

Contextualizing Magic Realism in the folklore of the Ao Nagas

(Thesis Submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of requirements for
award of Ph.D degree in English)

By

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Zulusenla

Research Scholar

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Chapter - 1

Introduction

The Aos form a major tribe among the sixteen recognized tribes of Nagaland who live on the ridges of hills corresponding to six ranges (Longchar 2002:112). It is believed that the ancestors of the Aos emerged out of the earth from 'Lungterok' and this is the fountainhead of everything in the Ao-Naga folklore. The 'Lungterok', meaning six stones, were three were males and three females. The first site where the Aos established their village was at *Chungliymti* where they lived for a considerable length of time until they dispersed to different villages and ranges. The myth of 'Lungterok' is so pivotal to the Ao world view that it's oral traditions, folk songs, folk narratives and all other customary and cultural practices are traced to 'Lungterok' and the ancient village called Chungliymti which was established by the first people there. (ibid.,78-111)

"Folklore represents the archaic thought of mankind, their feelings and worldview. It articulates a culture and provides a part of the historical picture of the bygone ages." (Sen 2007: vii).

The Orality of the Ao's

Orality is a complex and tricky phenomenon that builds in its own ways through the mode of expression and transmission of the folklore of a tribe giving birth to narratology and telling of stories. In any ancient pre-literate tribal societies, oral traditions played the dominant role in disseminating the chronicles of history, knowledge and wisdom. For years, the Aos depended on the Oral tradition which has been the only means of passing down the historical, cultural and social milieu of the unwritten lives of the tribe from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Ao Naga history and culture flourished without any written script of their own. Oral narratives – folktales, myths and legends proverbial sayings, folk songs, animal tales, rituals, customs and traditions have been an integral part of the Ao's. Orality has been a very strong and vital form that creates oral literature, expresses and preserves lives of the people in the myriad stories and history that has been unheard.

As such, even in the era of Christianity, attempts at conserving the cultural tradition and practices are made by the community especially in the villages. “To bury the past,” J.P Mills says in *The Ao Nagas*, “is the tendency of the semi-educated generation which is growing up.” Folklore is a vernacular expression of beliefs, customs and tradition that identify a particular group of people. Many folktales have been recorded as explanations of particular custom and beliefs of the Aos but there are still many left that needs to find a place (Mills 1973:307). Any oral narrative of tradition, culture, history, origin and migration of people (tribe, clan and individual), formation of village, events of war, peace, festivals and so on are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the other. Folklore, therefore, has been and is the keeper of the tribe’s history and identity. Folk culture explicates moral and spiritual wisdom. Story-telling and oral narratives dealing with a variety of folklore have been an integral part of the Ao society.

The history of the Aos with their cultural heritage, customs and traditions flourished without a written script or document of their own. The last three to four decades of the twentieth century has witnessed various cultural and traditional changes among the Aos yet they had an effective medium of communication and records that have been conserved for many centuries through the oral tradition which has a deeply-rooted foundation. The legacy that the forefathers left behind are the rich cultural past with its folklore, fables, legends and tales which are still told in the hearths of the Ao homes.

The oral tradition of the Ao-Naga folklife, which is also the fabric of the social lives of the people, is the backbone of the tribe. It is observed that the Ao-Naga community is a distinct folklore community. As such, the folklore of the tribe, with its rich heritage, has much scope for interpretations other than documentation and translations.

Different forms of Folklore of the Ao’s

The most common of Ao folklore takes the form of oral transmission. The Ao’s share a common platform with regard to any type of folk culture with only slight variations in the observation of certain rites and cultural practices pertaining to specific

village. Folktales that are narrated by the village elders and passed down to the next generation are not confined only to a particular village. The same tale can be found in the other villages as well. Though narratives on settlement and formation of village differ from one village to the other, the rest of the folklore remains seemingly similar or same. Folk songs also play a pivotal role as a form in the folk culture of the Ao's. Almost all the oral narratives are strewn with folk songs. There are several songs sung by lovers, among friends and peer groups, between villages, songs of war (war cry), songs sung for partings (death, broken friendships, divorce etc.), songs sung in the fields, while collecting firewood, green vegetation in the jungle and also while fetching water from the village pond.

Myths and legends are a part and parcel of the oral tradition of any tribal society. Among the Aos also there are a number of myths surrounding the myth of the origin of the tribe, origin of the world and many other legends that are believed to be true stories. Each range of the Ao region comprises of a number of villages with its own myths and legends. It is important to concentrate on the ranges of the region namely- Langpangkong Range, Ongpangkong Range, Asetkong Range, Japukong Range, Changkikong Range and Tsürangkong Range which are famous for their mythical and legendary narratives for deeper interpretation of the mythical tradition of the Nagas and the Ao-nagas in particular to throw new light on their origins and migratory patterns through the ages. Though the myths and legends and most of the folktales that are narrated orally maybe seemingly same, the villages under each range have certain specific tale which tells of the men and women and culture of that village. Certain feats of heroism achieved by the menfolk, observance of rituals, ceremonial worship of deities and gods, taboos and superstition and the number of days for observing genna may differ from one village to the other. There are certain parts of the region which are famous for folktales such as Animal Tales, Tall Tales, Supernatural Tales, Folk Riddles, Proverbs, poetry, songs, lullabies etc. Thus, by far and large topographically, the six ranges of the Ao tribe have a rich reservoir of folklore that needs to be studied under various literary modes and patterns.

Material culture is another important form of the Ao folklore. Material culture is that physical aspect of the social reality that defines the culture of a particular group of

people by their physical objects, resources and spaces. This includes tools, weapons, utensils, crafts, clothes, ornaments, art, houses, objects of worship and properties. The Ao's were very artistic people. There are a number of traditional crafts exhibiting high poetic quality which serves as metaphors of the Ao-Naga lifestyle. Apart from the material culture that are commonly found across all cultures, one of the material culture specific to the Ao's is the men's warrior shawl called 'Tsüngkotepsü' (shawl specifically worn by Ao men only) which is the most characteristic cloths of the tribe. The shawl has a white median with the imprint of various pictures depicting various meanings e.g., mithun representing wealth, elephant and tiger sybolising valour, human head representing head-hunting and others like dao, spear, shields and cock. On either side of the white median is a horizontal band of red and black. This is an exclusive male showl and it is a taboo to be worn by women. In the days of the lore, it was exclusively worn only by those who has taken heads in war or offered mithun sacrifice which is a feast of merit performed in the Ao society by a rich man.

Weaving was another form of material culture and all womenfolk, old and young, knew the art of weaving. The cloths worn by both men and women were hand weaved using several tools. Clay pottery was another art of material culture. Yarn was made mostly from cotton and silkworn by spinning. Changki village was more exceptionally well known for this art among the Ao's. Temsula Ao in her short story 'The Pot maker' from the collection of stories *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* gives an elaborate explanation on the art of pot making. Menfolk were engaged at the Morung's in bamboo, wood, stone and metal crafts. It is in the morung's that they learn the techniques of making houses and all that is deemed necessary for an Ao man to learn as the head of the family. Crafts such as baskets of all kinds and mats, wooden cots, wooden seats, spoons, spears, daos, nets, cages for hunting and making local fire hearths were chiefly taught and learned by all Ao men.

Origin of Magic Realism and its Definition

'Magic Realism' and 'Magical realism are two terms that are often misunderstood and misinterpreted. While there is a subtle difference in the meaning underneath, on the

surface they appear synonymous. “Magic realism refers to a technique of art and painting that attempts to produce the mysterious elements of everyday life as clear representation of reality. Magical realism is a literary narrative mode, employed by many writers in their texts in order to present extraordinary occurrences as ordinary and mundane affairs, by taking help of magical elements” (Chandrima 2013:19).

Magical realism began as a reaction to Expressionism which Franz Roh referred to as “Post-Expressionism”. There are a number of reasons that led to the development of magic realism. There was a feeling of disillusionment and disgust in the post-war Germany which arose from the defeat in the war. The art of Northern Europe had been dominated by an extreme emotionalism and experimentation for almost two decades. Thus, there was a distraction seen in the art work of this new age which depicted, not the expressionistic ideas but moved more towards the direction of abstract by adding dreamlike qualities and marvelous elements in their paintings and art while the subject remained within the realm of the real. This is where the main difference with surrealism lies. Surrealism, which was launched as a concerted artistic movement in France by André Breton, ensured the unhampered operation of the ‘deep mind’ and exploited the material of dreams, of states of mind between sleep and waking, and of natural or drug-induced hallucinations (Abrams 1993:390-391).

The history of magical realism spans around eight decades which is neatly divided into three periods. The first period is set in Germany in the 1920s; the second period concerns the Central America in the 1940s and the third period, beginning in 1955 centers around Latin America and it continues till today. The root of the emergence of the term ‘magic realism’ goes as far back to Novalis, a German poet and philosopher, in 1798. According to Novalis, this term refers to a ‘true prophet’ or an ‘isolated being’ who cannot be bound by ordinary human limitations and therefore a ‘magical idealist’ or a ‘magical realist’.

Though the concept of magical realism’ by Novalis could not be developed further, in 1925 the term was again used by Franz Roh, another German and an art critic, to refer to paintings that demonstrate an altered reality. He used the phrase *magic realism* in his essay titled, “Naeh Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten

europaischen Malerei” (Post-expressionism, Magic Realism: Problems of the Most Recent European Painting). Through the term, Roh referred to a form of painting that

“differs greatly from its predecessor (expressionist art) in its attention to accurate detail, a smooth photograph- like clarity of picture and the representation of the mystical non-material aspects of reality” (Bowers, 9).

With reference to magic realism he also writes:

“We recognize this world, although now - not only because we have emerged from a dream - we look on it with new eyes . . .” (Zamora and Faris 17-18)

Magic Realism coined by Franz Roh in 1925 to describe –

“...a magic insight into reality. For Roh it was synonymous with the post expressionistic paintings (1920-1925) because it revealed the mysterious elements hidden in everyday reality. Magic realism expressed mans astonishment before the wonders of the real world”

Roh continues, “This calm admiration of the magic of being, of the discovery that things already have their own faces, means that the ground in which the most diverse ideas in the world can take root has been re-conquered - albeit in new ways” (ibid.,20).

The term magic realism was ushered in during the later part of post modernism. After establishing itself in Europe, the magical realistic mode of narration moved to Latin America and ultimately became a global phenomenon in the hands of the French-Russian Cuban Alejo Carpentier who traced the history of magic realism from post-expressionist point of view. He supported Roh’s view of magic as residing within everyday objective reality. He initiated a distinctly Latin American form of magic realism, coining the phrase ‘*lo realismo maravilloso*’ (marvellous realism). Carpentier strongly felt that marvelous real was the most suitable mode of writing to capture the marvelous American reality elaborately capturing the history of Latin America with its racial and cultural mixture. Carpentier argued:

“In Latin America, the fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images.

Rather, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvellous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography and politics- not by manifesto." (*On the Marvelous Real in America*, 75)

The 1940s and 1950s witnessed the Latin American Boom, with the emergence of a considerable number of magical realist writings from the Latin American soil. Many Latin American critics stated that Latin America was the birthplace of magical realism and the rich cultural heritage of that region facilitated in the emergence of several magical realist writers who perfected the genre to a great extent. However, they credited Arturo Uslar- Pietri, a Venezuelan writer for bringing magical realism to Latin America and not to Alejo Carpentier because he exposed a line of continuation between magic realism and 'vanguardia' modernist experimental writings of Latin America (Bowers 15). However, if we delve deeper into the issue, while Uslar- Pietri's work was confined to only the Spanish- speaking readers of Latin America, Carpentier's introduced his *lo realismo maravilloso Americano* specifically in the context of Latin America and his concept even greatly influenced Gabriel Garcia Marquez to write his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) which is regarded as the finest specimen of magical realist novel. It is a wonderfully marvelous comic novel full of the most unexpected and delightful incidents and characters with an extraordinary uplifting experience. There is something magical about the world that is described in the novel. Garcia Marquez maintains that realism is a kind of pre-meditated literature that offers a static and exclusive vision of the reality. Marquez suggests that the magic text is more realistic than the realist text itself.

Magical Realism defined in Glossary of Literary terms, Eleventh Edition by M H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham -

"....a sharply etched *realism* in representing ordinary event and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales"

A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Third Edition defines *Magical Realism* as, "The mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or

strange skillful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories expressionistic and even surrealistic descriptions, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable.”

Magic realist writers portrays everyday life in a realistic style with an intermingling of that which is strange and mysterious with marvelous and fantastic qualities and elements with the subject matter remaining within the realm of the possible. There is a wonderful play of imagination, exaggeration, hyperbole and metaphorical representations of life. These magic elements are explained like normal occurrences that are presented in a straight forward manner allowing the ‘real’ and the ‘fantastic’ to be accepted in the same stream of thought.

Characteristics of Magic Realism

Magic Realism embodies characteristic traits describing incidences that are fantastic in themselves in which one experiences life as a fantasy rather than a historical fact. Life in magic realist texts is neither of idealization nor romantic subjectivity. The experiences of life are presented as shrouded in mystery but not innately gothic. There is also the blend of the binary opposites of the supernatural and the natural, real and the unreal, dream and reality. In magical realism the presence of the fantastical element cannot be explained by the conscious. It is not based on any logic or reasoning but the magical things do really happen. Another characteristic is the non-existence of a dichotomy between the two worlds – the world of the supernatural and the world of reality. In the magic realists’ text’s, these worlds are represented by the world of the dead and the world of the living. The interplay of these two worlds is powerfully brought out in the novel ‘Beloved’ by Toni Morrison. In the fictional works of literature, writers employed legends, myths and folklore which help by giving form to the dream like sequences in the plot construction of the text. The magic realists’ texts may be purely or partly fictional with exaggerated event’s subtly blending the difficult facts with magic which is found in the indigenous story telling. Folklores are narratives in their raw

unpolished form that has not undergone any manipulation and they tell of a period and people that existed in reality.

Magic Realism as a narrative technique in folklore

‘Magic realism’, ‘magical realism’ and ‘marvelous realism’ are terms that are debated upon in the west as it is difficult to come to a concrete definition for each of them. Nevertheless, they are applicable to art, literature, films and television (Bowers 2005:1). Folklore is the collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and by example rather than in written form. “It includes legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes: pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants and animals; customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings.” (Abrams 1993: 70). The Ao-Naga folklore is rich with the elements of the supernatural, of spirits and deity and tales of man and spirits living together presenting the ordinary etched with dreamlike fantastical qualities which in modern term is called *Magical Realism*. There is a wonderful play of imagination, exaggeration, hyperbole and metaphorical representations in the Ao Naga folklore. At the same time, their folklore is traditionally and explicitly factual that places them in the very canon of magical realism. The purpose and intention of most magical realists’ text is to find and enroute or escape from that which is mundane or ordinary day-to-day real life by incorporating elements of the magical, the fantastic or the marvelous. In the folklore of any folk culture, the magical, the fantastic and the marvelous are inherent as part of their day-to-day real life. It was a part of not apart from their real life accepted into the folds of their traditional and cultural life.

Magic and Realism as seen in the Ao Folklore – an overview

The dichotomy of magic and realism in the Ao-Naga folktales and the commingling of the supernatural with the real are vividly seen in almost all the stories that has been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Ao-

Naga folklores exhibit surreal elements which, at that time and place, were real to the people of the region. The rich oral tradition of the Aos has open up many avenues for interpretation and re-interpretation of the folklores within the different literary genres.

A critical study on the folklore, both verbal and non-verbal, gives a huge responsibility of the need to preserve the rich tradition in the face of modernity and westernization. The challenges that the oral tradition has to face in the post-modern age are another area of interest that needs to be explored.

Much of the written document, materials and articles on the folklores of the tribes are translated works by various academicians, researchers and writers. Apart from these translated works, there is also the need to explore the folklore further on the literary aspects in its various forms and modes. Literature has thousands of threads which can be woven into the beautiful piece of art with each thread having its own importance in any creative work of art. Of late, there has been a growing interest among the new generation of writers to revive their culture by exploring into the deep recesses of the oral narratives of the tribe. “For most of human history ‘literature’, both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written --- heard, not read. So fairy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our worlds” writes Angela Carter. Of late, in many of the documentations and translated works of the tribe it has been observed that in most of the folklore of the Aos, the presence of the magical and real permeates through and through.

Significance of the study

The research helped in recognizing and understanding the role and importance of preserving the rich cultural heritage of the tribe through the oral tradition. In the process of collecting verbal and non-verbal materials, the research explored not only the Ao-Naga oral tradition but represent an integrated and holistic approach of the Nagas as a whole. It threw light on the necessity of restoring the negligence and disappearance of oral tradition in the face of modernization while establishing the distinctiveness and identity among of the community. It explored the various literary aspects in the folklore of the tribe

bringing out the identifiable artistic vibrancy and forms of literature within the folklore. While bringing out the typology of the oral narrative, the study also explored the extent of its scope and tangibility.

Aims and Objectives

One of the aims of the research was to study the role of folktales in the oral tradition of the different villages of the Ao-Naga tribe. It explored and analyzed the status of various forms of tribal and folk art & culture. Another objective was to analyze the kind of proverbial sayings used in their oral narratives and to what extent it was used. Different villages of the Ao-Naga region were identified and the various aspects of similarities and dissimilarities in their folklores were compared. The research studied the intensity of acceptance and popularity of the folklores within the area of study as well as the adjoining areas. The wider scope of folklore as an academic discipline that is beyond documentation and translation was exhaustively examined. Oral tradition and folklore as a narrative mode where magical as well as realistic elements are merged together to foreground a hidden reality was examined thoroughly in the select narratives that fell under the category of magical realism.

Methodology

The nature of the study was based on the primary and secondary sources. This study is to give a view and evaluate the sources collected and draw a conclusion from the collected folktales. The methodology of the study is primarily qualitative with a few cases where quantitative data collections were also done.

Primary sources

The primary source of the study is the folklore gathered from the field work. The primary sources are on the information based on the oral interviews, personal observation and local sources. Extensive interviews and discussions were done with the local community members and stakeholders of traditional knowledge and wisdoms which form the bases of this research work. Since the Ao-Naga culture is rooted in their folklore

traditions transmitted orally throughout the generations the study focuses on the oral narratives as the major source of study. Oral narratives are highly dynamic genres embodying the essence of culture; how it is being experienced, represented and transmitted to the other generations.

The oral narratives broadly include folk narratives (myths, legends, proverbial sayings, folktales etc) Meta narratives (narratives on narratives), personal narratives, life experience narratives and auto ethnographies of the informants in the field. Men, women and children from different socio-economic statuses and age groups were the primary sources in the field study.

The material culture associated in the folklife of the Ao-Nagas was also collected from the dwellings of the people. The other folklore genres of the community were also collected through verbal narrtion. The field work was done in and around the villages of the six ranges of the Ao region with certain restrictions by some villages for the sake of protecting their history lest it gets distorted by outsiders.

Secondary Sources

The secondary sources were based on literary sources like books, publications, documents, journals records and official information. Besides books, journals, magazines, etc. unpublished works of researchers found in reliable academic websites as e-resources were also consulted for supplementing the thesis. The published or unpublished written data related to the topic of research constitutes the secondary source material. Besides the research works that were already analyzed above in the survey of literature, administrative records of the British colonial writings and Indian government and village reports from the source material were also consulted.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that:

The Ao-Nagas oral tradition might be fast disappearing due to the emergence of modernity and the influence of the western culture. The larger population of the Ao-

Nagas migrating from the villages (urban) and permanently settling in the towns (rural) reveals change and discontinuity of the orality of the folklores. Much of the origin, history, traditions etc of the Ao-Nagas are reflected in their oral narratives. Morung, which was the only site for disseminating this knowledge, has now become monumental sites. If written documents are not preserved by the literate, the identity of the people might become very grave. Many collections of folktales of the tribes has been produced over the past few years in the written form but not much has been done on the various literary aspects and forms of these collected folktales. Ao-Naga Folklore is strewn with elements of Magical Realism which has not yet been tapped in the written form. The study of the oral narratives of the tribe is also a study on the other literary aspects of literature.

Review of literature

J. P. Mills in his book *The Ao Nagas* gives a detailed account of the habitat and affinities of the tribe, their dress, ornaments, and appearance; their villages, agriculture methods of production, and the technology of crude tools; their religious and social customs and ceremonies. The book is divided into six parts. *Part I* gives an introduction to the grouping of the people and the myth or story of the origin of the tribe and their migration from Chungliyimti where they first settled to the other parts of the region. The chapter also throws light on the Phratries and the division of clans, their appearance with physical description, the culture of tattooing, the dresses that the tribe uses, the ornaments used to decorate themselves and the weapons used for domestic purpose as well as for hunting.

Part II deals with the domestic life of the tribe. Here Mills gives an authentic report of the village set up and its defense mechanism. The chapter at large discusses the construction of the house, rituals and ceremonies of the tribe, the festivals, games and music and medicine. Weaving and spinning, pot-making and dyeing are described as the main occupation of the women and the main occupation of men are described as wood work, basket making hunting and fishing. Sowing, planting and harvesting are done by both men and women.

Part III is about the laws and customs of the tribe. Mills gives a pen picture of how the age-group system plays a very important role in the Ao social set-up. The 'Morung' which is the male dormitory and the only place of learning for boys is also described in detail. Inheritance of the sons is also a very important aspect of the customs where the family property is divided among the male siblings. The chapter also elaborates on war and head-hunting, adoption and slavery and also the position of women.

Part IV focuses purely on the religion of the tribe. Mills describes the animistic religion of the tribe by giving details of the deities and spirits, of the sacred stones the tribes worshipped, of Lijaba (the god of creation), of the soul and life after death, of witchcraft and the ceremonial official. Mills also talks about the worship of the dead various beliefs surrounding dreams, omens, animals and natural phenomena. *Part V* is a collection of folk tales and folk songs of the tribes which was the only tradition of passing down by word of mouth the history of the people. *Part VI* is on the language and vocabulary of the tribe as they spoke two different dialects ie, Mongsen and Chungli.

The Naga Society by Dr. Chandrika Singh throws light on the penetration of the western Baptist missionaries and their cordial relations with the animist Nagas and the spread of the new faith and establishments of churches and schools. These historic events changed the traditional outlook of the indigenous people. The author also maintains the Naga culture as very old and stable and therefore the arrival of the new culture could not exterminate it though it had its share of influence. At the same time under the influence of modernization the Naga society has lost its collective character and moved fast towards individualism. This transition of Naga society from traditionalist to modernity carries numerous histories which need thorough investigation close observation and critical interpretation. The book, therefore, dwells on topics such as the Anglo-Naga relations, the role of Christian missionaries, education and its role in the Naga society, the political dimensions and the socio-economic structure of the people.

Emergence of Nagaland: Socio-economic and Political Transformation and the Future by Hokishe Sema is a fascinating account of the Origin of the Nagas, their chivalrous dispositions, social customs and their deep rootedness in animism. The ambitious British and the ambivalent missionaries' inroad into this animistic world

during the early nineteenth century is narrated. The book also serves as the inside story of the underground movement and the democratic traditions of the peace process in Nagaland.

A Pilgrimage to the Naga by Milada Ganguli is an explicit account of the author's acquaintance and experience among the various Naga tribes inhabiting the steep ridged and wild forested region nestled between Assam and Burma. The narrative is based on the authors' collection of knowledge of the land and its people with its history, culture and its problems and progress. The authors opines about how, until the Independence, very little was known about the Nagas in the country except that they were savage tribesman who practiced the cult of head-hunting.

The *Ao-Naga Oral Traditions* by Temsula Ao is written from the perspective of an insider. The book is very informative because it brings the authors cultural sensitiveness in weaving the diverse thread of Ao-Naga oral-cultural practices that goes beyond colonial constructions. The book talks about the tribes' belief system – *Animism* and their belief in a number of spirits called Tsungrem (God). The book is strewn with myths and legends of the origin of the tribe and a number of tales about the people, their deities and spirits.

Ancient Ao-Naga Religion and Culture by Panger Imchen gives a clear projection of socio-cultural beliefs and practices in traditional society until the emergence of Christianity and its impact on Ao Naga religion, culture and society. The book is also a critical observation of the Ao Naga society which is in the caught up in the fast changing transition from traditional to modernity with the coming of the Christian missionaries and the establishment of churches and scholl in the Ao areas. The book exhaustively deals with the Ao-Naga culture and religion, social organization, customary laws and procedures.

Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton in her book *A Girl swallowed by a tree: Lotha Naga Tales Retold* gives a brief and concise introduction to Folktales and orality. It is also a critical discourse on history and orality as an empowering form of narration. Patton

discusses the Naga tribes and their stories, the need to tell their stories and the urgency of collecting the folktales which will become a treasured legacy in the future.

Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity edited by Margaret Ch. Zama blends critical perceptions on writing emanating from the region on issues of identity construct, colonial burdens and the key role that oral traditions continue to play in the region. The book take into consideration not only the new writing in English and the vernacular being generated from the region, but also the already existing works in the form of translations. The book is representative of the literary genre of writing from the Northeast region examining those voices which aspire to move towards the national mainstream. The book provides a wide spectrum of writings from scholars of literature, language, folk studies, social sciences and the media.

The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century by edited with an Introduction by Verrier Elwin is a huge collection of essays and articles written by the Europeans covering the period 1827 to 1869. In the introductory note Verrier Elwin states “This record is not presented as a correct picture but to illustrate how outsiders looked at the Nagas at the time.” (Elwin,1961). The anthropological and ethnographical records of the writers cover a wide range of study from the geographical and physical description of the land to a general overview of the people who inhabited the land and their unique history which was then purely through the means of oral narration. Some of the extracts are about the tours undertaken by the writers in the Naga Mountains and the severe physical and hostile environment they had to encounter as it was still in its semi- primitive era. Observatory articles are also written on almost all the major tribes of Nagaland with a description of their cultural traditions, religious rituals, festivals, dress and ornaments. Many of the extracts elaborately deal with the customs and traditions of the Nagas in general and the Head-hunting mode of war. Developmental aspect of the Nagas in terms of trade and commerce, though negligible, art of cultivation, animal husbandry, education are all recorded by the writers.

A History of Nagas and Nagaland (Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation) by Visier Sanyu gives a very apt introduction of the lack of representation of the indigenous people in world history. A detailed study of the migration and settlement

of the Naga tribes are given with emphasis on the Angamis. The book also details the formation of Kohima district, the early settlers in the district giving a clear flowchart of the clan organization. Khonoma is also another very important village of the Angami region whose history of ferocious and courageous warriors echoes from the hilltop of the village. The author clearly brings out the importance of the village without which the history of the Angamis would be incomplete. The book throws light on the impact of British Colonization and the resistance that the Angami people had to put up. Modernization soon began to invade the culture and traditions of the tribe and eventually the British colonizers began to subdue the people. In conclusion, the author brings out the huge impact the colonizers' system in administration, political and social organization, and religious practices had on the tribe.

Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English by K B Veio Pou gives an in-depth study on the understanding of North-East India with a penetrating focus on Nagaland. The book is not merely a historical, political or anthropological account but it explores the literary writings of many Naga writers which are the windows to the unspoken world of the Nagas. The exploration of the Nagas writers also throws light on social, political, cultural and historical lineage of the Naga people. The book is also a study on the emergence of Naga writings in English, be it literary, sociological or historical. The impact of westernization and Christianity which left the Naga Culture at the verge of disappearance as there were no written records until the post-colonial writings began is also examined in the book. Other than the literary aspects of the Naga writings, another important component that the book analyses is the status of women in Naga society and how women had struggled to withstand the test of times to the various challenging changes in the society. Thus, the book not only provides a cultural history of the Nagas but it also presents the interdisciplinary blend from various social sciences perspectives in the book.

The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays edited by Tilottoma Mishra is a two-volume anthology that includes poetry and essays by writers from North-East India. This collection of writings represents a wide variety of cultures, nationalities and languages which is not subjected to any conceived notion.

Most of the essays and poems are from the pre-Independence era. Apart from the essays on social turmoil, political unrest, cultural and traditional clashes with modernity at different levels, the anthology also includes oral literature of contemporary writings offering the significance of oral literature as the lens through which negotiations with the various practices of modernity can be viewed. The term ‘North-East’ representing eight states of north-east India seems to denote only a geographical region but on a broader view these states also seems to share a similarities in various aspects of life – social, political, historical, cultural and traditional, which is vividly evident in the writings from the North-East.

Folklore in the North East edited by Soumen Sen is a collection of essays by various writers from North East. The book discusses the historical potential of folklore and the importance of folklore studies in North East which is still very rich with its diversity of cultural heritage. The volume of the book has essays from all the seven sisters North East states, thereby, covering a large area of folklore from each state. While some of the folk elements remain similar to one another some of the customs and traditions vary from each other. Nevertheless, all the states being inhabited by tribal's, shows stark similarities in the behaviors and nomenclature.

A Handbook of Folklore material of North East by Birendranath Datta examines the importance of folklore in the academic circle in India. It is a fact that North East India has a huge reservoir of folklore heritage. The book is divided into two parts. The first part contains discussions on the various aspects of folklore material of the North East while the second part is chiefly made up of the specimens of different types of folklore items mostly extracted from different published works. Additional matter has been incorporated in the last section of the book.

Insider Perspectives: Critical Essays on Literature from Nagaland by Vizovono Elizabeth and Sentinaro Tsuren presents different kinds of essays that deal with the development of Literature in Nagaland. While some of the essays talk about the contemporary Naga narratives, some are about difficulties that one faces as writers from the margins. The essays by Sentinaro Tsuren are particularly on the Ao Naga tribe. Her essays are a systematic study of the Ao Naga literature bringing out vividly how folklore

among the Ao's is treated as the cultural history of the tribe and the importance of the art of Orality and story-telling. Both the writers have extensively made a study on the major Naga writers such as Easterine Kire, Temsula Ao, Nini Lungalung and many other minor poets on how verse becomes the voice for women to find their identity and the status in the patriarchal Naga society.

Magic(al) Realism by Maggie Ann Bowers navigate the complexities of one of today's most popular genres within literature, art and film. The book traces the history from the 1920's to the present day: from early twentieth century to the German Art criticism to International contemporary literary criticism. Following the developments of the terms chronologically provides a way to understand the often confused application of the term and also its relation to the other literary and artistic movements such as realism, surrealism, the fantastic and science fiction from magic(al) realism. The book attempts to untangle this confusion that is often found as the lacunae by many readers. The book also provides a guide to the variations of magical realist writing and the locations and circumstances in which they developed with reference to important magical realist novels by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter, Günter Grass and Toni Morrison.

While bringing together debates about the future and the appropriateness of magical realism in relation to postcolonialism and the cultural contexts, the book also focuses on the problem that since, many readers of magical realism do not come from the same cultural context as that of the writer or of the text, they have a different understanding of what is reality and the magical means.

Thus, the book in whole provides a guide to the range of ideas concerning magic(al) realism and to explain their relationship to each other, rather than to provide a limiting definition of the term. It also points to the ways in which magic(al) realism can be a highly appropriate and significant concept for cultural production created in the context of increasing heterogeneity and cross-culturalism at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. The book is a concise and wide ranging guide offering a clear way through confusing terms and debates to provide the ideal introduction to a fascinating field.

Garcia Marquez suggests that realism is a kind of premeditated literature which offers a very exclusive a vision of reality with disproportions which is also a part of our reality. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is a wonderful comic novel strewn with the marvelous, unexpected and fantastic incidents and characters. The world described in the novel has the fusion of the extraordinary and the real that keeps the senses alert of the real at that particular point of the novel.

Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative by Wendy B Faris defines the characteristics and narrative techniques of magical realism. Faris also discusses an array of examples from magical realist novels in the most critical comprehensive treatment. Faris puts up the argument that by intermingling that which is real with that which is fantastic, the marvelous seems to grow extraordinarily. The author compares the cultural role of traditional shamanic performance, which joins the ordinary world as well as the world of the spirits. Because of the act of bridging the different world, magical realism has been an effective mode giving a ground for the marginal voices, hidden traditions and emergent literature to develop and create masterpieces.

CHAPTERIZATION

Tentatively the study will be undertaken according to the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter examines the origin, the differing usages and interpretations of Magic Realism. The chapter also offers an historical overview of the geographical and cultural contexts within which the genre has developed and the relationship between magical and realism. Analyses of the relationship of magical realism with other artistic movements such as surrealism in order to bring out the distinctiveness of the term

Chapter 2: Overview of the Ao-Naga folklore:

The chapter describes the geography and environment of Mokokchung district in detail which is the land of the Aos. The chapter focuses on the oral tradition of the Ao-

Naga folklife, which is also the fabric of the social lives of the people, while bringing out the typology of the oral narrative, its scope and tangibility. It is observed that the Ao-Naga community is a distinct folklore community. As such, the folklores of the tribe, with its rich heritage, have much scope for interpretations other than documentation and translations. Thus, this chapter presents how, in most of the folklores of the Aos, the presence of the magical and real permeates through and through.

Chapter 3: Myths and Legends

Myths and legends are a part and parcel of the oral tradition of any tribe. The chapter discusses the origin of the tribe, origin of the world and many other legends that are believed to be true stories. Each range of the Ao region comprises of a number of villages with its own myths and legends. The chapter concentrates on three ranges of the region namely- Langpangkong Range, Ongpangkong Range, Asetkong Range which are famous for their mythical and legendary narratives. The chapter analyses and interprets the mythical tradition of the Nagas and the AO-nagas to throw new light on their origins and migratory patterns through the ages.

Chapter 4: Other Types of Folktales

The fourth chapter of the thesis analyses the various types of folktale in the Ao-Naga oral tradition by collecting the folktales of different villages that falls under the three ranges namely Japukong Range, Changkikong Range and Tsurangkong Range. This part of the region is famous for folktales such as Animal Tales, Tall Tales, Supernatural Tales, Folk Riddles, Proverbs, poetry, songs, lullabies etc.

Chapter 5: The Thread of Magical Realism and its Incorporation in the Ao-Naga Folklore

The chapter explores the dichotomy of magic and realism in the Ao-Naga folktales and the commingling of the supernatural with the real. The Ao-Naga folklores exhibit surreal elements which, at that time and place, were real to the people of the region. The rich oral tradition of the Aos has open up many avenues for interpretation and

re-interpretation of the folklores. Thus, this chapter analyses the wide range of folktales within the different literary genres.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter is a brief summary of all the chapters along with findings. A critical study on the folklore, both verbal and non-verbal, gives a huge responsibility of the need to preserve the rich tradition in the face of modernity and westernization. The challenges that the oral tradition has to face in the post-modern age are another area of interest that is explored in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 2

Overview of the Ao-Naga folklore

The Aos, being one of the major tribe of the Nagas, constitutes a large portion of the population of Nagaland. They inhabit a territory of a long range of hills under which the villages are grouped into different ranges totaling up to six ranges. Each range comprises of more than five villages according to the geographical area of the range. The villages within the same range normally have similar customs and traditions but they can vary linguistically as well. All these six ranges fall under the umbrella of Mokokchung district which is the home of the Aos.

Geographical and Historical background of Mokokchung district.

Mokokchung district is bordered by Assam in its North, Wokha in its West, Tuensang in its East and Zunheboto in its South. It is situated at a height of 1100 meters above sea level (Longchar, 10). According to 2011 census, the population of Mokokchung district comprises of 194,622 making it the fifth most populous district in the state. The district of Mokokchung is predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to Ao tribe. They constitute more than nine-tenth of the total population in the District. The total geographical area of Mokokchung district is 1615 sq.km and is the sixth smallest district by area in the state. There are nine sub districts in the district with Ongpangkong range as the most populous sub-district. Mokokchung district experiences cold climate mostly. Summer is shorter with heavy monsoon in July and August. Overall, the district enjoys temperate climatic condition with summer and winter dominating the year. Spring and autumn are of very short duration. Mokokchung town is the centre of trade and commerce for the Aos living in the villages. The villagers come to Mokokchung town with their agricultural goods/products for sale. With Assam as the neighbouring sister state, the people get the other commodities from Assam. Road connectivity, transport and other means of communication was a big hurdle for any means of trade and commerce. But after the arrival of the Britishers and the Christian missionaries in 1832 and 1876 respectively, progress gradually began to set in.

Mokokchung district was formed in the year 1957 with the formation of Naga-Hills Tuensang Area. It was under the British administration that, for the first time in 1876, the area under the erstwhile Mokokchung district came when the headquarters of the Naga Hills District were set up at Wokha. When Mokokchung subdivision was created in 1889, Wokha, which was opened as a subdivision in 1875, became a part of Mokokchung. Thus, during the British period, Kohima Sadar and Mokokchung were the only subdivisions of the Naga Hills district. It was only after Independence, in 1948, Tuensang was created as a separate administrative centre and in 1952, and it became a sub-division of NEFA. On 1st December, 1957 Mokokchung became one of the three districts of the Area. Later on when Nagaland came into existence as a state, it continued to remain as a district with Wokha and Zunheboto as sub-divisions under it. Later, in 1957, Tuensang subdivision was bifurcated from NEFA and merged into the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area along with three districts of Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang. In December, 1973 the district was divided for administrative convenience into three districts, namely Mokokchung, Wokha and Zunheboto.

The nomenclature of the district originated from the name of Mokokchung village, now an urban area and the headquarters of the district. The story says that a group of early Ao people who had scattered to different places away from their original settlement in defiance of the wishes of their parent village, namely *Koridang*, came to a new place and established a new village which they named as Mokokchung. The name literally means going away (chung) in defiance (mokok) of the wishes. For a long time the past lives of the Aos were woven entirely around their own land, families, the clan, the *khel* (a designated part of the village) and the village. Most of the villages are constructed at the hilltops for advantageous defense against the attacking enemy villages which were very rampant during the head hunting past. Settling in isolation was a common life style of the different Naga communities different from each other. Each village lived almost in an exclusive area with a view to protect itself from the head-hunting raids of others. There are very few approaches to the villages and they are well guarded with a gate called *Sungkum* (village gate) to mark the entrance to the village which is guarded by sentries round the clock. Another characteristic of the location of the village is that thick jungle covers the ravines and ridges almost upto the village. In some

villages high trees are grown near the villages and *Mit Semtos* meaning ‘watch towers’ are constructed at the tree tops to warn the villagers of enemies approaching the village. With the disappearance of village enmity and disputes and also the end of the practice of head-hunting, these defensive structures are also fast disappearing.

