CHAPTER II
LAND & PEOPLE

THE AO- NAGAS

Mokokchung, one of the 11 districts of Nagaland is inhabited by the Ao tribe. It is situated at an altitude of 1325 metres above the sea level having an area of 1615 sq. km. It is bounded by Wokha district in the southwest, Zunheboto district in the southeast, Tuensang and Longleng district in the east, Mon district in the northeast and Assam in the west. Mokokchung district enjoys monsoon types of climate, which is quite pleasant and healthy over the year with maximum temperatures during summer of 27°C, which do not rise beyond 32°C. In winter (January to February) the night temperature drops to 2°C. Average rainfall is about 250 cm, which is concentrated from 80% to 90%. The land is hilly with minimum slopes of 10°, while minimum slopes ranges from 45° to 60°. The population of Ao tribe according to 2001 census is 227230.

The Ao occupies a territory comprising long unbroken ranges of hills, which perhaps accounts for the fact that the entire Ao territory is divided into six ranges. The villages are grouped into units according to their proximity to various ranges and named thus: Ongpangkong, Changikong,
Langpangkong, Asetkong, Japukong and Tsürangkong. The Longkhum village falls under the Ongpangkong range.

Myth of Origin

The Aos believed that their ancestors emerged from the six stone at Longtrok (literally six stones). Some of these stones are to be seen above a village called Chungliymti which is situated on the bank of the river Dikhu. The Ao myth records that of the six stones, three were males named Longpok- Pongener, Tongpok- Longkumer, Longjakrep- Jamir and the other three were females Longkapokla, Elongse, Yongmena/a. These three males married the three females and thus the different clans among the Aos trace their respective origins to one of these stones.

Language

The Aos have a distinct language known as Ao-0 shi (Ao language). It has two distinct dialects i.e. Chungli and Mongsen. The Chungli dialect has now become the standard Ao language and the reason for this is because the American missionaries settled in Chungli speaking village and that this dialect was learnt and adopted for all subsequent communication and translation. That is how the entire Bible has been translated in this dialect and other formal discourse and official communication are today conducted in it. On the other hand, all the folksongs and traditions are preserved and transmitted through the Mongsen dialect. For example, the teller of the story
may be Chungli speaker and even though the main discourse may be delivered in his dialect when he wishes to authenticate his narration with the ballads of old, these are presented in the Mongsen dialect. The variations in dialect persist even today thus emphasizing the vital role that language plays in human society. On the personal level too a very interesting relationship is maintained between husband and wife speaking different dialects. Normally a Chungli speaking woman will communicate with her husband only in her own dialect but will use her husband’s dialect with her son as by tradition the child must be taught his father’s dialect.

THE VILLAGE

Longkhum village is situated about 20 km southwest of Mokokchung at an altitude of about 1623 metres above sea level. Longkhum is bounded by the Lohas in the north-west and the Semas in the south-west, Mangmetong village in the north-east, and Sütsü village in the south. Longkhum is literally translated as ‘protected or covered with stones’. The village is known by the Aos for its legendary and mythical caves and stones. The Longkhum people were known for their bravery and courage and considered great warriors. According to the oral tradition, during the ninth century, war against Nokrang was very significant. During this war, Longkhum played a triple role as crusader, defender, and protector and because of this, Longkhum earned the proud sobriquet Aofonümro which may be referred as the protector and the guardian of the Aos.
One of the most remarkable features of the Longkhum village is that the southeastern and western side of the village is protected by natural stone fencing and is believed to be the main obstacles for the enemies to attack the village. Another feature is a mythical cave known as Amo-ku or Mongzu-ki, which means ‘the abode of the eagles’. It is located at the high precipice bearing three holes where eagles have nested for many centuries. The Aos believe that the eagles are the manifestation of the spirit of the death and therefore, who ever dies turns into an eagle and flies all the way to the abode of eternal rest. Whenever eagles are seen hovering above, the villager believes that someone from their tribe is dying. Just beyond the cave there is another mouth-like cave known as Tunken marok, which may be referred as ‘stone turned to cup’. It is believed that the water from this particular spring possesses mythical and healing powers. On the western side of the village there is another cave like tunnel known as fosen kü or posen ki (Home of the fox), which is as dark as night during the daytime. It was believed that long ago, a dog entered the cave and reached the other end of the cave, which is located at another village called Waromong, about 60 kms away from Longkhum village.

Another striking feature of the village is the long pathway of about 1/2kms, where stones are naturally piled up along the way, known as longlangba, which literally means ‘stone bridge’. There are footprints on this bridge and people believed that the stones were soft at certain point of time.
and hence the footprints. Red rhododendron grows abundantly in this particular area. Besides, there is another cave movong kū or mepong ki, which may be literally translated as the 'cave of the wind'. It is believed that the winds coming out of this cave are strange and during cold season occasional warm wind breezed out of this hole. Next to the cave lie two elongated stones, which were worshipped and revered by the villagers as male and female in the olden days. These stones were also considered as caretaker and guardian of the village in the olden days. The northern side of the village is almost plain and it enables the villagers to easily communicate with other neighbouring villages and tribes.

There are many man made structures, which adds to the beauty of the village. A monument, which stands at the highest point of the village, was constructed in 1979 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee celebration of the Ao Kaketshir Mungdang' (Ao Students Conference). It was in the Longkhum village that the Ao Kaketshir Mungdang took its birth in 1929. From this area one can see many places of Nagaland and also breakthrough view of the Himalaya Range.

At present the village has a total population of 2320 with 340 numbers of households. The village is divided into two dialectic groups: Chungli and Mongsen. Chungli group has one khel (spatially contiguous unit) known as chungli mefu and Mongsen group has two khels i.e imrong mefu
and sangpang mefu. Like any other numerous dialects of the Aos, Longkhum dialect has also its roots in the Ao language although there is slight difference in term of its accent, pronunciation and slang in its usage. Both Mongsen and Chungli speak their own respective dialect, which are mutually intelligible.

