

**LITERACY AND PRINT CULTURE: A STUDY OF AO NAGA  
LITERARY TRADITIONS IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL  
TIMES**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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DECLARATION

I, Arenmenla Jamir, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Literacy and Print Culture: A Study of Ao Naga Literary Traditions in Colonial and Postcolonial Times" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.


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CERTIFICATE

We hereby recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


  
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**I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

**Philippians 4:13**

## Preface

Ever since a conversation, which I had with Nathan, a friend and senior, I was intrigued with the role of newspapers in the Naga society, it being a topic relatively unexplored by scholars. Over the course of time, the interest expanded to the larger theme of print culture, which made a relatively late entry into the Naga Hills in late nineteenth century.

Thus ensued my field works in archives and libraries in Delhi, Guwahati (Assam) and Kohima and Impur in Nagaland. However, days spent with enthusiasm, hunting for materials turned into disappointment when it became evident that materials on the topic were scarce. This initial disappoints did not hamper my interest though and with the encouragement from my supervisor, I experimented with the topic in a paper which was submitted as a seminar paper for my M.Phil course work in May, 2015. It was during the writing of the seminar paper that I decided to take a risk and continue with topic, which took the shape of the present dissertation. Thus, this is an exploratory work, which I hope can be followed up with further research with the help of suggestions and criticisms. It has to be mentioned here that this work has depended mostly on missionary sources, as they were the ones who introduced print in the Naga Hills and thus made the most documentation on it start and growth.

One this note, I express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Sangeeta Dasgupta for her full support and guidance throughout my M.Phil course. This dissertation would not have taken shape without her encouragement, constructive criticism and ideas. She has generously given me her time, patiently gone through the many drafts and has allowed me to grow at my own pace. I thank her for being extremely patient and gentle.

I owe my gratitude to Nathan for the inspiration and encouragement.

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I owe my gratitude to many of seniors and friends who encouraged my work and made me believe that what I was working towards was not a lost cause. Thank you to my seniors working in the research group under Ma'am Sangeeta- Sourav, Zaheer, Anirban, Rajarshi, Umar, Sanjina, Ufaque, Soni and Saquib. Their enthusiasm and encouragement for my work not only motivated me but also warmed my heart. Not forgetting my other set of seniors and friends, Ketho, Bauna, Limasen, Khekali and Honjem for their suggestions and criticisms. A heartfelt thank you to Riku for generously sharing his materials and putting forward suggestions. I thank Mami and Anirban for editing my work on short notice.

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To all, thank you. God bless you.

Arenmenla Jamir,

July, 2016.

### **Abbreviations**

ABAM- Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang

ABFMS- American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

AKM- Ao Kaketshir Mungdang.

CBCNEI- Council of Baptist Churches North East India.

NMML- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

NSA- Nagaland State Archive.

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## Introduction

Mary Mead Clark, wife of the first missionary to the Ao Nagas, E. W. Clark, recorded the arrival of the first printing press in the Naga Hills in early 1880s in these words:

Later literary and schoolwork going on apace, Mr. Clark requested that a hand printing press be sent out from Boston. A much bigger one than was expected came very near proving a black elephant on our hands. The Nagas, now eager for every new evidence of their progress civilization ward, voluntarily contributed two whole days to the tremendous task of bringing it to our hill top.<sup>1</sup>

What the missionaries perceived as ‘eagerness’ of the Nagas for evidence of ‘civilization’ may not have been true. However, undoubtedly the eventual impact of literacy and books among the Nagas was transformative. Print as a ‘force of change’ was recognized by the missionaries and used as an ‘ally’ to spread the Christian message.<sup>2</sup> This work is an attempt to give insight into the impact of literacy and print in the Naga Hills, which came as part of the evangelical mission under the patronage of the American Baptist Mission starting from the year 1872. Although the role of literacy in the Naga Hills has been widely studied, print and its impact as a subject of study have been relatively unexplored. While I will be discussing the coming of the missionaries into the Naga Hills, my specific focus will be on the history of the print together with that of literacy, as the two cannot be studied separately in the case of the Naga Hills, this being because “literacy was itself mediated through the missionaries” to the Nagas. Thus, this study aims to offer a broader look at the impact of literacy and print in a society, which prior to their coming was ‘preliterate’.

This unique socio-cultural backdrop of ‘pre-literacy’ against which print made its entry in the Naga Hills makes its study different as opposed to the study of its arrival in a society with an already writing tradition. This meant that there was no immediate appropriation of print by the locals nor was the printing press required to print popular

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1907. pp.108-109.

<sup>2</sup> ‘A Glimpse of the Mission and Church Presses of India’, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi.



books in demand by the locals. As far as printing was concerned, the missionaries had full monopoly over what to print, what sort of 'literature' the locals will be exposed to and the like.

An example where "there was a perfect mismatch between the intentions and impacts"<sup>3</sup> of print because it was introduced in a society with an already existing writing tradition is seen perfectly in the case of the Assam valley. The American Baptist Mission first introduced the printing press in Assam when the first mission station was started in 1836 in Sadiya on the invitation of Major Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam<sup>4</sup>. The thrust of this initiation was to aid in the spread of the gospel, having experienced that other means was not of much help in this area<sup>5</sup>. Since then, the Mission started more stations in Jaipur, worked with the Nagas of Namsang before starting a station in Sibsagar. In the Sadiya and the Jaipur station, the printing press was set to work in printing the translated books of the Bible, hymnbooks and some schoolbook. However, from the Sibsagar printing press, the most prominent printing venture of the mission was produced in the form of the periodical, *Orunodoi*, "A monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general knowledge". The aim of the periodical and the printing press is explained in the following words:

Its objective is to kindle and foster a spirit of inquiry. Whenever the missionary sets up his tent, his first business is to set up that instrument to which the nations of Europe are so greatly indebted for whatever superiority they enjoy over ancient world. Hence, even when we are not able, as in the case of the present mission, to notice a large accession of converts, we are still certain that the elements of improvement are quietly and vigorously at work.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Zou, 'The Interaction of Print Culture, Identity and Language in Northeast India', unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Queen's University Belfast, 2007.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to the introduction of the printing machine in the mission stations in Assam and printing of tracts, pamphlets, etc..., the missionaries had tried other means to draw the natives to listen and hear the gospel, the most noticeable being, preaching the gospel in the streets and bazaars in hopes to draw the people to the gospel.

<sup>6</sup> Jayeeta Sharma, 'Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam: The Orunodoi Periodical of the American Baptist Mission', Robert Eric Frykenburg, *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-cultural Communication Since 1500*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2003, p.260.

The *Orunodoi* “carried out its improving project by linking Christian literature with apparently secular and objective facts...”<sup>7</sup> as a result of which the paper made its way into the homes of the upper caste Assamese Hindus, the targeted readers. However, “the *Orunodoi*’s initial focus on the enlightenment through religious exhortations and the secular truths gradually began to be supplemented by the contributions from its indigenous reading public, reflecting their concerns about the education, language, and the social regeneration of Assam”.<sup>8</sup> The Assamese were able to understand the influence of print and were able to contribute to the periodical so that the missionaries did not enjoy the monopoly of the periodical for long. The Assamese were able to manipulate the impact of the printing press not only through their selective reading but also by participating in the contribution of articles. Thus, the ‘perfect mismatch between intention and outcome’.

It was different in the case of the Naga Hills because ‘unlettered’ tribes inhabited these hills. In an unusual situation where the mission introduced both literacy and print, the mission found itself in an advantageous position. They able to manipulate the ‘fluidity’ of the Nagas, forging links between older traditions and new ideas so much so that: “the Nagas were able to identify some of their powerful forces of nature with the all powerful Creator to whom they were introduced”.<sup>9</sup>

The popular image of ‘preliterate’ people in ‘literate’ societies is negative. The words ‘primitive’, ‘simple’ and similar catchwords are generally employed to describe these societies. Ruth Finnegan in her book, *Oral Literature in Africa*<sup>10</sup>, takes a refreshing approach to oral tradition of Africa and argues that the oral tradition of Africa should be appropriately seen, referred and studied as literature. This work offers a different approach to societies following oral tradition. Her contention is that literature does not necessarily have to be written and the ‘unwritten’ oral tradition of the African society qualifies to be categorized as literature. The book details every genre that forms African oral tradition like prose, poetry and drama. What is interesting about this work is that, it

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 262.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 272.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Open Book Publishers, 2012.

explores the prejudices that ‘literate’ societies have towards societies, which they consider ‘illiterate’. I draw upon Ruth Finnegan’s work to explore and explain the pre-print tradition of oral of the Ao Nagas.

An essay, ‘Cultures of translation in Early Modern Europe’<sup>11</sup> by Peter Burke is a fascinating work on what translation really means. He argues that translation of books is not only a translation of languages but also of cultures. The process of translation involves the ‘decontextualizing’ and ‘re-contextualizing’ of concepts and ideas. This work helped me look at the translation work painstakingly undertaken by the missionaries in a different light.

A pioneering work that discusses the impact of the book as compared to the manuscript is *The Coming of the Book* by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin<sup>12</sup>. This book gives a detailed account of the manuscripts, the early printing presses, the printers, the booksellers. It argues that the book was and is a force of change and have also shown the changes that the printing press has brought, the most distinct being the fast duplication which has in turn caused the faster dissemination of knowledge. This book although concerned only with the European context, gives us interesting information about the growth of the book industry and the replacement of the old manuscript culture by the book. It throws up several important ideas, which I would like to explore in my dissertation, for example, looking at the book as a force of change and the codification of languages.

In the context of India, specifically on the themes of the impact of printing, we have ‘An Uncertain “Coming of the Book”: Early Print Cultures in Colonial India’<sup>13</sup> by Anindita Ghosh. Here, Ghosh traced the beginning of the printing press in Bengal and its confrontation with the then existing oral tradition. Oral tradition, she argues, was more popular than reading, although the culture of writing existed in Bengal before the printing press was introduced. The printed book was not much of a success in Bengal in its initial

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Burke, ‘Cultures of translation in Early Modern Europe’ ed. Peter Burke and R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Lucien Febvre Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, tr. David Gerard, Verso Classics, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Anindita Ghosh, ‘An Uncertain “Coming of the Book”: Early Print Cultures in Colonial India’, *Book History*, Volume 6, *John Hopkins University Press*, 2003, pp. 23-55.

year. Thus, Ghosh's work reflects how a society with an already existing script and a love for communal reading responded to print culture and how the coming of print did not automatically meant the compromising of earlier traditions.

Jayeeta Sharma's work, 'Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam: The Orunodoi Periodical of the American Baptist Mission',<sup>14</sup>, shows in brief the history of the missionary periodical *Orunodoi*, the most "prominent product of the first printing press established in Assam". The main argument of her essay is that, the existences of a script amongst the Assamese posed a serious challenge in the conversion of the people as lettered societies were less open to change. The *Orunodoi* was introduced as a tool to convert the upper caste Hindus however, the plan backfired as they instead used the periodical as a platform to strengthen their culture and language. However, this was not the case with the Nagas as they did not possess a script like the Assamese. Her work mainly concerned with the Assam valley and although she has mentioned the Nagas and why conversion was so successful with these tribes because "literacy was itself mediated through the missionaries", it happen only in the concluding paragraphs of her essay.

There are others who have discussed the importance of the script and the role of the written word against the background of the missionary encounter in the Naga Hills. 'Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876-1971', by Richard M. Eaton is a work predominantly about the conversion pattern among the different Naga tribes. In this work, he shows that the Nagas' indigenous religions were not static but were in a constant state of evolution. Moreover, he argued that the absence of a script was one of the reasons why their religion was fluid and was open to accommodating new elements in their religion. Not only did the missionaries wisely decided to establish associations between their old religious beliefs and Christianity, for example, by adopting already existing features and terms of the Nagas' religious belief to the Christian doctrine, Christianity was a "religious system with powerful literary support". Although this work gives interesting ideas on the role that script and the art of written word played in

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<sup>14</sup> Jayeeta Sharma, 'Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam: The Orunodoi Periodical of the American Baptist Mission', ed. Robert Eric Frykenburg, *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, 2003, pp. 256- 273.

Christianity, it does not form the main body of his research. Nevertheless, his work has paved the way to investigate these questions further.

Hoineilhing Sitlhou in his article, 'Straying beyond Conquest and Emancipation: Exploring the fault lines of Missionary Education in North East India'<sup>15</sup>, has written briefly on how the missionaries used the 'evangelizing methods' of education, publication of literature in local language and translation of books into the native language as means to aid them in the conversion of the people. This work is a much-generalized study of the whole of northeast India. However, it does show that the introduction of education, books and printing by the missionaries was primarily for the spread of Christianity. Thus, this would require us to look into the print history of the Naga Hills to see what exactly were the kind of books that were printed that have aided the missionaries in the conversion of the people in the Naga Hills specifically, if indeed conversion was the primary aim for the introduction of schools and books.

Mar Atsongchanger' work, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*<sup>16</sup> gives us a history of the printing press in the Naga Hills since the time of the American Baptist missionaries and the various publishing ventures that were undertaken under the missionaries. However, the writer wrote from a theological perspective and he fails to be critical of the impact, which the particular kind of publishing that was undertaken by the missionaries had on the Nagas.

One of the most critical articles on the growth of publishing and writing in Nagaland, is Charles Chasie's, 'The History of Nagaland Reflected in its Literature'. Chasie shows how the history of Nagaland is reflected through the literature produced from the region. His article discusses the publishing history of Nagaland, and shows how the political, economic and social conditions of the Nagas affected readership. This is an interesting work, which has shown the print history under the missionaries and how the Nagas could not, until very recently, engage seriously with print owing to the political turmoil that the state went through.

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<sup>15</sup> Hoineilhing Sitlhou, 'Straying beyond Conquest and Emancipation: Exploring the Fault lines of Missionary Education in North East India', *Indian Anthropological Association*, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Mar Atsongchanger, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*, TDCC Publications, 2012.

These existing literature show that books and printed materials are agents of change. Whether it was in fifteenth century Europe or in nineteenth century Bengal and Assam, print was widely active in initiating change in the society and according to Febrve, books have been in the service of 'History' since the invention of the printing press<sup>17</sup>. However, what happened when this 'force of change' encountered the 'unlettered' tribes of the Naga Hills? This study works with the premise that the Nagas encounter with the missionaries and with also literacy and print, had a far-reaching impact on the Nagas leading to negotiations between older traditions and newer ideas, which ultimately transformed the society.

In the first chapter, I stress on the socio-cultural background against which the missionaries and print intervened in the Naga Hills. This is done in an attempt to understand pre-print tradition of the Ao Nagas.

In the second chapter, I try to capture the shift from an oral society to one where being able to 'read' was seen as a mark of 'modernity'. I also emphasize on the translation and transfer of a particular form of knowledge to the natives by the missionaries via Christian literature.

In the third chapter, I highlight the status of print in the twentieth century now effectively used by the natives for their specific purposes. I show that print by the mid-twentieth century did not remain dominated by one section by it became a site of exploration used by various sections of the society.

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<sup>17</sup>Lucien Febrve Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, 2006, p. 2.

## Chapter One

### A Plunge into ‘Orality’

*In the beginning, when the earth was still young, and there was no sharp differentiation between darkness and light, man and beast lived together. During this age, according to the Aos claim, there was a written script. The script was written on the hide of an animal and was hung on a wall. One day, when the people were away in their fields, a dog dragged it down and ate it up. From that time onwards, the people had to commit all knowledge to memory and began transmitting the same by word of mouth to succeeding generations.<sup>18</sup>*

An Ao oral tradition,

Temsula Ao,

*The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition.*

“They have no written language”. This was how E. W. Clark described the Ao Nagas as the American Baptist Mission was contemplating the start of a mission station in the Ao region of the Naga Hills in April 1872<sup>19</sup>. This oral character was often used by the missionaries along with the word ‘savages’, ‘primitive’ and ‘uncivilized’ to describe the Ao Nagas who were to be ‘civilized’ and brought to the ‘light’.<sup>20</sup>

‘Orality’ was indeed an important character of the Ao Nagas. The story quoted above explains as much that things were done orally for as long as they could remember. The existence of such myths and legends, not isolated to the Aos alone but to the larger Naga community, the Mizos and Khasis (in short other ‘unlettered’ people), is explained by Tilottoma Misra as:

The growing awareness that possessing the art of writing is in many ways more empowering than oral communication is evident in the construction of a set of

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<sup>18</sup> Temsula Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Heritage Publishing House, Dimapur, Nagaland, 2012. p.8.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Mr. Clark, in A. Bendangyabang Ao, *History of Christianity in Nagaland: A Source Material*, Shalom Ministry, 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Mead Clark wrote in her book *A Corner in India*, “There in a crowded village, fortified by a heavy stockade, was begun the mining of this *unwritten language* and the necessary deeper delving to unearth the real character of these new parishioners” (emphasis added).

myths by the different oral communities of the region about the loss of the technique of writing in some ancient times when there was no difference between oral and literate communities.<sup>21</sup>

She is not alone in this observation. Stuart Blackburn explained the existence of such myths amongst the Nagas emerging because of the “perceived superiority of scribing stories in letters”.<sup>22</sup>

In the absence of a writing tradition, the Ao Nagas relied heavily on the oral tradition, creating a web of memories through the means of stories (myths, legends, and folktales), poetry, riddles and songs. Thus, although a written tradition was missing, it did not mean that AOs were lacking a history.

This chapter aims to give an idea of this oral tradition, by studying the socio-cultural background against which print made its entry. A close study of the oral tradition of the AOs leads me to the belief that the AOs might not have felt the need for a written script as the oral sustained the people through centuries. This is further given impetus by the fact that, basing on available sources, the AOs did not make any effort to adopt the script of the plains of Assam although they were close neighbors and had frequent contacts.<sup>23</sup> As far as the AOs were concerned, they were satisfied with their ‘orality’.

However, the oral character of the Ao Nagas was constantly associated with a negative image and often with a lack of history prior to the coming of the ‘outsiders’ to the Naga Hills. The chapter will attempt to debunk this idea. The importance of the oral tradition in the Ao Naga society and why it is more than just ‘primitive nonsense’ is seen in the fact that it sustained the AOs, managing its complicated social, religious and political practices for centuries before the written word was introduced. Many of these are adhered to even today.

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<sup>21</sup> Tilottoma Misra, ‘Speaking, Writing and Coming of the Print Culture in Northeast India’, ed. Margaret Ch. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India*, 2013, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Blackburn, ‘The Stories Stones Tell: Naga Oral Stories and Culture’, eds. Micheal Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban Von Stockhausen and Marion Wettstin (eds) ., *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in Northeast India*, Snocek Publishers, Gent, 2008, p.267.

<sup>23</sup> The AOs were ignorant of the Assamese language as shown many times in missionary reports.



