hornbill feather became the progenitor of the Ozukum Clan. The clan traces its origin to Pongtangdi and in some narratives the

name Songmaket is used, for the one who transformed into a man from the feather of a bird. This is a popular tale among the Ao Nagas.

1.2 Festivals and Ceremonies

Ceremonies and sacrifices occupied a major part in the day to day life of the Ancestral Ao Naga society. There were different ceremonies accordingly, public, household, or individual ceremonies which the people followed throughout the year. The ceremonies were not just celebrated as it is, but had to observe taboos or “genna”, where there were restrictions and limitations. Sacrifices were made at the beginning of the year to ward off epidemic or sickness for the whole village. After the cleansing ritual, the people of the village had to spend the following day as a sacred day. No one is allowed to loiter in the streets on that day. The Moatsu festival is one of the major festivals which were celebrated for six days; it was observed in the spring season just after the grains were sowed in the fields, in the spring. It was a celebration asking for prosperity and blessing for the agriculture. The people celebrate the occasion by singing, dancing, merrymaking and playing varieties of games for young men, women, and children. They sang of bravery, honor, in praise of the warriors. Young men wore new belts received from maidens.

The Tsungremmong is the last festival which was celebrated in the Ao Naga Community life. It was the highest form of worship for the people, giving full attention to Lichaba, the creator of earth. The people imposed strict Sabbath during this festival. They celebrated three days, which is why it is also called as “Asemnumong.” They believed that if any persons did not comply with the restrictions or celebrate the festival in purity or to the conventions of the Sabbath, there will be heavy consequences of natural calamity like

draught, hailstorm, landslides which will damage the crops. The celebration of this festival finds its origin in the folklore which has been illustrated in *Myth of the Hills* (Jamir et al 62).

Narrative

Once Lichaba, the god of all creation disguised himself as a beggar, with tattered cloth and walking stick passed through a village. He approached all the homes of the village to stay the night but no one welcomed him. At the outskirts of the village, he knocked on the doors of a small hut. There lived two poor sisters, they felt pity for him but were reluctant as they had nothing to offer to him. He told them that he had enough food and he could sleep anywhere, thus they let him stay the night. The women started to prepare for dinner, when Lijaba took out a nit from his head, and put into the pot, it turned into rice, just enough for the three of them. He told them to place another cooking pot on the fireplace for curry. He again scratched a small skin from his knee and put into the pot which turned into meat. They happily had the dinner and slept the night in content. The next day, to the amazement of the two sisters, the cooking pots were full of rice and meat for lunch. Afterwards when they were leisurely chatting, Lijaba asked the two sisters to point the location of their fields. The two sisters were embarrassed to show as it was very small compared to the neighboring fields. At that moment, the younger sister dropped the comb on purpose, and when the elder sister bent down to pick up, he younger sister pointed towards their small farm. Lijaba blessed them and told them that they would have bountiful harvest. The entire village did not have a good harvest except the two sisters, which the villagers were curious. They narrated the story, and the villagers realized that it was not just a simple beggar but it was Lijaba. The following year, they waited for the return of the old man, but he never came. From then on, just before the

onset of the harvest, the villagers decided to set a special day in reverence to the old man to seek for blessing for the bountiful harvest by strictly performing rituals.

Thus, till date, the Ao Naga celebrates Tsungremmong.

1.3 Arju and Tsuki

One distinct feature of the Ao traditional Society is the setting up of learning institute for men, to attain manhood. It was a process where every young man had to go through to become a man in society. The dormitory is called the “Arju”. The tradition of Ariju is as old as the village. The construction of the Ariju was important for the village. They kept pigs and cows ready for slaughter during the construction of the Ariju. The construction of Ariju does not begin without rituals and ceremonies. The construction of Ariju is divided amongst different age groups with their own respective duties.

After a young lad reaches the age of 15, he has to sleep in the dormitory until he marries. The first three years of his life in the dormitory is spent serving the elders. It was a learning institution for men to learn the way of life, discipline, hard work, courage and to be good men of society. Apart from the Ariju, the Ao Nagas did not have any learning institution in the ancient era, thus it was the place where the young men, learned the basic tenets to equip him with the knowledge to meet the challenges and requirements of life. The people made decisions in the village celebrations of festivals, warfare, and any matter relating to the society. The learning institution of what the Ariju stood for depicted the unity and oneness of the society that taught faithfulness, hard work, sacrifice, punctuality, and bravery to the young men. It was an institution for the young men to learn and prepare themselves for the future in the council. In the institution, a leader is chosen amongst

themselves on the basis of bravery, one who had more experience in wars, wise and has brought the head of his enemies. He was also considered as the religious head of the Ariju. Thus, he performs the religious ceremonies and rituals on behalf of the Ariju before and after the war. The Ariju Unger or leader defined the moatsu festival, had to win the confidence and favor of the villagers. It was the responsibility of the Ariju Unger to lead the village in celebration of the moatsu, if the festivals are not celebrated it was believed that certain unfortunate fate would befall on the villagers. The morung was the sanctuary for young men to receive knowledge and learn from the elders, to prepare themselves for the future. It was political, social and religious institution, which was treated like a religious place, with sanctity and purity.

The young maidens are not allowed in the Ariju, they, on the other hand, sleep in the "Tsuki" which is the house of the eldest woman in the sector. The young maidens also learn various etiquettes to be woman, like weaving, make handicrafts, learn traditional songs etc. It was taboo for women to enter the Ariju but it was allowed for the male to enter the tsuki for it was in the Tsuki that young men and women socialized and mingled. The young girls ran errands and performed menial works for the lady where the young maidens stay. It was a shameful act for the parents to make their daughters who have attained puberty to stay with them. It was a custom in the Ao society for young girls to stay in the women's dormitory. At daytime, the Tsuki is empty as most of the women go to their respective paddy fields and return in the evening. It is in the evening that the institution becomes lively as the young men visit the maidens, and mingle with each other. They share their personal life and community life. They learn songs, stories, compose songs and share and learn from each other.

The Tsuki and the Ariju are important for the village as both the institutions act as the centre for disciplining and teaching the young generation to prepare them for the future. The institution also paved the way for the young men and women to find their partners that they deemed to be the best for them. The young women were attracted more towards the brave and the courageous; those that had brought more heads for the village as they felt that those men would protect them in times of war. It also served as a competition among the young men to bring more heads as the women were attracted towards the male with outstanding quality. It encouraged headhunting indirectly. The men also talked about the beauty and the character of the women amongst themselves in the Ariju. The men would compete amongst themselves and develop qualities that were well liked by the women in the Tsuki. The existence and the activities of the Tsuki became a good influence and a source of strength for the men in the Ariju.

1.4 Village Log Drum

The village Log Drum has religious and social symbol for the village, which is one of the most striking features of the Ao Naga society. The log drum is beaten in times of war, emergency and in celebration. It is kept near the morung. The log drum was held in high regard as that of the village deity where it was showered with offerings like human heads. It was beaten in times of fire or death, enemy attacks, celebration of successful war. Each occasion is beaten with different tones, which the villagers could easily identify. The making of the log drum, from selecting the right wood for making, the design and the day to pull it to the village is done in accordance to the instructions given by the diviners. When it was under construction, the village gates were shut and no outsiders were allowed to enter till they finish making the log drum. They followed strict rituals when they made the log drum,

to sanctify the symbol of the drum. The whole operation of pulling the log drum from the forest to the village was yet another auspicious event which involved the whole village. The leaders of the village divided the works. The elders cleared the road leading to the village, collected woods to serve as headlight as well as for resting place. Meanwhile, the rest of the elders made the house of the Log drum at the village. The different categories of the villagers divided according to age in the Ariju, made the log drum, the head, the body, the tail, etc and some collected the ropes to pull the entire Log Drum to the village. Dinner was served in groups, each category of men ate together, which also strengthened the relationship among the group members. If the Log Drum was male, the features were made masculine and if it was female, the facial features were made feminine. The leaders and young men of the Ariju pulled the Log Drum to the village.

The Log Drum existed in almost every Ao village, it was a cultural heritage. It was worshipped as a deity, and offered the enemies' heads that the villagers brought back from wars. Moatsu, tsungremmong and the log drum worship were the most important ceremonies which governed the communal life of the Ao Naga society.

1.5 Headhunting

Narrative

“Kenu Anogo tesem ka nung Mertsu o Sangken na rara-r Sangkeni mekoki pa kolak Mertsui metepzuka tangzuka bener aoba meiemchirtemi angu.” (Jamir 10)

Translation : One day, in a village, men witnessed a lizard and a red ant fighting. The lizard lost the battle after which the red ant bit off the head of the lizard, and took it away.

Men who saw the action of the red ant, learnt headhunting and from then on, they practiced the act of headhunting. Head hunting flourished in the Ao Naga society, and bringing heads for the village gained them prosperity, honor and respect. No villages ever felt that they were free from being raided. They made defensive fence that acted as barriers to shield them from surprise attacks. Mostly, villages would meet at a certain spot where they would fight to death. The villagers had different tactics and strategies in offence or ambushing their enemies to drive them to a corner and chop their heads off. The custom of headhunting prevailed which gained recognition for the warriors. Although the warfare of headhunting was practiced, it did not imply that the people could head hunt any person that they wanted to, instead, the headhunting expedition was done after proper consideration and devising strategies.

The headhunting form of war was not just a way of fighting but it was a way to prove one's bravery, and gain status. Prestige increases if he brings the heads of his enemy for his village. The Ao Naga headhunting is closely attached to religious, social and political beliefs and it cannot simply be branded as savagery or blood feud driven by lust of fame, it was also a fanfare and to display one's bravery. During the headhunting season, the warriors maintained certain taboos and rules, like abstinence, consuming certain food, etc. Occasionally, a war starts when a village attacks another, and if they come into a peaceful settlement, the village that lost the most heads would pay certain war indemnities to the one which had conquered them. When a husband is at the warfront, his wife had to remain chaste and is restricted from doing certain chores which she usually does, like spinning or weaving, till her husband returns. She had to live as if her husband was with him, talk as if her husband was there with him during her meals.

Usually, a head was offered to a new log drum. A new log drum could not be beaten unless a human head was sacrificed to it. The act of attacking and counter attacking villages, the praise and the prestige that warriors received at the success of bringing heads to the village, governed the people. The village received the warriors singing praises and incantations upon the arrival of the headhunters who brought heads of their foes. The successful warriors were received with songs about their courage, bravery, ornaments and titles as well as ceremonies and rituals performed for them. The heads that was brought back were taken to the house of the “tir”, the head of the clan, where it was divided on the basis of who had chopped it off, if it was done by a person alone, he got it. If it was done by two persons, it was cut in half. The person who speared first, received the face part, and the person who speared the second, got the back of the chopped head. The heads after being so divided, each warrior took it home where he was received by his wife. If the warrior was unmarried, he took the heads to the morung and hung it up.

1.6 Agriculture

Agriculture was the main source of occupation for the Ao Nagas, they practiced shifting cultivation, and those that did not own lands, could also rent lands and work as tenants. Most of the time when cultivation took place, couples stayed in the huts at the farm for days and even months. The indigenous knowledge of farming and common traditional ways sustained themselves from generation to generation. They observed the nature, such as the movement of the sun, moon and the birds and animals around them to make assumptions and predictions for cultivation. Farming, marriage, hunting and social activities were decided by taking the direction of the moon in consideration. The time of the full moon is considered the best time for setting up marriages and also burning the field for agriculture. At the

outset of spring, when the moon does not appear for few days, it is believed to be the best time for sowing seeds. They sow and reap observing the nature around them. They observed the nature around them like the sounds of the birds and insects and predicted the weather according to the different sounds.

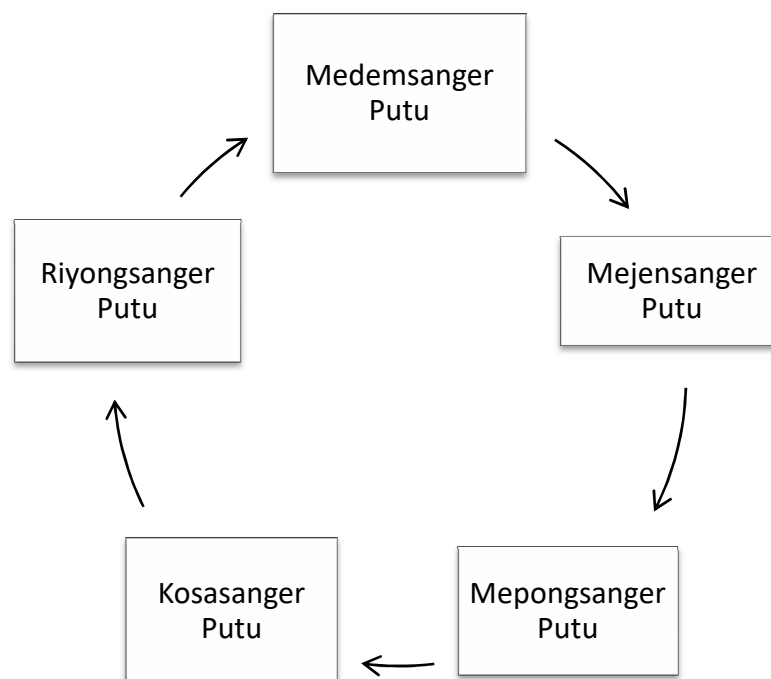
1.7 Administrative System

The Nagas from the ancient days were self-sustained and independent. They set up democratic and republic administrative system in every village. The distinct features of the customary laws, practices and the moral code of conduct practiced in every village under the rule of the local administrative institutions was impressive. Considering the importance of traditional institutions and customary practices, the Government of India set a special article in the Constitution of India, Article 371 (A) and The Nagaland Village and Council Act 1978.

The Ao Naga society has its own distinct administration system. They maintained a democratic but effective system of administration. Every village had their own republic, set up to govern themselves to maintain peace, order as well as practice and preserve customary laws, and maintain harmony amongst themselves. They were free from external control. The women had no place in the official functioning of the governing institutions, yet they held that all members in the society had equal status. The authority and the political system of governance was not based on written constitution but based on oral customary laws. The council of elders chosen was known as “Putu menden”, in the chungli speaking village. “Putu” means “Generation” and “menden” means “seat”. Thus, it can be literally translated as the “generation seat”, and it was the highest form of village council. The Mongsen phratry called it “Samen Menchen”. They settle disputes of any form, give out punishments. The putu menden was a federal assembly of elected leaders from the founding

clans in the village. The elders are elected according to the sectors, thus the size of the council, putu menden varied according to village. There are five established putus, (generation) and each putu rules the village for a period of 30 years in a cyclic pattern. The size of the putu menden varies from village to village as it depends on the size of the village, the number of clans. The function and the size vary but the norms and conventions in the frame work follows similar pattern in the different villages. Each putu governs the village for thirty years, and each zunga succeeds another after the tenure is over. After one putu completes its 30 years rule, all the councilors vacate their seats and the next putu takes over. In some Mongsen villages, the samen menchen governs for six years. In modern contemporary society, the year has been reduced to lesser years of governance.

Given below is a diagram that can show the cyclic governance of the Putu Menden:



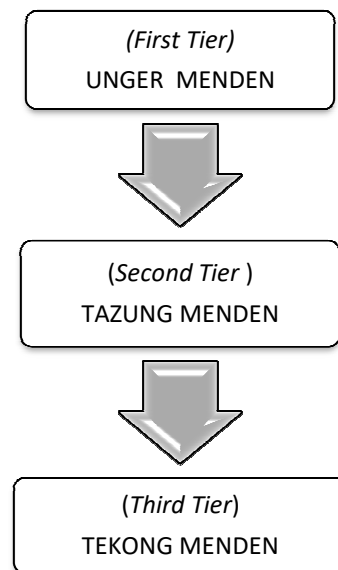
The Medemsanger Putu means the generation of equal people. It was a generation when there were so many leaders with similar ideologies, interests that governed the village. They ruled for 30 years, and the next generation took over.

Mejensanger Putu means the generation who do not grow old. This council of leaders were usually such that the people did not want them to leave their seats as they were prosperous and the people were very much satisfied with their governance. The third is the Mepongsanger Putu, which means the generation of wind people. "Mepong" means "wind". They were quick and smart in everything that they do, just like the wind. The fourth is the Kosasanger Putu which means the generation who hunt Tigers. When this generation took over, the people fought with wild animals a lot, especially Tigers. Riyongsanger Putu is the last, which means the generation who proclaimed war, since the time of this generation, there was a lot of warfare with their enemies. It was also the time of warriors.

