Chapter VI

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS AS CULTURAL METAPHOR

The well-knitted social organization of the Ao sustains on the performance of the ritual observances that require individual as well as the communal participation not only to socialize its members, but also to bind them with the community to which they belong. A ritual is a formalized, predetermined set of symbolic actions generally performed in a particular environment, be it sacred or secular. However, the line of demarcation between these two realms often fades in mundane lives. Any custom usually involves a physical action (giving the food), a shared belief (the premonitory dream), and a material object (the penny loaf). Customs that have acquired considerable magical and sacred potency are known as rituals\(^1\). Ritual is a social quest that every community expedites to express its norms, values and belief system in a symbolic way through several magico-religious and cultural performances. The rituals mark the belongingness of the members to their respective communities. The ritual ideology, behaviour; the material culture and the course of the ritual process always remain in conformity with the community and the people that celebrate them. Hence the rituals are metaphor of identity formations. Thus the rituals reinforce and confirm the collective as well as the personal identities, respectively of the community and its members when juxtaposed amidst different cultural groups in the society. The identities are not static but changes in spatio-temporal dimensions. Every change has to be celebrated as a ritual to (i) enlighten the ritual passenger about his /her positioning in the changed spaces, (ii) instruct the dos’ and don’ts in newly acquired statuses, and (iii) legitimate the newly acquired (changed identity) position in the society. Thus the rituals mark the shift of identities both in personal as well as in communal domains. The Ao-Naga rituals can be classified into two categories: the life cycle ceremonies that one undergoes in the course one’s own life and communal rites that one observes as a member of their society.

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

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

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

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

**Ritual theories**

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

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

Victor Turner (1920-1983) is one of the symbolic anthropologists. He examined how the people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols. Turner mainly studied rituals in non-western societies and looked at the roles of the symbols in specific social situations. He analyzed rituals and demonstrated roles of symbols in various social contexts. One of Turner’s famous studies is his analysis on the rituals of the *Ndembu*, an African tribe
in Zambia. The Ndembu used several kinds of trees for young women’s ritual and they attributed various symbolic meanings to these trees. Turner explored liminality as a period in which human beings found great strength in the joint support of others in the same situation. Turner coined the term liminoid to refer to experiences that have characteristics of liminal experiences but are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis. According to him, the liminal/ liminoid entities are neither here nor there; they are ‘betwixt and between’ the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial rite. To him, liminal entities, such as ‘neophytes’, in initiation may be represented as possessing nothing. Turner used ideas, like communitas and liminality to organize his thoughts and to help in understanding the ritual behaviour of the tribe he studied. He coined the word communitas to explain the feeling of shared unity among those who, for example, were initiated together. To him, both structure and communitas are very important to humanity. Turner believes that those individuals who are deprived of either structure or communitas will seek to fill their needs through rituals that provide them with either structure, in the case of those that are structurally inferior, or communitas, in the case of those that are structurally superior. Turner’s work incorporates structural ideas of society, communitas and liminality into an anthropological study of religious ritual. Turner believes that rituals serve to fill needs not filled within everyday life, by balancing structure and community.

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

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

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

**Life -Cycle Ceremonies**

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

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

**The ritual process**

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

(i) **Pre-birth:**

At the moment a woman knows that she is a pregnant (*mashisa*), she herself takes care of her physical and mental health. Even the family members treat her distinctly in the matters of food, bed, rest and other comforts. She is abstained from eating food items like tiger meat, slippery fish (*angopongo*), monkey, fox, tortoise, frogs etc. that is forbidden to her. If she finds a tasty beetle in the fields she may not bring it up for supper, tucked into her skirt at the waist, or her child will be born with a birthmark; she must bring it tied in a corner of her cloth so that it does not touch her. When she is pregnant, her husband (even she) is not allowed to kill any animals like snake, tiger, even pig or chicken. It is believed that the ‘yet to be born
child’ would resemble to the animal the father had killed. Till date, such belief governs the worldview of the newly wedded Ao-Naga couples who did not bear children. The pregnant woman should be alert while working and should not to get traumatized by animals or by any other acts or events to protect the unborn child from shocks that may cause premature delivery or stillbirths or timid children.