The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section attempts to show how the oral tradition sustained the Ao Nagas prior to the coming of print to their hills. This is done with the help of selected illustrations. The last section shows the socio-cultural background against which the missionaries entered the Naga Hills.

## I

### **Understanding the Aos and their oral tradition**

Although writing history began only with the coming of the written word in the Naga Hills, the Ao Nagas have a rich oral tradition which tells their ‘history’ through the use of stories, songs, poems and riddles. This ‘history’ documented the social, religious, political and everyday life of the people. This tradition was passed down from generation to generation through the organized system of the *Ariju*. In this section, I show how the Aos ensured the continuation of their ‘history’ orally and the implication of their oral tradition through selected illustrations. These stories “have been instrumental in providing them with the mechanism for setting up their ( the Ao Nagas) social structure along clan divisions, establishing their traditional religious practices and a system of ethical conduct based on these”.<sup>24</sup>

This bring us to an important question: What is oral tradition? Scott Momaday explains oral tradition in very simple words, “The oral tradition” he argues, “is that process through which the myths, legends, tales and lore of a people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing. Or it is a collection of such things”.<sup>25</sup> Specifically on the Ao Naga oral tradition, Birendranath Datta says:

The Ao-Naga oral tradition is not a mere form of ‘story telling’ as opposed to a written, recorded version. It is indeed in many ways the source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history. But at the same time, it is more than that. It has evolved into a comprehensive and integrated network of

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<sup>24</sup> Temsual Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in Temsula Ao, *On being a Naga*, Heritage Publishing House, 2014, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, quoted in Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, p. 7.

indigenous knowledge systems, incorporating art with reality, history with imagination, and the ideal with the practical. In this sense the tradition constitutes for the Ao the world of his origin as well as the idiom of his continuance within the world.<sup>26</sup>

The Ao oral tradition with its interesting blend of “myths, superstitions and historical incidents”<sup>27</sup> tells the listeners the story of their origin, migration, clan formation and human and animal stories with moral. And although we cannot take all the oral tradition at face value, they do “reflect the social behavior and norms within which the society operates”.<sup>28</sup>

The Ao oral tradition begins with their earliest memory, which is their supposed origin at Longterok (six stones) at Chungliyimti.<sup>29</sup> Chungliyimti, thus, occupies an important place in the oral tradition of the Ao Nagas. This is not only the place where they supposedly emerged from Longterok but also the place where the Ao lived together and formulated their clan division, political institution, social norms and belief system<sup>30</sup> before they migrated to different locations and established the various villages, which exist till date. Their claim to have emerged from Longterok is claimed to be the ‘fountain-head of everything in Ao folklore’.<sup>31</sup> J. P. Mills describes this: “Ao tradition states quite definitely that the ancestors of the tribe came out of the earth at Lungterok (“six stones”), sometimes called Ungterok, lying on the top of a spur on the right bank of the Dikhu just about opposite Mokongtsu”.<sup>32</sup> This origin myth sets the Aos apart from the other Naga tribes because the others trace their migration route elsewhere.

According to the Longterok legend, from Longterok emerged three men, Tongpok of the Pongener clan, Longok of Longkumer clan and Longjakrep of Jamir clan and three

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<sup>26</sup> Birendranath Datta in his foreword for Temsula Ao’s, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Heritage Publishing House, Dimapur, Nagaland. 2012, p.xv.

<sup>27</sup> Walunir, Narrative Responses of the Ao Community: A Semiotic and Interpretative Study of Tarnunger Otsu, unpublished M.Phil dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2008, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47

<sup>29</sup> Chungliyimti is place where the Ao people stayed together for a long time before their migration to different sites and their settlements. Presently, Chungliyimti falls in the Sangtam area, another Naga tribe.

<sup>30</sup> Ao, *The Ao- Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p.9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.6.

women, Longkakupokla of Pongener clan, Yongmenala of Longumer clan and Elongse of Jamir clan.<sup>33</sup> They are regarded to be the ancestors of the Ao Nagas. All the other clans today are supposed to be descendents of these three ‘major’ clans.<sup>34</sup> One strict rule that is adhered to when a new clan is formed is that it should be able to trace its lineage to one of the three main clans.

An important feature in this myth is the clear indication on why the Aos follow exogamous marriages. According to the myth, Tongpok (Pongener) married Elongse (Jamir), Longpok (Longkumer) married Longkakupokla ((Pongener) and Longjakrep (Jamir) married Yongmenala (Longkumer).<sup>35</sup> This was the beginning of the exogamous marriages, which the Ao practices till today. This story of clan distinctions and the birth of new clans forms a major part of the Aos’ oral tradition. This can be taken as an indication of the importance which clans hold in the Ao Naga society. Apart from exogamous marriages, which the Aos follow from their Chungliyimti days, all the other important traditions of the Aos, for example, clan division, political institutions, social norms and belief system, are believed to have begun in Chungliyimti from where they migrated to different settlements.<sup>36</sup> These dispersions from Chungliyimti birthed more lores and stories on migration of people, the establishment of new villages, war songs, etc. However, it is of paramount importance that the lores and stories that start in the new villages should correspond with the origin story in Chungliyimti. This implies that people should be able to trace their genealogy to Longterok in Chungliyimti.<sup>37</sup>

Belief system is another important area touched upon by the oral tradition of the Aos. Many stories, songs and poems deal with the belief system of the Aos. According to Temsula Ao, “The sacred tradition or religion among the Ao-Nagas is centered on the

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<sup>33</sup> Temsual Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in Ao, *On being a Naga*, 2014, p. 58.

<sup>34</sup> Ao, *The Ao- Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p.31.

<sup>35</sup> Temsual Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in Ao, *On being a Naga*, 2014, p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>37</sup> Temsula Ao have divided the Ao oral tradition into three, one Primary Tradition. This deals with the lores and stories about the Aos origin in Longterok, clan division, social norms, and belief system. Second, Secondary Tradition is that part of the Ao oral tradition that talks about the migration of the people from Chungliyimti to the different mountain ranges that the Ao began to migrate to. This includes folktales, folksongs and other stories that tell of the village formation and the village heroes. This also includes hunting, fishing, warrior songs, proverbs and other sayings. Lastly, the oral tradition that traces the clan genealogy.

fundamental belief in the existence of supernatural powers in the universe”.<sup>38</sup> Here is a song that tells the story of how this belief system came about:

From Longterok  
The Children of the three Fathers  
Established the village of Chungliyimti  
There they started to worship  
The biggest stones and trees  
Let this worship be continued  
By all the young ones to come.<sup>39</sup>

Although there are many *tsüngrems* (gods) in the Ao belief system, the three main *tsüngrems* are Longtitsüngba or Aningstüngba, Lijaba or Lizaba (believed to be the creator of the earth) and Meyutsüngba (believed to be the lord of the land of death).<sup>40</sup> Out of these three *tsüngrems*, Lijaba is the most worshipped because he is the creator and *tsüngrem* of the earth. Thus his blessing is most sought by the people. Lijaba worship has even taken the elaborate form of *Lijabamong* or *Tsüngrem mong* (popularly known as *Tsüngremong* in recent times), a form of Lijaba worship which extends for three days. According to Temsula Ao:

Among the religious observances of the Aos, this was the most important and was marked by rituals lasting for three days in the first week of August each year. This was done in order to invoke Lijaba’s blessing for a good yield and for protection from all other calamities. All the prescribed procedures were to be

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<sup>38</sup> Temsula Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in Ao, *On being a Naga*, 2014, pp. 60-61.

<sup>39</sup> O Longterok poker  
Chungliyimti lima  
Bochi asemsangeri  
Lima tasen mesendena yur,  
Sungdi Lungdi kulemdena aru,  
Lanu asen Sori yimsu baji benshiangne. Quoted in Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p.172.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.

strictly adhered to, otherwise it was believed that Lijaba's wrath would cause havoc among the people.<sup>41</sup>

On the third and final day, after all the rituals were observed, the people offer food to Lijaba and chant the following words:

‘Here we are offering  
Everything to you,  
Even the bottom  
Of the pots.  
Eat this and in return  
Give us your blessings’.<sup>42</sup>

This *among* (observance), first instituted in Chungliyimti, was adhered to by the Aos even after they had migrated to other settlements and villages and this remained an important part of the religious practice of the people and has been instituted as an annual ‘festival’ after conversion to Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

The *tsüngrem* of the ‘Land of the Dead’, Meyutsüngba or Mojing was not worshipped as it was believed that no form of worship or offering would change his decision or appease him. According to Temsula Ao: “The belief in the finality of *Meyutsüngba's* judgment and the fact that prayers or praises, or even worship and sacrifice were no substitute for moral conduct helped evolve a system of ethical behavior among the people”.<sup>44</sup>

Even the political practice of the Aos was sustained by the oral tradition. Mary Mead Clark explains the political scenario of the Ao Nagas:

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<sup>41</sup> Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in *On being a Naga*, 2014, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p. 64. In Ao it is,  
Hang Poland temang  
Neli khiogo  
Nang dang jaangma  
Ter ila moayang.

<sup>43</sup> Ao, ‘Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective’, in *On being a Naga*, 2014, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

Each village is a little democracy managing its own affairs, except as other villages interfere either voluntarily or by partisan invitation; each has its head men, called tartars, who are the civil magistrates. These may hold office for a limited term of years or for life, or may be set aside by the village for unworthiness, unpopularity, or bad administration. They have entire control of civil matters, look after the entertainment of distinguished guests and of persons coming on official errands, and have power to impress the service of the village for any labor necessary to the well-being of the community. They have no salaries, but are well paid in perquisites and gratuitous labor. All higher offices, civil, military, and priestly, are held by those of mature years, the younger men not objecting to this, as each one hopes that in due time his turn will come.<sup>45</sup>

This 'democracy' was in the form of the *Putu Menden*, which performed:

The role of an elected assembly to look after the welfare and security of the people living in it and to ensure that friendly relations are maintained with neighboring villages. The *Putu Menden* thus enjoys a wide range of powers concerning the running of village affairs and is entrusted with a variety of duties.<sup>46</sup>

The oral tradition claims that this *Putu Meden* was first instituted in Chungliyimti and continued in all the villages established after their dispersion from Chungliyimti. The oral tradition has sustained this practice. There are many intricate rules that one must follow in this system, for example its membership, the various bodies within the system and their duties and functions. All the rules are enshrined in the oral tradition.

*Ariju*, roughly translated as the Morung system, played an important role in the continuation of the oral tradition. The functions of the *Ariju* were multiple. Its function "both as a guard house and club house and plays the most important part in the social life of the village".<sup>47</sup> It was here that the young ones were trained to be the protectors of the

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<sup>45</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.45.

<sup>46</sup> Ao, 'Ao-Naga Myths in Perspective', in *On being a Naga*, 2014, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p.73.

village. Here is a song, which was reformed in order to commemorate the establishment of the first *Ariju* at Chungliyimti:

From Longterok  
The children of Tongpok, Longpok and Longjakrep  
Established the village of Chungliyimti.  
People belonging to these clans  
Built the first Senden Riju  
At Chungliyimti.<sup>48</sup>

The other function of the *Ariju* was that it acted as a medium through which the oral tradition was passed down from generation to generation. The reason why oral tradition was taught in the *Ariju* where men stayed was as follows: “The Aos had a patriarchal society, so it became imperative for young males to be acquainted with the tradition and to train themselves to inherit this knowledge so that they would transmit it to the younger generation of males”.<sup>49</sup> The role of the *Ariju* in the transmission of oral tradition to the younger generation is explained as follows:

The *Ariju* was the equivalent of an Academy where the youngsters were governed by strict rules. This is where discipline was taught and enforced. The many arts and handicrafts were taught and learned here. The youngsters were told of the brave exploits of the heroes of the tribe. They were told which villages were, friendly and why; they were also told of the enmity with other villages. It was here that the young men had a foretaste of community life and were indoctrinated about the need to follow rules in order to survive in hostile surroundings. But most important of all, it was here that the history and traditions of the tribe and the particular village was taught. However, mere

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<sup>48</sup> O Longterok poker  
Tongpok, Longpok, Longjakrep nangpongi,  
Lima tasen mesemone  
Lima tasen mesemdena yur,  
Bochi asem Sangeri,  
Chungliyimti ali tema pangnung  
Senden Riju yangerkone. Quoted in Ao, *The Ao Oral Tradition*, 2012, p. 171.  
<sup>49</sup> Ao, *The Ao- Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p. 9.

acquisition of information was not enough. They were also taught the correct form of address in an assembly, the right way of narrating stories, singing songs and ballads. In other words, the emphasis was on the proper form of delivery of speech so that these youngsters in their turn would become good teachers when their turn came.<sup>50</sup>

For the girls too, a counter part of the *Ariju* was established in the form of *Zuki*, or the girl's dormitory. Here the girls were taught, "handicrafts, social etiquette and all the different songs and chants used in the various religious and social festivals of the village".<sup>51</sup> The *Ariju* remained one of the most important institutions for the Aos until their encounter with Christianity, which discouraged it on the claim that it was part of Ao 'heathen' practice. In the later part of the nineteenth century, the *Ariju* faced a challenge from the schools that missionaries introduced in the Ao region. These schools were different from the *Ariju*. In the missionary schools, instead of transmitting oral tradition, the Aos were taught the art of writing, reading and simple arithmetic (the three Rs) and were given a predominantly Bible education. By leaving behind the *Ariju* system and receiving the school system, the Ao transitioned from being a 'preliterate' society to getting 'literate' and possessing a script.

The place of language in an oral society is very important as it is the medium through which oral tradition was passed down across generations. In the context of the Aos, the language trajectory is quite different from that of the other Naga tribes because unlike many of the other Naga tribes where usually only one language is spoken, amongst the Aos, variants of the Ao language are spoken. J. P. Mills have recorded several dialects of the Ao language like Chongli, Mongsen, Changki, Sangpur, Yacham and Longla.<sup>52</sup> Of all the variants of the Ao language, Chongli and Mongsen was termed as "by far the most important".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>*Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> Sangpur dialect of the Ao language was recorded to have been no longer in use when J. P. Mills publishes his monograph on the Aos titled, *The Ao Nagas*, in 1926. Longla dialect was spoken by the people of Longla and Noksan who followed the Chang Naga custom. The Yacham dialect was recorded to



This difference in the dialects was strictly maintained in the society. J. P. Mills has given an interesting example of this:

Each 'khel' knows the other's language but speaks its own, and a Mongsen woman married to a man of the Chongli 'khel' will speak Mongsen to her husband but Chongli to her baby, for the child is Chongli like his father and must be brought up to speak Chongli.<sup>54</sup>

He also mentions how within one village, there were speakers of both Chungli and Mongsen and how both maintained their own respective customs.<sup>55</sup> This implication of the difference in the customs of the Chungli and Mongsen speakers is further given impetus by the slight variations in their narration and understanding of the origin story at Chungliyimti.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it appears that the Chongli and Mongsen speakers were viewed as different people by their close neighbors like the Changs.<sup>57</sup> J. P. Mills also suggested that the difference in the dialects of the present Aos was an indication of different waves of migration of the people<sup>58</sup> the Mongsen speaking people represented earlier migrants.<sup>59</sup>

Despite differences with regard to dialects, it is interesting to note that the songs and ballads (the means through which most of the oral tradition have been preserved), is

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have been spoken by the people of Yacham and Yong whose population was mostly composed of Phom Naga and Konyak Naga.

<sup>53</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p. 332.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>56</sup> J. P. Mills notes this difference in his explanation of the origin theory of the Ao Nagas. He writes, "The Mongsen came out of the earth first and settled at Kubok, a vacant site on a spur running down from Mokongtsu towards the Dikhu. The Chongli in turn emerged and settled at Chungliyimti".

<sup>57</sup> This is suggested on the bases of a Chang song where the Chongli and Mongsen people are indicated to be separate groups of people by the line, "The Chongli and Mongsen long to be hosted by my village". Thomas Kaiser have inferred that this would suggest, "they were not viewed as one >tribe< or one >people<, but as two groups related in some way or other through speaking different languages".

<sup>58</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> An oral tradition of the Aos explains this and J. P. Mills have also narrated the story of how the Mongsen speaking people were the first to settle down in Chungliyimti. The story is that of the Chongli speaking Shiluti who saved the Chongli village from the raids of the Mongsen, whose existence the Chongli khel was unaware as the Mongsen village was hidden by living cane. Shiluti discovered the hidden village of the Mongsen and a raid was conducted which made the Mongsen village come out and live side by side with the Chongli village. That was how their long 'co-partnership' begun.

in the Mongsen dialect. J. Mills called this “poetical Mongsen”. He describes the language as follows:

The language used both by Chongli and Mongsen in songs is a very obscure and artificial dialect of Mongsen. The Mongsen is implied rather than clearly expressed, and verbs are often conspicuously by their absence. An Ao song is a series of words, each pregnant with meaning, rather than grammatical sentences in the form of verse. This makes translation extremely difficult; indeed it is impossible to produce an English version which gives a true idea of the excessively condensed original.<sup>60</sup>

Temsula Ao also wrote about this “poetic dialect”. According to her:

The tradition bears out this observation because even a Chongli speaker, when singing or delivering punch lines in a discourse uses this dialect. Moreover, there are many instances in the tradition where even animals and birds in myths and tales use this dialect.<sup>61</sup>

It is important to note this pre-print language scene in the Ao Naga society. As we shall see in the next chapter, the trajectory of language of the Aos goes through a stage of transformation with the coming of print into the Naga Hills upstaging the kind of negotiation that existed between the speakers of the various Ao dialects before the arrival of print.

The collection of prose, poetry and songs that make up the Ao oral tradition clearly manifests the historical experiences of the people. Through it, we see the

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<sup>60</sup>Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p. 328.

<sup>61</sup> Ao, *The Ao Naga-Oral Tradition*, 2012, p.168. An example of animals and birds speaking this dialect is seen in the story of how water was discovered by two brothers. In the story, a bulbul bird directed two brothers, Lmsenpirong and Sempirong to a body of water leading to the discovery of water. The song sung by the bulbul goes,  
Lmsenpirong Sempirong  
Longkitsuyong tsumayong  
(Imsenpirong, Sembirong, haven't you  
Seen the water in the cave?)

evolution of the Ao society from probable nomads to having a settled life<sup>62</sup>, we see that the organization and functioning of the villages, their social practices, through their hunting, fishing and songs related to agriculture we see their occupation and economy. The Ao oral tradition is not all seriousness though. We also see the everyday life, personal experiences<sup>63</sup> and the lighter side of the Aos through their merrymaking and festival songs (the two most important festival being Tsungremong and Moatsu).