In the ancient times, there were two more generation, but many people lost their lives. In fear of the same thing happening over again, they abandoned the two Putus, and decided on the five Putus which take turn in governing the village.

The Council was the highest body or the ruling system. No one could dare challenge or disobey the decision made by the body. The Council itself was the legislative, executive and also carried out judicial powers. They were responsible for the village to carry out proper use of their powers and to lead the community. There was no distinction amongst the Putu Menden, each clan were entitled with equal status. The democracy in the whole village system was clear cut and impressive. The people obeyed the rules of the decision making body, and generally disobedience was witnessed from the people. The people were loyal and true to the Village council.

Given below is a diagrammatic representation of the structure of Putu Menden:



Although the Putu menden varies according to the village, it is generally comprised of three tiers: the first Tier included the Unger Menden. The Unger (Priest) was the head of the Putu Menden, and this was chosen from the Tongpok clan. If no such clan was found in the village, a member of any clan could take the seat of the Onger.

The Second Tier is the Tazung Menden, in which it is similar to the Cabinet in modern parliamentary system. It consists of senior members of each clan. The eldest among the Tazung menden presides over the meetings and act as the Speaker.

The third Tier consist of the Tekong Menden, they are constituted by subsidiary groups. They execute the decisions made by the Putu Menden. They assist the Putu Menden in carrying out the administrative policies.

They believed that any kind of disobedience was a breach and would gain the wrath of the Supreme Being. The religious and political structure was closely knitted, as ceremonies and rituals were done by the leaders, or any decision or societal functions were performed by the leaders.

Irrespective of the size of the village, every village was capable to govern themselves and also maintain permanent relationship with the other villages. Sometimes, a smaller village often suffered in the hands of slightly bigger villages. When a village could not withstand the invasion of bigger village, it surrendered to the attacker, and paid hefty fines as fixed by the larger village. Thus, it was a kind of agreement that the smaller village was under the protection of the principal village, and the smaller one enjoyed freedom without the fear of being attacked by other powers. But the payment had to be done in advance and if it was failed to do so, the principal village attacked and destroyed the village, or took them as slaves. The tartars or the council were chosen for a set of terms or for life, or the village had the right to expel a person by the village for unworthiness or because of poor administration.

The Ungr is the head of the Tatar putu menden, yet he could not object to the decisions made by the council. He was the nominated head from the Pongen/Im song clan, and in the absence of such clan, Longkum clan which is another founder clan gets the “Ungr menden”. The Ungr is assisted by another person from a different clan, who exercise the power of the Ungr incase the head is absent. The Ungr, in a way becomes the treasurer, since any kind of proceedings that involved political, social and cultural discussions, is done at his house and any decisions made at his house becomes final. Headhunting, Ceremonies, diplomatic mission etc are all discussed at his courtyard, and those that were not in the Putu Menden could not attend the meetings either. When there is any kind of fines which involved killing of an animal or fines imposed for crimes committed because of treason or violation to the custom, the head of the animal which is killed, goes to the Ungr. In case there is constitutional crisis and the Putu Menden is not functioning properly, the Ungr can

call a public conference to discuss the crucial matter at hand. On the death of the Ungr, the assistant does not succeed him. In fact, another qualified member from the Tongpok descendants is chosen as the next Ungr.

The Putu Menden plays an important role in the society and protects the people, culture and tradition which is constructed and preserved orally from generations to generations. The Putu Menden focused on cases relating to tradition, civil, criminal etc and also punished the offenders as per the law which was constructed. Land disputes, norms on marriage, inheritance, divorce, disputes between villages, etc the Putu Menden oversees, and which is still in practice with slight variations to the settlements, of village level cases decided under the customary laws.

1.8 Friendship Feasts

The tradition of maintaining a good relationship between two villages of the same clan in different villages, or the bond of friendship between two different villages, was celebrated with a practice called “Askü”. The literal translation of “Aksü” is a combination of two words, “Ak” which means pig and “Sü” which means “Death”. Therefore it can be translated as death of a pig, which means that pigs were killed for this occasion. It was done as an honor towards reconciliation or mending diplomatic relations between two parties.

It is called “Kidong/Tenu Aksü” when the same clan between two different villages practices this. It was practiced as a way to strengthen the bond of brotherhood between the same clan in different villages. They recount the old stories, sing love songs; exchange gifts and discussions are done. It was a way to make peace and maintain good will relationship with one another. This cannot be done more than once in a year.

Another kind of honor feast is that, since the Ao Naga Society practiced headhunting, some villages rescued the people belonging to another village in danger. After the people are safe from the enemies, the saved clan or village would host a feast of honor for the one that had rescued them, as gratitude. It was a way in which a new bond of friendship begins, and they celebrate together, visiting and strengthening their relationships. This kind of “Aksü” is called as “Nokyin / Nokren” Aksü.

Akangjungshi: this is another form of feast, in which rich individuals or leaders belonging to different villages come together. They exchange gifts, sing songs in praise of each other, and make merry. This is done as a way to built relationships when they have no relations whatsoever.

This practice was done in order to create a socio political relationship between clans, different villages and also individuals belonging to different villages. It created a peaceful relationship between them. In an era of headhunting, peaceful reconciliation like the practice of Aksü is an important factor which created socio political relationships which led them to coexist and cooperate between different villages and clans. It was a tradition that promoted the feeling of brotherhood and values of tradition and familiarity in an age where headhunting between clans, villages took place. The practice of Aksü between two parties made the involved parties seek each other in times of need, helped one another from enemies and also strengthened the bond of brotherhood.

"The family is the first social unit in any culture" (Ao 46). The Ao Naga system follows a distinct system of marriage, the family is an important social institution which they take into proper consideration of who can marry, become a family. Each village has distinct clan phratries and marriage between the same clan is strictly prohibited in all the villages. The Ao

Naga society does not know the system of joint family. Any man that takes a wife builds for his family and lives separately from his parents. Once a man and a woman get married, they establish a new household where they are responsible for themselves, and for the upbringing of their children. An Ao family is patriarchal, the man is the head of the family, and his descendants carry on the name of his clan. Although a woman may marry into a man's family and his clan she does not change her clan name. It is her birthright which cannot be changed. A man's priority is first to the unit in which he is the head, yet he does not neglect his parent's welfare, as well as his in-laws.

The importance of being a good member of society, to live in dignity and honor was which they strived for. Their willingness to help each other in times of need, share one's good fortune with neighbors during plentiful, groups of friends working in each other's fields turn by turn, illustrates the deep bond between the members of the society. Even if an Individual did not belong to a major clan or did not have much wealth to boast about, if he was a man of dignify and character, he gained popularity and respect among his peers.

1.9 Oral Tradition

"Oral tradition plays the all important role in defining good citizenship and maintaining a harmonious social fabric because all the subtleties of social structure and inter-action are encoded in this tradition" (Ao 31,32). The importance of being a good member of society, to live in dignity and honor was which they strived for. Their willingness to help each other in times of need, share one's good fortune with neighbors during plentiful, groups of friends working in each other's fields turn by turn, illustrates the deep bond between the members of the society. Even if an Individual did not belong to a major clan or did not have much

wealth to boast about, if he was a man of dignify and character, he gained popularity and respect among his peers.

The Ao Nagas were prominent in the oral literature. Poetry or songs were the medium of any public speech or any kind of relating news in which a song accompanied the speech at intervals. It was the way in which they presumed the magnitude of the speech. The song and the speech went hand in hand, and not independent of each other. Each and every song had different meanings reserved for particular reasons and it could not be sung on any occasion.

Dance and songs during festival and feasts of merit always go together, in which the people expressed themselves about their celebration. The people sang the glories of their heroic leaders, historical events, legends, myth etc. An Ao traditional folksong was not just a series of grammatical words put together, but each word implied meanings. The Aos usually accompanied the songs with an outcry at the end except for the war dance. The costumes that were worn differed from each other, men wore according to what he was entitled to, according to his merit, his wealth, his bravery in bringing heads or his leadership qualities.

The following is an Ao naga folksong based on the historical myth of origin as written in the native dialect:

“O Lungterok poker

Tongpok, Longpok, Longchakrep nangpongi

Lima tasen mesemone

Lima tasen mesemdena yur

Bochi asem sangeri

Chungliyimti ali tema pangnung

senden riju yangeroni” (Jamir 15)

Translation:

With the emergence of Lungterok,
The children of Tongpok, Longpok, Longchakrep,
A new land was found
With the founding of a new land,
Upon a flat land at Chungliyimti
The senden riju was erected.

“The Aos make use of a large number of proverbs and sayings in their conversation, which exhibit the richness of their culture and tradition” (Tsuren 138). It is the usage of the proverbs at the appropriate moment and the kind of proverbs used depicted the person’s wisdom and knowledge, which made people recognize his fluency and potentiality in oratory. For instance, “Pokpo yimyim ayim ama” is a proverb which can be translated as “making a random proclamation like the owl”. This proverb is based on a folklore, in which the owl makes a random comment and embarrasses himself. This folklore is a popular lore which is found in various sources, *The Ao Naga Oral tradition* (Ao 86), *Asen Sobalibren* (Jamir 9,10).

Narrative

After the world was created, there was no clear distinction between day and night. There was unrest in the kingdom because of this condition, therefore all the birds gathered to discuss this problem. In the assembly, there was a great debate on how to solve the problem. Suddenly, the owl professed that if there was light then there should be light and if there was darkness, let there be darkness. This proclamation was not liked by the rest of the

birds. Thus, they beat him up, and in the process the owl's face became round and flat. They kicked him out of the assembly, and it became an outcast. Thus, an owl only comes out at night.

The folksong which signifies the story :

“O long-trok-ko pok ker
 Ozu temang mongdang nuko
 Pokpo ne yim yim ayim mane
 Mangle mangjen mangang
 Sangwale Sangwa angta
 Ozu rongnung Impang mejempongi
 Kenpang opang medem tsuba
 Mangle sangwale angta”. (Jamir 9)

Translation:

With the emergence of Longterok
 All the birds gathered for an assembly
 The owl proclaimed
 If darkness then let it be dark
 If light then let it be light
 Amongst the birds, mejempongi (a fowl like bird)
 To bring a conclusion
 Let there be light and darkness at alternate intervals

A fowl like bird declared that the light and darkness be at alternate intervals. This proclamation was liked by all the birds that came to the assembly. They agreed on the statement, and the bird became popular for coming up with such a brilliant idea. All the birds congratulated it and petted the bird, so much that the bird was reduced to a small size bird. Thus, it is believed that this is the reason why the world is separated between darkness and light at alternate intervals.

The Ao Nagas are unique in their tradition and practices which they have created for themselves and makes up their cultural identity. From the myth of origin, their political set up, the learning institutions and the ceremonies and festivals which they celebrate, constitute their cultural structure bound by aesthetic and ethical values, which has been passed down orally, should be preserved and maintained.

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CHAPTER -2

TABOOS IN THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE AO NAGAS

Every society has its own unique traditions and customs which defines them, shapes the people and the society into how they want to be. It is a way of life which they adopt and practice, and sets them apart from the rest of the other societies. Like customs and traditions, laws are no different; a society cannot be free without laws if the people wants to live in peace and harmony with each other. It is the laws and customs which makes the society rational and maintain the smooth running of the people. The social life of the Ao Nagas was governed by set of conventions which they followed with utmost respect and obedience. These conventions did not imply that the society was tied down by authoritarian rule instead it illustrated the welfare of the society above individual's welfare. There existed certain taboos which came with severe consequences if they break these oral conventions. The unwritten conventions were followed by the people from generation to generation and going against or breaking the taboos was unimaginable.

TABOO

“Taboo” in simple term is a practice which is forbidden on religious and social grounds. It is often set up to protect individuals, society. It also contributes to the formation of identity. It is related to the acts or practices which is prohibited on moral and social grounds, because it is offensive to the moral judgment and cultural norms and objectionable in the eyes of society. In the Ao language, taboo is translated as “Ashiabang” or “anempong.” The Ao Naga has their own customary laws and this term “taboo” for the Ao Naga society depicts that practice and tradition which must be kept by all means.

The Ao Naga society has its own various set of taboo, which they, as a whole community prohibit from attempting, as well as if done so, then follow suit in refraining one self from undertaking various activities, seclusion, from the society as ritual to cleanse himself. These particular days set aside, secluding oneself from the society may range from one to few days, weeks or months, depending on the gravity of the situation.

In general, taboos in the Ao context can be of two terms:

- a) Ashiabang : Public Prohibition on social, moral and religious grounds
- b) Anempong: An Individual's seclusion from society, and performance of rituals for cleansing himself as a result of certain situations

The taboos or restrictions in the society were not decided randomly by the elders or the village council but it was a tradition which was practiced since the time of their ancestors. It was a way of life that they chose to follow for their survival through the ages. The people abided by the conventions, and what they termed as 'taboos' imposed on them. They accepted their way of life to maintain peace and harmony among themselves and promote their general well-being and not so much to restrict their freedom in society.

The conventions and the laws were set up in each and every village and it was unimaginable to break it. If violated, it was highly condemned by the society, and being ostracized by the society was the biggest insult and shame that a man or woman could ever live with. The people did not follow through blind faith; in fact they had their own understanding and belief on the reasons behind these customs set up by their ancestors. The laws and the taboos were not in written form but were passed down from the forefathers to their children. Every man, woman and child were taught in their household by the elders. It

was the duty of the elders to teach their children, to bring them up in the right way. Bringing shame on the family by breaking the conventions set up by the society was not something the family could live with. It was not simply a sin or crime that was committed, but the consequence of breaking a taboo resulted in the defaulter paying the price for it, and in certain case it led to the whole family or the village to suffer the consequence.

“All religious festivals are connected with certain prohibitions, therefore are classified under the term ‘Genna’. With the exception of fetching water and cooking, no other housework is done” (Sinha 126). “Genna” is the practice of seclusion or avoiding certain activities to purify and cleanse and to do away with evil. It was a ritual which he had to follow, or else it was a belief that he would bring more misfortunes upon himself if he does not purify himself. It was not a matter of the society forcing one to seclude himself but the fabric of tradition and custom was so much imbedded in the people that they followed suit without anyone pointing out to them what they ought to do. The thought of not making other people suffer because of them, drove the people in following the rituals so that other people may not suffer the misfortune which would happen in the future if left unheeded. Also the fear of misfortune befalling on their descendants, their children and grandchildren greatly influenced them to live in such a way that they do not bring any kind of unwanted situations that would cause serious trouble.

When a family follows certain kind of seclusion from the society based on certain reasons, like the birth of a child, of domestic animals, sickness, or death of a person etc, a kind of sign or mark is put up so that people may recognize it and stay away for certain period of time. It is usually a bunch of green leaves put at the front door or wall. The family follows abstinence and they do not go out of the house, nor allow other people to enter the

house. They do not fetch water with other people nor bring any fire from the neighbor's place. The people respected each other's privacy and knew when they see green leaves at the front door; it signified seclusion from the society. The number of days for observing seclusion, or anempong varied accordingly. Sometimes the whole village also observed this anempong where it was a taboo for them to work on that day, not for auspicious reasons, but as a way to cleanse the village from impending evil that had defiled the village with bad energy. They are not allowed to work nor do any or certain manual labour. The days of seclusion varied accordingly. It is carried out at any moment when there is some kind of bad calamity that had brought misfortune upon the village. Therefore, each household had firewood collected, and waters filled in the carriers lest some kind of unfortunate situations arise. Each individual is responsible, and learning the etiquette and proper manners was an important factor for them to live in society. They took proper care even through the way they speak and their actions so that they do not offend people in any way. They strived to live in the right way, so that they do not attract any misfortune upon them.

2.1 Taboos Regarding Marriage and Marital Affairs

The Ao Naga marriage system is based on the unwritten laws of customs. It was the tradition which was followed as early as the origin of the Ao Nagas. The marriage system is based on clan exogamy. Marriage is not just compatibility of two persons coming together or finding a companion for the rest of the life. It is the communion of two persons, two families, two clans, and the Ao Naga believed that the whole communion was a divine union, which is sacred and binding. The Ao Naga society has distinct restrictions with regard to marriage system and it is strictly followed by all the members of the village.