(ii) Birth (Delivery)

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

After the child has been delivered, the mother holds the umbilical cord (tepela tezü) by keeping it beneath her toe and the father carefully separates it from the child by using a knife made of bamboo. Otherwise, the naval would swell and become puffy which causes discomfort and ugly look to the baby. Before the birth the father keeps six such knives ready. One knife will be thrown away if a daughter is born. If a son is born, all six knives including the one used for cutting umbilical cord will be bundled and tied to the thatched roof just over the bed of the new mother. Ao-Nagas believe that they tie the knives to ward off evil spirits. Now the father’s paternal aunt or the child’s paternal aunt, father’s sister (tenü/onü) washes and wraps him in new cotton cloth. Then the father touches the child with his left and later with his right hand keeps a little munched rice into his mouth. Then utters “Ni tsüngrem tenung nung tanur dak tangshir, tsüngrem shinga ya kodanga maoyatsü (I have laid my hands before the god so no god can snatch this child).” Again the father touches the lips of the child with cooked chicken’s temesen (liver) and says, “From today onward you will have such kind of food.” Then again cooked rice is munched softly and is put on the child’s mouth and the father says, “Starting from today you will have such rice to survive.” The mother is also given a cup full of high-quality mejemtsü (rice beer) to
gain her strength. Later she is allowed to have food with chicken but without chilly because that will hurt her stomach. The best medicine to regain her strength is to give good food especially chicken with rice beer.

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

(iii) Post-Birth

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

On the second day after the child is born, the narong (earlobes) of the child are to be pierced. Sharp piece of bamboo and a hammer made of half a sword-bean seed were used. A little bunch of hair from the child is cut with a dao, a big knife. The hair and the hammer were kept in the house. The kinii narongto (ear-piercing) ritual is
performed by the father of the child. The ritual act of ear piercing mutually reaffirms that they both are father and son. Though in some families onū (paternal aunt) would perform the ear-piercing rituals but the father and mother of the child would present there. Fowl has to be killed to celebrate the ear piercing ritual. The baby then wears earrings after the hole of the ear lobe gets healed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The father feeds the child with little munched rice and temesen (chicken’s liver), kinü narongto (ear piercing) and Tenungjiaba (naming) ceremony. All these are celebrated during the liminal period only. Ear piercing is the first marker of identity of
the child to become an Ao-Naga. The tenungjaba (naming) of the child takes place on the third day. The naming process initiates the first step of constructing child’s personal identity. The selection of the name of the child and first utterance of that name to address the new born is exclusively done by the father. It not only confirms the identity of the child in the family but also right of the father in patriarchy as a giver of name to the child. Thus the period of liminality for Ao-Nagas is no more a period of confusion but a dais for construction and assertion of their identities and thus differs from the structural model.

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

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

(v) Symbolism

The rituals symbolically speak about the values the people attach to the self and identities of the community. Following diagram No: 2 shows the importance of symbolism during the childbirth ritual.
To begin with, during the child birth ritual, using of certain numerical figure has found out to be very significant and symbolic. The numerical figures namely five and six signifies the sex of the child. After delivery, bamboo knives were used to cut the umbilical cord (tepela tezi). Five such knives are used if a girl child is born and six knives are used to if a boy is born. Whereas tribes like Angami and Rengma do not follow such practices. Certain leaves called asangdong/ Changpet are hanged on the door. Five leaves symbolizes that a girl child is born and six leaves for a boy. Even this practice is followed only among the Aos. By looking at the leaves the villagers identifies the sexes and also do not visit the house knowing that the household is observing genna. Observance of genna differs for male and a female; five days for a female and six days for a male. The above explanation show how Ao-Naga sect is different from the others because other Nagas like Angami and Rengma do not have such particular days, figure and time that identifies between a male/boy and a female/girl in all the above mentioned events. For the Angami Naga, the genna that follows was the same whichever the sex of the child.17

The symbolism of food is also significant. The father touches the lips of the child with the cooked chicken’s liver (temesen) and joins him in their family meal. Till date it is being practiced as an important ritual. The ritual touching of liver of chicken to the child symbolically represents the practice of offering the delicious and nutritious food to the young who require more care. In Ao-Naga family still youngest of the family are fed with liver of the animals they cook to eat. The women from the
community tell that the body parts of the cooked animals are shared basing on their roles and age. Certain foods are prohibited to the mother during pregnancy and after delivery to protect the child from resembling like the animals and according to Ao custom certain foods were restricted to the women folk. Only fowl was used for offering because it is the only domesticated item that every family could afford for every ritual otherwise other animals were expensive. It also symbolizes humbleness. Egg was used for offering which symbolizes rebirth.

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

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

(II) Puberty ritual

Like in any other human society, in traditional Ao-Naga life, puberty is an important phase to be celebrated it as a rite. Attainment of the age of puberty is the state wherein the girl/boy shifts their status and roles from childhood to youth. Ao-
Nagas visualize puberty as an indicator to get married and ability to beget children through legitimate marriage. For boys attainment of puberty indicate a state at which they can launch for the activities meant for men like war tactics, construction of house, art and craft and so forth. In this section puberty rites of girl and boy are given separately.