A layman's perspective on the oral tradition is seen in the interview of one Chutisang Pongen, an old singer of Ungma village by Thomas Kaiser:

These songs were sung only in Chungliyimti, in ancient times. All these things, all these stories happened there in Chungliyimti, so we learnt from our forefathers, the songs and all, and we are still singing them. The language, the song language is ken-o. It's a mixture of Chungli and Mongsen. For all the Ao. Because in Chungliyimti all the Ao were together. First we stayed in Chungliyimti. Everyone, all the Ao were there. And from there only we came to this village Suyim, and from there we went to Koridang, and from there only all the Ao village split.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Walunir, *Narrative Responses of the Ao Naga Community: A Semiotic and Interpretative study of Tarnunger Otsu*, p. 10. His argument is, the origin story at Longterok could be an indication of the Aos living as one for the first time after being nomads.

<sup>63</sup> For example, according to an oral tradition, Nungjasangla of Rutu was captured by the people of Sakso. There she was made to marry the chief of Sakso village as she was very beautiful. This song was supposedly sang by her when she missed her husband and children in her native village Rutu with whom she was forcefully separated,

Aya terem ko  
Rutu donglen jenli ni rangjen  
Ni tai sangni  
Sangso donglen  
Ngangpa waroni  
(In the middle of the night  
When I hear the log-drum  
Of Rutu, my village  
I feel very lonely,  
And I am guilty  
For now I am the wife  
Of another man at Sangsodang village)

<sup>64</sup> Kaiser, 'The Songs of the Nagas', eds. Micheal Oppitz, Thomas Kaiser, Alban Von Stockhausen and Marion Wittstin, *Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in Northeast India*, Snock Publishers, Gent, 2008, pp.239-240.

The oral tradition also give a glimpse of the existence of an important aspect, that of identity. It is interesting to see the existence of an 'Ao identity' very early on among the Aos. Their origin myth at Longterok or their migration story all point to the notion that the Aos considered themselves as one ever since their Chungliyimti days. For example, here is a song, which tells the migration of the Aos in search of better settlement. In these few lines, we see the journey of the Aos from one settlement to the other:

Originated from six stones  
They defeated all enemies.  
People of four centuries left Chungliyimti,  
Constructed a cane bridge  
To cross Dikhu river and proceeded  
Towards Tubalongla  
And there established Aonglenden.  
Aonglenden on its hill top was blessed.  
In one night ten sons were born;  
Therefore they named the land>Suyim<.<sup>65</sup>

This song finds resonance in another myth of the Aos, which tell the story of them crossing river Dikhu and leaving behind another group of people. The term 'Ao' is known to be the corrupt pronunciation of the word 'Aor' which means 'those who came' (beyond the river Dikhu, which is pointed out in the song). This is the term, which is supposed to have been used by the Aos to identify themselves from the 'Mirir'<sup>66</sup>, meaning 'those who did not come' (beyond the river Dikhu).<sup>67</sup> According to Thomas Kaiser, it is only in the Ao songs that we find a "self-designated name for the tribe: aor".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p.234.

<sup>66</sup> Mirir is the Aos' term for the Sangtams, Changs, Phoms and Konyaks.

<sup>67</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p.1.

<sup>68</sup> Kaiser, 'The Songs of the Nagas', 2008, p.234.

Thus, through the oral tradition we see that the idea of being ‘Ao’ was already being imagined and popularized by the Ao ancestors. Many of their stories, songs and poems point to a common past. Thomas Kaiser and Stuart Blackburn, both writing on the traditional songs and folklore of the Nagas respectively, suggest that the Naga songs and tales have more to them than they have been given credit for.<sup>69</sup> The Naga prose, songs and poetries are all embedded with meaning and reflect the culture of the society. For example, there are many stories that deal with kinship, the ties of clan, the tradition of headhunting and so on.<sup>70</sup> Stuart Blackburn specifically argued how in ‘pre-industrial’ societies: “cultural knowledge about the past is transmitted primarily through oral stories”.<sup>71</sup>

## II

### **The oral and the written encounter**

It is claimed that the fluidity of the Ao Nagas, courtesy of their ‘orality’ was one reason that attracted the American Baptist Mission to work with them. In Jayeeta Sharma’s words: “Newcomers at the mission were now turning full circle back to earlier attempts claiming the *preliterate* “tribes” of the region, with Edward Clark resuming work among the Nagas in 1871-1872”<sup>72</sup>(emphasis added). This was because the mission’s work with the “indigenous lettered tradition” in the Assam valley appropriated the efforts of the mission “without committing themselves to aspects seen as incompatible with their own belief”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp.233-269.

<sup>70</sup> An Ao traditional song that hints at the practice of headhunting goes as,

Oh women like metsuben-flowers from Lungkam!

Our lovers-flowers of the morung

(went for headhunt)

Village women like hornbill feathers-

You breast feeders, too-

Assemble at the morung’s verandah,

And watch them coming on the field-path

(Quoted in Kaiser, *The Songs of the Nagas*, 2008, p.246.

<sup>71</sup> Blackburn, ‘The Stories Stones Tell’, 2008, p.265.

<sup>72</sup> Jayeeta Sharma, *Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam*, 2003, p.270.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid*, p. 271.

Although the American Baptist Mission had worked in the Assam valley since the early nineteenth century, it yielded fewer results. Thus, slowly the mission decided to shift their energy from the ‘civilized’ and ‘lettered’ Hindus of the plains to the ‘unlettered’ tribes in the Hills because: “positive experiences with other *unlettered* communities such as the Kols... was encouraging”. (emphasis added) <sup>74</sup> Clearly, the ‘unlettered’ character of the hill tribes was put into consideration when the shift from the valley to the hills was contemplated. One reason why the ‘unletteredness’ of the Ao Nagas attracted the mission was because the ‘reordering’ and ‘refashioning’ of the ‘civilizing’ message of Christianity was easier in such societies. The oral character of the Ao Nagas thus formed a part of the lure for the missionaries.

John Thomas has argued that the aim for the start of the mission with the Nagas by the American Baptist mission was part of their “‘manifest destiny’ to ‘Christianize’ and thereby ‘civilize’ the ‘savage races’ around the world- to draw them out of ‘darkness’ and ‘barbarism’ into ‘light’ and ‘civilization’”.<sup>75</sup> Thus, we find the constant association of the Nagas with ‘savages’, ‘primitives’ and ‘uncivilized’ in the missionaries’ writings. Recounting one of the first encounters with the Nagas, Mary Mead Clark wrote:

“I don’t want the goat! I don’t want it! I will not have it! Take it away, take it away”, was reiterated again and again; yet these strange, uncivilized men, down from their mountain fastnesses, still persisted in dragging up the steps of the veranda of our bungalow a large, long-horned hill goat, hoping to receive from us double or quadruple its value, and nothing short of landing it inside the house would satisfy them. Thus was I introduced to these stalwart, robust warriors, dressed mostly in was medals, each man grasping his spear shaft decorated with goat’s hair, dyed red and yellow, and also fringed with the long black hair of women, telling the story of bloody deeds.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>*Ibid*, p. 270.

<sup>75</sup> John Thomas, ‘Missionaries, Colonialism and the Writing of History Among the Nagas’, *The Journal of Theological and Cultures in Asia*, Vol. 7&8, 2008/2009, pp. 5-6. This argument is set in the backdrop against which the American Baptist Mission started its mission to bring ‘redemption’ and ‘progress’ to mankind.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p.1.

This projection of the Nagas, who went down to the Assam plains for trade, as ‘strange’ and ‘uncivilized’ by the missionary resonates in other missionary reports and letters where the Nagas were clearly perceived as people needing the ‘civilizing’ effect of the Mission. This is highlighted again by Mary’s observation that: “The Nagas, once civilized and Christianized, will make a manly, worthy people”.<sup>77</sup> Further, the ‘Babel’ of unwritten ‘language and dialects’ that greeted the missionary when the mission was started led Mary to comment that the language of the Ao Nagas showed “considerable mental capacity”.<sup>78</sup> This throws light on the perception of the missionaries on the oral character of the Ao Nagas.

Although it was ‘orality’ (partially) which attracted the mission, it was also the attack on oral tradition (viewed as ‘primitive’) of the Ao Nagas through which the missionaries tried to highlight the superiority of their culture and Christian faith. Local converts, on the other hand, were referred to as ‘enlightened’ who no longer participated in “singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories and engaging in lewd conversation...”.<sup>79</sup>

The missionaries definitely took an interest in the oral tradition of the Ao Nagas, especially the part of the tradition that dealt with the religious aspect. In most of the published works of the missionaries who worked with the Ao Nagas we find them mentioning that part of the oral tradition that deals with the belief system of the AOs. For example, in Mary Mead Clark’s book, *A Corner in India*, the belief system of the AOs is explained in the chapter titled, *Savage Worship and Strange Legends*. The use of the ‘savage’ and ‘strange’ to describe this belief is telling. Another missionary to the Ao Nagas who has noted their oral tradition is W. C. Smith in his book, *The Ao-Naga Tribe of Assam*.<sup>80</sup> He discusses some of the oral tradition associated with the Ao beliefs and the various deities they believed in the chapter titled, *Religion and Magic*.

Clark’s celebrated work, *Ao Naga Dictionary*, mentioned the three main *tsüngrems* in the Ao belief system, *Lungkitsüngba*, *Lizaba* (also *Lijaba*) and *Mojing*. His

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<sup>77</sup>*Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>80</sup> William C. Smith, *The Ao-Naga Tribe of Assam*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2002.

work is by far the most scholarly approach to the Ao oral tradition. He explained the myths surrounding each *tsiingrem*. Thus he explains Lungkitsingba as: “the great deity supposed to live in heaven, the *tiatsüba* of all men, i.e., he is supposed to fix the state or condition of all men in this world, *teti* or *ti asem*”<sup>81</sup> Lizaba is explained to be the chief diety of the Aos, credited to be the creator of the world. According to Clark: “*Lijaba* was accredited to have been the world maker. But the Aos never travelled much beyond their own country and their horizon was supposed to embrace all there was of the world, so though *Lijaba* has the credit of being world maker, all he did (by tradition) was level the surface of the plain of Assam valley...”<sup>82</sup>

Mojing is simply described as the ‘king of the dead’ and “the spirit of every person who dies is supposed to go to his judgment-seat or *kima*...”<sup>83</sup>

We can sum up the missionaries’ view on the Ao oral tradition, in these words by Mary Mead Clark: “From the abundant folk-lore of the Aos the following came to us; its source can hardly be conjectured”.

There was a gap in the way the oral tradition was understood by the missionaries and what it actually meant to the Ao Nagas. This gap resulted because something was ‘lost in the translation’ and understanding of the oral tradition by a culture, which was not familiar with the oral. What it represented to the Aos was not what it stood for the missionaries. This is explained by Peter Burke: “the close study of what is lost (in translation) is one of the most effective ways of identifying differences between cultures”.<sup>84</sup>

‘Orality’ to the missionaries represented an ‘uncivilized’ society, which could be manipulated easier than a ‘lettered’ society. However, it meant something more to the Ao Nagas. So what does the Ao oral tradition tell about their past? What importance did it hold in the Ao society before print? Can we only look at them as mere ‘superstitions’ and

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<sup>81</sup> E. W. Clark, *Ao Naga Dictionary*, Heritage Publishing House, 2013, p.350.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p.340.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 456.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Burke, ‘Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe’, ed. Peter Burke and R. Po- Chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 38.



as part of their 'heathen' practices like the missionaries referred to them or can we regard it to be something more than that?

For starters, we find the Aos' 'literary expression' in their oral tradition. Moreover, an understanding of this tradition will allow us to see that the Aos' oral tradition was neither all superstitious nor pagan as it was made out to be by the missionaries. Their social practices, religious beliefs, political system and everyday life all found expression in their oral tradition.

'Orality' was seen as one of the 'negative' markers that defined the Ao Naga society.<sup>85</sup> To be 'non-literate' automatically meant 'illiterate'.<sup>86</sup> However, there are societies where people communicate, express and 'literate' orally because:

being non-literate or technologically simple does not mean that such societies are lacking in elaborate artistic forms, in literature, in complex symbolism, in scope for the individual to express his own artistry and insights or in an awareness of the depth and subtleties of the world and of human life.<sup>87</sup>

It is pertinent to note that the practice of oral tradition amongst the Aos was well organized with a way and system of transmission. Apart from the *Ariju*, from where people usually learned the oral tradition, people apprenticed to a 'master' of the oral tradition to learn the songs and poetries<sup>88</sup>. Learning the prose, songs and poetries was

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<sup>85</sup> Headhunting, one of the major practices of all the Naga tribes along with animism and illiteracy has been constantly referred in the missionaries' writings as aspects of the Naga society that made them 'savages' and 'barbaric' and 'primitive'.

<sup>86</sup> Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, 2012, p.504.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Chutisang Pongen, an old singer from Ungma village explains how he learnt songs from a *kenshier* in Kaiser's, 'The Songs of the Nagas'. "The pupils of a *kenshier*-usually there were just one or two-had to come with firewood and rice beer, and if they forgot to do so the master would claim without more ado that he had forgotten all his songs. The *kenshier* would sing them a song, line by line, as a short teaching song (< *ken seiak*): a text set to a simple tune, without the repetitions and musical finesse of the actual singing. He explained the meaning of the words and the background to the songs, and the pupils tried to mark what they had been taught. The next evening the *kenshier* got them to sing it; if the pupils managed, the old man went on to the next song- if not everything was repeated. And so in the course of time, song by song, and story by story the pupil absorbed the oral tradition-the history and the culture- of his clan, his village and his tribe". P.240

their way of learning “the history and the culture of his clan, his village and his tribe”<sup>89</sup> which was in turn, getting ‘literate’.

One of the recurrent topics in the missionaries’ records and correspondence letters relating to the Naga Hills was the work in the literary field and how they were the first to provide a ‘literature’ to the Ao Nagas. In a report titled, ‘Assam Historical- A Century of Service’, Rev, Wickstrand wrote: “They (the Ao Nagas) had no literature to begin with, naturally. The only way to get it was to get busy and do it. They (the earlier missionaries) did so well that we are still dependent upon their work”.<sup>90</sup> This he wrote in reference to the huge amount of literary (translation) work that was done by the early missionaries in an effort to give the Ao Nagas a ‘literature’. A separate department for foreseeing the literary works was also established.<sup>91</sup> This literature, as we shall see in detail in the next chapter, was predominantly Christian literature.

The point is, the perception of the Ao Nagas as ‘primitives’, ‘savages’ and ‘uncivilized was partly because of their ‘unwritten language’. The task of converting the ‘unwritten’ status of their language to a ‘written’ was immediately given attention with the start of the mission. The first missionaries to the Ao country, Rev. E. W. Clark and Mary Mead Clark, with the help of “two of the most intelligent men of the village” learnt the Ao language and reduced it to writing using the Roman script<sup>92</sup>, which was followed by the giving a ‘literature’ to the Aos. Although seemingly working for the ‘benefit’ of the natives, the missionaries were constantly working within a limited understanding of native people and societies. The missionaries discouraged the continuation of oral tradition with effective results.<sup>93</sup> This is typical of societies that have a tradition of written literature. However:

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<sup>89</sup> Kaiser, ‘The Songs of the Nagas’, 2008, p p.240.

<sup>90</sup> American Baptist Foreign Mission Societies, Microfilm-3253, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

<sup>91</sup> This is written in the report written by Rev. S. A. Perrine titled, Report From The Ao Field, in *All is Light! All is Light: Source Materials for History of Christianity*, compiled by C. Walu Walling, ATKAR for ABAM, 2001, p.50.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1907, p. 84.

<sup>93</sup> Kaiser explains this in his article, ‘The Songs of the Nagas’, in these words, “In the Ao village of Longpa the singing of old songs was forbidden by the Church for a long time. Even though the attitude of the Church has changed during the past few years, singing these songs is still considered a sin. It took a lot of effort to entice two old singers- of which there are said to live several more in the village- to sing some songs onto tape”.

In 'civilized' countries we are inclined to associate literature with writing; but such an association is accidental.... Millions of people throughout Asia, Polynesia, Africa and even Europe who practice the art of literature have no knowledge of letters. Writing is unessential to either the composition or the preservation of literature. The two arts are wholly distinct.<sup>94</sup>

The missionaries and others that came to the Naga Hills on the wings of colonialism missed out this understanding of the native cultures and practices. Although: "there is nothing necessarily 'backward' about a poet in a culture which does not use the written word choosing to express his literary ability through the rich oral medium at his disposal"<sup>95</sup>, with the coming of the missionaries, a new understanding of being 'literate' and being 'educated' began to take over the Naga Hills.

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<sup>94</sup> N. K. Chadwick quoted in Ruth Finnegan's, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Open Book Publishers, 2012, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Finnegan's, *Oral Literature in Africa*, p. 504.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **‘The Book in the Service’ of the Missionary**

*A raw Naga at first knows no more of the modus operandi of writing than does the pencil he tries to hold in his dirty, clumsy fingers. One thing he knows and only one that is how not to do what you tell him. But he soon improves and the effect of this simple accomplishment at the hands of a few Naga boys and girls has been remarkable. It alone has awakened quite an education throughout the hills, a revival in “letters”- a Naga “renaissance” so to speak<sup>96</sup>.*

Rev. S. A. Perrine,

Report from the Ao Naga field, 1899.

Because of the American Baptist Mission’s strong belief in ‘Christian philanthropy’ and ‘civilizing’ outreaches for ‘destitute brethren’<sup>97</sup>, the mission established a mission station amongst the Ao Nagas in March 1876, recognizing them as ‘savages’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘heathen’ which called for missionaries’ intervention. Thus, a surge of ‘civilizing’ activities quickly followed the start of the mission, which was deemed ‘desirable’.<sup>98</sup> One of the main components of this ‘civilizing’ activity was the introduction of a script to the Ao Nagas.

One reason why the missionaries took the trouble of reducing the Ao language to writing was because of their belief that the converts were to be able to read the Bible in their own tongue. Own reading of the Bible is an important mandate of the Baptist denomination.<sup>99</sup> Thus, not only was the task of reducing the spoken language immediately undertaken but also schools for educating the natives were almost immediately started and books were translated into the vernacular for schoolwork.

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<sup>96</sup> Rev. S. A. Perrine, Report From the Ao Naga Field, ABFMS, Microfilm-3256.

<sup>97</sup> William Gammell, *A History of American Baptist Mission in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America*, Boston Gould, Kendall and Lincoln, 59 Washington Street, 1849, pp.1-7.

<sup>98</sup> Rev. S. W. Rivenburg, ‘Historical Sketch of the Ao Naga Mission’, in *All is Light! All is Light!*, 2001, p. 16.

<sup>99</sup> Mar Atsongchanger writes, “These missionaries were the Protestants and they insisted upon the reading of the Bible, and this was one reason why the early converts and scholars were interested in reading and writing”. In *A Brief History of Literature and Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p.39.

