Chapter- 3

SOME ASPECTS OF EARLY AO NAGA SOCIETY

3.1 Early Settlements of Ao villages

Aos after crossing the Dihku River settled in a fertile, forested virgin land with broad, plain elevation, which they named as Aonglenden (Aong- forested land, lenden- plain). The Aos consist of both the Chungli and Mongsen groups which are supposed to have crossed the river together. As they were staying at Aonglenden, the legend has it that one night ten women gave birth to ten sons. Thus the place came to be known as Soyim (So- birth, Yim- village), meaning *birth village of ten sons*. However, this new settlement had to be abandoned within a short period of time as the son of the Unger (Councilor or chief) was killed by a tiger. They migrated to another place called as Koridang (Kori- plant fiber rob for holding the basket, dang- broken).

From Koridang, Aos scattered to different places. Due to the shortage of water, food and other problems compelled a group of people of Koridang to leave the place and move to another to form a new village. Oral tradition says that since they went away from Koridang, the name Kupza (meaning ‘going into’) was given to that group and their village is known as Kupza today.

While at Koridang, another group of people went back to Soyim and called that place as Ungma (meaning ‘loss of Unger’). It is said that when this group were staying at Ungma, a man called Kuradi, went for hunting and found a new place suitable for habitation. Returning to his village he suggested to some of his friends to settle in the newly found place. However, the people of Soyim/Ungma did not agree to his proposition. The villagers pleaded not to go away and wanted to stay together but the group determined to leave, did not listen to villagers. They went apart from the parent village and established a new village in defiance of the wishes of the parent village and named it as Mokokchung village (‘Mokok’ means ‘defiance’ and ‘Chung’ means ‘refuse/stop’).
There was another group under the leadership of one, Okipong Longkum at Koridang. This group discovered a hillock away from Koridang and decided to occupy that area. The setting of the hillock gives an aerial view of the whole hilly region including the plains of Assam, hills of Arunachal and even the Himalayas. Okipong died before the new village was established. However under the leadership of Yarang and Namo, the village was formed and named as Longkhum village (in Ao Mongsen language, ‘Long’ means stone and ‘khum’ means support/protect, meaning ‘stone support/protect village’). When the Longkhum villagers were staying together, a group of people decided to leave and form a new village called ‘Merasa’, a little away from Longkhum village. Later a group of people from Rito (discussed below) joined the village. Oral tradition says that there was a person in that group, who left the smoke dried corpse of his wife Yasanaro just at the gate of the upper Khel or müphu of the Merasa village. Since then the name Merasa was changed to Mangmetong (‘Mang’ means Corpse, ‘metong’ means leaning) (Longchar 2002: 118)

Meanwhile at Mokokchung village people began to migrate to different areas and form villages. A group of people migrated to a new area and established a village called as Khensa meaning ‘where song is sung’. The oral narrative says that, two persons, Koriba and Petisung, saw a dream where in an elevated area God was singing. Searching for that, they found an area exactly similar to that seen in the dream and migrated there, naming the village as ‘Khensa’. Two other groups left Mokokchung village on the same day in search of new places for settlement. One group reached their destination first within the same day and the name of the village was given as Aliba (meaning fillip reaching). The other group reached later to a new site where they removed the lungmi (bamboos) and settled. For this reason the village was named as Lungmiasang (Tall bamboo). However when the Ariju (murong) of the Rito village was destroyed by a storm a small part of it felled at the area near Lungmiasang, thus the name of the village was changed to Mopungchuket (wind passage) (Longchar 2002:125).

The above mentioned are oral narratives on some of the early Ao Naga village migration and settlement. Secondly, the candidate has emphasized more on the aspects like migration and

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1 Interview with T Senka Ao 2015
settlements of villages which are referred to in the thesis. Many other Ao villages like Changki and Longsa did not enter Aonglenden, and there are many other Ao groups which migrated from Koridang and formed villages. Also, there are villages which are off shoots from a parent village like Mangmetong, Khensa, Japu, Mekuli, Aonokpu etc.