In Ao-Naga society, the rites of puberty among girls do not onset with the first appearance of menstrual blood but begins from the time once the girl develops her secondary sexual characters. Interestingly unlike in the other tribal societies of India\(^\text{19}\), Ao-Nagas give less or no ritual importance to the first menstrual blood as a marker of identity for puberty and often hide the matter from publicity. The celebration puberty rites of the girls differ from person to person depending upon their respective physical appearances. The puberty rites of the boys are not as elaborately as that of for girls. In Ao-Naga termino logy there is no as such a specific word to denote ‘puberty’, but when the girl or boy attains the age of puberty the community says \textit{jangatilazati or asangurlaier}. It means that the boy/girl is grown up or reached an age of maturity (stage of fertility). The ritual practices with regard to puberty are not time bound as in other communities. The entire process continues till the girl or boy biologically, psychologically and culturally becomes fit to get married and beget children and establish a healthy family.

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

\textbf{Puberty rites of girls}

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

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

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

Narrative 6.1: Origin of tattooing

Once there was an Ao woman, Yarla from koridang an Ao-Naga settlement. One day when all the villagers went to the fields Yarla tied up her younger sister and tattooed her on the leg. It took some time to heal the wound caused by the tattooing. But the tattoos were much admired by the people after the wounds were healed completely. As such, the process of tattooing became widespread and admired since those days.
The general age to begin the ritual of tattooing is between years of 10 to 14 depending on the physique. Every year all the girls of the same age in the village are tattooed in the same season. The girls are separated from the society and are excluded from attending any community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works during the occasion of tattooing because it is a cautious and sanctified period for those who are undergoing the rite of tattooing. Till the sores were healed she is allowed to have only rice, bamboo pickle and water. During tattooing all food prohibited to her like any animal meat were avoided. Till her wounds are healed she remains in the process period. Once a girl undergoes her first year’s tattoo she is regarded as a full-fledged member of the community.

Art of tattooing

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

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

Tattooing instruments: colour

In the traditional Ao-Naga society, the colours used for tattooing were made from the juice of the bark of a tree, Ngupti or ‘Naptti’. The technology was primitive. The bark of the tree is rubbed back and forth against a flat stone slab with rough surface. Then the juice of the bark is collected by hand into a pot boiled on firewood.
Rice beer was added to the juice after it was half-boiled. Sharp cane thorns fixed to a wooden holder was used to apply the colour to the design on the skin. The pattern to be tattooed was marked by an old woman on the girl’s skin with a piece of wood dipped in the colouring liquid. The piercing was done by gentle hammering on the implement into the skin. Root of kamri tree was used as a needle to pierce. After the first round of piercing is done, the colour (Nap) is then applied once more after the blood has been washed off.

**Designs of the tattoo**

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

**Narrative 6.2: Designs of tattoos**

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

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

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

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

**Narrative 6.3: Two girls and the hair**

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

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

(iv) **Narongto, Piercing of upper earlobes**

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

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

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

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

In Ao-Naga society the puberty rites for the boys are not as elaborate as that of the girls. For them, tattooing is not a marker of identity. Tattooing of men was closely associated with the practices of headhunting. It is a politico-religious rituals act that...
proves the prowess and masculinity of males. But every headhunter was not tattooed. A headhunter who brings the head of the enemy to home was tattooed.

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

(I) Narangto, piercing of upper earlobes

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

(ii) Ariju, boys’ dormitory

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

(a) Süngpurltzüir, first age group

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

Narrative 6.4: A tree spirit who love a girl

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

(b) *Tenapang, second age group*

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

(c) *Chuzen, third age group*

The third age group is called *Chuzen*. This is the senior most group in the *Ariju*. They are considered as commanders of the Ariju and the most matured age group. They are the overall incharge of the activities of Ariju. The main duties of this group are building and repairing the Ariju, maintenance of the Ariju system and its organization, making decisions in the affairs of the Ariju administration and assigned duties to the respective Zünga (age group). They are the real bachelors of the village, almost free from all rules and disciplines but command respect and honour. The *Ariju* life retires at this age. Most of the men get married and settled independently. Any other member of outgoing *Chuzen* group who wish to remain as a member of *Ariju* remains as a member who is called *sangremer*, confirmed bachelor. But he cannot
exercise his power as his group (Chuzen) is already succeeded by the younger group. The members who left Ariju after marriage and whose sons have not yet entered Ariju are called Arijusangerlarijununger. They always contribute their service and labour for common welfare of their Ariju. They no longer consider themselves as Arijusangerlarijununger after their sons enter the Ariju and ceased from all contribution to the Ariju. From this organization they are inducted into Putu Menden, village government.