Although the printing press in Molung, in the Naga Hills was used for printing books for the schools<sup>100</sup>, a large number of books for the Ao Nagas were also printed from Sibsagar, Shillong and Calcutta. One reason for this could have been the difficulty of acquiring paper in the Naga Hills.<sup>101</sup> The Ao hymnbook of 34 pages containing 20 hymns (both translated and original) and the Lord's Prayer by Godhula were probably some of the first printed books that appeared in the Chongli Ao dialect. It was printed in the Sibsagar mission printing press in 1879.

The two main purpose of the printing press in the Naga Hills appear to have been to produce textbooks for the schools and to help in the evangelical venture of the mission through translation work. Books that were deemed necessary and important for the uplift of the Aos (usually the gospels of the Bible) were chosen and translated into the vernacular leading to the transfer of a specific kind of knowledge and cultural exchange.<sup>102</sup> Between the 1880's to 1954 (the year that the white missionaries left the Naga Hills permanently), thousands of Christian literature not only in terms of the translated gospels but also pamphlets, small journals and magazines were issued and distributed for free.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section show the efforts made by the missionaries towards the standardization of the Chongli Ao dialect whereby I argue that the missionaries' patronage to this particular Ao dialect led to the emergence of 'the' Ao language. The second section, titled Learning to talk with books<sup>103</sup>, highlights the start of schools and education among the Aos where the pupils were encouraged to read the 'word of God'. It also show the growing acceptance of the written word against the oral and how knowing how to read signified being 'modern'. In the third section, I

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<sup>100</sup> This printing press was in Molung, after the base was shifted from Dekha Haimong to a new site, a new Christian village as the Christians were persecuted by the non-converts.

<sup>101</sup> As late as 1945, Mr. Hunter the station missionary at that time wrote about the "shortage of paper" in the Naga Hills and wrote that examination were not frequently held because of the crisis.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Burke has written that one mark of cultural transfer in Europe has been the enormous effort given to translation of book from one language to the other, ranging from religious, scientific, political to literary works. In ed. Peter Burke and R. Po- Chia Hsia, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> The Ao Nagas are supposed to have invited the missionaries to come and educate their children. "Come up to our village in the hills, Sahib, and teach our children to talk with books; we will give our children that you may teach them in the new way".

attempt to show the changes that print initiated in the Naga Hills in the language trajectory where foreign languages along with the vernacular were introduced leading to the Aos', and the Nagas' at large, familiarization with English. Drawing on Peter Burke's work<sup>104</sup>, in the last section I look at the translation and transaction of knowledge between the natives and the missionaries via the translated books introduced in the schools. Central to this is the study of schools and the school curriculum through which the Aos got in touch with print.

## I

### **Standardizing the language**

One of the first and most important things for the missionary to pick up in order to settle-in in the Naga Hills was the native tongue. All the missionaries who came to the Naga Hills had to learn the language of whichever tribe they worked with. As Mary Mead Clark noted: "A good knowledge of their language, habits and character is absolutely essential for gaining their confidence and winning souls".<sup>105</sup> In the case of some missionaries who got transferred from one mission station to another, ministering to different tribes, it was double the trouble of learning an extra tongue which they often complained were extremely difficult to learn.<sup>106</sup> Writing on the need to learn the Ao language, Clark wrote:

The language of this tribe, embracing over forty villages, is totally distinct from the Assamese and much more difficult to acquire. But it must be used among these people. Probably not one man in a thousand, and scarcely a single woman, would understand a religious conversation in Assamese, nor will they understand it without a good deal of teaching.<sup>107</sup>

When the initial plan for the mission in the Naga Hills was contemplated, Clark encouraged his Assamese evangelist to get acquainted with the Aos who belonged to the

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<sup>104</sup> Peter Burke, 'Cultures of translation in Early Modern Europe', 2007.

<sup>105</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 68.

<sup>106</sup> The Rivenburgs worked with the Ao Nagas for starting from January 1885. For their work with the Aos they had to learn the Ao language, which they were told was harder to learn than Assamese. Later when their mission base was shifted to the Angami Nagas, they had to learn the Angami language.

<sup>107</sup> Report of Rev. E. W. Clark, Ao, *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 56.

Dekha Haimong<sup>108</sup> village as they would frequent the plains of Assam. It was through these people that Godhula learnt the 'Ao language', learning enough for him to visit the village in 1872.<sup>109</sup> It was in this village that Clark started the new mission, the Ao mission in March 1876. Naturally, he also picked up the dialect spoken by the Dekha Haimong villagers, which happened to be the Chongli dialect. Thus, amongst the 'Babel of dialects' spoken by the different villages of the Ao Nagas, it was the Chongli Ao which was standardized by the missionaries.<sup>110</sup> Two locals: "the most intelligent men of the village" taught the Clarks their dialect against a payment of one rupee for eight lessons each.<sup>111</sup>

The process through which the spoken language of the AOs was reduced to writing is given as follows:

After much thought the English or Roman alphabet was chosen with the Italian sound of the vowels. One new letter for a certain vowel sound was designed. With this arrangement the Ao language is phonetically written without a diacritic mark, each letter having (with only a slight deviation) one and the same sound whatever used. In this way learning to read and to spell words is easy.<sup>112</sup>

Clark and his wife devoted much of their time to learning the native tongue. Toolkits especially for the use of the new missionaries to the station for acquiring the language soon followed. Mary Mead Clark's, *Ao Naga Grammar with Illustrative Phrases and Vocabulary*, appeared in 1893.<sup>113</sup> Here, it is interesting to note that the missionaries took an active role in choosing the print language for the AOs. In the chapter titled 'Dialects', which also served as the introduction to her book, Mary wrote:

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<sup>108</sup> In a letter from Clark dated, Dec 5, 1871, he writes, "The tribe to which my native preacher Godhula went has probably fifty or more sungs, which speaks a common language".

<sup>109</sup> Godhula was an Assamese evangelist who assisted Clark in his mission to the Ao Nagas. he learnt the Ao language through a native. Mary Mead Clark in her book, *A Corner in India*, wrote, "A Naga man living near Sibsagor was persuaded to come evenings to Godhula's house, and while he talked about his people Godhula listened with open ears and soon could speak a little of the language", p.10.

<sup>110</sup> Books on the grammar, vocabulary and a dictionary of the Chongli Ao appeared in 1893 and 1911 respectively. Mongsen did not receive the attention from the missionaries. It was J. P. Mills who attempted to give "an outline grammar" of the Mongsen in 1926 in his book, *The Ao Nagas*.

<sup>111</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 84.

<sup>112</sup> *All is Light! All is Light: Source Materials of History of Christianity*, 2001, p.41

<sup>113</sup> This book was printed by the Superintendent, Assam Secretariat Printing Department, Shillong.

When Zungli (sic) and Mungsen converse together, each frequently, though not always, speaks his own dialect. From the first Zungli has evidently been the dominant element in the Ao tribe, and only among the Zungli do the village offices descend in family lines. This dialect is now decidedly more prevalent than Mungsen. Some words of the latter have crept into the Zungli dialect, but only very few, considering the long and intimate relationship of the two dialects. The language of the books thus far printed in Ao is Zungli, and this is employed in the following pages.<sup>114</sup>

The other important work with regard to the Ao language undertaken meticulously by Clark is the *Ao Naga Dictionary*.<sup>115</sup> Although published only in the year 1911, it was a work undertaken almost immediately after the start of the mission with several rounds of revision been done before it went to the press.<sup>116</sup> In the writing of the dictionary, he was assisted by his wife, Idizungba, Scvbonglvmba and Kilep Alvm (natives). Much of the work undertaken by him after the arrival of the new missionaries to the Ao station concerned the writing of the dictionary.<sup>117</sup> In 1896, Clark wrote about their work with the books concerning the Ao language:

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<sup>114</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *Ao Naga Grammar with Illustrative Phrases and Vocabulary*, Shillong, 1893, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup> With regard to the dictionary, Clark wrote, "For the dictionary, the correct spelling as well as the meaning of every word has been carefully considered. The primary and secondary meanings, the development and growth of the words should be shown; the synonyms with the differences and the peculiar uses need to be noted. The cross references require much labor. But it is hoped that when the work is completed it will be all the more valuable for those who hereafter may wish to acquire the language. In writing the dictionary the third time, I am now in the letter O of the alphabet. New records and new meanings to words already obtained are constantly being added. This is, of course, true of every living language, but all the more so is it in a first attempt to complete a dictionary in a language. It is hoped that the manuscript will be complete this year".

<sup>116</sup> Clark recounts an incident involving the dictionary, "The manuscript books of the Ao Naga-English Dictionary had the misfortune, at the time of the Venice disaster, to be soaked in Hoogly brine for three days or so, but I am thankful to say that much the larger portion came out legible, but in places of few words on a page and in places many words have to be re-written". In *All is Light! All is Light!*, 2001, p. 74.

<sup>117</sup> In 1897 Clark wrote, "Most of my work the past year has been in revising and rewriting the Ao Naga English Dictionary. This I have not been able to complete as I hoped to do one year ago, but a large measure of progress has been attained. The Ao language is polysyllabic so much so that it is difficult to find sufficient monosyllables or the first primary book for the schools. The resolving of the polysyllables into their component parts is sometimes very easy and sometimes very difficult. But until the original parts are ascertained, one is seldom sure of the fundamental meaning of a word. The past year I found a couple of keys that unlocked quite a number of these formidable words that had been baffling me". In *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 154.



In 1893 an Ao Naga Grammar with illustrative phrases and vocabulary was printed. On this Mrs. Clark and I bestowed considerable labor. But a complete dictionary of the language is a much larger undertaking. As the dictionary is first in the language it is especially difficult. Before my time no mission work had been done in the tribe and no effort had been made to reduce the language to writing.<sup>118</sup>

These were some of the first and the most important steps taken by the missionaries in their effort in standardizing the Chongli Ao dialect. This was an important step for the further translation of books in the Ao language. All the books that followed these were printed in the Chongli dialect, as a result of which Chongli came to be recognized as the print language for the Aos. Thus, this led to the use of Chongli by the Mongsen speaking people on a more regular basis than before. As J. P. Mills observed on the development of Chongli as 'the' Ao language in his book, *The Ao Nagas*:

Of the two main dialects Chongli is the dominant, and shows signs of gradually becoming the language of the tribe. Most Mongsen-speaking individuals know Chongli, while comparatively few persons whose natural dialect is Chongli can speak or understand Mongsen. The spread of the Chongli dialect has received great impetus from the work of the Mission. The first station was at Molungyimchen, a Chongli-speaking village, and Chongli was thus naturally the language learnt by the missionaries. All the translation has been done in it and it is used for all Mission work. The result of this is that few Ao can express themselves on Christian subjects in the Mongsen dialect. A Mongsen-speaking pastor, probably, ordinarily thinks in Chongli when he thinks about his religion; certainly he almost always uses that dialect even when preaching to a Mongsen-speaking congregation. When inspecting schools in Mongsen-speaking villages I have more than once got the boys to read a portion of the Bible and shut their books, and I have then asked them to tell me what they have been reading. They will repeat it almost word for word fluently enough in Chongli, but when a request is made to explain in their own dialect the invariable answer is that "it

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<sup>118</sup>*Ibid*, p. 135.

cannot be done; it is written in Chongli and can only be explained in Chongli”.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, a standardized language of the Aos began to emerge after the arrival of print.<sup>120</sup> This did not lead to the disappearance of other dialects like Mongsen and Changki. However, it did lead to a form of ‘Chongli hegemony’ where even in a pure Mongsen speaking village, official meetings and church services are held in the Chongli dialect.

## II

### Learning to talk with books

In most societies, print is usually preceded by a scribal culture. Thus, when print made its entry, it was naturally employed to duplicate already popular works in demand by an already established reading community for mainly commercial purpose. The preprint Aos though, were not a ‘reading’ community and had to be taught to ‘read and write their own language’. Paper itself was a new artifact for the Aos.<sup>121</sup> The task of teaching the Aos to ‘read’ their own language had to be taken up by the missionaries. Schools were therefore a ‘necessity’. Specifically concerning the mission area of Assam under which the Naga mission fell under, one missionary observed:

It is the duty of the government to provide primary education for all its subjects. But the government of India has not yet done this great duty and large numbers of the most ignorant of the people of Assam are without educational facilities.

It is the legitimate use of the Mission resource to expend them in educating those who are thus neglected in the public school system, if in establishing schools for these neglected people the two fold aim of leading the public to

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<sup>119</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, pp. 333-334.

<sup>120</sup> It was not only with the Aos that this phenomenon took place. In the Assam valley when the mission was first started, the use of the Assamese language was considered to be ‘uncultured’. However, when the mission was started, the missionaries used the Assamese language instead of Bengali (then used extensively in the Assam valley) to print their paper *Orunodoi*. This single act has been credited for reviving the dying Assamese language. ABFMS, Microfilm no-3253, NMML.

<sup>121</sup> Rev. E. W. Clark once made a paper kite and while it was flying the people are supposed to have said, “He is sending a message to the spirits”. Mrs. Perrine Longwell, *The Ao Naga Jubilee*, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 109.

Christ and for the formation of Christian character predominates together with a third and subordinate aim of diffusing Christian ideals throughout the community.<sup>122</sup>

Soon after joining her husband in the Ao mission field after her return from her furlough in America, Mary Mead Clark opened the first school in the Ao region in 1878. Rev. W. F. Dowd in his report, 'Assam- Impur- The first Mission to the Naga Hills of Assam, 1916', wrote how Mrs. Clark "gathered around her the boys and girls who were to be the first to read their own language".<sup>123</sup> In 1880, another school was opened by Clark at Merangkong (another Ao village) under Godhula and M.D. Burnath. Godhula was one of the first teachers of the school who taught the pupils how to read the alphabets.<sup>124</sup> The first book in the Ao language was the 'Ao Primer 1' printed in 1877.<sup>125</sup>

The objective of the schools was mainly to prepare native 'Christians workers' for the mission.<sup>126</sup> However, apart from carrying out this 'evangelical mission', schools also became the main site where the pupils interacted with print. School textbooks like the Primers, hymnbook and the gospels were the first reading books used by the Aos.

Rev. S. A. Perrine wrote in his report in 1899:

In teaching the Nagas we use the sound method and find it very satisfactory... we have laid special stress on writing and the results have been so pleasing that an extra word on this very primary subject may be pardoned. We procured some American copy books with very simple plain round letters. These are most helpful.<sup>127</sup>

For a long time the Clarks were the only missionaries in the Naga Hills and no other missionaries were assigned to this mission station.<sup>128</sup> This meant that the two lone

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<sup>122</sup> Education Committee Minutes, June 1914, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3252, NMML.

<sup>123</sup> ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>124</sup> "This is A and this is K; A and K together becomes AK (pig in Ao). Again, A and N together becomes AN (hen); and if you add another A in AN, it becomes ANA (two)". Merangkong Arogo Otsu, p. 123. (Translation mine).

<sup>125</sup> Mar Atsongchanger, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p. 29.

<sup>126</sup> Paper by Mr. W. Danielson, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3253, NMML.

<sup>127</sup> Rev. S. A. Perrine, Report from the Ao Naga Field, February, 1899.

<sup>128</sup> Apart from the Rivenburgs who came to replace the Clarks when they were on furlough.

missionaries had to divide their time in the fields of education, translation and evangelism. As a result, the work's progress was slow. It was only in the years 1892 and 1893 respectively that two missionary families joined the Ao mission field, Rev. and Mrs. S. A. Perrine and Rev. P. Haggard and family.<sup>129</sup> This added entourage in missionaries' force meant that they were able to divide the different fields of ministry. The literary work was placed under the direction of Clark, the village schools and churches were to be supervised by Haggard and the training school and evangelists was placed under the care of Perrine.<sup>130</sup> There were other shifts apart from this. The mission station was shifted from Molung to Impur in 1893<sup>131</sup> as it was more centrally located for not only the Aos but a strategic place to minister to the bordering tribes as well.<sup>132</sup> One significant venture associated with this shift was the establishment of the first training school in the Naga Hills in 1894, the Impur Mission Training School. According to Mary Mead Clark, the need for a higher grade school "for training teachers and evangelists" was much needed and this desire was fulfilled with the coming of the new missionaries.<sup>133</sup>

All schools, primary schools in the villages, Training schools or high schools, were established with evangelism in mind. In 1916, W. F Dowd made his observation on the village primary schools:

In the village schools are gathered every morning several hundred boys and girls to learn to read and write their own language , study a little arithmetic and imbibe a little of the spirit of progress which is invading even these mountains on the furthest frontier. These schools are the training ground for the churches.

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<sup>129</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 131-133.

<sup>130</sup><sup>130</sup> Perrine, Report from the Ao Field, December, 1895, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> 'Brief Sketch of Impur', Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>132</sup> Ao, *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 160.

<sup>133</sup> This training school had three main classes. First was called the 'Teachers Normal Class'. Here the main aim was to train the teachers to be 'better teachers'. They were taught both English and Naga. The second was called the 'Workers Class'. Here those who felt the 'calling' to preach however were too late for training were trained in the native tongue to make 'useful workers'. Lastly, 'the English Training Department' where the training was in English or in some other foreign language "for the simple reason that they have no literature and probably will never have any to speak of". Perrine, Report from the Ao Field, December, 1895, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p.53.

The Gospels are the principal reading books and often the pupils are the first converts in the villages.<sup>134</sup>

The pupils were thus exposed mainly to Christian literature. A quick look at the books printed for the Ao Nagas after the start of the mission extending into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is enough to show us that it was a predominantly Bible based literacy which the missionaries introduced.<sup>135</sup> Mrs. Perrine Longwell wrote in 1926 that during the first fourteen years of the mission, the books that were printed in Ao were a “Primer, Catechism, Life of Joseph in a book of 116 pages, a hymn book, and the Gospels of Matthew and John.”<sup>136</sup>

The list of books printed by the mission for the Aos till the year 1931 were as follows: Ao Arithmetic, Book I, Ao Arithmetic, Book II, Primer in Ao Naga, First Reader in Ao Naga, Folklores of the Ao Nagas, Ao Reader (Second), An Outline Grammar of the Naga Language, O.P., The Story of Joseph O.P, First Catechism O.P., Second Catechism, Ao Naga Dictionary and New Testament in Ao Naga. All of these books appeared in the Chungli Ao dialect.<sup>137</sup>

To be able to ‘read’ the book was a major part of the education. Although all three Rs were introduced in the schools, most emphasis was apparently on the learning how to read the letters. In his Triennial report for the year 1896-98, Rev. S. A. Perrine wrote: “We have asked them to adopt no less a standard than that every Christian be able to read his Bible.”<sup>138</sup>

I. Ben Wati, an alumnus of the Impur Mission Training school has sketched a picture of how they were taught how to read when he started schooling in 1927, in his autobiography, *My Early Years in Nagaland 1920-1935*:

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<sup>134</sup> W. F. Dowd, ‘Assam-Impur- the First Mission to the Naga Hills of Assam’, ABFMS, Microfilm no-3255., NMML.