“Marriage with same clan is not only restricted, but unthinkable” (Imchen 108). The Ao Naga custom forbids marriage between the members of the same clan, and this rule cannot be violated under any circumstance. If such a union happens, severe punishment is meted out to the couple as per their customary law. The Ao Naga society has been following this rule throughout their history, and has been passed down to their descendants, and it is still followed in the present times. A man belonging to a *Jamir* clan cannot marry a woman belonging to the same clan even if they may be from different village. Even if the clan is different, if they are related by blood either through the mother’s side or the father’s side, it is also prohibited. Cross cousin marriage is also restricted. The Ao Naga society also has strict rule in following a monogamous marriage system. The taboo on same clan marriage has been followed since the time of the progenitors, and it has been followed till date. The magnitude of this rule is such that offenders pay a hefty price for not following the rule, even losing their lives at times as consequence. Same clan marriage amounted to incest, and this kind of taboo was unacceptable in the eyes of the society. Such couples were excommunicated from the village. Some were even killed off, so that the bad blood would not taint the society. It was a union which was not recognized by society, the Supreme Being, which they believed in, and did not recognize such a union. The offspring of these couples did not have any identity in the society, nor were they even counted as members of the society. They did not have a place in the family registry, nor allowed any kind of inheritance from the family. People did not want to be associated with such kind of couple, and they were ostracized by the society. The fear of being shamed and ostracized by society greatly influenced the people to avoid such kind of behaviour. Since every individual’s life depended on the society for his survival, it influenced the people to avoid committing such kind of offensive activity, which would lead to their own downfall. It was an action which

affected not just the two persons involved but their family, the clan and the whole society. No clan wanted such kind of bad reputation brought upon them.

Following a patriarchal lineage in the Ao Naga society, the children takes the surname of the father. But this does not follow that the wife takes the surname of the husband. The custom of the Ao Naga society restricts the woman from taking the name of his husband, if the husband and the wife share the same title, it becomes a cultural taboo. If a woman belonging to the *Pongen* marries a man belonging to the *Jamir* clan, the woman does not change her clan name to *Jamir*. It shows the distinct nature of the Ao society in upholding the ties of the clan, irrespective of man or woman. In the ancient Ao Naga communal life, marriage between different khels in the same village were even taboo. The man marrying a woman from a different village or tribe was not favoured by society. It was unfathomable to even imagine a man marrying a woman from a different tribe. It is not just the marriage between the same clan which is prohibited, but the clans which find its origin from the same progenitor or the descendants from the progenitors are forbidden to marry. This also varies, from village to village. A person belonging to a Pongen clan cannot marry another who belongs to an Imsong clan, since it is believed that these two clans are the same. Or they are referred to as brothers, descendants of the same progenitor. Similarly, person belonging to a Jamir clan cannot marry one belonging to Sempur clan. It amounts to committing an offence as that of same Clan marriage. There are certain variations on the prohibition of marriage with regard to clans depending on village. Every village do not have all the clans, some clans do not exist in certain village. The names referred to a clan also vary according to village. Some refer the Mongsen Aier as Imchen and Chungli Aier as Imsong. The variations according to different villages either allow or forbid the marriage between two persons, and

all these are put into consideration so as to avoid any offence to the tradition. This practice is believed to have been followed since the first settlement at Chungliyimti, and no one is above the law and the consequences for these taboos must follow. The people were well versed with the values that are tied with the oral traditions which have been passed down by word of mouth. The marriage system follows an intricate affair which must be checked in all details before going through the process of marriage to avoid any kind of offence towards each other, to the society and the clan.

In case of marriage between same clan members or illicit relationship between members of the same family, the whole village observes the ritual of “menen mong.” They observe a day where they close the village gates so that no one will enter nor any of the villagers were allowed to leave the village. They would not work that day, everyone will remain indoors and only the eldest among the priest, would sacrifice a piglet. He would tie the dead piglet on a stick, carry it and roam around the village cleansing and purifying the village so that the sin which was committed would not destroy the people, their children or their yields. The entire village had to stay indoors and observe such a day when a couple commits such kind of offence.

Although the Ao Naga society follows a patriarchal society, it does not depict that women were treated as the inferior gender among the two. In fact, the women in the Ao Naga society enjoyed extensive independence and power in the society. The womenfolk were not mistreated or looked down upon in any way. They were revered and protected by the men folk. The men protected the women as they believed that the womenfolk were the symbol of fertility.

The system of marriage in the Ao Naga society binds families and clans together; it was a result of contact and mutual admiration for each other with various circumstances taken into account. It was an intricate affair where the family approved the couple after consideration of various factors; it wasn't just restriction on same clan, but they also looked into the history of the family, the generation of their forefathers. They examined whether the families had any kind of clashes in the past. If they had enmity in the past, to the point of imposing fines from either of the family, it was not the case of still having grudges with each other, but they believed that since conflict existed between the two families, the union would bring misfortune for the couple. In some cases, even if there was no kind of clash among the families in terms of clan or family history, some were not compatible. In such cases, the parents did not give their blessings, and forbade their children from getting married. Such restrictions were based on their belief and their experience and tradition which were followed since their forefathers.

They believed that marriage that occurs despite their incompatibility or families that have a history of conflict result in unhappy married life, short life span of either the spouse, or result in mentally challenged or physically challenged children. They believed that the consequence of committing such acts went to their children. If the offspring was mentally or physically challenged, it was the family alone that struggled. But if the children borne out of such families become a thief, trouble maker, it was not just a burden on the family but also the village. They feared the possibility that those children would even pick a fight and clashes with other villages.

No person, whether rich or poor, is allowed to marry a second husband or wife if they have not divorced their first spouse, as the first marriage is legal and binding in the eyes of

the society. They are one, unless they divorce or death parts them. If a man is found taking a second wife, the “Putu Menden” (Village Council) imposes a fine on the man for committing such atrocity. On such an account, at the most severe punishment, the village council even exiles the man and the adulterous woman. The fines imposed were mostly of livestock, pigs, cows, mithun etc. The people adopted various ways in killing off the animal which was paid for the price of committing such kind of atrocities. If the fine was imposed because of adultery, the pig’s eyes were blinded first, because the adulterous man or woman looked at another person, or found another person when they already had a legal and binding marriage. In case the fines was imposed because of disobedience, which implied marriage between same clan or marriage between cousins, or relatives, the live animal would not be killed right away, but its ears would be chopped off first, and made to suffer the entire night. Only then, it would be killed in the morning. The bawling pig would be heard by the whole night by the village; and act as an example which would make people aware of the fatality of the crime, so that it would not be committed in future. Moreover, the meats from those kinds of fines were never taken to their own homes in fear that the sin would be contracted to their own children. The chopping off of ears signify that the persons accused disobeyed. Generally, in almost every society, one catches ears or box ears as punishments for disobedience.

The Ao Naga society does not know the system of dowry. Although the family may present gifts on the wedding day, it cannot be termed as dowry. The woman’s parents prepare her belongings and sent her off with whatever gifts they prepare for her, in a woven basket. Her husband does not have the right to usurp his rights over her in taking away what she was given; he does not even need to know what is inside that basket. It was an

embarrassment on the side of the man if any kind of arguments or disagreements broke out because of it. When the husband and wife go to the field, the basket is kept outside, a little bit away from the house, in case some mishap or some unnatural calamity happens when they were away. A husband, if he returns first before his wife, does not collect the basket no matter if it gets late or even if it rains, as it does not belong to him. It depicts a husband's respect for his wife's possessions received from her parents. It was a precious possession where no husband had the right to fight for it. On the other hand, the nature of keeping it outside the house when they go to work also symbolize the nature of the society, where the people lived free from fear of any kind of robbery. It was a taboo for the men to take the possessions of the wife which belonged to her. Such kind of behavior was an embarrassment and shame on the part of the man and it resulted to paying hefty fines if the men did not follow the custom.

A husband and wife were not allowed to eat at the same plate, it was a taboo. It was believed that sharing the same plate between a man and a wife, their souls becomes only one, one overshadowing the other and making it weaker. In simple terms, it was the same as one consuming the energy of the other one. They believed that it led to early death of the one with the weaker soul, since his/her energy is consumed by the other.

Divorce in the Ao Naga society was permitted, although it was rare. A couple divorced when a spouse committed adultery, due to domestic violence, or sometimes with mutual understanding. When a man and a wife divorce because of a spouse committing adultery, it has to be proven guilty by the accuser. If the man is proven guilty, he leaves the house with the clothes he is wearing, his plate, his dao (machete) and spear. He can take no belongings with him. If a woman is proven guilty, she leaves the home with the clothes she is wearing,

her plate and her woven basket. It was a heinous crime and great shame. The erring spouse takes only those belongings which they were allowed to leave with.

In matters of forming a family or even divorce, the Ao Naga Society has its own ways which contribute to the unique structure of tradition and custom. The practices which they followed were constructed based on their own understanding and belief, and their experiences, and which some of these practices have survived till date. Not only is it a union of two persons, but family, clan and village were all involved.

Each and every person was educated about the customs to be followed, and which actions or behavior he must abstain from, in whatever moment of life he may come across. And a woman while pregnant was one of the most fragile and crucial time, not just for her, but the entire family. A pregnant woman was a blessing not just for the family, but to the entire village. It signified an addition to the family, another member added to the society. She was well taken care of by her family. It was the time which she had to live with utmost caution, so it does not have any negative impact on her and the baby. A woman with child had various restrictions not just herself but even her husband, her family, which they must follow. They believed that any actions done had a serious impact on the condition of the baby, which may even lead to a stillborn. Her mannerisms, actions and the food she consumes, her emotional, as well as her state of mind, and her body had to be in constant stability so as to have a healthy and sound child. Everyone wants to have a normal child that would grow up to be beautiful, and contribute to the society.

2.2 Taboos during Pregnancy

A pregnant woman avoided any shapeless, conjoined or scarred fruits. It was a taboo since they believed that the baby would take after the appearance of the fruit. Any eatables which were plucked between rocks or the branches of trees were avoided, for they believed that if they consume those, then the baby born would be stuck and would not be conceived properly, and die. If they eat conjoined fruits, either the child born would be twins, or his fingers or legs would be conjoined.

It was also a taboo for her to eat at another person's house. The food that she consumes might not be pure, or unclean. No matter what food she is offered at another person's house, especially when it came to meat, it was a taboo for her to consume it, since the nature of the meat is not known to her. The animal might have died when it was giving birth, or the meat was cooked with unclean wood. If the fire in the kitchen goes out, it is said that the wood must be unclean, and it was a taboo for them to bring a lighted fire from the neighbor's place. People also avoided eating at a household where the wife was pregnant.

Restrictions on movement: A pregnant woman was restricted from going to certain places at certain times. It was a taboo for her to go to a funeral, when there was a divorce meeting, or any place where there were arguments or quarrels going on. These were sad times, and the sad voices might be heard by the baby inside her womb and it might not want to come to the sad world. Thus, a pregnant woman had to take great measures to avoid the places which might be an influence on the unborn child.

Taboo on sharing clothes: a pregnant woman never borrowed clothes from friends nor family. No matter how poor she was, it was a taboo for her to borrow clothes from other

people, it was avoided for two reasons; firstly, the clothes she borrowed might be unclean. The person that she borrowed from might be unclean. It might bring misfortune upon them. Another reason is that, the baby in her womb, might feel that the mother is so poor that she had to borrow clothes, and the baby would grow in the same condition, meaning would be poor.

Taboo on buying goods: A pregnant woman avoided buying anything from other people. The reason for selling materialistic objects like skirt, necklace, bangles, etc cannot be apprehended, and the goods might be unclean or cursed. The unclean or cursed objects bought will bring misfortune upon her, she might have stillborn or die at childbirth because of possessing those cursed objects. It was taboo for a family to sell or buy land or any expensive goods, like which was expensive when a woman was pregnant. It was already a huge blessing for the family to when a woman was expecting, therefore it was attributed to greed when they bought land or fields or anything which was expensive. It would displease the Supreme Being and they did not want to do anything which would hinder them from receiving blessings from the god. If they sold off their belongings, the unborn baby would feel that the family was sustained only because of selling their own belongings, that their family conditions were poor, thus it would not want to come into this world where he would be poor. Moreover, they also believed that, when by selling off their belongings, the blessings which they were expecting would also go away with it.

Taboo on killing animals: A woman expecting a baby should never kill animals. It was not right for her to take a life when another life was inside her. Raising a knife or machete to take a life is no happy deed, and animals also die in pain. The child bears the grudge or the

sadness of the animal which is killed. The baby born would look like the animal. Thus, a woman while pregnant should never spill any blood with her hand.

Taboos for the husband: when the wife was pregnant, it was important that the man also lived with caution. A man's action had to be careful so that he may not anger the spirits, or bring upon his family misfortune by his actions. It was a taboo for him to kill animals when his wife was expecting a child. It was believed that any actions done by him towards any animals, the consequences will be upon his child. If he even injures any animal, then wherever he hits it, his child would be born with a mark in the same place he injured the animal. Therefore, he took precautions and avoided killing any animal, at his home or anywhere else.

2.3 Taboos Regarding Unnatural Deaths

When a person passes away due to unnatural death, or without saying his final words to his family, it was believed that he was taken away by bad spirits. So such a death is unclean. When this happens his family has to follow the ritual. They leave their home, and go to the jungle where a house is made for them by the clan members. It was a ritual which was practiced to cleanse themselves and they had to live away from the village. At this time, no villagers can visit them, nor talk to them. The home which they occupied previously would be abandoned. Whatever belongings they owned, the perishable goods were burnt and the non perishable goods were thrown away. The livestock which they reared were also killed off and the bodies were disposed off. The family did not take anything from their home no matter how valuable their belongings were to them. Even if it were heirloom which was passed down from generations to generations, all those were abandoned. It was a practice to cleanse the family from whatever evil that had taken their away one of the family

member before his own time, so that the future would not bring such misfortunes. If they break this taboo, or could not keep the ritual then more misfortunes would be upon them, on their children, or grandchildren. When they live in exile, it is the clan members who come and leave them food. Even when they bring food for the people in seclusion, they would never meet them or talk to them. They would cough loudly or say out loud that they are throwing away food. The people neither talk to them nor meet them for fear that they might get defiled too. The people avoided even crossing the path leading to the secluded house which the family lived. After a month, the family is cleansed from the Sin, and they could come back to the village amongst the people. But they do not go to their previous house. Their clansmen would build a new house for them, usually at the corner of the village, and contribute whatever stuffs they can donate. The land of the previous house still belongs to the family, but it is a taboo for the father or his children to rebuild a house. Only the grandson that is the third generation can rebuild and start living if he wishes to.

“When a man dies unnaturally through some calamity, the entire village observes *menen kho mong*, for the whole month until the new moon appears. All properties including fields, house, food, clothes, cattle and every single tool in the house is abandoned never to be taken back again.” (Jamir 146)

The practice is to wash away the misfortunes that have happened to them. This is followed for any unnatural case, such as death by falling off cliff, trees, killed by wild animal, struck by lightning, drowning or death at childbirth. This practice is called as “*menen mong*.” (Jamir 162)

The Ao Naga regarded the water bodies as the abode of gods or spirit. They carried water from the Village lake or ponds, for their sustenance. Sometimes this spirit or god was very powerful that they consumed lives, meaning people sometimes drowned. When this

happened, the village followed genna, day of seclusion. It was a taboo for all the villagers to avoid taking water from that very pond or lake for seven days, for fear that the same misfortune would happen to that family, the misfortune would be contracted to that family. The family of the one who died was forbidden to pull water from that pond or lake for a period of 30 days.

The villagers would clean out the pond where a person dies within three days, they would throw away all the water in the pond. Since living beings cannot survive without water, and the source of water is cleaned out, they had to keep an alternate pond. Therefore, while shifting to another area for settling, the people never settled in an area where it had only one pond. They had to keep alternatives in case misfortunes fell on them, since the future is uncertain. At home, they always kept their bamboo water carriers full, firewood stacked outside for they never know when a day would be declared as genna day, they would not be able to fetch water or firewood.