**FLORA AND FAUNA:**

The area consists of both deciduous and evergreen forest and is very rich in natural resources. The flora includes flowering plants, ferns, lichens, fungi, orchids, wild apples and red rhododendrons; some of the evergreen trees include champa, bonson, gamari, sal, simul, hollock, walnut, bogiboma, etc. Besides, medicinal plants, hard and soft woods are also found. Pine trees are also found in some areas. Cherry blossom looks enchanting, which are planted by the villagers on the way between Alichen (sub-division) and the village.

Dense jungle clothes the lower summits. Forest area constitutes about 80 % the geographical area of the village. However there is a danger of denudation and deforestation due to constant practice of jhuming and felling of trees for fuel and other economic purposes. Wild animals such as deer, porcupine, bear, jackal, wolf, etc are also found. There are numerous birds such as sparrows, bulbul, eagle, etc. Hornbill, which is considered as a legendary bird by the Nagas is almost extinct.
THE HOUSE:

The houses in the village are built close to each other and they are connected with each other internally through small footpaths. Normally one could hear the happenings in each others house. Traditionally the houses were built in such a way that it precisely indicates the status of the owner. Though the frontal adornments were different, however the main structure was almost the same for every house in spite of different social status. The walls of the house were made of bamboo matting and the roofs were of thatch, beaten earth was commonly used for plastering the walls and polishing of the floor. The ceilings were made of bamboo matting. The houses had a small room on the ground floor known as tiyong, and another room, which is a little elevated from the tiyong known as jooka and behind the jooka there is the sünjang/chupang. Tiyong was used for the domestic animals like pigs and fowls. The larger room jooka served as both kitchen and bedroom. They never had a separate bedroom and it was not necessary as all the children after attaining puberty joined their respective dormitories. The materials for construction were procured from the village vicinity itself. Bamboo matting, bamboo splint, and thatch are some of the materials used for the construction of a house. The elevated platform was meant for drying grains, vegetables and also used as a place for relaxing. Even today the villagers prefer to have this elevated platform sünjang/chupang for the same purpose, which are constructed either attached to the house or separately. Traditionally they always kept small benches müküm in the kitchen near the
fire place for visitors. And even today they still practice this. The hearth was
normally in the middle of the kitchen so that all the people could sit around the
fire. Today the hearth is made of bricks or stone placed at the two ends few centimeters apart and two iron rods of about two to three foot each placed in a parallel manner. Even today the hearth is in the middle of the kitchen to accommodate as many people as possible around the fire place. Due to the cold climatic conditions of the village fire becomes an important source of warmed for the people, beside its importance for cooking and other purposes. Like in the past tsükten/khuso is erected just above the hearth for hanging baskets, mats, gourds, and drying meats and other vegetables.

Earthen pots were used, procured from the Changki village, the village known for its expertise in pottery. But today the people have started using aluminum pots bought from the market and the earthen pots are kept as a showpiece only. Traditionally they used indigenously made kitchen articles like ao oso/awa yabo (bamboo plates), suchung/putsung (wooden plates), bamboo cups (ao marok/awa marok) etc. However with the availability of aluminum and steel articles, use of indigenously made these kitchen articles are no more however some people still use these articles in the jhum fields.

The type of houses today is different from the traditional one. Earlier houses were bamboo walled and thatch roofs with little or no partition. One can say that the house type has changed because there is no thatch
house, or traditional hearths made of stone, wooden or bamboo utensil etc. Today many houses are concrete building made of bricks and cement. Almost all the houses are equipped with radios, telephone, television (TV) etc. In the early 1980s there was only one TV, which belonged to the village and was kept in the Government Middle School. The Head master of the school was in-charge of the TV. The villagers used to gather in the school for watching TV. The villagers have started using aluminum, plastic buckets and steel pitchers etc for fetching water from the taps and streams. They also use iron drums, aluminum pots, huge buckets etc for storing water. Some people construct cement tanks for harvesting rain waters just nearby to their kitchens. For washing purposes they no longer use ashes, charcoal instead they use steel wool and soaps.

For carrying firewood and vegetables they use the bamboo baskets known as Khu/ Akhu which are not closely knitted. But for carrying paddy, they use closely knitted bamboo baskets commonly known as Chi/ akhi. The villagers still use curved-out logs süm/ aachem for pounding grains and yam leaves anūshi/ moyasū a delicacy for the Aos. However paddy is milled since the installation of rice mills in the village which has lessened the labour for the women.

In the past they used bamboo box kütsū/ akūt for storing cloths. But today these have been replaced by wooden trunks, iron trunks and in the
present days they use all sorts of boxes, suitcase, cupboards etc to store things. They also keep their cloths in wooden and steel almirahs which are free from rats and insects.

In the olden days the villagers used split bamboos stick aou milen/ wasūng milen as torch lights at night, later when kerosene were available they made kerosene burners jarak with a wick fixed to the oil container. But today almost all the houses have been electrified. They also use candles, petromax, gas lamp, cell torch, etc.

In the olden days families offered sacrifices and performed rituals before the construction and after completion of the house. Today instead, they invite pastor, deacons and the church elders and also relatives to pray and invoke God’s blessings for the new house. In the olden days the people use simple method of locking the door with cross wooden bars. But today they use locks. They no longer decorate the front of the houses like before. However during Students Conference in the village, the Conference hall is built in the old style without involving any rituals.

TOOLS & IMPLEMENTS:

Considering the tools, they are skilful wood-workers. In the olden days ariju posts were adorned with conventional figures of men, tigers, and hornbills, pythons, mithun heads which were excellent masterpiece. The axe
and daos were the tools used for making both the huge xylophones and small dancing drums. Fire was used to assist in the hallowing process. Dao holders are often ornamented either with pierced pattern or with carvings designs of heads, snakes, etc. Wooden utensils were also carved out of hard wood.

Big knives, axes, hoes and the sickles are the tools, which are commonly used. Splits bamboos were the usual material used for making both mats and baskets like akhu, mülok, apak, apa, etc and almost all men had some knowledge in weaving bamboo products.