<sup>135</sup> Wickstrand noted that this was mostly the work of the earlier missionaries who had to work hard fast to supply a ‘literature’ to the Aos as they had none.

<sup>136</sup> Mrs. Perrine Longwell, ‘The Ao Naga Jubilee’, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p.109.

<sup>137</sup> List of Ao Naga Books Published by the American Baptist Mission, File no. 35, 1931, NSA.

<sup>138</sup> Rev. S. A. Perrine, ‘Report from the Ao Naga Field’, The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Fifth Triennial Conference held in Diburgarh, February 11- 19, 1899, Triennial Reports-1896- 98, pages 38-43, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p.67.

The ABC was read like this: Ah, Bee, See, Dee. Ey, Yef, Go. “E” was read like the English pronunciation of “A” and “G” was not like the English “Gee”, but with a little bit of an aspirated “H” sound I pronounced it as “Gho”. We learned M as Yem, and “N” as “Yen”.<sup>139</sup>

Later when the individual alphabets were learnt, words were added to them. For example:

KA-kia ka

LA-ela la

MA-yemma ma

NA-yenna na

PA-pia pa<sup>140</sup>

This was an activity in which the entire class would participate and was a matter of great enjoyment.<sup>141</sup> Explaining this system, missionary Wickstrand wrote in the foreword to, *A B C Kakut* in 1930:

The Student upon learning the alphabet and letter combinations or the idea of pronunciation is then lead to review the alphabet and learn simple one or two syllable words beginning with the corresponding letters. When this is completed the student has a limited vocabulary ready. Accordingly, very elementary sentences are then introduced based entirely upon the already familiar words. When new words are used in a lesson in each instance they appear in script and

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<sup>139</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland 1920-1935*, tr. Chubatola AierCouncil of Baptist Churches in North East India, Board of International Ministries, ABC-USA, Guwahati, 2008, p. 179.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180. The two letter words were succeeded by three letter words and so on. The entire class would read these letters, which the writer recalls sounded a lot, like singing. This method of teaching the school in the 1920s is same like the method that Godhula used when teaching schoolchildren at the Merangong School in the 1870s.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

print form at the outset of the lesson and should be learned before attempting to read the ensuing sentences.<sup>142</sup>

It is being argued that in nineteenth century Northeast India, the emphasis of the missionaries was to mint ‘passive readers’ of the Bible and related religious tracts and not necessarily writers who could “interrogate the missionary scripts or the master texts.”<sup>143</sup> Throughout the missionaries reports and letters, we find their emphasis on ‘being able to read’ by the natives and rarely on the writings. One example of this is the report by Clark, which he made in July 1884:

The main objective of these schools is the proclamation of the gospel to the people of a village where the teacher is located. The first converts are usually from the men of middle life. Later, as the children grow up, we reap from the schools; and, as these know how to *read the Scripture*, we have a better foundation for church-membership and for preachers. A school two hours in the morning during week days does not seriously interfere with the teacher’s work as preacher during the rest of the day. Or reliance for the formation of Christian character is upon the Spirit and the word, not upon secular education (emphasis added).<sup>144</sup>

In harmony with Clark, Rev. S. A. Perrine also wrote in December 1895 that during one of the training sessions for the English Training Department of the Impur School, emphasis was in “reciting orally the Bible narrative- more especially the Old and New Testament stories. This course improves the students in their English rapidly, fixes in their mind what the BIBLE REALLY SAYS and gives them a fund to draw from in preaching which is of the highest value”.<sup>145</sup>

This emphasis on reading and more specifically the reading of the Bible nurtured people who were centered on the ‘Word of God’. By 1900, the *Catechism of Bible*

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<sup>142</sup> *ABC Kakut*, The American Baptist Mission, Impur, Assam, 1930.

<sup>143</sup> David Vumlallian Zou, *The Interaction of Print Culture, Identity and Language in Northeast India*, unpublished Phd thesis submitted to School of Geography, Archaeology and Paleocology (GAP), Queen’s University Belfast, BT7 1NN Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2007.

<sup>144</sup> E. W. Clark, ‘The Naga Mission’, in *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 108.

<sup>145</sup> Rev. S. A. Perrine, ‘Report from the Ao Field’, in *All is Light! All is Light!*, 2001, p. 54.

*Teaching* by Dr. John A. Broadus was translated and printed for use in schools.<sup>146</sup> It was only with the coming of the newer and younger missionaries that secular education was introduced in the Naga Hills.<sup>147</sup>

In 1927, a Reader containing stories outside of the Christian domain was published. This Reader was the *Ao Naga Tazungtsu Kakut, Reader-3*. The book covered stories of the pied piper of Hamelin, Horatius of Rome, also stories and legends from Scotland and England apart from many popular moral stories.<sup>148</sup> Pictures accompanied the stories. For the first issue 1000 copies were printed. Prior to this, 'the use of scripture texts as text-books in the common schools' was common and was of great help to the missionaries and Christian teachers.<sup>149</sup> The shift from a predominantly 'listening' to a 'reading' community is well expressed in these words:

"My grandfather received the faith on hearing the Word of God;

My father gave me a New Testament to read the Word of God;

I was born again through the reading of the Word of God;"<sup>150</sup>

A shift was thus starting to take place in the Naga Hills where a people dependent on 'hearing' and 'listening' to words began to 'read' and write letters.

By the late nineteenth century, there was a growing acceptance of the written word and books. As early as 1899, writing on the 'awakened interest in education' and the changes that the young people were entertaining, Rev. S. A. Perrine wrote: "So many and urgent became the letters flying back and forth on matters that were hardly urgent, that we had to interfere in the interest of the *siti mungers*, or village letter carriers".<sup>151</sup> The growth of the importance of the written word among the Aos is seen in Mary's work, A

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<sup>146</sup> Ao, *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 179.

<sup>147</sup> In 1905, Rev. W. F. Dowd reported that that in the Impur school the students studied, "arithmetic, writing, spelling, physiology, hygiene, geography and history; at the same time special attention is given to the study of the Scripture and practical Christian work". Ao, *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 202.

<sup>148</sup> Rev. W. F. Dowd, *Ao Naga Tazungtsu Kakut, Reader 3*, The Ao Baptist Association, Impur, 1962. (Sixth Edition)

<sup>149</sup> *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 42

<sup>150</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland 1920-1935*, Guwahati, 2008, p.10.

<sup>151</sup> Rev. S. A. Perrine, 'Report from the Ao Naga Field', 1899, in *All is Light! All is Light!*, 2001, p. 66.



*Corner India*. While explaining the role of her husband in settling affairs between hostile villages, she wrote:

Again and again there came ambassadors from different villages to counsel with Mr. Clark; some, cognizant of their own misdeeds, would plead for his intercession on their behalf, and all begged for a *written testimony* of their peaceable conduct and good-will. It was amusing to see what confidence they suddenly had in a written statement, though *none of them could read* (emphasis added).<sup>152</sup>

Once education was firmly built in the Ao country, the people were 'eager for the printed' books. This is seen in the description by Mary Mead Clark:

We can never tell the joy when the young men and women in our congregation began intelligently handle the Scriptures and hymn books! What did it matter if sometimes the books were held upside down by the older ones who did not wish to be outdone; their honest pride spoke volumes. Of what account were any sacrifices for this people now glad to have us with them and eager for the printed words.<sup>153</sup>

The written word and the ability to read came to be thus associated with a certain level of reverence and prestige. We see this when a 'written testimony' began to hold more credit than the oral oath which was in the case earlier. The perception that the written word came with a greater level of permanency followed suit into private matters as well. For example, I. Ben Wati wrote about how his father began to maintain a journal from the 1920s onwards where every important event were recorded. According to him: "As education made a beginning in this new generation, father did not only keep the early ways of taking oral oaths, making commitments through word alone, but as far as possible, he wrote as a witness".<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 120.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 109.

<sup>154</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland*, Guwahati, 2008, p. 128.

The indication that the people were becoming more receptive and making room for the printed books is also seen in the increase demand for books. In March 1936, Rev. B. I. Anderson wrote: “There seems to be no end of making books but we are glad that the people want them and are willing to pay for them”.<sup>155</sup> Free distributions of Christian literature usually in the form of pamphlets, tracts and small books were also common.<sup>156</sup> The Ao students in the form of campaigns initiated attempts to ‘literate’ the illiterate and distributed textbooks.<sup>157</sup>

Although the demand for books was clearly increasing, the Ao were solely or mostly dependent on the missionaries for the influx of books into the region. In 1941, a missionary of the Impur station wrote: “Those who learn to read must have books and it is this connection that we feel our responsibility the heaviest. During the year past a new addition of the Ao hymn book has been printed and also a first edition of Pilgrim’s Progress and a reprint of the First Reader”.<sup>158</sup> This was also the time that the Aos were realizing that they can reach out to people through literature and that people can be influenced through books and the kind of literature they were exposed to. While observing that “many unhealthy literature” were going into the hands of the people, Rev. Kijungluba commented that: “The Ao Field has come to an age when we can speak with men and women through literature... we are trying to capture the minds of the people through Christian Literature.”<sup>159</sup> An eager crowd awaited the first edition of the *Ao Naga Holy Bible* in 1964. For the first edition, 10,000 copies were printed out of which 3,000 was sold on the first day!<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Experts from letter from Rev. B. I Anderson from Impur, Mokokchung , ABFMS, Microfilm- 3256, NMML.

<sup>156</sup> The free distribution of tracts and pamphlets has been mentioned many times in both the white missionaries’ and later the natives’ reports. For example, in 1966, Rev. Kijungluba reported that, “The Mungdang is trying to spend more money to produce more literature for free distribution”. In *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 164.

<sup>157</sup> Annual Report, Impur, Assam, 1941, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Rev. Kijungluba, ‘Ao Mungdang’, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 164.

<sup>160</sup> This was during a time when the Aos had 65 churches with a membership of 20, 908. Ao Mungdang Report by Rev. Kijungluba Ao, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p.163.

### III

#### **Negotiation through print: Language**

Chongli was not the only language that the missionaries used for their work with the Aos. However, a permanent decision could not be made regarding which language to use along with Chongli. In 1895, Clark wrote to the Mission centre if a foreign language(s) should be introduced for the education of the advanced pupils so that they may be exposed to the 'general literature'.<sup>161</sup> Thus, a sort of experiment ensued with the Assamese and English languages amongst the Aos.

Usually, the vernacular was used as medium of instruction in the lower classes. As the pupils went into higher classes, the two other languages were introduced.<sup>162</sup> Although Assamese was taught in the school, it did not leave an impact as much as English. In the beginning, the pupils usually began by learning how to read their own language along with Assamese. Assamese was chosen not only because of the proximity of the Naga Hills with the Assam valley where the missionaries were instrumental in reviving the Assamese language through the paper *Orunodoi* but also because many of the first teachers brought to teach in the Naga Hills were Assamese.<sup>163</sup> Also, Assamese was useful when the natives left their hill abodes and went down to the valley for education. These are some of the possible factors, which might have affected the choice of Assamese as a second language for the Ao Nagas. However, the Aos were not able to adapt well to the Assamese language and it was introduced time and again only to be dropped out of the curriculum.

The earliest missionaries made the learning of Assamese a part of the school curriculum. However, in 1905 it was reported that it was dropped as the second language: "giving the place entirely to English" which was followed by 'justified results'.<sup>164</sup> By 1915 again, Assamese was made a part of the school curriculum. J. Riely Bailey one

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<sup>161</sup> ABFMS, Microfilm- 3246, NMML.

<sup>162</sup> The tribal language was taught to the pupils in the Roman character from the start and the Assamese language in the Assamese character from class II. Report- Teaching of tribal language in the Naga Hills, File No-175, NSA.

<sup>163</sup> Godhula Brown, Zilli, Levi Farewell were some of the earliest and most well known Assamese preacher cum teacher who worked with the Aos.

<sup>164</sup> Report of Rev. S. A. Perrine, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 79.

of the station missionaries wrote: “All the pupils are studying Assamese. I had this inaugurated because of the difficulty arising from their inability to read Assamese when they go to Jorhat. So to obviate this in the future, they must all take the language of Jorhat”.<sup>165</sup>

English was the other language, which was used in the schools. One of the main reasons for the introduction of English was that it was a language in which a large body of literature was already available.<sup>166</sup> Mary Mead Clark gives us an idea on why the decision to introduce English in the schools was made:

In the schools at Molung- and this has been continued in the training school at Impur- it was decided to use the English language in connection with the vernaculars. As there were no books in the Naga Hills, save as the missionaries made them, it seemed desirable that the pupils be also educated in a tongue in which there were already text-books, and also that they have access to the entire Bible before it would be possible to translate it into the different tongues of the hills.<sup>167</sup>

W. F. Dowd wrote in 1902 about the language situation in the Ao region in these words: “Most of the work done is teaching the raw Naga to read his own or the Assamese language, with very little Arithmetic. There have been, however, a few more advanced pupils and fairly good work has been done by these in Scripture study in the Catechism. A number also have studied English, but with indifferent success”.<sup>168</sup>

By 1905, English was made the only second language with the brighter pupils taught to study in the English as soon as they were able to read their own language and “thus is opened to them the way for more advanced work in secular subjects as well as for the study of the entire Bible”.<sup>169</sup> The missionaries noted the progress made by the

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<sup>165</sup> Report of J. Riely Bailey, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 95.

<sup>166</sup> Contention has been made as to whether it was wise to translate “a large number of books into the language of so small a tribe.

<sup>167</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, pp.132-133.

<sup>168</sup> W. F. Dowd, ‘Report from the Impur Naga Hills Field’, in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 70.

<sup>169</sup> Rev. W. F. Dowd, ‘Typical School in the Hills’, in Ao, *History of Christianity*, 1998, p. 202.

pupils in English.<sup>170</sup> One of the reasons why the natives found English easier to learn and adjust was because both languages shared the same script making the situation such that: “to be literate in the vernacular, learning English was essential”.<sup>171</sup>

#### IV

##### **‘Translation of knowledge’**

One thing is clear from the earlier sections, the Aos were mainly introduced to translated books. These translated works, mainly the gospels and other Christian literature were rapidly introduced in the schools as the main reading books for the students. This translation work involved the understanding of the natives’ culture to decontextualize and re-contextualize the translated literatures, in other words “first reaching out to appropriate something alien and then domesticating it”.<sup>172</sup>

According to Peter Burke:

In the case of the early modern period, the idea of negotiated translation seems particularly appropriate to the mission field. Christian missionaries had to decide how far they could go in adapting (or as was said at that time, ‘accommodating’) the Christian message to the culture in which they were working.<sup>173</sup>

In late nineteenth century, the missionaries faced similar situation in the Naga Hills. E. W. Clark, the pioneer missionary to the Ao Nagas is known to have allowed compromises with the Ao culture, which allowed the quicker conversion of the Aos.<sup>174</sup> Richard M. Eaton wrote on this identification of local culture with Christianity by the missionaries in these words:

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<sup>170</sup> In a report by Rev. Dowd in 1903, it was reported that the mission had decided to drop the Assamese language to “focus more on the vernacular and English”. In the same report, Dowd notes that a large number of pupils had made good beginnings in English. Repot- Correspondence Letter relating to Primary and Mission school, File no-21, NSA. It was later to be introduced again in 1939.

<sup>171</sup> Riku Khutso, English Language and the Formation of Public Sphere in the Colonial Naga Hills: 1870 - 1950s, unpublished M.phil dissertation submitted to University of Hyderabad, 2013, p. 88.

<sup>172</sup> Peter Burke, ‘Cultures of translation in Early Modern Europe’, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>174</sup> This was opposed by later missionaries that joined the mission.

...the American Baptists leaned heavily on its (Aos') cosmological dimension. 'The old religion of these people furnishes a splendid basis for Christianity', wrote E. W. Clark in 1881. 'The fundamental ideas are there'. Accordingly, the Baptists pioneers among the Nagas attempted to match the important features of Christian doctrine with corresponding features of the Ao system. Mary Clark was pleased to write that the Aos believed in an individual soul and an afterlife, that they had a notion of sin and a need for salvation, and that they had an apocalyptic vision that closely approximated the Day of Judgement."<sup>175</sup>

Again:

In translating 'God' for the Ao scriptures, E. W. Clark and his Naga assistants did not use the term standing for any single deity-neither the Ao supreme being, Lungkijingba, nor the important creator and crop deity Lizaba. Nor was the foreign term 'Jihova' used, at least not initially. Rather, the Ao Bible translated both *kyrios* ('Lord', 'master') and *theos* ('god', 'God') by the Ao word *tsungrem*, a word that denotes simply 'a spirit' not endowed with any specific attributes... Thus by using the generic term 'tsungrem' for 'God', the missionaries were in effect pulling together what the entire pantheon shared in common--its spirit-ness, or '*tsungrem*-ness' ----and endowing that notion with all the power, majesty, transcendence, and the universality of the Biblical supreme deity.<sup>176</sup>

Through the process of 'domesticating' alien concepts and ideas by forging links between the old and the new order through the process of modification of earlier meanings, the missionaries were able to negotiate with the natives. Thus, the printed versions of the gospels were given a touch of indigenous element so much so that the natives identified with Christianity to such an extent that during the Centennial

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<sup>175</sup> Richard M. Eaton, 'Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876-1971', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 21, 1, (1984), SAGE, p. 26.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

Celebration of the *Ao Mungdang* in December 1972, the Ao land was declared as “Ao Land for Christ”.<sup>177</sup>

However, this was not the only site of negotiation between the natives and the missionaries. Other cultural practices for example, the Aos’ love for music and singing was also used to domesticate the ‘alien concepts’. The two main characteristic of the Aos according to Clark was firstly, they had a strong religious element in their mind and secondly, their love for music. Miss E. May Stevenson also noted that: “The Aos love to sing”.<sup>178</sup> According to Mary Mead Clark, Godhula during his venture into the Ao country is supposed to have charmed the hostile Aos when with “his deep-toned, melodious voice he poured out his soul in the sweet gospel hymns in Assamese the people flocked around him and listened as he told them, in his own eloquent way, the sweet old, old story”.<sup>179</sup>

The Aos’ love for singing was used by the missionaries to get the message of Christianity across. Church services were incomplete without the singing, with usually a song being sang one at the beginning of the service and one at the end.<sup>180</sup> In fact, one of the first printed books, which were made available to the Ao Naga, was *The First Ao Naga Hymn Book*, printed by the Mission Press Sibsagor in 1879.<sup>181</sup> According to the

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<sup>177</sup> D. John Richard, The Centennial Celebration of the Ao Mungdang, “Naga Hills Resound with Songs during Baptist Centennial Celebrations”, Indian Witness, Volume CII, No. 51 (December 21, 1972), p. 405 (5), in *All is Light! All is Light!* 2001, p. 168.