3.2 Early Ao village formation and society

Village plays an important role in the formation of Ao society. Hence a village cannot be established by its own. It needs various factors of social importance. Whenever it became necessary for the Ao’s to establish a new village, the geographical topography of the new site and its picturesque view was reconnoitered carefully. The early Ao society was a society of headhunters and it was essential to save from the hand of the enemies. Enmity with any village landed in headhunting the enemy’s village. In order to select a site for habitation a hillock was searched and occupied. This strategic location of a hillock offered best defense against enemies attack. Though there can be some elevated plains around, a hillock was preferred for habitation (Fig.3.1). Secondly, availability of water sources was an important consideration for the Aos in selecting the location of a village. There are villages or sites which are abandoned due to drying up of water sources. Therefore at least two perennial sources of water were essential requirements for selecting a village site. Thirdly, accessibility to forested areas where the villagers could collect woods and hunt animals for food and for providing land for later usage was looked into².

In addition to the natural suitability, Ao’s also draw lots from dreams before they took over a new site. Only when luck was in their favor and dreams propitious that they decided to move in to the new place. A batch of selected people representing as many clans of the group or the village would first go to the site for inspections. A portion of land digging at the site is carried out to know the fertility of the soil. First they will dig a hole and refill the dugout. If the soil which has been taken out does not fill up the hole again the site is discarded. However, if the soil

² Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
after filling up is left over with some more soil, it shows sign of a fertile land and the land is
taken over for cultivation and settlement³.

The shifting of the village or the group to a new site is decided mostly after a year’s harvest. While forming a village at least some clans are required. Since Ao is an exogamous society, intermarriage within the village required at least some few different clans. Each village constituted several exogamic clans, with each clans composing of several lineages and phratic groups. The selected site is cleared of the jungle and important sites like the selection of the ‘Morung’ or ‘Arju’ (Bachelors’ Hall); the housing of the village war drum –Sungkong and other common activity area is selected. The ‘Arju’ meaning, Ar- enemy, ju- clash/meet/fight –‘where one meets or fights with the enemy’, is always constructed near the village gate at the entrance of the village and the sünkong (log drum)is also kept near the Arju so that any information or turning up of enemies could be made through it (Fig. 3.2). On each end of the village there are gates. In the olden days, it was closed with a wooden door hewn out of a single piece of wood and designed with carves circles (Fig. 3.3). These days, village gates exist; it does not have doors

³ Interview with T Senka Ao, 2014
and are mostly made of bricks and cement, with the usage of wood in some villages just for decoration (Fig. 3.4). Another important feature of the village is that every village is surrounded by a belt of bamboo clump and light jungle so that it can provide woods and other necessities to the inhabitants of the village.

Fig. 3.2: *Arju* (middle), *süngkong* (right) and common seating place (left) (After Mills 1925)

Fig. 3.3: Wooden village gate, Merangkong village (After JP Mills, 1926)
The rest of the village land is divided between all the clans of the village for the construction of dwelling houses and for the cultivation of crops. Each married clan member construct their houses at their provided clan land within a definite distance between houses (mostly the measurement of stretching both the hands which comes about two meters is taken as the distance), and gets a share of land for cultivation. The villages are divided into localities or müphu, largely, representing a clan, or a group representing various clans, having joined the village into stages. In certain Ao villages, where the Chungli and Mongsen groups prevailed, each occupy a separate müphu, forming its own council of elders for administration. The village however, united as one against a common foe. An Ao Naga village can also be divided into two segments as yimpang (beginning part of village) and yimlang (end part of village). This division often gets created due to misunderstandings in the village council⁴. Both the segments will have different village council and morung or arju. However if there is an issue pertaining to the village as a whole both of them gets united to deal with such issues like war, famine, fire and wild animals.

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⁴ Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
Whoever comes as pioneers of the new village are recognized as ‘yimkumer’- village founders. They are included and given lands within the division of the village for cultivation. Those who come late are recognized as ‘ainer’- outsiders. The ‘ainers’ adopts or makes one of the founding clans as their father clan and can get land from his adopted father’s clan where they can cultivate\(^5\). They are dependent on their adopted clan for its activities within the village.