The Aos themselves divided their country into six ranges and each range is assigned with villages on or near to the range. These ranges run roughly in parallel lines. Mokokchung district comprises of a number of villages which are neatly grouped under these six ranges which are, in no particular order, Langpangkong Range, Asetkong Range, Japukong Range, Ongpangkong Range, Jangpetkong Range and Tsurangkong Range. Following are the names of villages under a particular range:

Table. 1. Villages under Langpangkong and Asetkong range

Langpangkong range	Asetkong range
1. Longkong	1. Mopungchuket
2. Mongsenyimti	2. Sungratsu
3. Chuchuyimlang	3. Alongchen
4. Unger	4. Longjang
5. Changtongya	5. Longpa
6. Akhoya	6. Chami
7. Kilungmen	7. Khanimo
8. Asangma	8. Kubulong
9. Merangkong	9. Yimchalo
10. Wameken	
11. Kangtsung	
12. Anaki	
13. Salulemang	
14. Yaongyimti Old	
15. Yaongyimti New	
16. Aopenzu	
17. Anakiyimsen	
18. Yaongyimsen	
19. Chakpa	

Table. 2. Villages under Japukong and Ongpangkong range

Japukong range	Ongpangkong range
1. Japu	1. Aliba
2. Longjemdang	2. Alichen
3. Atophu	3. Chungtia
4. Satsuk	4. Khensa
5. Alongtaki	5. Kinunger
6. Lakhuni	6. Kubza
7. Changtang	7. Longkhum
8. Nokpu	8. Longmisa
9. AoNokpu	9. Longsa
10. Longchem	10. Mangmetong
11. Lirmen	11. Mekuli
12. Saring	12. Moalenden
13. Yajang A	13. Mokokchung village
14. Yajang B	14. Aosettsu
15. Yajang C	15. Ungma
16. Lozo	16. Meyilong
17. Longto	17. Chubayimkum
18. AoNokpuYimsen	18. Chuchuyimpang
19. Shiaphumi	
20. Akumen	

Table. 3. Villages under Jangpetkong and Tsürangkong range

Jangpetkong range	Tsürangkong range
1. Changki	1. Medemyim
2. Chungliyimsen	2. Moayimti
3. Mongchen	3. Chungtiayimsen
4. Debuia	4. Watiyim
5. Warumong	5. Meramen
6. Alongkima	6. Longpayimsen
7. Yimjenkimong	7. Aokum
8. Molungyimsen	8. Aosungkum
9. Mulongkimong	9. Aosenden
10. Luyong	
11. Khar	

Even though the villages under each range have a reservoir of folk life that differs from each other, there is a lot of commonality when it comes to the story of origin, migration and settlement. There are two festivals celebrated and observed commonly by the Ao's. The first is *Moatsü* and the second is *Tsiingremong*.

Moatsü is celebrated nowadays in the month of May. It is a festival celebrated after the field is made ready for sowing. In the olden days the villagers would decide the days for the celebration depending on how early or late they finish their work in the field. It was a most look forward festival of the village both by the old and the young. During *Moatsü* the people of the village would wear new cloths, eat meat, sing and dance and drink. On the first day of *Moatsü* the villagers cleaned their houses, collect firewood and keep the food ready for the celebration. Young men would go to the *Tsüki* (female dormitory) and spend time singing songs and drinking rice beer. On the second day cows and pigs were butchered both rich and poor, old and young alike partake in the cooking and eating of this preparation. Eating and merry making among the peer group called *Zünga* (peer group) was also an important affair. On the third day, pigs would be slaughtered outside the *Ariju* i.e. male dormitory. The eldest in the peer group would slaughter the pig and clean it properly. A certain portion of the meat would be cut out for each member of the *Ariju* and the remaining cooked for consumption by the members. On this day *Tonger* (close friends) would gift each other with a portion of the meat with *Amruso* i.e. rice soup. The third day was mainly celebrated among friends and peer groups with a lot of gifting.

On the fourth and fifth day, everyone wear their best and new cloths and gather at the village *Mangkoterong* ie village common ground. After that they would make a circle and sing songs of praises for one another. In the song they also challenge each other to the game of tug-of-war between boys and girls. On the fifth day, the young men would go around the khels of the entire village singing songs while the women would wait on them to offer them rice beer. On the sixth day, which is also the last day of *Moatsü*, the newly married couples of that year would offer rice beer with soyabean and animal skin curry. In the evening the villagers would dance holding onto one another and men and women responsively sang to one another. During the *Moatsü* festival, the villagers pray to their

gods that all their seeds to be sowed that year to be blessed so that they can have a plentiful harvest.

Tsüngremong, which is the second festival most popularly celebrated by the Ao's is celebrated in the month of August nowadays. In the days of the fore-fathers; this festival was celebrated after the harvest. During this festival the tribe would pray to *Lijaba* (the creator of Earth), *Anüngtsüngba* (the god of the sky) and *Longkitsüngba* (the god of caves) who were but one god. *Tsüngremong* is the festival of thanksgiving to god. The festival is a significance of the blessing from god for good harvest of all that is planted in the field by the villagers. From the collection of the entire village, the healthiest pig is slaughtered at *Mangkoterong*. The eldest of the peer group say the prayer of thanksgiving to the god of destiny *Tiaba Tsüngrem* (*Tiaba*-destiny *Tsüngrem*-god). The meat is then cooked and distributed to each household of the entire village. Those who are rich slaughter their own pigs and cows and invite their relatives for feasting and celebrating.

On the first day young men repair the bamboo verandah outside their houses. Both men and women go to collect firewood from the field or the jungle. The wives clean the house and prepare food and rice beer for the festival. It was a day of preparation. On the second day, every household would prepare rice beer in preparation for the visitation of their peer group and friends to their house. The villagers also participated in various games. On the third day, the menfolk went around the village singing while the womenfolk would offer them rice beer. There was rice beer kept in bamboo mugs in each *khel* for them to have if their beer gets exhausted. They sang songs requesting their gods to protect the village from any calamity.

The Ao tribe: Origin, migration and settlement.

Story of Origin

Every Naga tribe, till today, clings on to their specific story of origin and migration. "The existential identity of the Naga's is immersed in mythical lore of how they originated...and these myths have been accepted by the people as an inalienable

principal of their tribal history.” (Ao, 2006:6). These stories are very important to the identity and root of the people. The origin and migration of the tribes are, therefore, guarded viciously by the tribes lest there should be any distortion. Migration narratives are given more emphasis than other folktales as it is believed to be based on the historical foundations of a particular tribe that constructs the village identity. It is also these narrations that validate the belonging of the tribe to a larger political, economic and socio-cultural structure. To the other tribes like Sangtam, Chang, Phom and Konyak Nagas, the word Ao (literally) means “those who went” meaning people who branched out from the main stock. As such according to J. P Mills, Ao’s are ‘those that came/went’ across the Dikhu river.

The story of origin of the Ao’s is the most popular belief of the Ao-Nagas. Though there have been several claims of the origins from stones among the other Naga tribes, most of the narratives remained vague except for the myth of origin known as the *Longterok Otsü* (Six stones story). It has been passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the other and without the myth of origin the history of the Ao’s would be lost altogether. In the absence of written record, much of it has been altered and part of it distorted. Nevertheless, the fountain-head of the Ao folklore is the myth of origin. The Aos believe that they originated from *Longterok* by a mythical power of creation. The word *Lungterok* is a word formed by joining two words ie, ‘Lung’ meaning ‘Stone’ and “Terok’ meaning ‘six’. It is also believed that the Aos settled in *Chungliymti* because these ‘six stones’ are situated in *Chungliymti* in Tuensang district which is now occupied by the Sangtam tribe. After migrating from *Chungliymti*, they established themselves at *Aonglenden* and dispersed from there.

The Ao consists of two groups of descent based on their dialectic differences – *Mongsen* and *Chungli*. The *Chungli* and *Mongsen* narrative of the *Longterok*, however, slightly varies in its narrative form. According to the *Chungli* speaking Aos, the ancestor of the three *Chungli* clans along with their three sisters originated at *Longterok*. Longpok, Tongpok, and Longjakrep were the males and Longkakpokla, Yongmenzala and Elongshe were the females. According to the *Mongsen* narrative, there is no reference to the myth of origin from the magical stone but they hold the belief that they originated and

migrated from the eastern direction. They, nevertheless, have a clear narrative that says that at Chungliyiimti there were six clans. They believe that the *Chungli* clan ancestors were Tongpok, Longpok and Longchakrep whereas the *Mongsen* clan ancestors were *Tsüngremchang*, *Longchenti* and *Longmetang*. The Aos share a very close affinity with the present residents of Chungliyiimti i.e., the Sangtams in terms of various cultural and traditional observations (Aier, 35). The Ao-Naga region is divided into different villages and each village comprises of citizens belonging to a particular clan. Each clan of the village traces its origin to one of the stones which they call ‘tebou’ meaning ‘forefather or grandfather’.

Migration and Settlement

Stories revolving around migration are descriptive accounts of the movement of the people from one place to the other with geographical locations which are within the actual ones they presently occupy and sometimes only obscure references of the locations they inhabited. Migration legends are usually defined by folklorist as narratives about historical events or personal experiences, even illusions, believed to be true. The migration of people and tribes has been an important aspect in history since the very inception of human society. This movement of people from one place to the other as the nomads do has always shaped and reshaped the history of the world. Every Naga oral narrative encapsulates many legends revolving around the story of migration from the East and of crossing the Big Rivers. It is a common saying among the Ao’s also that differentiates between those who have crossed the rivers as ‘civilized’ and those who have not as ‘uncivilized’.

According to J. P Mills the *Mongsen* came out of the earth first and settled at *kubok*, which then was a vacant site on a spur running down from Mokokchung towards Dikhu. The *Chungli* emerged from *Longterok* and settled in *Chungliyiimti*. Since the settlement of these two dialectically divided groups, they had their “first taste of war” (Mills 1973:7). Much to the ignorance of the *Chungli* speaking group, the *Mongsen* speaking group had been head hunting and raiding the *Chungli* stragglers. Legend has it that a man by the name Shiluti, a great *Chungli* hero, was the one who chanced upon the

Mongsen speaking people settled at *Kubok* and attacked them. Thus, the *Mongsen* speaking group had to surrender and come to settle at *Chungliyimti* and form a ‘*khel*’ as per tradition. Thus, the settlement of both dialects speaking AOs at *Chungliyimti* began.

Though the AOs first settled at *Chungliyimti*, they migrated from there to different parts of the AO region and made their own respective settlements according to the clans. It is to be noted that, initially Nagas lived a nomadic life and therefore change and movement was required. Migration and bifurcation from the mother village still continues among many Naga villages till today.

Oral tradition of the AO tribe.

Angela Carter writes, “For most of human history ‘literature’, both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written---heard, not read. So fairy tales, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world.”

In any ancient pre-literate tribal societies, oral tradition played the dominant role in disseminating the chronicles of history, knowledge and wisdom. Oral narratives – folklore, folktale or fairy tales, have been a part of every culture. Orality is a very empowering form of narration that create oral literature, express and preserve lives of the myriad stories and histories of the people that has been unheard. Orality or transmission of knowledge by word of mouth had been a very strong and vital form of passing down the history of the unwritten lives of the AOs.

AO culture and oral history flourished without any written script of their own. Yet they had an effective medium of communication and records that have been conserved for many centuries through the oral tradition which has a deeply-rooted foundation. Any oral narrative of traditional history, origin and migration of the people (tribe, clan, individual, etc.), formation of the village, events of war, peace, festivals and so on are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the other through songs, poetry, ballads, prayers, sayings, stories and tales or as public oration when the situation

demands. Through such means younger generation were trained not only to learn but to master them.

This tradition is so vital for the Ao's that it goes much beyond their culture. The very history of the Ao people, their religion and entire social life is shaped by their oral tradition.

In the socio-cultural and political life of the Ao's, oral narration was, and still is, a powerful weapon to prove or disprove, substantiate and support or resolve any dispute/claims or conflict. It is also instrumental in peace negotiation or to conduct truce in times of war or confrontation. Due to the non-availability of written form of all forms of folklore, oral tradition was the only means of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other. As such in the process of transmission, because of the limitations of human memory and communication, the transmission was always at a risk of undergoing changes. This is one of the reasons why there are slight variations in the origin story, migration and settlement and other folktales from one author to the other. It is clear that the narration taking place at different time with different people results in different versions of the same story. Therefore, authenticating and validating the stories becomes very difficult.

Oral tradition among the Naga tribes – a comparison

Though the origin and the migration of the Nagas are shrouded in obscurity in the absence of written documents, the Nagas share many common cultural traits on the oral tradition of their origin, migration, and their settlements at the present locations. The cultural traits are similar but each tribe has its distinctive and specific myths, legends and other folklore. Folk history gives accounts of actual movements of the people whereas the other folklore is essentially mythological descriptions of events etched in the memory of the knowledge keepers. Oral narratives are broadly classified into myth, legend and folktale. Myth is believed to be true; Legend purports to be true while folktale is seemingly untrue.

The commonest myth among the Nagas is the myth of origin. The Naga myth of origin is widely based on origin from the underground, origin myth from the stones, origin myth from somewhere in the east. While most of the major tribes Angami, Chakhesang, Rengma, Sema claim that they originated from Khezakenoma, the Ao's claim that they originated from 'Lungterok' and settled at Chungliyimti after which they dispersed into different ranges and villages.

According to the *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland* by Dr. Purtongzuk Longchar, there are various traditions among the Nagas about their origin. The Angamis have the tradition that they came from the bowels of the earth somewhere in the south. The Lotha tradition says that their ancestors came from far off country which they call Mansuraj. The tradition of the Sangtams migration is from Yatsimi to Yezami to Katarimi to Kungizzu and then to Tsantomghi. Some of these sites have become vacant or under the Sema territory. But the villagers of Pirr (Sangtam) in their account to Hutton said that they came from Chungliyimti i.e., the first settlement site of the Ao's. The sema's believe that they came from the south of Mao and Swemi or Semi hills near Khezakenoma while there are other narratives that the clans of the Sema came from Hebulimi, Awohomi, Chishilimi and Mishilimidespite the different versions of the origin, it is very clear that the Sema's came to their present settlement through the Doyang valley. The Chang's believe that they are connected to the Yachumi. The konyaks claim that they are the descendants of Changnyu village. The Yimchungers hold the belief that the Konyaks separated to the North from Nokrak but a small group proceeded towards Mokokchung which are found in Kongen, Tamlu and Namsang villages. it is believed that the Rengma's migrated across Doyang river to the Mikir Hills while the Zeliang's went towards the Southwest route and settled in the southern part.

Every Naga tribe tells of legends pertaining to their specific tribe or village. Legends of migration clearly detail the geographical landmark, place of origin, genealogies of the clans and occupation of the land. The most popular legendary story at Khezakenoma is the legend of drying paddy on a magical stone with the power of doubling the paddy. A similar legend of the magical stone is told at Ighanomi, a Sumi village with slight variation. Other common legends are the legends of migration and

crossing big rivers. The Ao legend of migration tells of the people migrating from Chungliyimti crossing the big river *Tzüla* popularly known as 'Dikhu'. Though not uniform there are definitely oral narratives of crossing big rivers among the other tribes as well.

There is a uniformity of belief system among the Nagas. Almost all the Naga tribes believed in a supreme being although they worshipped objects of nature like the stones, trees, rivers, mountains, jungles etc and attributed certain supernatural powers on them. These objects of nature were considered very sacred.

Customary laws and traditions were the law makers and moral policy markers of the people during the folklife of the Nagas. These laws and traditions were orally transmitted and practiced by all the Naga tribe with certain variations from tribe to tribe.

Taboos (genna) were very common among the Naga tribes. It means anything that is prohibited. This custom prevails among all the Naga tribes. Sometimes 'genna' affected the whole village, sometimes the khels and sometimes the individual alone. It was taboo to keep the dead body of a person who died an unnatural death. He has to be disposed off before sunset if he dies during the day or before the cock crows if he dies at night. There are prohibitions put on women during pregnancy and men during the festivals.

Societal and cultural norms of the Ao's

A society or a tribe without a cultural background can be termed as a society without roots or identity. The Ao tribe is purely a patriarchal society. As such, it becomes important that a male should be acquainted with the traditions and customs of the society.

The oral tradition maintains that after settling at Chungliyimti it was necessary to establish an order within the community. So it was decided that one man from each clan who was blameless and not scarred in any form was to form the order. This order was given the name Putu Menden (the apex body of the social order of the Ao's). The Putu Menden was the highest decision making body of the tribe. It comprises of the representatives from each clan usually the elder among the clan members. One putu is

equivalent to thirty years which means when one is elected to the Putu Mendenhe remains for thirty years. There are strict conditions to be elected to be a member of the Putu Menden of which women are never allowed. It acts as the final court in which all difficult cases were heard and judged. Putu Menden has the power of using the customary laws and functions as the elected members to look after the welfare of the community.

Some of the customary laws that governed the people were:

- i. When the leaders spoke, no one must cut him in the middle.
- ii. No harm should be done to public/village and private properties like the rest house, village gate, morung, log drum, pond/well or any other objects that was worshipped by the villagers.
- iii. Going against the customary laws, immoral activities, non co-operation in the village activities, non participation the village social work, destruction of fields was not allowed.
- iv. Carrying out illegal business, misunderstanding with the neighbouring village which leads to being fined by the other village were not tolerated.
- v. Cutting the harvest of others and the village gate with dao, failing to convey the news of sick and death properly, selling the meat of dead pig/cow etc. were also not allowed.
- vi. Theft, divorce, giving false testimony in any case, buying things from the thieves and giving them accommodation, murderer, poisoning food and any other crime were all punishable.

The punishment and fines meted out for breaking the customary laws were very heavy and strict. The amount of fined imposed and the punishment deemed necessary varied according to the nature of fault committed. J. P. Mills has given a very discreet description of the characteristics of the Ao's. He describes Ao's as having claimed to emerge from under the earth and settling at Chungliyimti whose women were tattooed with a complicated clan and phratry rights controlled by organized village councils and disposing their dead on raised platforms.

After the forefathers settled at Chungliyimti, they built a Senden-riju i.e. common morung. Here the young unmarried men slept. Till today the six Ariju (morung)

representing the six ranges and one common Ariju stands firm at Chungliyimti. Whenever any new settlement was made the villagers made their individual houses. After the completion of the individual houses, the villagers would gather together to make the Ariju. This was the first community work of the village. All the young boys from a certain age group in the peer group began sleeping in the morung. In the morung they did not allow any unknown person to sleep but sometimes travelers who did not have a house to sleep were brought in by the village elders. The youngest peer group was called Süngpor. The peer groups were those born in the same year or in a span of three years. Since the Süngpor were the youngest, it was their duty to work and serve those peer groups above them for three years. Their duties were to cook, fetch water and run errands. Every night before anyone arrives at the Ariju the Süngpor will get ready with the lamp post, clean the Ariju and make fire at the fire place and keep the dao sharpening stone ready. Süngpor is expected to serve the elders and do all menial and odd jobs at the bidding of the elder peer group. This manner of treatment does not pertain to any kind of insult or demean but purely based on teaching and learning respect and discipline in the society.

The Ariju or 'Male dormitory' was the only established institution where young men, who had reached adolescence, were taught and trained to learn the customs and traditions of the tribe so that they can, later on, pass it onto the younger generation. They are also taught various kinds of traditional handicrafts and hunting and fishing as well. All the young men would go to the Ariju with their dao which has to be very sharp and shining. At the Ariju the young men were first taught to work with bamboo. They learned how to cut bamboo at one stroke, shred it into bamboo ropes to make baskets and mat. They started with making small bamboo pens for keeping chickens. Then the rest followed from working with wood to stones. During festivals like Moatsü, they would clean the surrounding of the Ariju and keep it very clean.

Similarly, female dormitory called Tzüki was the place where young girls are taught knitting, weaving, pot-making and other household chores. This Tzüki was also as old as the Ariju. There would be a girl's warden at the Tzüki, usually a spinster. Only girls belonging to one clan would sleep in one Tzüki. Different dormitories were made

for different clans and as such the young men would know which Tzüki to visit to court the girls for their future wife. The youngest in the girl's dormitory obeyed the elders by running errands for them. She would sweep and clean the house of the warden, fetch water, pound paddy, make fire and cook for her. In the dormitory she learned from her elder sisters how to roll cotton and turn it into thread and roll the weaving stick. They are also taught various social etiquettes – cleanliness, cooking, washing, hygiene, hospitality etc. The young men would visit the girl's dormitory, observe them carefully and choose their life partners from among the girls in the dormitory. The same goes for the girls also. When the young men from the morung come to visit they observe the caliber of the men, their smartness in words and in deeds and decide whether to say yes or no to the proposals.

Marriage was a very important institution of the Ao society and culture. The husband is the head of the family and provides security to his wife and children and the children will take the title of the father. In the Ao marriage system, the man goes to ask for the hand of the girl in marriage with a fish. Then he makes a house to bring in his wife after marriage. In the Ao culture, married children do not stay with their parents and so making his house before the marriage is very important. A widower can marry an unmarried woman and an unmarried man can marry a widow. In the event of the death of the parent's ancestral inheritance goes to the sons. Acquired property also goes to the sons and in the case of having no sons the acquired property goes to the relatives. If the parents leave lots of properties before their death they can give certain portions to the daughters as well which is made known to the relatives. This is binding within the village.

Verrier Elwin writes:

“Each village amongst the Aos is a small republic and each man is as good as his neighbor, indeed it would be hard to find anywhere else more thoroughly more democratic communities. Headmen (tatar) do exist, but their authority is very small.”

Typology of the oral narrative: its scope and tangibility.

“The Nagas make a clear distinction between oral traditions of origin and migration and other tale types by way of the importance they lay emphasis upon each genre of folklore.”(Ao, Anungla 2018: 42). The oral traditions of the Ao’s are nuggets of wisdom which acts as agents of transmitting knowledge of the fore-fathers traditions and customs. For the Ao’s the process of oral tradition begins with the myth of its origin from the ‘Lungterok.’ The oral tradition has a pervasive effect on the social, domestic and political institution of the tribe. Not only that, it is also the store house of all folklore, religion, belief system, customs and traditions. The elders are the store houses of the oral narratives and therefore, it becomes their responsibility of the elders to disseminate the knowledge to the younger generation for the continuity of the tradition.

Types of Ao Folklore

Some of the Oral narratives of the Nagas can be broadly classified as:

Myths and Legends

The word Myth is derived from mythos in Greek concerns supernatural beings beyond time and space. These are stories that attempt to explain the origin of people, communities and natural phenomena like death, races and languages. Myths are stories with a religious basis based on the beliefs of a certain religion or people. They are believed to be true and the sacred nature of the myths increases their believability. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology – a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happens as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives (Abrams, 2015:231). In the naga context, an important aspect of myths is that it is very metaphorical in nature. Metaphoric symbols and characters help to recreate the past that act as reminders transcending human memory.

The greatest myths among the Ao's is the myth of the origin of the tribe. Unlike the myth of Kezhakenoma of the other tribes, Ao's believe that the originated from 'Lung-terok' meaning six stones. Later on, these stones disseminated into the six ranges which still exist till date. The six ranges, in no particular order are, Langpangkong Range, Ongpangkong Range, Asetkong Range, Japukong Range, Changkikong Range and Tsurangkong Range.

There are also several myths associated with the names of certain clans. The name 'Imsenpirong' in particular, can be used only by the Jamir clan. Legend has it that it was the Jamir clan who first discovered water in the Ao region and thus the name is suggestive of this fact meaning 'discoverer of water.' The Ao's believe in the myth of the departed soul that when a person dies the departed soul goes through Asür Rikhum which is 'the gate of departed souls' and cross the Longkhum village. Myth of the tiger spirit is also very popular among the Ao's. There are several case studies documented by scholars on the people who possess the tiger spirits.

One of the most popular and common myths among the Ao's is the myth behind the origin of the Ao tribe. There is not one major tribe among the Nagas that is not devoid of the story of their origin and their settlement in different parts of the Naga Hills. Stories of origin, therefore, are mythological with supernatural elements surrounding such tales. Myth of origin among the Nagas contains such mythological and magical elements that, in the present premise, it becomes almost obnoxious to the normal human understanding. That which appears so magical and unbelievable was what, once upon a time, reality for them. Thus it becomes plausible for such myths to be accepted without any question.

The word Legend is derived from *Legenda* in Latin implying identifiable personalities in time and place, having extraordinary qualities and often interacting with supernatural beings or forces. In folktale, fantasy reigns as it deals with fictional characters in time and place. (Ben Amos, 2006:255). These are stories about characters whose exploits are worth remembering. These stories present heroic persons whose deeds helped their communities in one way or the other. Most legends, international, national and regional, are about characters that helped their communities win battle and wars. There are also legendary stories of illustrious patriarchs, brave warriors and those who

enhanced clan histories through their heroic acts. There are also legendary love stories that are still talked about popularly in the household. The famous love story of Jina and Etiben of the Ao's is still an all-time favourite of both the old and the young.

Folktale

Folktales have been an integral part of Ao society. Folktales of the Ao's contain elements of supernatural and tend to be fictional and imaginative in its subject. The characters in the Ao folktales are both human and non-human because it tells of a time when men, animals, the deities and the gods lived together. The tales relate to a time when the world had not yet assumed its present form when men had not yet attained the cognitive power of civilization. And therefore they are not dogmatic in nature neither historical in its subject and are timeless and placeless. In the folktale of the Ao's there is a lot of personification of animal, bird and other objects of nature. Despite the unusual occurrences and incidents narrated in the tale, it is believed to be true at a given point of time.

According to M.H Abrams, 'Folktale, strictly defined, is a short narrative in the prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form.' (Abrams, 2015:139). The Ao folktales can be clubbed together into animal tales, supernatural tales, trickster tales, jokes, anecdotes, riddles, proverbs, maxims and folk songs and poems. These tales are all identical illuminating the object to be interpreted where that which is interpreted remains subordinate most times.

Another explanation given by Shipley is, 'Folktale is universal as it exists among all peoples of all ages. It is handed down traditionally by word of mouth or in the written form by group of people whether literate or illiterate. These tales which exist in the memory of people cannot easily be categorised. Students of the folktale are primarily concerned with the origin and dissemination of tales as well as the folktale as an art. As an art form it concerns the conditions of folktale telling such as by the kind of people that tell tales, circumstances of the telling, the reception of the audience, the way they are handed down, and the stylistic effects of this oral art.' (Shipley 1993:1245).

The tales also revolves around motifs which are mostly explored by folklorists in their studies. These can be cultural motifs, historical motifs, psychological or physiological motifs. These folktales are subjective and speculative that can be highly interpretative. They also convey strong moral lesson that is used till today by the community. Tribe specific folktales show how one group is distinct from the other.

According to the explanation of Ben Amos,

‘since folktales are fictional and irrational narratives these could be interpreted at different levels: psychoanalytically, anthropologically, or literally. Psychoanalytically folktale is considered a cultural or universal dream fantasy which expresses suppressed emotions of individuals and society. Anthropologically folktales reflect a society’s view of itself as these express their fantasies, mirroring their culture and history. Folktales can be also be analyzed to examine the inner working of people in traditional societies. The folktales also have the function of entertaining and instructing people.’ (Ben Amos, 2006:2645)

The Ao folktales display characteristics which are neither forms of natural life nor ordinary language. There are tales of animals and birds meeting with the god to discuss disputes, young girls falling in love tree spirits and animal spirits, men and animals living together and in conversation with one another, transformational tales of man transforming to another form other than human. Some of these tales are so beguiling that one can be enchanted or charmed in a deceptive way.

Animal tales

Animal tales are found at all cultural levels in all periods. These are stories in which the principal characters are the animals with the plot revolving around them in the animal as well as human setting. Animal tales are also one of the oldest oral narratives. They are not only entertaining but have moral truths. It also gives us a glimpse of how certain animals came to be domesticated while others not. In most of the animal tales of the Ao’s one or two members of different species enter into some kind of competition that stimulates one or several to enter into some kind of dispute. The competition arising among the characters in the tale ‘The fight among the birds’ drives them to war and kill

each other and announce the winner. There are tales explaining the appearance, habitat and behavior of the birds and animals. The story of Lijaba distributing the attire of the birds is the most common tale by which the Ao's believe that the birds are how they appear to be based on this story.

For example, the tale of 'The Pig and the Dog' who went to the field is both a trickster tale and of domestication where the tricks of the dog gets himself a spot in the house of men to live as one with him whereas the Pig was made to stay outside.

Folk songs

Singing is an integral part of any narrative and no account of the oral tradition of the Ao's would be complete without a reference to its poetic form. Ballads, lullabies, dirges, love songs are all part of the poetic forms of singing. War songs, songs in praise of a particular man or clan, dance songs, song of the origin of man, songs of lovers – solemn, joyous, longing, heartache, songs sung in girls' dormitories, songs that wards off evil spirits (chant), mourning songs (dirge), lullabies. There are songs which are sung while pounding rice and doing menial jobs. Though the common language of the Ao's is Chungli, all the songs were sung in Mongsen because Mongsen was deeper in bringing out the theme or subject of the songs. There is not a festival, ceremony or celebration without the accompaniment of a song. The other chapters will dwell on the songs sung by the forefathers on all occasion from the day of their settlement at Chungliyimti. The folk songs were as frequently used as the proverbial sayings by the Ao forefathers. In all course of discourses folk songs a part of the day to day life. The young man and woman courting each other would sing to each other in the fields.

There is a narration by a grandmother of how after she and her husband were forced to divorce by the in-laws for the fear that she will not beget a son, through songs they would often tell of how they missed each other and long to be together.

Songs sung in the girls dormitories when the young men came to visit were mostly sung to woo the girls. In such gathering when songs are sung the ones who have a strong vocal was often admired by many and envied by their friends. During festivals like

Moatsü and Tsüngremmong even today folk songs called ‘Kimak-ken’ are very popularly sung. The culture of singing songs has been absorbed very strongly by the Ao community. The folk songs transmitted orally among the community are the true characteristic songs of the Ao’s. Thus, folk songs have flourished even within the compass of urban civilization.

All these songs are no different from a poem because all of them contain elements of poetic diction, rhyme and rhythm as well. They can be read and studied as poems of various kinds according to the thematic structure of the song. In the new pop culture there is a lot of folk fusion that is being robed into creating a new genre of singing.

Superstitions and Taboos

Much of the study of the history and the social behavior of the pre-literate Ao’s are governed by superstitions and taboos. Pre-literate Ao’s were superstitious by nature whose reasoning was clouded by illogical beliefs. This can be traced back to the forefather’s religious belief system. Existence of spirits, both malevolent and benevolent, was common among all the Ao’s. The Ao’s believed in certain trees, stones, jungles and rivers or ponds that they possess supernatural powers and touching them or mistreating them invites calamity not only to the individual but the whole community. The primitive life is strewn with superstitious beliefs which, sometimes, have a redundant effect on the growth and progress of the tribe. There are many sayings of the Ao’s that fall under the category of superstitious beliefs. For example, if a cock crows at odd hours it was superstitiously believed that some misfortune or unfortunate thing will happen in the family or the village. If a dog climbs to the top of the house, misfortune may befall on the family. If a hawk hovers over the compound of a family, there is a premonition of death in the family.

The word ‘Taboo’ comes from the Polynesian dialect which means ‘prohibition’. The word taboo is termed as ‘anembong’ in Ao which have a very strong connotation of fear. For the Ao’s taboos are prohibition of behavior, things or any area of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden. It also means any act that violates community norms which will incur supernatural penalty. Taboos during pregnancy and

childbirth were mainly for the women. A pregnant woman was prohibited from tucking away anything at her waist as it would lead to the birth of the child with a birthmark. Husband was to refrain for any sort of killing- animals or birds. During the feast of merit, it was taboo for the host to receive anything from others and was to refrain from any physical intimacy. Taboos on marriage were very strict and came with a heavy price. Marriage within the same clan was a taboo. Men could not marry another woman while being married to one. Elders would warn one to be aware of these taboos which, otherwise will lead to misfortune. Breaking of the taboo is considered objectionable or abhorrent. The consequences of going against the taboo were ex-communication from the village and the exclusion of the children till three generation.

Proverbial sayings

“Proverbs are short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life. Many proverbs are allegorical in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference, a general application.” (Abrams 2015:11)

Proverb or proverbial sayings are expressions that carry deep meanings and wisdom according to the circumstances surrounding the speakers of the community. They are multifunctional and flexible instruments of everyday reasoning and are loaded with hidden feelings, wishes and intentions. In the olden days (so also now), a village whose speech was rich in proverbial sayings and proverb centered had more advantage of winning and argument or dispute. Such a village would be highly feared and favored by the other villages. Proverbs have been a part and parcel of the spoken language and folk literature of the Ao's originating in oral tradition. The proverbial sayings of the Ao's are always related to objects, event, name, character, sound, shape, sickness, joy and sorrow. Some sayings are long while some are short or very short yet they all convey specific meanings to the community. For the Ao's the proverbial sayings play a pivotal role in the socio-political context. It is these sayings that form the basis of their thoughts and actions. A person holding the highest or important position in the community is expected to know and provide relevant proverbial sayings on all occasions as and in that way he qualifies himself to be esteemed and respected. The proverbial sayings inculcate values

and virtues in the mind of the younger generation. They are important assets for preventing quarrels and ointment for the wounded (physical and emotional). It also teaches one to conduct himself proper in public offices and with his peer group.

The Ao oral tradition and folklore is not a mere collection of stories or narration of customs and traditions but it constitutes for the tribe, the world of his origin and the continuity of its identity. It also imposes the responsibility of revering the customs and traditions and living by the ethics of the oral tradition that has been handed down by word of mouth by the elders. The oral tradition is a comprehensive source of the history, social customs, religion and laws that has been recorded verbally. Though, modernization and Christianity has impacted the oral tradition to some extent, it has stood the test of time. Much of the customs and traditional practices still continues to prevail and adapted by the Ao's in many cultural functions and festivals.

Importance of Oral Narratives in the Naga society: then and now

According to Dan Ben Amos(1971:4-15) the difficulties in defining folklore results from the nature of folklore itself and the basic conceptions underlying the many definitions of folklore make it clear that it refers to a body of knowledge; a mode of thought as well as a kind of art. Though documentation of folklore have been done and is in existence, they are mostly in one's own dialect which calls for translation again for broader circulation. With the older generation slowly passing away much of the folklore is also losing its importance because they are the keepers and store houses of the oral tradition. The culture of oral narration does not hold a place among the younger generation and therefore, continuity becomes very challenging in the face of modernity.

Although folklore and oral traditions are believed to be on –the-verge-of-dying tradition, it can also be argued that these traditions are being conserved even in the modern generation in other forms. Accumulation of indigenous knowledge is the effort of many thousands of years. Nagas have a close interconnected relationship with their surroundings. They observe their environment carefully and learn through experience. Thus, the teachings of Indigenous peoples come from observing and learning from objects of nature such as the water, the moon, the plants, the animals, the stars, the wind,

and the spirit world. In turn, the world of Indigenous knowledge is a study in all the ‘logies’ that includes language, governance, philosophy, education, health, medicine, and the environment. Indigenous knowledge is founded not only in the immediate world of personal and tribal experience but also the spiritual world evidenced through dreams, visions, and signs. Thus, by way of oral traditions and histories, this accumulated knowledge has been passed on to the next generation, using oral narratives like sacred creation stories, songs, historical events, cultural traditions, environmental knowledge, educational lessons, and personal life experiences.

For the Nagas, oral narratives are relevant in today’s society because oral narratives connect the past to the present. The orator constantly evaluates and balances the old customs with new ideas. As such, to address these challenges and to avoid resistance by the younger generation, teaching of oral narratives and stories necessitate qualification, guidance, and creativity of the elders who need to bridge the past with the present. The dearth of the oral tradition and the resistance of the young generation pose a great challenge to the bridging of the past and the present and the continuity of the indigenous traditions. One of the significant elements of the Indigenous narratives is “...understanding of a worldview embedded in Aboriginal oral traditions” (Archibald, 2008:13). A lack of cultural understanding of a particular Indigenous worldview limits the process of uncovering the layers that are embedded within the Indigenous stories, and Indigenous oral narratives may have many variations, metaphors, and symbols with implicit meanings and layers.

It is important to note the inherent challenges of translating oral tradition and oral narratives into the English language. Oral traditions include “a belief system” that is meant to be shared orally only. When the Indigenous oral tradition is presented in written form, it hinders true understanding because written form fails to capture the cultural contexts in a meaningful way. And therefore, much of the literariness of the meaning is lost in translation. Additionally, many non-indigenous writers and translators appropriate, distort, and exploit Indigenous oral narratives by, at least, romanticizing indigeness by emphasizing ‘nobility’. In this context, language can become an instrument for perpetuating colonial stereotypes, tone, and attitudes (Archibald, 2008).

To survive as a people, Nagas have accumulated valuable knowledge over thousands of years. This wealth of knowledge has been passed on to the coming generations by word of mouth. Oral language is the most important vehicle of transferring Indigenous knowledge. Through oral narratives, the elders have carried the responsibility of transferring the oral traditional knowledge to the next generation. Oral language is an essential instrument that allows the elders to communicate their knowledge to others, particularly children.

Chapter 3

Myths And Legends Of The Ao Tribe

Introduction:

The rich cultural background of any group of people abounds in the oral narratives of myths and legends that have left a deep imprint in the consciousness of the people. An exploration of these culture and traditions, for the literary culture and oral tradition, serves as a vast repository of knowledge which is not yet exposed or known to the world. No history of a group of people with its origin and migration narrative can be told without the accounts of myths and legends. It is myths and legends that act as the storehouses of the past to be told in the present and passed on to the future generation. In the process of the dissemination of these mythical and legendary stories, the identity of the people, tribe, village, clan etc are preserved. The villages of the Ao's share almost the same oral narrative that speaks of the myth of origin and migration. Myths and legends of the Aos are very important for the authentication of the identity of the tribe.

Definition: Myth(s)

The word Myth takes its origin from the Greek word 'Mythos' means 'Fable' or 'Tale'. It also means anything that is opposed to reality. Myths are commonly associated with the terms 'mirror of the past', 'repositories of the past', 'indigenous wisdom and knowledge' have gone through several layers of filters in the hands of the oral narrators and folklorists and yet remain the most authentic source of reliance for the identity, culture and tradition of the people.

The sacred history of an event that took place at a primeval time existing from the beginning of the history of a group of people is narrated by myth. In this way, it is myth that accounts of a reality that came into existence through the actions and functions of magical unbelievable beings. Myth, therefore, always tells of something that first began or originated relating to something created and of that which really happened at a particular period of time. ." (Eliade, M., Myth and Reality, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1964, 5-6)

Naga's in general and the Ao's in particular followed animism before Christianity set into the folds of the cultural and traditional lives. They were ardent worshippers of nature and so to them the inanimate objects of nature were worshipped with life like attributes. The mountains and the rocks, trees and rivers, animals and caves were believed to have certain extraordinary powers making them the supernatural beings.

