Chapter - III

ORIGIN AND DISPERSAL OF NAGAS: A FOLKLORIC PERSPECTIVE

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

The Oxford reference Dictionary, defines identity as the fact of being who or what a person or thing is, or a close similarity or feeling of understanding. Again in the Oxford English Dictionary it is said that Identity is from Latin root (identitas, from idem, ‘the same’) and two basic meanings. The first is a concept of absolute sameness identical to and the second is a concept of distinctiveness or difference which presumes consistency or continuity over time. Identity is a term used to describe a person's conception and
expression of their individuality or group affiliations. Peter Robb considers that identities are always multiple, contingent and continuously constructed, so that traditions, also continually reinvented, are shared and reiterated practices and beliefs which reflects the collective memories of previous constructions. Thus multiple identities operate at personal (individual), family level (relations), gender (social roles), sex (men and women) class and clan, community (group of people), social (collective), global (worldwide), national, local etc. In the light of above discussion, the identity can broadly be categorized as personal and social.

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

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

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

Migration and origin of the Nagas

Till today it is an unsolved mystery how the people of Naga\(^7\) come and settled in the present habitat because of the unwritten records. Many writers have different opinion on the migration of the Naga tribe. But most of them are of the opinion that the Nagas might have come from different places of Southeast Asian countries. The Nagas are generally believed to be a people of Mongolian descent who migrated to the hilly regions. The Philologists have grouped Naga languages as belonging to the Tibeto-Burma family. All the different tribes of Naga come to their present place from different directions and in different waves, not all at a time. Their date of migration is not known due to lack of written records. Many anthropologists had studied the tribe of Nagas since ancient time. The British were the pioneers who encountered the Naga people and studied about them. The Nagas have not its own written history about their origin. But the folksong, folk-tale and legends of different tribes of Nagas are the sorts of Naga history that can trace the origin of the Nagas. The uniqueness of this tribe brought the curiosity to the British
ethnologists to study and wrote about them. Most of the pioneer ethnographers on Nagas were soldiers. The authorities of Nagas were non-professional Anthropologist. Some of the important notes and documents on the Nagas were also lost and damaged in 1879 insurrections (Battle of Khonoma). Damant who was the political agent at Kohima had Manipur Dictionary and a paper on the Angami Nagas, but this was destroyed in the Kohima stockade, during the fighting. The pioneer ethnologists tried their best to accumulate the information on Nagas but they have inadequate knowledge and information about Nagas, perhaps due to communication gap (interpreter) and no written history. There are different perspectives on the Nagas by outside and inside writers, but the works of pioneer authorities on the Nagas have been acknowledge and appreciated, regardless of their incomplete knowledge.

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

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

W.C Smith compares the Nagas with the Austro-Asiatic stock. He suspect that the use of the buffalo in the Naga Hills, both as a domestic animal and as an emblem in carving, is to be associated with this Austro-Asiatic stock, also the practice terracing the hillsides and perhaps in making permanent settlements in villages with shifting, but not migratory, cultivation. He tries to enumerate some thirteen characteristics of the Nagas, which are common with Indonesians (the people of Malaya and the island of Indonesia). Some of them are head hunting, common sleeping room for unmarried men, disposal of dead etc. This goes to prove that one time or other; the Nagas were closely connected with the tribes of South-East Asia, particularly with the Dyaks of Borneo, The Attacks of Sumatra, Iqords and others of Philippians and other tribes of Formosa.
M. Horam, holds that the present group of Nagas came from the Philippines. His argument is based on the fact that there is a village ‘Naga’ in Philippines. However the above belief is just an assumption because the Naga village (present Naga city) in Philippines was named by the Spanish troops only in 1573, when they discovered a flourishing Bikol village with abundance of *narra* trees in that place. The Naga being left undisturbed for such a long time, have retained the culture of the most ancient times till today. Their fondness of Cowries shells for beautifying the dress, and use of Conch shells as ornaments (precious ornaments for them) and the facts that the Nagas have many customs and way of life very similar to that of those living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia etc. indicates that their ancient abode was near the sea, if not in some islands.