The village served as a natural unit organization, self contained, self productive and like all other Naga tribes, the real political unit of the tribe was the village. It is the most central for a person’s identity besides his clan. Ao (1980: 89) asserts that an Ao village is highly organized unit in which every man of the village renders his services to the village. He contributes and subscribes for the service of his village. Each village carried their own spears and fought for themselves\(^6\). An Ao village could fight with any Ao village and an Ao head was good as any other (Mills 1926:176). However a feeling of oneness prevailed and distinction was drawn from an outsider and an Ao and if required help was extended to each other villages during times of needs and wars. Wars of headhunting begin if there is an enmity between two villages due to boundary disputes, on issue of land acquisition and infiltration and on issues like on exchange, killing of villagers and such social issues. If there is bloodshed between any village, intermarriages and exchange or any contact between the villages is strictly avoided. It is believed that intermarriages between such villages (if there are), during its enmity, do not invoke blessings but are cursed with loss of life, lack of offspring and no marital bless\(^7\).

The boundary of a village is demarcated on the land from all its north, south, east, west directions. It can be in the form of a river, forest or hillock which can be as a boundary between villages. While forming a village the boundary is always kept in mind to demarcate “my land” and “your land”. No outsiders could infiltrate or use the land within the villages’ jurisdiction without prior permission. However, the river or the forest that sets a boundary between villages could be used by both the parties for fishing or for hunting.

\(^5\) Interview with Bendangangshi lmsong 2015  
\(^6\) Interview with L T Maja Longkumer, 2015  
\(^7\) Interview with Bendangashi lmsong, 2015
The formation (creation) of Ao Naga villages may be due to various reasons like over population leaving no scope for further expansion or any social reasons such as misgivings/misunderstanding between the inhabitants which cannot be resolved and people part ways and carve out a new village in the neighborhood. Abandonment of a village may also occur owing to shortage of water supply, lack of strategic physiographic locations providing natural defense and absence of suitable land for better harvest. Abandonment is decided by the common consensus of the villagers headed by the village council- putu menden. However there are instances where only a group of people leaves the village due to population pressure or moving out for better pasture or in some instances the episodes of misunderstanding between the fellow villagers.

3.3 Tenancy of Land among the Ao’s

Land is sacred and close to Ao society. According to them, without land there is no village-society, no culture, no production and no livelihood. The land system of the Aos has its foundation on the origin of the village. A good land is an asset for the village’s prosperity as economy was tied up with land. The main feast of the Aos- Moatsu and Tsungremong each year is invoking God’s blessing on cultivation and praising god for good harvest. This reflects the importance of land. If the land is not suitable for habitation, it reflects a non suitability for cultivation. Thus economy and land was tied up in the early Ao society. The village land and boundaries are guarded and any encroachments, stealing or disputes related to land is strictly dealt with, and sometimes cursed for generations.

Cultivators have very clear and intricately articulated ideas about the distinctions between personal land, family land and village land (Lloyd 1962). Thus even for the Ao Nagas, there are three types of lands within a village. They are village (common), clan and individual land. The village and the clan land are demarcated when a village is formed. Individual lands are later properties. The village under the guidance of the village council- has a common land which can be a village ground for general gatherings, the site for village gate, arju or morung, log drum etc. These types of sites are open to all the villagers. Also the adjoining forested areas around the village come under such land. Clan lands are those which are divided into the founding clans of
the village for cultivation, collecting of woods and other domestic use. Individual lands are those which an individual may acquire like a piece of land as a prescriptive right on the land he is cultivating or a clan could transfer a piece of land to an aggrieved party as a fine inflicted on one of its members, or a clan would become reduced in numbers and the survivors would sell off their surplus land to individuals of other clans. In another case, if a man dies leaving no heir, his nearest relative shall inherit his land. Otherwise it shall become the clans land. However, all the village members are free to hunt, fish on all the lands within the village. An outsider trespassing or hunting at the village is dealt with under that specific village law.