Among the different genre of folklore of the Aos, there is distinction made between oral traditions of the origin and migration and other tales. Stories of origin and migration has been told and retold and passed down from generation to generation while the other tales are told according to the need of the occasion. Thus, more emphasis is laid and greater importance is given to the myth of origin and migration as observed.

Myth is defined in the Glossary of literary terms by M. H Abrahms as

“....a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and why things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives.”

B. Malinowski says,

“Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom...”

Oxford English Dictionary definition says,

“Myth is a purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions or events and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena.”

There are a number of definitions on myth that has come into existence at present. Many stories of myth among the Ao's fit into such definitions embodying various aspects of it.

Myths of the Aos – an analysis.

Myths of the AOs are prose narratives which are conceived to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past in their ancestor's society. As these myths are passed down through oral transmission the new generation accepts them as they are taught to be believed on faith that can answer to any doubt or disbelief. The myths of the AOs are usually associated with rituals and held to be sacred and dogmatic. The mythical characters may not necessarily be humans but one's with human characteristics and attributes whose actions are set in the days of the lore when "the stones were soft". These narratives account the origin myth, activities of deities and those worshipped as gods. The main purpose of myths is to justify the event or happening with which they are associated particularly those having to do with ceremonial worships.

A close analysis of the myths shows the close affinity between man and nature and the supernatural beings.

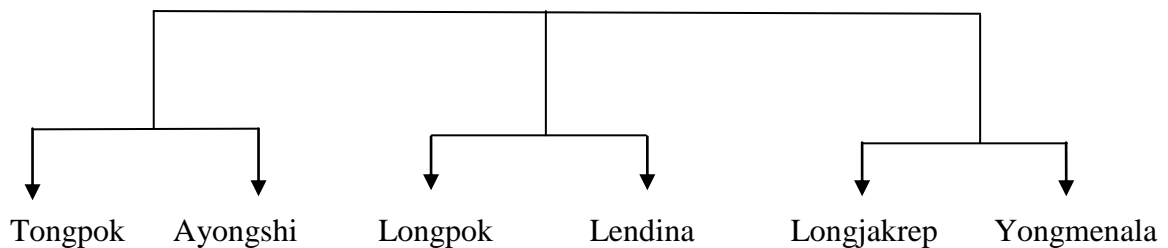
Origin myth of the AOs

The myth of origin is disputed one among the *Chungli* and *Mongsen* phratry speaking groups of the AOs. J. P Mills has recorded in his book *The Ao Nagas* that 'The *Mongsen* came out of the earth first and settled at *Kubok*, a vacant site on a spur running down from *Mongkotsu* towards the Dikhu River'. This differs from the *Chungli* version. Nevertheless, the *Chungli* version of narrative is the most commonly accepted story of origin.

The origin myth of the AOs from *Lungterok* is, according to Temsula AO, 'the fountain head of everything in AO folklore.' According to the narrative of the myth which has been passed down from one generation to the other and is continuing, the ancestors of the AOs emerged from the six stones which is situated at Chungliyimti, at present under Tuensang district. These six stones were three males and three females. The males were *Tongpok*, from who also emerged the three main clans Pongener, Longkumer and Jamir. The females were *Longkakupokla*, *Yongmenyala* and *Elongse* who were married accordingly to the three males.

Oral narration of the forefathers says that the first stone to emerge out of the earth was called *Tongpok* and his sister *Lendina* also known as *Longkakpokla*. After that *Longpok* and his sister *Yongmenyala* emerged followed by *Longjakrep* and *Ayongshi* also known as *Elongse*. Since three males and three females of different clans emerged, inter marriage was appropriated.

Figure 1. Marriage of the three males and three females is shown in the figure below.



The three males and females reproduced many sons and daughters in each household and expanded their family which led to the expansion of their settlement as well. This settlement came to be known as *Chungliymti*.

“O *Lungterok poker*;
Tongpok Longpok Longjakrep nanpongi;
Lima tasen mesemmoni.
Lima tasen mesemdena you;
Terong ka nung meyirjang bena;
Chungliymti jatetkoni”

Translation of the song:

After emerging from *Lungterok*, *Tongpok*, *Longpok* and *Lonjakrep* settled at a hillock. There they reproduced in thousands and this place came to be called *Chungliymti*. The Ao's were very simple minded and lived a very simple lifestyle. As the population increased at *Chungliymti* this song was sung,

*“O Chungliyimti kong ko;
 Bochi asemsangeri lima tasen mesemone.
 Lima tasen mesemdena yur;
 Terong junga koda;
 Chungliyimti jatet kone.”*

Translated as:

After settling at *Chungliyimti* and making it its settlement by the three fathers, each clan is prospering with increasing number.

While living at *Chungliyimti*, men, animals and the gods lived together. Folktales of the Ao's have many stories pertaining to the shared habitat of the animals, men and god together. According to N. Talitemjen Jamir in his book *Asen Sobalibaren* (Our Culture), 1992 in Ao dialect narrates in the folktales that, as the Ao's continued to live at *Chungliyimti* some girls fell in love with the tree spirit or snake spirit but all of them turned out to be supernatural beings only. It was the time when night and day were not divided. So according to one of the folktales, one day all the birds that could fly were summoned to gather together for a meeting to discuss on the division of night and day. All the birds gave their opinions but they could not come to a satisfying conclusion. Then the Owl came and said loudly 'If it is day, be it day and if it is night, be it night.' Since they could not come to a proper conclusion they dispersed deciding to gather the next day. It was the *Jongpongñü/Impang Mejempong* (a small bird) that announced loudly, 'Let there be day and night alternately' and all the birds were happy and satisfied with the wise announcement.

*“O Longterok poker,
 Ozü temang mongdangñüko; Pokpo yimyim ayimani,
 Mangli mangjen mangang, Sangwali sangwa angta.
 Ozü rongnung Impang Mejempong
 Kenpang opang medemtsüba,
 Mangli sangwa angta.”*

Translated as:

After emerging from the six stones, in the gathering to decide between night and day the Owl announced ‘if it is day, be it day and if it is night, be it night’ but the *Impang Mejempong* bird announced ‘Let there be day and night alternately.’

Inspite of the wise announcement day and night was still not divided so the birds gathered again to discuss about it. The mother sun would not come out of her house and therefore the birds decided to send the cock to coax her to come out of her house. The cock reached the threshold of her house and requested the mother sun to come out of her house narrating how the creatures were suffering in confusion but she would not come out. So the cock came up with an idea and said to the mother sun that it was leaving but incase if it is attacked by the fox on its way it will crow loudly. He requested the mother sun to come out then and help him. After a few distance he started crowing loudly again and again until the mother sun came out of its house to help the cock thinking that the cock was in trouble. And that is how because of the wisdom of the cock, the announcement given by the small bird was fulfilled. Since then the cock is known as the harbinger of light. And till today when the cock crows, the dawn breaks to day.

One day verbal dispute arose between the fire and the water and they had a big fight in which the fire was defeated so it went and hid inside a bamboo cylinder. Since then the Ao’s suffered because they could not find fire anywhere. But one day a monkey discovered it but he did not want to share it with the humans. A *Jangkok* (Cicada) saw the monkey discover the fire and it wanted to help the humans but the monkey warned him that if he revealed it to men his eyes will be taken out. Anyway, the *Jangkok* feeling pity on the humans told them the secret and the humans hunted down the monkey and snatched the fire from him. Since that day the *Jangkok* lost its eyes but men got fire.

The Ao people at *Chungliyimti* did not have proper houses to stay. They were taking shelter under the trees, in the caves and on the trees. It is incomprehensible to think that people lived on and under the trees and caves and not in villages. Such narratives are, therefore, associated to a mythical time when men and animals lived together in a ‘dream-like existence’. Men started learning to build houses from the birds.

The most luxurious house that was built those days was the hut. They began to know their neighbors and started to learn to live with one another. But another problem they faced was water. They could not find water for their daily needs at *Chungliyimti*. One day the Jamir brother's i.e., *Imsenpirong* and his brother saw a bird drench in water. The bird perched itself on a tree and started singing:

“Imsenpirong Senpirong longkitzü tzümayong.” It means *Imsenpirong Senpirong* (names of the Jamir brother's) drink the water from the cave. Sensing that there must be water nearby, the brothers started searching and finally found the water in a cave. They brought the good news to the village elders. The village elder decided to consult an *Arasentsür* (indigenous healer with healing power) to make arrangements to worship the water. The *Arasentsür* instructed that the ceremony of worship should be conducted by the eldest from the Jamir clan since they discovered the water. Since then the ceremony of worshipping any water source in any village was always conducted by the eldest from the Jamir clan. That is how water was discovered.

Creation myth of the earth: a detailed illustration.

Before the dawn of Christianity in the land of the AOs, it is believed that the forefathers were worshippers of the different objects of nature. They were given different names and worshipped during festivals, sowing season, harvesting, before a war with another village etc. among all the gods that AOs worshipped, '*Lijaba* is considered to be the almighty and all powerful' (AO 2012:84) because it is believed that he created the land of the AOs. He is also considered as the protector and sustainer of the land

According to the narrative of the myth, one day *Lijaba* was carefully and meticulously creating the world from one end. He started creating the rivers and ponds, mountains and valleys, caves and forest, all that was necessary to make the world beautiful. On one side was the tiger knitting a bamboo mat. A fox passed by then and seeing the tiger knitting the mat offered to help him as he must be tired. The tiger willingly agreed. But the fox was cunning and so he knitted the tiger's tail into the pattern of the mat. Then the fox told the water cockroach that since the tiger was very tirelessly working. So in order to make him stand up once, he said to the water cockroach that he

must give an announcement of the approaching enemy to kill them. The water cockroach did as he was told by shouting that enemies were coming to destroy the earth with *dao* and spear.

The announcement of the water cockroach interrupted the work of *Lijaba*. Thinking that the enemies were really coming and in a hurry to prepare for a fight, he haphazardly molded the rest of the land. This is how the Ao terrain is mountainous and hilly with very little plains. *Lijaba* got very angry with the water cockroach for the misinformation and beseeched that when the cockroach fell on its belly it will not be able to rise up again by itself. On the other hand, the tiger also was jolted from his work but when he tried to stand up he could not because the whole mat rose with him. While he was in this desperate state, he asked the help of the wood worms to cut through the bamboo into which his tail had been knitted. The wood worms freed the tiger from the bondage.

Origin of the clans

Based on the oral narrative of the origin of the Aos from *Longterok*, it is evident that the Aos comprises of two phratry ie *Chungli* speaking group and *Mongsen* speaking group. Three clans descended from the Chungli Aos – the *Pongen*, the *Longkumer* and the *Jamir*. The *Imchen*, the *Longchar* and the *Walling* descended from the *Mongsen* speaking group. Under the distinction of these clans are a number of sub clans that have emerged over the years.

Tongpok who was the first to emerge from the Lungterok was from the Pongen clan married to Elongshe from Jamir clan. Their first son was named Yimkum from whom the Pongen clan continued, the second was Yimsonger from whom the Yimsonger clan originated, the third Yimvu from whom the Yimchen clan originated and the fourth Lisen from whom the Tzüdir clan originated. The fifth was a daughter named.

There is a myth surrounding the emergence of the *Ozükumer* clan which is a sub clan of the *Longkumer* clan. According to the oral narrative on the emergence of the *Ozükumer*, there was a woman by the name *Longkongla* who lived in *Chungliyimti* along

with her people. She was the only daughter and the youngest of the children of Tongpok of the Pongen clan. She was much loved by her all and sundry because of her hospitality and loving nature. One day as she was weaving outside her house in the courtyard, a male hornbill flew across her. Just then she wished for a hornbill feather to wear to the *Moatsü* festival. Those days the hornbill feather was an adornment for women to wear on special occasions. Just then a feather was dropped by the hornbill. She tucked it into her skirt at her waist. She became pregnant by it and gave birth to a son whom she named Pungtangdi. Another version says that *Longkongla* kept the feather in her *Kettsü* (cane mat box). The feather had turned into a stone the next day so she kept the stone in the room at the entrance. The next day the stone had turned into a broken bamboo basin and so she threw it out but later that night the broken bamboo basin turned into a baby boy who started crying. So she took the baby and began to take care of him like a foster mother. The boy grew up to be a strong handsome young man admired by the women of the village. But some of the villagers were jealous of him and so one day they took him for fishing and killed him. When *Longkongla* learned of what had happen she vowed to take revenge on all the villagers. The next day when all the villagers had gone to the field, she killed a pig and invited all the children to the feast. While the children were happily enjoying the feast inside the house she closed the door and set the house on fire. All died except one of them who narrated to the villagers of what had happened. The villagers made plans to kill *Longkongla* the next day. When *Longkongla* came to know of the villagers plan, she set up a trap for the villagers. She spread dry grains, paddy, and beans in her compound and sat in the middle of it weaving. When the villagers came to attack her with her daos and spear they couldn't because they slipped and fell on the grains. At that moment she took her *alem* (weaver's baton) and killed everyone. By evening *Longkongla* was all alone in the village and she realised she couldn't live alone so she requested her god of heaven to lift her up. Her god agreed but on the condition that she should forget all her attachments, possessions and belongings on earth. She was also told not to look down lest she will be dropped. She promised not to look down but when she was being lifted up she heard the voices of her livestock and she looked down. As told she was dropped to the ground and turned into a stone. Her son, thus, became the originator of the *Oziükumer* clan of the Aos.

Longpok who was the second to emerge from the Lungterok was from the Jamir clan. He married Yongmenzala from the Pongen clan and they begot four sons and continued with the generations.

Longjakrep who was the third to emerge from the Lungterok was from the Jamir clan. He married Yongmenzala from the Longkum clan and they begot three sons and a daughter and continued with the generations. There are some names which can be given or taken only by a particular clan as in the case of the name Imsempirong of the Jamir clan. The legend behind the name relates to the first discovery of water by the two brothers. Since then the name has been synonymously used only by the Jamir clan from generation to generation. Whenever an Ao boy says his name is Imsempirong, it is understood by all that he belongs to the Jamir clan.

The myth of how the Ao's started worshipping deities

After the Ao's emerged from the six stones, the three clans married one another and started procreation. Though the Ao's did not have any particular god to worship, they believed in a supreme being and relied on him for all their hardships, misfortunes and pleaded with him for goodwill. They believed this unseen spirit was everywhere with them wherever they go. Since the ancestors of the Aos were cultivators, before the commencement of any work in the field they would offer the food they have taken with them first to this unseen spirit saying, "Oba (father), you eat the food and drink first." Oral tradition says that many years passed and the Aos began to feel uncomfortable with the thought that the unseen spirit was with them all the time. Then they decided that it would be best for the unseen spirit to live away from human beings.

So one day a person took a fowl and an egg. Plucking out the feather one by one from the fowl he started chanting, "Oba drink this, eat this and never come back to the village or visit the households again." He went till the *Süngküim* (village gate) and slit the throat of the fowl and sprinkled the blood around the village gate, broke the egg and let it drip to the ground. He cooked the meat of the fowl and on a stick with branches he stuck the head, wings, feet of the fowl and the egg shells. Then he returned home. Thinking that they had got rid of the unseen spirit the Aos lived in freedom for sometime, but the same

troubles and misfortunes began to afflict them again. They thought that since the unseen spirit was left just outside the village gate troubles were visiting them again so they made the same strategy to leave it in the deep forest. So following the same ritual and chanting the same curse, he went to the deep jungle. There he cooked the fowl and left some of the meat on two *Am*'s (a large smooth glossy leaf which serves as plate for the Ao's). At that moment a voice came from one of the *Am*. It said, "Your mistreatment is a lot and so from today whatever you have to offer me do it in this basket." And he threw out the basket from the *Am* plate. (It is believed that the Ao's learnt the art of basket making from that day)

The man returned home and felt lightened that he had got rid of the unseen spirit. But whenever he had problems he could not share with any other fellow beings, he longed for the spirit with whom he used to share his burdens so he again decided to go looking for the spirit. Getting ready with all necessary preparations, he set out to the deep forest where he had outcast the spirit. Then entering the particular grove of *Am* he started looking for the spirit but could not find it. He started tearing the *Am* to determine the whereabouts of the spirit and finally could determine that it had gone inside a big stone. From that day onwards, the Ao's started worshipping stones with the same ritual done to outcast it.

The myth of Aonglemla

According to Temsula Ao, Aonglemla (in some other narratives Aonglemlatsü) is depicted as a malevolent and spiteful being. The places that she haunts are the deep jungles rivers or streams. The physical appearance of it is also described as much distorted with the height of a dwarf, long hair touching the ground and her feet are pointed reverse. Aonglemla is a female as the name suggests and many hunters' narratives have claims of having seen such creatures. They claim of having heard her laughter, crying, giggling and screams. It is believed to be a bad omen to meet her.

Talilula Longchar, in her paper entitled *She who walks with feet facing backwards and laughs in the wilderness: Ao Naga narratives of Aonglemla*, has done an extensive study on this being with factual narration of those who met her in the wild. The places

which are supposedly frequented by this being have been located by many villagers of the Ao's because they often came across tiny footprints left behind by Aonglemla as they believe. Longchar also throws light on the prejudicial labeling of Aonglemla as inherently evil or ghost. Emphasis on the representation of the being as an entity rather than spirit is made as she neither human or spirit but something in between. To understand the origin of the existence of Aonglemla, it is imperative to know the folktale surrounding this entity. The written version found in *Tar Nunger Otsü: Myths of the Hills in Ao Dialect* by Talitemjen Imchen (1993:33-34) gives a background understanding of the existence of Aonglemla explicitly.

There was a man and a wife in a certain Ao village but unfortunately the wife died leaving her husband, son and daughter. The father married another woman and had a son. There came a day when the village fell into bad times and the villagers were compelled to desert the village. Since the father was among the village leaders, while he was engaged in the planning, the step mother took care of the arrangement at home.

The next day, before leaving the village, the step-mother sends the son and his sister to fetch water. She had an ulterior motive and so she put a hole in the bamboo cylinders of the son's bamboo vessels and instructed them not to wait for each other but return at the earliest. The sister filled her bamboo vessels and returned home whereas the son could not. Scared of his stern step-mother he stayed back late and did not go home.

After all the planning was done, the father returned home. On noticing the absence of his son, he inquired of his whereabouts to his daughter. The step-mother cut in by accusing the son of being very disobedient and that he must be at his friend's house. The next day, the villager's proceeded to their new village and the father remembered his son so moving towards his wife and the children he asked if the son was coming. The wife nonchalantly replied that he must be coming with his friends. But even after they reached the new settlement, he could not find his son among his friends or with anyone else. None of the villagers seem to have seen him.

Next day he packed some cooked rice and went to the old village to search for his son. Not finding a single soul in sight in the village, he proceeded towards the village

well where he found his son sitting on a rock with his back turned towards him. Filled with happiness he went towards his son to offer the food he had brought with him but every time he moved closer the son went away a little further. The father began to ask for forgiveness and tried to appease him but the son didn't respond. After a while the son disappeared from his sight. The father was quit perplexed at the unusual things happening right in front of him. At last the father bid farewell to his son saying how much he wants him to come home but if he doesn't wish to then he can at least have the food he brought for him. And leaving the food on one of the rocks, he left with a heavy heart. The same was repeated the next day also but the son would neither turn towards his father nor respond to him. He thought and thought about ways and means to bring his son back until one night the son appeared in his dream. In the dream the son came to their house and stood in the corner of the house. The father tried to make peace with him but the son said to him that it is time for them to live separately and saying that he walked out of the house.

The next day after the dream the father again went to the well expecting to see his son but this time he couldn't even see the back of his son turned towards him. Remembering what his son said to him in his dream the father bid his final farewell never to return to the well again by saying that whenever they happen to meet they will make way for each other and live together.

After that whenever hunters or vegetable gatherers went to that place they would often see him with his back turned towards them sitting on one of the rocks. The jungle seem to liven up with his presence and therefore they called him Aonglemlatsü ('Aong'-forest/jungle, 'lemlatsü'-enliven)

Myth of the art of reviving the dead

The oral narrative of the myth of the revival of the dead goes back to the story of a man from the *Tzüdir* clan who went to the river for fishing. After catching the fishes, he started to make preparations to cook them in the hollow bamboo vessel (cylindrical shaped) which is the traditional way of cooking practised by the Aos. After filling up one vessel and corking it up using some leaves found in the jungle he kept it I the fire to cook.

Since there were some more fishes left, he decided to fill another vessel and this time corked it with different jungle leaves. After making sure that the fishes were well cooked he removed them from the fire. He uncorked the bamboo cylinder and emptied it into the banana leaves. All was well. But when he emptied the second one, to his utter amazement, he found that the fishes were alive. It baffled him so much that he repeated the same procedure again and again and the result was the same. He discovered after this repetitive trial that the fish that was corked with a particular jungle leaf was revived whereas the other not.

This led him to the conclusion that the leaves possessed some miraculous properties of reviving the dead. This secret was very closely guarded within his family and they used this leaf whenever one of his family members fell ill he would heal them with this leaf. It is also told that he was able to revive a dead person as well with this medicinal leaf.

This secret was passed onto his children but they did not safeguard it with the same keenness and vigor as he did. Thus, this valuable healing power was lost forever to the clan.

Myth of the Tiger-soul

This myth has been and is a very common narrative among the Aos. The setting of the myth takes one to a distant time when there was no distinction between light and darkness and men and animals lived in complete harmony with one another. It was a time when young girls married tigers and many had trees as their lovers.

‘The most famous medicine-man in the Ao country is Tsoknungtemshi of Unger. It is said that several times persons who have laughed at him and expressed disbelief in his powers have been told that they would meet his leopard at a certain spot and have done so. The animal is said to wander round his house and come to him for scraps of meat. In 1914, Akhoia ringed and killed his leopard. Tsoknungtemshi developed ulcers corresponding to the places where a stick has been fixed to keep the dead leopard’s jaws open. He saved his life by procuring another leopard and drinking an infusion of

scrapings from the ‘daos’ and spears with which his animal had been killed.’ (Mills 1973, 248)

Lijaba’s spirit

In the days of our forefathers, the ancestors worshipped *Lijaba* as the almighty and the creator of the earth. Since he was a god nobody had seen him and it was the *arasentsür* (witch doctor/healer) who mediated between the people and *Lijaba*. One day he told the *arasentsür* that he was not going to live in the midst of the people anymore and that he will send his spirit to punish or bless the people according to their deeds. He instructed the people to celebrate to commemorate his name. He told them to offer a healthy animal without any scar and also that his bone should not be broken. The meat should not be shared with others either. That summer a grasshopper appeared and thinking that it is the spirit of *Lijaba* they started calling it *Lijaba Süngkok* (Lijaba’s grasshopper). The whole village worshipped and asked for blessings from it. The grasshopper stayed for few days and disappeared again. Hence the AOs believe that the grasshopper is the spirit of *Lijaba*.

Myths can be interpreted as an ancient religion of the tribe which over a period of time became the set of beliefs sanctioned to become the basis for the rituals, taboos and superstitions of the AO community. Myths of the tribe gives an understanding and deep insight into the ethos of the tribe which has been preserved and maintained by a wide variety of folkloric expressions of belief and customs.

Legend(s)

A legend is a genre of folklore that consists of a narrative featuring human actions perceived or believed both by teller and listeners to have taken place with human history. Narratives in this genre may demonstrate human values, and possess certain qualities that give the term verisimilitude. Formerly the term legend meant a tale about a saint. Legends resemble folktales in content. They may include supernatural beings, elements of mythology, or explanations of natural phenomena, but they are associated with a particular locality or person and are told as a matter of fact history.

Although a lot of importance has been attributed to the major genres of oral stories, legends have not received so much attention in the scholar study as that of myth and other folktales in comparison. Except for the saints' legends, most other types have remained of little interest without any comparative scholarship on them (Blackburn (2004:16)

Tales pertaining to legends among the Aos

Like myths, legends of the Ao's are also prose narratives which are regarded and accepted as true but not of a remote past. They are both sacred and secular but more secular than sacred. The characters in the legends are human beings which tell of war heroes and their victories, legendary stories of lovers in that period and their pursuits and the deeds of past heroes and chiefs. They are believed to be true holding certain factual information that provides information to specific inquiries.

Migration legend

One of the most recurrent motifs in the legends of migration among the Aos is crossing big rivers or water during the course of their migration.

According to the narrative of the *Mongsen* phratry, it is said that the ancestors were first found inhabiting the land in the east called *Tsüingporong*. From here they went and settled in *Longsürr* land. It is supposedly believed that while living in this part of the land they learned the art of cultivation like rice. Then they migrated to *Lephorr* from where they shifted *Lakhorr* again. In this land people learned the timings of their meal by observing the sprouting of plants like the banana plant. From *Lakhorr* they migrated again to *Tsüküm* (shore) but were faced many problems of food and water. It is from this place that the ancestors went to different directions some went by land while some other by water. They wandered for sometime until they reached *Chungliymti*.

The most popular legend pertaining to the migration by crossing big rivers is in connection with the dispersal from *Chungliymti*. According to this legend, after living in *Chungliymti* for many generations, the people crossed the river *Tzüla* which is

commonly known as *Dikhu*. They are said to have made a cane suspension over the river which helped them to cross the river. Talitemjen and Lanunungsang (2005) writes “... one group had to migrate and settle in a place called *Tzüngtsüing Yongpang* or *Tzütayongpang* (A sangtam settlement in Tuensang district, a little district from *Chungliyimti*). Another group also left the village willingly and so they were called ‘*Molunger*’, which means ‘willing’ or ‘willingly’. At one time they settled at *Molungkimong* ridge which is about seven kilometers from Mokokchung town.” It is also told that after crossing the *Tzüla* river, the people who already crossed cut the suspension bridge in order to prevent anyone from crossing over. So those who were left behind had to take a detour. To those who remained, the Aos to this day call the *Mürir* (ones who took a detour). The name Ao-er is given after crossing over the river which means ‘those who went’. The first Ao settlement after the crossing over was at *Aonglenden*. The oral tradition says that at the new settlement the people were blessed with ten male newborns in a single night and so was named *Soyim* (birth village).

The legend of Soyim village presently Ungma village.

Legends have it that, from *Chungliyimti* the whole Ao community migrated westwards by constructing a cane bridge over the *Tsüla* (*Dikhu*) river. They landed at *Tubalongla* on the other side of the river bank. From there on, the Ao’s came to *Aonglenden*, Mokokchung district. Both the *Mongsen* and *Chungli* speaking people of the Ao’s settled at *Aonglenden*. On their arrival and settlement at *Aonglenden* ten sons were born on that very night. Therefore to mark the great event they gave the name *Soyim* to that place. To necessitate the elixir of life, a source for water was created after the Ao’s settled at *Aonglenden*. The pond is known by the name *Yimtenta Tzubo* (*Yimtenta* pond). Since agriculture has always been the main source of sustenance for any Naga community, the Ao’s, after settlement at *Aonglenden* chose a fertile area where they could cultivate and produce food crops for their livelihood and survival. This first area of cultivation and farming came to be known as *Lusenkong*. Unfortunately, Ngarensang, the *Unger* (Chief) of *Soyim* was taken away by a Tiger. In order to let the dew drops cleanse the place, the population left *Soyim* temporarily and went in search for a place where the sun’s first light set upon called *Koridang*. From that moment and place where the *Unger*

(chief) Ngarensang disappeared, the place came to be known as *Ngaren Tzubo*. Victorious in many battles and against all rivals, the Ao's then returned from *Kordang* to reclaim their first settlement in the South and founded *Ungma*. Thus *Soyim* became *Ungma* meaning *Ung* (chief) *Ma* (lost). From *Ungma* the Ao population gradually dispersed further and established more and more villages. It is believed that the event of the settlement of the Ao's in the present territories indicate that there are a number of sites and places still bearing testimony of the Ao history.

Understanding the language of the birds and animals

According to a narrative based on the above mentioned, the Aos started cooking food without having any knowledge of the use of water when they first settled at *Chungliyiimti*. 'It is said that rain water, dewdrops and sap water obtained from roots and tree trunks were used for drinking and cooking.' (Ao 2012: 15) in those days were two brothers namely Imsempirong and Sempirong. One day to their surprise their names were called by a '*tsükpo*' (bulbul) who started singing

Imsempirong Sempirong
Longkitsuyong atsuyongang
(Imsepirong Sempirong
Drink the water of the cave)

It is believed that after listening to the song of the bird the brothers found the water source from where they started drawing water for drinking and cooking. Apart from this belief it is also concluded that it was the *Jamir* clan who first found water among the Aos because *Imsempirong* and *Sempirong* belong to the *Jamir* clan.

Such narratives form the assumption that there was a time when humans could understand the language of birds and animals too.

Legendary love story of Jina and Etiben

Jina was a man of short height who came from a poor family. Nevertheless he was a great and strong warrior who wielded the naga dao. It was so sharp that nobody could

compete with him. He also showed exceptional talent in playing the cup violin (a stringed musical instrument made of dried gourd). It was known as the 'kotak kongki' (heavenly instrument). Etiben was a woman of wit, beauty and charm who came from a very wealthy family that kept many servants to work for them. She loved decorating herself with ornaments and also loved singing. Oral narration says that she had the skin colour of amber and big dovey eyes.

Despite of the differences in their appearance and family status, Jina and Etiben fell in love with each other. Etiben would sing songs of love to Jina 'Even if it is a broken house with boulders falling from our neighbours and even if the rain downpours on our poor house, beloved, I would still want to live with you.' Moved by her singing Jina replies, "Though I go without consuming food or rice beer, it feels as if I ate gooseberry and drank water from the river every time I speak with you lady." And so, the love story between the two lovers began to blossom.

It was around this time that Etiben had many suitors coming to ask for her hand in marriage. There were suitors lined up at the Morung and at the end of the line stood Jina. As per the Ao customs, Etiben carried her basket and walked past her suitors one after another. Each of them tried their best to put their shawl into her basket but every time she dodged and did not give them a chance. But as she went closer to where Jina stood, she slowed down making it easy for Jina to put his shawl inside her basket. Thus, all the suitors were rejected and Jina was the chosen one.

Despite all the differences they had, mainly financial differences, and although both of them knew that their love would not be approved by Etiben's parents, their love continued to grow. They would secretly meet at Longkhum village which was about eighteen kilometers away from their village. They would take breaks while walking and sit on the stones along the trail. Everytime they sat down to rest there Jina would play his cup violin and Etiben would listen to him and sing along. Sometime she would keep herself busy by taking off her ornaments, cleaning and polishishg them. Thus, the day would pass by until they reach the point where the hill ended in a cliff where they would sit and spend the remaing hours in each others company. They always made sure that they return home before their absence is felt or anyone spotted them together.



Image 1: The trail called ‘Longlangba’ that Jina and Etiben used to walk at Longkhum during their secret meetings

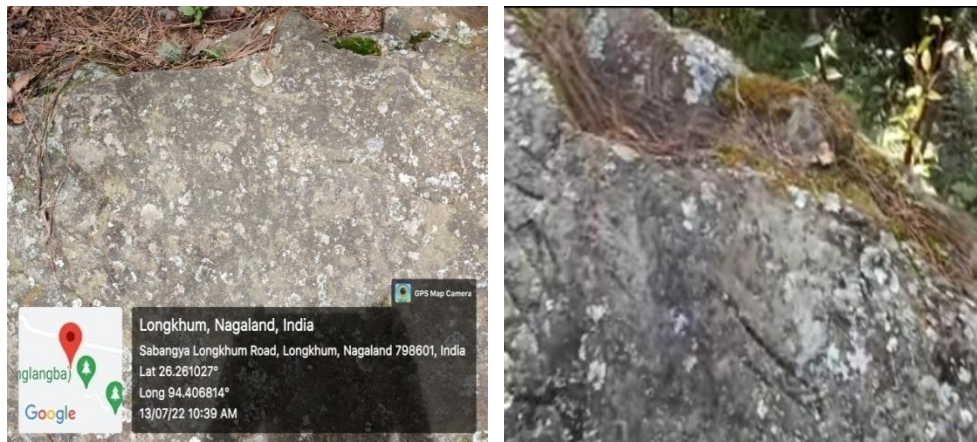


Image 2 (a) (b): Stones where Jina and Etiben sat at Longlangba stone trail

Eventually their secret meetings were soon discovered by Etiben’s parents. Etiben’s parents were very disappointed to find out that Jina was from a very poor family and they saw him as someone who would not be able to provide a good and comfortable life for their daughter. Jina and Etiben could not accept their disapproval and eloped to a place called Mongchen and stayed up on a hilltop. However, fate was not in their favour and Etiben fell seriously sick so Jina took her home.

As Etiben was recuperating from her illness, Tenyur, a wealthy eligible bachelor from Sungratsü village came to meet her parents and ask for the hand of Eiben for marriage. Etiben’s parents put forward their demand that whoever brings the dowry of cattle within a stipulated time, he will have Etiben as his wife. The demand of dowry with

the condition gave Tenyur an upper hand over Jina who could not arrange such a huge dowry within the short stipulated time. Thus, Jina was at a disadvantage. On hearing about the demand of dowry by her parents, Etiben rushes over to Jina to inform him about this matter knowing that it was not in his capacity to fulfill the demand of dowry. She takes off her precious necklace and hands it over so that he could pay for the dowry. But before Jina could arrange the dowry, Tenyur came along with the cattle with pride. This greatly pleased Etiben's parent's and was of the impression that he was the right match for their daughter. Without further ado, they made arrangement for the marriage of Tenyur and Etiben. Etiben came up with several tricks and excuses to postpone the marriage by feigning sickness and remaining bedridden. She longed and pined for Jina but she was not given a chance to say what she wanted as the dowry had already been accepted. Meanwhile Jina also managed to arrange the dowry and brought the cattle to Etiben's parents but it was too late. Etiben was married and had been long gone by then. Despite the turn of events, Jina's love for Etiben did not waver for he knew that she was a victim of circumstances over which none of them had any power and he continued to love her dearly.

Contradictory to the life that Etiben's parents had imagined for their daughter, Etiben was living a miserable loveless life without compassion. Tenyur did not have any regard and respect for Etiben. She also suffered physical abuse and ill treatment from Tenyur and this went on until Etiben could not take it any longer. Her only solace was in Jina so she started sneaking out of the house to meet Jina in the fields. This became frequent until one day the rumour of her secret meetings with Jina reached the ears of her husband. The angry Tenyur goes out in search of Etiben calling her name. When Etiben heard Tenyur calling her name, she was shocked and tells Jina to hide quickly. When she meets her husband, he started questioning her with suspicion. But Etiben denied all his accusations and in a fit of anger and jealousy, Tenyur strikes Etiben, beat her mercilessly and threw her on the ground until she could move no more. Tenyur left Etiben's crippled body in the field only to be found by Jina who took her home.

Etiben's condition did not improve but worsened day by day. Although her parents did their best, they could not nurse her back to health and shortly after she passed

away. When the tragic news of the death of Etiben reached Jina, he was overcome with grief. He mourned her bitterly without eating, drinking or sleeping. This took a severe toll on his body and he too passed away consumed by his grief.

The villagers who knew of their inseparable love sympathized with them and cremated their bodies together. The villagers witnessed magical shaped wisps of smoke emerge from the fire in the shape of two persons holding hands who resembled *Jina* and *Etiben*. Thus, it was concluded that at least in death the two lovers were united.

The story of Samataba of Mopungchuket village

This is the story about the devil that lived in a pond (awatsung) in the Mopungchuket village. The devil in the pond was powerful and therefore, the villagers tried to appease the devil by way of offering eggs, chickens and pigs to it. This appeasement was done in order to befriend the devil so that whenever the village was in trouble the villagers would take the help of the devil. Through these offerings the devil made friendship with a villager who acted as the mediator between the devil and the other villagers. He would be often informed by the devil whenever the devil left the village. One day a group of *Ahoms* came to attack their village. They took bath in the pond, killed a dog, cooked and ate it. The villagers could only look helplessly because the *Ahoms* were very overpowering. While the *Ahoms* were carrying out their activities near the pond, the devil appeared and frightened them. The villagers chased after them and killed them. The doas they procured from their enemies were kept under a tree trunk. One day, on their way to the fields they saw a big snake on the tree. The villagers tried to kill the snake with stones, catapults, bow and arrow but failed. Just then a young man called *Samataba* from Chungtia village came. He came to this range because he was denied membership by the village council of Chungtia village. There is a custom among the Aos practised by many villages that whenever killing is happening in the village, no new member should be allowed to come inside the village. However he was allowed to come in because of the situation and was also asked to kill the snake. He spoke to the snake:

‘asa nüka meta, azü nüka meta, kii tenung Samataba kü madang ko teplakzüükang’

(I got neither meat nor rice, my name is Samataba, come and fall on me). And when the snake fell on him, he killed it with his catapult. Samataba became a popular figure and was known for his bravery by the villagers. This pond is a natural pond. Oral narration says that the size of the pond was widened in the fight between the big snake and Samataba.



Image 3: Carved out image on a single tree stump a depiction of the devil in the form of a large snake killed by Samataba

The legend of the naming of *Mangdangtakong* (Dried body)

Once upon a time there was old man whose name was Punazungba. As is the practice of hunters, during one of his hunting spree he placed the traps for the animals. After waiting for some time when he returned to check his trap, he found the devil Aonglemla caught in the trap and decided to kill her. The devil pleaded with him to spare her promising that she will bless him with good food till he dies. But he refused. So the devil said that since he was going to kill her she will also break his plate. After killing the devil the old man went home but when he reached home he found that his daughter had

died and he understood what the devil meant by ‘break his plate’. He told the villagers that he had killed Aonglemla but none believed him because it was believed that men cannot kill devils. So, as proof he took the villagers to the place where he had killed the devil. When they reached the body of the devil had already dried up. That is how the village came to be known as *Mangdangtakong* which is presently known as Changtonya yimsen.

Analysis of the use of myths and legends in the Ao folklore – a magical realism perspective.

While doing a thorough study of the myths and legends that has been cited above, it has come to the purview that most of them hold in content as well as subject the quality of the fantastic and the magical. Oral narratives of any type are absurd in nature because most of them characterize fantastical elements which are difficult to comprehend in ordinary sense. They are gripped by an atmosphere of mysteriousness and the dream like qualities can hardly be thought to be real. The oral narratives of the Ao’s are store houses of an ancient past that is far beyond the remembered cultural past. They are tales about men and his surroundings and also the different animate and inanimate objects of nature he lived with. They are narratives of a time when human lived in a dreamlike condition not distinguished from the other animals of the jungle. These dreamlike qualities are found in almost all the folk narratives of the Ao’s.