Diagram No. 6.4: Boys Puberty ritual

(iii) Analysis:

The puberty ritual of the Ao-Nagas is represented in the (A) Phases in ritual course and (B) Structure of the ritual. The above diagram shows different steps of transition period of the girl and the boy from child to adulthood. The boy’s dormitory played an important role in bringing up great warrior among the Ao men. All the war tactics and special training and testing were given to the boys in the Ariju. The young men were energized by the pressure of rivalry among peers and hence they had to
prove their worth by taking heads in succession. Regarded as a prelude to marriage, each Ao young man usually hoped to take one head at least. A man who had taken a head has more advantages. For marriage, it enhances his status and adorn with war medals, a means to enhance his personality, and to avoid the scorn of others. Ao young men were supposed to be competent in the game of feuding and raiding but the 'quick one' with the ability to lead his warriors and track down enemies was celebrated in ritual, story, songs and oratory. He was the 'sushir' or commander of the contingent. The sushir was selected for one battle but a good sushir was appointed again if he proved his worth and if he was willing to retain the title. Selection was done by the village rulers on behalf of the whole village community. The sushir gets sandwiched between two pressures, to lead his contingent towards success and to retain his position as commander.

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

Unlike the other tribes of India\(^{30}\), the separation and the liminality are continuous and they merged together. In puberty rites of the girls, separation and liminality occurs five times (B) Structure of the ritual. In the first year of tattooing (1to4), the girl is separated from the societal activities like community feast and family sacrifices, domestic and agricultural works and abstains from all food prohibited to her. Till her wounds of the tattooing are healed she is in liminal period. Again in the second, third, fourth and fifth year of tattooing (5to 16) again separation and liminality continued. Separation alongside is followed by liminality because she is in process of entering into another stage called adulthood from childhood. The
The tattooing procedure is same all these years but the girls are tattooed in different part of the body every year. Unlike the theoretical model of liminality put forward by Victor Turner, in the Ao-Naga puberty ritual the boy and the girl is not in the state of betwixt or between and neither here nor there because the boy and the girl gets his/her status/identity during the liminal period itself. Before she even enters into the puberty (adulthood) stage, the rites of teptsü atep (tattooing) on the first year itself made her a full-fledged member of the community and shows that she has reached the marriageable age. Even the boy obtains his identity through the piercing of earlobes before entering into the dormitory (B) Structural model, rites of separation (1). He also becomes a full-fledged member of the village once he enters into the dormitory.

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

Once the girl undergoes or completes all the puberty rites she then incorporated into the Tsüki, girls’ dormitory. She is legitimized by incorporating into the dormitory (B) Structural model (17). This signifies that she is capable for marriage. Unlike the girls, the boys enter into the Ariju/dormitory very early because they have the age group system (rites of incorporation (3to5). It is a very strict affair.
The Tsükibutsüla/matron did not just simply permit a girl to enter the dormitory.

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

(III) Marriage rite

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

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

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

(A) Traditional Ao-Naga Marriage ceremony

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

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

The proposal and acceptance are communicated through agents such as mother, sister, relatives or friends. The communication for marriage through the agents is found in both regular and irregular but not in the prohibited marriages. Generally, for the Ao parents there are certain other factors which may have some influence in the choice of mates, like family histories of would-be brides and grooms. Families with a history of mental illness, hereditary diseases or even criminal records are often avoided. The besides the rules of exogamy and endogamy, the Ao-Nagas strictly observe spatial integrity while selecting grooms/brides. The villages which are to be articulated by matrimony should have compatibility (*melembo*) mostly political. That is, marriage should not take place between the bride and groom whose villages
are war-ridden or war-prone. Further the villages whose war-disputes (Nokpangmentang) were not finalized are prohibited for marriage. The villages must first have a peaceful agreement (Jatsütep) and Jatangyongtang, settlement. Marriages are not allowed between villages that once fought, and not yet under peace treaty is considered under Nokra (accursed of dao) under warfare. Any village that is attacked by dao (big knife) is considered as cursed. If marriage takes place between such villages it is believed that the couple would not have cordial relationships and their lives will not be prosperous. Their children may have congenital disorders and parents may become childless.

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

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

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

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

Narrative 6.5: A boy who choose his wife

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

That night, the boy took the collected stones with him and visited the girl’s dormitory (Tsíki). He took out the stones and asked the girls in the dormitory, “Supposed this stones are cooked yum then is it possible for a human being to finish this much?” The first girl happily replied, “For me it is possible. I can even finish double the size of the collected stones. I had food again, even after we came back from fishing.” But the second girl replied, “How can a person eat that much, it is not at all possible.” Without waiting any longer, the boy straight away told the second girl, “Is it not you who had eaten this much yum in the evening? I was outside your house counting when you were breathlessly eating those yum.” The girl felt very embarrassed. In the end the boy chose the first girl as his perfect wife. In another version the boy’s mother tested the girls by asking them to come and collect flowers from her house. In the past, girls were very much found of flowers. The girls used different kinds of flowers to decorate themselves. The boy’s mother collected some flowers knowing the fact that the girls will love to have it. She placed the flowers on the sapang (backside kind of balcony). Before they come she scattered the dishes and plates all over the house and also near the doors. The mother called the girls to the house and told them, “I have collected and kept some flowers on the sapang so if you want to decorate your ears with those flowers then go and get it from the sapang.” Having said the word flower, the Mongsen girl went straight to get the flowers without noticing the dishes and the plates on the floors, but the Chungli girl cautiously picked up the things lying on the floor, placed them properly as she go to get the flowers. After she placed the things properly only then she went to get the flowers. Looking at the different manner and behaviour of the girls, the mother came to
know that her son’s choice was perfect)\textsuperscript{35}