If a person died outside his home, his dead body would not be brought back to the village. Whether a person is killed by an animal, or had fallen off a cliff, struck by lightning that is, when deaths happened away from home, it would be buried there, and not be brought back to the village. The death which took place outside their own home was believed to have taken away by certain unnatural forces, before his own time. It was not right in the eyes of the society to bring back the dead body which nature had claimed.

The nature of men in the early life of the Ao Naga was such that these taboos and rituals which they follow were practiced from the time of their forefathers, which they made according to their experiences and belief system. It was not just a ritual that they performed half-heartedly or done out of fear, but it was a duty which they fulfilled so that they are

cleansed away from the misfortune, and their children and grandchildren do not suffer the same condition.

2.4 Taboos Regarding Names

A name in the Ao Naga society holds great dignity which has been given after proper consideration, especially in the early society. A name identified a person's clan, a father's lineage. It held great respect which was treasured and upheld with pride. Whenever a person was named after their forefathers, either for being a great warrior, wealth, being a leader, it was a great blessing, which is called as "narokhum".

The people who had committed great crime or people dying of unnatural deaths, their names are strikes off from the family registry. It becomes a taboo for them to use the same name in that clan, or that lineage. The name is erased off. Every clan had their own distinct names which they name their children. At the agreement for betrothal, it is agreed upon to bring back their name to the village at the time for her passing, since it has great significance for them. Her children or grandchildren cannot be named after her, since it was a name of her very clan. Leaving a clan's name to another clan or naming a clan's name for another clan was a taboo. While naming their children, it was done with utmost caution. Names hold great significance for the family as well as clan which should be respected. A poor man giving a rich name to a child or giving a warrior's name to a child when there was no warrior lineage was a great taboo, since it was a name which they did not earn or deserve. The child would be unable to bear the weight of the name since it had much significance. Thus, the child becomes sick or even dies unless they change the name. It was a behaviour which the society greatly condemned, since the Ao Naga society strived to live in modesty and with dignity. It was a shameful act.

“such historical names have thus been recognized as the sacred, exclusive property of the specific clans. Any attempt to appropriate an ancient name which traditional history does not associate with a particular clan is interpreted as an attempt to distort and falsify tribal history and is considered an unforgivable act of treason against the tribe itself.” (Ao 23)

With the increase in population, new names were added and similar names can also be found in different clans and villages, but have different significance. Supernatural aura is believed to surround names since it is deeply rooted in tradition and culture. In a family, if new born child dies one after another, the next one is named something bitter, “taku”, “Teka”, “Likok” etc. These words can be translated as bitter, to denote something tragic that has happened to the family, and these names are given to ward off the bad or evil aura which had defiled the family and brought tragic upon them. It is believed that since the new born child bears a bitter name, even the evil aura would not want them. The nomenclature is also another aspect in which the people have kept the tradition alive. From the very outset, a name depicts the tribe, clan he belongs. It has a significant role in preserving and perpetuating the culture. It is an essence in itself where it signifies a certain group of people and their way of life, the culture and the traditions. This is one of the core elements of the oral tradition which they have carefully constructed and maintained through the years.

2.5 Taboos Regarding Tattoos

The art of tattooing flourished in the Ao Naga Society. Women were the ones who tattooed their body. A young woman getting tattoos signified that she became a full-fledged member of the society. It was a gradual process that took about five years to complete. These tattoos were done by the elderly women in the village. The activity was not done

inside the village but it was done outside, in the jungle. Since the cold winter healed the sores more quickly, it was carried out in the winter months. The women of the chungli and the mongsen varied in the design of the tattoos. All the women of the society had to be tattooed according to the custom, before they got married. A woman, while in the process of being tattooed, had to avoid any food which was prohibited so as to keep her clean and also to avoid any kind of infection. If she was not careful, the tattoos would not heal properly, and she might lose her leg in the process. The tattoos were done with indigenous tools which they carved for themselves, and the color was taken from the sap of a tree which retained its color even after it was washed. It was a pride for the women to have the tattoo on their body as it was a sign that they have become a full fledged member of the society. If a young woman could not bear the pain of the sharp tools when she was being tattooed, a fowl would be sacrificed to appease the spirit which had made her unable to bear the pain.

It was not just the fear of infection but women as a symbol of fertility and the bearers of the leaders of society, had to remain pure in body and mind and also take care of themselves to ensure that the children they gave birth to, were healthy in mind and body. After completing the elaborate process of tattooing for years, the women were prohibited to take the flesh of certain animals due to various reasons which they deemed that it tainted the body and mind of the women, and also in fear that it might have a negative influence on the women, and the children that they bore. The meat of dogs, goats were not allowed to be consumed by women because dogs and goats were promiscuous animals. Dogs and goats mate with their own offspring. The people abstained from consuming the meat of these domestic animals, fearing that such negative behavior might rub off on them. A pig's

intestine is considered as the dirtiest part of the animal, since it consumed almost anything. In the olden times, pigs were reared outside, in the open. They consumed literally anything, even excreta. Thus, to ensure that the children do not become defiled or unclean, the intestines of pigs were avoided by women with tattoos. Chicken is associated with being a coward. Therefore, to avoid bearing a child who was a coward, women avoided taking chicken also. Catfish is an aquatic animal which has the physical attribute of being slippery since it does not have scales. Any scale-less fish were avoided by women, it was a taboo for them to consume this fish since they feared that the slippery physical attribute which the catfish possess would have a negative impact on the child borne to the woman. The child might be insolvent, or someone untrustworthy. Birds like Dove, thrush, etc were also prohibited for tattooed women. A dove does not have a pleasant voice. It was believed that a person eating the flesh of this bird would “make a person forgetful and have meaningless dreams” (Jamir, 152). The thrush is also avoided as it is considered as a bird which was exiled from the community since it did not fulfill its work. The fear of having children which might get excommunicated from village in future made them to avoid the meat of these birds.

The taboo on food for women who go through the process of tattooing were also elaborate and stood with reasons which they believe to have a strong influence on the one that consumes the meat. Tattooing was the art of beautifying a woman's body as well as depicting her place in the society. It was a sign of her stepping into adulthood.

2.6 Taboos for Warriors and Their Wives

Headhunting has been practiced since the days of Chungliyimti, the tradition of headhunting was an honorary feat which was practiced for social and religious reasons. A

man who had succeeded in bringing a head was revered, praised and welcomed by the village in great honor, sometimes even received with beating of the log drum. The social status of a warrior was looked up by all, even rich men coveted for the title. The man that had brought the head of an enemy was considered as a hero, women admired and people sang praises of those that were successful in bringing such glory for the village. When a village decides to go on a raid, they would select the best amongst themselves, and they would stay at the *Tir's* (head of the clan) house for 30 days as abstinence. It was a taboo for them to cohabit with women during this period. When the men folk were at war, the women had to stay chaste. It was taboo for her to bring fire from another person's house if the fire at her fireplace was out. She has to light the fire herself and not borrow from anyone. Moreover, even though her husband was at battlefield, she would pretend as if he was with her while having her meal.

When a man's head was taken by an enemy, his name is not taken by his descendants, unless an enemy's head is brought back to the village in exchange, his death has been avenged. It was a taboo to name a child with the name of a fallen warrior for fear that similar fate may befall the child. During headhunting, they followed certain practice before they behead another. They had to take the name, clan and village so as to give correct information and proof of their deed. A person wounding an enemy but coming back without a head would show his weapons which is smeared with blood, to show that he fought with bravery. "The targets were not discriminative and could be any man, woman or child. But the head of a woman was more prized and her long tresses would later be a part of the warrior's regalia" (Aier et al 10). The success of headhunting earned him the privilege of ornamenting spear shafts, and battle axe handles with tufts of hair, adorning their shawls

with elaborate decorative and so on. The title of a warrior and the bravery of the man was praised and commemorated with such entitlements which he wore with pride. It is taboo for ordinary man to wear or decorate his shawls with the ornaments or beads if he has not achieved such feats.

The village would avenge the death of any person who was killed by an enemy. The popular shawl, “Mangkoteptsu” or “Tsongkoteptsu” is a shawl worn only by those that had successfully brought a head of an enemy. It was a shawl which was woven to honor the warriors who had brought victory for the village and the people.

2.7 Taboos Regarding Shawls and Skirts

The Ao Naga shawls and skirts is another important factor that is distinct on its own, where the attires were different from one another. The dress was not just mere clothes that they wore but it defined them, it was their identity. It depicted their political and social standing in their society. Amongst the different categories of shawls, the “Tsongkoteptsu” was one of a kind. It was the highest honorary shawl which a man could own. Ordinary men could not possess this. It was earned, only those persons who had taken the head of another in battle, were entitled to wear. If a man had brought glory to the village in bringing a head of the enemy, a picture of a skull was sewn in the pattern. If he had successfully done the mithun sacrifice, then the shape of a mithun was sewn in the pattern. It was a taboo for women to wear this shawl. The right to wear this shawl was earned by the man. It signified the valor and wealth of the man. Anyone sporting this shawl without being entitled to, had to pay hefty fine. This shawl was not worn on ordinary day to day life either. Festivals like the Tsungremmong, Moatsu, or official duties were the times that they could wear this shawl, with pride. Renowned personalities, warriors were distinguished by the shawls and

the ornaments they wore. No men could sport the shawls which he was not entitled to. It was a shameful act, and frowned upon by society, which was totally unacceptable. Every man had to earn dignified attires to wear.

Each clan had their own shawls and skirts, and even among the different phratry groups. The women folk also wore different ornaments, and dress according to different phratry groups, the wife of a warrior differed from the dress worn by the wife of an ordinary man. For example, a mongsen woman tied her hair with white yarn and a woman belonging to a chungli phratry tied her hair with a black yarn.

The Ao Naga Society distinct in its attire has various types of shawls in which some are meant to be worn by a specific group only. The shawls entitled to each of them depict their social standing or their economic status, or their valour. The "Rongsu-su" is a shawl which is elaborate in its decorations. It is entitled only to those that had done the mithun sacrifice for three generations: by his grandfather, father and himself. It was a feat which was very difficult to achieve. But the harder the challenge, the bigger the celebration in achieving it.

"Takar-laipi su" this shawl is entitled to the one that had done the mithun sacrifice. The descendants of the Tongpok clan could wear this shawl even if he has not done the mithun sacrifice. When a man sacrificed a mithun, his wife could wear a feather of hornbill. A daughter can also wear a feather for every mithun sacrifice that her father had made, till her marriage. It is called the "ozümi". It is taboo for an ordinary woman to wear this as this is entitled only to those that had done the within sacrifice. In a way, ornaments and dress depicted the social status of the people. Brass bracelets were also another ornament which the women were also entitled to wear, for those whose husband or father had done the

mithun sacrifice. The head gear of an Ao male is a skull-like cap made of bear hides called as "Shim Kurang" or "Iremkep khurang", and it is decorated with small pair of boar tusks. This headgear is entitled only to those elders who had taken a head of the enemy. It is an ornament which is greatly valued. Another ornament is the "Tsungetsung" which is the ringing bell, and can be worn by those who had taken the head of an enemy when avenging the death of a relative. It is the women of his clan who prepares the bells. The wife or the daughter of the one, who has earned the right to wear this ornament, can also wear bells while dancing to the folksong. This ornament is precious and has high value that when a woman passes away, her other belonging is inherited by her daughters or sisters. But these particular bells, the "tsungetsung" goes to the heir of her clan.

A woman belonging to a poor family wears less ornamented skirt or the "subeti", than the wife of a rich man. A rich man's daughter may marry a man from a poor background, but she is not deprived of her right to wear which her father had earned for her. Each and every clan and even villages had their own distinct pattern for the skirt, and no phratry could wear except the one which they were entitled to. The values tied to their identity in their attires were deeply respected by each other among different clans and phratry groups so it was unquestionably offensive to wear the attire which he was not entitled. The different ornaments and the shawls, the skirt all signify the status of the wearer, and this difference was known by all members of the society, so that people would not mistakenly wear something which he was not entitled to. No matter how many riches a man possessed if he did not bring the head of an enemy or done the mithun sacrifice, he cannot wear those ornaments of shawls. This laws and rules were imbedded in their own teachings and understandings that the people rarely made mistakes of breaking the taboo. The whole cycle

of life, from birth till death, individual, society was woven together with practices and rituals, and their way of life reflected their belief system.

The system of these oral traditions that guided the society was constructed out of their own belief, wisdom, experience and it reflected their strength, unity, and their lifestyle. It was an identity in itself which they constructed for themselves from their own unique belief system. Although some of the activities which were forbidden in the early life of the Ao Nagas, are no longer practiced nor is it applicable in the changing modern society.

Certain actions may not be deemed as severe or serious but in certain cases it has serious connotations which are taboo based on tradition and culture that the Ao Naga people practiced and established through the ages. The importance of this social structure can be seen in their obedience towards the established set of rules which had governed them and protected them from impending danger from external forces as well as danger from within themselves. It had provided a demarcated area in which they survived within the walls of those restrictions created, based on moral, religious and social grounds. These guidelines and taboos protected them and restricted them from committing atrocities which would hinder the prosperity and their peaceful cohabitation.

2.8 Taboos Regarding General Behaviour

Speaking ill of the spirits or unnatural forces was also taboo for the people. The worship of spirits varied accordingly to the villages, but all the people believed in the Supreme Being, and which often resided in the stones. They sacrificed chicken, eggs, animals to appease the spirits, and did not speak ill of them. Almost all the villages had their own particular nature worship, and sacrificial animals offered to it. It was a taboo to even spit or

defecate in the areas around those particular stones that they worshipped, they believed it would anger the spirit and bring misfortune upon them. Jabbing their spear, or plucking pebbles or flowers around the stones were taboo, which they consider to have spirits residing in it. They avoided any activity which would anger the fortune god, who blesses them. Even while speaking, they were careful in the words they choose to speak so that they may not jinx it. They believe that even choosing the wrong words to speak might invoke misfortunes upon them. The belief that words are powerful, and should be careful employing them in speech was what they were taught and practiced. Their understanding and their approach towards speech and utterances having its own weight, illustrate their close connection with the nature of the world and their relationship with each other.

A person's way of living determines his character and personality. His interactions with the society and his manners show his wisdom and understanding when dealing with society. He learns the custom, tradition from his elders, and learns discipline, knowledge from the interactions with others. The whole fabric of society is built up on the discipline and the wisdom gained from the elders. From his birth till his death, a person follows the tradition which is laid down by the society whether he likes it or not. In fact there is no question of liking or not liking, but the duties which he should perform, are done without fail. Failure of doing such rituals and practices, the people believed that it would invoke the wrath of the spirits, which would shower them with misfortunes upon the person as well as his children and grandchildren. They believe that whatever activities one does in his life would come back to him in the form of blessings or misfortunes, so every person tried to live in such a way that they would not bring misfortunes upon themselves with their activities. A dignified and a good citizen of the community were what each individual strived for, performing what society required from him. In the day to day life of the people, there were certain activities

and behaviors that were considered as taboo. Although it might not directly make the society impose fine on him per se, but these activities were forbidden so that he might not call upon misfortunes to befall on himself, his family, or the society as a whole. At a glance, taboos on such activities might seem like too much stress on superstition, but these taboos on certain activities were made so as to avoid tragedy.

It was taboo for a person to chop woods at night. A man should not chop any wood or bamboos at night. It was a deed which should be done at daytime. But when a person dies, the coffin is prepared no matter what the time it may be. Therefore, chopping wood or cutting bamboo at a time when it was not meant for, signify that some tragedy had taken place. Chopping wood or cutting bamboo after the sun set depicted death in the family.

In the olden days, the people used earthen pots for cooking. The pots in which food were cooked and served, should be treated with care. An angry person, who throws away or breaks the earthen pots, was a grave sin for the community. It was believed that the pots that was used to provide and sustain the life of the people, gets offended by such behavior, and that this offence results in a grave consequence, where an innocent person may fall sick. Unless the person who has committed such kind of behavior goes to the sick person and takes care of him, share wine with him and cleanse away the evil that had defiled him, the sick person does not get well. No community wants an obnoxious person who brings upon misfortune to others, or makes the people suffer because of his bad attitude. Thus, breaking an earthen pot which was in use was a taboo in the household.