Many such mythological stories and legendary feats tell of narratives that do not conform to the general understanding of nature in the present times. While considering these narratives purely from the point of oral narration, the possibility of the occurrences can be accepted. There is a contention in the present times that while some parts of the narratives can be exaggeration what it tells is not all fiction also. Oral narratives can be assumed to be not a reliable tool for the assumption that while it get transmitted from one generation to the other, it goes through a lot of filtration and changes. Nevertheless the core of the story is based on an actual event.

Table 4. Magical or dream like qualities and realism in the Myth/Legend of the Ao Tribe

Myth/Legend	Characters	Magical or dream like qualities	Realism
Myth of <i>Ozukumer</i> clan	Longkongla, Hornbill, Boy	1. At the wish of Longkongla for a Hornbill feather, the hornbill drops one on her. 2. Transformation of the feather to stone, broken basin and a boy.	Magical transformation was almost everyday occurrences in the olden days.
Creation of the land of the Aos	<i>Lijaba</i> , the almighty god among all the gods the Aos believed in.	The cockroaches warning	It was those times when men, animals and birds could understand each other's language
Understanding the language of birds and animals	Imsempirong, Sempirong, bird	Message in the song of the bird to the two brothers about water	Men, animals and birds could understand each other's language
Myth of origin	Longpok, Tongpok, Longjakrep, Longkakupokla, Yongmenyala, Elongse	Emergence from the six stones	A phenomena that was normal during the days of the ancestors.
Migration and settlement legend	Tsüingporog, Longsürr, Lephorr Tsüküm, Soyim	Birth of 10 males at Soyim in a single night	This was a usual occurrence, a kind of normalcy observed in many other oral narratives
Jina and Etiben legend	Jina, Etiben, Tenyur, Etiben's parents	Emergence of magical shaped wisps of smoke from the fire in the shape of two persons holding hands who resembled Jina and Etiben.	It was those times when men lived with the spirit. They could see with their naked eyes as well

Revival of the dead.	A man from the <i>Tzüdir</i> clan	Fishes bottled in a bamboo cylinder for cooking becomes alive.	The effect of the medicinal power inherent in the leaf that was used as a cork in the bamboo cylinder.
Tiger soul	Tsoknungtemshi	When his tiger was killed and a stick was kept to keep the jaws open, he developed ulcers corresponding to this area of his mouth.	The development of wounds where the animal had been hurt.
The story of Samataba	Samataba , the devil and the villagers	Communication between the devil and the villager, Samataba's request to the snake and the obedience of the snake	A time when man, spirits and animals living in complete understanding
Naming of <i>Mangdangta-kong</i>	Punaziüngba, Aonglemla, villagers	Killing of the devil, communication between Punaziüngba and Aonglemla	Man and spirits could communicate with each other.
<i>Lijaba's</i> spirit	<i>Lijaba</i> , <i>Arasentsür</i> , grasshopper	Communication between <i>Lijaba</i> and <i>arasentsür</i> . The grasshopper believed to be the spirit of <i>Lijaba</i> .	The role of the witch doctor as mediator.

Folklore of the Aos is a vast canvas and within this canvas is encapsulated the varied cultural occurrences - religious, cultural and traditional rituals and practices. Myths and legends impart cultural values and practices that are passed on from one generation to the other. They are narrations of stories and tales that lead to important discoveries and conquests. The functional and symbolic aspects of myths and legends among the Aos is that they act as medium to re-enforce customs and shared values. Folklore is the best tool in understanding ones culture and tradition to establish models of behavior for generations to come. The importance and significance of folk and oral tradition has come to be widely recognized in the context of tradition-oriented

communities of the non-western world for whom the search for identity in the face of change has become widely vital as it validates one's identity. The connection between myth and religion, myth and culture, myth and society, myth and the individual are various significant elements in the oral narratives indicating distant memories of shared values and historical experiences in the past upon which the Ao identity is build.

Chapter 4

Ao folklore and other tales

(Animal tales, proverbial sayings, spirits, religious practices, traditional beliefs, transformational tales, trickster tales)

The folklore of a tribe is the mirror of the cultural and traditional heritage of that group of people. They are the prose narratives that are neither dogmatic nor historical, may have happened may not have, and therefore are more fictional in its subject. When these are handed down from one generation to the other either by word of mouth or written documents, they unearth a store house of knowledge and wisdom in the course of passing or writing down. The traditions of genealogical and other historical events, principles, beliefs, customs and the like that are supposed to date from the earliest times of the Ao tribe have been carefully preserved as guiding precedents in all discourses.

One of the peculiar features of the Ao folktales is the important part which is played by the animals. Animal tales have been a part of the Ao folklore since the origin of the tribe and thus, occupies a considerable number of stories concentrated on various animals and birds. The animal element in the animal tales has a predominant thematic content in the discourse of the human and the animal and among the animal themselves. The animals are always or nearly regarded as almost human, if not in appearance but in their thought, speech or act. This was the time when men and animals were alike. Sometimes they appear in the form of man and transform themselves to animal form. Sometimes, despite acquiring human reasoning and speech remain in the animal form. Folk and fairy-tale animals 'have metaphorical meanings that exceed their existence as natural beings in a world shared with humans' (Lewis C. Seifert, 244). The role of the animals in the interpretations of the tales has significant merit. Animal tales reveal a wide range of perspectives on the relation that is build by humans with them.

1. Animal tales

1.1. The tale of the Mouse that gave good variety paddy to men. (Translated from *Myths of the Hills: The past is the Beacon of the Future* by Talitemjen Imchen)

In the olden days of our forefathers, good quality paddy seeds were not available so the people used to eat only bad quality rice. After perceiving how humans eat bad quality rice, the mouse felt pity on man and wanted to help them. So the mouse approached man and said “I will bring you good quality of paddy seeds, in return take good care to honour and bury me when I die.” Then the man replied, “When you die, we will wrap your body in a fine *Mangkotepsiü* (Ao-Naga warrior shawl) in a dignified way and your graveyard will be kept very clean.” Hearing the assurance of the man, the mouse was delighted and the mouse swam across the mighty rivers and from the other shore brought the finest paddy seeds and gave to men. The quality of the paddy seed brought by the mouse was exceptionally good that man began to consume white rice and enjoy the aromatic meals.

Seeing the contentment of men, the mouse thought of testing him of his promise. So, one fine day, the mouse pretended to be dead and lay at the entrance of the main door. When the man saw it, he quickly picked up two sticks and said, “This disgusting mouse! Today also he is lying dead here dirtying the entire house.” Grumbling, the man lifted the mouse with the two sticks and dumped the mouse in a stinging nettle bush. After sometime, the mouse, with bitter resentment, came to the man and said, “What happened to your promise? Didn’t you say that when I die, you will honour me by wrapping my body in a fine *Mangkotepsiü*? But today you insulted me, hated, cursed and dumped me in the stinging nettle bush. You have utterly lied and deceived me. Since you didn’t keep your promise to me, from today onwards, over the rice, in the grain storage baskets, in the pots and on all other food items, I will eat first and then leave my feces on them all.”

It is believed by the Ao’s that from that day onwards till today, in the rice, the grain storage baskets, we see feces of the mouse and all other food items are eaten by the mouse first.

1.2. The tale of the Pokpo (Owl) and Jongpongno ozü (a small brown bird)

In the olden days, there was no night and day. So for the decision to take place between day and night, all the birds in the world were called for a conference. And in that conference they decided to let the Owl make the grand announcement because among all the birds, the voice of the Owl was clearer and louder. And thus, the Owl, with its *Nulaksong* (to make a public address) cried out loudly, “O hoi! If it is dark let it, be dark throughout, if it is light, be it light throughout!” When the birds heard the cry of the Owl, they were all unhappy. They didn’t like the cry given by the Owl so they beat the Owl by stamping on its face until it became flat. That is why the Owl’s face is flat till today. And men also do not eat the flesh of the Owl till today. This is because one fears that when one speaks in a village conference or any meeting, like the Owl they might speak foolishly and speak only what one wants to speak.

After the birds were settled in their anger, the birds understood that the *Nulaksong* of the Owl was not good. So they decided to select another bird among themselves and selected *Jongpono* bird to do the job. So, the bird standing on the elevated bamboo platform shouted loudly, “Oh! Let there be day and night alternately; night to sleep and take rest, day to go to the fields to work for the stomach!” When the birds heard this cry of the bird, they rejoiced together and accepted that the cry of the bird was very good. Then all the birds patted on the bird to congratulate for its wisdom. Thus the body of the bird became smaller and smaller with the patting. Earlier this bird was as big as a cock with shining feather and very grand in appearance. But the patting of the bird reduced her to thumb size.

Proverbial saying:

Jongpongñü ozü ama.

Lit: Like the Jongpongñü bird. Fig: Too much praise can make a person lose its worth

Pokbo yimyim langktem ama.

Lit: Like the owl’s careless announcement. Fig: Looks very wise but does foolishly.

Till date, many of the elders in the Ao community use these proverbial sayings in daily conversations in reference to the situations appropriate.

1.3. The Dog and the Pig tale

In those days when men and animals lived together as one, there lived a man with his dog and pig. One day, the man sends the dog and the pig to work in the field. The pig worked the whole day in the field and went home very tired and exhausted. The dog did not do any work but slept the whole day in the field. After reaching home the pig complained about the dog to the man. But the dog played a clever trick. After the pig went home, he got up and walked all over the field leaving his footprints everywhere. The dog also went home and told the man that he had worked in the field the whole day. So the man replied that he will go to the field and whosever footprint he finds in the field will be the one who had worked in the field. The next day, the man went to the field to check the footprints and he found them to be the footprint of the dog. He thought that it was the dog that had done all the work in the field. The man went home and scolded the pig for lying. As a punishment the man told the pig that from that day he will not be allowed inside the house. He was to stay in the small porch just outside the threshold of the house. And the dog was allowed to stay with the man inside the house.

To this day, therefore, dogs live with man inside the house and the pigs outside the house. This is seen mostly in the villages where pig rearing is common in almost all the households. While the dog is kept as a pet, the pigs are reared mostly for meat during festive seasons.

1.4. Why Some Water Animals have Peculiar Body Shapes

This tale is about a frog, a crab, a shrimp and a little fish. These four creatures were very good friends and did everything together. The story also says that all of them were females. Just like human beings, it is said that these creatures were also cultivators and grew rice, maize, pulses etc.

Among the Aos, it is a custom among villagers to work in the fields collectively. For example, a few families, often close relatives, would form a sort of a group and take turns to sow seeds, weed and even harvest the crops in the different fields by turns. It is believed that in this collective way, the work gets done a lot quicker and exertion seems to make the labour seem less tiring and tedious.

In the same manner, the story says that these four water animals worked collectively in their fields by turns. As is customary, a member of the group usually stops work a little earlier in order to cook the mid-day meal for everyone present. This too is done on a rotation basis.

One day, it was the crab's turn to be the day's cook. So she went to the farmhouse and started cooking the mid-day meal. But it so happened that on that day, the group's food stock was meager and included no meat at all. Seeing how all of them had been working hard, the crab decided to put one of her own legs into the curry in order to enhance its flavour.

When the group assembled for the meal, they found that the food on this particular day tasted delicious and congratulated the crab on her excellent cooking. But they also wanted to know how she managed such a fine meal when there was no meat in the storeroom. The crab confessed that she had put one of her own legs in the curry and that is how it tasted so good.

The other three were truly amazed at this and jokingly said that the crab should become the regular cook of the mid-day meal. However the crab took the remark seriously and agreed to become the cook.

And so whenever the group had no other meat, the crab plucked out a leg and cooked it in the curry. And every time she did this, the meal tasted better than other times.

But soon a day came when there were no more legs on the crab's body and she needed a little meat very badly to prepare a tasty meal for her friends. So in desperation, while the rest of the curry was being cooked, the crab rolled into the pot and got cooked along with the other ingredients inside.

That day, there was no signal call from the crab to her friends to come and get their meal. After waiting for some time the other three came to the farm house and began eating. They thought that the crab must have gone out on a personal errand or something of sort. The meal, everyone agreed, was so much tastier than the other meals the crab had cooked so far. While one of them about to ladle another helping of the curry, she discovered the body of the crab, now only a legless stump, cooked into a pinkish lump and they all realised why the crab had failed to appear for the mid-day meal with them.

They were all stunned into disbelief and wonder at the crab's supreme sacrifice. But instead of appreciating her last act, the three found it quite amusing and began to giggle at what they now began to term as the foolishness of the crab. The giggles turned to open laughter and gradually into hysteria. The fit went on and the three friends could not stop laughing for a long time.

When the bouts subsided out of sheer exhaustion, the three friends discovered certain changes in their bodies.

The frog discovered that her upper body was distended abnormally and that she had no waist and her eyes also bulged out. Since that day, the Aos say, the frog has this ugly misshapened body with the eyes almost bulging out of their sockets.

The shrimp on the other hand realised that there was something funny about her legs. During her fits of hysterical laughter, she was rolling so much on the ground, that they appeared to have turned backward and involuntarily hopped backwards. That is why, the Aos say, from that time hence, the shrimp lost her ability to walk straight and could only hop backwards.

The fish too had undergone, without her consciousness, a peculiar change in her body shape. When the other two had started felt to laugh at the poor crab in the cooking pot, she had at first felt sorry for it and did not join in the laughter, but gradually the fish forgot her initial shock and dismay at the poor crab's fate. Being a shy person she tried to control herself, though the hilarity of the other two was fast catching on to her mood too. She held her hand to her mouth so as not to laugh too loud. Thus, she thought could

suppress her laughter, but eventually, the general merriment overwhelmed her and she too went into giggles first and then into wholehearted laughter.

As she now saw the transformation in her friend's bodies, she turned her attention to herself and realised that she had lost her slim neck. Instead, there was a big goiter like bulge at the point which at one time was considered her mark of beauty. So the fish, till this day, do not have any neck to speak of.

As for crabs, the Aos consider them a delicacy, and men go to any lengths to look for crabs in streams and rivulets which abound the Ao countryside. The crabs try hiding underneath huge boulders but even here, they are not safe because the people have discovered their secret places and hunt them relentlessly for their delicious meat.

1.5. The distribution of the attire of the birds. (Translated from *Tar Nunger Otsü-II. Myths of the Hills in Ao dialect by Talitemjen Imchen*)

After *Lijaba* created the birds of the sky, he decided to distribute attires for all of them. One day he made an announcement that all the birds from the biggest to the smallest should gather together in his compound.

After the crowd gathered, *Lijaba* came and looked around to decide whom to be dressed first with the attire. While all the birds were anxiously waiting how their attire would be like, Hornbill was chosen to be dressed first. While he was selected, all the birds started saying 'Chu (see) ba (him)'. The birds pushed each other to see the Hornbill being dressed saying 'Chu ba, Chu ba'. The literal translation of this word is 'King'. Thus, the Hornbill came to be known as the king of the birds. The Hornbill's tail was given white colour with a black strip dividing the tail. The same strip of black was put on the feathers of the wings as well. When the other birds saw the attire of the Hornbill, they were ecstatic. They began to shout at of the voice in admiration. Among the birds was a small bird called *Oja Ozu* who shouted so loud that its beak turned red. *Lijaba* saw in the small bird the wholeheartedness of the bird and elevated it to a greater position and allowed that it will always travel in unity. From that day onward, *Oja Ozu* became very

talkative and always travelled, searched for food and ate it in unity. Thus, the bird came to be known as *Chiyungmecha*.

Behind the Hornbill was standing the bird *Kosong* (a dark colored bird with a little white about the neck and tail which is used as head dress by the Ao's). *Lijaba* put a dark shade and white for the tail. A little away from the group of birds was standing *Imlang* bird. *Lijaba* called the *Imlang* bird and dressed it so beautifully. So satisfied with the beautiful attire, happily the bird flew down and perched on a *Nusemdong* (a pole put on the ground where the placenta is buried). Since the bird perched on the *Nusemdong*, from that day onwards, it is believed that the bird has a strong connection with men and therefore, its meat is not eaten.

There was another bird named *Oyimi*. Before its turn came, with a very clear loud voice, the bird called all the birds and enthusiastically waited for their turns. The talk of the bird was very enticing and appealing to the listeners. All the birds surrounded him when he spoke. That is how *Oyim* bird always had a crowd around him wherever he went. Therefore it was called *Oyim/Yimyu* by all. Since all the birds followed him around, *Lijaba* decided to dress the bird in dark shade which was very different from the other dark shades. *Lijaba* also called the mouse to come and make two holes on the tail of the bird and the mouse did so.

Next came the turn of *Waro* (Crow). The Crow was also given beautiful attire. Seeing how beautiful it looked in the attire the crow became proud. Whenever he crossed, the other birds also admired its beautiful attire. One day the crow was getting ready to go to a festival. Thinking that it will be a large gathering, he started dreaming of how he would walk so that its beautiful attire would stand out among the crowd. As he was wistfully thinking of its grand entry into the festival, he slipped into the pot filled with *Osak* (black liquid made from a plant). The crow had been standing near that pot. After sometime of struggle, he could finally come out of the pot and spread itself in the sun to dry. When it was dried up, the crow found that it had lost its beautiful attire and was turned fully black. The crow suddenly decided to ask for its attire again and shouted *Kua! Kua!* (Give! Give!). The crow quietly left the festival in shame. From that day onward, the crow never mingled with the other birds. The crow began to steal the food of men and

whenever men came home, he would cross path with the crow that would be leaving after stealing the food. Thus, man began to beat on the tree stumps and branches to chase away the crow.

The other birds took their turns to receive their attire. The bird *Pokpu* (Owl) all along was counting the birds who had received their attire. The Owl thought that it would be the first to receive and felt very bad. As it was contemplating on what type of attire he will receive, *Lijaba* saw the gloomy face of the Owl and knew that he was impatient and therefore gave it not-so-beautiful attire.

Lastly, the bird *Jongpongnu* was given its attire. *Lijaba* collected all the colours of the sky and added it in the attire of the bird. He even gave the remaining colours he didn't use for the owl and added them too in *Jongpongnu's* attire.

Thus, one after the other all the birds were given their attire. After the crowd had dispersed, *Lijaba* cleaned his compound and went inside the house to clean the house.

But there was a bird that had not come to collect its attire. Its name was *Ongum*. It is a bird of the sky and since it was always flying up in the sky, the bird was very proud. The bird thought that for a bird like him who is always up in the sky, a beautiful attire will be reserved so there was no need to hurry. When the bird reached the compound of *Lijaba*, the bird said, "Obou (Grandpa) where is my attire?" *Lijaba* replied, "There is no more attire to give." And looking at the ash he had kept in the fireplace, took it and threw it at the bird saying, "Take this!" the bird was shocked and hurt at the same time. It went away grumbling *Um Um*. From this day on this bird has the colour of ash on its body and goes around *um*.

The Ao's still hold its belief that the bird's outlook, like, the shape and size of their body, the colour of the feathers, the sound they make and also the mixture of colours and stripes on their feathers as the handiwork of *Lijaba*. Any narrative on the birds is done with reference to this story and other versions.

1.6. The quarrel of animals and birds (Translated from *Tar Nunger Otsü-II. Myths of the Hills in Ao dialect by Talitemjen Imchen*)

After the creation of birds and animals, *Lijaba* marked the territory of the animals. The birds and the animals, according to their territory, lived and hunted for their food.

One day, *Pentzu* (ashey wran warbler bird) while scavenging for its food, perched on a tree. The bird heard a loud voice from below. It looked down but found nothing so it waited in alert. As the bird was waiting, a fruit from the tree fell on the ground and a lizard picked it up and quietly started eating the fruit in a corner. The bird felt angry and scolded the lizard and the lizard felt very bad. After the incident, there arose a disagreement between the birds and the animals.

In order to hear the case from both sides, it was decided that a meeting of the birds and the animals was required. The Elephant leading the animals and the Hornbill leading the birds came to the meeting on the appointed day. When the discussion started, it took a wrong turn and instead of coming to an amicable conclusion, a fierce altercation erupted between the two groups. The gathering, therefore, decided to have a fight between the birds and the animals another day.

Both parties began to prepare for the fight. But the *Pentzü* was not to be found among the birds and they began to search. It was hiding in the hole of a bamboo tree. They asked *Pentzu* why it was not joining in the group and it replied that it has four legs and teeth so it cannot be in among the birds. When the animals came to learn of the absence of *Pentzü* among the birds, they searched for it and found it hiding in a hollow tree. When they asked it why it was not joining the animal group, it replied that it had wings and therefore cannot join them.

The day of the battle came. From morning till evening, they fought with one another. Many from both groups died. The group led by the snake killed many birds and was leading to victory. All the animals united and supported the snake. Among the birds none was willing to fly down to fight with the snake. Filled with terror of the snake and knowing that there was no chance for them to win against the snake, an emergency meeting was called among the birds. In the meeting it was decided that whoever fights

and kills the snake will be given freedom to eat anything it wants to without any restrictions like the other birds. But there was no one to volunteer for the fight. In the meeting, while the birds introduced itself one after the other, it was found that the Owl was missing. Some from the group went in search of the Owl and found it perched on the branch of a *Mongizunudong* (a species of hard wood with red heart) and watching the fight between the birds and the animals. The birds brought the Owl to the meeting and started requesting the Owl to fight with the snake. They praised the Owl and promised that if it wins then there would be no restrictions for it to eat anything on the earth. Hearing the enticing words of the birds, the Owl volunteered to fight with the snake. The Owl was not very confident because of its short and curved beak. But since it had promised, it decided to go and fight the snake.

Sitting on the branch of a tree, the owl began to get ready for the fight and all the birds united to support the owl. When the snake saw the owl, it started to make fun of the owl's short and curved beak saying that many birds with long beak have fought it but were all killed. After listening to the insults hurled at it, the owl flew down to the ground and stood a little away from the snake. The owl saw the dead birds with long beak and found that they all had injury on their beaks.

The fight began and the support for both the owl and the snake began louder and louder. As for the *Pentzu*, it was found supporting the animals when the snake was winning and the birds when the owl was winning. Both the owl and the snake were tired after a long battle. The snake tried to bit the beak of the owl but failed several times because the owl's beak was short and curved. Finally, the owl killed the snake with its claws and strong beak. There after the altercation between the birds and the animals was settled.

The bird and the animal group were witness to the selfishness of *Pentzü* (a small diviner bird that is supposed by the charater of its song or cry to foreshadow good or evil) and they all started making fun of it after the fight. In shame it avoided any crowded places and walked alone in hiding. It went into hiding during the day time and came out only after everybody had retired to rest between evening and dawn. In the wee hours of

the night when no birds and animals could be seen, *Pentzii* was often met by men and was given the name *Aleptei*.

When *Lijaba* saw that there was no peace on the earth, he started to search for the reason and found out what had happened between the birds and the animals because of the fruit from the tree. So he decided to grow the fruit of that tree in abundant bunches so that both the animals and the birds can eat from it. *Lijaba* allowed all the birds and animals to eat from that tree except *Pentzii*. Fearing that some of the animals and birds might come to take revenge for the death of their friends on that tree, *Lijaba* also decided that whoever touches that tree harshly would develop disease on their bodies.

Among the beaks of all the birds, the beak of the Hornbill is the biggest. But after its loss in the fight with the snake, the Hornbill was always in perpetual fear of the snake. Even after laying eggs in the hollow trunk, the hornbill feared that the snake will eat the eggs and so after the eggs are laid the female sits on the eggs inside the hollow trunk while the male covers it up with mud keeping only a small opening for him to feed the female.

It is observed that the behavior of the birds relate to the folk tales that tells of the days of the birds in the beginning of the days of the tribe. Till date, much of the birds found in the region, display characteristics that the forefathers tell about in the stories.

1.7. The caterpillar that called *Oba* (Father) (Translated from *Tar Nunger Otsü-II. Myths of the Hills in Ao dialect by Talitemjen Imchen*)

Once upon a time, in a family there was a wife and a husband with no children. Koktila was the wife's name and she always longed for a child. But *Sobatiaba* (God of destiny) did not bless them and so they lived for many years without a child.

One day while they were sharing tobacco leaf, the wife saw a caterpillar on the fresh leaf. As she watched the movement of the caterpillar, it rolled over and blinked the eyes like men. Koktila saw the caterpillar like a small child and loved it. She hid the caterpillar from her husband in her lungi and brought it home and put it in the bamboo basket.

It was difficult to go to the field together because she wanted to feed the caterpillar before leaving for the field. So every morning as they stepped out of their house and had gone a few yards, she would pretend to have forgotten something and go back asking her husband to go ahead. Then she would give milk and feed chewed rice to the caterpillar and go to the field late.

This went on for some days and the husband suspected because of the sudden change in her behavior. When the husband questioned her on her change in behavior she said that she has become absentminded because of old age. But the husband was not convinced and was angry with her for not being honest. One day, the husband decided to find out the truth and therefore laid a plan. Telling his wife that menfolk will be working in the village, he asked her to go to the field alone. So sharpening his *Dao* (machete) and stepping out of the house, he said to his wife he is leaving for the village work. But he climbed up the ceiling and waited quietly to observe his wife. Thinking that her husband will return only in the evening, Koktila very relaxingly went to the bedroom, opened the bamboo basket and took out the caterpillar. She gave it milk and fed rice from the rice pot. Then she wrapped the caterpillar in a cloth, laid it on her chest and started singing a lullaby to it. After that Koktila put the caterpillar back in the bamboo basket and went to the field. The husband slowly got down from the ceiling and opened the bamboo basket to see a big tobacco caterpillar staring at him. Then it called him *Oba* (Father). He was in shock and drawing his *Dao* and shouting, “I am not your father” cut the caterpillar into two.

Koktila decided to return home early because she wanted to clean the house and cook before her husband returned home. She reached home earlier than any other days and as usual went to check on the caterpillar first only to find it dead with blood everywhere. With so much pain Koktila cried out very loudly. When the husband found his wife crying loudly, he started singing a song to her.

Moko longpen tesua humer,

Ku meimla Koktila temulung itu raksaku jeburu pa?

(Holding the dead tobacco caterpillar, is my wife crying with such painful heart?)

1.8. The tale of the deer whose antlers broke.

One day a deer was getting ready to go to the dance occasion at his uncle's place. The deer cleaned all his attire and dried them in the sun. At the time, a squirrel climbing up the tree broke one of the branches and it fell on the attire of the deer and broke its antlers. Filled with fury the deer began to jumping around and stepped on an earthworm. The earthworm began to wriggle in pain and broke the egg of the fowl. The fowl got very angry and in its anger went and spoiled a field with its claws. The field happened to be *Lijaba's* field. *Lijaba* caught the fowl and scolded it for the spoilage but the fowl blamed the earthworm for breaking its eggs and making it angry. So *Lijaba* caught the earthworm and asked why it broke the fowl's eggs. Then the earthworm blamed the deer so the deer was called. The deer explained that it was the squirrel that broke its antlers and in anger while he was jumping around accidentally stepped on the earthworm. So the squirrel was summoned again by *Lijaba*. When the squirrel was asked for explanation by *Lijaba* holding its tail, the squirrel said, "Obo (grandpa), it is not my tail that you are holding. It is a branch." *Lijaba* loosened his grip on the tail and the squirrel quickly ran away.

In almost all the animal tales it is found that man converses with the animals and sees them as a kind of equal to them. The characters in the tales are of all kinds – of the water and the land but birds occur most frequently.

2. Proverbs/proverbial sayings

Proverbs are multifunctional and flexible instruments of everyday reasoning and are loaded with hidden feelings, wishes and intentions of the speaker. Proverbs are part of every spoken language and folk literature, originating in oral tradition and are often found with variations in many different parts of the world. Proverbial sayings not only enliven the speech of the ordinary villager but also set before him standards of value and codes of conduct.

"Proverbs are short pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life. Many proverbs are allegorical in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference, a general application." (Abrams 2015:11)

According to *The Chamber Dictionary*, “proverb is a short familiar saying expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson; a byword; a saying that requires explanation.”

Roger D. Abrahams says, “Proverbs are short and witty sayings....traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play. Proverbs are the shortest form of traditional expression that calls attention to themselves as formal artistic entities.”

The word proverb in Ao is ‘Shin O’ which literally means ‘Shin – prophetic, O – word’. Proverbial sayings are expressions with the striking idioms, figure of speech and word compounds are nuggets of wisdom for the Ao’s. It served them well the purpose of winning arguments and disputes between individual and villages. In any disputes, the party with a vast reservoir of proverbial sayings appropriate to the time and the nature of dispute had the greater advantage. Thoughts, intuitions and wisdom were ingrained and hidden in these proverbs which were sought for in the darkness of antiquity in everyday conversations of the elders. As such this is a tribe that has a vast storehouse of proverbial expressions that has been used since the time of its origin. In all the folklores of the Ao-Naga tribe, proverbs or proverbial sayings play an integral role in the cultural life. Proverbs are very effective tools of conveying meaningful thematic messages that ordinary day-to-day language cannot fulfill. In the olden days, a village whose speech was proverb centered had more advantage of winning an argument or dispute. While much of the proverbial expressions find their place in the hearth of the kitchen, there are also those that are used only in the socio-cultural affairs of the tribe. The Ao’s are very cautious of making crude or uncomfortable remarks directly to a person or a group of people and therefore resorts to the metaphorical or allegorical proverbial expressions which sounds subtler in nature. The usage of proverbs in lieu of the obvious statement often saves bitter arguments and quarrels among groups of people or individuals. Proverbial expressions explicate moral and spiritual wisdom and it is the common belief

that the one who has more knowledge about proverbial sayings is considered the wise one in the community.

In the different parts of Ao-Naga region there is a mass of sayings, frequently mouthed by the humble peasant and the unlettered old woman, that covers a wide range of things, from the light-hearted commentary to the satirical banter, from the charming witticism to the insipid homily. The true nature of the use of proverb is that it has to be used only by those who know when and how to employ them appropriately. The primary status of the use of proverbs is achieved through their use in actual situations.

Table 5: Some commonly used proverbial expressions of the Ao's

Sl. No.	Proverbial expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
2.1	<i>Tepang nung temeli ana aten ama.</i>	Like having two tongues in one mouth	A manipulative person
2.2	<i>Shiti dak kechi poknungsa keta lir kasaji petsü ozü daka lir</i>	Whichever innards is present in an Elephant is also present in the small bird	Everyone is equal irrespective of the status or size.
2.3	<i>Tepui taseñ achi nung chiernur tepo mejemer.</i>	If the father eats sour things, it makes the children's teeth sensitive	The wrongs done by the father affects the generation.
2.4	<i>Kirongnü mi makiner saka alurongnü mi akiner.</i>	Fire is not wanted when house burns but it is wanted during burning fields for cultivation.	Wanting/searching for certain things/person only during times of need
2.5	<i>Pongdang bo nembang, allubo joka yok.</i>	The jar was closed but the frog still escaped..	Effort was given but in vain.
2.6	<i>An molokbang nung atem ama</i>	Like the fowl that sat on the mouth of the open basket.	A person that walks into a trap knowingly.
2.7	<i>Ak matsüing dang berem tendok</i>	Do not waste precious stones in front of a pig	Speaking words of wisdom will mean nothing to a foolish person.

Sl. No.	Proverbial expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
2.8	<i>Azüki tejen nung tzünglu senoyongbo pei kidang ayipjanga mejanger.</i>	Even if rain falls on a worn out thatch house one still sleeps soundly if it is one home.	Even if others may have better things, the little that one has gives much happiness
2.9	<i>Anong tapong dang puang</i>	Catch the termite fly when it flies	Grabbing opportunities when it comes.
2.10	<i>Amerlongtsü nung alongdang alangra tangar menepa motettsü.</i>	If one falls while riding an <i>Amerlongtsu</i> (Three wheeler made of wooden blanks and tyre) they will never reach the others.	While trying to be faster or ahead of the others if one is not careful one may fall.
2.11	<i>Apidangang, mangdang medeni shisa akaba dangbo tabensa masü.</i>	Even though one may be intelligent without aim and dream one will not succeed.	In order to achieve anything, one should have an aim in life.
2.12	<i>Azüi mejanga alidang teben nung ajemra meyiper pa dak angutsü.</i>	If one steps on the tail of a sleeping dog, the dog will bite him.	If one insults a humble person, one will end up being shamed and hurt.
2.13	<i>Alu joka or tsüngen apu.</i>	The frog jumped away but caught a crab.	The bad people escape and the good one unluckily is caught.
2.14	<i>Ammang milen züiksep.</i>	Blowing out the night lantern.	The death of a great leader in a community or father in a family.
2.15	<i>Anaknüa alidak anakshi.</i>	Scratching where it itches.	Getting what one wants, fulfillment of a need or want.
2.16	<i>An tebung dak tebu maket.</i>	A cock does not have teeth.	Appears to be very knowledgeable with grand outlook but does not have the credentials to compete with others.

Sl. No.	Proverbial expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
2.17	<i>Anojungi lungtem ajungshi.</i>	Lifting boulders before becoming strong enough.	One should not take on task that beyond one's strength or capability.
2.18	<i>Angati nübuji sa jenjang tasaktiba.</i>	A free goodwill is the most priceless.	Anything that is given or done free has to be rapid back. It doesn't have a price tag.
2.19	<i>Anü taitsü nung nok renem.</i>	Getting one's machete at sunset.	Getting blessed with children and wealth at old age.
2.20	<i>Auh langkotem agi atep.</i>	Hitting with a long bamboo stump.	Doing things or hurting others without thinking with words or deeds often leads to grave danger.
2.21	<i>Asur mi agi teka marunger</i>	The fire of the dead does not burn.	A lukewarm person can do nothing.
2.22	<i>Azüpong nung nü tsuloktsü</i>	Throwing spear at the thatch tied together.	Indifferent attitude of worthless person who does not accept either good or bad words or deeds.
2.23	<i>Bokpo angishi agi alak</i>	The owl fed up of bird lime (used to catch small birds)	When a person falls into difficult time, he/she becomes distracted and perplexed.
2.24	<i>Bokboi mesangjang amen ata ama</i>	Like the owl waiting for the fruit of <i>mesang</i> (a tree with thick bark, hard wood and used for timber) to ripen.	Waiting for a very long time for the impossible to happen.
2.25	<i>Chili koyala, mechili koyala</i>	Eaten or not eaten, it is the mouse.	When a person always disobeys, he/she is never trusted.
2.26	<i>Teni langa aküm</i>	Nose became lengthened.	Becoming proud
2.27	<i>Etsüngpen punga ngur ongmok pelar</i>	Seeing the termite flies, the small bird becomes happy.	Being happy in vain or profitless expectation.

Sl. No.	Proverbial expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
2.28	<i>Azükpur metsüren dang alipur tsüren ama.</i>	While those on top isn't scared the ones at the bottom are.	The ones doing the work are not scared while the onlookers get scared
2.29	<i>Anü talui tsük putak ama.</i>	Do not dry the paddy at sunset.	All works must be done at the right time or else they will not be successful
2.30	<i>Ak nipong nung hon küri sentak medem</i>	Tying a gold ring on the nose of a pig.	One who does not know how to use ones talents wisely
2.31	<i>Ak oktsukolak ama</i>	The pig like the head of a sow.	A head or leader is always heaped with complaints.
2.32	<i>Asükwa anü.</i>	Like winter sun.	Untimely death
2.33	<i>Chipnü ali nung maoktsü</i>	Slapped on the verge of crying	Fulfillment of a wish or a want unexpectedly.
2.34	<i>Entsü nung teret chitet</i>	Finding/Tasting bone in an egg.	Finding fault in a faultless person.
2.35	<i>Kürai lungbang metsübur</i>	A turtle does not fear a steep rock.	Strong and fearless person does not fear any danger.
2.36	<i>Nikong anu agi tsük marar.</i>	Afternoon sun does not dry the paddy.	Works not done at right time will not be successful.
2.37	<i>Ongmmoki molutzü benzü ama</i>	<i>Ongmok</i> (a brownish small bird) admiring a big river.	A poor person dreaming of the impossible.
2.38	<i>Ongpanglu tsük abener amai.</i>	Carrying paddy during the harvest in the field.	Very quickly and efficiently doing one's work.
2.39	<i>Shiti pok nung azü maittsü masü.</i>	Like there will be no blood in the Elephants stomach.	Reference to a rich person that he will have lots of wealth.
2.40	<i>Sorak lang nung metsük</i>	Pinching a spider's anus.	One who drags on endless conversation for a long time even after the listener's have become bored.
2.41	<i>Tebang nung masemtsu teguzük</i>	Do not bite off what is too big for the mouth.	Making very loud and big promises that cannot be fulfilled or speaking of impossible things that will bring harm to the speaker.

Sl. No.	Proverbial expressions	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
2.42	<i>Tagitsü süngjanbo, arem süngo ama masü, meilonger ang ainer.</i>	A worthy fruit is not like the leaves grown in the wild, they grow slowly.	A worthy person does not go through an easy life, they go through thick and thin to become a leader.
2.43	<i>Akong tsükli mere mama.</i>	Like prawns turning red as soon as burned.	A person who is quick to anger.
2.44	<i>Waro mesünga jembitet.</i>	Able to turn crow into white with talk.	A very convincing liar
2.45	<i>Shingo melena shitsü aru.</i>	Monkey came in place of monkey.	A change without a change.
2.46	<i>Etsük agi esü melen ama</i>	Exchanging fresh bamboo shoot with dry bamboo shoot.	Exchange things or work that does not have any difference.
2.47	<i>Shirong alettsü melen shitük alet.</i>	Scalding a tiger cat instead of the jackal.	A cunning person tricking another person into danger.
2.48	<i>Nok naro ken.</i>	Machete flower song.	Song of praise for head-hunters
2.49	<i>Teka talang</i>	Long hand	Stealing other's property or things.
2.50	<i>Mongnü nü.</i>	Eagle eye.	Sharp eyed
2.51	<i>Tebang nung temeli masem</i>	Tongue does not fit in the mouth.	Someone who is inarticulate.
2.52	<i>Tepo külen aki shi mongozüktet.</i>	One set of teeth is unable to bite off meat.	A lone person cannot achieve anything.
2.53	<i>Waro or tempang takoshi</i>	Don't hit/beat the stump after the crow has flown away.	Don't regret after the opportunity is gone.
2.54	<i>Tsüngen tetsü o techanu ama</i>	Like mother crab like baby crab.	Acquiring/Imitating the parent's behaviour
2.55	<i>O ji yintsüh</i>	Word is hard wood	What is spoken stays for long.
2.56	<i>Nuktsü agi tasür shia marutsütet</i>	Tears cannot bring a dead person alive	Regret in failure cannot bring success
2.57	<i>Nabong süngkong kii atu ama</i>	Like a goat that entered the log drum.	A person of high profile visiting a poor/unworthy house.
2.59	<i>Azii azüasanger.</i>	Dog barking at each other.	A person at fault pointing at the fault of others.
2.60	<i>Adang lung lenden nung mezüden ama.</i>	Like the rocks on the cliff rolled down to the plains.	The crooked works or unfair means always comes back to the doer.