<sup>178</sup> E. May Stevenson, ‘The Girl’s School’, pp. 67-68, *All is light! All is Light!* p. 106.

<sup>179</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 11.

<sup>180</sup> A printed program me for an ordaining service on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, 1896 was as follow,

1. Singing
2. Scripture reading
3. Prayer by Molung Church Pastor
4. Sermon- E. W. Clark
5. Charge to Church- O. L. Swanson
6. Charge of Candidate- S. A. Perrine with laying of hand.
7. Ordaining prayer- E. W. Clark
8. Hand of fellowship by all the Christians
9. Singing
10. Benediction by Zilli

<sup>181</sup> For the first edition 200 copies were printed. it was translated by Godhula Brown with some original compositions. A total of 20 hymns were featured in the hymn book. ‘The Sufferings of Christ’, ‘The Awakened Sinner’s Prayer’, ‘Show Pity, O Lord Forgive’ were some of the translated songs. Some of the original songs were, Kreesta Tanaben Alooba’ and ‘Temenene Kreesta num Temeppeeba’.

missionary reports, the Ao hymnbook also became one of most reprinted books, with almost each edition being an enlarged version of the last.<sup>182</sup>

One of the most anticipated events of the year for the Ao Christian community was the *Mungdang* (Conference) which was hosted by a different village each year and the most impressive memory of a *Mungdang* was the singing.<sup>183</sup> During the *Mungdang*, singing competitions were held amongst the participating villages and the winner's price was a golden cup.<sup>184</sup> Wickstrand commented that: "Practically all of the Ao Naga young folk know the tonic sol-fa method whether they have attended school or not".<sup>185</sup> After one particularly good performance at the *Mungdang* at Aliba by the Impur boys and girls, one person said:

When Dr. Clark first came into these hills we knew only folk and war songs which were sang mostly in a monotone. Especially the war songs were accompanied with a great deal of sentiment and motion. It was impossible for us to either sit or stand still while trying to sing the simple hymns Dr. Clark taught. Accordingly Dr. Clark devised a simple dance to the tune of 'Jesus Loves me'. By this method we learned many songs and after a long time were able to sit or stand quietly while singing. Tonight our children have sang very well and we are proud of them and happy for the song which Jesus has put into our hearts.<sup>186</sup>

Music and singing thus became an important site for two factors- first, being indigenous to the Aos, it became an important medium through which the missionaries negotiate the Christian message to the natives. Second, it allowed the continuation of older traditions because although the singing of the old 'objectionable songs'<sup>187</sup> were discouraged, the singing in the old tune did not seized altogether.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> The missionary reports on their literary work and progress usually have a line or two on the reprint of the hymnbook.

<sup>183</sup> Roger R. Wickstrand, 'A "Mungdang" in the Ao Naga Hills', ABFMS, Microfilm no. 3255, NMML.

<sup>184</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland*, 2008, p. 300.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Roger R. Wickstrand, 'The 1931 Ao Naga Annual Association', ABFMS, Microfilm no. 3255, NMML.

<sup>187</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, p. 138.

<sup>188</sup> One song found in the present Ao Hymnbook, which is in the traditional tune is, *Kotak Kubok Alir Ajak*, Osangtajung Ken, p. 419.



This translation of knowledge was not a one-way street where only one party was the 'donor' and the other 'receiver'. It was an exchange of knowledge constantly taking place between the locals and the 'outsiders'. Locals' knowledge sipped into the missionaries' understanding, seen precisely in the missionaries' understanding of the local cultures and using them effectively in their effort to re-contextualize the Christian message.<sup>189</sup> In turn, the knowledge that was produced for the natives via, translated books, influenced the natives' perception about themselves.

The Ao Nagas were quickly familiarized with the translated version of not only the gospels but also other Christian books. This introduction of print to the Ao Nagas through the translated books and tracts meant that they were rapidly introduced to a culture that was not their own. For the Ao Nagas, they were rapidly exposed to a different culture, re-contextualized to make it their own, which although widened their horizons, led to distancing with their original culture and they began to increasingly identify with the new Christian identity negotiated by the missionaries. Familiarization with a new culture resulted in some losses and renunciations of earlier traditions that was felt by later generation.

Education and print as tools of evangelism under the missionaries was a success so that although earlier tradition remained, it was the newer practices like writing, reading and possessing a book, which became more trendy. The evangelical print culture introduced by the missionaries was a success and this is reflected not only in the numerous reprints of the translation works that was painstakingly undertaken but also in the way the early local writers conformed to this style of writing even after the departure of the missionaries from the Naga Hills in the early 1950s. In fact, evangelical reading materials were the most popular form of books that the Aos engaged with both as writers as well as readers.

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<sup>189</sup> Peter Burke, 'Cultures of Translation in early modern Europe', 2007, p. 9.

The printing press, which was described as an ‘invaluable ally’ of the missionary in the Christian work was ‘effectively’ and ‘conveniently’<sup>190</sup> used for the transfer of knowledge to the natives mainly through Christian literature.<sup>191</sup> With the Christian literature acting as the main textbook in the newly introduced schools, the Ao Nagas “so isolated and so primitive that they have no signs for the words they speak”<sup>192</sup> began to experience a ‘renaissance’ leading to the creation of a reading public. By the early twentieth century, the Aos began to seriously engage with print recognizing it as platform not just for religious discourses but as a platform to have discourses on identity, world affairs, etc. In short, the Aos began to harness the power of print.

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<sup>190</sup> ‘A Glimpse of the Mission and Church Presses of India’, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3253, NMML.

<sup>191</sup> However, this was not a one way-street. Local forms of knowledge had to be acquired and understood by the missionaries to assist in the translation, which made it an ‘exchange’ of knowledge between two cultures. For example, In translating the Christian doctrine, the missionaries used the Ao traditional cosmological structure. For example, the Ao term ‘*tsungrem*’ meaning spirit (of which was a host of them) was adopted by the missionary to translate the English term God into Ao, leading Clark to say, “The old religion of these people furnishes a splendid basis for Christianity”. Richard M. Eaton, ‘Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876-1971’, 1984, p. 26.

<sup>192</sup> Rev. J. E. Tanquist, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Print and its Varied Use and Users

*This transition from the folk/oral to the written has accompanying dynamics of changes, and in the process of modification also modifies the social and political concerns of a community, and hence is capable of providing a cultural poetics to ground and appreciate the creative works arising out of such cultural hinterland, where both the traditional and post-traditional features straddle the same creative space...*<sup>193</sup>

Parag M. Sarma.

By the twentieth century, there were visible impact amongst the Ao Nagas not only of Christianity but also of the education, which was introduced to them. A class of people slowly grew within the Ao society who were educated in the mission schools and had seen the world outside the Naga Hills as they ventured out for higher education.<sup>194</sup> Many of these students were provided stipends by either the mission or the government.<sup>195</sup> This was also the class of people, who used print to negotiate the ideas of 'progress' and 'modernity' as they understood them to their fellow Aos. Print in the Naga Hills, by the mid-twentieth century, was no longer the monopoly of the missionaries nor was print solely used for printing Christian literature.

This chapter will deal with two sections with the interlinking theme of appropriation of print by the natives. The first section deals with the appropriation of print in the earlier years of the twentieth century through a study of the Ao vernacular

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<sup>193</sup> Parag M. Sarma, 'Towards an Appreciative Paradigm for Literatures of the Northeast', ed. Margaret Ch. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 42-43.

<sup>194</sup> Most of the students who wanted higher education had to go to either Jorhat or Shillong. Some of them also went to Calcutta. Many of these people, mission educated people, like L. Kijung Ao, Mayangnokcha, would not only work for the missionaries but when the white missionaries were compelled to leave the Impur station, these mission educated people were left in charge of not only the people but the surrounding tribes of Chang, Sangtams, Phoms, Konyaks and K. In fact, as early as 1898, the Ao Mungdang had launched the 'Meri Mission', which was the mission to the 'unreached' Naga tribes. The Aos were the main participants in this mission.

<sup>195</sup> In order to avail the stipend from the government, the Ao Nagas were asked to follow their tradition way of dressing and haircut. This was one area where the mission and the government clashed.

newspaper, *Ao-Naga Messenger* later renamed as *Ao Milen* (Ao Torch), which was started in 1932. The very inception of the paper was with a clear motive to draw the people to the ‘progressive’ side, introducing the readers to news outside the religious domain, although this too formed an important department of the newspaper. The section attempts to draw attention to the role which the paper played in the Ao society, especially in its early years. The appropriation of print during this time was clearly more to rally the people together as one people and community as missionary Wickstrand, the first editor of the newspaper stated that the paper consolidated the “Aos as a tribe and as a Christian community”.<sup>196</sup> The second section investigates at the use of print by the Aos and the Nagas at large<sup>197</sup> in the later part of the twentieth century to ‘recover’ and ‘record’ the past memory, which people have started to ‘forget’. The reason for this ‘forgetting’ past traditions was a result of multiple factors, one of them being conversion to Christianity. The missionaries noted the distancing by the converts with their traditional practices with appreciation. Mary Mead Clark as early as 1907 commented: “Instead of congregating promiscuously at different houses to sleep at night, singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation, these young reformers separate themselves and built a dormitory for their own accommodation, in which purity and holiness should reign”.<sup>198</sup> Over the course of time the effect was felt to such an extent that J. P. Mills, who held charge of the Mokokchung sub-division from 1917-1924 commented:

Another generation and hardly a memory will remain of the stories and songs which the Aos have handed down from father to son for untold ages. What care the well-oiled youths of the Impur Mission Training School for the foolish traditions of their ignorant heathen forebears? To bury the past is the tendency of the semi-educated generation which is growing up.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Copy of letter from Rev. Wickstrand, ABFMS, Microfilm no-3255, NMML.

<sup>197</sup> I say ‘Nagas at large’ because this new found use of print by the turn of the century in the form of creative literary writing emerged from the Nagas as a whole as a result of common experiences with colonialism and Christianization. Thus, in this section, the use of print by the Naga writers as a whole will be studied.

<sup>198</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, 1907, pp. 138-139.

<sup>199</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p. 307.

Literary writers especially from the late twentieth century, conscious of this 'cultural loss' are trying to restore these traditions through their writings. This 'emerging' literature which is termed as the 'new literature', is a trend among not only the Aos but also Nagas in general. Works by Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija and Easterine Kire are used to highlight the use of print in the form of creative writing in contemporary times to negotiate a better understanding of past Naga traditions as against what they were made to believe by the 'outsiders'.

## I

### **A newspaper for the 'welfare of the Ao people'**

Although Christians formed only a sizable amount of the total Ao population<sup>200</sup>, it was steadily growing and constantly trying to bring more people into their fold. The schools greatly aided in this endeavor as the pupils were usually the first ones to convert.<sup>201</sup> By the late nineteenth century, association and societies for the 'welfare' and 'unity' of the people were initiated and formed by the students and Christians. It was claimed that the mission organized such association "to serve as forums for discussion on social welfare activities as well as church policy"<sup>202</sup>. However: "these associations also served to integrate Nagas of the same language groups".<sup>203</sup>

The first association of the Ao Nagas was formed in the year 1897 when the Ao Association was formed by the Ao churches with the aim "to unify all the Naga Christians and tribes into a strong unity".<sup>204</sup> It is to be explained here that in the early twentieth century, many Naga tribes like the Konyaks, Sangtams, Changs, Semas and Lothas came under the jurisdiction of Impur station and thus clubbed under the Ao churches.

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<sup>200</sup> W. F. Dowd reported in 1915 that 2/3 of the Ao villages were Christians.

<sup>201</sup> In 1889, Clark wrote, "The number of day schools in operation in 1887 was five, pupil 157, average attendance 115. In 1888, seven schools with 180 pupils, average attendance 156 and in 1889, there are nine schools with over 200 pupils. These nine schools are in eight villages, one large village having two schools". Abbreviated Minutes of the conference of the Assam Mission of the American Baptists Missionary Union, Dec 21-30, 1889.

<sup>202</sup> Eaton, 'Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas', 1984, p. 13.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Ao, *History of Christianity in Nagaland*, 2002, p.33.

Another society, which was formed in the year 1897, was the Christian Endeavour (C.E.) society. This was a youth society where Christian youths meet and shared their ‘Christian experiences’.<sup>205</sup>

Such association and societies were used as platforms that spearheaded ‘social transformation’. For example, one of the resolutions adopted when the first Ao Association was convened in March of 1897 was: “Every parent should send their children to school”.<sup>206</sup> I. Ben Wati described the society as a means through which: “Many people became good through the discipline in the Christian Endeavour Society, and became leaders in the church and in the land”.<sup>207</sup>

A student body, which was a direct result of the education introduced by the missionaries is the Ao Kaketshir Mungdang (Ao Students Conference) or the AKM. This body, which was formed on 29 December 1929, was referred to as an ‘offshoot’ of the education introduced by the missionaries.<sup>208</sup> This association was formed by the educated Ao youth for the ‘welfare’ of the Ao people with a vision to provide “leadership to the people in matters of education and social change”.<sup>209</sup>

Over the years since its inception, the AKM, which also happen to be the first student’s organization in the Northeast of India,<sup>210</sup> kept true to its vision of providing “leadership to the people in matters of education and social change”.<sup>211</sup> One of the most

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<sup>205</sup> I. Ben Wati has written about his personal association with the CES in the early 20th century. The society met every Saturday. There was bible reading, singing and testimony sharing.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

<sup>207</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland*, 2008, p.191.

<sup>208</sup> Ao Kaketshir Mungdang (AKM), Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, 27<sup>th</sup> 29 December 2004, pp- 18-20.

<sup>209</sup> This conference was started at a time when there was ‘Naga awakening’. This period has been seen as troubled time in the Naga Hills because of the increasing rise of a separate Naga identity. In 1929, the Simon Commission visited the Naga Hills. A few educated Nagas submitted a resolution representing all the Nagas stating their case that Naga were never a part of India and wished to remain away from the Indian Union. A few Aos also represented the Ao people when the Simon Commission was met. Thus, when the AKM was formed, it was met with discouragement from the government thinking that it would instigate the Aos against the government.

<https://www.google.co.in/httpsnagalandjournal.wordpress.comnaga-hills-memorandum-to-simon-commission->

<sup>210</sup> 66<sup>th</sup> AKM General Conference Souvenir, Published by the Planning Committee AKM, 2014.

<sup>211</sup> In 1940, under the initiation of the AKM, the Naga Students’ Federation, the apex Naga students’ body was formed. In 1951, the AKM “resolved to have a college in Mokokchung, and through its initiative, the first private college in Nagaland was born in the form of Fazi Ali College in 1959”. The Law College in Mokokchung, Nagaland was also established in 1981 through the initiation of the AKM. These were some of the main contributions of the AKM not only to the Ao people but also to the Naga people at large.

outstanding contributions of the AKM however, is the start and publication of the first newspaper in the Naga Hills (second in the North-East India, the Assam Tribune being the first), *Ao Naga Messenger* in the year 1932.

The desire and need for a newspaper for the Ao public was discussed in the yearly conference of the AKM for two consecutive years. However, the paper could not be started as the question of how to finance the paper, question about the readership came up and who would be in charge of the editorship of the paper could not be answered.<sup>212</sup> In 1932, finally, this would materialize in the form of the launching of the Ao vernacular newspaper, *Ao Naga Messenger*.

Although it was the AKM, which initiated the paper, missionary Wickstrand was heavily involved with the publication of the paper both as the publisher as well the editor of the paper.<sup>213</sup> In a letter addressed to the G.P. Steward, SDO of Mokokchung, the district headquarters, Wickstrand wrote:

I, Rev. R. R. Wickstrand, B.A., B.D. of the village Impur in the district of Mokokchung at present of Impur, Naga Hills, Assam do hereby declare that I am the printer and publisher of the Newspaper entitled Ao Naga Messenger printed at the Assam printing Works which is situated at Cally Building, Jorhat, Assam.

Even the name of the paper, *Ao Naga Messenger*, was suggested to the AKM by Wickstrand during the AKM conference in Waromung.<sup>214</sup> This attachment of the missionary with the paper continued till 1937 after which the paper was solely taken care of by the AKM.<sup>215</sup>

The purpose and intent of the paper is reflected not only by the content of the paper but also by the insignia and motto used for the paper. The insignia of the AKM was used as the insignia of the paper as well which was an arm bearing a torch. The motto of the paper was: “Published for the welfare of the Ao people”.

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<sup>212</sup> AKM, Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> December 2004, pp-24-27.

<sup>213</sup> Letters relating to the Ao Naga Messenger, File no. 35, 1932, NSA.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with an ex-editor of the newspaper, T. Senka Ao, Mokokchung, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

<sup>215</sup> AKM, Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> December 2004, p. 25.

With the 'nature and content' of the paper being both 'secular and religious', the newspaper began as monthly with a circulation of 200 copies for its first issue being printed at Dose and Co. Jorhat, Assam.<sup>216</sup> The first native to be co-editor of the paper was Jakjemnungba.<sup>217</sup> The subscription charges in 1932 were Rs. 1 (delivered by hand) and Rs. 1.80 (by post).<sup>218</sup>

By 1937, the paper went through certain changes not only in terms of the AKM taking complete control of the paper but also in terms of a change of name for the paper. The first issue of the paper under the new name *Ao Milen*, was issued from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1937.<sup>219</sup> Starting from then on, the paper was also made a bi-monthly, which earlier was monthly.<sup>220</sup> During the years intervening these changes, the paper appears to have enjoyed the support of the people so that by 1937 the subscription numbers have climbed to 400.<sup>221</sup> The following year it reached to 500.<sup>222</sup>

In a letter by Wickstrand to the mission board in November 1932, he gave invaluable insight into not only the nature and content of the newspaper but also on the reception of the paper by the people:

One of the landmarks of the year has been the inception of a religious and secular newspaper. It is the first paper of any kind to appear in the vicinity. The people have given it a welcome reception. Slowly people are recognizing its worth. By nature the Hills people are very conservative and look askance at any innovation from this old routine of life. School boys and girls and others away from home appreciate it especially. Also, the pastors find it an excellent adjunct to their work. Then too, it serves as a link between the missionary and the people. Further, it consolidates the Aos as a tribe and as a Christian community. The departments of the paper are as follows: news items, articles of general interest, i.e., better methods of cultivation etc, question box and answers,

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<sup>216</sup> Letters Relating to the Ao Naga Messenger, File no. 35, 1932, NSA.

<sup>217</sup> AKM, Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> December 2004, p. 25.

<sup>218</sup> Letters Relating to the Ao Naga Messenger, File no. 35, 1932, NSA.

<sup>219</sup> Atsongchanger, *A History of Literature and Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p. 43.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> A History of Ao Baptist Churches Source Material (1888-1894), NSA.