Narrative 6.6: The embarrassing boy

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

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

Narrative 6.7: Improper marriage

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

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

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

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

Phase II: Kibong makem mong, engagement

It is a very important phase in marriage as it ritually binds bride and bridegroom to become husband and wife in the next phase. Once the choice of bride/groom is decided, a formal process of negotiation begins between the two parties. The male member from the boy’s extended family-his maternal uncle or brother-in-law goes to the girl’s house and formally asks for bride to his boy. If the girl and her party accept the boy’s offer, a fish (ango)

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

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

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

Phase III : Keyir Benjong, Marriage rite

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

Once the marriage invitation was conveyed verbally to the relatives and friends, preparation for the marriage ceremony begins. A cock was kept in the new house built by the bridegroom before the marriage rite takes place. Then one of the older female members of the bride’s clan sets fire in the hearth of the new house. On the marriage date before the bridal march takes place, the bridegroom accompanied by his best friends goes to the bride’s house. They wait outside the house of the bride. Then the bride serves them with rice beer and food. After they are done with eating, the bridegroom and his friends wait for the bride to get ready for the nuptial procession (jeptsü). There was no specific dress for the marriage ceremony. The identity of the clan of the bride and the groom is recognized by the dress they wear. Wearing of such dress shows that the marriage between the two clans is legal and acknowledged. The attire shows the status of the rich and the poor families. The rich
attires are elaborate but the poor dresses were simple with few ornaments.\textsuperscript{40}

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

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

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

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

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

**Contemporary Ao-Naga marriage ceremony**

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

Before her marriage proposal came formally, the groom met the village elders and discussed whether the two clans were appropriate for marriage according to the norms. After the village elders gave recommendations for the marriage, the families approached the church and formal procedures like engagement and marriage ceremony were fixed. Engagement rite was done at the narrator’s place i.e., girl’s place. They invited the Pastor and Deacons of the church for a prayer along with the relatives from both side. Then their marriage date was fixed. The marriage feast was prepared by the Bridegrooms’ side. After the marriage ceremony was done at the church, they took a procession from the church till the bridegroom’s parent’s house. Then wedding cake was cut and then there were wedding feast prepared for all the villagers. In the contemporary time, after the engagement is done, the church allows the marriage to be done only after 90 days. It is a strict rule to be followed by all the members of the church.
She further explained about her parent’s marriage after the coming of Christianity. This marriage ceremony was a mixture of traditional as well as contemporary. When her father’s marriage proposal was accepted by her mother, he gave her a packet of salt to her as a sign of acceptance. Salt was given because it was very expensive and rare to get in the hills. They go all the way to Assam to buy the salt. They travel many days to reach Assam.

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

The ritual course of the Kiyimba rite is represented as following diagram No: 5. In the diagram represents (A) phases in ritual course (B) Structure of the ritual. In (A), the entire process followed by the bride and the groom is divided into three stages, the pre-marriage, marriage and post marriage. In each stage a series of rituals that are being observed are sequentially numbered. In the (B) the series of ritual observance performed in the marriage rite are analyzed and interpreted in terms of the models of rites of passage.
Diagram No. 6.5: Marriage ritual

The ritual of the Ao-Naga marriage is a long process. The boy and the girl could get married only after they fulfill the norms prescribed to them by the family and the community. Only after the completion of such phase, the families along with
the boy and girl prepare for the ceremony. They are accepted as an independent family only after they start cooking and eating in their new house.

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

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

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

**Symbolism**

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

**Diagram No. 6.6: Marriage symbolism**

In the Ao-Naga society when the boy give a fresh fish to the girl’s father it symbolizes that he wants to marry his daughter. The acceptance of the fish is a sign of discussion to fix the marriage. Fish means a good new family. This fish gift is called *Nesem*, *Nesem*- the word *Ne*- is equivalent to *Ane* which means wife and the word *Sem* is participle of the verb *Semtsu* which means betroth. After the engagement is done between the two families, the boy constructs a new house before the marriage ceremony. The construction of the new house symbolizes the independent family and the marital status. It also symbolizes that the girl and the boy is ready to start a new family and procreate children. The territorial rites like house warming ceremony were integral to marriage ritual. This is because only after the house was constructed the couples were allowed to get married. There was no need for a separate celebration for house warming as ritual. In the contemporary times, the ritual process of the marriage
has changed. The practices are not observed in the way the forefathers used to do by giving offerings and sacrifice cock or pig. With the coming of Christianity, the Pastor of the church will say a prayer before constructing a house and after the house is completed, again for dedication the pastor of the church pray for the family for blessings and protections. Then as a thanksgiving they will have feast. Due to changes socio-economic conditions the people are now moving to different places for jobs and different purposes. The building of a house does not become a necessity before marriage. In fact, those who are financial sound buy ready-made house, flats and even rich parents built houses for their children. But the practice of separate family is still retains in the Ao-Naga family.