The proverbial expressions of the Ao's can be categorized into the general categories of usage as metaphorical, paradoxical, hyperbolic and allegorical. At the same time, it has its own essence of:

Table 6: Proverbial sayings under different expressions and meaning

Telling of the timing – the right timing and the wrong timing	Sl. No. 2.7, 2.29, 2.32 and 2.36
Cautionary expressions	Sl. No. 2.3, 2.10, 2.12, 2.18, 2.25, 2.43 and 2.60
Blessing	Sl. No. 2.19, 2.48
Vanity	Sl. No. 2.5, 2.45, 2.46
Cunning	Sl. No. 2.1, 2.44, 2.47
Contentment	Sl. No. 2.9, 2.33
Clever	Sl. No. 2.11, 2.14, 2.16, 2.38
Foolish	Sl. No. 2.6, 2.8, 2.20, 2.21, 2.11, 2.23, 2.24, 2.27, 2.30, 2.40, 2.42, 2.59
Equality	Sl. No. 2.2
Selfish	Sl. No. 2.4

It is not surprising that the Ao's had a rich power of communication between and among the villages within the tribe because of the use of the proverbial expressions which were multi layered in meanings, metaphors, hyperboles, paradoxes and allegories. The proverbs encapsulate not only the cultural wisdom but also recognize the appropriateness of the application of them in the extraordinary, uncertain day-to-day situations.

In the Ao society it is believed that a person who has amassed the knowledge and wisdom embedded in the proverbs has a sharp sense of discernment and therefore was likely to be best judge among men across the land of the Ao's. While the subject matter in its naked structure may be crude and sound rude, it is very often that the use of proverbs in place placates the hearers with humour, sarcasm or pun intended proverbial expressions. Thus, in situations where raw sentences may arouse an altercation, the subtle use of proverbial expressions may subdue the situation.

3. Spirits

The concept of spirit

The beliefs in the existence of spirits play an important role in the oral tradition of the Ao's. The spirits are impersonal being that can manifest themselves into any material form or shape endowed with supernatural powers and capable of doing unusual things. Besides the gods and the deities the Ao's believe in and worship, they also believe in these impersonal supernatural beings called *tanüla* or spirits. There are both benevolent and malevolent spirits who can influence human beings and animals for their interest. The Ao's commonly believe that they dwell away from human habitation in thick dark forests, caves, waterfall, mountains which are designated as their abode. While it is believed that the malevolent spirits cause diseases, illness, death and work against the well being of the humans, the benevolent spirits enter into close friendship with humans to the extent of marrying them. Another kind of supernatural, impersonal spirit is the 'spirit –leopard' or 'spirit-tiger'. Another spirit present object is the *arenlong*^{lxxxi} ie fetish stone. This stone becomes active because of the presence of the supernatural power in the object. When the power of the *arenlong* (a stone that is supposed to increase the property of its possessors kept in the granary and offerings made to them as a deity) is effective, it means *arenlong* is alive but when the power is no more effective then it is believed to be dead and is no longer considered *arenlong*. This fetish stone gives power for different activities.

3.1. *Aonglemlatsü* (One who walks with feet facing backwards and laughs in wilderness)

Aonglemlatsü has been, by and large, an integral character in the folklore of the Ao's. The physical description in the oral narratives as documented and written down by many scholars are similar with slight differences only in the descriptive structure. *Aonglemlatsü* is described as a female having a small short stature with the feet of her legs facing backwards. Her height is not more than three or four inches and hair is longer than her height. She has a hairy body as well. She inhabits parts of the deep dark forest, bamboo groves and swamps and lives on insects, worms and leaves of the trees. Her

laughter has eeriness to it because of its high pitch which sends a chill in the spine of those who have heard her.

“There is also a jungle ghost called Aonglemla (C and M) ^{l xxxii}, a dwarf creature with long hair reaching to the ground, which goes about chuckling. Happily, it is very rare, for, to see one is fatal. One Puroshushang of Waromong saw one near the Tzürem stream about eight years ago. He told my informant when he got home, and died five days later. His widow and children have been poor ever since.” (Mills 1926: 223)

Description of *Aonglemlatsü* found in *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition*:

“...many hunters and people who have gone deep into the jungles have claimed to have seen such creatures. At other times, it is claimed that its laughter is heard; sometimes giggling like a young girl and sometimes ferociously, shaking the trees and mountains around it. Any meeting with such creatures is considered a bad omen. At times one comes across foam like substances clinging to shrubs and bushes, which the Ao say is the sputum of Aonglemla. Incidentally, as the name implies, this creature is female!” (Ao 1999:52)

Another version of the story is found in the book *Myths of the Hills: The Past is the Beacon of the future* by Talitemjen Imsong and translated by Anenla Jamir, Chubatola Aier and Asangba Tzüdir in which the story of a boy mistreated by his step-mother and left all alone by the village well all alone in the village that was deserted. Despite his father’s plea to take him to the new village where the family had settled, the boy did not respond to the father. He had turned into Aonglemlatsü.

The small footprints left behind by her are the indicators of her presence in the vicinity of the forest. Hunters and travelers are often cautioned while passing certain parts of the village which is assumed to be inhabited by her presence. Any type of encounter with her would mean bad omen leading to sickness and misfortunes to that person or anyone related to him/her.

3.2. Tiger spirit (Lycanthropy)

Lycanthropy is a condition of the mind of a human in which he believes in having been transformed into an animal. In the oral narrative of the Ao's, the narrative that human can change themselves into *Keyi* (tiger/leopard) or vice versa is as old as the folklore of the tribe. For the primitive man, transformation from one form to the other was a possibility. This phenomenon is found commonly existing particularly in primal/tribal inhabitant societies. Those that can transform itself into the nature of animals also exhibited certain supernatural power.

In the *Census of India Assam, Vol. 1, pp. 250 – 1*, Davis, A. W writes: ‘Men with the power of turning themselves into tigers. Tiger men are well known and I have the pleasure of the acquaintance of one. This gentleman is a Sema Chief of a small village in Tizu valley. He himself disclaims the power, but that he has it implicitly believed by the whole of Sema and Angami tribes. A whole village of tiger-man is said to exist in the far north-east. It is in this direction too, that there lays the happy village peopled entirely by women. The population of this village is kept up by its inhabitants being visited by traders from the surrounding tribes.’

It can also be inferred from the writings of Hutton (1919) and J.P Mill(1926) that such phenomenon were in existence among the various Naga tribes. The origin of lycanthropy cannot be ascertained because of the obscurity of valid records. But there are oral narratives of many occurrences that make it believable. The man communicates with his tiger through a language that only they can understand. On very rare occasions a tiger-man may kill a human i.e. when the man cannot take control of his tiger, the tiger kills human. The relationship between the tiger and the man is a mysterious one, not only in terms of the spirit world but also the physical world. If the tiger gets injured while hunting in the forest, the man also gets hurt in the same spot where the tiger was injured and vice versa for the tiger also. Whatever the tiger hunts and eat also satisfies the man's hunger.

Some case studies conducted by A. Lanunungsang in *Journal of Tribal Affairs: A theological Reflection on the Culture and Social Life of Tribal's in India*, Vol IV, No.1, January-June 2000, are explored below.

3.2.1. The case of Late Martemjen of Mongchen village.

Late Martemjen belong to Mongchen village comes under Changkikong range in Mokokchung district. He was known in the entire range of possessing *Keyi-nela* (tiger spirit). It is told that only the Moller clan can possess this spirit. As narrated by Late Martemjen himself, the tiger spirit was transferred to him from his sister. As any other possessing tiger spirit he possessed the power of healing sick persons, foretell the future and gave wise counsels during critical situations.. When Late Martemjen was converted to Christianity, his partner tiger started suffering seriously. The tiger came near the village and took shelter in the Chapokin forest and the villagers could hear the roar of the ailing tiger. Late Martemjen also suffered severely and he knew that his tiger partner would not survive for long. He told his wife where to find his tiger partner and instructed her to give him proper burial. His wife found the tiger in the spot that was told by her husband. She performed some rites and buried the tiger in the same spot. Late Martemjen died forty-eight years after the death of his tiger partner and continued to still possess the powers.

One time hunters from Waromung village shot the tiger in the hip. At the same time Late Martemjen also felt severe pain in the same spot on his body. The tiger died with bullet inside its body and Late Martemjen also had a distinct swollen mark on his hip when he died. On another occasion, a group of people working in a new construction road near Mongchen village challenged Late Martemjen and his tiger spirit and laughed at him mocking at his claim of having a tiger spirit. That night when they were all sleeping in their camp, the tiger spirit went and started throwing mud and pebbles at them. When they woke up and saw the tiger sitting right in front of their camp they were filled with fear. The tiger spirit after that left their camp and disappeared into the jungle. The next day they came and apologized to Late Martemjen.

3.2.2. The case of Late. Talimeren of Khensa village.

Late. Talimeren is from Khensa village which is under Ongpangkong range in Mokokchung district. Late Talimern was a confirmed bachelor of the village who lived with his family of dogs. When A. Lanunungsang, the scholar, asked him where his tiger partner was he said that it was camping near Mangkolemba forest which is under Changkikong range. The tiger partner of Late Talimeren was attacked many times by hunters of which several distinct marks on the body of Late Talimeren was also visible. Late Talimeren also happen to know Late Martemjen and another tiger-woman from Süngratsü village and regarded them as seniors with more experience than him. Unlike Late Martemjen, there is no history of hereditary lineage of lycanthropy in the family of Late Talimeren.

3.3. Yajangla's Story of Supernatural Transformation (a folk tale)

Once upon a time, there lived a woman called Yajangla who not only had a tigress as her familiar spirit but she could also transform herself into a tigress if she chanted a particular magic formula. She could also conjure spirits and perform miracles. But the secret of her Supernatural powers was not known to anybody, not even her own husband. Outwardly, she led the normal life of a village housewife and in due course of time became the mother of a baby boy.

Since she could not help her husband in the field for quite some time due to her confinement, the husband found it increasingly difficult to cope with the weeds which seemed to flourish more than the crops. Tired of his constant complaints about this, Yajangla one day asked him to stay at home with the baby so that she could go and work in the field that day.

On reaching the field she found that her husband had indeed very good reasons to complain. The weeds did seem to choke the rice stalks and unless something was done quickly the rice plant would wither and die.

Yaiangla decided to use her supernatural powers and conjured up several spirits. On her instruction, they dug ditches around the field. Next she caused a network of fine

thread all over the field As she pulled the net towards her, only the weeds were caught there which were cast into the ditches. She continued the process till not a single weed remained in the field. Lastly, the ditches themselves were once again filled with earth by her magic.

In the evening, Yajangla went home and told her husband that weeding in the field was finished. The husband was amazed that she could perform such a feat in one single day by herself and he began to question her and pester her, asking her to reveal to him the secret of her powers. In the beginning she refused to say anything, insisting that it was in the interest of the family that the secret remain only with her. But the more she counseled against it, the more insistent the husband became.

At long last, giving in to the husband's constant pestering, she agreed to reveal her secret to him. At the same time she pointed out the consequences of such a step and gave him some instructions for his own safety. She asked him first of all to make a high perch for himself on the ceiling of the house. Then she instructed him to collect several conical shaped bamboo baskets near his seat on the ceiling. Lastly he was ordered to keep a large collection of stones near his seat.

Even as all these preparations were afoot, Yajangla once more begged her husband to give up the idea as the revelation might prove to be more than he could physically cope with. But having come this far, the husband was unwilling to abandon the project and so the stage was set for the drama of the revelation of his wife's secret.

Seeing that there was no turning back now, the wife gave this last instruction to her husband, "When I conjure up my magic spirit, I shall be transformed into a different shape and will try to kill you and eat you up. In order to repel my attacks you must push the conical ends of the baskets into my mouth when I jump at you. If my power lasts longer, then you must throw the stones into my mouth and protect yourself. So, beware of my fierce nature while I am under this spell."

When night came, the husband climbed onto his seat in the ceiling and looked down on his wife who was chanting some magic words. The instant she finished saying the words, she was transformed into a full grown tigress displaying all the ferocity of one

who's had a cub recently. Growling menacingly, she tried to jump up to the ceiling, baring her teeth at the human being perched up there. The husband did everything as instructed earlier, to save himself from the attacks of this fierce animal. But the battle was between unequal powers which raged all through the night. But finally the man was overcome by the superior and superhuman strength of the tigress that killed him and began eating his flesh. As Soon as she tasted human flesh, she began returning to her human form slowly. She then quickly grabbed her baby who was crying throughout the battle between the parents and began to suckle her breasts that were swollen with overflowing milk.

Hearing the commotion in the house and the baby's incessant cries, the neighbours began to assemble. When they came, Yajangla still had not turned fully human, and while suckling her baby, she was seen eating a portion of the husband's legs.

Upon being questioned by the neighbours, Yajangla, without, showing any emotion or regret replied thus, "Oh, the baby's father was at fault. It was he who forced me to reveal my secret magical powers in spite of my warnings. Because of my supernatural powers became a tigress and killed him and ate him. I am not to blame because when I am under the influence of these magical powers cease to be a human being for that period and I have no control over my actions. And I still say that it was wrong of him to force me to do it."

The neighbours and the village council could not take any action against Yajangla as they too were afraid of her powers. They however made a stipulation that if she wished to stay on in the village, she should promise not to use her magical powers anywhere.

4. Religious practices.

4.1. Ceremonial practices in relation to cultivation.

There are a number of festivals that are observed in relation to cultivation. One of the cultural practices of the Ao's is that for any new venture to be undertaken they do it with the worshipping of the *Tsungrem* (god).

4.1.1. *Süngku Lepten Mung* (Wood cutting ceremony): This ceremony is the first among all the ceremonies related to cultivation. It takes place during the new cycle of jhum cultivation (October to November) when the cultivators start cleaning the area for the cultivation. Village elders announces the day of felling trees and clearing the proposed area for cultivation. The eldest among the village cultivator carries out the act of the ceremonial sacrifice and worship. He takes for the ceremony meat, rice beer and an egg. Standing in the middle of the way to the field and facing towards the field for cultivation, the village elder prays to *Sobatiaba Tsungrem* (god of destiny) for the protection of the cultivators from accidents, wild animals and evil spirits. He also prays for bountiful harvest. Then he offers the cup of rice beer and asks the god to drink first as a sign of respect. Then he breaks the egg on a banana leaf and slowly let it drip steadily on the ground. After the ceremonial worship is done from the next day the villagers would go to clear the field and get ready for cultivation. (Ibid.,1-2)

4.1.2. *Süngku Meshi Mung* (Wood sanctification ceremony): This ceremony is observed by the group of cultivators of a plot of field or an individual who occupies the entire plot of field by himself. It is believed that there are some fields which have very strong and dangerous spirits and therefore, it needs to be appeased first. For this ceremony they take a fowl and an egg. Praying to the spirit to ward off any danger, bad weather, sickness or death, they cut the throat of the fowl and sprinkle the blood around and then smash the egg and drip it in the soil. Ibid.,2-3)

4.1.3. *Alu rung mung* (Field burning ceremony): The dried branches and trees of the cleared fields are burned on the same day by the villagers. On this day the priest will carry out the worship ceremony in the middle of the way to the fields. The blood sacrifice of a white cock is made. He prays to the god to cleanse the fields if in the process of burning any or any other unclean items have been burned. This ceremony can be carried out only by a priest and after the ceremony he goes into seclusion for six days (for Chu8nglir) and seven days (for mongsener). (Ibid.,3)

4.1.4. *Metsü walok mung* (Seed spurting ceremony): This ceremony is observed during the second year of cultivation. It is observed after the full moon and a period of eleven to thirteen days before the new moon. The village elders announces the day of this ceremony for the villagers. On this day for the ceremony the priest takes some grains from the rich man's house and collects all kinds of seeds for sowing in the field. He also takes a piglet, a fowl, ginger and an egg. In the middle of the way to the fields, he lays six plates of banana leaves and puts in them small pieces of meat, seeds and the ginger. Holding the fowl by the two wings, the priest starts praying to the god, "O! God, today I bring to you a piglet, a fowl and ginger as offering for the cultivation in the fields. Bless all the farmers with good paddy. Let us reap the harvest like the sand of the ocean and let all that we sow bear fruit." The blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled near the place of sacrifice. Then the two pointed intestine of the fowl is taken out and the left side of the intestine is examined. If there is even the slightest trace blood on it, it was predicted that it will be a year of good harvest. Then the priest ties the neck of the piglet and the fowl and the cover of the egg in the place of the sacrifice. The remaining meat is cooked and the village elders eat it with rice beer. If they can't finish it, they burn it as it is taboo to bring it back to the village.

The next day the whole village will quarantine. No outsiders will be allowed to come inside the *süngkum* (village gate) and no villager will leave the village. The priest will be quarantined for three days (for chunglir) and seven days (for mongsener) and the next day the villagers can go for sowing in their fields. (Ibid., 4-5)

4.1.5. *Tenden mung* (Sowing commencement ceremony): By the old faith no villager could sow on the *lutti* (name of the white rice cultivated by the Ao's) before the *Tenden* ceremony has been observed by his village. Near the sowing time one of the *putir* (oldest male of a clan or priest of the village) takes to his cultivation a little cooked rice, rice beer and a male fowl, a little *lutti* grain for sowing and a small ginger. Having arrived at the site of cultivation the *putir* offers the fowl in sacrifice to *Lijaba*. Then he tears the banana leaves into six pieces and in each of them put a little cooked rice, the liver of the fowl, rice beer and a small piece of ginger. Having completed the first course he again lay the banana leaves on the pile and puts the cooked rice, pieces of the meat, rice beer and a

small piece of ginger each. While the offering is being made, the *putir* prays for a prosperous year of bountiful harvest for the village cultivators.

After the sacrificial ceremony is completed, the priest will sow some *lutti* grain on a small piece of land near the place of sacrifice and make a bamboo fence around it. The day following this ceremony is observed by the villagers as Sabbath and is called *tenden mung nüi*. Depending on the germination of the grain sown by the priest on the day of the ceremony, the villagers predicted if the year would be a year of good or poor harvest. (Clark 2013:816)

4.1.6. *Mosü mung* (Straw ceremony): There are some years with very scanty rainfall. The rivers also dry up the paddy in the field and other vegetables don't grow well. The villagers call this *Nüka* which means dry season. In order to have a favourable climatic condition, the villagers call upon rain by observing this ceremony. The priest goes to the village center place where human heads are hung and breaks an egg. Then he sprinkles rice beer from the bamboo cup and calls onto the god *Sobatiaba* to have mercy upon the villagers since their crops are all withering and dying in the fields. He prays to the god for rain. After this ceremony the villagers observe *Anembong* (quarantine) within the village for three days. (Jamir 2017:7)

4.1.7. *Longpen sem mung* (caterpillar and other insect ceremony): Some years caterpillars and different kinds of insects infest the crop and the harvest fails. The villagers observe this ceremony to prevent such calamity on the cultivators. The village elder collects some insects and caterpillars in the field and put them in a bamboo cup. With a stick he rammed down on the insects and caterpillars inside the bamboo cup. Then he takes the stick out and pretend to lick the end saying, "Oh, it's bitter very bitter. Let me throw it away." Saying this he throw away the bamboo cup very far into the jungle. Then he proclaims that he has collected all the insects and caterpillars from the field and thrown them away. Henceforth none of these insects and caterpillars will eat the crops. (Ibid., 8)

4.1.8. *Koyapang alang mung* (The cutting of mouse mouth ceremony): This ceremony is observed during rat plague. The increased number of rats destroys and contaminates the crops. This ceremony is observed by individuals. The individual of the field will go to the barn where the grains are kept taking with him a piglet, a fowl, an egg and lay them on top of the grain basket. Then he catches hold of a rat and says to it, “You are the one who eats my grains and destroys all my crops in the field.” Then he cuts off the mouth of the rat with the *dao* and sends it away with the warning that if he eats the grains again all the rats will be killed. The blood offerings of the live animals are made and the egg is broken and dropped in the barn. The one who carry out the ceremony has to quarantine for three days. (Ibid., 8-9)

4.1.9. *Chiten mung* (Eating ceremony): A few days after the *tenden mung*, when the grain sown during the *tenden mung* grows to about six inches, the priest plucks the leaves and eats it saying it is he a man who ate it not any animals or birds or insects. This is to notify that no animals or birds but the cultivators only can eat the grains grown in the field. The good or poor sprouting of the grain inside the *putir's* enclosure was believed to be the prediction of the years' harvest of the villagers.

4.1.10. *Alu meshi mung* (Field sanctification ceremony): This ceremony is observed in relation to the presence of powerful evil spirits in the field. For this ceremony a piglet, a fowl and an egg is required but there are some fields where the evil spirits are very powerful. In such cases the sacrificial animals are a black dog, piglet, fowl and egg. It was believed that the god loved the black dog the most. With the blood sacrifice of these animals, they worshipped god and pleaded with him to protect the people and the crops from the evil one.

4.2. Religious practices/ceremonies in relation to objects of nature.

The concept of divinity to the Ao's recognizes the existence of many deities and impersonal powers working beyond the cognitive understanding of the human mind. As such, when objects of nature were found to possess such attribute they declare it as a deity to be worshipped. Apart from the three Gods that are unanimously worshipped by

all the Ao villages, there are a number of other deities in the form of nature that are worshipped which differs from village to village.

Some of the ceremonial practices of nature common to the Ao tribe are as follows:

4.2.1. Worship ceremony of large pools (*awatsüing*)

Large pools within the village or in the outskirt of the village were worshipped by the village when they come to know of powerful spirits guarding the pool. While some villages worship every year, there were some that worshipped once in three years. For the worship ceremony only fair pigs are offered for sacrifice. Along with a healthy red cock without any blemish and an egg were also used. When water pools are worshipped, the eldest of the Jamir clan can initiate the ceremony. The liver, gall bladder and heart of the pig is always the share of the Jamir clan since the days of the Ao's at Chungliyimti because water was discovered by 'Imsenpirong' who belonged to the Jamir clan. The one who carries out the ceremony of the worship will quarantine for three days.

4.2.2. Worship ceremony of *Kirunglung* (*ki*- house *rung*- burn *lung*- stone)

The word *Kirunglung* means the 'evil one'. It is a rock which resembles the shell of a turtle. It was predicted that at night when the rock faced a certain village the next day houses in that village would burn. This evil spirit came out only at night in the form of a fireball. It was also referred to as the fire god. That is why this particular rock was preserved well and worshipped by the villagers to appease the god. The *putir* of the village would worship the rock with egg to save the village especially during dry season from the outbreak of fire.

4.2.3. Worship ceremony of *Shitilong* (*Shiti*- elephant *long*- rock)

This rock is located in Mongsenyimti village. There was a villager by the name Suwameren who on his way to his field struck his foot on a stone and started to bleed profusely. So he decided to dug out the stone in case others should also hurt their feet by it. After several attempts he could not find the end of the stone and failed to dig it out.

That night in his dream the stone appeared to him and said that his roots lay in the *molutsü* (sea). After narrating this strange dream to the villagers, they started worshipping the stone with the blood sacrifice of a cock by the village elder. Once, when the enemies came to attack the village they got intimidated by the stone which looked like a huge Elephant. Thus, the village was saved by the stone from the enemies. From that day onwards the villagers gave the name *Shitilong* to it. *Shitilong* was the greatest god of the village since then.



Image 4: Stone slab erected in memory of the founder of the stone Suwameren

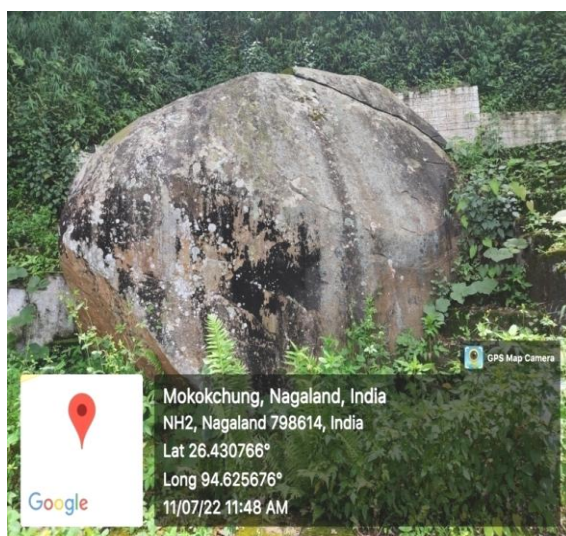


Image 5: *Shitilong* taken from below

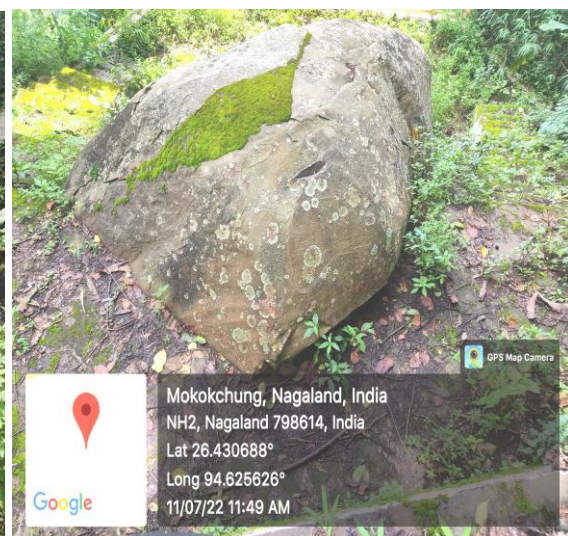


Image 6: *Shitilong* taken from the top

5. Belief system

5.1. *Tangkum Marok* (cup of life): This is a fresh water spring that is supposed to possess mythical healing powers for the enhancement of life. Oral narrative says that *Tangkumba* was a man hailing from Longkhum village in the days of the lore. On his way to the field he became very thirsty and when he came upon the spring of fresh water he drank contentedly and left his Marok (cup) in the spring which to this day remains. These were the days when the stones were soft and not hardened and so in winter when the water dries up the two cups can be seen very clearly which are supposed to be his cups. Villagers going to the field carry water from this spring and while returning in the evening refreshes themselves by drinking the water and freshening up before proceeding to their homes. People often leave the bottles they drink the water from so that the next person can also use it for his purpose.

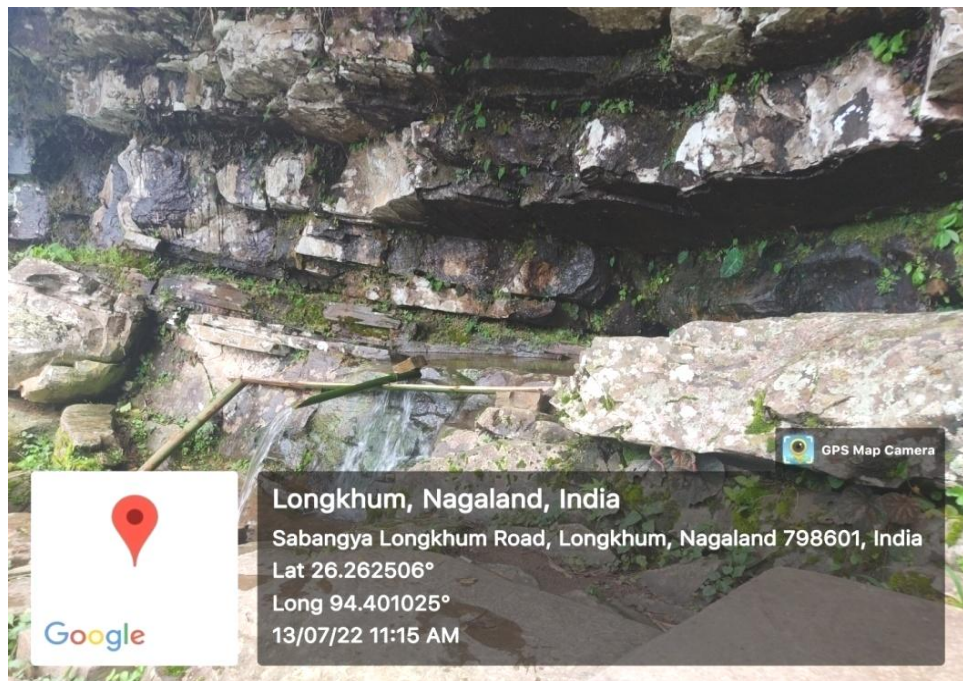


Image 7: *Tangkum Marok* at Longkhum village



Image 8. *Tangkumba's cup*

An old saying goes, “a single visit to Longkhum village is not enough, for your soul stays behind the first time and that you have to return to the village once more to get it back.”

5.2. Life after death belief(s)

The Ao's believes is several popular assumptions about life after death.

- (a) When a person dies, his soul is taken to 'Asüyim' meaning 'the land of the dead'. The sighting of hawk hovering and circling over the compound of the dead person is taken and believed to be that of the dead person and that it is a sign of the transition of its soul being complete. Some people sprinkle water in the air as a sign of giving water to the soul before it finally leaves the land of the living.
- (b) Another assumption says that they are transported to an underground world to begin a new existence. This version says that the souls of the dead can go only downward.
- (c) Another popular claim says that on a clear sunny day, white strips can be seen at the base of Dipu mountain (located beyond the Wokha Hills) which is thought of as the

discarded garment of the dead after cleansing themselves in the river and entering the land of the dead.

(d) *Longritzu Lenden* (boundary between the dead and the living) or the river valley of the departed soul, located little below the cliff is supposed to contain an underground river. The Ao's believe that the soul of the dead go to the world of the spirit passing Longkhum village by this river beyond the Dipu Mountain.

Longritzu is called the stream of bitterness where, it is believed, all the souls of the dead cleanse themselves before entering the land of dead. The land of the dead is looked over by one of the gods called *Meyutsüngba*. He is the one who presides appropriate judgment to the souls according to their deeds on earth.

(e) After the mourning days are over, which is six days for men and five days for women, on the seventh or sixth day the family members and relatives go to a river to cleanse themselves. Then they speak to the dead that from then on they will go separate ways and that their world is different from that of the living so they cannot live together anymore. It is believed that until these final words are spoken to the dead their spirit continue to live among the living.

5.3. Different *Tsüngrems* in the traditional belief system.

W.C. Smith records the use of the term *Tsüngrem* as:

Tsüngrem is the general term for deity, of which there are several; for instance, *Kimong Tsüngrem* (house site deity), *Ki-tsüng Tsüngrem* (house deity), *Arem Tsüngrem* (jungle deity). (Smith, 77)

E. W. Clark in the *Ao Naga Dictionary* describes *Tsüngrem* as :

“A general term for deity, of which the Naga have many.”

The Ao's worshipped certain objects with which there had been an unusual encounter. Their worship is that of praise and adoration, supplication and petition. There are a host's of deities that are worshipped by the Ao's which differs among the villages. The belief in the existence of god or gods form the core of the religion of the pre-literate Ao's and it is the guiding principle that conditions the conduct of a person. Thus,

all the gods or deities are revered highly depending on the purpose for which they are worshipped.

Apart from the various deities worshipped by different villagers, there are three *Tsüngrems* that the Ao's worship since the origin of the tribe. They are *Lijaba*, *Longtitsüngba* and *Meyitsüngba*.

5.3.1. *Lijaba*, the creator of the earth.

According to W.E Clark in the *Ao Naga Dictionary* describes *Lijaba* as:

“...world maker, the recognized supreme ruler of the earth.” (Clark 2013:340)

The oral tradition of the Ao's says that *Lijaba* is the creator of the world. It is *Lijaba* that causes the natural calamities as well as disasters if he is displeased with the people. *Lijaba* is believed to reside under the earth and is responsible for everything that happens on it.

As *Lijaba* was believed to be the chief sovereign of the earth, a day was set aside every year to worship him. On the day of the *Lijaba* worship, the *Putir unger* (chief priest) took a fowl in his basket and the other priest a pig, some cooked rice and cooking pots to the altar of worship. Only the chief priest can perform the ceremony of the worship. The meat of the pig and the liver and if required gizzard of the fowls were cut into small pieces and laid out on the *am* leaves piled one over the other. Also a little of the cooked rice were added to it along with a cup of rice beer. After the ceremony was completed, the chief priest prayed to the god *Lijaba* that the village might be protected from enemies, attack of wild animals, for bountiful harvest and all types of blessings on the villagers. After the worship and prayer, the chief priest and the other priests cooked and ate the remaining meat and the pots were deposited at the altar. The priests observe *anembong* for six days and the whole village for one day.

5.3.2. **Appeasing Lijaba** (Extracted from *Myths of the Hills: The past is the Beacon of the Future* by Talitemjen Imchen)

When people came to realize *Lijaba* as the creator of all things, they began to worship him and followed this practice as they lived on through the generations.

During one of the generations, a time came when they decided to observe some days of giving thanks in honouring *Lijaba* and also seek his blessings. After sowing the grains in their field, to invoke blessings from *Lijaba* for germination and growth of the paddy, the villagers set aside six days, named it *Moatsümun* (ceremony of blessing), and observed those six days solemnly in homes without going to the fields. After this festive observation, when it is time for harvest, in remembrance of *Lijaba's* visit to their village and spending a night in a fern hut, the villagers observed another six days as *Lijabamung* (ceremony of *Lijaba*) or *Tsiüngremmung* (ceremony of god).

At the start of both these celebration, and till the third day, the village believed that, *Lijaba* would come near them underground and would listen to their festivity with his ear placed on the surface of the earth. Because of this belief, for the first three days, no home was to pound rice or chop firewood as a sign of respect knowing *Lijaba's* presence and for fear that *Lijaba's* head may be put to discomfort because of the vibration caused by pounding rice and chopping firewood. All these basic things were kept ready ahead of the observance. Even after fetching water in the bamboo vessels, they would put it quietly without making any sound. While piling firewood stacks in the kitchen, they did it carefully ensuring that *Lijaba* was not disturbed nor caused discomfort. Even the children were told to maintain silence while walking around in the house.

After strictly observing for the first three days the villagers would wait in anticipation and observe the turn of events because if the first three days was not observed properly as it was supposed to be, then it was believed that, in anger, *Lijaba* would bring storm to destroy their crops and that particular year their harvest will be badly affected and they will suffer. Whereas, when the three days are observed as desired

by *Lijaba*, people believed that *Lijaba* would make the seasons and weather pleasant and bless the villagers with a good harvest so that they will live in prosperity.

5.3.3. *Longtitsüngba*/*Aningsüngba* or the lord of the sky or heavens.

According to W.E Clark in the *Ao Naga Dictionary* describes *Longtitsüngba* as:

“The great deity supposed to live in heaven, the *tiatsüba* of all men, i.e., he is supposed to fix the state or condition of all men in this world.” (Clark 2013: 350)

Longtitsüngba is not worshipped by the whole village but by individuals. He is believed to be the one who decides the fate or destiny of a person. Whenever an individual wants to mediate with *Longtitsüngba*, an *Arasentür* ((indigenous healer with healing power) is arranged. The *Arasentür* is given by the owner of the house a male fowl, some baskets of paddy, rice, dried fish and salt. He binds the salt, a little cooked rice, dried fish, dried pig separately and hangs it at the central post of the house beyond the reach of the dogs and other animals. A small cup of rice beer is also hung along with the items. Then, flinging the fowl around the house the *Arasentür* prays to *Longtitsüngba* to ward off any deaths, untoward calamity or sickness and prays for the prosperity, wealth and health of the family. The *Arasentür* takes the live fowl with him after the completion of the ceremony which is called *Longtitsüngba shilem* (*Longtitsüngba*'s share).

That night if the owner of the house see a dream, depending on the good or bad of the dream, they determine if *Longtitsüngba* has accepted their petition or not. The family of the house where this ceremony has carried out has to strictly observe *anembong* for six days.

5.3.4. *Meyutsüngba* or the lord of the land of dead.

The Ao's believe that *Meyutsüngba* preside over the land of the dead and therefore is called the lord of the land of the dead. Once the soul of the dead leaves the *akümli* (land of the living) and crosses the *longritzü*, the soul of the dead faces his judgment given by *Meyutsüngba* to enter the land of the dead. The deed of the person

determines the merit or punishment that is awarded. No form of worship can appease the god because he is impeccable.

6. Transformational tales

6.1. How a Boy Turned into a Monkey

Once upon a time there was a boy in a certain village whose mother had died when he was young. After some time, the father married again in order to have a helpmate for himself as well as to provide a mother for his young son.

But unfortunately for the little boy, the stepmother took an intense dislike to the boy from the very beginning and began to ill-treat him. She assigned him difficult chores but very little food, which was also inferior in quality. But most of this went unobserved by the father who was almost always away at his paddy field far away from home. And though, sometimes, he detected signs of unhappiness in his son, he soon forgot to ask his son because the woman was cunning and he was completely under her charm and domination.

(The Ao-Nagas have always practised the shifting form cultivation. According to the cycle, a farmer maintains two fields, the previous year's field where he grows mainly rice and the current year's field where, besides rice, he grows an assortment of fruits and vegetables also. The harvesting seasons of the two fields are also different. The rice in the old field, having been sown earlier, ripens earlier than the rice in the new one.)

This particular farmer also had two fields. In the new one, besides rice, he grew pumpkins, cucumbers, maize, arum and various other fruits as well. But his crop was relentlessly ravaged by a pack of monkeys which ate up not only the fruits and vegetables but also the stalks of the young rice plants.

In order to save the crop in the new fields, the farmer decided to send his son to chase away the monkeys from the new field while he went to harvest the ripening rice in the old one. The son had to go to the field very early in the morning and came home late at night because the monkeys chose the hours before the arrival and after the departure of

the farmers to depredate the crops. The boy really had a difficult job to perform but he did it sincerely.

The stepmother had never shown any kindness to the boy and now she started to give him even less food than before. For his morning meal, he was given a little cold rice with no curry at all. But for his mid-day meal, she wrapped a few lumps of rotten rice in a leaf. When the boy found that the rice in the leaf-tiffin was unfit for consumption, he threw it away and ate the fruits and vegetables from the field itself. This went on for a number of days and the mound of rotten rice in a corner of the farm house began to grow bigger.

As days went by with this unvarying pattern of treatment from his stepmother, the boy decided that there was no need to walk those long miles of rough road back home for a few lumps of cold rice and no curry. It was merely a waste of time and energy. And so he began to spend the nights as well in the farm house itself, surviving on the maize and vegetables growing in the field.