Tools and implements are designed by themselves in such a way that it serves the purpose as needed. Traditionally the agricultural tools such as aya, keeya, etc were made of bamboo and wood but today similar designs made of iron are readily available in the market leading to the adoption of modern tools. However it may be noted that though the materials have changed, the uses and its importance remains the same.

EDUCATION:

The history of education in Longkhum could be traced back to the early 1900s with the arrival of the first American Missionary Dr Clark at Impur. The first school was established in the year 1903. During the colonial period, the pre-requisite qualifications of a teacher were that: he should have pass class II-III standard, he should wear half-pant and shawl, should not be a liar,
and should refrain from wearing any traditional dress. In due course of time when the American missionary entered the areas, they insisted teachers to wear dhoti. It is stated that during that time there was only one Primary School with only few teachers and students. The Teachers salary ranges from Rs.10/ and Rs.8/ per month for the Headmaster, and the Assistant Teacher respectively. No admission fees were charged and there was no attendance register for the Teachers. The subjects taught were only basic alphabets and arithmetic. During harvest season, there were hardly any teachers attending schools. Most of the time classes were finished before noon to enable them to go to the fields. There were instances of teachers found sleeping in the class room and woken up by the students. Examination was held only once in a year and result were declared on the basis of merit.

Since 1903, when the first Lower Primary School was established, there has been gradual expansion of educational facilities, and at present the village has three primary schools and one middle school. The educational scenarios over the last five years are shown in table I & II.
### TABLE I

**NO OF STUDENTS STUDYING WITHIN & OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE (As on 2005)**

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Source: Field work 2005

### TABLE II

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Source: Field work 2005

Education opened up the mind of the Longkhum people to new ideas and change. They provided a common language for communications and enhance the sense of unity. The development of broader and healthier outlook of the people enabled them to accept the new trends of change in their society. As a consequences of the growth of modern education, the people witnesses gradual tendency of social cohesion the characteristics of which was conspicuously lacking among them in pre-colonial period.

**FOOD AND DRINKS:**

The staple food of the villagers is rice. In the olden days rice was used for both eating and brewing rice beer vū/ ayi, but today only those who follow the traditional religion brew rice beer. Many have given up the habit of drinking after converting to Christianity on ethical and moral ground. Maize is cultivated for feeding pigs. Normally, the villagers take meal thrice a day i.e. morning, midday, and evening. Generally, in the morning extra meal is prepared so that the surplus is served as midday meal for those (old, sick and the young) that stay at home and midday meal is prepared in the field for
those working in the jhum field. Before they take meal they offer prayer to God, either individually or collectively however it varies from family to family. Generally food is served by the mother, but in her absence the eldest daughter in the family takes the role of the mother. Along with rice they also take varieties of vegetables, fish and meat. The common vegetables are jeebelaan (mustard leaves), mapulmafo (pumpkin), pok (gourd), pento (brinjal), alo (potatoes), sheem (beans) (long beans) Lolee, etc. As regards to fish and meat they take both fresh and dried. Normally they prefer curry with hot chilies. Yam leaves is considered to be one of the most essential vegetable, as numbers of items can be prepared from it. Its leaf, stalk, and tuber are all eaten. They prepare two types of items from the leaves, one is called anüshi/moyasü and the other is rubo/raapa. In the former case the leaves are collected and kept compact in a bag for about 3/4 days after which it is smashed into fine paste and packed in banana leaves. It is then cooks under low flame for about one night, then finally made into small round balls, and keep above the oven until it becomes hard and dry. This is one of the special ingredients for making gravies. The later is more simple and easy. The leaves are collected and dried in the sun. Similarly stalk of yam plants are collected and sliced longitudinally and dried in the sun. The tubers are in no way ignored as it can be preserved all throughout the year. It may be noted that the villagers are very fond of dried vegetables. Brinjals, gourds, beans, etc are also dried when there is surplus. Besides vegetables, other wild products such as edible mushroom and wild leaves like laliwa, amünüm
etc, which are available within the vicinity of the village, are also collected for consumption. Meat is relish but they highly relish an indigenous curry *mersüon/ mertsüenjo*. Generally domestic animals are killed at the time of Christmas, wedding etc. Wild animals like wild pig, deer, etc. are also relished.

In the olden days, vegetables and chilies along with dry fish were usually used in cooking. Soybeans were fermented and used as taste maker. Today they have learnt the art of cooking even non-local dishes like continental, Chinese, Indian etc but they still prefer boiled foods rather than fry. Smoked meat cooked along with *anūshi moyasūu* is highly relished. Beside some people also have come to know the art of making fruit juices, jams etc from fruits available such as plum, pineapple, mango, lemon, orange, and passion fruit and are sold in the marked.

In the olden days smoking pipe was very common among men. Rice beer was an essential drink, which were locally brewed in every household. They brewed drinks from rice, sticky rice, tapiocas, etc. With the advent of Christianity such practices are on the declining. Drinking red tea is instead a common practice now. They use red tea as an alternative to rice beer. Almost every household have a separate kettle exclusively for red tea, which is always keep near the fire to keep it warm. It is significant to note that once a visitor enters their house the first thing they offer is red tea as a sign of
welcome. The tea leaves are grown indigenously for their own use. After the leaves are collected, it is grinded and dried and made ready for use as per the requirements. Presently they also take milk tea.

**DRESS AND ORNAMENTS:**

**Dress & Ornaments for men**

In the olden days every man wore body cloth known as *langtam lungen*. It was a strip of blue or white cloth some four feet long and ten inches breadth with usually a pattern at one end. This strip was folded from the opposite end and sewn into a narrow strip leaving the front end flat to form a flap. In putting it on the narrow position was tied round the waist with a knot in the front. The knot was then twisted round and the position left hanging down was pulled through the legs from the back and up through the belt in front, so that the pattern or ornamented position forms a flap in front. Each clan has its own style of dress and ornaments which traces back to their origin and historical events. Boys till five to six years almost wore nothing. They were then given a little dao belt. But once they attained eight or nine years of age they start wearing *langtam lungen* like grown ups.