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

**Origin myths with regard to Naga migration**

The oral tradition, especially the myths speak about the Naga migrations. The myths are the sacred narratives that tell how the world came into existence. The myths explain how the Supreme Being reveals his mysteries through creation, the place of human and animal kingdom in this universe and their relationship so on. Marca Eliade holds that myth is a true and sacred history which relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the beginnings. Myths tell how through deeds of Supreme Beings a reality came into existence, be it, the whole reality, the cosmos or only fragment of realities. Myth is always an account of creation. It relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only what had really happened and which manifested it completely.
Oral traditions reveal that the Nagas hailed from mainland of China who migrated to Myanmar along the rivers and corridors. They migrated to the Southern Seas of Myanmar along the rivers and lived near the Seas coast of Moulmein (Myanmar) for generations before they retreated to Irrawaddy and Chindwin valleys. They lived for generations in Irrawaddy valley but most probably they were driven out to the hills by more advanced races in warfare. The Nagas migrated from Irrawaddy valley through Indo-Myanmar corridor and then to Manipur and finally reached the Makhel (the place from which the Nagas dispersed), a historical site in Senapati, Manipur District. It is believed that many Nagas took to diversion from Makhel and migrated to the present Naga inhabited areas. The following myth shows how the village Makhel is associated with the origination and migration of the Maos, another Naga tribe.¹⁹

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

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

The myth suggests that Nagas lived in a mythical world wherein the terrestrial (human beings and animals) and celestial beings (sky, clouds, and spirits) lived together sharing the same environment for their sustenance and continuity. In due course the humans learnt to survive on other living beings by using bow and arrow (hunting). As the people began to acquire land for practising shifting cultivation, their fellow-beings began to part from them. Thus the animals went into the forests and spirits disappeared into air
leaving the lands to human beings. The myth reveals the unusual union between the woman (earth) and clouds (symbolises solidified waters, symbolising semen) that yielded three atypical uterine siblings – man, tiger and spirit – who shared same environment. Till date the Nagas believe that some people have tiger soul. If a person with such soul dies, it is believed that a tiger in forest dies. If the tiger gets injured, the person with tiger soul also gets injured. In the same way the people believe that spirit which harms or threatens by its miracles would stay inside the big trees, unused water ponds in the forests, deserted places etc. Similar myth is with some variations is found in other Naga tribal groups.

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

Photo, No. 3.1: Panel of photographs.
The Sacred tree in Makhel(1), the stones of (2), man(3), God and tiger(4).

One of the Naga myth tells about the migration of the Nagas from their origin place Mikhel, Manipur region (as revealed in the tiger, spirit and man myth, Narrative,1), to Khezakenoma in Chakhesang region and thence to different parts of north east region. The myth further tells how different Naga tribes the Angamis, the Semas, the Lothas and the Rengmas emerged. This origin myth is an Angami-Naga version. When the myth is analysed interesting information emerges regarding their origin at migration. The myth runs as follows:
The history of how the Naga tribes came precisely to occupy their present position had, of course, passed into the dim obscurity of vague tradition (Hutton, 1921). The tradition mentions that the Angami-Nagas sprung from two ancestors who emerged from the bowels of the earth, not in Angami country, but in some where in the South probably Manipur region.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to tradition, the people after a long period of life at Chungliyimti (presently in Tuensang district) felt to acquire more lands as their population grew enormously. So groups of people had set off to a western region. In order to reach their
destination, they have to cross Dikhu River. Then they constructed a cane bridge. Among the others, Aos were the first to reach the other side of the river. Soon after they landed on the bank, they cut off the bridge with the intention that nobody should come onto their side. Hence, those who crossed the Dikhu River were known as “Aor” or “Ao” meaning went or went away and those who were left behind came to be known as “Merir” meaning “left out” or “left behind”\textsuperscript{31}. Till today the Ao people call the other tribes like Sangtem, Chang, Phom and Konyak as Merir. This is how the word “Ao” and “Merir” originated. The Sema tribes of Nagaland refer to the Aos as Cholimi which means the people of Chungliyimti or gone ahead; while Lothas referred as Chuwomi which means “who proceeded”; Angamis are called Tsungumi which means “left behind”; this shows that the Aos went ahead from the rest of the tribes. But Panger Imchen contradicts the above presumption with regard to the derivation of Ao and advocates that the Aos called themselves as Ahors, with a stress given to Ho, which in several dialects means Mountain or mountain dwellers.\textsuperscript{32} According to B.B. Ghosh, every term or name originates with a meaning either through an accident or through a story linked to it.\textsuperscript{33} The Aos address the Sema Naga as Moyar which literally means, ‘not hungry. Ao’s tell the following account with regard to the naming of the Moyars as Sema Nagas\textsuperscript{34}.