In the meantime, the father too was busy harvesting his old field singlehandedly. He used to start for the field very early in the morning and come back home late at night only carrying heavy loads of paddy on his back. He had little time to ask about his son's work and simply took it for granted that all was well with him.

But when the harvest in the old field was over, he turned his attention to the new field and began to enquire about his son's work. He was told that the son had not come home for many days now. (This in itself is not unusual, because when there is much work to be done in the fields, the farmers spend the night in the farm house in order to save precious time spent on commuting to and from the village.)

The father decided to check on his son and set out to the new field very early the next morning. On reaching the field, he looked out for his son but there was no sign of him anywhere. As he looked around the farm house, he discovered the mound of rotten rice left by his son. He now began to realise that something had gone terribly wrong with his son. Thinking that he might be somewhere in the field the farmer began to call out

loudly for his son, "Dear Son, where are you? I am your father, come to relieve you. Come to your father, my dear son."

But there was no response from his son. To his surprise a monkey which was sitting on a log near the farm house began to respond to his call. Though he looked like a monkey, there were still traces of his human form and voice which made the father realise that he was no ordinary monkey. He at once knew that it was his son who was gradually transforming into a monkey and he became terribly saddened at this turn of events. He shed bitter tears of remorse when he realised that it was because the boy had gone too long without proper meals and had been living on fruits and vegetables alone that he was undergoing this strange transformation. As he was not warmed by the fire at the hearth, fur began to develop on his body and he was now almost transformed into a monkey.

Seeing the mound of rotten rice, he was convinced that it was his wife who was responsible for what had happened to his son. In this, he too was betrayed by her, and once again he wept for the loss of his son.

Before leaving the field, he turned to his son who was now becoming a monkey and said, "Since you find it impossible to return to your human form, I am leaving you here along with the other monkeys. You may eat all the fruits and vegetables you like. Among the rice stalks those in the corner are sweeter because they are special sticky rice plants. You may eat this particular type of rice plants. With these parting words, the sad man left his son to join the group of monkeys as one of them.

The father, after bidding farewell to his son, returned home utterly dejected and broken hearted. He accused his wife of her cruel treatment toward his son and on this ground he divorced her and drove her away from his home. He lived alone with his grief and died a broken old man for having lost his only son in this manner.

(To this day, the Aos claim, because of the father's last words to his son, monkeys can distinguish this variety of rice from the ordinary one and relish eating it first.)

6.2. How A Woman Became the Kaku (Cuckoo) Bird (Extracted from *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* by Temsula Ao)

Though the Nagas have been a fierce head-hunting people, there has been no evidence to indicate that they ever practiced cannibalism. However, this particular tale which is current in an Ao Naga village called Changki, is an indication that this practice was not unknown to them. Whether the village from which the heroine of this tale hailed was a Naga village or not is not mentioned. On the contrary, there is a strong emphasis on the word 'foreign' in the narration and hence the surmise is that the heroine could belong to any of the neighbouring people of the region. The tale begins thus.

Once upon a time, there was a brave warrior called Tsunang, in Changki village. During one of his forays outside the perimeters of his village, he met and fell in love with a very beautiful girl from a 'foreign' village. He was determined to take this girl for his wife and approached his parents for their approval. The parents flatly refused permission to marry this girl, about whom nothing was known - the tribe she belonged to, her family history and what kind of a girl she was. They pointed out that it was not advisable to enter into a lifelong relationship with such a person and hence he should forget all about her and marry someone from his own village

The boy was, however, unwilling to listen to their reasoning and insisted that if he married at all, it would be this girl and no one else. So the reluctant parents gave in to their son's obstinacy. The marriage took place in the girl's village and she was brought by the groom to their new home in his village.

The girl was indeed very beautiful and she won over the hearts of her in-laws by her beauty and charming manners. In a year's time the young couple was blessed with a beautiful baby boy and their happiness seemed complete.

However, things began to change. The once beautiful girl seemed to grow paler every day and her beauty seemed to fade literally before one's eyes. No amount of special care regarding her diet, rest etc. seemed to work. The young husband was extremely worried about his wife's condition and he was convinced that she was going to die very soon.

In his desperation about her he asked his wife if there was anything she could suggest which might help her get cured of her ailment. She said that there was something - some kind of medicine which only her mother could give and which should be kept secret from everyone else. Seeing some hope of saving his wife, the young man undertook the long and tedious journey to his father-in-law's village on the errand of bringing this wonder medicine for his wife.

When he reached this village after several days' journey, he narrated the symptoms of his wife's ailment to his mother-in-law who listened in silence and in answer, gave only a cryptic smile. She assured the boy that his wife would be alright soon and that she would prepare the medicine immediately.

On the following day, the boy set out for his own village with the medicine for his wife wrapped in green leaves. The mother-in-law gave strict instructions that no one must open the parcel or see what was inside. Otherwise, the efficacy of the medicine would be lost, she warned him. The parcel was not too heavy, though it was quite bulky. On the long journey back home, the boy began to think about the medicine her mother was sending to his wife. The more he thought about it, the more intrigued he became. And finally giving in to his mounting curiosity, he began to un-wrap the parcel. But he found that there seemed to be nothing but layers and layers of leaves only. In frustration, the young man made a hole through the remaining layers of leaves with his spear and struck on a solid object. When he probed the hole slightly bigger, he peeped through it and saw, to his great horror, that the object was a human hand, to be exact, a female hand, complete with tattoo marks and all. The young man was stunned by the realization that his wife was a cannibal and being deprived of this item in her diet, she was becoming weaker day by day. He sat there for a long time, unable to decide what to do.

Finally, he resolved that he would take the parcel to his wife and watch her secretly to see what she would do. So he wrapped the parcel again as neatly as his mother-in-law had done and continued on the journey. On reaching home he gave the parcel to his wife.

In the mean time, the wife had brewed rice-beer for the husband and she entertained him well after his long and tiring journey. That day she declined to eat together saying that she was not hungry. After the husband finished his meal, she asked him to take their son out for a walk as he seemed to be fretting too much. The husband readily agreed and pretended to go out with the son.

But after a little while, he came back and hid outside the house and looked in through the chinks in the bamboo-matting wall to see what his wife was doing. What he saw was horror beyond his imagination. The wife sliced through the leaves with sharp dao (an axe like implement) and took out the hand with a look of positive glee on her face. She then roasted it over the live coals in the hearth. She took out a huge amount of rice and began to eat it, alternating it with one bite of the roasted hand. The husband could see that she was relishing every mouthful of this ghastly meal.

After watching her for a while, he could not tolerate it any longer and so he made loud coughing sounds from outside to let her know that he was coming back. When the wife heard her husband coming back, she gathered all the leaves and the half-eaten hand and threw them into the garden outside. The half-eaten hand then turned itself into a green caterpillar and crawled away.

The husband did not say anything to his wife because he still cared for her a great deal. But he confided in his father who decided that she must not be allowed to remain in the family any longer. At the same time, they feared that if it was known by others in the village that they had brought in a cannibal woman, however unwittingly, they would be in danger. They might be killed straight away or cast out from the village. So the father devised a plan to get rid of the woman. But the son made a stipulation; that he must never know what exactly happened to her, lest in his weaker moments he should attempt to find her or even blame his father for her fate.

So with this great burden in his heart, the young husband accepted the decision, which he knew was the only one they could take. According to this plan, the father-in-law one day suggested to his daughter-in-law that she could come with him into the neighbouring forests so that they could pluck banana flowers (a vegetable). The daughter-

in-law agreed and so the two of them set out on the fateful journey. When he made sure that they were in an area which was unfamiliar to the girl, the father-in-law began to look for the tallest tree around. When he found it, he invited his daughter-in-law to climb up after him to locate the banana plants. (When climbing tall trees, the Nagas cut out step-like foot-holds with their daos as they go up. The man also did the same as they proceeded to the tallest branch of the tree.) When the girl protested, he said that she must have a proper look from this vantage point before they start back for their village. When he made sure that they had reached the highest branch, he dropped his pipe purposely to the ground.

The father-in-law then began to descend ostensibly to retrieve his pipe, and after every notch down, he smoothed the step so that the daughter-in-law could not climb down after him. And so all the way down he went, making the tree smooth and more slippery because the bark was peeled off in the process.

When the girl realised what he was doing, she began to cry out and ask him why he was doing this. But the old man did not utter a word and after completing his task, went away without a backward glance at his hapless daughter-in-law with her screams of Aku-Aku (father-in-law) ringing in his ears. It was a task executed out of extreme necessity but he was not a cruel man naturally and he too was saddened by what he had to do. There was overwhelming gloom in the family; the husband was absolutely grief-stricken at what he and his father had done. When he could not contain his sorrow any longer, he begged his father to give him the location where he had left his wife. The father, seeing the great sorrow in his son's heart and himself feeling terribly guilty at what he had done, gave him the directions to the tree where the daughter-in-law had been left.

The husband took some rice-beer for his wife and set out into the forest. When he reached the tree as described by his father, he could not see her but heard only a lone bird giving out a plaintive cry Kaku-Kaku.

The husband realised that his wife had turned into this bird which was still calling out to her father-in-law, Aku, which now sounded Kaku-Kaku. With a heavy heart, he

left the jug of wine at the tree trunk and sang this song for their love which had met S a terrible and tragic end:

Ichem Kunuk lemlarle de,

Ongo aloyongang sangle de,

Ichem Kunmuklemla tsurabale

Nemera nange ibi jemang

Translation:

(O you who were once the darling of my eyes

Today you belong to the wilds of the forests

My darling. If you feel thirsty

Drink of this, your favourite drink.)

So saying the husband went back to his village, with a heavy heart. He never married again and died soon after of a broken heart.

But this sad tale does not end here.

There is a superstition in the village Changki which dates back to this particular tale, which concerns the women descended from Tsunangpong's son. It is believed that the taint of cannibalism inherited from this woman finds other expressions in the women belonging to this clan. They say that men who marry them die young the innuendo being that such women sort of 'devour' their men in this way.

However, in the present society of the village, such superstitions are no longer even mentioned. Besides, the present generation of youth may not even be aware of many of the tales and legends of their folklore, including this one.

6.3. The story of the small bird. Narrated by Aotula Longchar|Tar Nunger Otsü shitepba tetoktepba|finalist <https://youtu.be/_1Ud8MO8aGe>)

A long time ago, during the times of dreams and magic, there lived a family with two young daughters. One day their parents went to their jhum cultivation leaving their

two daughters alone at home. When the parents were in the field an incident happened in their absence. The older sister said to the younger sister, “*Tenu* (younger sister) today mother and father have gone to the field so I will clean the rice and prepare the pig feed. You go to fetch water from the river and collect firewood from the jungle.

When the elder sister said this, the younger sister happily agreed and went to collect firewood from the jungle. After a while the younger sister returned overladen with firewood in her basket and dumped it on the ground. Then she went to her elder sister and said, “*Oya* (Elder sister) I am hungry. Give me something to eat. But the elder sister pretended not to hear her and send her to fetch water three more times. As her elder sister told her to, the younger sister filled all the pots and containers with water.

Then it was time for the evening meal and the elder sister again told the younger sister to cook. By now, the younger sister was famished and cried out loudly to her elder sister, “*Oya* I am so hungry, please give me some food.” The elder sister, instead of giving food to her starving sibling, told her younger sister to open her palm and with the hot rice ladle hit her palm. For the pitiable younger sister who was so hungry and tired, it was too much of suffering to bear. Crying loudly she ran out and huddled in the corner of the bamboo balcony at the back of their house.

Meanwhile, her parents were on their way back home from the field carrying basket full of fresh produce from their field. The parents were eager to meet their daughters but they found only the elder daughter. So the mother asked the elder daughter, “Where is your younger sister?” And the elder daughter replied, pretending to be very busy, “Today I did all the work and I am so tired while she has been loitering around all day. She must be outside.” So the parents rushed outside to look for the younger daughter because they suspected that their elder daughter must have done something wrong to the younger daughter. The parents knew the character and personality of their daughters too well. So they went out searching for their younger daughter telling her that they have brought fresh cucumbers, maize and other food from the field. They also promised her that they will let her choose first whatever she wanted to eat.

They parents called, “Where are you? Come back home.” But the younger daughter already heard the blatant lies her elder sister had told about her. She could not bear the injustice and climbed up the nearest tree and turned herself into a small bird *Kongliang*. Her parents looked for her everywhere but she was nowhere to be found. Finally when they came near a tall tree, they saw a small bird perched on the branch and it was singing a song mournfully.

*Oyalai sungbeni oang ta,
Oyalai tzudai oang ta,
Aji-asa mekila sungko lidi
kongliang ta kongliang ta*

(Elder sister sent me to fetch firewood. Elder sister sent me to fetch water. Not once was I given rice or meat, better to live in the trees where I am supposed to stay.)

Repeating this song, the small bird jumped from one tree to the other and eventually flew away to into the thick forest. It left the parents very heartbroken.

In the days of the lore mistreatment of the younger sister by the elder sister in the absence of the parents were very common. This story is also a reflection of such mistreatment.

The story of the small bird is a tale of transformation and the transformation seems to be regarded as the act that ends any humanly qualities of the transformed. Such motif of metamorphosis puts a character in between the species. It also underscores what it means to be human and non-human.

6.4. The lady that was covered in Nirep (bee wax) (Translated from *Tar Shilu: Tejen otsü Penzü* by A. Mar Jamir)

Once upon a time in chungliyimti, there was a beautiful girl named *Ngazala*. There was also a handsome young man named *Tsülaksang*. One day the young man went to the girl’s parents to ask permission to marry *Ngazala*. But they replied that she is so fragile like a yam leaf. They were scared that after marriage if she has to work for

livelihood and gets tired from the work, she might melt away (literally). But the young man was determined to marry her so he promised the parents that he will not let her work and keeps her inside under the shade of the house. Since the young man begged so much, the parents gave *Ngazala* in marriage to him. As promised, the young man did not allow *Ngazala* to do any work. She stayed inside the house all day long. She gave birth to a son and they named him *Yimsa* (Melt). She stayed home looking after the baby but one day a big number of villagers had to go to their field to work. Her husband forgot that his wife was fragile and asked her to come to the field to cook for the villagers. It was a hot day and she had to cook near the fire and the smoke. Slowly she began to melt. When her husband saw that he quickly brought a straw and made a hat to protect her from the heat. He then asked her to go home ahead of them. But since it was a very hot day, the straw hat could not protect her for long. She melted away on a flat stone like oil before reaching their house and the hat rolled down. When the villagers went back from the field, everyone stepped on her including her husband.

The husband did not find *Ngazala* at home when he reached. He started wondering what had happened to her. After sometime *Ngazala* also reached home and when her husband asked her why she was late she narrated to him about how she melted away halfway and also how all the villagers including him had stepped on her on their way back from the field. Only after the sun set and the air became cooler she came back to her original form.

When the chungliyimti villagers heard of this, they were awestruck and they gave her the name *Nirepyangla* (Covered in bee wax). The path where she melted is called *Nirepyangla Lenjem* (Nirepyangla path). This is located in the *Longsa* territory.

At this time the husband sang a song:

Kir juma temshenla

Bangmerenla jangdong tiangsem

Navi neiyanger mesakone

Kotak tsunglilar yimpatiene

Tiangsemane

Yakala zunu mangishiki

Tongjen shar ongpak temlen

Yarangpongba sungti akum

Sur tanepla tongtong pi nonie

(The one that has become new. Your mother has given a worthy birth to you. Just like the heavenly woman no blemish. Just as I have kept you under the shade I will keep you safe from all harm)

The husband sang this song remembering the promise he had made to her parents when he asked her hand for marriage.

6.5. A Girl who was Loved by a Tree-Spirit Bird (Extracted from *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* by Temsula Ao)

A very long time ago, in the first established Ao Village called Chungliyimti, there lived a very beautiful girl, the only child of her parents who were very rich. As was the custom among the Aos, when a girl reached puberty, she went to the girls' dormitory to spend the nights. It was in these dormitories that young men would come after night fall to court young ladies and in this way many young people would choose their life partners.

This young and beautiful girl was also courted by many eligible young men of the village. But her eyes were fixed on a particular young man who was very handsome. As time passed, their friendship grew more and more intimate and he visited her every night and left before dawn. But during the day he was nowhere to be seen and all her efforts to locate him in the village were in vain.

So in desperation she confided in her parents who thought deeply over the matter. The young man in the meantime continued to visit the girl as usual. One dawn, as advised by her father, when the boy was preparing to leave the girl, she tied a new waist-band, with a dao, around his waist with which he departed.

In the morning, the family was very astonished to see the dao-belt tied round a tree which stood below their house on the bank of a pond. This meant only one thing to them, that the young man was not a human being at all but was the spirit of that tree which had fallen in love with this beautiful girl.

However, they wanted to be absolutely sure about it. When, in the following night, the young man came to the girl as usual and was preparing to leave her at dawn, she wrapped a new indigo-dyed shawl round his shoulders, with which he departed.

In the morning, the shawl was found hanging from the fork of the same tree, which confirmed the suspicion that he was the tree- spirit.

As the girl pondered over this, she recalled that during their initial courtship, whenever she went to the pond to fetch water, or wash herself, the branches of the particular tree would sway, whether it was windy or not. She then realised that even while in the form a tree the young 'man' was courting her, in the daytime too!

The girl's father, in the meantime, decided to see for himself this phenomenon before he could do anything about it. So one night he kept vigil outside the girl's dormitory, and when the young 'man' left her at dawn the father followed him secretly to see where he went. Not heading for the men's dormitory as other young men were doing, he went straight to the bank of the stream and stood there. And right in front of the father's astonished eyes; he was gradually transformed into the tree which people were always used to seeing. His body turned into the trunk, his arms into branches and his hair into leaves and gradually, instead of the youth, there stood this majestic tree, gently swaying in the early morning breeze.

The father then resolved to cut down and destroy this mysterious tree. He went to the villagers and told them of the real nature of the tree and enlisted their help in getting rid of it. As the villagers prepared to cut down the tree, the father locked his daughter in her room with strict orders not to try to come out.

The villagers then proceeded to chip away at the tree with their sharp daos. But the tree simply refused to yield to their attack. Hour after hour, they hacked at it, but it

stood there as firmly as ever. In the meantime the girl was trying to see what was happening outside and strained to look out through a chink in the bamboo wall of her room. Just as she was able to widen the gap in the wall and peep out, a sharp splinter of the tree trunk which was being chipped away by the villagers flew towards the house and, entering through the narrow chink, pierced the girl's eye. The splinter entered the eye with such a great force that it lodged in her brain through the eye killing her instantly.

At the precise moment when the girl fell dead, the tree also swayed for a moment and fell to the ground with a mighty crash. The villagers were jubilant and the father the most of all, because he thought that now his beautiful daughter would no longer be haunted by the tree-spirit.

But when he came home to greet his daughter with this news, to his utter grief and shock, he found that the girl was dead with the splinter stuck in her eye. Thus he realized that the tree-spirit, had won after all, and claimed his lover even in death.

The two lovers were thus united in death.

The marriage between an animal and human or a tree or any other non-human form seems to take place with the human being a woman. This kind of marriages also seems to be a favorite motif in the Ao folktales. The animals or other non-human beings are endowed with human faculties with the ability to speak. They can also take the form of men.

7. Other Tales

7.1. How Man, God and Tiger Went their Separate Ways

Once upon a time in a village a man lived with his three sons. They were healthy and hardworking and helped the father in cultivating the land. The father was happy and proud of them. The three brothers had contrasting personalities and character. The eldest son was calm, steady, and slow to anger and was very considerate towards his brothers and obedient to his father.

On the contrary, the second son was excitable, erratic in his work, aggressive and greedy. He loved to be outdoors all the time. But with the patient guidance of his elder brother, he did commendable work in the field. Only his elder brother could help him control the outbursts of his excessive temper. The youngest son on other hand had a very peculiar nature. He was withdrawn, aloof, spoke few, was irritated over small matters and was also very emotional. He was secretive and none in the family could become close to him. But the eldest son was tactful and patient and could coax his brother to relax and be normal with him sometimes. Yet, the youngest son remained the mystical one, though he did help out diligently in the field work.

During a harvest season, one morning, the father sent the sons to the field early, even before the morning meal so that they could put in extra hours of work in the field. The father was to follow, bringing their meal for them.

Later in the day, upon reaching the farm shed, the father hailed the sons in a loud voice so that they could come for their meal. But to his surprise nobody appeared. He called again but there was no response. So he went out looking for them and after some time discovered his eldest son, reaping grain at a far end of the vast field. Upon being questioned about his brothers, the eldest boy told the father that his brothers behaved in a very peculiar manner that morning. They would not listen to him and were very adamant in their attitude. They seemed to be bent on doing things their own way and so he left them in disgust at the farm shed and had not seen them since.

When the father and the eldest son were coming towards the shed in order to have their meal, they could see that the second son was prowling about on the roof top of the shed. On coming nearer, their great amazement and horror, they saw that he was undergoing a transformation. He was gradually turning into a tiger!

When he saw the father and brother coming near, he jumped down from the roof and started to move away towards the jungle. The father then called out. "Dear son, you have now turned into a wild animal and will begin killing for your food. But do spare your father's domestic animals." But the ferocious tiger only replied, "In the darkness

where I am going, all animals will look the same to me." Saying so, he gave a mighty leap and vanished from their sight forever.

The father and the son began to look for the youngest son and found him sitting under a big tree near the shed. He too was in the process of a strange transformation. He appeared to them to have no well-defined form but seemed to be only a shadow of his former self. They called out to him, asking questions, but he remained silent. He turned his face away from them, and told his father and brother that henceforth they would not see him, that they should worship him under that tree bringing offerings of meat and eggs. But he stipulated that the eggs should be brought in a specially woven egg-basket only. Even as he was giving these instructions he turned into a god-like being and he too slowly vanished from their sight.

So, to this day the Aos observe the custom of bringing the sacrificial eggs in baskets of this special type. It is also believed that only a few people know the art of weaving this particular kind of basket as god gave the instruction in a hurry and that too with his face averted. The custom of offering sacrifices to god during sowing and harvesting seasons is believed to have been instituted by this god who was once a human being. These offerings are left at a specially selected place near the farm shed usually under a tree. This is how, the Aos believe, man, god, and the tiger went their separate ways. Until this time, the AOs believed that man, animals and the gods lived together.

7.2. The Leaf that Heals. (Translated from *Tar Shilu: Tejen otsü Pezü* by A. Mar Jamir)

In the land of *Settsü* where six summers had passed, there live a young handsome man named *Tsiingroba*. Unfortunately he suffered from an unknown skin disease. He had rashes all over his body. No medicine could cure him of this disease. As he was growing up, he often went to the *Ariju* (Morung) to sleep and also visited *Tzüki* (Girls dormitory) along with his friends. But none of his friends wanted to sleep near him at the Morung because of the disease and it led to hatred. Even when they went to the girl's dormitory,

some of the boys sat on the girl's bed while some near the fire but he was made to sit in the corner where the firewood was kept. This went on for quite some time.

One day when *Tsiingroba* went to the field one day, on the way he heard the voice of a frog in danger. He looked around and saw the frog of a snake. His body was half swallowed and it was trying to wriggle free from the snake's mouth. Feeling pity upon the frog, he killed the snake with his *Dao* and set the frog free. The frog rested for a while and slowly began to move. *Tsiingroba* was curious to know what the frog would do next and therefore followed it. Then the frog took a bite of a certain leaf and continued moving. *Tsiingroba* took notice of the leaf and went home. The next day when he went to the place where the leaf was growing, the frog also came. This time its wound had healed a little. The frog again took a bite of the leaf and left. On the third day also *Tsiingroba* went to the same place and the frog also came. This time the frog was almost completely healed. It took a bite again and left.

After witnessing this, *Tsiingroba* realized that this particular leaf medicinal value and thought that just as it healed the frog would, it might also heal his disease. So he took a bite of the leaf and the itching sensation stopped. He continued eating the leaf for a few days and finally the rashes disappeared from his body. Not only that his skin had a glow. After that he could bare his body and sit with his peer group in the Morung and the woman also began to admire him. Reminiscing on the past days he sang the song:

*“Naza mese bilemdang
Süingrong bangko mungliangdar
Ni takümla chuba tuli yaloker
Jendongbangko langbang pajoker
Sangbang iko mungliangtaki
Ni tziütelang waza nangsha penyur nungani
Imtongshika waror”*

(You used to tell me to sit in the corner where the firewood was kept only because you disliked me but now I am attired nicely and walking around with the other I am told

to bare myself and sit with you. But I am a faraway bird. I am not looking at you but just roaming around)

Thus, remembering his past when he was insulted and rejected by others, with tears in his eyes he sang this song.

Tsükibutsula (monitress of the girl's dormitory) replied to him by singing:

“Imshangerdang odia koda mejebrangla

Tsüingsak mopung agi anak ayiatakang shinüali”

(Oh! Yes. Even if one cannot show openly to the villagers, taking the excuse of the wind and the rain one wishes to wipe the tears away)

7.3. How the Moon Brightened the Earth (Extracted from *Myths of the Hills: The past is the Beacon of the Future* by Talitemjen Imchen)

A young married couple set out with the aim of farming in equally big measure like the rest of the villagers with the intention to have a bountiful harvest.

As was the practice over the generations, they used to leave their children with their grandparents and went to work in the field regularly. Everyday about noontime their grandmother would take out rice in the plates and eat it after taking it to the *sünglang* (a flat and raised bamboo platform attached at the front or back of the house). This became a daily routine for days and months the grandmother used to take care of the kids; and one day, as usual, as the grandmother was feeding the children, a sudden gust of wind blew up the rice plate on to the roof of the house. Grandmother quickly brought a long bamboo pole and as she tried to get the rice plate down, the wind blew and took the plate higher up into the sky.

After this, the children waited eagerly looking up towards the sky for the plate to fall down to the ground but in vain and as they waited, it grew dark in the night and a bright light appeared in the sky. The children showed their grandmother that the plate was hung up in the sky. Starting from that night the bright light came out every night in the sky. They named the plate hanging in the sky as ‘*Ita*’ (moon). With the moon lighting

up their world at night, they could go out at night without carrying a torch. Bundled twigs or bamboo splinters were lighted up to serve as torch in those days.

They were so happy and grateful to the moon and started to treat the moon with great respect. At night whenever children cried, the parents would take them out and relate them with the moon like one of their own and cheered up the babies and rock them to sleep while singing praises of the moon.

They sang the lullaby,

Lata, lata, nang süür Lata?

Anüngtsünger lata. Ni tettsüa küüraru,

Nang tettsüa larangma.

Translation:

Moon, Moon, whose moon are you?

The Heavenly Moon

I will come up a little,

You come down a little.

Whenever the light of the moon fades away from the sky, people used to say that the Tiger must have eaten the moon. To see clearly if the Tiger actually eats the moon, they used to keep a large pot filled with water and used mirror to watch the moon. Whenever the earth gets dark, they believe that the Tiger is eating up the moon and therefore, before the Tiger eats the whole moon, they would hurriedly sound the alarm by beating the log drum in the village to chase the Tiger away.

They believed that the Tiger got frightened by the alarming sound of the log drum and ran away without eating the moon fully. Thus, the beating of the log drum prevented the moon from being eaten up by the Tiger. And because of which the moon also continued to give its light to the people at night.

7.4. Taken to the Land of the Dead (Extracted from *Myths of the Hills: The past is the Beacon of the Future* by Talitemjen Imchen)

In a small and lowly family, the father and mother died very early leaving behind their two sons. Not a single person in their village wanted to take care or help them. The two boys lived so lonely, poor and rejected by everyone.

As carried out traditionally, the two boys also took up farming alongside the same range with the rest of the villagers. They burnt their fields following the time and season. They eagerly waited for the right season to sow seeds and crops and went to various *arasentsür* (mediator between the humans and the spirits) to get their dreams interpreted, to find out what fortune was in store for them that year. Following the prediction of the *arasentsür*, some villagers used to take dogs and sacrifice to the gods before they begin sowing. Some take hen with them and after sacrificing its blood they start their work in the field. For the poor, they took eggs and only after offering the eggs to the gods, they begin work the field.

Sadly, the two poverty stricken brothers could not even afford an egg to offer the sacrifice to start their work and left the held unattended, while others were already growing paddy. Later, after everyone had done their job, one day, when the brothers were collecting vegetables in the jungle, they fortunately came upon a quails nest. They found some eggs in the nest and took them home. The next day, they took the quail's egg to their field and offered it to the gods to begin their sowing.

While the brothers had just began sowing their paddy, rice grains in other villagers field had already germinated and grown into young crops. To catch up with the rest of the villagers in harvesting, the two boys Worked harder and longer hours each day. One pleasant morning when they came to the field, they were astonished to see the work in the field completely done, twice more than what they have done the previous evening. They were amazed by the miracle and gathered the harvest in great disbelief.

One day they decided to find out who works for them in the field when they are not around. That night the brothers did not go home and waited, hidden behind the tree stumps. When it was almost midnight, they saw their deceased mother and father coming

out of the barn with spade and paddy grains in their hands and going into the field. The parents began to sow the grains and plant the paddy and sang while they worked.

They were singing...

Kü zü benlu,

kü an benlu

Osü entsü agiang alu tentenogo ni.

Translation:

To the field I carried dog.

To the field I carried hens,

Yet, only a quail's egg could now make it to the field.

Seeing their parents that night, the boys were heartbroken and they missed them. Wanting to live with them again and to have them back, the brothers rushed out towards their parents and tightly held on to them. One son caught the mother and the other son got the father. They held them tight against their bodies. The father escaped the grip of his son but the mother could not get out of the hold of the younger son. When the mother asked what she should do, the father instructed her to take the younger boy along with them to the land of the dead. Thus, the parents took the younger son along with them to the land of the dead.

While the young son was residing with his parents in the land of the dead, the Chief of the village gave a call to all the villagers to go hunting for wild boar. The son also went along with the villagers to hunt the wild boar. Once in the jungle, they started to bellow enchanting war cries', and then from one side a group, with dao and spears, began to cut and slash the jungle. That time, the son also joined the row of women and children and moved along with the group. While the people with dao and spear continued to clear the jungle, the wild boar came towards the women and the children and seeing the boar coming they alerted themselves and started chasing after the wild boar. But the son did not see the wild boar coming towards him. Later, he saw a wingless cricket hopping towards him. He picked up the cricket, hooked it up on a stick and showed it to

the crowd. When they saw the cricket, they shouted, “*Akümliba's* (a living person) spear is getting bend.” The son gave the hooked cricket to the villagers and returned home.

At home, his mother and father were waiting for him smiling. They had cricket's meat in their hands. The son asked his parents to send him from their place back to where he belonged. The parents agreed to send him back to his place again and taught him the details of all the seasons. “Whenever spring approaches and the birds chirp *rakoa* (came), *rakoa*, it is time to sow grains in the old fields. And whenever the birds chirp *Pako Pako*, *Pako Pako* you should sow common grains,” said his father. Later, the mother packed food of rice and pork for her son and asked him to open and eat it before reaching the *Longritzü* (a river that runs between the land of the living and the dead. It is believed that that soul of the dead cleanses itself in this river before entering the land of the dead) river and to proceed on. But as he was not hungry, the son thought of eating the food only after crossing the river. At the bank of *Longritzü* river when he opened the food packet sent by his mother, he found that it did not contain rice but husks and the meat was not meat but pigs faeces. He left the food pack at the riverbank and resumed his journey back home when he woke up with a shock.

When he woke up, he found his elder brother hugging him and crying inconsolably. It was already dawn and the sun had risen and brightened up. Back home the brothers narrated every bit of the story about meeting him to the villagers. To test the veracity of what the parents had told the young boy while in the land of the dead, the villagers, without even observing the moon cycle, they started sowing the *maipo* (white grain that is sown during jhum cultivation in the second year) grains whenever they heard the bird chirping *rakoa*, *rakoa*.

And later, whenever the bird chirps *Pako pako*, *Pako pako*, they sow *chi tsükchitsük*^{lxxxvii} (red grains which are sown in jhum fields in the first year of farming). That year the whole village was blessed with good harvest. The villagers realize that the harvest is better when they do the sowing following the sound of the birds chirping. Thus, sowing after the chirping of the bird became a tradition.

After some years had passed, when it was time to harvest, wild boars appeared in great numbers and ate up the entire crop. Seeing this, he remembered the wild boar chase while he was with his parents in the land of the dead and narrated the same to his villagers. As narrated by him, similarly the villagers chased the wild boar and managed to kill many. They brought them home and distributed to all households in the village and feasted on it. Not very long after, the son died.

Once again he went back to where his parents lived. On his way to the land of dead, he found the food pack still in the spot where he had left them. He opened the wrapped food pack and that day he found inside the food pack fresh rice and pork meat. After having the sumptuous food, he went to *Longritzü* river to wash his hands and drink water. After washing his hands he drew the water on his hands to drink. He was surprised to see the water run out through his hands. He checked his hands and saw that both his palms had holes. By this he got himself confirmed that he is no longer with the living and hurriedly proceeded to the land of the dead, crossing the river.

After his death, the villagers called the long legged, wingless hopping cricket ‘the dead men's wild boar.’

7.5. Tsüingremmung (Extracted from *Myths of the Hills: The past is the Beacon of the Future* by *Talitemjen Imchen*)

Once upon a time there lived a family of four. Unfortunately their mother died suddenly leaving behind their two daughters, Yartenla and her younger sister Matajenla with their father Yimkongtemba. Time passed by and they struggled to make ends meet, not able to keep up with the rest. Considering the state of his family, their father remarried. Unlike others, even in the midst of poverty, the father and daughters were happy and loved each other dearly. Gradually, the father grew older, so too the daughters into young damsels.

One day, the father thought of testing his daughter's mind and asked the eldest, “What song would you sing for me the day I die?” The elder daughter replied, “The day you die I would sing this song for you”.

And she sang like this...

Aba Yimkongtemba Oh..,
Anok tajua hümer
Ami tesoa hümer
Tekariü lu ko ritepükü jenüngtongko,
Jangnem ayim chu,
Yapua jamayokjang

Translation:

Oh father Yimkongtemba Oh...
 The one who holds a sharp edged dao
 And a small spear
 While toiling in the fields of the rich
 The one who finished a plate of rice porridge

The father with a saddened face expressed his dislike for the song, and turned to his younger daughter and asked, “What song would you also sing for me the day I die?” The youngest daughter replied, “Father the day you die I would sing this song.” And then she sang

Aba Yimkongtemba oh..,
Anok tajua hümer
Ami tesoa hümer
Mopung den sako wakü,
Tongpang ko Arir
Mangko tera leplakjang

Translation:

Oh father Yimkongtemba, oh...
 The one who holds a sharp edged dao
 And a small spear
 And goes as fast as the wind,

While in battle,
The one who hacked Tens of heads of enemies.

Hearing the song sung by his youngest daughter, he was so happy. He thought, "After my death, my youngest daughter Matajenla will praise my name but my eldest daughter Yartenla would rather shame my name." Thinking so, the father made up his mind to end the life of Yartenla before he died.

One day he went with his eldest daughter to dig wild tuber from the jungle. In the jungle they found a big tuber vine and begin to dig the tuber out. From morning till noon they dug the ground making it into a pit as he went down digging. He then asked his daughter to find a branch of a tree and send it down to the pit so that he can climb out along with the tuber.

The daughter was unable to cut a strong and sturdy branch, so she cut a tender tree with branches. With the branches facing down, she let it down to her father. Collecting all the tuber from the ground the father came out crawling using the tree with branches as a ladder. After he came out, he asked his daughter to go down to the pit to see if there was any tuber left. Right after she reached the bottom of the pit, the father quickly removed the branch of the tree and covered the mouth of the pit with a huge flat rock. After that, he put the wild tuber in a basket and returned home.

When the youngest daughter saw her father returning alone with a basketful of wild tuber, she asked, "Father, isn't my sister coming?" He replied that she may be following nearby. After a while when the sister did not return she asked again, "Father, hasn't my sister reached as yet?" Again, the father uncaringly replied that she may be coming.

When the sister actually did not return home, the younger one made up her mind to go till the village gate to pick her sister on the way and she started going. It was already getting dark, yet she did not see her sister coming. It was already dark and the girl was scared. She went farther into the jungle calling her sister's name. Going farther, the younger sister seemed to hear a faint voice responding to her call. She excitedly asked her sister where she was. To this the sister replied, "Remove the rocks that you come across

and come further.” She removes a rock and finds a snake. She removes another and finds a spider, and again removes another rock and finds a scorpion, and thus with every rock that was removed she encountered dreadful animals.

Frightened by the dreadful animals and insects, the younger sister could not go further and asked her sister what to do. The sister instructed, “Pluck the leaf and place it on top of each animal or insect that you come across and come walking upon them.” She went further more fighting the dreadful animals as instructed by her sister and finally came to a rock and stood upon it. She called out, “Sister, where are you?” The elder sister replied, “I am under the rock that you are standing upon. She removed the rock from the mouth of the pit and looked inside and saw her sister there but she had already turned bald. The younger sister anxiously asked her sister how she could help her come out. The elder sister said, “There may be a branch of a tree somewhere nearby with some steps made on it. Send down the branches to the pit with the branches facing towards the hole first.” As instructed, the younger sister sent down the branch of the tree and helped her sister crawl up to the surface with the help of the branch. The sister then narrated the whole story how the whole thing had happened. After hearing her sister story, the little sister assumed that their father may scold or could even kill them if they go back home. So, the younger one told her sister, “Let us not go home and escape into the jungle.” And the two sisters ran away into the deep jungle.

The villagers came to know about the disappearance of Yimkongtemba’s daughters and made enquiries from their father. When he narrated the incident, the villagers were afraid that the eldest daughter must be dead by now and hurriedly rushed to the place where they had dug the wild tuber.

There they found the bark of *tangmo süng* (sumac tree) with cut steps lying at the spot. But they could not find the sisters anywhere nearby. They were astounded and talked among themselves that the sumac tree saves human. Since that day, whenever the villagers scale heights or cliffs and gorges, they carry sumac tree branches to help as props while trekking places. Hence, the name Apu or Ladder was given to such tree bark for enabling the people to crawl or scale up from a place to the other.

Meanwhile, Yartenla and her sister Matajenla roamed through the jungle and finally came to a village. Narrating their story, they asked the villagers to allow them to stay in their village. But seeing the wound on one of the sisters, the villagers did not believe their story and instead afraid of danger they refused to give shelter to the two sisters. The sisters constantly made the request to the villagers. Knowing that they had nowhere to go, the villagers finally took pity on them and allowed them to stay at the outskirts of the village, in a hut made out of fern leaves (house of the children of unknown parents called *asang-chir* 'asang' -Fern and 'chir'- child). The villagers also allowed the sisters to do farming in a half burnt community plot towards the edge of the field.