It may be noted that there were distinctive dress for a common man, rich man, rulers, war heroes, etc. A shawl known as *mangkotep sū* or *tsüngkotep sū* was considered a special shawl and is respected by the people
of Longkhum. The motifs on the shawl are a symbol of status, wealth and power and can only be worn by people who have hosted the feast of merit.

The following motifs may be woven on the mangkotep sū or tsüngkotep sū shawl depending on the status of the person.

1. Human’s head, shield, dao, spear, and cock: This motif represents a warrior.
2. Mithun’s Head: This motif represents wealth, which could be worn by only those who had host feast of merit.
3. Sun, moon and stars: This motifs could be worn by a ruler or an administrator.

Earlier ordinary people were not entitled to wear this shawl but today it has becomes a common shawl for every man they usually wear on festive occasions like as ‘moatsū’ and ‘tsüngremong’ and other formal occasion.

In the past people wear traditional ornaments like temkho, wazami, kümpang, khüptang, laküpmelong etc. The headdress temkho is a ring made of bear skin affixed with hornbill’s feather, ‘wazami’, kümpang is an armlet made of elephant tusk. Khüptang’ is made of goat’s hair or women’s hair dyed in red and woven with yellow and laküpmelong is a necklace made of cowry shells.
Today these traditional dress and ornaments are worn only on special occasion like festivals moatsü’ and ‘tsüngremong and also during cultural related programmes.

During the colonial period men were not allowed to wear langtem/ungen and may be deprived of any government jobs. Thus initially all the Primary School teachers and government employees began to wear Dhoti. Later on when the American missionary entered the area, they found the traditional dress langtem/ungen improper as it appeared more or less naked so they insisted that the villagers wear Dhoti instead, and all the Priests, teachers, and the government employees started wearing Dhoti. Subsequently this has been replaced by half pant (brownish in colour) indigenously called khaki half-pant and till 1947, all the male members commonly wore this. But after India attained independence and the subsequent evolvement of the Nagas in the Naga National movement, suspicion cropped up, as some of villagers were already involved in the Naga independence movement. The colour of the kaki half-pant being identical to the Assam Battalion uniform the Indian government banned the villagers from wearing khaki half- pant and empowered the Assam Battalion to capture any one wearing the same. Thus the villagers were force to abandon the kakhi half-pants. Instead they started wearing black half-pant, which were readily available in the nearby market of Mokokchung town.
The present generation prefers western cloths. Majority of them prefer jean pants, shirts, etc. Most of the educated one, during any social gatherings, student’s conference, church service etc, instead of wearing traditional dress, prefers formal dress such as coat, necktie, pant, shoes, etc. with shawl known as *tsüngkotep sū/ mangkotep sū*. It may be noted that this shawl which was entitled for rich men or warriors, has now become a common shawl for any men. Besides this they wear casual such as sweater, jacket, pant, shoes, socks, sneakers, cap etc. The youngsters prefer the latest outfits and dress available in the markets. Men go for western dress rather than wearing the Indian dhotis, or kurtas or their own traditional ones.

*Case study 1*

Meren age 20 a BA students studying in Mokokchung stated ‘I feel very awkward to wear traditional dress today as it is not suitable for the present life. If I wear the wear traditional attire as normal wear people would laugh at me. During any social gatherings, student’s conference, church service etc, I prefer formal dress such as coat, necktie, pant, shoes, etc. with shawl known as *tsüngkotep sū/ mangkotep sū*. It looks more grand and presentable today’.
Case study 2

Moa age 21 a B.Sc student studying in Mokokchung opined 'I had to wear school uniform when I go to schools and even in collage it is compulsory to wear college blazer. For other days I wear ready made garments which are readily available in markets. Thus there is no time to wear traditional dress and moreover traditional attires as 'normal wear' is not comfortable for the present generation'.

Dress & Ornaments for women

A little girl's first garment was a cotton string tied around her waist. At about five years old she was given her first skirt, which was white or black ornamented with embroidery colour and the pattern of which varied from village to village. The patterns also depend on the ascribed and achieved status of her father. A woman's body cloth was usually white or dark blue and till she attained motherhood it was generally bound tightly around the body under the armpits in order to prevent exposing her breast.

Women were also identified by a distinctive skirt sübeti/ anü which consist of a piece of cloth a yard and a half long and twenty to twenty inches long wrap round the waist with the top outer corner tucked just in front of the right hip. The patterns and the colour of the skirt however varied from clan to clan. Earlier chungli and mongsen women were distinguishable at a glance by the way they tie their hair. The former bind the bun round with strings made of
black thread, while the latter used strings of white thread. A shawl dyed in indigo mosak was most commonly worn. Other ornaments includes the arm sized coiled with bronze and brass yongmen were worn on both side above the ear, stringed by a thread across the head. A kind of earring called nharū about one and half-inch square, shining and transparent marble stones cut open on one side from the middle swings down the ear lope. A necklace known as alük/ asük of oval shaped beads which are red in colour and some round shaped blue beads and bells which are sparsely embedded in between the red beads are some of the ornaments for women.

Earlier, women of different clans and status were identified by the dresses they wear. Till 1940s women were very particular about their distinctive sūbeti/ anū. There was vast difference between the rich and poor in terms of dress and ornaments. However during mid 1940s the Village Conference proposed to have a common sūbeti/ anū known as waro nū, which was woven in red with melon-embroidered. It is observed that today they prefer to wear dresses which are available in the market as they are less expensive and available in numerous patterns. However it is very interesting to note that for any formal occasion like wedding, church etc the women prefer to wear traditional sūbeti/ anū as they believe this to be more decent and respectable than any other dress. Except for the elderly people, the younger generations have adopted western clothes like trousers, skirts,
jackets, blazers, frocks, blouses etc that can be procured easily from the markets.