The Ao Nagas also engaged in the indigenous form of Cottage industry, which is spinning, dyeing and weaving, where the womenfolk excelled. "It is an industry which

gratifies the need for artistic expression as well as meeting the need of each family for clothing. It is also an important means of preserving folk traditions and legends." (Ao 3)

Women took great care in spinning and weaving, which was not an easy task to perform. It takes time for a woman to spin, and then make a cloth out of the thread. This activity takes patience, and is time consuming. It is a taboo for men not to cut the cloth in anger which his wife or sister or any woman was weaving. It is said that even the cloth feels unhappy with such kind of arrogance, the woman who had sacrificed her time and energy to create the cloth, gets offended and this sadness brings upon the curse of misfortune to an innocent person in the community. Moreover, the "Allem", is a wooden shaft which is used for weaving. It is carved and shaven with precision and care that it becomes smooth. The tool is an important material for weaving which is even inherited from a mother to a daughter, which has great value to them. It was believed that any man, who is touched with this tool, would not marry. Or even if he does get married, he would not beget any children. Therefore, men usually avoided going near a woman when she was weaving. Folklore also depicts the story of a woman who killed many people with this wooden shaft. The art and the practice of weaving in the Ao Naga Society is done by the women folk, and men did not hold them back or do anything to deter them. To earn the wrath of the spirits for mistreating womenfolk or their weaving tools was a great shame on the part of the men, and which earned a bad name in society. Especially in the case of making an innocent person suffer the pain from the curse of misbehavior, society strongly objects to such kind of behavior.

In the early days, wild animals often came to the village and killed domestic animals. It is in the nature of tigers to fix a target and kill, sometimes they even targeted humans. When a man was targeted by a tiger, it was a tradition not to hide from his predator. The man

could not seek help from the other men in the society. He should not hide in his house or run away, but face the tiger. The conflict should be solved between the two. It was believed that when a man is targeted by a tiger, either the tiger be killed by his hands or he would be killed by the tiger. On the other hand, when woman was targeted by a tiger, they took as animal, mostly a goat, and sacrificed it to the tiger. If the tiger kills the goat and takes it away, it would mean that it has stopped targeting the woman. If it does not kill the animal sacrificed to it, it meant that the tiger still sets target on the woman. In that case, she would be made to stay on a higher platform, and the men would wait and kill the tiger upon its arrival. Sometimes the strategy was successful, at times, it was a failure. Such cases were not the same for men. It was his burden alone to face the tiger. When he was targeted by the wild animal, it was taboo for him to get married, to go to warfront, or to collect timbers for house making or any of that sort. If he breaks this taboo, he was surely to be killed by the tiger. Their approach to impending danger and the tradition to prove a man's worth and courage is seen in their behavior with regard to different hardships which they face. A man faces the danger head on, either he succeeds and defeats the enemy, or he gets killed in the process. A woman, on the other hand is protected by the men in the society.

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Chapter-3

SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS OF THE AO NAGAS

3.1 Supernaturalism

The word "supernaturalism" depicts a belief which encompasses supernatural forces. It implies the belief in an external force which is beyond human control that constantly interferes in the lives of the humans. It is simply beyond the laws of nature and cannot be explained. Supernatural beliefs have a major role in the life of the tribal Ao Nagas, for which practices and rituals began to honor these beliefs around them, unseen and unheard, but no doubt believing in their presence.

Since the ancestral Ao Naga society had no written records, they strived on oral traditions which they sustained from the early primitive days for survival of its culture. Folklores, myths and legends played an important role in the community, which paved the way for developing a unique sense of identity, the traditions and their beliefs. "The 'folklore' encompasses an enormous field and a deeply significant dimension of culture. It consists of legends, music, oral, history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories tall tales and customs included in the traditions of a culture." (Aier 13). Folklore is much more than stories of legends and songs, it teaches values, traditions and depicts the culture of the people.

The word "Myth" is derived from the Greek word "Mythos" which means traditional story. Myth explores the idea of creation and origin of things that are presented in the traditional and narrative tales. Myth generally consists of beings which are gods, goddesses, demigods, heroes' and heroines. A myth can depict several meanings involving symbols. "A myth by

definition is 'true' to the extent that it embodies beliefs, concept, and ways of questioning to make sense of the world." (Aier et al 14)

If a story consists of the protagonist with an ordinary human being, it is a legend. Legends are about people and the activities which they perform. The stories mostly are based on facts but it might not be verifiable. The Ao Naga Folktales consists of various stories that shed light on the origin of and creation of things which has been passed down orally by word of mouth through the ages. It holds a sacred and religious historical significance for the people.

The mythical lore reflects the belief of origin of the Ao Nagas, of animate and inanimate creations. The myths with regard to origin include

- a) creation of the Land of Ao Naga
- b) Origin of man
- c) Origin of clans (from animals, birds, plants etc)

The people also had a strong social relationship with the living creatures around them, the animals, insects and plants. Lore depict of man living together with them, even speaking with them or having interactions.

Narrative

One fine day, when Lichaba was molding the landscape for the Ao Nagas, which he was deeply immersed in his work. A water beetle approached him and warned Lichaba about the impending danger, that the enemies were coming. The cockroach disappeared,

and Lichaba, believed the warning given to him. He hurriedly made the rest of the landscape for the Aos and left to fight the enemies.

The narrative mentioned in *The Ao Nagas* (Mills 220) explains how the land of the Ao Nagas was created; it gives a contrast between the geographical landscape of the neighboring state and the Aos. The geographical landscape of the former is of plain area whereas the latter have steep, deep valleys and forest covered hills. It also suggests the threat of external danger posed by neighboring places.

“The relation between the Nagas and the Ahoms and later on the Assamese reveal a curious blend of hostility and friendship following raids and counter raids. From the beginning, the Nagas living near the plains used to submit and pay nominal yearly tribute to the Ahom kings as a show of allegiance. This took the form of slaves, elephant tusks, spear shafts and cotton and hand woven cloth, and they recruited themselves into the Assamese Army. The Ahoms in return granted the Nagas revenue- free lands and fisheries on the understanding that they would not undertake predatory raids on the plains. These lands were called “Naga-khats” in Assamese.” (Ganguli 7)

The relation between the Aos and the Assamese conflict can be seen from the historical point of view (where, since the settlement of the Nagas in their land, the contact with the new groups that occupied was quite constrained as they feared for the subjugation from the Ahoms.) There were frequent disputes between the two groups. In course of time, the Ahoms opened special trade markets, Nagakhats in which even the Nagas participated. It was a kind of unwritten contract between the two groups which was formed out of hostility to guarantee the safety from raids from each other. Although there was still

unresolved hostility between the two groups, it never resulted in the subjugation of one community by another. They inevitably learnt to depend on one another because of geographical conditions and economic reasons.

The relation between the two communities reflects the unrest of the Nagas, always looking over their shoulders, to safeguard their territory from his neighbors. It is seen in the story which depicts the behavior of the Supreme Being in molding the lands hastily to fight off his enemies. Since he is the creator and the protector of his people, he rushes off to save his people from the enemies, finishing the creation of the rest of the land in a rough manner. The myth explains the geographical formation of the Ao Naga Lands as well as the political scenario which existed before. Because of the harsh and deep forests that covered lands of the Ao Nagas, it remained unapproachable from being attacked by enemies to a great extent. The Ao Nagas mythified the environment and the geographical conditions by making connections to its creator, the Supreme Being, Lichaba. The people mythicized their connection with nature and land with the Supreme Being, the history, creation and location, and formed their tribal identity and continuity.

The Ao Naga's belief in the myth of their origin to "Lungterok", the "six stones" is the foundation of everything. The six persons, three male and three females that emerged out of these six stones, are the progenitors, and trace three clans to them (The folklore depicts the origin of the Ao Nagas and it has been believed till date.) In the modern context, it is quite illogical to believe that people literally emerging from stones, but it is a myth that has been accepted and believed as the lore on the origin of the Ao Nagas since the time of the forefathers. The myth of origin is a sacred and historical significance for the people. The AOs also have the folklore on the legendary heroine Longkongla, in which a sub-clan traces its

origin to her son. The myth of origin of the Ao Naga illustrates their unique beliefs and it also embodies their sense of belonging and identity which is attached to the belief of their origin. The myth or origin is the genesis of the Ao Naga folklore, incorporating their history with supernatural elements. Along with the myth of origin, the Aos also have several myths or lore which explain or illustrate how the universe works like the way they do.

From time immemorial, the Ao nagas believed in the supernatural force which created the nature around them, the presence which they could not see nor hear, but which followed them wherever they went. A Supreme Being which was omnipresent controlled the nature according to his own will. The Ao Nagas termed it as “Tsungrem”, a combination of two words, “Tsung” which means “leg” and “rem” meaning “buried” or “buried.” When men tried to follow the footsteps of this Supreme Being, the footprints disappeared halfway, thus the name. The people later referred to the Supreme Being as “Lichaba”. The name “Tsungrem” does not mean only refer to the omnipresent, Supreme Being, but it was attached to any supernatural spirits or forces that manifested in both inanimate and animate objects (which was anything metaphysical). The people, in awe of the supreme creator who controlled everything around Him, started to worship him and practice rituals. Evidently, the belief in the existence of other spirits also came into existence. The existence of essence and spirit in nature made them self aware about their surroundings, to respect and to protect from harm or destruction of the nature. The nature of the spirits, however, was different from one another.

There are lesser spirits or deities which are also associated as Tsungrems in the Ao Naga belief:

Tekong Tsungrem /Mountain Deity

Along Tsungrem/ Stone Deity For instance, the people worshipped the sacred and legendary stones which were believed to have spirits within them. They worshipped, made offerings and sacrifices. Negligence led to chaos and retribution by the stone upon them.

Yongpang Tsungrem/ Spring Diety, Tsuba Tsungrem /well/ spring Diety,

Tzuta Tsungrem/ Stagnant and Lowland Tsungrem.

Kini Tsungrem /House diety.

The people did not buy a land nor build a house without making an offering to the land or site. They occupied or settled down only with the consent of the spirits which resided in nature. It was a way of giving respect to his surroundings to avoid unnatural events which might disturb his well being in case the spirits living in the vicinity gets offended because he did not offer any kind of sacrifice or took its permission.

3.2 Spirits

Benevolent Spirits: The benevolent spirits blessed the people and brought prosperity amongst the people. The people revered and worshipped the spirits with great respect. They offered sacrifices of animals and food to please the spirits, and asked for protection and blessings in return. It was important to maintain a good relationship and follow proper rites and rituals in worshipping the spirits. If it was not done in the right way, the spirits gets offended and do not protect the people. Loss of crops, epidemics, disease, etc takes place. The people worship the spirits out of love and reverence too, and not out of fear alone.

Malevolent spirits: On the other hand, the people also believed in the existence of malevolent spirits that disturbed the peaceful life of the people. When person drowns, falls from a tree or cliff, killed by an animal, or dies at childbirth etc, these deaths are believed to

be caused by such spirits. Destruction to property, ill-fortune, death, tragedy were also believed to be caused by them. The people offer sacrifices to them in order to avoid such kind of misfortunes happening to them, to appease the spirits.

Aonglemla: Apart from the benevolent and malevolent spirits, the Ao Nagas also were also under the belief that certain supernatural visible creature like "Aonglemla" exist. Aonglemla is depicted to be hateful and evil. It is a dwarf-like female creature, with long hair that reaches to the ground and the most peculiar feature is her feet, which supposedly point backwards. She is found in the deep jungle near rivers or streams, marshland etc. It is like a forest spirit, which is feared by hunters and seeing this creature is a bad omen for them. Claims have been made by people who have gone deep into the jungle, that they have seen such a creature. It is also claimed that they sometimes heard the laughter or giggles similar as that of a young girl, or the forest around them shaken ferociously. Thus, the spiritual world of the Ao Nagas includes the belief in a number of gods, benevolent spirits as well as malevolent spirits, and other creature like Aonglemla.

3.3 Superstitious Beliefs

The belief in the spirits that surround them, with their characteristics, also led to the birth of in various superstitions that they believed, and as a result, practices, rituals and ceremonies arose. The people began to fear the power of these spirits since it was evident that human beings are vulnerable to such powers. Although most superstitious beliefs may be illogical or farfetched in the modern context, it occupied an important role in creating a pattern of social practice and rituals which was performed through the ages, and passed down from generation to generation.

When a person goes missing from the village or the fields, he is believed to have been taken away by the spirit of the woods. Sometimes, a man may lose his way in the jungle and no matter how far he walks, comes back to the same spot. In this case, he must cut off a piece of his cloth or hair and tie it on a branch of a tree and then he can find his way home. Illness is most commonly believed to be due to the capture of the person's soul by the spirit. It is the soul which accompanies man, therefore the soul is captured and held prisoner, and if his soul is not restored to him, he would die. A "Medicine man" acts as the mediator between the spirit and the patient, and performs certain ceremonies and offer sacrifices for releasing the soul of the person. The dead are believed to sometimes visit the land of the living. It is a bad sign if the dead appears often in dreams, for it means that the soul of the dead is searching to take them away from the land of the living. There is a belief that if a man has a phenomenal piece of good fortune, he would not live long. The idea is that a good luck is given to him to make up for the shortness of time left to him to enjoy the pleasures of his life.

The absence of modern understanding also led the ancient Ao Nagas to believe that any form of sickness was because of evil influences from spirits. All living beings are prone to sickness, and the early society attributed that their illnesses were caused by the spirits. To cure the sickness which they were suffering from, they not only had to perform rituals, but also sacrifices to the spirits so that it would no longer hurt them. The people approached the diviners and consulted them, and accordingly they sacrificed animals in order to appease the spirits which had caused sickness to the persons. They offered pigs, hen, cock, eggs, goats, dog etc depending on the severity of the sickness to appease the spirits which had caused harm to the victim.

When a person gets sick and does not get well over a long period of time, it is said that the evil spirit has caught his soul. The family of the victim sacrifices animals such as eggs, hen, cock, pig etc until the victim is cured. Such practices often lead to exhausting the economic state of the family sometimes as land and property were sold off to meet the needs of these sacrifices to cure the sickness. At times, when the sickness does not get healed, wherever the victim acquired the sickness, the family would set a cock free in that very place to exchange for the captured soul. Such practices were performed.

The ancient Ao Naga tradition consisted of various ceremonies and rituals which ranged from household ceremonies to collective community. They believed that god or the supernatural forces were the keeper of man's well being, it blessed them and the devil brought misfortunes on them, they worshipped and performed rites to appease the gods, as well as sacrifices to keep misfortunes away.

The Aos also believe in the existence of the spirits of departed souls or ghosts, who died of unnatural deaths, like accident, suicide or murder victims. The spirits are unable to find peace, therefore roam the earth and haunt or linger around their family or loved ones. In such case, the Ao believe that if they perform a simple deed, they can repel the spirits. A vessel or bowl filled with water is kept in front of the head or near the head while sleeping. The belief in the partition between the land of the living and the land of the death, in which the boundary is a river, the spirits of the dead or the ghosts cannot cross over this river. Thus, keeping a vessel or bowl of water near the head, the spirits cannot come over and claim the victim.

3.4 Sacred Stones

Lore with regard to the Sacred stones depict how it appeared in the dreams of men and relayed to them about why and how to worship them. The powers which they possessed were revealed to men that they would grant prosperity and protect them in times of need. The different purpose along with worship was prescribed to them.

JP Mills on Sacred stones give the narrative of the lore :

“changchanglong used to be at war with Kibulung, the big boulder in the Lhota country between Lakhuti and Akuk (called by the Deolong Footnote by JP Mills). One day Kibulung came and killed one of Changchanglung’s men and took his head. Changchanglung was in his fields at the time, but he hurried home when he heard the alarm. With such speed did he chase Kibulung that he caught him at Longpha, and forced him to drop the head. Kibulung succeeded in getting away, but the head which immediately turned into a stone, was taken charge of by Longphalong, another stone, who reverently laid a flat stone over it as a man would lay a cloth over a corpse...”
(Mill 216, 217)

“There is the Mangchilung (Corpse Eating Stone) near Merangkong. Its name arose as follows. Yimakong, an extinct village near Merangkong, was at war with the Konyak village at Tangsa. The latter came raiding across Dikhu, took two heads and bolted. Yimakong turned out to look for the bodies, which they expected to be near the Mangchilung. They found, however, that the corpse had disappeared, while the boulder was red with blood. Thus, they knew it must have eaten them. Offerings are made to the stone to bring fine weather.” (Mill 218)

The lore presents the nature of the stones and the attributes to the manifested spirit in the stone, and that they were also acquainted with one another, in good terms as well as bad terms. The various nature of the Spirit stones which was worshipped by the people depict shared characteristics, even though the spirit Stones were very much different from one another. They interacted with men on several occasions. These Sacred Stones were believed to be endowed with supernatural powers as well.