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

**Ao-Nagas’ Worldview on their origin**

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

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

Narrative 3.3: Lijaba, the creator of Aos’ terrains

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

Thus the myth establishes geographical contrast between the plains of Assam and the Nagaland, the former has plains and the latter is unevenly spread by hills, forests, deep valleys etc. It further suggests the threat of the outsiders probably be the Assamese to the Ao-Nagas. Here it is needed to give historical reasons for conflict between the Assamese and the Aos. By the time Ahoms reached the South Eastern Burmese region under King Sukhapa in A.D. 1228, the Nagas were already settled there. The Nagas’ contact with the Ahoms began as early as the 13th century A.D. There were frequent
disputes between the Nagas and the Ahoms. The Nagas always apprehended that their territories may get occupied by these new groups. Hence they used to launch raids upon the Ahoms to plunder their possessions. There were frequent ferocious wars between both the parties. The Ahoms crossed Ao territory during the course of their invasion over Kachari\textsuperscript{37} capital, in Dimapur. On another occasions, during 1765-67, when the Ahom army tried to help Manipur Raja, they were unable to cross the forests of the Naga land. There were many possibilities for Ahoms to raise wars with the Nagas to carry on their political and commercial activities. Hence they opened special trade markets, Nagakhats in which Naga participation was accepted. It served the purpose of trade and protection from the raids of Naga tribes. The Ahoms even paid money to Nagas which was a kind of protection money to guarantee that no raids would be carried out against those who made payment. The initial contacts were marred by strong feelings of hostility on both sides. For quite some time the hostilities continued, but these battles never resulted in the subjugation of either one by the other. Geographical proximity and economic exigencies has made them inevitably dependent on each other.

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

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

In the same way as the cockroaches cure the ailments of the humans, it even saves the entire human kind of the Nagas from the attack and destruction by the enemies. The cockroach hastened Lijaba to complete his work as the enemies are approaching. He
hazardously finishes and goes to fight with the enemies. The Ao-landscape remains
unapproachable to attacks of enemies and unreachable for alien people due to its
geographical inconveniences. Thus Lijaba and cockroach could save the people and
environment from atrocities of foreign invasions. Thus the Ao-Nagas mythified their
landscapes and environment by associating its creation to their supreme god Lijaba and
thus legitimized the possession of their territories from God. In otherwords, the narrative
gives mythical explanation to the existing structure of Ao-land and environment.

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

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

The popular belief of the Ao-Nagas with regard to their origin is that their
ancestors got emanated from six stones Longterok. Thus a sacred narrative was
developed on their origin in the name of the myth of Longterok. The traditional Aos tell
that the word Longterok is made of two words, Long for stone and terok for six. Thus
thee literal meaning of Longterok is ‘six stones’. The settlement around these six stones
was named after them as Longterok situated in Chungliyimti, Tuensang District. The
origin is mythified and the myth is articulated with geographical spaces and remains.
Thus the Aos constructed cultural memories in their collective consciousness. The myths
and memory stones that symbolise the originators both perpetuate the tradition of Ao-Naga origin the Naga society. The following photograph shows the stones at Chungliyimti, Tuensang District:

**Photo, No.3.3: Remains of Longterok**

![Photo of Longterok stones]

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male and Female</th>
<th>Clan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tongpok (M), Lungkupokla (F)</td>
<td>Pongener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longpok (M), Yongmenyala(F)</td>
<td>Longkumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longjakrep (M), Elangshi(F)</td>
<td>Jamir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Diagram No.3.1: Origination of Ao-clans