3.4 House planning in Ao settlements

Ao houses vary in structures indicating the status of the owner (Mills 1925: 83). These variations are confined to the front of the house and the decoration of the roof indicating the kind of feast of merit the owner has given (Fig. 3.5 and 3.6). The plan of the main structure of the house remains the same. According to Mills (1926:84) the houses vary little in size, restricting on the spread of the house. It consist of a small front room (chin for chungli, tiyung for mongsen), a large main room (kilung for chungli, aki tetsung for mongsen) and at the back a sitting out platform (sünglang for chungli, sabang for mongsen). Houses are set up on post making holes on the rock. The small front room is on the ground level, the main room on piles and the back sitting outs are on platform. An average house measures 25 feet long by 14 feet broad, with a platform at the back measuring 11 feet long by 14 feet broad. (Mills. 1926: 84) (Fig.3.7). No particular orientation of the house is favored but it is believed that houses should not be built exactly opposite each other, or evil influence will be carried straight out of the door of one house into the one facing it.
Fig. 3.5: Poor men’s house (After Mills 1925)

Fig. 3.6: A rich men’s house (After Mills 1925)
3.5 Social markers through cloths and ornaments

Clothings identified a man in Ao Naga society. The kind of shawls and ornaments he wore were markers to denote which clan he belongs, how wealthy one is and whether he has achieved in wars. Women shawl and supeti (wrap around) and her ornaments show the clan she belongs to and whether she is a rich men’s wife or daughter irrespective of the clan. The typical and most precious Ao women’s necklace contains large carnelian beads alternating with miniature trumpet-shaped metal ornaments. The more the carnelian beads at the necklace, the richer the wearer (Fig. 3.8). Ornaments mark the holder’s membership in a certain clan, age group, or rank. It also reflects that a person has performed certain rituals or ceremonies. It furthermore expresses status and power of the wearer, the right to wear certain types of clothes and necklaces. Thus there was distinction between the rich and poor in the society which was identified by the kind of clothes and the jewelers they wore. There are various songs sung for the rich as well as ballads sung by the poor, reflecting on the social status. This provides a fitting commentary on the kind of distinction between the rich and the poor. The position of the poor is recalled in a ballet of the Aos:
Not loved in this world
I cry alone
After my death to my fellow beings
Be good
I don’t have anyone to love me
I am alone
Turning one side showed tongue
Turning one side spitted on me
Nowhere to turn
I rather die at my courtyard
How do I die
How I envy and want to become like the rich women
Oh the rich women
Jeweled up in carnelian necklace
Smelling the fresh sweet wine
Drinking the fresh water from the rivers mouth
Oh a poor women’s life
Wearing charcoal necklace
With wild fruits in the mouth
Drinks the water from the end of the rivers mouth

This ballet reveals that there was distinction between the rich and poor in the society which was identified by the kind of clothes and the ornaments they wore. A popular shawl worn by any Ao men today is the ‘Tsungkotepsü’ or ‘Mangkotepsü’ shawl (Fig. 3. 9). It has a red and white shawl with a white strip in the middle. The white strip is about four inches in breadth and on it are drawings of cocks, tiger, lion, mithun, elephant, hornbill, sun, and moon, chaplee (ancient Naga currency, dao (machete), spears, and skulls. Originally the wearer of this shawl indicated that he has taken a head. It was meant for the warriors to wear it. With the addition of mithun and chaplee, it portrayed that the wearer has done a mithun sacrifice thus recognizing the rich to wear it. Also, the administrators like the putu menden started to wear it with the addition of the sun,