The power to transform nature according to its wishes: The sacred stones which protected a village would help the village from impending danger. Lores depict the nature becoming harsh towards an attacker to a village where a sacred stone was protecting them. Leaves would sting. The vines and roots would become snakes etc. The stone god creates illusions and manipulates the nature around them, causing confusion and chaos for the people.

The weather is one of the natural calamities which are very much influenced by the Stone God. The sacred stones are believed to manipulate the weather, bringing storm, rain sunshine, wind thunder and so on depending on the rites and rituals performed, or not performed. When a stone is disturbed or the rituals is incorrect and rejected, the stone lashes out its wrath on the people, with heavy rain and storms as punishments. The punishment was fatal and immediate.

The sacred stones were worshipped because of a reason. The vicinity where the stones were located had to be kept at bay from trespassers and transgressors. Any immoral activity done in the location of those stones, for instance when the trespassers gather wild produce, immoral activities or even engage in loose talks were disapproved by the stones, Sacred stones were believed to punish those people. The greedy gatherer may find that his basket

never gets full. Or the stone god appears in the dreams of the people and scolds them for destroying its surroundings. Sometimes the people while returning home, they would get lost in the way even if it was a familiar path. They would walk round in circles and reach the same place again and again. Some may even become sick.

People made offerings, before they went on an expedition for headhunting. They sought the blessings of sacred Stones which they worshipped. Sometimes, if the Stone god was pleased with them, it would go before the people and insure a successful expedition, resulting in lots of heads for the village. The people believed that their prowess, their bravery and the energy which they possessed were because of the power of their Stone God that they worshipped, who helps them in their warfare. With regard to the Stone Gods, it has been illustrated the importance of the people attaching supernatural powers to stones in almost all the villages of the Ao Nagas, "There is no single Ao Village even after a hundred and sixty years of Christianity, which has done away with the extraordinary power of the stone fetish." {Imchen 36)

Apart from the sacred stones and legendary stones which had spirits in them, there is also another category of stones which the people venerated. These stones were believed to be endowed with divine supernatural powers that gave them peculiar characteristics (more defined as charm stones). The people either desired such charm stones or removed them from the perimeter of the village according to the stone's characteristics.

Another type of stones called Arenlung or Prosperity stone is believed to bring blessings or luck to the owner who possesses it. The stone is shiny black in color, and water appears in the stone as if it was sweating when it was held lightly. People often made

offerings to them and these stones were usually kept in granaries, since it was believed that having these stones would double the grains.

Of all the charm stones, the Awalung stone is supposedly the most powerful one, because of its rarity. The owner of this stone was deemed to acquire great wealth in no time, as well as attract what he desired. The stone could be found only from the possession of snakes, aonglematsu, bulbuls, or in foxes' den.

Kirunglung/House Burning stones were considered dangerous to the village. If houses were burnt down frequently, it was believed to have been brought about by these stones. The elders therefore gather and search for these stones, and it would usually be found in the vicinity where the fire broke out. They would remove such stones from the village.

Tsungilung/ Lightning axe stone are axe-like thunderstones which are found in places where the lightning strikes. The people believed that preserving such stones would prevent lightning from striking again in the surroundings. It was also kept as an object of blessings.

Nuktsulung /Tear Stones always deemed to be wet, and it brought misery, tears, heartbreak, or sorrow to those around it (The people believed that these stones brought tears to the persons living in close proximity). To avoid such tragedy, these stones were removed from the village.

Mangoterong lung /Head Tree stone, these particular stones were deposited under the head trees. When two villages made peace with each other, they would bring and exchange a stone, and lay in under their respective head trees , vowing that until the day when the stone break down and diminish, they would no longer wage war against each other. Such were the vows made upon the stone.

Kitsunglung is another stone which was also considered dangerous, that brought sickness upon the people. Existence of such stones nearby the house or village would bring various kinds of sickness to the village. They were identified and removed as far away as possible from the village to avoid sickness.

3.5 LONGTSULAR (ANGELIC BEINGS)

The concept of heavenly beings was not a new idea for the Aos as it was believed that heavenly beings, spirits, man, animals etc all lived together in harmony in the early times. Lore depict of “kotaklar/ Longtsular” which translates to Angels that visited the land of the living. They are beings who “came down from above” illustrating that which descended from heavens. The legendary story of the Heroine, Longkongla, highlights how the lord of heavens pulled her up towards the sky, to heaven. The concept of heaven is different from the Christian concept of heaven, since the people believed that the dead enters the Land of the Dead, and not heaven. The Angels that visit the land of the living, are depicted to be beautiful and so man is always mesmerized by the beauty of these heavenly beings, the interaction between man and these heavenly beings also occurs through marriage. Lore also depicts how *longtsular*, came down from heavens and plucked the flowers at night in the garden which was near the Ariju. The men decided to keep watch and find out the persons that came at night. They waited and realized that it was *longtsular*, the men were entranced by the beauty that they tried to catch them but they disappeared. They could get a hold of only one, after which the eldest of the ariju men married her. Angels or heavenly beings visiting natural world was no new affair. The divine intervention was both destructive and positive which influenced a huge part of their lives.

3.6 Thyrianthrophy, Belief of Tiger-Soul (Tigerman/ Tigerwoman)

According to Encyclopedia, The term "Thyrianthrophy" is derived from the Greek word "Ther" which means "wild animal" or "beasts" , and "anthropos" meaning "human" It was used to refer to animal transformation folklore of Europe as early as 1901. The term zoanthropy is also used. The term Thyrianthrophy is used to describe the phenomenon where some human had the mythical ability to transform into animals, they could shape shift. Mythology often describes some people with the ability to shape shift in folklores, their physical appearance is altered. Their human form is changed to an animal. Lycanthrophy is one of the best known forms of thyrianthrophy. Lycanthrophy is the ability of man that could transform into wolf, werewolf. It has been claimed about the tribal of the Nagas "The belief in the existence of Tigermen i.e man with the power of turning themselves into Tigers." (Gait 250) While it is stated that men being able to transform into Tigers, depicting a physical transformation, the concept of the Ao Naga tigerman is akin towards the soul of a man residing in a tiger. Thus, the actual physical transformation does not take place but the souls are connected, as

"According to this belief, the tiger, which embodies the man or woman's spirit is no different in appearance from other tigers in the forest except that the particular animal has a strong sense of affinity and attachment to the person whose soul or spirit he is supposed to embody." (Ao 73, 74)

The myth of the tiger souls existing in men and women has been believed to exist from the earliest belief of the Ao Naga, with regard to relationship of man with animals. The belief in the Tiger soul is more towards the concept of a person possessing more than one soul, and in which one of this soul resides in an animal. The system of belief in the Tiger soul

constructs an important part in the early society. A tigerman, also known as medicine man, and they played an important role in the society. He was the chief consultant or advisor of the community. The tigersmen were believed to possess supernatural powers that give them the ability to do or see things beyond what an ordinary person could see or know. He is able to cure ailments, perform rituals and conclude by reading the omens to worship or make sacrifices to deities; he could control the natural calamities at his will. Such persons could also predict the future in general, like the season's harvest, or if the hunting expedition was going to be a success or not, or the death of a person.

The person and the tiger who shared his soul with also depicted similar traits when an injury or pain is inflicted. If the tiger stumbles, the man also stumbles in a similar fashion. If there is any kind pain or injury inflicted on the tiger, the man also feels the pain, in the same part where the tiger gets injured. If the tiger gets trapped, then the man also begins to behave in a certain way, like he was also trapped. He scratches the walls, growls and stomps on the ground, with the same behavior as that of an animal trapped in a cage. Thus, it is the family members who help him, and also the tiger to break out from the cage. It is believed that if the man can jump over certain obstacles in the house, that is in one go, then his tiger-soul can also break out from the cage. Unless there is a way to free the tiger from his cage, the man would continue to display the behavior until the tiger is freed or dies. It is also believed that the tiger, if it dies, it is replaced by another tiger. The man does not die, but then the tiger soul can be replaced only till six times, after which the man also dies.

The similar behavior exhibited by the man and his tiger soul is not just at the time of crisis but at normal times as well, if the tiger is supposedly hunting for prey, then similar

behavior is seen with the man as well. The man could also taste blood in his mouth, or sometimes furs or shreds of meat are also found in the man's teeth.

Although the Tigermen played an important role in society, there were also negative aspects that were attached to him possessing supernatural powers. Such persons were often held responsible for unexplainable tragedies in the village. The people, revered and respected such persons with supernatural powers but also feared them, since they possessed powers which could hurt them. The powers of the Tiger-soul gave the person abilities beyond the capabilities of man, but it also binds him with the burden of its powers which he could not ever be free except by death. Both the man and tiger counterpart, fought for their survival.

The tigermen and tigerwomen had their own social group and they gather from time to time. Normal tigers are not allowed. In this way, they demarcate their territories and do not interfere in another's area. Thus it can be concluded that the tigermen and women knew about each other.

The belief in acquiring such supernatural powers of Tiger soul is they are inherited either through paternal or maternal line, but it does not include multiple family members. Moreover, generation gap can also be found in the line of succession. The Tiger soul can also be acquired if a person is willing to have, by application to those that possess such Tiger souls. But a person that acquire by application is different from those that are preordained with the tiger souls. For the one who acquires a tiger soul from another person, the tiger soul will be transferred only when the person dies. The ones who were destined to have the Tiger soul, upon the death of the tiger, a replacement is gained until it reaches its limit, but the ones that acquire a Tiger soul, no replacement is possible for him. Folklores and myths

for which the Ao Nagas see deep significance regarding their history, custom and beliefs, tell of how at one time, when there was no clear cut between darkness and light, animals, man and spirits lived together in understanding, of how kinship was established amongst them. Folklores also depict of how women fell in love with trees. There are love stories between women and tigers, of men capturing celestial women and marrying them. The intrinsic connotation with regard to these lore, depict the nature of these non-human beings having relationship with humans. The tiger comes to the women in the form of a man, the tree spirit also takes the form of a man, and the celestial females come in the form of women. It embodies that perhaps human beings can have souls which reside in other physical form apart from human beings, or that spirits, animals can also have the souls similar to humans. Thus the whole nature of the Tiger-soul belief, although is obscure in its origin, the myth is not seen as an implausible lore, rather it encompasses an important part of the supernatural domain of the Ao Naga beliefs. The world of such beliefs exists in the Ao Naga society which is beyond ordinary people's experience. The supernatural power possessed by the tigerman/Tigerwoman is a kind of connection that links the natural world and the metaphysical world.

Another kind of connection between the natural world and the spiritual world can be seen in the tribal spiritual leaders or Shamans. Shamanism is based on animism; they are believed to be skilled in harnessing animals as their allies and also look after the community. They go in some trance of altered consciousness to speak to the spirits. Shamans had considerable influences in the society since the people flocked to him when they needed help with regard to activities or anything which had to do with the spirit world.

3.7 Dreams and Divine Revelations

Dreams, in the Ao Naga society is not just part of sleep as modern psychology puts it, but it is a divine revelation just as it was in the Ancient Old Testament. It interpreted one's fate, fortune and his future. They depended on dreams to provide an omen for their expeditions, and decisions are made according to the dreams of a person. Especially with the community attaching a strong essence to names, the people believe that a dream that has to do with some distinct names is an omen. The people believed that dreaming of one of the Ao Naga village which is called "Mangmetong," that translates to "dead bodies erected in a row", is supposedly a bad omen. Even dreams which include visiting the village or the name itself is considered to be a harbinger of ill fortune or grave danger for the dreamer. Lore also depicts gods speaking to man through dreams. The story of "Kupza Lung", a boulder in Kubza, a village of Ao Naga depicts how the boulder speaks to Tsatiba, a warrior and a soothsayer, who tried to dig out the stone, on which he stumbled every time he walked out of his house. The stone god revealed Himself to Tsatiba, in his dream, after he dozed off exhausted after trying to dig out the stone, which he failed to do so. The stone god spoke to him that his efforts is useless since he would never be able to dig out as one of its leg rested at Jangjanglung, and the other at kibulung. Thus it told Tsatiba to worship him instead, that the deity would bless him, with good fortune and prosperity.

The concept of dreams and the interpretations of the dreams is not just another form of superstition but it was a phenomenon which controlled their activities. The people depended on the most convincing dream to make decisions to have a better outcome, and in some ways, these ancient superstitions also controlled the people in certain activities and also saved the people from common mistakes and helped them to live in caution of any ill fortune or tragedy that might happen to them.

The Ao Naga society laid great emphasis in living an honest life (with truth and just) and it was even believed that a person's honesty was revealed in his graveyard. The manner in which the grave falls is an omen for the people, which is called as "leptsü". The Ao Nagas did not bury the dead but the corpse was kept in a platform with stakes to support the corpse which was smoked and dried. They kept a slow fire burning to reduce the odor, as well as to keep away unwanted pests. They offered daily meals to the dead and no one would utter any word of complaint lest the dead curse them. The corpse was kept in such a way that when the bamboo rotted the lower limbs reached the ground first. If the head reached the ground first, it was believed that the person lived a dishonest life before his death. The way in which the grave fell to the ground depicted the man's character. Thus the Ao Naga also had a common phrase used, "leptsu chirep ajia lidi" which translates to "let us see your grave falling."

Supernatural beliefs in the Ao Naga society have a great influence over the religious practice of the people. Supernaturalism and the belief of supernatural forces is not just a base for religion in the Ao Naga society, but it influences the whole life of the people. The daily life of the people, activities depend on the beliefs, superstitions which govern their lives, as well as metaphysical forces which they may not worship, but which plays an important role in affecting the nature around them. It is not just the existence of the supernatural elements which is felt and acknowledged, but even humans endowed with supernatural powers, whom they do not worship are recognized for their relations with the spirit world.

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Chapter 4

AO ANCESTRAL RELIGION AS THE BASIS OF TABOOS AND SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS

According to Ao understanding, the concept of religion is known as "Yimsu", it is a combination of two words, "yim" which means village, and "su" which means shawl. It literally translate to "village shawl" it implies that the religion for the Ao village is something which covered the whole village, the whole of its inhabitants.

The common belief in with regard to religion of the Ao Naga is considered to be a kind of Animism. Animism is the belief that natural objects and phenomena are attributed to soul and spirits. The Ao Naga religion before the arrival of Christianity, were deemed to be animist. The fundamental concept of tribal religion is the spirit or soul existing within objects, which can be widely seen in the religion of the Ao Nagas, the word "animism" is the closest to define the tribal religion of the Ao Nagas.

4.1 Animistic Belief

Animism is the belief that spirits inhabit non-human entities, thus it become spiritual beings. It depicts the idea of soul or spirit. Animism itself is a religion of its own. The word "animism" is derived from the Latin word "anima" meaning 'rebirth. It is one of the oldest beliefs of human civilization. In certain animistic cultures, the people worshipped plants and trees as a source of strength, beauty and life. The belief that all living beings had soul had an important place. The spirit of Supreme Being, spirit of faith, spirit of god is inevitably found in all religion. Many individual religious practices have been considered as animist, more in terms of something out of religious by the world religion, which repercussion to exclude

indigenous religion from the definition of religion. For the indigenous people, what they practiced day to day life is religion, like the way the world religion understand themselves as religion.

In animist societies, ritual is considered essential to win the favor of the spirits that ward off other malevolent spirits and provide food, shelter, and fertility. The traditional religion of the AOs has been defined as "animism" with their beliefs in the supernatural beings and spirits, but an in depth study signify that it cannot simply be classified under "animism". Although the Ao Naga society believed in the existence of soul or spirit, it did not imply that the people worshipped all the inanimate objects which existed around them. It can be understood that the concept of animism is the closest of a religion which can illustrate the worship system of the Ao Nagas. Thus, it can be said that since their religion were animistic in nature. They created a pattern of social customs and rituals in relation to worshipping gods, ancestral souls, celebration festivals and performing ceremonies. It led them to establish and give impetus to moral conduct and values such as honesty sincerity, purity, truthfulness towards their prosperity of their community life.