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

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

(IV) Asümong, Death rite

Like in any other culture, Aos consider the death Asümong, as an irreversible cessation of organismic functioning resulting into the permanent loss of personhood. It is an event that concludes earthly life of individuals and is the last occasion to be celebrated in the life cycle. Interestingly the rites that are performed on the eve of death are highly elaborate and most of its rituals are performed in public spaces like
burial grounds. Death, like birth or marriage, is universally regarded as a socially significant event, set off by ritual and supported by institutions. It is the final rite. A corpse must be looked after; the deceased must be placed in a new status; his vacated roles must be filled and his property disposed of; the solidarity of his group must be reaffirmed and his bereaved family must be comforted (Blauner 1966). Death is mostly a public event. It is also celebrated to let the death person get away from all the earthly sufferings and to rest his/her soul in peace. The family also celebrates by offering a feast with prayers on the last day of lokomong (mourning) to share the happiness to the relatives and friends for showing their love and concern. Death event is an expensive affair for the Ao-Nagas. It takes lots of time, energy and wealth but it is also a time to acknowledge and experience the love from the people.

**Concept of death among Ao-Nagas**

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

The Aos deem that the world of dead is different from that of the living beings and the spirit of the dead would wander around their near and dear. Sometimes, the souls of the dead may get transformed into insects or creatures like gross hoppers. The following narrative gives interesting information on the worldview of the Ao-Nagas on the feelings of dead regarding their kith and kin and nature of the domain of death.
Narrative 6.8: The son who went to the land of dead

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

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

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

Beliefs associated with Death

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

- The Ao-Nagas generally believe that on a bright sunny day if heavy rains pour down suddenly then people speak that an influential person will die which used to happen.
- If sun is surrounded by rainbow or big thunders and heavy wind (mekurang) visit the place then it is believed to be a bad sign which will bring death among the community or influential person will die.
- If a branch from a tree suddenly brakes down in front of a person when he/she is walking then it is believed that death will come to that person because the spirit of the tree is frightening him/her. According to a narrator 44, when her brother was walking down the longlangpa (a place in Longkhum village) a branch from a tree suddenly broke. He shared this with his family members as a bad sign. He died next year after this incident happened.
- Howling of owl near the house in the night also indicates danger or a sign of death not only in the family but among the relatives as well.
- If a person kills a dog or pig in the dream it is believed that terrible thing will happen that will cause death.
- If sound of pentsū (ashey wran warbler bird) is heard on untimely, then it is a sure sign of death happening.

**Pantheon associated with death**

Unlike the other tribes of India, Meyutsüngba (lord of the land of death or god of justice) is the pantheon associated with the death among the Ao-Nagas. He is believed to have a wife called Ongangla who assists him in judging man (Panger Imchen: 1993; 35). Between life and dead, Meyutsüng gives the ultimate judgment. He judges everyone according to his/her deeds on the earth, so no ceremonies were observed and offerings were given to him because he is the god of righteousness. He expects to live a righteous life with purity, honest, humble, and so on. The dead person after crossing Longritzü River (lonely river), the dead reached the house of Meyutsüngba and Ongangla his wife. Meyutsüngba says, “I’m in the gate between life and death, there is no other gate to the land of the dead except through my house”45. At the entrance of the gate, there is a big tree called Sungtidong/Asangdong (a fern tree) standing which is called tree of righteousness. As the person enters the gate, each person carries a spear (woman carry weaver’s baton) and walk down the streets of the Meyutsüngba’s gate carrying the load of whatever they did when they were alive on earth. According to the deeds, the righteous man will find their burden
or load light while the unrighteous finds their load heavy. As the unrighteous man cross Meyutsüngba gate, for example, eggs will fall down if he has stolen. Likewise everything was revealed in the presence of the righteous who have gone before which was a dishonorable day for him. On the tree of righteousness every individual soul are asked to throw his spear if he is a male and if she is a female, she has to throw her weaving baton/alem. The righteous and the honest being undisturbed by his load able to throws his spear at the tree and hit it in the middle. After that he/she is declared righteous and the Meyutsüngba calls him to go through his house to the land of the dead. Whereas the thief or the crooked man would miss it due to the heavy load so he/she is declared unrighteous and Meyutsüngba calls him to the land of dead via the back of his house. That is how each man departs his destination according to his own deeds. This test enables Meyutsüngba to easily differentiate the good from the bad.