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8 Interview with Bendanganshi Imsong 2015
moon star etc. Thus it became a common shawl for the Ao men folk to wear it in any occasion. Another shawl is the Tabensasu and Takarsu (Fig.3. 10), which was worn in the early society by the rich men only irrespective of its clan. Only those men whose grandfather, father and they themselves had each offered mithun sacrifice twice were entitled to wear this shawl.\textsuperscript{9} Rongnüsü (Fig.3.11). It is the most decorative in the Ao cloth and the most difficult to earn (Mills. 1925:35) it can be worn by a person whose grandfather, father and they themselves have done a mithun sacrifice. The pattern consists of alternate narrow bands of dark blue and red, with occasional light blue line. All over it are thick bunches of goats hair dyed red and edge with tassels of red and black goats’ hair ornamented with cowries.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{fig3.8.jpg}
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{fig3.9.jpg}
\caption{Fig. 3.8: Rich Women’s Necklace (After Jacobs 1990) \hspace{1cm} Fig. 3.9: Tsungkotepsü}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{fig3.10.jpg}
\caption{Fig. 3.10: Takarsü (After Jacobs 1990)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{9} Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
Ornaments of the Aos are connected with war, feast of merit and the individual clans. The right to wear the ornament of a warrior can be bought by the rich in the form of feast of merit. Ornaments for the Aos have certain hereditary privileges which are resentfully guarded by the specific clans. An interesting oral narrative of the Aos (Mills 1926: 42-43) talks about an issue between the men folks of Pongen and Longkumer clan on their right to wear armlets and how it was taken over to the Raja of Assam for settlement. The oral tradition says that rivalry arose between the Pongen and Longkumer clan regarding the right to wear certain ornaments. Pongen clan was represented by Rosangba and Longkumer clan by Mangyanger. It is said that Mangyanger was more handsome and smarter, a great traveler with many friends than Rosangba. Thus he tried to deprive Rosangba by persuading him to go to the plain and lay their case before the Chuba (chuba-King, Ahom Raja). The King after hearing their case put the two to a series of tests. He made them sit on a log of wood, which Mangyanger chose the top end and Rosangba sat at the bottom end. A cock and an egg were brought and both were asked to pick one. Before Rosangba could utter any, Mangyanger picked the cock. Next, a bag of earth and a bag of salt were laid to carry, Mangyanger without waiting Rosangba to choose, took the bag of salt. Lastly they were asked to choose between two drinking cups, one of beautiful red clay and other or dull metal. Mangyanger picked the red cup and Rosangba was left with the metal cup. The King then told them to throw their cups on the ground, Mangyanger’s clay cup broke on the ground, whereas Rosangba’s metal cup did not. Then the Raja gave judgment that Mangyanger choose
the top of the tree, but Rosangba sat at the root, from which all trees grow. Mangyanger chose the cock, but Rosangba took the egg, from which all fowls are hatched. Mangyanger took the salt but Rosangba took the earth where all the salt is washed. Lastly, Mangyanger took the clay cup but Rosangba took the cup that could not break. Therefore the King said that Rosangba made a better choice, and that he and his descendents shall be greater than Mangyanger and his descendents. The Ahom Raja made the decision over the ornaments as; both the clans were allowed to wear ivory armlets on both arms, but the spike metal armlets called *merangkhambang* (Fig.3. 12), and the grooved metal armlets called *kürakhambang* he gave to Rosangba. To him too he gave the right to wear a certain trumpet- shaped brass ear ornament (khiru) to the women of both the clans he gave the right to wear heavily embroidered *mekhela* and to adorn their heads with brass rings (*yongmen*).

![Merangkhambang](image)