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

Narrative 3.4: The attack of Kubok village

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

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

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

There is no historical record to trace the route of Ao migration and moreover Ao traditional stories also do not go beyond Longterok. In present day, there are many writers and research scholars who are of the opinion that Ao Naga origin goes beyond Longterok (six stones). For many centuries it was believed that the Aos originated out of six stones in Chungliyimti, but with the coming of Christianity and education, historians and scholars concluded that humans cannot be emerged out from stones. In order to have a clear idea of the Ao origin, the Mongsen group formed a group to study and research especially on the Mongsens in 1985. They went and visited all the neighboring tribes of the Nagaland. Panger Imchen writes that the Mongsen Aos came to Nagaland through the lower parts of Irrawaddy valley where as the Chungli Aos came through the upper part of the Chinwin River at about 300B.C. and their first settlement at Chungliyimti was in between A.D. 100 to A.D. 125. W. C. Smith is of the opinion that Mongsen and Chungli had their separate identity before they lived together in Chungliyimti. Even J. P. Mills’ writes that the Mongsen came out first and later the Chunglis. Opinions and views on this are diverse.
The places now occupied by the Sema and the Lotha Nagas have names, which was said to have been once inhabited by the Aos. There is a story that tells of a group of Aos who moved southward towards the present Sema and Lotha area from Koridang in search of better land. They settled in those areas for sometimes but finding no suitable land they retreated towards the north and joined the mainstream of the Aos. The Semas called the Aos by the name Julimi because they tried to follow them but could not reach them. The Semas saw that some Aos once passed through their areas, and the places like Aochakilimi, Lumami and Lotisami are said to be areas where Aos once lived and went away. In a report, the Mongsen group gathered information from the grand old men of the visited tribes in regard to the origin. The Yimchunger tribe says that the Ao people once lived together with them but after sometime they moved out. They all came across Burma searching for a hilly area. From Khezakenoma, one group went to Eastern Sangtam, from where the name Chungliyimti was apparently coined. They do not agree with the Aos origin from a stone. According to the Sangtams, Aos and Sangtams lived together in Chungliyimti once upon a time. They are of the opinion that the Aos came from Burma, and some went through Japhu and stayed in Jakhama village and the other group without moving out continues to live in Chakhesang area. Later on the Aos went ahead leaving the Sangtams. When the Aos wanted to establish a village to settle down, the first thing they did was examine the land. First, they dug a hole in the ground and filled it up with the same earth. If the dugout earth could not completely fill the hole it was considered infertile and if it filled the hole it was considered fertile. In this way the Aos settled down and moved on with cultivation.52

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

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

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

Narrative 3.5: Child of sun and moon

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

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

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

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

Her son who was born from hornbill feather became the originator of the Ozukumer clan of the Aos.

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

From the above discussion it is evident biggest mystery is the origin of various tribes of the Nagas because different tribes have their own version of their origin”. However, there is a consensus that has been agreed upon by all scholars that the Nagas are Mongoloid by race. They have broad head and are light complexioned with black hair and yellowish eyes. They have different tribes and sub-tribes with various customs and
traditions broadly scattered between the great rivers of Brahmaputra in India and Salween River in Myanmar. It is believed that the earliest home of the Mongoloid people was on the upper reaches of Hwang-Ho River in China. They further moved down to South-East Asia then to these mountains. The Nagas claim their origin from village Makhel (as mentioned in the myth of Tiger, spirit and man, Narrative No.1) a historical site in Senapati, Manipur District and also from Khezakonoma (as mentioned in the Myth of flat stone and Three brothers, Narrative No.2) in Chakhesang region. The Angami Nagas connected their descent directly from the man mentioned in the tiger, spirit and man myth from where one of the sons diverted his way to Khezakonoma (origin of flat slab). From this place the remaining tribes like the Lotha, Sema, Rengma emerged. The parents who stayed back in Khezakonoma were the descendent Kezami village (Chekhesang Naga).