4.2 Totemism

Another belief relating to the close connection with nature is Totemism, which is the belief in the close connection or kinship of a group of people with a particular being, an animal plant, or bird. The entity or the totem is said to have interactions with the certain group or kin, and serve as their emblem or symbol. Certain clans of the Ao Naga associate animals or bird, which they worship and revere the totemic symbol, and pay respects to it. They keep their relationship with the totemic symbol as a sacred and religious convention.

‘A Totem, therefore, signifies a close relationship, blood kinship, as between members of a family.’ (Longchar 44)

It is a taboo for some totemic clans to marry as it amounts to incest. Any disobedience resulted to excommunication from the village. Clans that have a kinship to the animal or bird that serves as a totemic symbol, they not take the meat of the sacred animal. It is also taboo for the the women and the children of the ozukum clan to consume the meat of the Great Hornbill as it is believed that their ancestor conceived son from a feather of this bird.

“The Wozukamr clan are fined if they claim origin from stones at all, as they are descended from an old woman who was weaving when a hornbill’s tail feather fell on her from a bird flying over.” (Hutton 45)

Some clans look upon taking the meat of their sacred animal as strengthening the relationship between the totem animal and the clan. The practice of totem can also be seen as a way of maintaining relationship between the community the environment. The restriction of these symbolic animals is also a way of protecting the animals from being exploited, hunted by the villages.

4.3 Supreme Being

The Ao Nagas always had a notion of a Supreme Being which controlled and influenced the nature around them. They believed that they were not alone in the world, and depend on the Supreme Being. The people revered and worshipped the Supreme Being, and perform rites and rituals to honour as well as seek blessings from him. The belief in the existence of the Supreme Being is evident in the myth, folklore and the legends which have been passed down by word of mouth.

Narrative

After the emergence at Lungterok, the people wandered from place to place searching for fodder, and place to reside. Man came to a realization that he was not alone on earth, that there was something higher and greater than him. He felt the presence though he could not see it. It was omnipresent; it followed him wherever he went. Man realized that he could not escape from the watchful eyes of the Supreme Being. Therefore, he started to converse with It, wherever man went, he told the presence that he was going there, and acknowledged the presence, which was greater than him, The creator of earth and heavens, and referred as the Supreme Being, "Lijaba." Gradually, with the passage of time, man trusted Lijaba and took him to his family and they lived together. Wherever he went, he could feel the presence of Lijaba so he never felt lonely. Whenever he cooked or prepared something, he would cut out a small portion and keep it above the fireplace, and told Lijaba to have it first. The people liked the idea of calling upon Lijaba and offering food to Him, thus the practice began.

With Lijaba in the family, man had nothing to fear and lived in prosperity for many seasons. After some time, there was sickness in the family, and he thought that it was because of Lijaba living with the family. Disheartened, he packed some pots and went to the tzuin, (the first room of the Ao traditional house where several things are kept, like the rice pounding stand (traditional mortar), water, etc) and told Lijaba to stay there, and he had prepared all the stuffs He would need. Sadly, even without Lijaba living with them,

the sickness still continued. Man thought that separating with Lijaba would cure the sickness, so he took a hen, and called Lijaba to accompany him. He plucked the feathers of the hen, threw it away outside the village, and told Lijaba that it would be better for him to stay there. After reaching the gates of the village, he killed the hen, spilled the blood as a way of seeing off Lijaba, cooked the hen and ate it. He thought that since Lijaba was no more with the family, he thought that the sickness would be cured. To his disappointment, the sickness still continued. he was very disheartened, the next day, he took a rooster to the gates of the village, and ranted on Lijaba, telling Him that the sickness still continued because Lijaba roamed and lived together with man. he continued further, telling Lijaba not to follow man, or roam with him, instead live and reside in the gorge of the steep and hilly places, in the trees and boulders, and lakes be his pond. He cursed Lijaba and then cut the head of the rooster and spilled the blood of the rooster. He then proceeded to cook the meat, but unlike before, he did not offer any meat to Lijaba and had it all by himself. Observing the behaviour of man, Lijaba was offended by the man's words. He told the man that since they were chasing Him away, anytime the humans need him, they must bring an offering to him in a woven bamboo basket, and threw a bamboo basket towards the amchi (phrynium pubinerve, it is a leave which the Ao use to wrap food, as well as use like plates. It is used in rituals, and considered as sacred) groove. The man picked up the basket, and looked around, but Lichaba had already left. He followed Lichaba by tracing the latter's footstep, but the footsteps disappeared after some distance. He was shocked by the ordeal, and ran back towards the village and informed the village. The villagers named Lichaba as "Tsongrem" which is combination of two words, "Tsong" which means "Leg" and "rem" which means "buried" since footprints disappeared on the surface of the earth, as if it was buried by the earth.

The narrative is from *Myth of the Hills* (Jamir et.al 1) which illustrates the origin of the word “Tsongrem” which is god, as believed by the Ao Nagas. It also explains why the belief in essence or presence of spirits of Boulders, Lakes and Rocks which is worshipped by the people, which exist in almost all the Ao Naga village. The lore presents and explains several aspects with regard to the belief system, the belief in the existence of the Supreme Being, the origin of the word “Tsongrem” which is god and also the giving of offerings to those gods.

The Ao Nagas were rich in its belief system, as they performed various rituals and ceremonies to appease the spirits which they believed in. It can be understood that the practices and tradition played an important role in the lives of the people. They connected their wellbeing with the spirits around them. They tried to live in harmony and worship the spirits around them so that they would not offend and bring the wrath upon themselves. Although the fear of misfortune influenced them to practice rites and rituals, it does not mean that the people lived in constant fear of the spirits, but it was more of reverence and respect for the higher forces that existed alongside them. The traditional belief system is influenced by the Supernatural understanding which they believe to exist around them, their interaction directly or indirectly through the nature and the universe.

4.4 Religious Ceremonies and Worship

“Ceremonies, rites and sacrifices are the carriers of tradition and medium of religious expression. Ceremonies make individual conscious of themselves as a group affirming their belief in common symbols” (Imchen 10). The religious belief touched all parts of their lives, the individual and the community as a whole. The worship and the practices involved the

people in their daily live and the nature around them. Their main source of livelihood was agriculture, and the forest around them. It was important for them to protect the nature and also to revere the gods, since they needed a good harvest for their survival. There were religious ceremonies and rituals performed for the sake of agriculture as well as to protect the nature around them. The worship and the rituals were carried out by the Chief Priest, who observed the waxing and waning of the moon to decide on the chosen date. Any calamities or sudden tragedy which happened on the chosen date, the rituals were postponed to a later day. Religion and ceremonies unite the people in the belief of the existence of a higher being, which controlled the nature around them. Polytheism is the belief and worship of many gods. It can be traced back to the ancient times in Egypt when the people attributed that gods take the form of objects in the nature, which they worshipped as gods, which included trees, sacred herbs, cattle animals and man-animal hybrids.

The indigenous practice and tradition of the Ao Naga depict its close connection with the religious nature that they had observed through various activities in the ceremonies and rituals. The celebration of Moatsu and Tsungremmong is not just singing and dancing, but it is a celebration, where the people seek the blessings with good harvest as well as thanking the gods. It depicts the nature of the people believing in something greater than the people itself that controls the nature around them and influence their lives. The individual life as well as the society includes living in the right manner so that they do not anger or offend the spirits around them to acquire misfortunes upon them. Almost all the villages associated a particular stone, boulder, lake etc, which was endowed with spirit that they worshipped, sought blessings and protection from harm as well as enemies since the practice of

headhunting was rampant. In most times it were the elders who performed the rites and rituals, sacrificing animals to appease or seek protection from the gods that they believed in. In almost all the occasion, a sacrifice to these spirits was done to seek the guidance and protection in their lives.

Stone worship has been existing since the early days, man were impressed with its appearance on the surface of the earth. The Ao Naga illustrates a close relationship with nature, especially with stones since time immemorial. It was not just the worship of stones in particular but their sense of identity and tradition is deeply rooted in the stones. The Ao Naga myth of origin “Lungterok” is literally translated as “Six Stones.” The stones represent an ethereal spirit which they objectify to worship within their moral code and ethical value system. They worshipped the stones according to the power manifested in the stone spirit, which was interpreted by “Arasener”, the diviners who explained the people on how to worship, or what sacrifices to make to these stone spirits to appease them. Some spirits that inhabit the stones were very powerful that it was not possible to worship in front of the stone, or even go near it, so the rituals were done near the vicinity of the stones.

The Stones which they worshipped were differentiated as male or female according to their appearances. For instance, it was believed to have the ability to speak and move according to its wish. The names of the stones that were worshipped were given according to its attributes as well.

It is believed that god speaks to man through dreams. There were incidents relating to the stones, after which the villagers started worshipping the stones. The gods blessed the people, helped and cared for them, blessed and protected them, and even punished them if they did not follow the right rituals or offended them. It was a supernatural power which

guided the people, and not an entity talking with the conscience of man. Amongst the stones which was worshipped, the “Jangjanglung” is perceived to be the most powerful and fierce stone which was worshipped. The name itself stood for Justice and truth, it chased away many other spirits, and anyone who tried to deceive, lie or insult him was punished. It depicts the nature of man in the early communal life where people had strong sense of Justice, and belief in the power of truth. Purity, truth, honesty were the moral etiquette which they strived for. They greatly valued virtue, friendship and brotherhood at its highest. The gods in the stones they worshipped were not unapproachable, as it was believed that the spirits conversed with them, blessed and protected them, as well as exchange gifts with the forefathers. The people believed and worshipped the stones with reverence and respect for its supernatural powers. Of course they feared unseen circumstances or misfortunes befalling upon them, but it was their faith in the spirits or their destiny that unless they offend any spirits or lived the wrong way, misfortunes would not prevail upon them.

The “Tsunngrem” in the Boulders that the people worshipped had significant characteristics which the people made rituals accordingly for worship so that they do not offend the Stones unknowingly. The belief in the manifestation of spirits within the Stones that they chose to worship depict the sacred presence of these Stones in the lives of the people, their concern towards their own well being , and to respect the nature around them. The concept that the people would rouse storm upon the offender if the stones were disturbed was a common idea which was believed by the people. Although they also believed that by performing rituals with much respect, the stone spirit would provide rain to the village in moderation.

To perform a ritual in worshipping a sacred stone was not an easy matter. It was done by the village elder, or clan elder. The village was informed before performing a ritual in the

worship of a sacred stone, and all the villagers on that day had to observe genna. It was done in strict and orderly form so that no mishap should happen. If anything goes wrong then there would be immediate consequences for the individual as well as the village. The sacrifices which were brought to them had to be heavy, and spotless, no impure animals were sacrificed. The tools and the animals which were sacrificed, none of the items were taken back to the village. A part of the rituals involved killing of an animal, where bits of the sacrifice were offered to the god, and the rest were eaten by those that made the offering. If there were any leftovers, it was not taken back to their home but it was just left on the ground. No one was even allowed to touch the remaining part of the sacrifice. Any items and materials used for rituals were left and it was not taken back to the village. The strictness of the ritual is so much that so that it is a taboo to take back any sacrifice back home. There was no case or indication of greed or gluttony when it came to making or performing sacrifice in honouring the Stone gods.

The Ao Nagas were deeply rooted in the religious belief and the traditions with regard to the worship and the rituals that they perform. The belief in the supernatural force since the time immemorial has been illustrated in the lores and the myths that they have perceived and passed down for ages. It is not just the Supreme Being which they call "Tsungrem", but they refer as "Tsungrem" any unconventional or supernatural forces, not just to one, but to different gods. They also believe in spirits and deities that are manifested in rocks, trees, lakes and certain areas. These spirits residing in nature around them was visible through the physical form that they manifested in, but the Supernatural forces which were invisible to them, but present in all walks of their life, were at the apex of their religious worships. The different pantheons of the Ao Naga Gods are:

Lijaba: It is the creator of earth and everything in it. He is the sustainer of all the living creatures which inhabit the earth. He blesses the people, and is considered the most powerful. He resides everywhere, in earth and the heavens. Lichaba is the greatest influence upon everything both on the earth and the sky, and is responsible for natural calamities. He blessed the people as well as punished them according to their actions and attitude. The Aos performed sacrifices and prayers to Lijaba throughout the year.

"Lichaba Kulemmong" (the Worship of Lichaba): The Aos believe that Lichaba is the creator of everything, and the universe is under His control. He can manipulate the natural calamities as well as human lives. He is worshipped with much respect and honour, thus the "Lichabamong" is observed three days after the celebration of Tsungremmong. Only the priest observe this ceremony, and with great caution and reverence. He worships in the hope that the Tsungremmong which was celebrated a few days ago was acceptable in his eyes, and that he is pleased with the people. No matter how successful the Tsungremmong was, the priest follows this ritual, with the prayers that, if there were any lapse in the tsungremmong which was celebrated earlier, Lichaba would accept the compensation offerings and sacrifice and not send natural calamities which might destroy the crops.

Aningsungba/Longtitsungba : It is the God of sky. "Aning" in the Ao dialect means the "sky." He the lord who has control over the atmospheric conditions, he brings storm, rain thunder, winds etc. He is the one that controls the sky.

Meyutsungba: He is the lord of judgment. He is god of death, and gives judgment to the souls that have crossed over to the land of the death. He judges according to the deeds that men had done while he was living on earth.

Tiarba/ Tiyaba (Pre-Destiner): He is the god of providence; he is regarded as the being that is responsible for man's fortune. He brings blessings for the person, protects him from danger as well as destroys a man's life. The people also speak when a tragedy has happened, that the fate and destiny is not on his side or that "Tiarba" does not favour them. The people did not have any specific offerings or ceremony for him, but from birth till death, the people offered sacrifices and murmured prayers so that the God of Providence would favour him and bring him happiness and good fortune. The religious ceremonies always involved sacrificing animals since the wealth of a man was counted in terms of live stock which he reared and the paddy fields which he owned. The people celebrated festivals on religious grounds to appease the gods and kept certain taboos.

Moatsumong: The Moatsu mong is celebrated in summer, which was actually observed for six days. Animals like pigs and cows were killed. They also prepared local brews for the celebration. The people cleaned and cleared the house and streets and heavy preparation were done for this celebration. They would celebrate the festival with folk dance, singing, making merry in the village. The young men and the women would exchange gifts. They would enjoy and sing various love songs throughout the night. It is not just making merry and eating and dancing, but the celebration is done as an invocation to the god for blessings. Health and agricultural prosperity were the main blessings asked of god. After the six days of celebration, the seventh day is reserved for genna, and the high priest would sacrifice a pig at the village altars as a sign of cleansing the whole village including the paddies, even the path leading to the fields. However in the modern society, the number of days set for celebrating Moatsu has been reduced to three days, but during the early days, the six days

of celebration and one day reserved for genna was how the Ao Naga celebrated the Moatsu festival.

Ceremony for cleansing of epidemic: This is also called as "Wara merokdok mong" (Imchen 51). This ceremony is done in order to drive away or cleanse any kind of epidemics which might break out in the village. It is done in the beginning of the year, to avoid sickness or any kind of disease which may break out. On this day, the whole village observed "genna" the family worship is done by the household priest.

Well/River Worship: The Ao Naga believe in the existence of spirits who reside in water bodies, a female deity who protects and is the guardian of the well or river. She would punish the people if they did not offer proper sacrifices to her. Sometimes the river would overflow and destroy the crops, sometimes monsoon will not come because it was believed that she was not fed well. She would even devour human beings a wrath on the humans to suffer. Therefore proper sacrifices had to be made in order to keep the members of the society as well as the crops safe, since they mainly depended on the mode of agriculture for their survival. A day is set aside to have a ceremony dedicated to this god, and the rest of the villagers observe genna on that day.

The intense awareness of living and dying prevails in all religion; the primal knowledge that needs to be focused in all religion to define religion is to understand that religion is a belief in the spirit of a being. Every individual expressed his religion with the way he behaved, with his actions and reactions. It was expressed in the way he communicated with his fellow community as well as the nature around him, through his observation and performing rites and rituals. Traditional religion and Individual life and the community were inseparable. The people practiced religion in oral tradition, without any written scripture,

they had their wisdom and knowledge of the spiritual performance in oral form. The concept of God and evolved as time moved on.