**Fig. 3.12: Merangkhambang (After Jacobs 1990)**

### 3.6 Slavery practices

Aos practiced the system of owning a good number of slaves during the past. Slaves could be brought from headhunting but they could also be bought from the neighboring tribes and within the Ao community in lieu of debts or sold by poor families. Slaves were deemed as property of the masters. They had no rights whatsoever and could never possess any property at all. They stayed with the master’s households but were not given the right to imbibe on any clan or intermarry with the free men. Slaves were not allowed to put body tattoos and could not be a part
of the social age groups and the morung and zeki (girl’s dormitory like morung). Rich men own more slaves which indirectly contributed towards the production (Aier 2006:32). Slaves were social markers for rich people. By keeping slaves it help them in the land cultivation, could cultivate large lands and get higher yield in return. Thus slaves were economically benefitting for the rich to keep. Slaves in the Ao society were treated as a commodity that can be bartered for grain or land. Freedom of slaves could be bought through payment of certain amount of grains or land to its master. Even a warrior can acquired slaves from the battle of headhunting, but he can sell it if required to anyone who can pay him good. There are oral narratives of the Ao which talks about the conditions of the slaves, their barter for selling/buying and their payment for freedom. A certain oral narrative\textsuperscript{10} talks about two sisters of a certain village who were sold by their parents to the rich because they could not pay back so in return sold their daughters. They were taken by the buyers to their village and keep as slaves. The sisters were not allowed to put any body tattoo and were kept doing manual works. One day one of their relatives passed by the village and saw the sisters kept as slaves. He requested the owner the price of the two girls for their freedom and bought their freedom by bringing them as free men to their village. Also a narrative talks about a person by the name Khono of Sansonger village\textsuperscript{11}. One day the villagers saw a beautiful lady by the name of Nungdangsangla, from the neighboring village Rito going to the field. On seeing her beauty they caught hold of her and took her to their village. Nungdangsangla was put in a caged cane basket like an animal and the village elders talked on what should be done to her. Some suggested that she be killed and so on. Khono one of the leaders asked his friends that he is willing to buy back the freedom of Nungdangsangla from being a slave and wanted to marry her. The villagers agreed on the payments and Khono bought Nungdangsangla, made her a free woman and married her. Thus in the Ao society it was not just the outsiders who were brought from the battlefields but even poor parents can sell their children in lieu of their debts. Also the freedom of the slaves could be bought back after certain payments done. By keeping slaves, however, it did not extent to large – scale agricultural production. Slaves were never considered as the dominant mode of production. However they were an economic asset to the rich and keeping them made a man richer during the early days\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{10} Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
\textsuperscript{11} Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Bendangangshi Imsong, 2015
Treatments towards the slaves on the whole were good and kind for slaves who were freed many elected to stay with the masters. (Mills 1926:211)

3.7 Position and hierarchy of elders in Ao society

An Ao village is divided into yanga (age group) to which the various communal duties are assigned. The system of this age group is that, within every three years boys born are clubbed into one age group or yanga and enters the morung. Till he dies he stays a member of that age group. At the morung there are different duties the age group conducts till they are taken over or replaced by another new age group. Works and other village activities of the village are assigned according to the age groups. The Chungli new entrance to the morung is called süngpur and has to work for the older boys for three years. Then they become sangmen for another three years. While in this group they can carry food for the raiders, but are considered too young to take part in the fighting. After this a boy becomes an achuzen, a class which includes all young unmarried men. These provide the chief fighting force. After marriage all men are called as arichungr (morung men). They cease to sleep at the morung but remain connected with the morung. In the Mongsen group, the youngest group of boys is called songyur, after three years they are tünabang. From here when they get married they join the class of pür, where he remains for four to five years he enters chuyenr (also called as arichungr-morung men). In all the morung of the Aos, it is headed over by one of the eldest member, who is not a member of the village council. If he had to, then he has to vacate the office and one of the senior members can replace his seat. Life of men generally begins in the morung (arju) where it was an institution of passing down knowledge, wisdom, duties and respect towards the elders was learned (Aier, 2006:31). However all the activities within the village and outside is controlled and administered under the village council of elders which is often decided and made at the morung.

The feeling of respect towards the parent village was prevalent in the Ao society. Any disputes or settlements which could not be solved within the village were sought after to the parent villages or to the villages they looked and relied. According to Mills (1925:176) Ungma village use to receive tribute from and extended protection to the villages of Langpangkong and Asutkong range, Longkhum village from the Changkikong villages and Waromung took tributes
from the Japhukong villages where as longsa and Changki from their daughter villages like Japhu and Namcham. It is believed that villages like Ungma being one of the oldest villages was looked up, Longkhum being a warrior village with lots of heads victory was respected and Waromung one of the oldest villages in the Changkikong range was respected as an elderly village by the villages of Japhukong which was around it and thus took their allegiance.