It is observed that there are noticeable changes regarding dress and ornaments. Today one will hardly find in general men or women dressed in traditional attires all the time. However they do wear them during festivals, cultural programmes or during important social gatherings. Both men and women do not wear full traditional dress any more. Aged women continue to wear the traditional sübetü/ anü whereas the younger generation prefers western dress. There are many reasons for the preferences of western dress over the traditional one. Some of the reasons are: firstly the younger generations feel more comfortable as there are various dresses for all the seasons. Secondly, the demand for conformity with the accepted social living standards and this applies even to dress norms. For example, in schools, school uniforms are compulsory and this is one such example where there is no place for traditional dress.

Case study 3

This is a case of Achila age 21 a student of BA studying in Mokokchung. She said ‘it is very odd to wear traditional dress while going to college. Today with so many new trends in fashions, wearing of traditional dress now is unthinkable. I know traditional attires are beautiful and aesthetic but these are not suitable for college wear’.
Case study 4

Anungla age 20 a student of BA studying in Mokokchung said 'I cannot wear any of the traditional attire as I find it very uncomfortable. I feel more comfortable to wear western cloths as there are varities for all the seasons.

Case study 5

Atula age 27 educated unemployed stated 'why wear traditional dress when plenty of dresses of different design for all season are available in the market. If at all I am financially independent I would have tried all the beautiful dresses that are available in the market'. She further stated 'traditional dress is like a uniform in which everybody looks almost same'.

FOLKTALES:

The Story of Longkhum Struggle Against Nokrang:

According to the oral tradition, Longkhums' struggle against Nokrang is considered to be an important event amongst the Aos. Thus the Aos had given the sobriquet Aofonümro for Longkhum as it has played triple roles of being a crusader, defender and protector.

The story centers on a beautiful Nokrang girl and two beautiful Longkhum girls. During that time there flourished a powerful village known as
Nokrang, whose inhabitant did not belong to the Aos. The Nokrang village had impregnable natural fortress being located on a hilltop. The village itself was well fortified by high walls of stones, wood & bamboo spike thus was well protected and secured from all sides. Besides the natural defenses they had well-trained and ferocious dogs forming a part of the advance guards, the pursuit of which could not be withstood by any invaders. The Nokrang had a King who had a daughter of exquisite beauty. The fame of the beauty of this girl spread far and wide into the land of the neighbouring villages as far as Assam. The king of Assam heard of the fame of the beautiful Nokrang girl and wanted to know how beautiful she was.

The King of Assam ordered his nobles to meet the village King of Nokrang and ascertain his daughter’s beauty. They were all stunned by her beauty and when they brought the news, the King was overjoyed and immediately issued proclamation asking all the courtiers and noblemen to assemble for a council. After a prolong discussion, they decided to send a goodwill mission to the Nokrang King to negotiate for a marriage settlement.

The mission proceeded with the marriage proposal. However the King of Nokrang was reluctant to send away his daughter to a distance place, so he conveyed his unwillingness to agree although he felt that it was foolish on his part to decline a King’s proposal. Undaunted by the initial refusal, the King dispatched another delegation with a will that he would give anything as
the price for the girl. The girl’s father was perfectly aware that the King was capable of giving anything he would demand and finally he appealed to the King of Assam to present him with a hornbill which had double strips on its feathers as he knew that such type of bird was not in existence in order to prevent the King from taking away his daughter from him.

Now, it was the turn of the King of Assam to play his game. He ordered a group of experts to catch a hornbill. At last they caught a hornbill but it was without the double black strips on its feathers. The king therefore embarked upon a cunning device to outwit the King of Nokrang by dyeing the feathers with a black dye, which looked exactly like the one demanded by the King of Nokrang. The King of Nokrang was completely shocked at seeing it and regretted that his trick failed miserably. At last he had no option but to give away his daughters as promised. He and his daughter bid tearful farewell. The King of Nokrang became sullen and sad. He missed the absence of his daughter and decided to hand over the bird to a young man for safe keeping. The bird was kept in a cage for several years and it became tamed and so it was set free. The bird used to fly to the nearby forest during the daytime and returned in the evening. However one day the bird was seen flying in another direction towards the Longkhum village and did not return.
During that time there was a wealthy and powerful Chief in the Longkhum village who had many servants and one of them was a man named Mezabang who was an expert in hunting specially catching birds. One fine evening he caught a hornbill with a double black strip plumes. The news of the wonderful bird spread like wildfire and they believed that it was a bird from paradise. The people of the Longkhum village held a council meeting and it was decided that the plumes of the hornbill should be shown to all the Ao villages because of its unique feathers. Two beautiful girls from the Longkhum village named Acharongmang and Jaksüngnaro whose dazzling and entrenching beauty was known by the entire Ao community were unanimously selected for the mission. They departed from the village with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. After traveling for many days and on the day they were to cross the Mopungchuket village, the entire villagers of that village were engaged in clearing a foot path which was a beautiful and ribbon-like path leading towards the Khar village in the west. The girls could not endure the glaring stares of the huge crowd. The people then gave a loud shout saying that they are fortunate to get two heads of two beautiful girls without going far. It was during the age of head hunting. The girls to find an escape route from this situation and composed a song and sang it to the crowd. The song enchanted the villagers and allowed them to leave without losing their heads.
Finally they reached the Nokrang village. The King's sons recognized the plumes of the hornbill, which belongs to them and reported to their father. The King was so enraged at seeing the plumes promptly announced the villagers to assemble and without investigating the circumstances of the plumes the girls were put under arrest, tortured them by every conceivable means throughout the night. Their fleshes were pierced with red-hot iron spikes and were put to death in the morning and their mortal remains were thrown down the rock precipice, thus perished the finest flowers of Longkhum.