<sup>222</sup> Letters Relating to the Ao Naga Messenger, File no. 35, 1932, NSA.



sermons hints including two and three simple Gospel sermon outlines and the stories chosen to illuminate spiritual truth. Yes, this paper meets a genuine need and we trust it will usher in the beginning of greater literacy achievements for the Ao Nagas.<sup>223</sup>

That the purpose and intent of the paper was more ideological than commercial. The ‘genuine need’, which the paper was supposed to meet, was the upliftment of the people.<sup>224</sup> By the time this newspaper started, a certain notion of ‘modernity’ had spread and was accepted by the educated Aos as the ‘modern education’ received through schools. These notions of ‘modernity’ understood and accepted by this class were usually the kind that was endorsed by the missionaries. For instance, the missionaries would comment on how the Christians were cleaner, smarter and sometimes ‘manlier’ than the non-Christians. Later, even the educated natives themselves began to define being ‘modern’ to be associated with these features. Thus, we find that the paper tried to negotiate these concepts with the reading and hearing public.<sup>225</sup> The content of the paper varied from hygiene, cleanliness, education, world news and religion. Although it also featured secular news, the paper, especially the earlier issues, frequently featured religious articles, clearly showing the close connection which the paper had with Christianity.

One difficulty, which come up with regard to the study of this newspaper was that, the Students’ Conference made no effort to collect the back issues of the paper. Meaning, only a few scattered issues could be collected from a private collector.<sup>226</sup> An explanation for the negligence of documenting the paper could be that, the paper had no permanent publishing place. Since the editors were students, the paper was published

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<sup>223</sup> ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>224</sup> T. Senka Ao wrote that the paper was started by the student leaders, understanding the role that newspapers played in improving and ‘uplifting’ people.

<sup>225</sup> Here I assume that the readers would have shared the contents of the paper with the non-readers and illiterates. As indicated by the subscription numbers, the readership of the paper was low. However, we can imagine that the discussion initiated by the paper hardly remained within the limits of the readership.

<sup>226</sup> This collector is T. Senka Ao, a former editor of the paper.

from wherever the students/editors were studying at that point of time. Thus, the paper was published usually from places like Impur, Guwahati, Shillong and Allahabad.<sup>227</sup>

For the July issue in 1937, the front page carried a short account of the life of John Bunyan, the writer of the book, *The Christian Pilgrimage*, which was one of the first books, which was translated into Ao after the Bible.<sup>228</sup> Most of the articles in the same issue dealt more with news of churches in the Ao area than any other information. Towards the end however, under the title '*Alima Osang*'<sup>229</sup> literally meaning 'World News', the editors introduced the '*Milen* readers'<sup>230</sup>, as the readers of the paper were referred to, to the war in Spain and news from Britain, France, Scotland and U.S.A.

An interesting article, appeared in the June 1941 issue under the title, 'Tenung Nunga Kechi Ali (What's in a name)'<sup>231</sup>. This article was in reply to an article published in an earlier issue, which rebuked the use of foreign names.<sup>232</sup> In reply the writer, I. Ben Wati, who himself had to undergo a change of name under the order from the government<sup>233</sup>, wrote that names do not define people and that having a foreign name should not be made an issue. The same issue published a letter of appreciation from the

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<sup>227</sup> Atsongchanger, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p.43.

<sup>228</sup> John Bunyan Taküm Otsü Tatsüka, *Ao Milen*, July 1937, No. 5, Vol. 1, p. 1.

<sup>229</sup> Alima Osang, *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>230</sup> Many of the articles and informations, started with the address, '*Ao-Milen azungertum*' and '*Milen azungertum*', meaning 'readers of the *Milen*'.

<sup>231</sup> 'Tenung Nung Kechi Ali (What's in a Name?)', June, 1941, Vol. v, p. 4.

<sup>232</sup> The article was titled, '*Tangar kin Tenung amshiba*' literally meaning 'Use of Foreign Names'.

<sup>233</sup> I. Ben Wati's was originally named Donald, a name given to him Mrs. Muriel M. Dowd. However, in the 1930's by an order of the government, the Aos were prohibited from incorporating certain changes which were different from their traditional practices including using foreign names. The order read: In the Mission and Government Schools in the Naga Hills all the boys up to class 11 shall wear only the Naga dress and keep the haircut of their own tribe. Meaning the Aos will keep the traditional mushroom style haircut and will not cut their hair like the plains people. School children will not wear boots, shoes and socks. Further, only half-pants and that also only the ones made from the fabric woven by the Naga people will be used. The Angami people can wear the black kilt or black half-pants. The girls will use the shawls of their own tribe, and keep their hair according to their tribe. The Angami girls will not shave their heads, but keep their hair short. The foreign names will be changed to Ao names, the clothes will also be only Ao clothes. This order was enforced by the SDO of Mokokchung, P. F. Adams and his successor, E.T.D. Lambert. In I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years in Nagaland*, 2008, pp. 159-160.

President of the Assam War Fund for the 'generous contributions', which the Ao Students' Conference made to the war fund.<sup>234</sup>

The contributors to the newspaper were mostly the schoolmasters from the Impur School and Jorhat, the native preachers, the missionaries and from the students themselves. In 1941, B. I. Anderson, the then missionary at Impur wrote about the newspaper:

The difficulty of collecting subscription is also a real one and the Student's Conference which claims this paper as its own is not doing very much to help with finances but they have not been slow to contribute towards its contents and for this we are grateful. Whether or not the paper can continue in its present condition depends upon the financial support it will receive. That it has an important place to fill is easy to see.<sup>235</sup>

Although officially the paper was taken over completely by the Students' Conference by 1937, the Baptist missionaries were still involved with the paper as they constantly, in their reports and letters, wrote about the *Milen* as part of their 'literary work'.<sup>236</sup> In 1941, B. I. Anderson reported: "The Ao Milen has been printed regularly during the year, but the boy who learned to set type became ill and we had to train a new printer and this was a slow work".<sup>237</sup>

The journey of the newspaper was not smooth, as its publication had to be halted many times for varied reasons. From the 1950s- 1960s, the publication of the paper was halted due to financial reasons.<sup>238</sup> It resumed publication in the 1970s only to be affected by the state of Emergency that was declared by then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.<sup>239</sup> After being dormant for nearly 15 years, the paper resurfaced only in the 1990s and is in publication till date.

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<sup>234</sup> The letter, which was addressed to the Secretary of the Students' Conference read, "Dear Sir, I write to convey to the members of your Conference my personal thanks for their generous contributions to the Assam War Fund".

<sup>235</sup> 1941, Annual Report, Impur, Assam, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>236</sup> American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, 36<sup>th</sup> Session, Nowgong, Assam, December 13-18, 1938, in *All is Light! All is Light!*, 2001, pp.123-125.

<sup>237</sup> ABFMS, Microfilm no-3255, NMML.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with T. Senka Ao, a former editor of the newspaper.

<sup>239</sup> Atsongchanger, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p.44.

The start of the ‘first newspaper in the Naga Hills’ greatly extended the impact of print culture for the Ao Nagas. Newspapers presented an opportunity for the people to make their views and opinions known to a large reading public allowing the exchange of ideas. The scattered issues of the newspaper, which were accessible, made it clear that the paper did allow this to happen. The contributors, who were better educated than most of the Aos at the time, were constantly engaged in discourses about the Ao society expressing sometimes concern, sometimes appreciation and many times sharing their thoughts on the future of the Ao people. The main theme that appeared in the paper aside from Christianity was issues that concerned the ‘uplift’ of the Ao people.

Another feature of the newspaper was that, it constantly tried to get the *Milen* readers acquainted with new concepts, thoughts and practices that were seen as more desirable than the older practices. An easy example of this is the issue of hygiene. Hygiene was the theme for many of the early articles that were written, especially in the earlier years.<sup>240</sup> Suggestions from how to avoid sickness to how to better take care of pregnant women were widely shared.<sup>241</sup>

The newspaper also negotiated a new public sphere where various sections of the public were able to participate and exchange ideas. Pastors, teachers and students were some of the main players in this new domain. All these sections used the paper to address various issues that concerned the Ao society. The enthusiastic reactions of the readers are visible in the rejoinders and follow up articles that usually followed earlier articles.<sup>242</sup> Thus, the *Ao Milen* was truly an ‘open public forum, open to all manner of views and opinions’.

One of the most distinct contributions of the newspaper, however, was the creation of an ‘imagined community’, a ‘shared world’ of fellow ‘*Milen* readers’ who comprised of the informed class of *Ao Milen* readers. For an article to begin, especially of

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<sup>240</sup> In an interview with T. Senka Ao in Mokokchung on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2015, a former editor of the newspaper, it was revealed that some of the earliest issues of the paper (which are no longer available), the topic of hygiene was constantly talked of.

<sup>241</sup> The front-page article of the June issue of 1947 discussed in detail why the students of the Impur hostel were constantly sick. At the end of the article, the writer suggested some measures, which could be adopted so that the frequent sickness could be avoided.

<sup>242</sup> In most of the issues of the paper that were used to write this chapter, there were many articles that were written as rejoinders to earlier articles.

the earlier issues in the 1930s and 1940s, with an address to the 'Milen readers' seems to have been the norm. Lachy Paterson says: "The very act of reading , say a newspaper, allowed an individual to imagine him or herself as part of a larger population, all reading the newspaper at the same time. People became more aware of commonalities of the group whilst its members effectively remained strangers".<sup>243</sup> This feeling of sharing of 'commonalities' with the fellow readers of the *Ao Milen* is apparent in the way the articles were written. For example, an article titled 'Literary Campaign', which was printed in the June issue of 1941, began as such, "Those who have read the May issue of the *Milen* will know a little about the efforts taken by the school students to initiated adult literacy in the villages" (translation mine). The article gave in jest about the literary efforts, which was undertaken by the students for the adults during their vacations.<sup>244</sup> The point here is, the article was written with the notion that those who have read the earlier issues will be aware of the efforts taken by the students. This is an example of how a reading community, with a feeling of being 'connected to other readers' was created among the AOs by the newspaper.

The paper is also credited for helping in the 'development of the Ao literature' in the earlier time and for the creation of 'literary awareness' in the vernacular in the modern times.<sup>245</sup>

## II

### **Print in the hands of 'emerging writers'**

Apart from the newspaper mentioned above, other important magazines and journals that were published were Lanur Teimla (The Hope of the Youth) which started publication in 1967 and Mitkar also started publication from the 1960s.<sup>246</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, many local writers came up with most of their books being self-

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<sup>243</sup> Lachy Paterson, 'Print Culture and the Collective Maori Consciousness', *Journal of New Zealand Literature: JNZL*, No. 28, Part 2: Special Issue: Cultures of Print in Colonial New Zealand (2010), pp.105-129

<sup>244</sup> This article was probably written by the editors of the paper.

<sup>245</sup> Atsongchanger, *A Brief History of Literature & Publishing in Nagaland*, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

published.<sup>247</sup> Some of the main literary personalities during this time were Mayangnokcha Ao, W. Chubanungba Ao, Renty Keitzar, I. Ben Wati, Rev. T. Likok Ao, L. Imti Aier and Rev. A. Temejn Ao.<sup>248</sup>

These people conformed to the earlier writings of the missionaries and wrote predominantly Christian books. Another theme, which these writers explored in their writings, was the standardization of the Ao language. Books on Ao grammar and spellings were published with the “design to stimulate uniformity”<sup>249</sup> in writing the Ao language. The Ao language as a purely oral language was reduced to writing when the missionaries arrived. One trouble, which arose because of this was its ‘flexibility’. People from different villages, although speaking the same dialect, say, Chongli, had differences in the way of pronouncing certain words. Thus, when ‘fixity’ in the form of print language was initiated, people had doubts in accepting the initial translations of the missionary. Thus, the need to have a uniform and ‘fixed’ spelling was greatly felt by the people. One incident that highlights this problem of fixing the spellings is seen in the 1940’s when the reprinting of the translated books of the New Testament was refused. Thus, the gospels were translated again with the help of the schoolteachers and the missionaries before they were reprinted.<sup>250</sup>

In the line of ‘fixing’ the print language for the Ao, several committees were set up. However, till today, no standard pattern of writing in Ao language has been achieved<sup>251</sup> with many writers still writing “by way of spelling”.

Some of the books that appeared in an effort to ‘fix’ the language were, Ao Zulu (1960), Tetenzukba Ao Grammar (1961) by W. Chubanungba Ao, Ao Grammar (1971), Ao Dictionary (1999) by Renty Keitzar.<sup>252</sup>

Other books, which were outside the Christian theme were *Ao Naga Orthography* (1969) by Renty Keitzar, *Aor Sobaliba aser Temzung Ozung* (The Ao Culture and

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<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, p.57.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, pp.47-51.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>250</sup> 1941 Annual Report, Impur, Assam by Anderson, ABFMS, Microfilm no- 3255, NMML.

<sup>251</sup> I. Ben Wati, *My Early Years In Nagaland*, 2008, p. ix. However, this does not mean that there has been no effort in this direction. Usually, the spelling of the Ao Holy Bible is employed as the accepted spelling.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47-51.

Customary Laws, 1981) by L. Imti Aier, *Geography of the Naga Hills* by Mayangnokcha Ao<sup>253</sup>, *A History of Anglo- Naga Affairs* by Tajenyuba Ao in 1958<sup>254</sup>, *Nagaland: Handicrafts of Nagaland* (1961), *Waromung: An Ao Naga Village* by Amenchiba Ao (1966), *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland* by M. Alemchiba (1970).

However, writing in general in the Naga Hills was dominated by the religious theme and “bore the recognized stamp of the style, imagery and diction of the Bible”.<sup>255</sup> In the words of Tilottoma Misra: “Since, under the initiative of the missionaries most of the Nagas from the first group of literates honed their literary skills on translations of the Gospels, written literature of the early phase took on a moralistic note”.<sup>256</sup> She is not alone in this interpretation. Charles Chasie made the same observation when he wrote about the literatures of Nagaland.<sup>257</sup> According to him, the missionaries dominated the early writing and publishing history in the Naga Hills until the end of the colonial period. He also argued why writing, reading and publishing could not progress in the Naga Hills (later Nagaland). He understood the situation as, as the Naga Hills was a politically disturbed area for so long where “survival took precedence over everything else”, it could not provide space for writing or publishing.<sup>258</sup> Also: “The few who wrote, not necessarily books, did so with an overwhelming sense of needing to set the records of history and politics straight as they saw/perceived them”.<sup>259</sup>

It was only with the turn of the century that “the dawn of writing in Nagaland truly began”.<sup>260</sup> Writings that emerged in contemporary times were distinctly influenced

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<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Charles Chasie, ‘The History of Nagaland Reflected in its Literature’, *Eastern Mirrion* (Nagaland’s Local Daily), January 4, 2015.

<sup>255</sup> Tilottoma Misra (ed), *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. xxiii.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxii.

<sup>257</sup> Chasie, ‘The History of Nagaland Reflected in its Literature’, January 4, 2015.

<sup>258</sup> This is not an isolated occurrence. The same kind of trouble in publication because of turbulent years in Mizoram have been stated by Margaret Ch. Zama in her essay, Locating Trauma in Mizo Literature, in Zama (ed), *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, 2013, p.66.

<sup>259</sup> Some of these books were, *The Rising Nagas: A Historical and Political Study* (1974) by Asoso Yunuo, *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears* (2000) by Kaka D. Iralu, etc.

<sup>260</sup> He has explained that the reason why writing and publishing did not take off in the Naga Hills for a long time was because of the Nagas’ “preoccupation with politics”. The Nagas were occupied in the struggle with the India government for the right to self-determination and secession leading to conflicts and armed

by what Chasie calls the ‘troubled times of Nagaland’. Although the growth of literature in the Naga Hills was dwarfed by the turbulent years of Nagas’ fight for self-determination, in later years these experiences provided material for the growth of native literature. Thus, around the late twentieth century, a different kind of appropriation of print by the natives began in terms of literary writings by the natives themselves, giving ‘insiders’ views on a region constantly defined from the ‘outsiders’ perspective.<sup>261</sup> This section will look at the use of print by the contemporary writers from Nagaland to ‘negotiate, translate and expose’ their ‘world views’ through the use of print.

Contemporary Ao and Naga writers like Temsula Ao, Monalisa Chankija and Easterine Kire are the prominent writers who drew inspiration from the turmoil that the Nagas have gone through for their writings. Thus, the ‘new literature’ (as they are commonly referred to), that emerged in Nagaland in the turn of the century reflects the history of the Nagas’ confrontation with the Indian government and their struggle to find a ‘Naga identity’. An interesting thing about this ‘new literature’ is that it is written in English and not in the vernacular.<sup>262</sup> One reason for this is, amongst the Nagas: “there is no clear common language available among the sacral tribes speaking different languages” and so English has been adopted as the official language of Nagaland.<sup>263</sup>

These writings are a departure from the writings of the past decades, which had plenty of religious undertones. Rather, these writings took the lead in exploring the experience of cultural loss as a result of contact with Christianity, experiences of the people under the colonial rule, their everyday struggles, their emotions and the common

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confrontation causing much disarray to the people. In such situation, survival was the most important priority for the Nagas.

<sup>261</sup> In her foreword for Temsula Ao’s collection of essays called, *On Being a Naga*, Tilottomo Misra wrote, “Temsula Ao’s present collection of essays shows a deep concern for the cultural loss suffered by her people during the colonial period and after, and the urgent need to search for the historical roots which can define the ‘Naga identity’, not as perceived by ‘others’ but as viewed from the inside the society”.

<sup>262</sup> According to Temsula Ao, “The use of English by many North-Eastern writers has proven to be of great significance. This in fact in many ways has been the facilitator for these writers whereby their works are now accessible not only to the English-reading public of the country but also to many readers elsewhere in the world”. in Temsula Ao, *New Literature from the North-East, On Being A Naga*, Heritage Publishing House, 2014, p. 136.

<sup>263</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p.9.



man's experience of the long drawn struggle between the 'underground'<sup>264</sup> and the Indian army. They are the 'post 1950s generation of Naga writers' who "journeyed through territories of the mind which are distant from the world of simple Christian pieties upheld by the newly converted Christian writers of the earlier period".<sup>265</sup> In fact, one of the main characteristic features of the 'new literature' is the reflection of cultural erosion inflicted by the new religion and the new comers in the Naga Hills. A poem, which captures the essence of this 'new literature' is Temsula Ao's *Blood of Other Days*:

Then came a tribe of strangers  
Into our primal territories  
Armed with only a Book and  
Promises of a land called Heaven  
  
Declaring that our Trees and Mountains  
Rocks and Rivers were no Gods  
And that our songs and stories  
Nothing but tedious primitive nonsense  
  
We listened in confusion  
To the new stories and too soon  
Allowed our knowledge of other days  
To be trivialized into taboo.<sup>266</sup>

The struggle for Nagas' self-determination is noted to have brought the big change in the course, which writings of the natives took. Tilottoma Misra writes: "The change (in the Nagas' writing) came after the outbreak of the war between the Naga

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<sup>264</sup> Underground has been used widely to refer to the Naga army after they were forced to go into hiding by the Indian army.