The ancestors tried to live a righteous and honest life for the fear of the final judgment. In this way, children were also taught in the past to live a truthful and righteous life. According to narrator Tsükdinungba Longkumer the righteous and unrighteous person go to different places where righteous person will enjoy the same good life as he did on earth but the unrighteous work hard, toil to survive and come across suffering and shame in that land.

**Traditional Ao-Naga death ceremony**

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

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

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

Every day, a plate of rice was being kept near the corpse to let him/her to eat. This was done with a belief that until and unless, the corpse remains in the house, he/she was still alive so dead body was properly taken-care by the family members. This practice is called *leptsungsong*. After death, it is believed that one soul of the death person lingers near the body for six days for the male and five days in case of a female. Foods are offered to the dead. If the food gets bad in a given period of time it is believed that the dead has eaten and is happy. But if the food remains the same then a household sacrifice is held in order to plead pardon from the dead.
During this time, *genna* was observed and not a single hatred or disapproval was shown towards the death, only respect. After the dead body was dried properly, on the last day of the oldest man of the clan comes to the house of the deceased. Some cooked rice wrapped in *am* leaves and rice beer in a guard was brought near the corpse to show the dead that the food and the drink belongs to him for the day. It was then put in a basket. The family members and relatives call out the name of the deceased for five to six times. Then the mourners were supplied with plenty of rice beer to withstand the awful odour of the corpse. Then the priest loosens the corpse from the platform by saying your site will be shifted which was then help by the male relation attending the funeral and kept in front of the house. The best shawl of the deceased was spread around the coffin and the coffin was also decorated with dresses prepared for this purpose. The male relatives carry the corpse in a procession holding burning bamboo torches with foods in a basket. Water is carried on bamboo cylinders. The women members follow till the village gate and return to the village. Then the corpse is taken to the cemetery which consists of a long line of corpse-platforms by the side of the main path near the village. The corpse is put inside the house on a raised platform four to eight feet high. It was believed that when the bamboo post roots ways, if the head falls first on the ground, the man was declared to have lived a dishonest life. This is called *Leptsii* or ‘grave falling’, a significant omen. The Aos believed that the falling of the death grave proved whether a person was honest or dishonest after the death.

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

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

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

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

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

After all these rituals are over, they begin to work in the fields. The family members put rice, curry on his plate, and offer to the dead by asking “you have this food”. It is believed that, the food smells if it is accepted and if it remains the same it
means that the food was not taken. When the harvest time comes, the villagers will clean the path to the cemetery. Even if he died on the month of January, only when harvest time comes only then the way to cemetery is cleaned. This practice is called Lechen. On this night, asenchant (special rice) is cooked. Some take this cooked rice and keep it on his graveyard. It is said that, if his graveyard is not made properly then it is shown in the dream so the family members go and re-made it properly.

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

Diagram No.6.7: Death ritual

Analysis

The death ritual among the Aos is interesting. There are eight phases in the ritual course (A) of death. As soon as the person dies, he/she is ritually separated from the living beings by wrapping the dead body and keeping on four pegs; the phases I and 2 in the ritual course (A) represents it. But his people believe that spirit of the dead lingers there though he is physically dead. Hence he is fed, cared and
protected by his family. It gets continued for 5/6 days the family observes genna. During this time the family members stop all normal activities like agricultural works and societal works. They make sure that they do not make the dead unhappy by showing any disrespect. This is the liminal period for the dead as well as the living people. The phases 3 to 7 in ritual course represent liminal period in which neither the dead is disposed nor the surviving continue their duties. Hence it is the period of Liminality. After the dead is disposed permanently and the family takes ritual bath, chilok (8 in the ritual course A) the process of incorporation gets completed. The dead is relieved from the earth and gets incorporated into the hell/heaven and the family attains normalcy.

Symbolism

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

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

Unlike the Aos, the Rengma-Naga buried the dead body as soon as possible. The dead body is wrapped in two new shawls, digs a grave and buried in front of the relatives house (Milanda Ganguli; 1984: 95). The Nagas followed both bury and exposing the dead on platform. But most tribes bury the dead. Angami tribe buries the dead outside the village, Lotha tribe buries outside his own house, Southern Sangtem bury under his own bed. The Chang-Naga too bury the dead at home in a corner of
the living room. But the Ao tribe practice only exposure as mentioned above which shows that it is different from the other tribes. The dead is smoke-dried then laid on a platform. The corpse-platforms are invariably along the path outside the village.