That same year, a stinking old man with tattered cloth, carrying a walking stick, passed through the village. Having travelled from afar, the old man was exhausted and wanted to take rest for the night in one of the elder's house in the village. But as the old man passed by, the villagers used to cover their nose and walked by, because the old man was stinking. As the old man roamed the village in search of a house to spend the night, to avoid hosting him in their houses, the villagers quickly hung sacred leaves in front of their entrance, an indication that the house is observing consecration. When the old man sought permission to stay, they would reply that their fowl had hatched chicks or that their pigs had given birth to piglets, and therefore the *genna*. Thus, he was not allowed to stay in any of these houses. When it was about sunset, the old man thought of leaving the village and going away, since no one allowed him in. While he was just about crossing the boundary of the village, he spotted the hut made of fern leaves. The old man knocked at the door of the hut. Amazed by the knock on their door at an unexpected time, the two sisters came out rushing and saw a pitiable old man with ragged clothes standing at the door

In the small fern hut, the two young girls Yartenla and her sister Matajenla had returned from their field and were getting set for cooking. The old man asked the girls to allow him to sleep in their hut for that night. Although they felt pity for the old man, the two girls had nothing to offer him and admitted, "Grandpa, we do not have enough food to eat and drink. And also the house is too small. But if you are comfortable, you can stay

with us. To that the old man replied with a cheerful face, "Grandpa has the food with me and for sleeping, I can sleep anywhere." Saying thus, he entered the hut

Inside the small hut the old man sat on a wooden seat and started asking stories of the two girls. He found out that the girls have been in the village just about a year. While the three sat and shared stories, the little sister Matajenla set the pot on fire to cook rice. The old man told the young girl to place a pot just enough to cook rice for three of them.

He then scratched out a grain of rice from his head and put it in the boiling pot, out of which they could cook a pot full of rice. Again the old man asked the girl to place a pot on the fireplace to cook curry. Once again he scratched out a small skin out of his knee and put it into the pot. This cooked for them a pot full of meat curry. That night, to the amazement of the two girls, the threesome had a great dinner and went to sleep.

The following morning, they found the pots still filled with enough rice and curry for lunch. More amazed and excited by the magical blessings, the girls merrily shared their lunch with the old man. After food, they went out to the *sünglang* (a raised bamboo platform outside the house), and leisurely spent time chatting, overlooking the green fields. Pointing at each of the barn in the fields, the girls informed the old man whose fields those were. After showing all the fields of the villagers, the old man asked if the sisters too have their own field. The elder sister was shy so she could not reply. At that moment, the younger sister came up with a plan and intentionally dropped the comb in her hands, into the ground through the holes of the *sünglang* and asked her elder sister to go and pick it up. When her sister went to get the comb, the younger one quickly pointed to their plot and said, "That small patch near the fence, a size that could even be covered by a winnowing tray."

The old man blessed the small field for a bounty harvest. He instructed them saying, "When the harvest is enough for you, cut of a short lash of the head basket and a thread end of the shawl and burn them in the ban. Only then will you be able to finish harvesting your field. Again the old man inquired how Yartenla became hairless. They narrated the story of how their father took her to the jungle and tried to get rid of her, and how the younger sister went searching and found Yartenla still alive but had already

become bald. He blessed Yartenla's head with beautiful hair and invoked a curse on the men folk to go bald. He also invoked upon women folk to have beautiful hair and never to go hairless. After pronouncing such blessings, the old man left the village and went away.

Within a short time after the old man had gone, it was already harvest time. That year the harvest was not good in the entire village. But in the tiny field of the two sisters the harvest was a plenty. Their harvest seemed like it was never going to end. During the day, they would harvest and collect the crop to their full. Yet, the next morning the field would be full and for harvest, as it were yesterday. Finally, when they had harvested enough, the sisters followed the instructions of the old man. They cut off a short lash of the head basket and a thread end of the shawl and burnt them at the barn which finally put an end to their harvest. Hence, to this day, the farmers are very careful not to burn lash or straps in the fields for fear of poor or stunted harvest. They instead collect such wastes from their fields and dispose them off in the jungle or in the streams.

The villagers were amazed by the rich harvest of the sisters and wanted to know how it was possible. The sisters told the villagers about the pitiable aged traveller who took shelter at their place for a night. The sisters narrated the whole incident that took place that very night. They told them about the miracles the old man performed and how he had blessed them before he left the village in the morning. The villagers later realized that the old man who visited their village was not a beggar as he appeared to be and indeed he was *Lijaba*. Each of them regretted not having invited the old man to let him stay and rest for the night.

The villagers then constructed a proper house for the sisters in the heart of the village and let them stay there. Henceforth, the villagers treated them well and maintained a good relationship with the sisters and also borrowed rice from them to feed their families. The next year the whole village along with the two sisters waited for the old man to visit their village again. But he never visited their village. They believed that the old man was *Lijaba* and after carefully studying the moon and stars and the seasonal cycle, the villagers set aside a day leaving their work to spend the day in prayer invoking blessings from *Lijaba*. They called this special day as *amungnü*. After *amungnü* the

harvest day comes. That year the whole village had a bounty harvest. So, from that year onwards, just before the onset of harvest, the villagers started to observe the day in reverence to the old man, seeking blessings from him by strictly performing the rituals. Even to this day such day of observance is called *Tsiingremmung* or *Lijabamung*.

7.6. The Tale of Nukpoliba (Trickster tale)

In the olden days, the forefathers of the Ao's went to the plains of Assam to do trade salt, dry fish and cattle. But unlike these days, they did not have money to buy these necessities. So, they took with them beetlenut leaves, cotton and other vegetables from the field. The items which they couldn't grow in the fields were traded with the items they took for barter. While such trade and barter were going on, among those who traded cattle, there happened to be certain magician who tricked the simple villagers of their trade. Whenever the villagers traded the cattle with him and return to the village the cattle would turn into another animal and ran away into the jungle before reaching the village. The poor villagers would return home empty handed. However, the villagers were so simple minded that they would never complain about it to the traders.

This continued for a long time with many from different villages and word began to spread to all the villages in the Ao region. There lived a man named Nukpoliba with certain magical powers who also heard about the trickster. On hearing the happenings, he decided to go and see by himself what this was really about. So, Nukpoliba filled his basket with leaves and turned these leaves into cotton with his magical power. He went to the cattle trader and traded his cotton with the cattle. On his way back to the village, Nukpoliba turned the cotton to green leaves with his magical power. At that time the cattle trader also turned the cattle to deer and the deer began to run away into the jungle. Nukpoliba turned himself into a dog and began chasing the deer. Suddenly the deer again turned into a paddy stalk. So, Nukpoliba also changed himself into a Pigeon and began eating the paddy. As Nukpoliba, in the form of the Pigeon, was eating the paddy it turned into an Eagle and killed the Pigeon. With the death of the Pigeon, Nukpoliba also died. Thus, Nukpoliba gave his life that day. However, the sacrifice of Nukpoliba's life was not in vain because from that day onwards the traders from the plains stopped cheating

the villagers in any kind of trade. Henceforth, trade and business between the villagers and the traders of the plains carried on with honesty.

The Ao's, in general, have a rich storage of folklore that can be preserved and passed on for generations if they are collected in written form before the passing of the keepers of the history, tradition, culture and folklore. Without thorough knowledge of the cultural roots of a group of people, history is uprooted and incomplete. The very act of oral tradition, which is the act of telling, is equivalent to bearing witness of the stories that are untold or unheard. Thus, the stories that are encapsulated in the folk narratives, the history of the people echoed through the myths and legends and the cultural practices in the material culture and other rituals are very precious to the tribe. Folklore in all its manifestations is the answers to many of the incomprehensible questions that the present generation has. Answers to occurrences that cannot be scientifically proven or logically understood are often found within the folds of the stories of the folklore.

Chapter 5

The thread of Magical realism and its manifestations in the Ao folklore.

Ambiguity of the genre

Magical realism was first coined by Franz Roh as *Magischer Realismus*¹ in the 1920s in Germany. Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian short story writer, was the first to introduce the term into literary theory. Alejo Carpentier rephrased it as *lo real maravilloso*² (the marvelous real) in Latin America in the 1940s. Gabriel Garcia Marquez introduced the theory of Magical realism in the Latin American literature in the 1950s and found its prominence in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1982). From Roh's *Magischer realismus* to Alejo's *lo real maravilloso* to *realism mágico*, the genre has travelled from the field of painting to the real literature. *Magical realism* has also found its way with the critics and seen in the backdrop of different theories in the context of the different locale. This is where the definitional issues of the genre arise. The genre has attracted a wide audience of writers, scholars and critics beyond the borders of Latin America and reached the remotest corner of the globe. This widespread momentum of the movement has led to accepting the genre as something in its own right leading to ambiguity of the term. There is no clear definition of magical though there have been attempts by many literary scholars to define the genre. The ambiguity of the genre has given ample scope for writers, researchers and scholars to dally with the application of it in their own context. As seen in the history of the term and genre, magical realism has gone through many variations of translations.

Definitions:

Mathew Strecher has defined magic realism as:

“What happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by “something too strange to believe”. (Stretch, 267)

Definition of magic realism is given by Erwin Dale Carter in the following words;

“First it is the combination of reality and fantasy and second, it is the transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal, thirdly an art of surprises, one which creates a distorted concept of time and space, fourth a literature directed to an

intellectual minority; characterized by a cold cerebral aloofness it does not cater to popular tastes, but rather to that of those sophisticated individuals instructed in aesthetic subtleties.” (Carter: 3, 4)

Quoting Alejo Carpentier,

“The marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace”. (Carpentier 1995:102-104)

The Oxford Companion has defined Magic Realism as:

“Magic Realist novels and stories have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic mingles with the unaccepted and the inexplicable, and in which elements of dream, fairy-story, or mythology combined with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrences.”

Angel Flores’ concept about the genre is:

“In magical realism we find the transformation of the common and the everyday in to the awesome and the unreal. It is predominantly an art of surprises. Time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality. Once the reader accepts the fait accompli, the rest follows with logical precision.” (Flores: 113)

M.H.Abrams has rightly observed as;

“The term Magic Realism, originally applied in the 1920s to a school of painters, is also used to describe the prose fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as the works of writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Columbia, Isabel Allende in Chile, Gunter Grass in Germany, Italo Calvino in Italy and John Fowles in England. These writers interweave, in an ever shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and descriptive details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.” (Abrams: 195-96)

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*,

“Magical Realism is chiefly a literary style or genre originated in Latin America that combines fantastic or dreamlike elements with reality.” (American Heritage Dictionary)

According to Isabel Allende,

“Magic realism is a literary device or a way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism.... It is the capacity to see and to write about all the dimensions of reality” (Allende: 54)

Jean Weisgerber³ distinguishes two types of magical realism – the ‘scholarly’ type which “loses itself in art and conjecture to illuminate or construct a speculative universe.” (Weisgeber, 1982: 27-53) and the second is a mythic or the folkloric type, the ontological type which is concerned with questions of being where the land and the reality are marvelous.

For the purpose of this study the second type of magical realism is of utmost importance with its emphasis on the community and its lore. History, myth and community and the concept of cultural identity is inevitably linked because the narratives emphasize cultural specificity and difference and concerned with the meaning of cultural identity and complexity of its construction. By affiliating folklore with magical realism a truly meaningful identity can be achieved through resuscitating myth and ritual, which re-establishes the bonds between the community’s central beliefs and the identity.

While it is true that magical realism has only been defined as a genre in recent years it is noteworthy to note that its roots are in the literatures, both written and oral (folklore) of cultures that are not affected by modernity which is the world of the indigenous people. To recognize and discuss the global presence of magical realism can serve not to homogenize its different manifestations and the cultural differences they often represent but to more explicate its role in re-imagining history or re-envisioning the past by bringing it forward magically.

Magical realism and the Ao folklore

Oral tradition and storytelling is a communal ritual which has been inherited from the elders. It has to do with recuperation of history and constitution of the tribe’s identity.

These stories are accumulated over a long period of time collected in the form of reality dreams, imaginings, rituals, myths and legends that constitutes the ‘subconscious of the people’ (Walker,62). The oral tradition of the Ao’s is impregnated with folktales, customs, tradition and religion typifying a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (A G, 1971) – the suspension between the two worlds – fantasy and reality.

In regards to Ao folklore, magical realism is more pertinent as a means of interpretation than categorization. Magical realism in the folklore of the Ao’s goes far beyond the romantic evocation of people, place or things. It is about drawing the group’s character and identity through the repetition of their history describing the rites, manners, cultural practices, and customs which serves as the preserver of the tribe’s traditions. It serves to revise preconceived ideas about race, class and gender which were generated by ideological, economic and political transitions of the tribe.

Magical realism as a narrative technique incorporates exaggeration, myth, history, time, ambiguous reality and supernaturalism subjectively. The rugged oral materials extracted from the ancient story tellers tells of the reality and the happenings of a fixed limit of the past which is handed down to the present and will be passed on to the future. The primitive Ao’s were quite comfortable with the notion of close proximity between the magical and non-magical. There existed no distinction or dichotomy between the two worlds. Anything unexplainable was thought to be a deity to be worshipped and since the mysterious and the unexplainable, the magic abounded their world it was accepted into the fold of their everyday life. In almost all the Ao folktales, its belief system, the gods and the deities, proverbial sayings magic is embedded in the tale in what seems like a realistic representation and the descriptions of life are quite plausible and mimetic of the real world which a primary characteristics of Magical realism – the use of traditional motifs of the magical and added to realism. Most of the Ao folklore which is complex and surreal often involved elements of mystery and surreal narratives that were at times beyond human perception. The presence of magic parts, appreciation of the story or traditional knowledge, both fantastical and the outlandish, invite a special attention to understand the history, culture and tradition of a particular ethnic group. The folklore allow the listeners or readers to indulge in a nostalgic longing and an imaginary return to

a world that is past or passing away, the kind of stories that transforms and marvels the ordinary into extraordinary of the afterlife journeys and the predicaments of everyday life.

The ancient myths, legends and cultural practices found its expression in magical realism giving voice to the indigenous people that use the non realistic events and images which is seen as a kind of narrative primitivism. Myths, legends and folktales are often habitually associated with the combination of the mimetic and verifiable aspects of realism with magical effects. Oral narratives give the picture of a primitive culture endowed with ordinary people and places but stories with mythic grandeur which appears to be larger than life quality and significance. The patterns of rituals and quest, of superstitions and taboos and of conquests and celebration mirror the identity and culture of a group of people.

There was no distinction between the real and the supernatural, as ordinary life was profoundly infused with myths, legends and superstitions which shaped the native perception of the world. In the tradition of oral storytelling grounded in folk tradition the communal magic of storytelling figures prominently. The magical intervention into ordinary reality followed distinct patterns based on the location of the tales. A supernatural or inexplicable event gives rise to a series of realistic consequences; but the realistic detail of life of the tribe can be satisfactorily explained only by reference to fantastic and surreal stories.

Common features associated with Magic Realism found in the folklore of the Ao's.

1. Perspective of 'the other entity'

The boundary between self and other is interrogated by the ability of the self to be transformed into something that was formerly alien to itself and this challenges the validity of even that fundamental duality of the self and the other. The supernatural folklore and the worship of the gods and deities in any form have the metaphoric power to signify the presence of 'the other' in the oral narratives of the Ao's.

There are many tales in resonance with the god *Lijaba*. He is always pictured as an old man shabbily dressed and comes to visit the people in the most pathetic state. In the story of the two orphan sisters, he went from door to door asking for shelter and food but no one opened their door for him only the two poor sisters did. He blessed them generously before leaving their house. As a god *Lijaba* is thought of as the other but in the lore of the Ao's he is often shown to be with the living.

One pertinent aspect of the perspective of 'the other entity' in the Ao folklore is strongly seen in the ceremonial worship of the gods and several deities. Though *Lijaba* is found to be in the midst of animals and people in his physical form in several folktales yet neither *Lijaba* nor any of the other gods or deities appears in their physical form. Men only invoke their spirits during the worship rituals with strict observance of all the procedure of the ritual lest their wrath cause misfortunes among the villagers. They are always referred to as the other. The deities worshipped in the form of stones, trees or any other objects of nature were believed to have a spirit which was powerful beyond the subjugation of men. There were also those called *Arasentzür* who acted on behalf of some individual to communicate to certain spirits. These were ordinary common people possessing some extraordinary powers. They go into a trance and chant in strange languages not understandable to common man. Though the act of conjuring doesn't take place, certainly the presence of 'the other entity' is definitely felt. Possession of such powers was also acknowledged by the priests.

Another aspect of 'the other entity' can be found in the tales revolving around lycanthropy. In the Ao folklore lycanthropy is essentially between a human and a tiger. There are many superstitions surrounding the tiger spirit as the temporary form of a living human being. This phenomenon is neither 'totemic' nor does it correspond to the transformational tales. Simply put, without adhering to any theory or logic, it is the strong affinity between the human, whose soul reside in the tiger. The human with such spirits supposedly acquires certain extraordinary powers like the ability to heal people and mending broken bones like a therapist. Whatever happens to the tiger is indirectly felt by the human from his state. Instances narrated by people who have tiger soul say that when the tiger gets wounded the human also feels the pang of pain in the same exact spot as on

the animal. The aura of ‘the other entity’ is felt more in this case because of the direct man-spirit affinity.

2. Specific historical settings or events

History is important for any group or groups of people at any given time. They are the keepers and the yardsticks with which the roots and identity of a certain group of people are authenticated. As such the oral narratives serve the purpose of this authenticity with the record of historical events at a particular period of time for a particular group of people which has been passed down from generation to generation either by word of mouth or documentation. Telling can be manipulative depending on the interest and the perspective of the teller or narrator. Nevertheless records of these events are found mostly in the ethnographical and anthropological documentation presenting eminent historical places and events.

Folklore holds an epitome of myriad interpretations that can open itself to any school of study and research. The Ao folklore abounds in the complex, almost tangible, representation of the real and the magical. The resources of magical realism are a combination of history and magical occurrences, a remembrance of the past that is not primarily nostalgic. . The folklore of the Ao’s subtly tells historical facts by blending the reality lives of the people with the magical elements found within traditional storytelling and in the course of the storytelling gently shift the views of those who have not had the experiences that the narrator endures/has endured.

2.1. The myth of origin of the Ao’s

In the origin myth of the Ao’s, the narrative speaks of how the ancestors of the tribe ‘sprang up’ by a mystical power of creation from the six stones – three males and three females. For a modern listener or reader of the myth, it may sound non-sensible but this is the heart of the history of the tribe’s origin and there is none other from which they can claim they originated. That man should originate from stones divided neatly into three males and three females make it almost unbelievable. This is where magical realism comes into play as a performative genre rather than a static term. It is etched in the

subconscious of the people of the tribe that their ancestors lived at a time when the dichotomy between what is real and what is magical did not exist. The Ao myth of origin finds a space for the invisible force which finds a place in the absurd and the unexplainable. The myth further says that from the union of these pairs of stones were born the three major clans of the Ao's. While interpreting the origin myth, it is to be taken into consideration that it may not reveal facts but only believed historical events which are symbolic and interpretive. The emphasis is on the significance of the past and meaning in the stories. The myth of origin of the Ao's containing such motifs and elements that to accept it as the story of a factual event may contradict with the normal human understanding and nature. According to Gazin-Schwartz without diluting the sanctity of the myth, it is more sensible to look for interpretive meanings embedded in the myth and what they reveal about the past events and the cultural ethos of the people. Truly there must have been the presence and work of some special power in the act of springing up from these six stones. These six stones also are believed to have been endowed with some magical element. Most myths of origin are essentially strewn with magical and fantastical elements and are usually associated with inanimate objects which are in non human forms. However incomprehensible it may sound about the origin of the tribe from the stones, the origin myth of the Ao's hold centrality in its folklore. The folktales of the tribe assert the claim that they not only had divine origin but are also the original settlers of their present settlement.

2.2. The birth of ten sons at Soyim

The Ao's left *Chungliyimti*, crossed the *Dikhu* river and settled at *Aonglenden*. On the night of their arrival at *Aonglenden* ten sons were born which is why *Aonglenden* came to be called *Soyim* (birth place). The birth of ten sons on the same night is held sacred by the tribe and operates as a significant 'strange enough' event at the backdrop of that which is real. In the occurrence of such unbelievable events, the 'magical' may precede the 'real' and generate the fantastic. Such unexplainable happenings cannot be explained in reality because they are not verifiable with logic as Faris says in *Ordinary Enchantments*, it is irreducible and magic. In the presence of the element of magical realism in any folklore it becomes blurry to be exact about time, history and identity. As

such in the migration narrative of the Ao's there are two narratives about the migration and settlement between the *Chungli* phratry and *Mongsen* phratry each in its own right. Not one version of history can actually present the exact picture of what happened but nonetheless it is important because it is the only material of reference of the people of the tribe.

Myths and legends provide vital insights into local history and beliefs. The importance attached to the myth of origin is that it can provide a single identity among the tribes. Within the Ao tribe also there are different villages that holds different stories of migration and settlement which is still continuing with the formation of new villages every year. The stories of the migration of people from one place to the other in search of a better environment and their settlement in the chosen land posit strongly the identity of the group.

3. Cultural context

In the Ao folklore there are a huge number of folktales that relate to cultural practices and belief system held by the people since the time of their origin and dispersal to different parts thereby forming the land of the Ao's. The tradition of passing down these cultural practices of the Ao's from generation to generation by oral communication is the mode of thought or behavior that has been followed by the people continuously over a long period of time. For a group of people who did not have written law, rules and regulations to navigate the lifestyle or behavioral norms, the oral precepts considered to be true and followed. These practices and beliefs shape their life as a community and their relationship with one another in the community. Cultural practices and norms are closely related to and interwoven with religious beliefs in the Ao community as well. Magical realism calls for a bond with the traditions and faith of the community to which one belongs; the one that he or she has historically constructed and culturally connected.

3.1. The culture of ceremonial practices

The Ao's observed a number of ceremonial practices in the form of worship either by the whole village, the village priest or by individuals depending on the situation for which it is observed.

3.1.1. Ceremonial practice in relation to the different *Tsüngrems* (gods)

The three *Tsüngrems* namely *Lijaba*, *Longtitsüngba* and *Meyitsüngba* were commonly worshipped by all the Ao's of all the villages. Abomination of these *Tsüngrems* would often lead to unfortunate circumstances of the person. The act of ceremony carried out to these *Tsüngrems* is in the form of offering a fowl or pig, cooked rice and rice beer and laying them at the altar. Only the chief priest can perform the ceremony. After the offering is done, the priest calls upon the blessings of the gods on the people.

Lijaba is worshipped by the whole village. The two main festivals, *Moatsüimong* and *Tsüngremmung* of the Ao's are in honour of *Lijaba*. These two festivals are observed till today by the Ao's, old and young. *Longtitsüngba/Aningtsüngba* is also known as the lord of the sky or heavens and so resides in the heavens and fixes the destiny of each man. He is worshipped by individual through a mediator called *Arasentsür* who is equivalent to a shaman and not by the entire village. *Meyutsüngba* or the lord of the land of dead is the only god that the Ao's don't worship or make any sacrifice because he is impeccable.

The culture of appeasing and worshipping the gods have been followed by the Ao's for a long period of time and had become a cultural norm which was practiced in their day to day life. After the ceremony the priest and the villagers also observe *genna*. Going against the observation of *genna* might incur the wrath of the gods.

After every ceremonial worship of the gods and the deities the observation of *genna* by the whole village or the priest most of the time or sometimes the individuals are very relevant to the cultural context at that time. Any abhorrence or negligence of the

genna, according to the beliefs of the people, would lead to grave unknown consequences.

Other than the three major gods of the Ao's, there are other minor gods who are associated with the surrounding and environment that human inhabits. *Kimong Tsüngrem* is the god who is worshipped before building a new house. He is thought of as the proprietor of the land on which the house is to be built so appeasing him first is important. The Ao's worship a lot of pond or well god, mountain god and stone or rock god.

3.1.2. *Shitilong* god of Mongsenyimti village

According to the oral narrative, *Shitilong* was the greatest of all the deities that the villagers worshipped. In one of the narration, the narrator recalled that whenever the villagers had to go to war, they first worshipped the inanimate object by giving blood offering of a cock. When the god is appeased the villagers would win them war and return home. The history behind the discovery of the rock by Suwameren and the revelation that the root of the rock lie in the big sea in the dream of Suwameren, in itself is magical enough. The metaphor of the dream was interpreted by the villagers as a warning to the one who discovered it and tried to exterminate it by trying to dig it out that it was not possible because the end of the rock was too deep to be dug out. The villagers held the dream akin to a supernatural element, unseen but present. For the simple minded villagers there was not much to think about but to worship it as a deity and from that day onwards they started worshipping the rock. How the rock got the name *Shitilong* is more fascinating. The story says that once when the enemies of the village (name of the village unknown) came to attack the village, they first saw the rock and it looked like an elephant standing huge and tall. The magical event is so powerful that the enemies retreated without attacking the village. Thus the villagers believed that it was the rock which saved the villagers from their enemies. They attributed god like qualities to it and made it the greatest god among the deities they worshipped because they believed that the rock had extraordinary power to appear like an elephant to the enemies of the village. Any material or element that was out of the ordinary is no strangers to the world of fantasy. For the

ancestors of the Ao's such phenomenon was completely beyond their simple understanding and common sense. Another characteristic of this type of phenomenon is that it does not relate to everyday reality.

The tribal religion exhibits a deep respect for nature. Natural phenomena like the sunshine, lightning and rainfall are not only seen as a manifestation of god but nature itself is regarded as sacred. In the conception of the tribe, all natural objects (animate and inanimate) are sacred since they are all the creations by *Lijaba*. The ancestor's of the Ao's treated the groves as sacred and the caves and the stones were worshipped as deities by treating these as the habitat of gods.

The religion of the ancestors of the Ao's was multifaceted because they worshipped a number of deities and gods. Their religion was a combination of theism, animism, supernaturalism, superstition and lycanthropic.

3.2. Life after death beliefs

The AOs strongly believe in life after death. There are several versions of where the soul goes after the death of a person. One of the most popular beliefs is that the soul of a person after death goes to the land of the dead after crossing a river called *Longritzü* which is believed to be the boundary between the dead and the living. Since it is believed that *Meyutsüngba* is the god that presides over the land of the dead, the souls before entering the land of the dead has to face his judgment from *Meyutsüngba*. These beliefs permeated the psyche of the people and the very fantasia of a god judging over the soul gave a kind of mandate for the lives of the living ie to live right so that he will please the god of the land of dead.

After the death of a person, it is believed that, the soul takes the form of an eagle which hovers over the compound before flying away. The Ao's take it as sign of the completion of the soul's transition. There is a place called *Mongzü Ki* (Eagle's house) at Longkhum village.

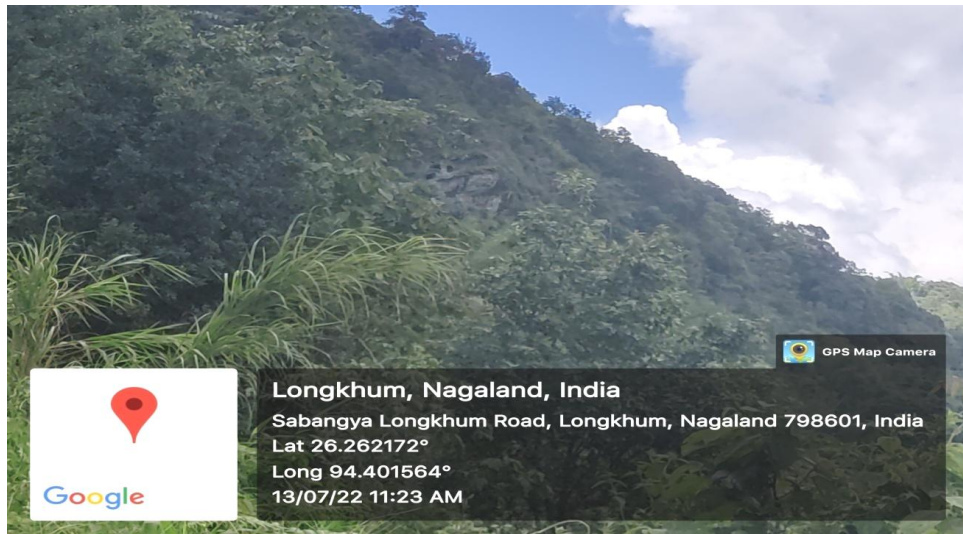


Image 9: *Mongzü Ki* (Eagle's house) at Longkhum village



Image 10 (a): Aerial view of *Mongzü Ki* (Eagle's house)



Image 10 (b): *Mongzü Ki* at a closer range

This place is believed to be the place where the spirits of the dead gather. The *Mongzü Ki* houses not only the souls of the dead people of Longkhum village but also the souls of the dead from other villages (Mr. Longkumba. Jamir, village elder of Longkhum village). This is a common belief among the Ao's to this day. The act of sprinkling water at the eagle hovering over the compound of the dead and the belief that it will drink the water and leave for the land of the dead in itself is a manifestation of that which is marvelous and magical. Another popular magical claim is that on any clear sunny days, white strips could be seen below *Dipu* Mountain which is believed to be the discarded garments of the dead.

The invisible forces found in the folklore find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magical realism. The interaction between the ordinary and the extraordinary realms or realistic and magical occurrences as such was, for the Ao's, a part and parcel of their normal lives.

There is a belief that magical realism as a cultural practice, with its emphasis on the community and its lore, is an effective strategy for the discursive construction of identity.

The notion that reality contains magical elements is inseparable from the cultural assumptions of the people and is reflected in their belief system in which the phenomena of the magical arises naturally from the reality portrayed. Magical realism in the historical myths and legends played a very important role in the cultural construct of the Ao's.

3.3. Proverbial sayings and the cultural importance.

The use of proverbs within the Ao tribe has been instrumental in disseminating the cultural importance of its usage in conversations. The proverbial expressions are devices of speech to name and characterize certain recurrent social situations. And also analyze things unto themselves apart from social situations. Proverbial expressions have the capacity to situate itself both within and interactional situation and outside of it. For example, the proverb,

“Like a goat that entered the log drum” does not have a referential situation because the log drums are restricted only to the villages now but it can be clearly identified with the scene and therefore is understood in that context.

An important factor of oral proverb usage involves an attempt of the speaker in assessing its appropriateness and applicability, where and with whom it is communicated.

Most of the proverbs are the closing line of a folktale or myth. For example, the proverb ‘Eaten or not eaten, it is the mouse’ refers to the story of the mouse that brought good quality paddy for the humans. But the human did not keep his promise to the mouse

so he told them that from that day onwards before men have their food he will eat first of everything they prepared. So whether it was the mouse or not human beings blame it on the mouse. The owl is another bird used in the proverbial sayings frequently. ‘Like the owl’s careless announcement’, is a reference to the foolish announce made by the Owl regarding the division of day and night. ‘Like the dog and the pig going to field’, is in reference to the story of the pig and the dog who went to the field to work. The dogs trickery made the pig stay outside the house of men while the dog inside the house.

The impersonal power of the proverbs is the most apparent in the mode of communication of the Ao’s. Specificity of the place and the situation is very important for citing the proverbs. For someone who is not oriented with the people their customs, traditions and culture, these proverbs may appear strange and mysterious. The metaphorical nature of the proverbs introduces the abstract thought content in a very natural and spontaneous manner. A person who is quick to anger is metaphorically referred to *Akong tsükli merem ama* meaning a prawn that turns red as soon as it burns. A very convincing liar is referred to as *Waro mesung a jembitet* meaning able to turn a crow white with talk. The ability of a person to turn the color of the crow from black to white with his talk brings out poignantly the convincing and alluring nature of his talk.

The use of proverbs in conversation simultaneously imbibes cultural values of appropriate role behavior, values, ethics, social relations, rules of etiquette of the community. *Azüpong nung nü tsuloktsü* which means throwing spear at the thatch tied together refers to the indifferent attitude of worthless person who does not accept either good or bad words or deeds. *An tebung dak tebu maket* means a cock does not have teeth refers to a person who appears to be very knowledgeable with grand outlook but does not have the credentials to compete with others.

Proverbs assume the role of the impersonal in the more mundane context of daily conversations. Proverbial sayings are structured in such a way that the everyday normal conversations are transformed to ornamental sentences that they become sayings and not mere words and sentences. The forefathers of the Ao’s were very careful with the use of vulgar and abusive words or sentences in their discourse. As such it was important that

the proverbial sayings needed to be formed to make anything vulgar, grave, and harsh or hate language into a subtle rebuff or rebuke.

Entsü nung teret chitet means finding/tasting bone in an egg which refers to finding fault in a faultless person. This proverbial saying is particularly use with reference to newly married couple as a discouragement to stay with their parents after marriage for too long because of the fear that the relation might turn sour between the in laws.

Sorak lang nung metsük means pinching a spider's anus which refers to one who drags on endless conversation for a long time even after the listener's have become bored. This is a very subtle way of indirectly telling the person that one is not interested in the conversation anymore. When the anus of the spider is pinched the web gets longer and longer it does not end.

They are words of wisdoms because such subtle usage facilitates reasoning and puts the other person to think before acting. It often prevents the outburst of anger and quarrel between individuals or villages.

In Ao society the content of proverbs conveyed through the association of the vivid imagery with the prescribed customs and traditions of the culture represent the invisible segment that protect or warns the living from wicket spirits or people. The proverbs therefore are sacred and carry tremendous power and authority for those who are able to use them skillfully.

4. The supernatural, the fantastical and the natural

The notion of supernatural is culturally specific to the Ao's since it is regarded as natural. The apparitions in the form of dreams, out-of-body experiences, sleep paralysis and contact with the non entity promote faith of the people in the extra ordinary forces. In the folklore of the Ao's, reality is presented as human experience with the comingling of elements such as dreams and imaginations. Most of the folklore creates a version of reality that distinguishes itself from what is normally supposed a real life. The fact that most of the life activities of the group take place in a separate and different social world

leads to the development of a distinct culture within the confines of the group. In the life of the pre-literate Ao's, there was no border between the natural and the supernatural, the animate and the inanimate, human and non-human spheres.

The representations of the animals in the animal tales are more than bewildering. For e.g., one of the most striking characteristics of the Ao folklore is the huge share occupied by animal tales in their oral narration. The way animals are perceived as almost human is fantastical and bizarre. The animals in those times were rather like people and men and animals could speak to each other.

Lijaba, one of the gods of the Ao's and looked upon as a supernatural entity is also seen to be actively involved in both the animal and the human world. *Lijaba* fully involves in *The distribution of the attire of the birds* and pacifies *The quarrel of animals and birds*. In spite of having seemingly the power of reasoning and speech they clearly are and remain animals in their physical form. The Ao's connotation of the appearance of the birds, the colors and their shapes is purely based on the story of how *Lijaba* distributed their attire. According to the narration of the tale, the crow had the most beautiful attire but after his fall into the pot of *Osak*, he was drenched in the blackest of the black color. The Owl was given a very dull attire because of his gloomy appearance. The Hornbill had the privilege of getting the attire first and so has a white shade with black stripe.

Birds occur most frequently in the animal tales. *The tale of the Pokpo and Jongpongno ozü* (a small fowl like bird) is the story of the foolish announcement given by the Pokpo (owl) of the division of day and night. The birds, thinking that the owl is the wisest of them all, asked it to make an announcement so that it will be as announced. The owl loudly announced that if there is day let it be day always and if there is night let it be night always. It was *Jongpongno's* announcement that finally divided day and night. There is another strain in this story i.e., the size of the *Jongpongno* bird. Initially the bird was of average size. But after the wise announcement given it made, the other birds began to pat on her saying 'You are the best' and that led to the shrinking of her size which is why it is believed that her size is that small. This tale is often used in the proverbial sayings with reference to the shrinking of the size of the *Jongpongno* bird that too much praise makes a lose his/her worth.

The story of the *The caterpillar that called Oba* is enchanting because the caterpillar impersonate a child and calls the husband of the woman who was taking care of it father. This particular insect has two big eyes like features on its head and when it moves its head, it appears to be staring directly at the person. Both in character and in impersonation, the tale portrays magical traits. Here the mimetic world and the real are negotiated.

The Dog and Pig tale is an example of the clever and naive nature of the two animals. Though it was the pig that worked the whole day in the field while the dog slept, the human rewarded the dog and punished the pig. The clever dog asked the pig to go home first and then he left his footprints all over the field. This is how the dog cleverly covered the footprints of the pig that when the human saw only the footprints of the dog he believed that the dog worked and the pig did not.

The animal and birds in these tales speak like men, act like men and even thinks like men. There is no line drawn between animals and men in such tales and to a certain extent these animals seems to be endowed with human faculties. The action appears to be trivial and insignificant and mostly in the form of repartee participating in a humorous situation.

It would be wise to take into consideration, while keeping in mind that the animals are not supernatural beings, their thought process, the speech and their actions are not less than the supernatural because that is not naturally explicit in the world of reality.

The tale *The quarrel of the birds and the animals* called for the intervention of the god of the humans *Lijaba* to settle the matter. And the verdict laid down by *Lijaba* is observed to be as it is till today between the animals and the birds. For example after the big fight between the hornbill and the snake in which the hornbill loses, it continues to be in perpetual fear that the snake will eat its eggs and so covers up the nest when the female goes in to hatch leaving only a small hole big enough for the male hornbill to feed the female.

The transformational tales of the Ao's is very rich in the shape shifting phenomena. *The lady that was covered in Nirep* is a tale in which a woman melts away when she is exposed too much outside.

There are also such stories that tell about healing experienced by men when coming in contact with certain objects of nature. The story *The leaf that heals* speaks about a young man who suffers from certain skin disease. He observes an injured frog applying a particular leaf and in a few days time getting healed of his wounds. So he also does the same and his skin disease is healed. Such supernatural abilities were manifestations of the exceptional reality of the days of lore. *How a boy turned into a monkey* is another transformation tale about a boy mistreated by his stepmother and neglected by his father and left alone in the field slowly turns into a monkey.

One of the most bewildering tales of transformation is the story of *How A Woman Became the Kaku (Cuckoo) Bird*. The story is about a young wife who was left at the top of a tall tree by her father-in-law in order to get rid of her because of her act of eating human flesh. Ultimately she turned into a cuckoo bird and the 'Kaku-Kaku' is in the imitation of calling 'Aku-Aku' meaning 'father-in-law father-in-law'. Though the authenticity of the tale is unknown yet it was believed that the women belonging to this clan inherited the jinx of 'devouring their husbands' meaning their husbands die young.