The god of Judgment is supposed to lord over the land of the Dead, called as "Meyutsungba." It is this god which passes over the judgments of a person according to his deeds while he was living in the Land of the living. The judgments would take place in the courtyard of Meyutsungba, where a simple test was performed to determine whether the person was a truthful man or not. They would be asked to throw a spear at a tree. A man of truth would be able to hit the tree, but a liar would not be able to hit the target no matter how many times he tried. For the women, they use a weaving tool, which is called the "allem", a wooden shaft. The ones that miss the targets are supposedly bad and the ones that hit the target are good, and accordingly each is sent to the land of the Dead through different paths. The good ones pass by without any problem, but the bad ones pass with great difficulty. With every step, they are prickled and clawed, on top of it, they even have to carry burdens on their backs, which also becomes heavier and heavier as they walk. Even after reaching their destination, they live in suffering and pain because of the wrongdoings which they committed when they were living in the Land of the Living.

4.6 The Concept of Land of The Dead, or life after Death

The Ao Nagas were very strong in its traditional Belief system, they also believe in the concept of the land of dead, which is called as "Asulima/Asuyim." After man lives on earth for a period of time, he dies, his body withers away but his soul does not die, it does not live in the land of the living either, he journeys to the land of the dead. There were several theories with regard to the location of the land of the dead, according to one version, the land of the dead is supposed to be underground, where all the death goes down and start a

new living. Another version illustrates the land of the dead as somewhere in the sky, where all souls live together. In another popular version,

"Designates a mountain beyond the Wokha Hills (Lotha Area) called Dipu Tenem as the land of the Dead. The Ao claim that on a clear day, white strips can be seen at the base of this mountain from the Ao area, which they say, are the garments of the dead, which they discard after washing themselves in a stream nearby before entering the Land of the Dead. " (Ao 60,61)

Although there may be different variations on the location of the land of the Dead, there is no doubt a unanimous agreement in the belief in the land of the Dead, wherever it may be. The connection to driving away deceased spirits from the land of the living by keeping a vessel filled with water is also connected to the land of the Dead, as it is believed that the dead have to cross over a river, which is called as "Longritsu", which is a traditional belief that the deceased souls wash in this stream before they step into the land of the Dead. When they dip their hands into this stream, their physical bodies, which is invisible to the people of the living, strips away from their soul, and they are left with a transparent appearance which is grotesque to them. They cry bitter tears, thus the name "Longritsu," bitter regret and nostalgia for the loved ones they had left behind. The transformation of their appearance is the validation that they no more exist in the Land of the living nor can they ever go back to their earlier state, but only left with the choice to move on to the land of the Dead, which is their new abode. The stream is the boundary which divides the land of the living and the land of the dead. If a soul reaches the stream but do not cross over the stream, it is believed that the person comes back to life. It is only when a soul touches the water in the stream and cross over, that he no longer belong to the land of the Living.

4.7 Tribal Religion

Religion is the channel between man and unseen supernatural powers, in which the rituals and ceremony is the mode of communication. Rituals include prayers offerings, blood sacrifice, trance, oaths, pilgrimage, etc. Religion also helps in keeping the understanding and the need to keep a deity, god, or anything they valued, satisfies and balance the belief.

Tribal Religion, in general,

"There is a sense of spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living natural objects, spirits and gods, the individual, clan, the tribe, animals, plants minerals and man form an unbroken hierarchal unity of spiritual force. The self of man is not an individual self, but an extended universal self present and actively participating in all the parts of totality." (Thomas 429)

It has also been explained "Religious faith became a common faith, common practice and common celebration." (Singh 34).The tribal religion is based on myths which illustrates how the Supreme Being works and reveal himself through his creation. The religious myths helped them to shape and create their identities as well as their social and cultural life. Tribal religion is basically a religion where individual and community life were woven together closely, the religious ethos created in the oral history protected them and cultivated social interactions amongst them which they preserved though the ages. The faith in unseen powers governed their social religious, spiritual as well as their political life. The belief in the superior powers which governed their lives, gave them the thought that these

powers were capable of doing anything, both good and bad. They realized the close proximity of these spirits with them and began to adopt the form of worship to keep the spirits happy so that it would bless them and not curse them or give them misfortunes. Such beliefs in the unseen powers compelled the people to live in decency as well as set up social and religious rituals, ceremonies to worship the unseen forces. It was practiced to keep them safe, from the unseen forces which had powers beyond them, as it was their well being they had to look out for, since these supernatural forces were all around them.

The religious customs which was established in the early Ao Naga society was community oriented. A religious ceremony or festival included all the members of the society, everyone in the community had their own roles to play in the celebration of a festival or ceremony. Anything that happened to an individual affected all the society. This is also one of the reasons why genna is observed in the community for any calamity that happens to a person in a village. The whole village comes to a standstill, they spend the day in seclusion, their works are paused, even their day to day life chores are kept aside and they spend a day or days as prescribed to them, in seclusion to cleanse away the sin or the evil aura that had defiled the village. The singing, dancing etc in the celebration of a festival includes all the members of the society, within the age groups or the community as a whole. This way of living also gives a sense of belonging to all the individuals in a society.

The people worshipped the natural elements of life such as trees, wells, fate, stones etc, and when they felt the presence and intervention of those gods that they worshipped, they continued to do so till the advent of Christianity, in the early 20th century. Of all the elemental aspects that the Ao Naga society worshipped, the Stones or boulders occupy a

central part in the myths, legends and folklore, which the people has elaborated with religious and sacred significance to it.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The focus of study is on the taboos and the supernatural beliefs which illustrate the cultural and religious structure that has governed the lives of the Ao Naga people, especially during ancestral times. The Ao Naga tribe has been recognized as one of the major tribes, with unique traditions and practices which have been passed down from generations by word of mouth. With no written records, tradition was the only link with the past and the present. The land of the Aos, filled with a unique pattern of tradition, culture and religious practices, had their own constructed society which was closely knitted and living in close relationship with nature. Traditions gave an identity to the people, a sense of belonging and wove the society to develop a sense of togetherness and belonging for every member of the society.

The past and the present were intertwined and the oral transmission of their traditions, folklores and tales about almost everything, explained their way of life and their practices. The oral transmission of their practices and beliefs were not just a way of teaching the young children how to live and survive but these spoken words were the mode of communication that prepositioned the practices of the people towards moral and ethical values.

The folklores illustrate the origin of the people and how the world came into existence, and the Ao Naga Tribe is distinct in its myth of origin, where “Lungterok” has been regarded as a sacred and religious factor that has sustained the people since the ancient times. From the settlement at Chungliyimti, the lifestyle and the structure of establishing the political system, free from external control, depicts a self-dependent and cultured way of thinking. Although primitive the tribe constructed for itself a sound and working political administration based on democracy that governed them, which was based on the sanctity and morality of their words and not any code of written laws or codified constitutional amendment. The people had high moral values on brotherhood, fraternity and ethics. The legislative, executive and the judiciary functioned accordingly in a proper manner where no sign of tyranny was witnessed in the political structure. The governing unit ruled according to the set of years allotted, and successors took over the predecessors in course of time. Usurping or manipulation of political power was unknown to the ancient Ao Naga Society. For an administration governed by customs and code of laws without any framed or written constitution, the Ao Naga society’s spirit of democracy and the governance employed by the people outlines their belief in justice and equality, as well as the importance of moral code of conduct, taboos and supernatural beliefs. The democratic spirit of the Ao Naga Governing system lays emphasis on the people who chose the right person and the leaders to rule them and guide them.

The system of “Arichu” and “Tsuki”, the dormitories for young unmarried men and women, were not just an indigenous learning institute for the young people but it also served as a place to mingle between young men and women, to court, for possible marriage. Without any formal learning institutes like schools, the arichu and the Tsuki played an

important role in maintaining the oral traditions. It was the place where young people learned the folk life of the community, and everything they learned, they passed down to the younger generations. The arrival of Christianity and westernization has completely discarded the institution of Arichu and Tsuki, which was one of the unique cultural features of the Ao Nagas that had social and religious significance in the ancient Ao Naga Society. The Log Drum which was kept just nearby the Arichu, had sacred connotation, the pride of the village, which was actually worshipped as a deity. The making of the village log drum was not just an art of carving done and displayed, it was a community work which was performed religiously and with reverence for the important role it played. It was a cultural heritage for the village, which they maintained with veneration.

From the smallest unit of the society which is the family to the whole fabric of the community, the people were taught to live by certain etiquettes and manners which reflected their decency and high moral values. The system of marriage, which was solely based on clan exogamy, is still followed and no one is above these set of rules laid down since the time of the progenitors.

An individual life, as well as society was bound by customary laws in oral mode, which they followed and practiced. The taboos and the gennas which followed were an important factor in the social construct. The taboo on same clan marriage was also a way for the people to know about their genealogy and history of the clan, and the values attached to the kinship of the clan members. There were also other restrictions apart from belonging to the same clan, on the basis of their understanding of past conflicts, incompatibility and experiences so as to avoid tragic outcome. The taboos imposed on different aspects in the life of the people made them aware about their identity, the position and their status in society. Their value of

honesty and living a truthful life made them to follow the moral code of conduct and not commit any kind of offence towards other people. They did not sport any kind of shawls or ornaments which they were not entitled to wear, because they had to earn it, their efforts and their worth to wear something had to be proven.

The Ao Naga society's approach to the beginning of a new life or bringing a new life into the world also had to be pure and free from any bad omen, which is why they do not give a name which was attached with unnatural death of the previous person with the same name. The precautions that a woman has to take, and not just her but the whole family depicts the value attached for the family to receive new blessings from the pre-destiner. The importance of staying away from sin, or cleansing oneself because of the bad energy that had defiled the individual or society, is another important factor of the Ao Naga society that was practiced. The act of abandoning all their belongings, even their heirlooms, possessions, house, killing off all their livestock, and living in the jungle as a way of sanctification, depicts their mindset towards living a clean life more than their interest in worldly possessions. The community's way of following a genna incase of any individual breaking the moral code of conduct or laws set up in the customary laws, highlight the close connection that the people had in the society. It was a way for the community to safeguard themselves so that no misfortunes should befall on the people as a consequence.

The belief in the mythological elements, taboo and the supernatural forces brought about traditional beliefs that greatly influenced the central understanding of the social order, which has been passed down for generations and such practices have been governing the lives of the people for ages. The people in the ancient society lived in primitive times, yet their social structure and the sense of community and their welfare were well developed.

The primitive people lived and worked by the signs of the natural world, keenly conscious of the spirits and deities. Their intervention in the lives of the people was nothing strange to them. It also taught the values of ecological and environmental well-being even though the threat on nature and its resources were not as large as the modern period. Their awareness of environmental concern largely stems from their awe and respect for nature. Lore, myths, taboos and legends have a strong connection with nature as well as their philosophies, value system and religious beliefs. The Ao Nagas attach their origin and the cosmos with supernatural elements in the folklore. It embodies their sense of closeness with one another as well as their sense of identity. The folklore also teach about the way of the universe, employing nature, animals and the humans and their relationship with each other to illustrate how and why the world works as it does.

The primitive man felt the spirits around him in the natural world, and these spirits lived, instructed as well as interacted with him. The socio-cultural and religious lives of the people were centered on the rituals and taboos, gennas and sanctifications done to honour and appease the spirits which they worshipped. The early people of the Ao Naga society strived to live as a model citizen. He had to be truthful in his ways and sayings, since oaths and swearing upon earth and stones supposedly reveal the untruthful ones and punished them. Men were required to live without greed, wantonly destroying the nature for one's own selfish gains led to misfortunes and guilt. It was a traditional lesson on man's respect towards nature as well as sharing between one another. Man could not strip the produce in the jungle near the abode of deities or gods to avoid their wrath and punishment for being greedy. They even avoided taking pebbles, speak ill or defecate in the jungle nearby the sacred stones which were believed to have spirits manifested in them. The stone worship

which was followed by the people did not mean that all the stones were respected and worshipped, but there were some stones which had striking features and characteristics that set them apart from the normal and ordinary stones, which the people venerated and worshipped. It was not just the respect towards the stone, but also the nature around it. In a way, the worship of stones also made the people protect the environment and nature. The manifestation of spirits in stones were not the only supernatural beliefs which encompassed the natural world, but the benevolent spirits and malevolent spirits resided in nature, in the lakes, rivers, mountains, etc. the belief in such manifestation of spirits in the nature around man led him to understand the importance of preserving the nature around them, and to live in caution and not destroy unnecessarily, lest they invoke the anger of the spirits.

There is the belief in the Land of the dead which exist for the dead, as the natural world is for the living, which is divided by a river. The belief in such metaphysical world also influenced the people to believe that man was not the only existing or central being in the universe. Nature works in mysterious ways and man cannot begin to comprehend the divine power it holds in the universe. The belief in the existence of the Tigerman/Tigerwoman constructs the supernatural force endowed in men, and men possessing divine powers, apart from the capabilities of ordinary people. In modern social context, it might be near to impossible to believe such instances of a man having his soul reside in a tiger, yet the ancient Ao Society records of such persons with divine powers, that even had a major role in leading a village, the people consulted such persons in times of trouble and they provided assistance whenever the village needs them. Religion and Culture in the Ao Naga society cannot be separated, it is interdependent on one another. Today, modern education and development

had brought an immense change which is apparent in the lifestyle and culture shift as seen in the Ao Naga Society.

Culture is a strong hallmark of identity for the Ao Society with its unique value system. However, the westernization and modernization of the society have paved the way for disintegration of traditional practices and value system. The study of folklore, myths and legends however, has shown the way to reconstruct and revive the traditional knowledge in modern times. The religion of the Ao Nagas deemed to be animistic actually had its own specific pattern of worship, which the people followed with reverence and veneration. Every society has its own way of following its own tradition, and the religion for the Ao Nagas were more akin to cultural system. The culture and religion in the Context of Ao Naga society is interrelated, cultural heritage was attached to religious ceremonies and pattern of worship. For instance, the Log Drum is a cultural heritage, the pride of the village, which also illustrates the artistic and aesthetic value of the Ao Naga society, which is again worshipped by the people as a deity. Festivals like Tsungremmong, Moatsu, Lijabammong are all social events with religious connotation.

The act of redemption and reconciliation between god and man was unknown in the Ao Naga society. With no knowledge of merciful forgiveness, the people's concepts were either living in virtue and receive blessings or live in wickedness and receive retribution. The people valued a life of honesty and decency so that he would not be punished; they made offerings and sacrifices to appease the deities and spirits. The ancient Ao Naga religion was devoid of the power of redemption and forgiveness, which is one of the reasons why Christianity which offered salvation to believers penetrated the Ao Naga religion.

The advent of Christianity has had a major effect in the belief system of the Ao Nagas. The ancient Ao culture which was governed by ceremonies, rituals and beliefs has totally been cast off, and new faith had taken over the way of life of the people. With the advent of Christianity, western education was also brought to the land of the AOs, in which the institutions of the Arijū and the tsuki system were discarded. The new faith of Christianity brought by the American missionaries has had a tremendous impact on the people. With the advantages and the modernization it brought, it also viewed the Ao Naga religion and the traditional practices which they performed as barbaric, and did away with the practices and traditions which had been central feature in the culture and the identity of the Ao Nagas. Their religious and cultural values were threatened, family values, norms and social structure were given new directions.

The arrival of Christianity had a deep impact in all the walks of life of the traditional Ao Naga society, which supplanted many of the cultural and traditional beliefs and practices of the Ao Naga society and brought westernization and modern education to the people. Many cultural features have been cast off along with the old faith, and the new faith was embraced. The war form of headhunting was staunchly opposed and was discontinued. Likewise, Tsuki and Arijū, Log Drum, etc were all discarded as it did not agree with the new faith. Similarly, the use of idioms, proverbs and even mother tongue have seen a gradual decline in modern society due to the influence of christianization, modernization and westernization. The unique features of the Ao Naga Culture, is reflected in the myths taboos and supernatural beliefs and folklores, and the oral traditions that has passed down through generations. Although many traditional features are no more in practice and have either been lost or is on the verge of extinction, the study on Ao Naga folk literature has had its

share in reviving the old flame and the importance of preserving such unique culture before it is completely lost. Hence this dissertation has been undertaken as a way forward towards this urgent matter of concern.

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