There was no information about the girls after they had departed from the village two months ago. The Longkhum villagers organized a search party and they came to know about the circumstances and the manner leading to their death at the Nokrang village. A meeting was called for the whole villagers and they unanimously decided to fight against the Nokrangs. During that time there was a brave warrior by the name Pentochepchep who had hunted countless number of heads. A group of 29 warriors who were distinguished themselves in various acts of heroism were selected under the leadership of Pentochepchep for the mission. They prepared provision for many days but were delayed by 30 days due to the birth of a son to Pentochepchep. After the completion of 30 days their departure schedule was fixed the following day. They announced to the villagers that they would return with a couple of heads from Nokrang as they did not have any head from the
Nokrang so far to adorn the village in spite of the loss of many lives. On the eve of the departure while retiring to bed Pentochepechep told his wife to take good care of their children and fields as he was going to fight for the welfare of the village but if he fails to come back his sacrifice should not be in vain. That night his sleep was disturbed by a horrible dream. He was aware that his dream seen in the first hour always came true. He woke up and sat silently for a while pondering over the dream he saw. From his dream he was aware that he was going to die, but a man of his caliber did not wish to believe in dreams. He woke up his wife and narrated the dream in detail. In his dream he found himself in the enemy’s territory wearing white flowers in both of his ears and in a twinkling of an eye his village was swept out of existence by a heavy landslide. His wife on hearing his dream tried to prevent him from going to the war, as she too had a premonition that something terrible was going to happen. She tried to stop him by saying that he has plenty of prestige and honour in his name and an untimely death would be a regrettable loss. But nothing could stop him.

The mission was undertaken in the month between April- May. Pentochepechep and his band of warriors reached the Changkikong range and looked down from the hilltop and surveyed the land towards Nokrang. They started to march to the village but the dogs of Nokrang village became aware of their presence and started barking and pursuing them. They fled from the dogs and took shelter in a cave. On seeing the images of the warrior in the
water just below the cave, the dogs started barking louder than ever but the Nokrangs villagers called the dogs back to the village. Many days had passed in this manner and foods were running short. Some of them suggested that they should go back to the village and come back with better equipped and with more warriors. But Pentochepchep encouraged them by saying that they should expect something within a day or two and after that only the future course of action could be decided. All the members accepted his suggestion and stayed for two to three days more during which an important event took place. They once again marched towards the Nokrang village but were chased by the dogs and took shelter in the cave again. The dogs started barking ferociously at the water so an old man of the Nokrang village looked down at the water and saw images of the warriors in the cave. He raised aloud alarm to the villagers who were following the dogs. After a while the place was swarming with the Nokrangs villagers like ants. They had divided themselves into age groups: some brought long bamboos and others started piercing those in the cave with the long spiked bamboos. The Nokrangs gave out a loud cry, which shocked the earth to its very foundation.

The Nokrangs strike the bamboos into the cave consistently and Pentochepchep and his band cut off the tip of the bamboos one after another. Pentochepchep encouraged his men to be more courageous and strive hard to defend themselves, as there would not be anyone to carry the news if all of them perished there. The Nokrangs pierced inside the cave with loud cries.
They defended themselves up to the afternoon of the following day. The great Tsürang River was filled with bamboos. The Longkhum warrior's limbs were bleeding from wounds and they were weary and tired and by the next evening, the gallant warriors were killed one after the other. The Nokrangs villagers gave loud cries of jubilation. Only Pentochepegcep and Toshiba a young warrior survived in the cave. Pentochepegcep asked Toshiba to hide in the corner and cut the bamboo spikes with all his might. When Pentochepegcep became exhausted Toshiba took his place and continued to defend themselves. At that moment a bird flew in before him. He talked to the bird 'O, bird of Longtrok, you know we'll have no messenger. So you take the news of our disaster to my wife and the villagers'. After killing 28 warriors of the Longkhum village, the Nokrang villagers held a council meeting and resolved to capture any survivor in the cave. During the lull Pentochepegcep said to Toshiba that he would be the only survivor and one day he would become a leader and so he should be brave, patient and love his own villagers and when the Longkhum village is full of the heads from Nokrangs village, there would be great celebration at which the departed souls would look smilingly at them. He asked Toshiba to remember to keep a sign to immortalize the exact place where the warriors had perished. He then gave a loud cry which echoed in the cave and the valley and cut off the bamboo spikes with the last ounce of his strength and by sunset he was exhausted and could not defend himself anymore. When he was about to fall from the cave, he shouted not to rejoice in his fall in their arms, as there were amny
young warriors of the Longkhum village, countless as stars to avenge his death. A young man climbed up to the cave and found Toshiba in a corner and shouted that there was a small child. Toshiba life was spared and was taken to the house of the King. Thus the Nokrangs annihilated the bravest heroes of Longkhum village. The death of Pentochepechep and the capture of Toshiba marked the climax of the glory of the Nokrangs. However, the captivity of Toshiba was the beginning of the end of the powerful Nokrangs.

In the Longkhum village an atmosphere of gloom and desolation prevailed because the warriors did not return for a long time. The villagers wondered and at that point of time a bird came to the village and started flying around singing 'Pentochepechep is dead'. It was the very bird that he had sent as messenger. The message of the bird was believed to be true by all and a day of mourning was observed in memory of those valiant and heroic souls perished in an unknown land. They were of firm conviction that all the thirty warriors were killed.

However, unknown to the Longkhum villagers, the sparing of Toshiba's life as a slave in the King's house of the Nokrang village had a far-reaching consequence. As a slave he tried to please his master by doing everything liked by him. Within a few months he won the confidence of the King who entrusted him to control all other slaves. In due course of time he grew up into a handsome young and talented warrior. His master had granted
him freedom of movement. However, in his heart he was always thinking of escaping from the Nokrang village. The walls were very high and below on the ground were fixed bamboo spikes. He had to spend a lot of time practicing high jump with the help of a pole. Escape in an ordinary manner was humanly impossible. Many young girls and even married women started liking him. He also received special attention from the King and his wife for his sincerity and good character. The admiration from the womenfolk and the special treatment from the King aroused jealousy of the young men of Nokrang village and they conspired against him and poisoned the minds of the King and his wife. They said that if they allowed the young man to live for a long time he would send message to the Longkhum village which would avenge them therefore setting him free would be worse. Moreover they accused of being an adulterer who had defiled the village. The King however refused to believe their report and refused to kill Toshiba. However, the King was forced to consent to a murder plot in the name of unity and safeguarding of the village. Toshiba being very smart learnt about the conspiracy of his murder from his female admirers. He remained alert and vigilant all the time and was fully prepared with the idea of jumping over the high walls.