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

Endnotes

5 Ibid, p. 95.
9 According to A.W.davis, 1891, the word genna is used in two ways: it may mean practically a holiday, i.e., a man will say my village is doing genna today, by which he means that, owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occurrence as an earthquake, eclipse, or burning of a village within sight of his own, his village people are observing a holiday; genna means anything forbidden. P.514 in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the 19th century*, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.
10 According to Milton Katz in the *Genna* complex, three discrete elements are apparent: the *Kenna-Penna*, the social *Genna*, and the erection of memorials. *Kenna* and *Penna* are curious and special
forms of taboo, the former a species of quarantine, the latter an obligatory holiday. Either may be pronounced for village, clan, family, or individual. When Kenna is observed no member from a village may depart or strangers allowed entering for trade or conversation. This is being abrogated; the household which is Kenna announces its situation by a branch of herbs posted outside the door, and the villagers avoid intercourse with its inmates; the individual who observes Kenna may speak with none. Kenna maybe rigorous or mild: a household maintains Kenna only toward members of another village, or of another clan; sometimes personal Kennas are directed merely to outsiders; and mutual Kennas, especially between husband and wife, are common. On Penna days no work may be done, or (for there are degrees of Penna as well as of Kenna), certain forms of work are prohibited. The duration of both Kenna and Penna varies. Village observes kenna accompanied by annual, monthly ceremonies which recur frequently though irregularly or occur occasionally. There are also clan kenna, Household and personal Kenna accompanying ceremonies which mark the crises in life—birth, puberty, marriage, and death, accompanying periodical ceremonies performed by house-hold or individual, accompanying ceremonies which are demanded occasionally of a family or a person. There are also mutual kenna between men-women of village, clan, and between man-wife, bride-groom. Like kenna the village observes penn ceremonies at annual, monthly, at irregular recurrence and at occasional. Household and personal Penna is observed at crises in life, at periodical ceremonies and occasional ceremonies. Magical application of Penna is also performed. Memorials are employed in wood or stone to recall a village feast, or signalize the performance of a social Genna; and among the Angami Nagas, to commemorate a religious Genna, celebrated by clan or village, monolithic pillars are erected. Forked (Y-shaped) posts are used by the Sema, Rengma and Sangtem Nagas for tethering sacrificial buffalo, to recall feasts and to proclaim the performance of a social Genna. Round-topped, cylindrical posts are erected by the Ao Naga for tethering sacrificial buffalo as memorial of a feast and as memorial of a social Genna. Ao Naga (presumably for the existence of social Genna among them is suggested by the phrase: “it [the harvest Genna] is the time chosen by some rich men for giving their feasts to the village). Neither Y-posts nor round-topped posts ever serve as memorials to the dead. Miniature hut over grave were practice by the Sema and the Ao Nagas. Likewise there are many memorial post were erected. An excellent description of a typical Genna complex may be found in the book by J. H. Hutton, Angami Nagas, London, Direction of the Assam Administration Macmillan and co., limited, 1921 pp. 189-242.

11 Victor Turner, op.cit., 1969, p.94
12 J.P.Mills, The Ao Nagas, Kohima, Directorate of Art and Culture, 1926, p.263
14 Ibid., p.98
16 To cite an example, in African society life is closely associated with blood. For instance, when blood is shed in making a sacrifice it means that human or animal life is being given back to God who is in fact the ultimate source of life. Indeed, blood is used to cleanse society and individuals and to propitiate or pacify the spiritual powers. It is used to establish links with the spirit world. The circumcision blood is like making a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and his people. Until the individual has gone through the operation, he is an outsider. Once he has shed his blood he joins the stream of his people, he becomes truly one with them. (http://www.mamiwata.com/women). 25th October, 2011.
18 J.P.Mills, op.cit., 1926, p. 200
20 Sangtem Naga girls are tattooed on the arms, calf, forehead and chin but the boy were not tattooed (Milada Ganguli, A Pilgrimage to the Nagas, New Delhi, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1984, pic.22) The Phoms tattoo their women only on the legs, but an Ao woman could be tattooed anywhere from face downward to the legs.
21 The people were active in art and craft works like basket making, weaving etc for them to use for the next year.
22 Information gathered from Mepolila Imchen, (F), 73 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 20.12.2007
Among the Kolams tribe, the girl/boy who go through the puberty rituals are considered as adults during incorporation period. See K.Mohan Rao, The Kolams a primitive tribe in Transition, Hyderabad, Booklinks Corporation. 1990, Pp. 119-128.


N.Talitemjen Jamir, A.Lanunungsang; Naga Society and Culture- A case study of the Ao Naga Society and cultures, Nagaland, Nagaland University Tribal Research Centre, Department of Sociology, 2005, p. 210

The identity of the narrator is changed because the incident is a personal one.

Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (M), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18th Dec, 2007.

Information gathered from Marla Longkumer (F), 89 years, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.12. 2007

For example, the Pongen women wear yongmen (brass earrings), tongpang (crystal earrings), azük (cornelian beads) and they wear a ‘tenük supeti’ (skirt) where the design looks like a cucumber seed or eyes shape. The colour of the tenük supeti is red and blue.

Information gathered from Otsufuba Longkumer (F), 73 years old, Longkhum village, interviewed on 18.12. 2007

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

See chapter III, Narrative 6: The story of Longkongla in the present thesis.