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

To conclude, the frequent inter-tribal conflict and migrations within the Nagas could not develop a sense of brotherhood and fraternity among the tribes. Instead each migrated group needed an identity for continuing their line of succession. Thus the seventeen Naga groups constructed separate myths of their origin to distinguish themselves from the others. Being the animist in their belief, the Nagas created their mythologies and traced their origins to animate and inanimate beings of terrestrial and celestial realms of the world. When the origins are in obscure, it is natural to the social groups to develop their genesis to mythical beings or directly to god. Thus the Naga creation myths fall under the categories of parthenogenesis and autogenesis. The birth of
the clans by parthenogenesis (origination due to the union between human beings and spirits) and autogenesis (self transformation into several forms before reaching a final shape or form) find expression in their narrative structures. The following chapter studies the structural feature of Ao-Naga folk narratives to see the linkages between the narrative structures and the identity formations.

**Endnotes**

7. Various scholars have given their opinion on the term ‘Naga’. According to Holcombe and Peal, the term “Naga” has its origin in the word “Nok” which means “folk” and as the Naga people use to live in groups, they come to be known as “Naga” later on (Ashikho-Daili-Mao, *Nagas: Problems and Politics*, New Delhi, Ashish Publishing house, 1992 : p. 10). Even Verier Elwin feels that the word Naga is mostly derived from the word Nok or “people”. Some groups of scholar’s feels that the term “Naga” must have originated from a Sanskrit word “Nagna” which means “naked”. Another two views are “Nagna” meaning “Naked” from a Hindustani word and “Nangta” again “Naked” from Bengali word. Whatever derivation might be, Hokhise Sema, a Naga writer in his book, Emergence of Nagaland has clearly written down two largely accepted viewpoints about the term “Naga” from Burmese and Assamese language the Burmese called the Naga “Na-Ka” which means people, folk with pierced ear-lobes. In Assamese Nagas are called “Noga” meanings “Naked”, writes that “Moreover, it was the Burmese that the British first came to know about the Nagas soon after their earliest wars with Burma during 1795-1826” (3). In the historical records of Assam, called Buranjis, the word Naga is used for the primitive man living in his natural surroundings in an uncorrupted form. The Nagas had contact with the people of plain in Assam during earlier times. Even Daily Namo in his book, Prisoners from Nagaland has expressed the same term “NA-KA” from the Burmese language for Nagas Hokeshi, Sema, *Emergence of Nagaland: socio-economic and political transformation and the future*, New Delhi, Vikas Pub., House, 1986.
8. [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2478/5/05_chapter%201.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2478/5/05_chapter%201.pdf), 30th Nov, 2011.
14. Narra (Pterocarpus indicus) is a briefly deciduous, majestic tree typically growing to 25–35 m (82–115 ft) in height. It is the narration tree of the Philippines, as well as the provincial tree of chonburi and phuket in Thailand.
For further readings refer:

21 Tsiukdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24.04.2008
24 Tsiukdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, interviewed on 24.04.2008
26 Purtongzuk Longchar, *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland*, Dimapur, Print home, 2002. In his book he narrated the myth as; there was a magic stone, flat and wide used for basking patty at the Khezakenoma. It goes on that the Longchar bask the grains on the flat stone doubled at the time of collecting in the afternoon. Due to increasing power of the stone the Longchar group of people became rich whereas their neighbours remained poor. So this difference led to a feud and affected where they were compelled to vacate the place.
29 Chubameren Longchar, 76 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.03.2005
31 Information provided by Imolemba Jamir (M), 57 years, Ungma village, interviewed on 19.12.2007
34 Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.
37 Non-Aryans
41 Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years, Longkhum village, on18.12.2007
42 Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years, Longkhum village, on18.12.2007
44 The smart, strong and depended warriors were selected by the village elders in the search party.
45 Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, on 18.12. 2007
46 Ibid
47 Bendangangshi, *supra*, he mentions that Ungma is the biggest village among the Aos and the biggest village in south-east Asia 1990: 2
48 J.P. Mills, op.cit., 1926, p. 9
49 B.B. Ghosh, supra. 1979, op.cit., p.30
51 Panger Imchen, op.cit., 1993, p.36
52 Information provided by Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, on 18.12. 2007
53 Information collected from Tsükdinungba Longkumer (M), 75 years old, Changtongya village, on 24 04. 2008.
54 Information provided by Sakunungla Longkumer (F), 55 years, Longkhum village, on 18th June, 08.