Having hatched the idea to kill him, the Nokrang villagers approached Toshiba flattering him as being the most handsome and the best dancer in the village. And therefore on specific day, he should entertain the whole villagers by jumping, dancing, shouting, running up and down for seven
Toshiba accepted the proposal quite willingly. He pretended as if he was unaware of the conspiracy against him. Many girls and women were worried because they knew that the days for Toshiba's were numbered. They knew he was going to die on that day. But in spite of their pity he did not reveal his secret plan of escape instead he replied them that what was feted could not be avoided. That night he conversed with the King and his wife for a long time but he did not reveal the secret plot to them. The next morning he woke up early in the morning and asked for the particular attire from the King who gladly provided him. The whole villagers assembled and looked anxiously towards the direction where Toshiba was to emerge. Like a cock full of grandeur Toshiba appeared in the scene. He could see young girls and women weeping and on the other hand young men gashing their teeth. Toshiba addressed the people by saying that it was a great honour for a person like him to participate in such occasion. But they might be disappointed as his role might not be up to their expectations. Nobody in the crowd could correctly comprehend the meaning of his speech and took it lightly. He started giving a loud cry and danced up and down. He knew that they had planned to kill him on the seventh time of his performance and they were ready by the time Toshiba was to come for the seventh time. He ran up at full speed in the sixth time, like wildfire to jump over the wall in the seventh time. Seeing this haste the villagers doubted they might not be able to kill him and on the other hand the women and girls started to weep openly. In the seventh time Toshiba speed up with all his strength and jumped over the wall.
and disappeared from the view. From outside the wall he shouted from the
top of his voice ‘O Nokrangs if you have men try to catch me, I am Toshiba ‘Eagle’ flying up to Longkhum’. The young men ready to spear him were
stunned. They opened the gate and chased him up to the border of their
territory but in vain. The fate of the Nokrang was decided.

As swift as the wind Toshiba reached the Waromong village and
recalled the past events about the death of Pentochepchep and his friends
and specially remembered Pentochepchep’s last speech. He was unable to
believe whether his escape to freedom was certainly a reality. After he
reached Waromong he went straight to the house of the ‘Chief of elders’,
Loyangpong. He and his wife Akangla welcome him heartily and nursed and
nourished him properly with love and care. Toshiba narrated in detail the
genesis of the struggle between the Longkhum and the Nokrang and his
adventures. Akangla could not believed that the struggle still continues for
such a long time as she had heard about the killing of the two Longkhum girls
long ago when she was a child. Toshiba further added the main reason
behind their failure was that they were put helpless in the face of ferocious
dogs. Akangla comforted him and told not to worry about the dogs, as she
knows an artifice to incapacitate them. Toshiba agreed that if only they could
deal with the dogs there would be no problem with the Nokrang warriors.
Akangla assured that she would handle the dogs but did not disclose how she
would do. Toshiba promised that he would come back and left.
Day and night he hastened with all speed and finally reached the Longkhum as if in a dream. He was worried how to meet the families of those who had perished in the Nokrang village. That very night Toshiba addressed the assembled crowd, and narrated in minute details leading to the death of his friends and Pentocepchep's last word and also about the way he made his escape from the Nokrang village. Finally he asked the villagers if they would avenge the death of so many great warriors. The village elders were pessimistic about it as nearly for four generations they could not conquered the Nokrang village. However after a long discussion they finally decided to take revenge.

Many young warriors from every clan volunteered and on the eve of the departure all the villagers offered prayer and sacrifices to the God of Longlangba the God they always worshiped before undertaking any war. The large group left the village amidst cheerful sendoff from the people. As they reached the Waromong the people of Waromong accorded them a warm reception and a great feast was arranged in their honour. A day of rest was proclaimed and on that day the women were asked to wash their heads and to collect the fallen hairs accumulated in combs. The hairs thus collected would be used for a special purpose created by none other than Akangla. She then asked a group of people to cook sufficient quantity of sticky rice to be mixed with hairs and to make a numbers of small lumps.
The next day Akangla accompanied by some people carrying baskets full of lumps of sticky rice and presented to the Longkhum warriors. She briefed them with her ideas; and was asked them to simply throw the lump when the dogs start barking and chasing them. When the dogs ate the lump it got stuck in the mouth and throat and the dogs struggled with it they could kill dogs and overpower them. Congratulating the people of Waromong and credited them for their valuable service they left the village in the midst of great jubilation. They descended from the hill and reached the Tsürang valley. They surveyed the cave and were overwhelmed with grief and anger and lamented the irreplaceable loss of the heroic souls. After spending the night in the forest, the next morning they advanced towards the village and on reaching the enemy's territory they halted and refreshed themselves. Altogether they were 823 warriors, strong and courageous. Before reaching the village they were detected by a sentry who alerted the entire Nokrang village. With the beatings of log drums they released their ferocious dogs. The warriors of Longkhum began to beat their shields with daos and gave out a loud war cry. The glittering of daos and spears in the sunshine sparkled like lightning. They were sure that the God of Longlangba was with them.

In the first wave of the attack, they threw the lumps to the dogs and when the dogs tried to eat, it got stuck and they were able to killed one after the other. They easily killed all the dogs and marched against the wall to
break in. They removed all the bamboo spikes fixed on the ground. The Nokrang villagers who were fully dependent on the dogs were stunned by the power of the Longkhum warriors. As they tried to break in the wall, they were attacked with spears, stones etc however, they could withstand the repeated attacks and captured the village. Seeing the gallantry of the Longkhum warriors, the Nokrang villagers retreated. The Longkhum warriors burnt down the Nokrang village. The Nokrang villagers fled and took shelter in Assam. Consequently the Nokrang villagers dispersed to different places.