<sup>265</sup> Misra (ed), *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, 2011, p. xxiii.

<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Kailash C. Baral, 'Articulating Marginality: Emerging Literatures from Northeast India', ed. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, 2013, p.9.

underground army and the Indian government forces which completely changes the cultural ethos of the people, bringing in significant changes in what was considered the ‘Naga way of life’”.<sup>267</sup> This ‘new literature’ indeed came to be dominated by the experiences of a people living in a ‘war zone’. According to K. B. Veio Pou:

One of the most dominating themes in the literatures written in English from the Northeast is the political undercurrent that runs deep. In a way, it was expected too, considering the unsettled political problems the people from the region have been engaged with for a long time now. The recent past as well as the present reality of the people has been marred by conflict and violence, ranging from sub-nationalist movements to struggles for greater autonomy to land-related ethnic conflicts. Through their writings the writers from the region have painted a realistic picture of the predicament of living in conflicting times.<sup>268</sup>

Poetry is one of the main forms of literary expression, which this ‘new literature’ took. According to Easterine Kire:

I cannot tell the story of Nagaland and the conflict that has been her lot, in prose. For the story of Nagaland is the story of the Naga soul on a long, lonely journey of pain, loss and bereavement, a silent holocaust in which words seldom were enough to carry the burden of being born a Naga. Therefore, I shall use poems to tell the Naga story.<sup>269</sup>

According to Monalisa Changkija, one of the prominent voices in this ‘new literature’, poetry is a form of ‘recording history’.<sup>270</sup> Specifically on the poems she wrote about the experiences of the people because of the Nagas’ confrontation with the Indian army, she said: “Poetry to me is also a commentary on what happens as a matter of routine in the Northeast besides it being an instrument of recording history as it

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<sup>267</sup> Misra (ed), *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, 2011, p. xxiii.

<sup>268</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p.11.

<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Margaret Ch. Zama, ‘Locating Trauma in Mizo Literature’, ed. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, 2013, p.9.

<sup>270</sup> Monalisa have published two volumes of poetry, namely *Weapons of Words of Pages of Pain* (1993) and *Monsoon Mourning* (2007). Quoted in Pou’s, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast*, 2015, p.48.

happens”.<sup>271</sup> Here, I mention a poem, titled *Aftermath*, which sets the tone for most of Monalisa’s poems.<sup>272</sup>

The silence of the sunlit summer afternoon  
Has just been shattered by gun shots across the town  
I stand rooted to the ground waiting for the echoes  
To die down in my mind  
Gathering my daughters into our seemingly secure home  
I wait for the endless night to begin when searches start  
And when they don’t, I know the nightmare is only postponed.

The silence of the sunlit summer afternoon  
Has just been shattered by gunshots across the town  
I stood rooted to the ground waiting for the echoes  
To die down in my mind.  
Claiming my nerves, concealing my fears  
I am desperately searching for an answer  
To my daughters’ question, when will the gun shots end.<sup>273</sup>

Poetry of this genre: “powerfully speaks out against injustices done to their people, the ill-happenings in their homeland and the assault of their beloved land”.<sup>274</sup> Apart from poems, fiction inspired by the experiences of the war is the other popular form, which writings from Nagaland takes. One of the most celebrated of this genre is Temsula Ao’s collection of short stories, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. In her words:

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<sup>271</sup> Monalisa Changkija, ‘Northeast outside the Newspaper Pages’, ed. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, 2013, p.138.

<sup>272</sup> While writing about Monalisa’s poetry, K B Veio Pou has commented that, “Her poetry has strong political undertone while at the same time shows strong protest against destructions of environment in the name of developments”.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*, p.141

<sup>274</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p. x.

Many of the stories in this collection have their genesis in the turbulent years of bloodshed and tears that make up the history of the Nagas from the early fifties of the last century, and their demand for independence from the Indian State. But while the actual struggles remains the backdrop, the thrust of the narratives is to probe how the events of that era have re-structured or even ‘revolutionized’ the Naga psyche.<sup>275</sup>

Another book by the same writer of the same genre is *Laburnum for my Head*.<sup>276</sup> These books were stated to relive “the different experiences of the common Nagas who are at most points in the struggle for sovereignty left out of the political discourse”.<sup>277</sup>

Another Naga writer writing on the same genre is Easterine Kire whose work also reflects the “kind of life she lived through during the first few decades of fierce war between Naga undergrounds and the Indian armed forces”.<sup>278</sup> A ‘lament song-poem’ by Kire is mentioned below:

We were proud and we were true  
a race of men like you  
we, too, were once, free children of those spaces  
of sky and mountain range and rock-bound river  
bequeathed us by the great spirit of these hills

The white man came  
and then the brown man came  
and sixty years it has been now  
that they have been telling us  
we are not our own

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<sup>275</sup> Temsula Ao, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Penguin/ Zubaan, 2006, p. x.

<sup>276</sup> Her other works includes *Songs that Tell* (1988), *Songs that Try to Tell* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Ao Naga Oral Tradition* (2000), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), *Songs from the Other Life* (2007), *Once Upon a Life* (2013) and *On Being a Naga* (2014).

<sup>277</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p. 49.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

How many men, how many women  
how many children they have killed  
for crying freedom I cannot recall  
for these are not the things  
out of which one can make  
songs or poems or dreams

Betrayed we have learnt to betray  
my brothers are riding out  
to seek my brother's lives  
and I stand here alone  
waiting, in the shadows  
afraid, of life, not death.

Bury my heart too  
at wounded Knee.<sup>279</sup>

The theme of this 'emerging' literature by the Nagas in general seems to project as Tilottoma Misra calls it, an 'insiders' view of the ordinary Nagas' experience. In the same lines with her, K. B. Veio Pou writes:

Much of what has been heard or written about the Nagas (by the 'outsiders') has always been limited to the troubled past of confrontation with the mighty Indian nation and in doing so only the stories of the leaders and the events are told. What is not heard is the how the ordinary folks lived through and

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<sup>279</sup> This poem is titled, 'After Reading 'Wounded Knee'' (2001), quoted in Pou, *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, pp. 55-56.

negotiated with the struggles that left the land scarred forever and in a state of unrest.<sup>280</sup>

This is exactly what the writers of the ‘new literature’ tried to capture with their writings. These writers effectively employed literature to make the earlier ‘unheard voices’ heard. According to Margaret Ch. Zama, this ‘emerging literature’ which is a trend not only seen in Nagaland but also in the entire North-East India is a product of the region:

having undergone historical and political trauma of untold suffering and marginalization, registers various voices that need to be heard and understood in the context of India’s multicultural mosaic... This is not to be mistaken simply as blind nostalgia for a way of life long lost, but must be received as voices of individual authors from societies caught in the cross current of their political and historical inheritances, personal tragedies and cultural ambivalence, voices that are involved in developing and contributing to a much larger literary consciousness that needs to be recognized and interrogated.<sup>281</sup>

According to Temsula Ao:

The new literature from the North-East is not about existential angst per se, though it is to a great extent, about a sense of loss of the people’s cultural past and the attempt at recovering the essence of that past. They are therefore writing about themselves and their roots. If they are writing about identity; it is more in nature of introspection rather than one of confrontation with the dominate ones. And if they there are political innuendos in the works of some writers, they are more in the nature of interrogating themselves within the present context rather than as indictments against the powers that be.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p. 49.

<sup>281</sup> Ed. Zama, *Emerging Literatures from Northeast India: The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity*, 2013, p. xii.

<sup>282</sup> Ao, ‘New Literature from the North-East’, Ao, *On Being a Naga*, 2014, p. 138.

Writing 'orality'<sup>283</sup> is the other main theme that is engaged with by the Naga writers of the 'new literature'. As their writings deeply reflected their 'bloody history', Nagaland and the Northeast as a whole, already 'exoticized', was "trapped in the 'stereotype' of the region thereby the non-Northeasters refuse to see beyond the stereotypes (of bloodshed) and not the other side of life that exists in the region".<sup>284</sup> However: "Along with the historical, political and social problems that the people of the region face, there are also stories that celebrate the people's tradition and culture and the belief system deep rooted in history yet closely knitted in present realities".<sup>285</sup> This design to change the 'misunderstanding' and 'misinterpretation' of the region seems to fuel this writing 'orality'. This writing 'orality' by the Naga and Northeast writers at large uses their oral tradition:

as an exploratory and evolutionary process of identifying relevant metaphors in oral sources to cope with modern predicaments by making creative writing perhaps more 'native' to the natives themselves... The feature which marks the works of creative writers from the North Eastern Indian, especially the poets, who draw inspiration from oral sources is the intricate inter-play of imaginative dialogue with elements from their collective past to produce a literature which is not only relevant to the people of this particular region but is bound to have universal significance because it deals with common human predicaments.<sup>286</sup>

Temsual Ao explains that oral tradition: "transcends the boundaries of time, space and memory because through the songs, myths, legends, proverbs and riddles man has recorded his understanding of the human experience through language". However: "...the perspective on oral tradition seems to differ in societies where there is a long history of

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<sup>283</sup> I borrow this from Temsula Ao's essay titled the same. This essay appeared in Soumen Sen and Desmond L. Kharmawphland (ed), *Orality and Beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective*, Sahitya Akademi, 2007, p.99.

<sup>284</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India's Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, pp.11- 12.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p.12.

<sup>286</sup> Temsula Ao, 'Writing Orality', eds. Soumen Sen and Desmond L. Kharmawphland, *Orality and Beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective*, 2007, p.110.

literacy and a written tradition. In these societies the oral form is generally identified with the 'illiterate' and even the 'uncivilized'".<sup>287</sup>

Contemporary Ao and Naga writers (like Temsual Ao and Easterine Kire) in general today are going back to their oral tradition and using them effectively as inspiration for their literary works. However, the use of oral tradition seems to be more than just 'inspiration' for these writers. These works seem to be motivated to do away with the negative perceptions associated with oral cultures. In Ao's words: "...the northeast Indian writers have gone back to their own cultural roots to articulate their perception about themselves in an environment where, more often than not, they find themselves marginalized on the side of 'orality' against the written".<sup>288</sup>

The poem *Stone-people from Lungterok* by Ao is according to her a, "poem which takes her back to the distant of her origin in an attempt to validate the culture embodied in the oral tradition and also to re-assess the perception regarding the so called oral societies vis-à-vis the written cultures".<sup>289</sup> A few lines of the poem are given below:

Lungterok  
The six stones  
Where the progenitors  
And the forebears  
Of the stone-people  
Were born  
Out of the womb  
Of the earth...  
  
Believers of soul  
And its varied forms  
Its sojourn here

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<sup>287</sup>*Ibid*, p.100.

<sup>288</sup>*Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>289</sup>*Ibid*, p. 107.



And passage across the water

Stone people

Savage and sage

Who sprang out of LUNGTEROK

Was the birth adult when the stone broke?

Or are the stone-people yet to come of age?

The stories and poems by these writers are efforts to allow the continuation of the rich oral tradition, which was neglected as, “the generation that were born after the encounter with the white people were taught how not to look back at ‘tradition’ but imbibe the ‘modern’ into their live”.<sup>290</sup> In short, the past was allowed to die.<sup>291</sup> According to Ao:

The most decisive blow to the fabric of the tradition was struck when the new religion i.e. Christianity, began to win converts quite rapidly. Acceptance of the new religion demanded total abandonment of the ‘old’ ways. A way of life, which had sustained and nurtured generation, suddenly became ‘taboo’. Thus, indigenous form of belief and worship, observance of the various festivals and rituals, chanting of traditional songs which contained not only religious elements but also much of the literature and history of the people became taboo.<sup>292</sup>

The writers blend the past with the present providing them: “with the catalytic framework wherein they are able to explore their responses to the complex modern forces and their impact on societal evolutionary process”.<sup>293</sup> These writers: “By blending the elements of oral tradition with their creative imagination and synthesizing the past with the present, these writers are exploring an exciting and derivative literature which is both

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<sup>290</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, p. 59.

<sup>291</sup> J. P. Mills commented that the missionaries were discouraging the converts from engaging with things related to the past including the oral tradition. He commented, “The past is being allowed to die”. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 1973, p. 307.

<sup>292</sup> Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, 2012, p.185.

<sup>293</sup> Ao, ‘New Literature from the North-East’, Ao, *On Being a Naga*, 2014, p.133.

oral and written at the same time”.<sup>294</sup> In addition, these literatures are the best examples of the ‘continuity’ of the oral tradition, once encouraged to ‘forget’. In Ao’s words: “We find the best examples of the continuity of the oral tradition in the writings of the indigenous people about their native philosophy, religious beliefs and the ‘new literature’ that was created out of the vast resources of the oral tradition”.<sup>295</sup>

These emerging writers are attempting to change the narrative of their history earlier dictated by ‘outsiders’. The tag of ‘barbaric’, ‘savage’ and ‘primitive’ Nagas, so popularized by the writings of the missionaries and colonial officials are now facing a counter from these writings through an explanation of the rich cultural and traditional practices from the ‘insiders’ perspective. Moreover, in the hands of these writers, the written is treated as an “extension and continuation from the oral tradition” rather than the identification of the written with the ‘civilized’ and the oral with the ‘less-civilized’.<sup>296</sup>

In nineteenth century Assam, when the missionaries started the *Orunodoi*, a periodical in the Assamese language, there was the ‘discrepancies between the paper’s intent and its reception’. The intent of the paper was to draw the people to Christianity. However, with the “religious component of the “enlightenment” that it was designed to achieve being mostly ignored...<sup>297</sup>” the Assamese reading public used the periodical to ‘regenerate’ not just the Assamese language but also the Assamese culture.<sup>298</sup> A similar situation can be said to take place in the Naga Hills (later Nagaland) in the twentieth and more specifically by the turn of the twentieth century.

This is not to say that print was employed to decry Christianity in the Naga Hills. On the reverse, the missionaries and later the natives themselves effectively used print to assert Christianity so much so that there is identification by the natives with the religion

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<sup>294</sup> Ao, ‘Writing Orality’, 2007, pp. 107-108.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>296</sup> Parag M. Sarma, ‘Towards an Appreciative Paradigm for Literatures of the Northeast’, 2013, p.38.

<sup>297</sup> Jayeeta Sharma, ‘Missionaries and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Assam’, 2003, p.258.

<sup>298</sup> According to Jayeeta Sharma, through the use of the periodical, “The plains’ intelligentsia engaged itself in “regenerating” its own culture so as to successfully respond to the challenges posed by colonial modernity”. *Ibid*, p. 271.

on an indigenous level.<sup>299</sup> However, print was used for addressing various other issues with the passage of time apart from religion. By the time the third decade of the twentieth century rolled in, print in the form of ‘the first Newspaper for the Naga Hills’ was used by the Aos for consolidating themselves ‘as a tribe’ and ‘as a Christian community’. The educated class actively engaged with the public sphere that was initiated by the *Ao Milen* and discussed issues facing the Aos apart from the spiritual aspect, which formed a part of the discourse. The ‘civilizing enlightenment through print’ was thus a success in the Naga Hills.

Print, by the late twentieth century, was appropriated differently again. Writers and audiences alike began to exercise print to revive some aspects of the Ao and the Naga past which were seen to be associated with the ‘heathen’ past and encouraged to ‘forget’ by the missionaries. In the hands of contemporary Ao and Naga writers like Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija and Easterine Kire, print in the form of creative writing was used to go back to the ‘roots’ of the people. As K. B. Veio Pou puts it:

Their (the Nagas) outlook might have changed, their lifestyle have altered and a new religion adopted but the Nagas understand that the innate bonding with their culture and tradition is essential to give meaning to their sense of identification with the rich heritage from the past. once upon a time, the oral tradition was shoved into the past as part of the heathen past, but a new understanding has dawned to prove that all of it was neither pagan back then nor obsolete at the present.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> This identification with Christianity is so much so that Lanusangla Tzudir wrote, “... the association of Christianity and Naga identity is so strong that a Naga Child grows up thinking that all Nagas are Christians by origin”. In Lanusangla Tzudir, *Christinas in Ao Land*, unpublished PhD theses submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1998.

<sup>300</sup> Pou, *Literary Cultures of India’s Northeast: Naga Writings in English*, 2015, pp. 105-106.

## **Towards a conclusion**

Literacy and print both came to the Naga Hills on the wings of Christian evangelism. The main objective for the introduction of education and print was for ‘civilizing’ the natives. And this objective was successfully carried out through these agencies leading to negotiations with earlier traditions, renunciation of some and the modification of others.

From the beginning, print became a site for negotiation between the natives and the missionaries. The missionaries mainly used it to translate and transfer a particular form of knowledge for the natives where ideas of being ‘civilized’ via Christian literature were negotiated to the people. However, this translation was not a one-way street but an exchange where local knowledge also sipped into the missionaries’ understanding and narratives.

A strong identification with Christianity is the most lasting impact of print on the Ao Nagas. The missionaries’ aim for the introduction of print to the Aos to assist in their shift from ‘darkness’ to ‘light’ was thus a success. The huge bulk of Christian literature produced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stands testimony for this.

A mixture of change and continuity marked the transitioning phase from an oral to a written culture for the Ao Nagas. During the initial transition period, it almost seemed as though earlier traditions would not survive the impact of print, especially when the early local writers conformed to the earlier writings forms of the missionaries. However, far from displacing earlier traditions and sticking to the standardized form of writing, older practices are finding continuity in the writing of ‘emerging’ writers who are exploring other genres of writing apart from the ‘evangelical’.<sup>301</sup>

Print as a site of negotiation continued and grew as the twentieth century dawned with an emerging reading public widely engaged in reading and sharing ideas and engaging in discussions concerning the society. A public sphere was thus resulted. Apart

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<sup>301</sup> I draw this argument from Anandita Ghosh’s article, ‘An Uncertain “Coming of the Book”’: Early Print Cultures in Colonial India’, 2003.

from this, print allowed the modification of older traditions seen most in the works of contemporary Naga writers who are using print in a bid to go back to tradition.

The shift from a mainly evangelical print to 'secular' print culture dealing with universal issues like identity, modernity and changing the narrative of earlier writing resulted because of multiple factors. Some of these were- spread of 'secular' education, exposure and contact with the outside world, internal turmoil and a realization that 'roots' should not be allowed to become obsolete in exchange for 'progress' and 'modernity'.

Charles Chasie commented that the literature of Nagaland reflects its history. This is indeed true. From evangelical centered literature, print was used for identity formation and assertion, for projecting 'nationalism' and for reclaiming a past that was almost pushed into oblivion, as their own. In short, print in its short lifespan in the Naga Hills (little over a century) has not remained dominated by one section of the society but is effectively employed by various sections, making room for change along with continuity.

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