The supernatural element is seen at its peak in the story of *Yajangla's Story or A Supernatural Transformation*. The protagonist possessed certain magical power to conjure spirits and perform miracles. Not only that, she could also transform herself into a tigress by chanting a particular magic formula. Intrigued by her prowess of working in the field and completing the works, the husband coaxed her to tell him the secret. She gave into his pestering and revealed her secret. The husband wanted to see with his own eyes her transformation and prompted her to show her transformation to him. So all preparations were made and proper instructions to protect him after her transformation also were given to her husband. When the transformation took place, despite following all the instruction the supernatural powers of his transformed wife was too powerful and he was killed by her.

The story *Taken to the land of the Dead* is about a living person going to the land of the dead and interceding with his dead parents and returning to the land of the living again. The son had to cross the *Longritzü* in order to reach the land of the living. It is a common belief that the soul of the dead crosses this river to go to the land of the dead. The story reflects dream like quality when the younger brother wakes up in his brother's arms. It was a temporal experience because when he left with his parents it was night and when he woke up it was dawn. So the dreamlike experience happened during a night. But for him he had had the experience of living with his parents in the land of the dead for a long period of time during which he learned a lot of livelihood skills from them.

The girl who was loved by a Tree-spirit narrates about a girl falling in love with a tree spirit unknowingly. The tree spirit would visit the girl dormitory in the form of a young man and courted the girl but she would never see him during the day time in spite of all her efforts to see him. The girl's father found out the young man's real identity when he found the waist band tied by her daughter was found hanging on a tree twice. With the help of the villagers the father tried to cut the tree but one of the sharp splinters from the chip of the tree pierced the girl's eyes and she died. At the precise moment the tree also fell. It is believed that they were united in death.

The Orphans who became rich through Supernatural powers is a story about two orphan sisters who were visited and blessed by *Lijaba*, the creator of the earth. When *Lijaba* found how about the poverty of the orphans, he used his supernatural power to make a pot full of rice from the single grain he scratched out from his knee and a pot full of meat curry from the small piece of meat. He transformed their poor small cottage into a big house and blessed their small patch of field with never ending harvest until they thought they had enough till next planting season and tied the belt-end around the harvesting basket. And miraculously the rice stalk in the field also disappeared.

The supernatural is bestowed in a real everyday situation and the existence of such supernatural powers seems indispensable for the ancestors of the Ao's. But they were not fully dependant only on these unseen powers but on their *Tia* or *Tiar* (destiny) as well. The dynamics of the natural and the supernatural permeates through and through

these tales. Shape-shifting between humans and birds and animals, human and trees is a general characteristics of the tales of supernatural.¹

There is also the animated energy of sacrifice between the supernatural in the form of gods or deities and the priests or the individual. Most of the festivals and the religious practices of the Ao's involves ceremonial worship and sacrifices to the gods and the deities. Most of the sacrificial ceremonies are performed by the village priest while some can be performed individually. Though there has been no mention of the worshipper exhibiting trance like behavior, the sacrifice is made by calling upon the gods or the deities with the petition they have to make. The folklore of the Ao's does not show any form of retaliation or abuse with their gods or deities whether their petition is answered or not. Whatever befall on them, good or bad, were accepted as the will of the gods or the deities. Appeasing the gods or the deities seems to be one of the primary concerns of the people. As such for every occasion, festival, event or any other situation ceremonial worship was important. In these acts was the faith of the people of the outcome of the consequences like to win or not in a war, to have or not a good harvest, to be protected or not by the gods or deities, to have or not sickness or plague in the village. That faith in the supernatural was what dictated their code of life, behavioural pattern and the psychology of the people to certain extent apart from the customary laws of the village.

The supernatural power in which the Ao's had their faith was beyond the confines of realism, beyond the perception of logic and common sense. In a purely oral culture as such, the fusion of fact and fantasy and juxtaposing the real with the fantastic is as functional and important as a way of life. There is a co-mingling of the extra-ordinary with the ordinary in the folktales that immediately put the stories in the category of magic realism. Presence of fantastical elements which cannot be explained according to the knowledge of the world but magical things do happen which were accepted without questioning. Magical realism, with its enchanting, disturbing, but insistent quotients of magic within realistic discourse characterizes the primitive world of the Ao tribe.

5. The inexplicable in its many shapes and forms.

5.1. *Tangkum Marok* (cup of life)

Located at Longkhum village, the *Tangkum Marok* is a fresh water spring believed to have certain mystical healing power. *Tangkum* is the name of a person and *Marok* means cup. According to the lore *Tangkum* quenched his thirst from the spring and left his *Marok* there. In the days of the lore it is said that even the stone were soft. So till today the *Marok* of the man is still visible especially when the water dries up in winter referring to the two holes in the shape of cups.

5.2. The legendary love story of *Jina* and *Etiben*.

The legendary romantic story of *Jina* and *Etiben* and the villages they traversed during their courtship has so many marks left which is visible till today. Longkhum village was one of the most frequented villages of the two lovers. The relics of *Jina* and *Etiben* preserved at *Longlangba* (believed to be the oldest stone) in Longkhum village are a proof of the legendary story. One part of *longlangba* has the imprint on the rock in the shape of the butt which is supposed to be where they sat down and also stretching out at a few meters is the print of the heels. The rocks also have the footprint of *Etiben*. The weaving place of *Etiben* is also clearly visible with stretch marks on the rocks.

Image 11 (a) (b): Footprints of Etiben and Jina





Image 12 (a): Etiben's Weaving Place

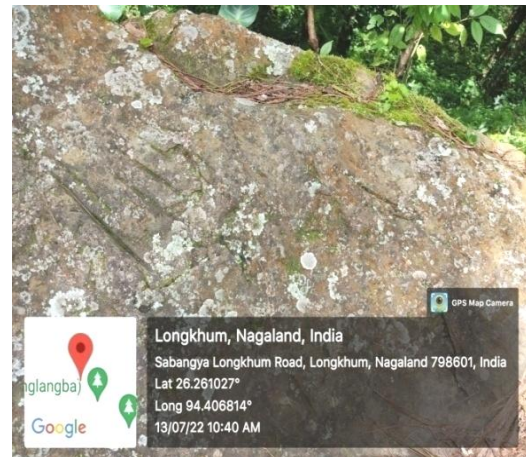


Image 12 (b): Etiben's weaving marks from a different camera angle.

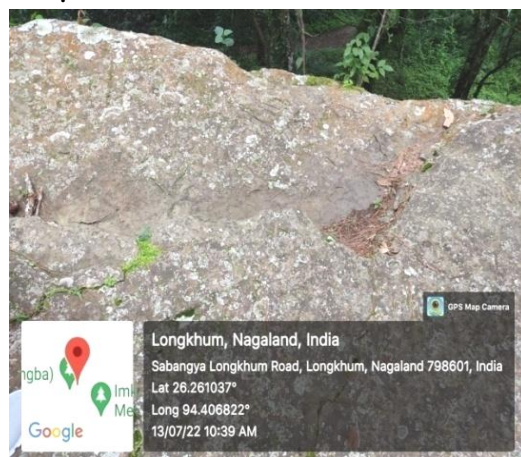


Image 13 (a): The mark where Etiben and Jina kept their heels

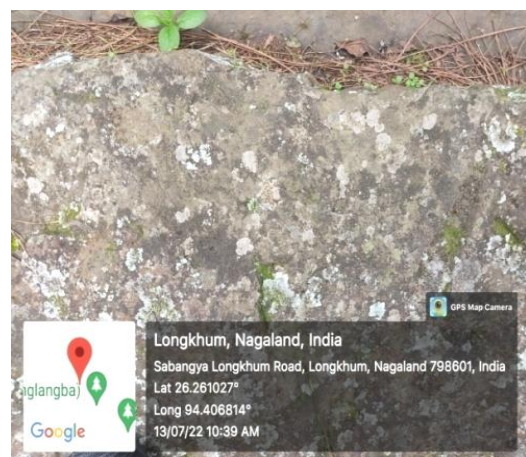


Image 13 (b): The heel marks at a closer range

There are several stones that have holes in them and those holes were pierced by spears during the forefather's time when the stones were soft.



Image 14: Holes pierced by spears



Image 15 (a): Holes made by spears on stone



Image 15 (b): Holes made by spears on different stone.

From a logical perspective, these may appear unconvincing and the validity of the discourse can be questioned. But the fact that the primitive period of the forefathers have gone through a lot of metamorphoses and at the same time that was a reality in which they lived. In the book *When the Stones were Soft* by Eleanor B. Heady narrates tales about the primitive days of the East Africans. The folklore globally has many significant characteristics that are verisimilitude.

At Mopungchuket, which is *Etiben's* village, the stone slab where she washed clothes and the vase like shaped hole in the slab where she arranged flowers are kept as relics at the museum. As mentioned earlier, they lived at a time when the stones were soft and so the formation of objects in the rocks itself are clearly visible. In the days of the old though the narrative may be magical the material culture suggests that they are about real people confirming the fact that the magical elements and the real go hand in hand. The interrelation of history and the magically real is the concern of the folk narratives.

5.3. The shape and form of *Aonglemlatsü*

Aonglemlatsü is assumed to be of a very short height almost like a dwarf. Her hair is longer than her body touching the ground. She walks with her feet facing backwards and laughs eerily in the deep dark forest which is rarely frequented by men. Encountering *Aonglemlatsü* meant misfortune that may result in sickness or even death of the person

who encountered her or someone related to him. For the Ao's she is an entity with supernatural powers and since meeting her means misfortune she is considered as a malevolent spirit.

Terms like strange, spirit, demon, and ghost are attached to this being. She fits neither into the human nor spirit category of being. Because of the ambiguousness of the state of being she is referred to as a 'supernatural entity'. The physical descriptions of *Aonglemlatsü* and the encounters with her are realistic descriptions but at the same time the nature and presence of the being is supernatural. This brings out the comingling of the magical with the real.

5.4. The shape of the Ao region

The myth of the creation of the earth is the story of how *Lijaba*, called the creator of the earth, created the land of the Ao's. The land of the Ao's is a terrain of hills with very little plains and rivers. Lijaba was at his work of creating the land of the Ao's in a leisurely manner. He first made a few plains and valley's surrounding it with the hills and the mountains. Suddenly he was disturbed by the alarming cry given by the cockroach of the approaching enemies. In a hurry he haphazardly arranged the hillocks and the rest of the land and left. This is why the Ao's believe that their landscape has acquired the sharp terrain.

To the primitive Ao's everything in the universe animate and inanimate has life and power. This attitude of the people made him conscious of the objects of nature and the ability to equate natural with the supernatural and ordinary with the extraordinary.

6. Sense of mystery – a quintessential element in the beliefs of the Ao's.

The oxford dictionary defines 'mystery' as something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain. There is an element of secrecy or obscurity that fascinates the mind. Mystery can never be unraveled. No rationality or knowledge can make one understand the mysteries that surround him. The pre-literate simple minded Ao's knew best that to elude the complexity of that which is mysterious was to accept

them as they were without trying to understand them. There was an experience of mystery mixed with fear that engendered religion. A knowledge of something that cannot be penetrated which only in their primitive forms are accessible to the minds. Despite the struggles of the unknown, the Ao's propelled towards the appeasement of these forces/gods with the hope good things to prevail. Certain things done by the gods or the deities in a certain way manifests by itself. Thus, faith becomes inexplicable and ultimate for all that happens in a person's life.

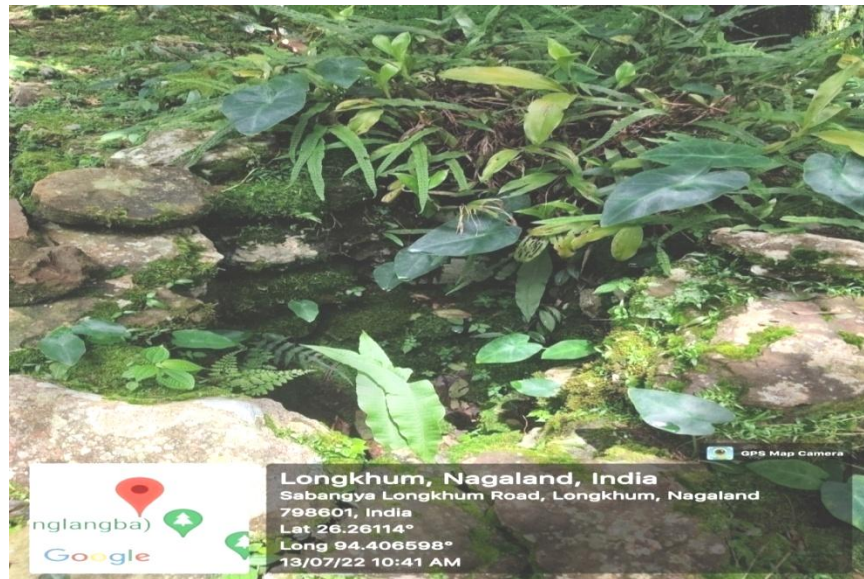


Image 16: *Mopung ki* at Longkhum village

Forefathers say that a dog was sent through the *Mopung Ki* tunnel and the dog emerged at Waromung village. The forefathers worshipped the god of Wind as it was believed that the wind that blew from this tunnel was very powerful. There is a narrative of how the villagers of Longkhum made their *Ariju* (boys dormitory) but was broken by the wind. This was repeated a couple of times until the villagers decided to construct a very strong one, so strong that they challenged the god of wind to come out and try to destroy the *Ariju*. That night the wind blew so hard that the strong *Ariju* was blown away without a trace. One of the palm leaves was blown away and perched at a hillock and the place where it perched came to be known as Mopungchuket meaning 'perched by the wind'.

Another mysterious object found at *Longlangba* are the stones divided as the male and the female with the children.



Image 17 (a): Male Stone



Image 17 (b): Female stone with children.

The Ao tribe cannot be called a superstitious tribe in entirety although there were definitely local superstitions that revolves around their lives and articulated within the community. On a very bright sunny day when the sun is surrounded by a big halo, it was believed that a man of eminence will die in the village e.g., a war hero, a village elder etc. Raining while the sun shines was superstitiously believed to be the marriage ceremony of two unlike things like the marriage of a fox and a lion. In any Ao folklore the division between the dead and the living is always marked by water. There is a superstitious belief that if the spirit of the dead keeps visiting the living a cup or bottle of water should be kept beside the bed. In this way the spirit of the dead cannot come across the water. In case of unnatural deaths like suicide or accidents, they had to be buried before the next sunrise in the outskirt of the village. The taboo about such unclean deaths was that it would bring misfortune to the village.

The Ao women folk engaged themselves in weaving *Mekhala*, *shawl* and waistband for the men. One of the tools for weaving is the weaving baton which is called *Allem*. There is a taboo about the *Allem* touching a man. It is believed that if a man happens to touch the *Allem* intentionally or accidentally it brings bad luck on him to the

extent of stopping his generation. Crow is a symbol of bad luck for the forefathers of the Ao's. The fore fathers were very careful while going to the field or jungle to hunt or fetch green leaves. If the crow happens to fly across their path it was a sign of bad omen. It was believed that misfortune fell upon the individual or group whose paths were crossed.

There is an air of mysteriousness about the beliefs, superstition and taboo's of the Ao's which are mainly in the nature of avoidances.

Roh's idea of "the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it" (Roh 1995:16) holds true for the Ao folklore. Myth, legends, tales, proverbial expressions, superstition and taboos are the representation of a culture that existed for real a very long time ago. They are representations of a reality that does not try to make magic attractive or even exotic but the everyday living of that culture.

Defining the relationship of the Ao's with nature and the magical: an empirical approach.

The use of traditional storytelling, with the appearance of strange phenomena, an impersonal invisible being or the ceremony to a deity for protection all foreshadows magical elements in the tale. The merging of the closeness or near-merging of the two realms of magic and reality is experienced and this is the foci where strange things begin to happen.

For the primeval Ao's, their relationship with the natural environment arose not from an obligation to endure but from a necessity of dependence for sustenance. Cultivation being the primary means of livelihood for almost all the people in the village, protecting the nature and preserving it for the next season was of utmost importance. The local legends and myths help in defining this complex relationship. Their beliefs in the spirits and demons help them maintain equilibrium with the environment and its objects with awe and respect. They worshipped all water bodies be it a pond, well, stream or a river because they believed that these are protected by certain spirits and treated with awe and respect. Water is a life line not only for men but for all living things including the

flora and fauna of a region. One of the main reasons for the migration of people from one place to the other is water. At the time settlement if the group doesn't find a good water source, they would migrate again. Any kind of abhorrence done to these objects of nature worshipped by men incurred misfortune, sickness or even death.

The narrative of a firsthand experience given by Lt. Lipokyanger Jamir of Mongsenyimti village:

One day while he was on his way to their field to cut some bamboos, he stopped at the rest house to rest for some time. There was a big stone right in front of the hut. After resting for sometime before proceeding he sharpened his *dao* and left. On his way back, just before reaching the rest house, a strong wind began to blow. So he decided to rest again at the rest house. As he was resting and waiting for the wind to subside, the stone on which he sharpened his *dao* stood straight and erect. Scared by the strange appearance of the stone, he ran to the village leaving the bamboos behind at the rest house. To his surprise, the village was as dry as the desert with not even a drop of rain. When he reached home and narrated the incident, his father calmly told him that before Christianity came to the village, that particular stone was worshipped by the villagers. By sharpening his *dao* he insulted the stone and therefore the manifestation of the angered spirit in the form of the strange behavior of the stone. (Narrated on 16th October 2014)

The Ao's worshipped a number of stones e.g., Ngazalung, Kipolung, Ansulong, Jangjanglung, Lunglangba, Shitilong etc). The ancestors worshipped these stones because they believed that the spirits of the stones gives blessings, protection from enemies and storm and thunder and from diseases and sickness. Therefore they were revered as sacred.

Temsula Ao in *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* has also mentioned how Dr. J. H Hutton recounts seeing the six stones on 6th November 1923. He also said that only three stones were standing – two males and one female. Of the others the biggest one which was apparently a female as reported was destroyed by a Christian missionary who obviously suffered misfortunes for his act of sacrilege.

Panger Imchen also cites a number of examples where the stones have displayed mysterious powers in the olden days. In his book he writes about an incident at Khensa village under Mokokchung district. It so happened that the British Administrator then known as Mr. Adams was shown a stone which was worshipped and revered by the villagers. Showing his antagonism he stamped on the stone saying he doesn't believe it. When he reached his bungalow in the evening, he found his most prized milch cow dead suddenly under mysterious circumstances.

Such beliefs have helped protect many objects of nature. An important feature of such narratives is the interaction between this world and the other world and of how magical elements are revealed in a real setting. Presentation of the supernatural and the extraordinary set against the backdrop of the real world are generally referred to as marvelous in relevance with the conventions of fables, myths, and allegory. The folklore of the Ao's is an empirical one as it is with the other tribes as well. In the name of civilization much of the traces and relics are slowly being wiped out, there are still much that are preserved in many villages.

The *Jina-Etiben* legend has left many traces behind and in almost all the villages they frequented during their courtship still remains in villages like Longkhum, Mopungchuket and Mongchen. Relics of the stone fetish of the Ao villages can be still found, some in their primal form and some in decay. The ponds and wells worshipped by different village remains the water source of the villages though worshipping it has stopped. Due to natural calamities and village development landscape has undergone so many change and along with particular places associated with certain religious rituals have also disappeared. With the remnants of what is still left of the primeval period, it can be said that what is told or spoken of by the forefathers in the oral narration stands valid.

The realistic nature of the folklore with descriptions of the everyday routine life and the suggestion of the magical titillates the traditional unwritten story that has preserved and survived in the oral traditions of the people. The process of oral transmission is central to and has played a very detrimental role in the fabric of the folk community.

Chanady (1985) explored yet another dimension of magical realism. She argued that magical realism exhibits contrasting ideas as “autonomously coherent”, but separated through the cultural vision; “one based on an ‘enlightened’ and rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality”, (Chanady, 21-22).

For the Ao’s the question of believing or not believing in the folklore does not arise given the fact that most of the young people grew up listening to the narratives from one elder or the other. Conforming to the idea that what appears to be so magical now was a reality for the ancestors and the fact that there has to be a beginning, an origin for any group of people, the myths and legends in the folklore gives the insight and understanding of this history.

In fact Magic realism as a mode in the oral tradition of the Ao tribe is associated with the incorporation of the magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of the events. The local folklore, cultural beliefs, geography, history and customary laws in which the fusion of the fantastic and fact takes place creates an atmosphere of the intangible aspects of culture.

Chapter – 6

Conclusion

The mode of communication of orality is different from the written mode. While the written form of communication addresses the literary culture, the oral form of communication address the illiterate culture. It is the oral tradition that brings the community together and keeps the culture alive. The telling of folklore and its transmission from generation to generation allows the people to go back to their roots and re-envision the uniqueness of their culture. History is protected by recapturing the past in order to construct a firm identity and culture in the fast changing social system. For a culture which is devoid of any written material or document, oral tradition becomes the only medium of collecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the past. Folklore is the vernacular expression of a tribe's beliefs, customs, traditions and customary laws that identify a particular group of people. As such folklore's are not just subjective but objective in the expression of its insights and passions in the form of revisiting history.

Every region of the Ao's abounds in rich oral traditions that include folktales, myths and legends related to history, landforms and place-names which hold the essence of the rich unique culture and tradition. The oral tradition is a part of the pre literate Ao's and its folklore helped in preserving the multifaceted features pertaining to this tradition. Though research studies on the oral tradition is developing very recently but there is still dependence on the oral form of expression. There has been no exacting rationale behind the categorizing of the tales but effort has been made to interpret based on some of the definitions on the genre. The purpose of Ao folklore studies is to explore and understand the characteristic spirit of a culture, an era or community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations which has been created and maintained by a wide variety of folkloric expressions of belief and customs. The study is also to situate an individual way of approaching Magical Realism in the folklore of the Ao context and juxtaposing it with other approaches that have been made earlier through the diverse contributions of researchers. In this study the context is given more importance than the phenomenon. This comes strongly from the life style, livelihood, beliefs and identity as people sharply bear the imprint of it in the folklore. It is from the lens of the contextual that the

interpretations have been intrinsically made juxtaposing it with the genre. The thesis also has made an attempt to explain the importance of contextualizing a literary discourse in the region on the vast collection of documentation made by the anthropologists and the ethnographers.

People continue to tell the myth of origin and other supernatural tales. The stories and customs were elemental not only for the ancestors but for every generation who saw in the taboos, proverbial sayings and superstitions a paradoxical blend of the magical and the real, heroic and the common, universal and particular to a people, place or nation. The lore associated with the folk have artistic features in a formal, patterned way which revealed the values and ways of life.

Ao folklore is a huge reservoir of myths and legends, human tales, animal tales, trickster tales, tall tales, proverbial expressions, taboos and superstitions. The folklore of the tribe is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but narratives about the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. The supernatural or the magical of the Ao culture co-existed with the rational or the reality in which myths, superstition and taboos played a big role.

In the previous five chapters of the thesis, it has been endeavored to develop the concept based on the hypothesis made at the very beginning of this research work. The present concluding chapter attempts to assert the distinct position of Ao folklore with the use of magic realism in selected lore's.

The chapter which on "Introduction" gives an introduction to the Ao tribe on which the study is to be conducted. It discusses the oral traditions and the folklore in a nutshell. The chapter also examines the meaning, history, definitions and various characteristics of magic realism. This chapter also gives a bird's eye view about magic realism and its incorporation in the Ao folklore which is the primary context.

The second chapter deals with the Ao tribe exclusively with elaborate discussion on the geographical and historical background of Mokokchung district and the different villages under the six ranges which are inhabited by the tribe. Origin, migration and

settlement which is the root of any identical group of people is further discussed in the context of the Ao's. A layout of the different types of Ao folklore is studied.

The third chapter is exclusively for the discussion of myths and legends in comparison to the various definitions given by earlier scholars and theorists. Different myths and legends of the Ao's have been analyzed with a view to bring out the similarities in its subject and content.

In chapter four, folktales of different types have been narrated and analyzed in the context of its transmission, usage, applicability and its importance in the Ao society and the individual. Out of the hundreds of folktales documented by different scholars and writers – ethnographers and anthropologists, a few has been selected for the study of the thesis based on Magical Realism. Since all the folktales do not come under the umbrella of Magical Realism, the researcher had to be selective in the use of the folktales in the thesis for the purpose of interpretation. Difficulties arise when one story characterizes two or more of the different types of folklore. As such, segregation and categorization of the folklore becomes very tricky.

Chapter five is purely focused on the manifestations of Magical Realism in the Ao folklore. The ambiguity of the genre or mode of the term was analyzed before making an attempt to study the manifestations of the mode in the folklore. The second part of the chapter focused on more definitions and discussions of the genre that has been done globally by scholars. Myths, legends, folktales, superstitions, taboos which exhibited magical realism in characteristics were analyzed in context with the Ao folklore. Based on the definitions that were studied in chapter two and the second part of chapter five, conclusions on how many of the Ao folklore fits into the category of magical realism though it does not fulfill the entire aspects in totality. Nevertheless, the research has authenticated the relevance of the tenets of the genre by a thoroughly interpretation and analysis of the folklore without losing its essence. The different types of folklore analyzed with the emphasis on the factual and the fantastical give a different sense of understanding and deeper insight to the readers.

The following conclusions were drawn from the research of the thesis:

1. The role of oral tradition of the different villages of the Ao tribe.

Existence of folklore is only possible because there was and is oral transmission. Without oral realization by a speaker or a narrator, an unwritten story cannot to have continued or independently existed by itself. No Ao village is devoid of the oral tradition that narrates myths and legends of the village and various folktales pertaining to their own specific village but mostly the ones commonly told in all the villages. The oral tradition has played the role of transmitting sources and data, consciously or unconsciously, about the historical records of the people with a culture, tradition, religion and language. Oral narratives are vital to the memory of the past cultural life that calls for contextualizing, examining and interpreting the folklore. The major oral genres – the myth and legend; the proverb, the folktales are characterized by metaphorical process which resolves into modes of human behavior and cultural patterns. Oral tradition of the Ao play the role of observing the society that reveals the community's self or the identity that moves in a cultural movement through time. Elements and characteristics that cannot be expressed in any other way are embodied in the oral traditions. This means no written form can clearly articulate what the performer of oral tradition can. All categories of the Ao oral tradition are interwoven establishing vital links and nourishing each other. For example, a tale ends with a proverbial thought and the myth contains the germ of the origin. It is the oral tradition that sets up a demarcation of the dispersal and settlement of different villages. They play the repository role of preserving when and how they settled at the present settlement.

2. The status of various forms of folklore and culture.

Folklore and culture of a tribe or group of people and its survival is one of the most remarkable achievements of the social institutions in deciphering the unwritten history, customs and tradition of the folk from an insider's perspective. It is concerning that folk culture is constantly changing – something always disappearing and transforming. The cultural tradition has been handed down from one generation to the other and in each generation something has disappeared and something has been added or

transformed. The existing folklore that are in transmission and culture that are still practiced by the Ao's are the ones that have been preserved – some orally and some collected in written by scholars. Since the disappearance of the morungs which were the centres for dissemination of folk culture, folk knowledge and traditions, it has become difficult to tap the oral sources from the elders that are still living. While observing the statuses of the folklore and culture one can say that all is not lost. Much have been documented, written and preserved and many cultural practices are still continuing though with certain in the manner of observation. For example the mourning period in the urban area has been reduced. In the olden days and the villages (till now) mourning period for men is six days and for women is five days but due to various reasons in the urban areas it is observed for three days only both for men and women except for a few countable villages.

3. Intensity of acceptance and popularity of folklore within the area of study.

Folklore society must seek not only to construct a living picture of the folk life of the past but efforts should also be made to draw the interest the literate to acquire knowledge about the complexity of the folklore and culture. Tremendous progress in attempting to record the past and making a conscious effort to represent the conscious self is significantly found in the writings of many scholars. It has paved the way forward to understanding the occurrence of religious and social festivals, of the myths and legends about the feats of their ancestors during head-hunting which fits into the framework of the activities of the Ao's in the past. Though folklore of the tribe may not be significantly popular yet much emphasis and importance is given to the acceptance of it by the people of all generation. Scholars of history and archaeology, sociology, literature and many anthropologists and ethnographers are moving towards the accumulation and documentation of the folklore through written form. The field of research has also opened a big door for the condition collecting and studying the folklore which did not generally exist earlier. In the non-traditional platforms, plays based on the legends and folk stories are also performed and recorded. The digital world has widened the platform of bringing the cultural heritage onto a global platform. One repercussion of the oral tradition was the lack of serious collection leading to some irrevocable loss.

These favorable circumstances have obviously influenced the widespread acceptance by historians of the ethno historical approach and multi-disciplinary co-operation. Oral tradition is not only a major source for Ao history but in the absence of written material is the leading source for the recognition, acceptance and popularity of the people and its lore. In any ethnic society, the influence of the social and cultural background on the tradition and its transmission or handing down of tradition must be recognized and assessed.

4. Folklore as a narrative mode where magical as well as realistic elements are merged to foreground a hidden reality.

There is a sense of revived interest that has been observed and has stimulated concern not only to collect but also to develop sophisticated techniques for recording oral sources. The best suited discipline for the utilization of oral traditions may hold some contention among historians or ethno historians or social anthropology but a prerequisite for the study of oral testimony is an understanding of the methods in other disciplines as well such as linguistics, archaeology and folklore. The certainty of truth contained in the myths and legends and the stories that are told in the folk tales of the Ao's are purely based on whether the ancestors said it was so. Many anthropological and historical sites also have been revisited to align with the transmission of folklore. It is the conception of truth that the ancestors said it so which allows them to regard an event even when it is obvious that such an event could not have occurred in reality. The multi-layered relationship between fantasy and folk tradition has been explored in the thesis with an overview of the Ao folklore – myths, legends, folktales, proverbial expressions, superstitions and taboos. From the huge reservoir of folklore, the examination and analysis was done only on some selected folklore that encompassed characteristics of magical realism. The analysis was done based on the examination of the presentation of supernatural elements easily identified as seen in the myth and legends and the sources or folktales that are not straightforward but can be identified as seen in the superstitious beliefs, taboos and proverbial sayings.

Based on the definitions given by different writers and authors on magic realism the following conclusion on the study of the Ao folklore as a narrative mode was made:

- i. There is a combination of reality and fantasy.
 - ii. Transformation of the real into the awesome and unreal.
 - iii. The strange was a commonplace for the pre-literate Ao's.
 - iv. Ordinary events are sharply etched in realism and dream like elements.
 - v. In the folklore of the Ao's, the invisible forces – dream, legends, myths, history finds a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magical realism.
5. The dirge of oral tradition with the emergence of modernity and the influence of western culture.

Awareness of cultural loss has contributed to the attempt for retrieval and recovery by research scholars and writers in their works. While collecting folklore data's in the villages it was revealed that in the villages most of the elders who held the baton of folklore, myths and legends and other types of folklore was negligibly poor. The elders are no more alive and the few that are living have problem with memory. Those who have acquired from them the oral traditions seem not very serious with the stories and often fail as reliable sources. At this rate the silence of the oral narratives might have already embarked on the road to decline. In the context of tradition oriented communities the importance of oral tradition plays a vital role in the search for identity.

Modernity and advancement have, to a large extent, affected the tradition oriented communities and the Ao's in particular. Modernity and technology has, hand in hand, reached the doors of the remotest Ao villages. Nursery rhymes played in modern gadgets have replaced lullabies which used to be sung to a child, fables, trickster tales, riddles and other folk tales which were narrated by the fireside are now replaced by video-gaming, mobile gadgets and other technologies. The art of storytelling is almost completely wiped out from the Ao community. The oral tradition captures the ambience of the Ao way of traditional life which is becoming more and more irrelevant in the face of the fast changing modernity and westernization which is readily embraced by the younger generation and oral tradition is being discredited. It is looked upon as old-fashioned or

gray that is fast disappearing from its former stakeholders under the impact of modern progress and development. It is only when the Ao's re-embrace re-write this vision into the fabric of their lives in spite of the distractions of the fast changing world that we can say memories have served its purpose well. It is observed that the traditional beliefs and practices are on the verge of erosion due to the twin effect of modernity and change.

As Temsula Ao writes; "It is a cold night in December and in a remote village, an old story teller is sitting by the hearth-fire with a group of students who have come home for the winter holidays. They love visiting her to listen to her stories." (Ao, 31)

6. Migration from the rural and permanent settlement in the urban areas.

The inheritors of history have a tremendous responsibility to sift through the collective experience and make sense of the impact left by the struggle in their lives. Our racial wisdom has always extolled the virtue of human beings living in harmony with nature and with our neighbors.

The movement from a complacent existence in the rural habitats to a world of advancement in the urban settlements is another adverse result that has left many of the traditional communities disabled in many ways. Those called the inheritors of history now have a grave responsibility to sift through the collective experience of preserving the folklore. It has always been the wisdom of the forefathers in the pre-literate days to live in harmony with nature and with the neighbors and this virtue is laudable till today. Folklore is most meaningful and significant in its oral form with all its manifestations but with the dirge of oral transmission it has become a necessity to turn from oral to written repository.

7. Along with the documentation of the folklore, research on the various literary aspects and forms is a necessity for global recognition.

The materials of folklore have been, for most part of its collection, a documentation of anthropological reservoir of history or ethnographical collection of data. Among the nagas there are only a few renowned literary figures who have tapped

the rich history of their oral tradition and interwoven it in the contemporary writings. It is debatable that oral tradition can be wiped out entirely from a community because folk tradition is very deeply rooted and its traces are ever present for whom it was their way of life. Along the fringes of mere collection, the study of folklore should move towards literary approaches to become absorbed in the mainstream of culture. There are a myriad of knowledge contained in the folklore like, beliefs, customs, superstitions, proverbs, riddles, songs, myths, legends, tales, ritualistic ceremonies, magic, and all other manifestations and practices of the illiterate people. These can be used as rich raw materials for in the abyss of scholarly studies because these resources are not yet tapped or absorbed in the big literary realm. A study of the folklores should not stop at just giving information on what, when, where and how events happened but it can also explain the motifs and meaning of the culture through the folklore which perpetuates the patterns of culture and can contribute in a great measure the interpretation of human life.

Folklore is an important component of any ethnic tribe. It is an eye opener for the people of every new generation to the history, tradition, culture and identity of its people. Though complex it maybe for a modern man to fully grasp the magical but real lives of the predecessors yet it is the only means by which one ascertains one's roots and identity. Though the Ao folklore has adapted to the changing circumstances yet it has not compromised the basic truths contained in them.

Following the most common methods of folklore studies, the thesis has attempted to analyze the Ao oral tradition as they actually occur and comparing them with the phenomena in other ethnic groups to determine the similarities and differences and the functions it performs for the individual and the social groups in which it operates. The study concludes with the elements of magical realism found within the indigenous storytelling as narrative technique that subtly explores myths, history, ambiguous reality and supernaturalism subjectively. The supernatural is infused in the ordinary lives of the tribe. It is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence that is accepted and admitted by the community without question or reasoning and this proves that primitive means being in touch with magic.

Magic(al) realism as a genre in the research field of folklore of the Ao tribe and has not gain populace of the research scholars. The number of researchers increasing by the turn of the twentieth century among the scholars of the tribe, much discourses, discussion and research studies are focusing on the folklore of the tribe. Since the folklore of the Ao's followed the oral tradition of passing down the stories by word of mouth from one generation to the other, it is an area that is still unexplored and studied.

American anthropologist, ethnographers and missionaries like Hutton, Mills, W. E Clark and Verrier Elwin were the first to document the folk stories of the Nagas and the different tribes. Since then many anthropologist, ethnographers and historians have studied and done research on the Nagas. But the evolution of Nagas writing about the history of the Nagas emerged by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's only. As Chinua Achebe says about the authenticity of native writing about its story in presenting the history, culture and traditions of the native people from the insider's perspective so also it was necessary for the Nagas to write about their own story not as stereotyped or thought of by the other. This is not to discredit the works of the colonial writers who left a bulk of written documents on the history of the Nagas for generations to come.

It can be concluded that Magical Realism incorporated in the literary works of writers like Gunther Grass' *Tin Drum* in 1959, Gabriel Garcia Marques' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1970, Salman Rudhdies' *Midnight's Children* in 1981 differ from the interpretations done on folklore. The literary texts are fictional works in which the author uses tales from various genres such as fantasy, mythology, primitive religion, oral tradition, history and culture. Magical realist texts are not only subjective but objective in their framework of observing 'the imaginative reconstruction' in post colonial cultures as is reflected in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The magical realist texts attempt to re establish the bridge between the rural past and the urban reality which is reflected in the work of Toni Morrison *Beloved*. In literate cultures, the subject is written into the text explicitly and implicitly but in oral traditions it can only be delivered in forms conveyed by visible means such as the speaker's gestures, expression and mimicry.

Whereas examining Magical Realism in the folklore in the myth, legends and folktales of a particular culture is not represented but studied in autochthonous and primordial form unexploited by any trends of writing or language. The thesis study is on the emphasis that the contemporary Ao culture has its roots in its oral traditions and the present cannot be meaningful/legit/explained without the past. Village story tellers and elders take up the task of conveying and passing on to younger generations their history and cultural identity. In any oral community, knowledge is passed on orally and so the logic of oral culture is 'magical' while those of the literate are 'rational' and 'empirical'. The number of tales analyzed in the thesis is to understand the dynamics of storytelling for passing the folklore of the Ao's from generation to generation validating the people and places through the fusion of the magical and the real in the folklore. The play of the magical and realism are found at their best in the eyes of the old; lighted up with excitement as he narrates a magical incident of the past with gesture and facial expressions. Acceptance of magical realism as a proper form of expression of the Ao's entails that the real with its order and logic is presented in accompaniment of the mythical and the fantastic. The folklore of the Ao's encapsulating the magical, the irrational and supernatural fused with the mythical patterns of history and rituals work together to undermine that which is empirical and rational, is clearly indicated in the study that has been done in the thesis.

Since the introduction of Christianity into the Ao community, the conception of reality on the historical view has undergone some changes. That is why Temsula Ao writes 'writing orality' as 'self deconstruction' which means deconstructing the stereotype assumptions of the non-literate Ao culture and traditions. A careful study of the Ao way of life projects their strong adherence to traditions without written records, strict laws governing marriage between clans, consultation with the gods and interpretations of dreams. Though it is tenable that memories play the role of faithful repositories for the Ao's, it cannot be denied that they have been the custodians of safeguarding the oral traditions for a long period of time. As such, oral tradition had been and should be transcendental in giving central importance to culture, ideology, identity and history of any oral society.

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