3.8 Early trade and exchange

Though the early Ao society was a self content one trade for the Aos was also an important economic activity. It was mostly in the form of exchange or barter within and outside the tribe, and with the people at the plains. This activity which was carried out by individuals did not substitute agricultural economy. Individuals either go to barter or people from different villages and regions come to villages to barter. It is said that Aos used to trade with the Ahoms, the Kacharies as well as with the Manipuries and the Burmese. These were the long distance trade which took in some cases several days to go and come back. Within the outside tribes, exchanges was made with almost all the neighboring tribes like the Angamies, Chakesang, Konyak, Chang, Sangtem, Yimchunger and the Khamnungan.

For the exchanges, different mediums were used in the form of rice, animals, goods and food stuffs. However one important medium was the use of chaplee. This was a kind of currency used by the Aos during the early days. Which, according to Hutton (1969:71) was mere token, having no use except money and one chaplee was reckoned to be equivalent of a day’s labor.

Within the villages exchanges was in the form of vegetables, grains, meat, pots, clothes and other essential commodities. Changki village was the main centre for manufacturing of handmade pots which garnered to the need of the whole region of the Aos besides some small scale manufacturing villages like Khar, Nokpu and others. However those Ao villages like Merangkong village which borders with villages of Phom tribe use to get their handmade pots

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13 Interview with L T Maja Longkumer, 2015
14 Interview with L T Maja Longkumer, 2015
from them in exchange of goods like vegetables, grains and other necessities\textsuperscript{15}. Though wheel made pots from the plains of Assam were brought by the neighboring Ao villages like Nokpu, Merangkong and others it never substituted the handmade pots for cooking and was used rather for storage of grains, dried foodstuffs like vegetables, fish, \textit{gour} and water. Langpangkong range villages were expert’s weavers and traded with other trans-frontier tribes like the Konyaks and Phom from which they made good profits as well. (Sanglier 2012: 129)

Salt was a commodity which was brought from the plains and from the neighboring tribe of Konyak and Khianmungan. To barter for this they used betel leaves, cotton, chilies, ginger, gourds, mats and the gum of a tree called \textit{liyang} (Mills1925:103). The salt obtained from such exchanges was used for domestic use and was also used for exchange with the Phom and Chang tribes for pigs, fowls etc. Hills betel leaves was in high demand by the people of the plains which was brought by the Aos along with other vegetables like ginger, chilies etc which was exchanged with salt, dried fish, metal sheets etc. An interesting networking of trade during the early days is enumerated by Jacobs (1990) where he reflects on the trading of salt in a circular way. The Konyaks traded salt from their salt wells to the plains, and this salt was then brought back into the hills by the Aos, who might then sell it to other Naga groups. The Hills provided the plains with wild cotton, chilies, ginger, ivory, palm- leaf mats, gourds and betel (\textit{pan}) leaves: the plains provided, in addition to salt, dried fish, cowries, brass wire and metal sheets, and some ornaments produced particularly for the Naga market.

\textbf{3.9 Early metal works}

Earlier no metal works was done by the Aos. Oral narrative says that \textit{daos} (machets) and other metal works were mainly imported from Maibong (16\textsuperscript{th} century Kachari capital in the North Cachar Hills) and from the Ahoms. Later contacts with the plains also brought metal items like \textit{daos} and came to be made in certain villages of Ao region. The Ao village of Merangkong talks about Ahoms coming and staying in their region from which they learned how to make \textit{daos} (machete). Nokpu village also talked about getting their \textit{daos} from the Ahoms during the early days. According to JP Mills (1926:97) around 1706, apparently, when Rudra Singha, the Ahom

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Imsutemjen Longkumer, 2011
King attacked the Kacharis at Maipang or it may have been a generation earlier, when Mir Jumla’s expedition against the Ahom king it must have greatly disturbed the population of the plain, a body of immigrants wandered up from the plains and built village on the hills. Later this people departed to the plains, leaving behind four men who settled in Külingmen (Ao village). From there they went to different Ao villages and even performed the *mithun* sacrifice. These people were absorbed into the Ao clan and they and their descendents were the smiths of the Ao country where later villages like Ungma learned the art and started making (Mills 1926:98).