Thus the people of Longkhum wrecked a terrible vengeance on the Nokrang and blotted it out of existence from the face of the earth. Toshiba revered the actual place where the heads of Pentochepeghep and his warriors were kept. As they stood in the ruins of the Nokrang, they were overwhelmed with joy and contentment and could imagine the smiles on the faces of the fallen heroes.

They left the ruin site of the Nokrang and reached the Waromong village and spent the night with the villagers. Meanwhile the Waromong villagers rejoiced in the victory, the warriors of the Longkhum attributed their victory to the brilliant devise of Akangla and her husband Loyangpong. The next morning they reached the village and celebrated the victory with great jubilation.
Creation of Earth:

The Aos believed that it was Lijaba who created the earth and all living things and vegetation upon it. First he created the plain areas of Assam and when he was about to create the Ao areas, a cockroach announced that enemies are approaching. Thus out of fear he created the Ao areas hastily making its terrain steep and rugged.

Division of Day & Night:

In the beginning there was no daylight and there was constant bloodshed between animals and human being. They affirmed to bring a solution to end this perpetual bloodshed. All birds and animals convened a meeting to discuss about the problems. After a long discussion the owl opined that there should either be a day or night forever. However, many disagreed with the owl's opinion and out of discontentment all the animals trampled the owl. Hence the head of the owl become flattened. Further the owl was expelled from the bird community. Thus till today owls comes out of the nest at night only. After a long discussion, a bird known as Jempongno suggested that there should be both day and night alternately. All were delighted by the suggestion of Jempongno and out of ecstasy all animals caressed and embraced him; hence its body became small. They unanimously agreed and decided to approach the sun to divide day and night. The cock volunteered for the mission and went to meet the Sun (zoni). The sun assured that their problem would be solved and asked the Sun to adhere to some of his
instruction. The first instruction was that the cock should crow when the sun wakes up from his sleep so that all animals should be prepared to proceed to the jungle. Secondly, as the Sun rises the cock should crow for a second time, so that on hearing it all animals should immediately proceed to the jungle. Third crow would be when the Sun ascends higher and bestow light to the earth. The Cock agreed to abide the instruction and returned with great joy. On its return they convened a meeting and delivered the assurances that sun had given. Thus from that day onward the cock started to crow thrice before dawn and both animals and human beings began to live peacefully and happily ever after.

**The Story of Pig and Dog:**

Since olden days, the animals that lived closest to man were pig (aok/ak) and dog (ai/azü). One day, the master sent them to work in his field. While the pig worked throughout the day, the dog calmly slept all day long in the shed. The pig went home after working so hard and reported to the master about his hard work and the dog’s laziness.

The dog was so cunning that it stayed back in the field and replaced the impression of the pig’s footprints; the dog went home late to convince the master that he had worked very hard. The pig and the dog quarreled in front of the master defending their own rights. The master adjourned that truth would be confirmed the next day.
The following day the master went to the field and found only the footprints of the dog. The master was convinced by the footprints of the dog and chased the pig away from his house and allowed the dog to live with him.

**Crushing of Deer’s ornaments**

One day all animals were invited by the God, Lijaba to his courtyard for a feast. While the deer was searching for dress and ornaments for that occasion, the fox known to be the deer’s best friend, snatched the ornaments belonged to squirrel and gave to his friend deer. When the deer was drying the shell, the earring, etc in the sun, the angry squirrel recognized his ornaments. Thus out of anger; the squirrel deliberately unfastened a dead branch from the tree and smashed the ornaments into pieces. Out of anger and disappointment, the deer jumped and trampled an earthworm that was basking in the sun. Out of pain the earthworm moved violently and accidentally smashed the eggs of a wild fowl. The fowl out of discontentment spoiled the field which happened to be the field of Lijaba. Out of anger Lijaba held the fowl and questioned the reason for causing such a great damage to his field. The fowl expressed her disappointment to the earthworm that had smashed her eggs. The earthworm in turn accused the deer for trampling him. The deer blamed the squirrel for spoiling her ornaments. The squirrel blames fox for snatching the ornaments.
Thus, Lijaba apprehended the root of all the destructions. Lijaba trapped fox in a basket and went to fetch hot water to kill the fox, before Lijaba return, the fox designed a cunning idea to escape from the trap. The fox called all animals and asked every animal what meat they preferred. When a wild cat suggests his preference, the fox asked the cat to first unfasten the trap, and the fox immediately trap the cat in the basket.

On his return Lijaba poured the hot water in the basket, without knowing the trick played by the fox. When the cat scream out of pain, Lijaba realized that it was not the cunning fox but his innocent grandson, hence he released the cat from the trap.

A story of two lovers:

Once there was a handsome boy by the name Mangchanger who fell in love with a beautiful girl Tsügenrongmang. But unfortunately the boy’s parents disapproved their relationship. He waited for a longtime with a hope that his parents would agree one day. However his parents became more adamant as time goes by. He became frustrated and an extreme idea struck his mind.

The next day, on their way to the field he expressed his anguish to his girlfriend. Just before they parted, he asked his girlfriend if she would like to carry firewood on her return. She agreed to his offer and decided to carry the firewood collected by him. On her return she found her boyfriend hanged
above a decorated platform nearby a huge tree. On seeing his dead, she broke down however she cried in silence to prevent from hearing by any passerby.

Meanwhile the boy's parents were worried about their son, when he did not return home for two-three days. They searched for him but in vain so finally the boy's mother approached the girlfriend to which she replied through a song. But the boy's mother could not comprehend what she was saying. The mother sent her younger son to persuade the girl to indicate the place where they could locate him. One night the younger brother of the dead visited the dormitory of his brother's girlfriend and requested her to disclose the secrets. She again replied with the song indicating the place where they would find him.

The following morning the boy's relatives rushed to the spot where they found the dead body. They were stunned by the tragic end of their beloved and the mother regretted for the rest of her life for the adamant stand.